

SPECIAL ISSUE:  
THE (DE)COLONIAL PEDAGOGICAL POSSIBILITIES OF FILM  
AND FILM FESTIVALS (A TWO-PART SPECIAL ISSUE)  
Guest edited by Sonia Medel and André Elias Mazawi

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

THE (DE)COLONIAL PEDAGOGICAL POSSIBILITIES OF FILM  
AND FILM FESTIVALS (A TWO-PART SPECIAL ISSUE) SPECIAL  
ISSUE EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION

**Sonia Medel and André Elias Mazawi**

## ARTICLES

RETURN, RECOLLECT, IMAGINE: DECOLONIZING IMAGES,  
RECLAIMING PALESTINE

**Farah Atoui**

LEARNING TO BE “GOOD ENOUGH”: HOLLYWOOD’S  
ROLE IN STANDARDIZING KNOWLEDGE AND THE  
MYTH OF MERITOCRACY

**Stephanie Glick and Allyson Dean**

FESTIVALS OF FILMS, DECOLONIAL SPACES,  
AND PUBLIC PEDAGOGY: SOME PRELIMINARY REFLECTIONS

**Neil Bassan**

CÁMARA DE COMBATE. EL FESTIVAL DE CINE LATINOAMERICANO COMO  
REFLEXIÓN-ACCIÓN (CÁMARA DE COMBATE. LATIN AMERICAN FILM  
FESTIVAL(S) AS REFLECTION-ACTION)

**Carlos Colín**

## REVIEWS

IMAGINENATIVE. ON SCREEN PROTOCOLS & PATHWAYS: A MEDIA PRODUCTION  
GUIDE TO WORKING WITH FIRST NATIONS, METIS AND INUIT COMMUNITIES,  
CULTURES, CONCEPTS & STORIES.

**Selina Crammond**

WOMEN MADE VISIBLE: FEMINIST ART AND MEDIA IN POST-1968 MEXICO CITY.

**Alessandra Santos**





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Postcolonial Directions in Education is a peer reviewed open access journal produced twice a year. It is a scholarly journal intended to foster further understanding, advancement and reshaping of the field of postcolonial education. We welcome articles that contribute to advancing the field. As indicated in the Editorial for the inaugural issue, the purview of this journal is broad enough to encompass a variety of disciplinary approaches, including but not confined to the following: sociological, anthropological, historical and social psychological approaches. The areas embraced include anti-racist education, decolonizing education, critical multiculturalism, critical racism theory, direct colonial experiences in education and their legacies for present day educational structures and practice, educational experiences reflecting the culture and 'imagination' of empire, the impact of neoliberalism/globalisation/structural adjustment programmes on education, colonial curricula and subaltern alternatives, education and liberation movements, challenging hegemonic languages, the promotion of local literacies and linguistic diversity, neo-colonial education and identity construction, colonialism and the construction of patriarchy, canon and canonicity, Indigenous knowledges, supranational bodies and their educational frameworks, north-south and east-west relations in education, the politics of representation, unlearning colonial stereotypes, internal colonialism and education, cultural hybridity and learning in postcolonial contexts, education and the politics of dislocation, biographies / autobiographies reflecting the above themes, deconstruction of colonial narratives of civilization within educational contexts. Once again, the field cannot be exhausted.

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**POSTCOLONIAL DIRECTIONS IN EDUCATION**  
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**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

1. **THE (DE)COLONIAL PEDAGOGICAL POSSIBILITIES OF  
FILM AND FILM FESTIVALS (A TWO-PART SPECIAL ISSUE)  
SPECIAL ISSUE EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION**  
Sonia Medel and André Elias Mazawi 1-7

**ARTICLES**

2. **RETURN, RECOLLECT, IMAGINE: DECOLONIZING IMAGES,  
RECLAIMING PALESTINE**  
Farah Atoui 8-42
3. **LEARNING TO BE “GOOD ENOUGH”: HOLLYWOOD’S  
ROLE IN STANDARDIZING KNOWLEDGE AND THE  
MYTH OF MERITOCRACY**  
Stephanie Glick and Allyson Dean 43-87
4. **FESTIVALS OF FILMS, DECOLONIAL SPACES,  
AND PUBLIC PEDAGOGY: SOME PRELIMINARY  
REFLECTIONS**  
Neil Bassan 88-126
5. **CÁMARA DE COMBATE. EL FESTIVAL DE CINE  
LATINOAMERICANO COMO REFLEXIÓN-ACCIÓN**  
(Cámara de Combate. Latin American Film  
Festival(s) as reflection-action)  
Carlos Colín 127-141

**REVIEWS**

6. ***imagineNATIVE. On Screen Protocols & Pathways:  
A Media Production Guide to Working with First Nations,  
Metis and Inuit Communities, Cultures, Concepts & Stories.***  
Selina Crammond 142-147
7. ***Women made visible: Feminist art and media in  
post-1968 Mexico City.***  
Alessandra Santos 148-153

## **SPECIAL ISSUE THE (DE)COLONIAL PEDAGOGICAL POSSIBILITIES OF FILM AND FILM FESTIVALS (PART 2)**

### **VISUAL GRAMMARS AND DECOLONIAL PRACTICES IN CONTEXT**

**Sonia Medel & André Elias Mazawi**

*University of British Columbia*

*Unceded Territory of the x<sup>w</sup>məθk<sup>w</sup>əyəm (Musqueam) People<sup>1</sup>*

This two-part Special Issue focuses on the role films and film festivals play in representing the relationships between diversity, modernity, and coloniality, from perspectives of diverse people involved in filmmaking and film festival engagement. The aim is to centre the perspectives of racialized, Indigenous, women and marginalized minoritized peoples within the film and education fields. Part 1, published in *Postcolonial Directions in Education*, Volume 8, Issue 2 (2019), unpacked the ontological and epistemic

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<sup>1</sup> The x<sup>w</sup>məθk<sup>w</sup>əyəm (Musqueam) is a “traditional hənqəminəm’ speaking people”. Their “ancestors have lived in the Fraser River estuary for thousands of years. Today, portions of Musqueam’s traditional territory are called Vancouver, North Vancouver, South Vancouver, Burrard Inlet, New Westminster, Burnaby, and Richmond” in what is currently referred to as the Province of British Columbia, Canada. For the full texts of the parts quoted here, refer to the following website: <<https://www.musqueam.bc.ca>>.

problematics that underpin audiovisual artistic forms as historically and politically situated narratives. Contributors engaged the challenges associated with pushing back on hegemonic modes of visual representation prevalent in film and cinematic encounters. Simultaneously, contributors delved into the decolonizing poetics of visual sovereignty and how these could be leveraged to effect social and political learning and transformation. Dr. Dorothy Christian captured this double-struggle by referencing the work of Māori filmmaker Barry Barclay. She pointed out that Barclay's notion of "talking in/talking out" is central to a decolonizing "Indigenous gaze" that shifts and flips the camera's lens around, offering new horizons on knowledge and being (conversation of Dr. Christian, with Medel & Mazawi, 2019, p. 165).

In this issue, Part 2 pursues the conversation regarding the relationships between diversity, modernity, and coloniality and considers their implications for adult learning and education. The contributions do not focus on what images or footage show. That is all too obvious. They seek to uncover, reconfigure, imagine, re-introduce, and re-collect from within the image or footage traces left – inadvertently or not – in the form of ruins and colonial destruction, erasure, and obliteration. By excavating the image, and the assumptions that underpin it, the contributions open up a space of decolonial imagination that does not seek to ground its authority in claims to objectivity, however understood. Rather, they aim to make visible the fractures and erasures contained in the cinematic footage and in media creations in which these artefacts are irremediably entangled.

The issue includes contributions by scholars deeply committed to decolonial approaches to filmmaking and film festivals within different contexts of practice and struggle.

In her article, “Return. Recollect. Imagine: Decolonizing Images, Reclaiming Palestine”, Farah Atoui examines the works of Palestinian filmmaker Kamal Aljafari and of visual artists Basel Abbas and Ruanne Abou-Rahme. She considers their decolonizing approaches to media arts. By delving into the audio-visual techniques they deploy, Atoui illustrates how these works—despite their marked differences—decentre colonial constructions of images and cinematic footage of Palestinian land, history, and society. She further shows how, by reworking Israeli cinematic footage and museum curated images, the artists’ filmic and audio-visual works expose Zionist ideological assumptions, re-introducing into them the silenced subaltern and expunged sounds and sights of Palestinians. The significance of Atoui’s contribution lies in its emphasis, not on the image or footage as an objective conveyor of a reality, but on their authenticity precisely as subverted and exposed artefacts. Atoui shows that, paradoxically, it is by subverting and distorting the image or footage, that the fractures and ideological erasures that underpin media creations are exposed, bringing back into them the Indigenous epistemic and ontological experiences which were expunged.

Quite differently, in their paper “Learning To Be ‘Good Enough’: Hollywood Film’s Role in Standardizing Knowledge and the Myth of Meritocracy”, Stephanie Glick and Allyson Dean examine the cinematic articulations of three quite different films that narrate the school journey of students



from marginalized and racialized social backgrounds in the United States. By delving into the ways in which scenes choreograph the academic journeys of minoritized students, Glick and Dean expose the neoliberal, patriarchal, and racializing assumptions that underpin the cinematic choices made by filmmakers and scriptwriters in two of the films produced in Hollywood. In their analyses, Glick and Dean re-read and critically re-view these films, and their educational uses, in ways that open the cinematic choreography to the subdued, subaltern, and normalized voices of racialized American students. By doing so, they reveal how two of the films analyzed, which are Hollywood films propagate the ethos of a meritocratic school system in the United States. Based on their analysis, Glick and Dean call for a careful consideration, not only of questions of representation, but also how cinematic stories are told and narrated. They thus offer a number of alternative ways in which the scenes and scripts could be re-imagined and their relationship with a neoliberal political economy critiqued and exposed.

If the first two papers focus on the critique of the image and footage as material sites of decolonial practices, Neil Bassan repositions the problematic associated with film watching as part of public screening. In his paper, “Festivals of Films, Decolonial Spaces, and Public Pedagogy: Some Preliminary Reflections”, Bassan approaches film festivals as collective sites of experimentation. He conceives of film festivals as a foundational pillar of participative democracy. He eclectically – yet purposefully – draws on the works of Jacques Rancière, Paulo Freire, Sara Ahmed, and Stuart Hall, to interrogate the role festival programmers can play in

articulating a sound pedagogical approach to collective film viewing that moves an audience from the lethargic state of passive consumerism to that of an actively engaged and committed public. The significance of Bassan's contribution lies in inverting the notion of "film festival" into that of "a festival of films". In doing so, the paper breaks away from the festival as a cultural leisurescape of sorts to emerge into a generative space of engaged and solidary politics.

The three articles are followed by an artist's perspective on Third Cinema and its underlying cultural politics in diasporic Latin American communities. Mexican visual artist Carlos Colín expands on an exhibition displayed during August 24 to September 1, 2019, at the Vancouver Latin American Film Festival, that was meticulously and supportively curated by Colombian visual artist Juliana Silva. Colín interrogates the role that could be played by Third Cinema and its possible contributions to fostering solidary diasporic communities. What then follows is a review by Selina Crammond who focuses on the protocols and pathways involved in working with Indigenous communities and cultures in the field of media production. Crammond calls for acknowledging the impact of colonialism on media arts, discussing how media producers could recognize "Indigenous ownership and control over their rights to their intellectual and cultural property and heritage." Equally significant, Alessandra Santos' completes this issue with her review of a book on feminist art and media in post-1968 Mexico City. In her review, she emphasizes the role educators can play in "promoting the main tenets of equality and equity...[when] fighting against gender oppression" through the teaching of art history.

In pursuing Part 2 we were supported by numerous participants. We express our deep gratitude to all those who have helped, through their efforts, to bring Part 2 of this Special Issue to print. The support and hospitality offered by the Editors and the Editorial Board of *Postcolonial Directions in Education* remains an invaluable and gracious pillar that allowed this project to take shape and evolve. We are extremely grateful to those who generously accepted our collegial invitation to review contributions submitted to Part 2: Peter Mayo (Department of Arts, Open Communities and Adult Education, University of Malta); Michelle Stack (Department of Educational Studies, University of British Columbia), Marina Riera-Retamero (Department of Visual Arts and Design, University of Barcelona); Sarah Soanirina Ohmer (Department of Latin American and Latino Studies & Department of Africana Studies, Lehman College, City University of New York); Boris Trbic (Department of Design Media & ICT, Swinburne University of Technology); and Nadia Yaqub (Department of Asian Studies, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill). Thank you to Mona Gleason, and to the Department of Educational Studies she heads at the University of British Columbia, for a generous grant to support editorial and formatting work related to the Special Issue's two parts. Thank you to Manuscript Editor, Kealin McCabe, and to Senior Executive Angela Xuereb and Graphic Designer Gabriel Izzo (both from the Marketing, Communications & Alumni Office at the University of Malta) for their indefatigable attention and care with all details and logistics in the editing, formatting, and designing of the present issue.

Equally, thank you to each of the contributors for their persistent engagement, trust, and commitment as they

navigated the different phases of this project, editorial feedbacks, and submission deadlines.

With the publication of Part 2, we are bringing this two-part project to completion, but not necessarily to closure. We hope that conversations regarding the intersections between decolonial approaches, cinematic and media production, and pedagogical praxis continue and expand into vibrant exchanges. Submissions were once again not only numerous, but unique and powerful—several submissions remain grounded in decolonial work—making the very editorial process transformative by establishing much soil for the future cultivation of film and film festival scholarship. Indeed, this is just the beginning of marginalized-minoritized voices working within or in close relation with the film industry. This is also the beginning of new scholarly relationships of arts and culture advocacy gaining long overdue publics and taking centre-stage in both film production and academia. Thank you all!

## **Reference**

Christian, D., with Medel, S., and Mazawi, A. (2019).

‘Talking in/talking out’: Indigenous knowledge, filmmaking, and the decolonizing poetics of visual sovereignty. A conversation with Dr. Dorothy Christian. *Postcolonial Directions in Education*, 8(2), 155-184.

## RETURN, RECOLLECT, IMAGINE: DECOLONIZING IMAGES, RECLAIMING PALESTINE

**Farah Atoui<sup>1</sup>**  
*McGill University*

**Abstract** This article engages with *Recollection*, a film by Palestinian filmmaker Kamal Aljafari, and *And yet my mask is powerful* (Part 1), a video by Palestinian artists Basel Abbas and Ruanne Abou-Rahme, as visual articulations of Palestinian resistance against Israeli practices of settler-colonial erasure. The paper explores how these works both activate, and are activated by, the Palestinian decolonial struggle. These works visually materialize a radical politics of decolonization that problematizes and subverts colonial practices and narratives. Engaging with (material, visual, discursive) sites of colonial violence and destruction as generative sites, these works recover and recenter Palestinian existence. They expose the colonial project's failure to fully erase and representationally evacuate traces of Palestinian presence. From the artists' decolonial creative processes and practices, new countervisual languages emerge that imagine/image an alternative reality, unbound from colonial time, space and narrative.

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<sup>1</sup> I thank two Anonymous Reviewers, the Guest Editors, Hoda Adra, and Samiha Khalil for their insightful comments and suggestions, as well as Copy Editor Kealin McCabe for her careful reading of the final text.

**Keywords:** Palestine – film/video, decolonial struggle, colonial erasure, countervisualizing, imaginative remembrance

“...the whole history of the Palestinian struggle has to do with the desire to be visible”.

Edward Said (2006, p. 2)

“I use cinema as an act of reclamation”.

Kamal Aljafari (cited in Zaher, 2019)

“Only now, returning to the site of destruction as the very site from which to cast a new projection that evokes the potential of an unrealized time, not bound by the here and now or there and then. A parallel time that is not occupied, a virtual time that is not ‘our’ time”.

Basel Abbas and Ruanne Abou-Rahme (2017)

## **Introduction**

Palestinian films are inherently and inescapably political, forged in the crucible of Israel’s ongoing settler-colonial occupation of Palestine (Dabashi, 2006; Yaqub, 2018; Burris, 2019), a project premised not only on the seizure and occupation of Palestinian territory and on the expulsion of Palestinians, but on the very denial of Palestinian existence (Zureik, 2015). The myth of a land without people for a people without land that animates Zionist ideology indeed requires the systemic erasure of Palestinian presence—bodies, homes, villages, cities, monuments, language, identity, history—an erasure that takes both a material and cultural form. Film, as a visual medium, holds the radical potential to undo Israel’s practices of settler-colonial erasure, by making visible what has been ignored, hidden, marginalized, excluded, or erased by the Israeli discourse.

Films provide, as academic, literary critic and political activist Edward Said eloquently puts it, “a visual alternative, a visual articulation, a visible incarnation of Palestinian existence in the years since 1948, the year of the destruction of Palestine” (Said, 2006, p. 3).

This article engages with *Recollection*<sup>2</sup> (Aljafari, 2015), a film by Palestinian filmmaker Kamal Aljafari,<sup>3</sup> and *And yet my mask is powerful* (Part 1),<sup>4</sup> a video by Palestinian artists Basel Abbas and Ruanne Abou-Rahme<sup>5</sup> as visual articulations of Palestinian resistance against Israeli practices of settler-colonial erasure, to explore how these works both activate, and are activated by the Palestinian decolonial struggle. I argue that these works visually materialize a radical politics of decolonization that problematizes and subverts the colonial practices and narratives. Engaging with (material, visual, discursive) sites of colonial violence and destruction as generative sites, these

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<sup>2</sup> *Recollection*, Germany, DCP, Colour and Black and White, 2015, 70'.

<sup>3</sup> Aljafari was born in 1972 in Jaffa. He studied in Jerusalem and Köln, and is now based in Berlin. Working with moving and still images, he interweaves between fiction, non-fiction, and art. His films include *An Unusual Summer* (2020), *It's a long way from Amphioxus* (2019), *Recollection* (2015), *Port of Memory* (2009), and *The Roof* (2006).

<sup>4</sup> *And yet my mask is powerful (Part 1)*, Single screen and 5-channel video projection, 2-channel sound + subwoofer, tools, bricks, boards, 2016. The trailer can be accessed at <https://vimeo.com/184413097>, and a detailed description of the work can be found here:

<https://www.baselandruanne.com/And-yet-my-mask-is-powerful-Part-1>. This work is part of a larger project, which includes a mixed-media installation, a publication, and sound work. More information about part 2 can be found here: <https://www.baselandruanne.com/And-yet-my-mask-is-powerful-Part-2>

<sup>5</sup> Basel Abbas and Ruanne Abou-Rahme (b. 1983) live between New York city and Ramallah. They work together across a range of sound, image, text, installation and performance practices. Their practice is engaged in the intersections between performativity, political imaginaries, the body and virtuality. A full biography is available at <https://baselandruanne.com/Bio>

works recover and recenter Palestinian existence, thus exposing the colonial project's failure to fully erase and representationally evacuate traces of Palestinian presence.

In my analysis, I focus on the artists' decolonial creative practices and processes, including how rituals of return that reclaim occupied territory are performed; how colonized images or objects are re-appropriated and subverted; and how the recollection of aural, visual and material fragments of Palestinian memory and history are recovered. At the intersection between creative practices and processes I map the emergence of new countervisual languages that imagine/image an *otherwise*, that is, an alternative reality unbound from colonial time, space and narrative. Unconventional, hybrid, and fragmentary, the decolonial imaginaries articulated and activated by these works capture the complex realities of Palestinian experiences. To draw again on Said, such works represent the defining features of Palestinian present existence: "dispossession, dispersion, and yet also a kind of power incommensurate with [Palestinian] stateless exile" (Said, 1986, p. 6).





*Figure 1: The old city of Jaffa seen from the Mediterranean Sea. Still Image from Recollection, courtesy of Kamal Aljafari.*

\*\*\*

Jaffa.<sup>6</sup> He returns to his city by boat, from the sea. He steps down into the port. He walks up a flight of stairs, and from there, enters the old city. He goes to places that no longer exist, having been systemically destroyed, renovated, and gentrified by agencies representing the Israeli state as part of an ongoing attempt at erasing Palestinian existence and identity. He is dreaming, and in his dream, he is filming

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<sup>6</sup> Jaffa was a major Palestinian port city on the eastern Mediterranean coast, the commercial and cultural center of Palestine. Its cosmopolitan and dynamic society, of around 70,000 inhabitants, was disrupted with the Nakba (or catastrophe) in 1948, when it was largely depopulated with the violent processes associated with the creation of the state of Israel. These processes of colonial violence and dispossession continue to this day in Jaffa in the form of home demolitions, forced evictions, land grabbing, gentrification (Sa'di-Ibraheem, 2020). More generally, the Palestinian *Nakba* entailed the uprooting of more than 700,000 Palestinians out of a population of 1.4 million, the mass destruction of around 400 Palestinian villages and several major cities (Khalidi, 1992). Massacre and/or forced expulsion of Palestinians from their homeland were perpetrated to establish a Jewish majority state (Sa'di & Abu-Lughod, 2007; Masalha, 2012; Abdo-Zu'bi & Masalha, 2018).

and taking pictures, realizing the importance of what he is doing, because he knows that none of these places exists anymore (Kamal Aljafari, personal communication, May 9, 2020). He wanders through the port and the old city's streets. He is returning to the place he is from, to the streets of his childhood, searching for his memories. He is the main character of the film *Recollection*. The film captures Jaffa through his eyes. It captures his *way of seeing* Jaffa, which requires a particular disposition towards the city's materiality, demanding attention to its urban fabric as living form. *Recollection* captures buildings and houses, streets and stairs, mosques and water towers. It focuses, lengthily, on their details (façades, walls, stones, doors, windows, floors, arcades, street signs) rendering their textures vibrant. They are signs, remnants communicating lost memories, and he is staring, listening, and feeling. He is recollecting these memories and recording them.



Figures 2 & 3: (2) Interior of a Palestinian home, Jaffa. (3) Unknown location, Jaffa.



Figure 4: Homes and shops in the port, Jaffa. Still Images from *Recollection*, courtesy of Kamal Aljafari.

Aljafari uses both “I” and “him” to refer to the main character (Handal, 2016). And yet, while *Recollection* is a deeply personal film, it also reflects a collective Palestinian desire to search for, and retrieve lost memories, to recollect and reclaim a stolen history, and as Edward Said observed, “to be visible” (Said, 2006, p. 2). The “I” in the film, as Aljafari states, is a composite of all the ghosts in the film, and “his walk is his grandfather’s, his mother’s, his uncle’s walk. The walk of all the phantoms he is finding” (cited in Handal, 2016). The “I” is a “vehicle” (cited in Handal, 2016), the I is multiple, performing a collective walk, performing a collective act of recollection through which Palestinian memory and subjectivity is re/constituted. Jaffa is also multiple, standing for any catastrophized city that has vanished or that is vanishing. Jaffa is Beirut during the

Lebanese civil war; it is Berlin in 1945; it is Aleppo today.<sup>7</sup> The main character's return is that of a displaced person returning to their disappearing/ed city to recollect memories. *Recollection* folds the personal into a collective experience of loss and displacement, and into a collective remembrance as resistance to erasure. That act of remembrance is not confined to a specific people, geography or political reality. As filmmaker and writer Nour Ouayda puts it, "Kamal Aljafari's film materializes an act of resistance against the occupying Israeli forces—but also against forgetfulness, erasure and exclusion—that is only possible through cinema" (Ouayda, 2016).

While the places represented in *Recollection* have been physically eradicated by Israel, their traces were captured in Israeli fiction films made throughout the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, as part of using the old city of Jaffa, and other neighbourhoods, as a fitting historic setting on which to project an invented history, and narratives that were excluding Palestinians. As Aljafari incisively puts it, "[Palestinians] were completely excluded from the image and therefore uprooted twice in reality and in fiction" (cited in Himada, 2010). *Recollection* undoes this violent visual displacement by re-appropriating colonial images of Jaffa, and manipulating them, to recenter the city and re-root the Palestinians in it. *Recollection* is entirely composed of cinematic scenes taken from over fifty Israeli films, collected, edited and repurposed by Aljafari. He edits out the Israeli actors from the foreground of the image, a process revealed

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<sup>7</sup> Kamal Aljafari during a Q&A session that followed the screening of *Recollection* at Montreal's Museum of Fine Arts, January 27, 2016 (Phi Foundation for Contemporary Art, 2016).

to viewers in the film's trailer<sup>8</sup> and opening scene, to be able to better see the backgrounds: the city itself, as well as the Palestinians that were inadvertently caught on film in the Israeli features. Despite efforts at erasing their presence, Jaffa's Palestinians "smuggled themselves into the image that didn't want them to be there" says Aljafari (2020, p.17). Ghostly figures roaming in the background, they haunted the Israeli films, waiting and wanting to be discovered. Aljafari finds them. Like a cinematic archaeologist, he digs into Israeli film archives to excavate visual traces of the old Jaffa, and its displaced Palestinian inhabitants. He collects the scenes containing these ghostly traces, removes the layer that conceals them, zooms in to recuperate them, and to make them visible. Aljafari explains this process:

In the first part of the project which wasn't yet a film project, I projected the films and took photos of places and details in the background of the films. This is when I started seeing the figures, passerby who were not part of the narrative, but were caught in the image. At the end of this process I had thousands of images of place and people, of Jaffa.<sup>9</sup> I later started working on the film, for which I made a selection of scenes that I valued for their documentation of the city, or where Palestinians appeared accidentally. Then I had the idea of removing the actors from the foregrounds of the scene—cleaning the moving

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<sup>8</sup> In the trailer of *Recollection*, Aljafari shows how the film was made: by removing the Israeli actors from the Israeli films' scenes, and zooming in on the figures he found in the backgrounds. The trailer is accessible at <https://vimeo.com/135388977>

<sup>9</sup> These photos were exhibited at Harvard Radcliffe Gallery in 2010: <https://www.radcliffe.harvard.edu/news/radcliffe-magazine/documenting-world>

image from the actors, so to say. Then I created a camera movement for these scenes depicting the walks and roaming of the narrator/camera/person/returning (Kamal Aljafari, personal communication, May 9, 2020).



*Figure 5: 'Issa Khimel at the door of his café. From Sixtieth Street [Rehov Shishim] by George Ovadia (1976).*



*Figure 6: Unknown. From The Delta Force by Menahem Golan (1986).*



*Figures 7, 8 and 9: These are from Kazablan by Menahem Golan (1974). They reveal the process of Aljafari: (7) excavating a scene with a Palestinian figure in the margin, (8) erasing the Israeli actors, (9) zooming in and centering the Palestinian figure, in this case, a school boy caught in the background of the film. Still Images from Recollection, courtesy of Kamal Aljafari.*



Through a process of “filming by means of editing” (Hochberg, 2017, p. 544) *Recollection* lays a claim, to borrow Aljafari’s formulation, to a “cinematic territory” that was occupied by Israel, and reconstitutes Jaffa’s erased and lost *image* (Aljafari, 2020, p. 19). He samples scenes from Israeli films; erases the “cinematic occupiers” (cited in Lee, 2016) subverts the “cleaned” images, by zooming in, or framing and photographing the edges and backgrounds to generate new images; assembles these new images into a film through which he recreates and remembers Jaffa and recovers its original Palestinian community twice removed—from the city and from its representation. *Recollection* enacts and represents what Aljafari terms “cinematic justice” (Hochberg, 2017, p. 547), as it dismantles the Israeli cinematic occupation by intervening in the colonial archive, and rectifying its colonial narrative/representation of Jaffa. From the Israeli images, Aljafari generates decolonized images. These images are grainy and pixelated, but it is precisely from these very grains and pixels that Jaffa (re)emerges. Through the filming, close-ups, zooming, and taking pictures of the colonial images, Aljafari conjures and reawakens the ghosts of old Jaffa and its Palestinian inhabitants, who were hidden/excluded/dismissed but were always there, inscribed in the very materiality of the Israeli images. The grains and pixels mediate Aljafari’s cinematic return to, and remembrance of, his city.

The terrain of visual representation, as *Recollection* reveals, is a site of decolonial struggle. Visual culture theorist and activist Nicholas Mirzoeff argues that such a struggle is produced amidst the confrontation between visibility and countervisuality. The former references the

aesthetic articulation/manifestation of colonial power's claim to authority which makes authority visible, and make it seem natural and right. The latter opposes this authority by laying a "claim to a political subjectivity and collectivity...that has the autonomy to arrange the relation of the visible and the sayable" (Mirzoeff, 2011, p. 1). The confrontation between visuality and countervisuality is a struggle that is not confined to the realm of representation, for visuality, as Mirzoeff conceptualizes it, is a discursive practice invested in organizing and ordering the world through processes of classification, separation, and aestheticizing. What is at stake is the shaping or structuring of reality. Visuality presents colonial authority as self-evident and consolidates relations of power, whereas countervisuality refuses such legitimation. As Mirzoeff explains, "confronted with this double need to apprehend and counter a real that did exist but should not have, and one that should exist but was as yet becoming," countervisuality lays a claim to "a right to the real" (Mirzoeff, 2011, p. 26). It is a claim to a different, unthinkable, decolonized, reality. In *Recollection*, Aljafari actively engages in countervisualizing. He refuses the visualized colonial authority of Israeli films, which renders Palestinians invisible, and contests it by reconfiguring the terms on which this colonial reality is premised. *Recollection* reverses the power relations embedded in colonial image-making, unsettles the colonial narrative and its erasures, and visually renders the unimaginable/invisible into reality. Through the (re)appropriation of colonial images of Jaffa and their use against the grain, Aljafari liberates these images to reconstitute a Jaffa that is not destroyed and a Palestinian community that is not displaced by colonial power. Decolonization happens through the processes of



(re)appropriation, manipulation and subversion of the image, which enable Aljafari to redeem the “authentic” image from colonial ideological and visual distortion, and to *countervisualize* an alternative decolonial reality for Jaffa. An alternative reality that was always-already there, embedded in those images but muted by dominant colonial discourse. An alternative reality that was waiting for an act of subversion to be activated and animated.



Figures 8 and 9: (8) Ajami quarter, Jaffa. (9) Street scene, Jaffa. Still Images from *Recollection*, courtesy of Kamal Aljafari.

While Aljafari enacts a cinematic return to visually reclaim and recreate Jaffa, the city’s sonic reconstitution warrants his physical return, and his engagement with (and sensing of) the city’s soundscape. In an interview with *Guernica* magazine, Aljafari explains that, in order to (re)create a soundtrack for these images, he used special types of microphones that capture sounds inside walls, and installed microphones beneath the water and on the port. The sounds these microphones record are the sounds of an erased history. The sounds of the Palestinian lives that the city’s walls bore witness to and still contain. The sounds that were buried under water with the debris of the destroyed houses that the Israeli agencies dumped on Jaffa’s shoreline, and were claimed by the sea (Sa’di-Ibraheem,

2020). To hear and capture those sounds, Aljafari recorded at night, “when places free themselves from the present, and its occupiers” (cited in Handal, 2016). The sound of Jaffa, unbound from occupation, (re)emerges and is recorded. This decolonized sound exposes the incompleteness of the settler-colonial project, and reveals its inability to mute Jaffa. Jaffa’s free but hidden sound, conjured by Aljafari, resonates to evoke possible pasts, presents, and futures.

By freeing images from the grip of Israeli cinematographic occupation, and invoking the possibility of free sounds, *Recollection* breaks from and through colonial hegemony to imagine and represent an otherwise. From this break, Palestinian history and memories that exceed colonial power spill over, they could never be totally contained, hidden, marginalized, oppressed, muted, or erased by its discourse, practices and narratives, their force is captured by the recurring sounds and images of a turbulent sea. These haunting traces, returning and persisting against colonial power, desiring attention and wanting to make themselves known, disturb the normative order of things. From this break and these recovered traces, freedom is imagined and Palestinian existence is affirmed. It is captured by a scene at the end of *Recollection*, which Aljafari poignantly describes: “phantoms are walking together, hand in hand. They are singing. It is a song where they are declaring themselves. They decide to walk and sing and talk to the world. It’s a final march where these ghosts are no longer ghosts” (cited in Handal, 2016).



Figures 10 & 11: Palestinian Children in the Ajami Quarter. Still Images from *Recollection*, courtesy of Kamal Aljafari.

*Recollection* remembers *imaginatively*, as African Diasporic culture and politics scholar Sophia Azeb would put it, as it explores “what was, what should have been, and what might still be” (Azeb, n.d.). It revisits the past in the present moment, and imagines/images another possible present future. Writer, media theorist, and media activist Franco “Bifo” Berardi argues that:

what is interesting is not the Image as a representation of reality, but its dynamic power, its ability to stir up and build projections, interactions and narrative frames structuring reality. What is interesting in the Image is its ability to select among infinite possible perceptual experiences, so that imagination becomes imagin/action (Berardi, 2005, p. 64).

*Recollection* engages in imaginative remembrance as resistance against settle-colonial violence and erasure, countervisualizing an alternative and radical reality that refuses and transcends colonial bounds, and that activates decolonial frames for reclaiming and practicing Palestine.

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Figure 12: Still image from *And yet my mask is powerful*. Courtesy of Basel Abbas and Ruanne Abou-Rahme.

A group of Palestinian youth walks through landscapes of dense vegetation. They are returning to the sites of their destroyed Palestinian villages inside the State of Israel. They return “to possess and almost be possessed by these strangely living sites of erasure and wreckage” (Abbas & Abou-Rahme, 2017). They sit amongst the ruins, circle around them, touch and feel them, film them, collect pieces of them. They re-inhabit these sites, even if for a brief moment, and reactivate their spaces. In *And yet my mask is powerful* (Part 1), Basel Abbas and Ruanne Abou-Rahme participate in, and capture in audio-visual form, the experience of these ritualized returns. Returns that defy colonial practices of enclosure, and reclaim sites of dispossession. Returns that perform Palestinian refugees’ right of return to their homeland, returns that, if truly

enacted, would dismantle Israel. As modern Arab politics and intellectual history scholar Joseph Massad argues:

it is precisely because the European Jews' 'right' to return to their alleged 'homeland' could only be realised through colonisation of the homeland of Palestinians, and Jewish colonisation of Palestinian land could only be realised through the expulsion of indigenous Palestinians and ensuring their inability to ever return home, that a Palestinian right of return would undo the entire Zionist project, which is premised on their expulsion (Massad, 2019).

Returns that embody the desire to return in/to history, particularly to sites of wreckage, and to engage with them.

Poet, essayist and feminist activist Adrienne Rich's poem *Diving Into the Wreck* (1973) is the starting point for *And yet my mask is powerful*. The poem lends the work its title and scripts its narrative. Verses from the poem visually appear on the screens, in an intensifying rhythm, throughout the video. They speak of the solitary pursuit of an explorer diving under the sea. A journey of exploration of an underworld. The diver came for "the wreck and not the story of the wreck/the thing itself and not the myth" (Rich, 1973). In other words, this is a journey of reckoning with the truth concealed by myth; a reckoning with an unmediated reality that had been dominated and structured by myth; a reckoning with the material evidence of damage and disaster. The diver engages with the wreck not to salvage it, but to confront it, and feel its force. A confounding bodily experience, both painful and precious, for the wreck is the



very site from which a different way of being, sensing and knowing emerges. In the hold, the sense of dispossession that takes over comes with a sense of recognition and liberation. The journey is one of losing one's self, of mutating, of becoming. A journey when/where the identity of the solitary "I" begins to unravel: "This is the place/And I am here, the mermaid whose dark hair/streams black, the merman in his armored body/We circle silently/about the wreck/we dive into the hold./I am she: I am he" (Rich, 1973). The "I" unravels into a queer presence, dissolves in a collectivity: "We are, I am, you are/by cowardice or courage, the one who find our way back to this scene/carrying a knife, a camera/a book of myths/in which/our names do not appear" (Rich, 1973).



Figure 13,14,15: Still images from *And yet my mask is powerful*. Courtesy of Basel Abbas and Ruanne Abou-Rahme.

The “we” gathers all those who risk such journeys of reckoning, who find their way back to the wreck to experience and record the evidence of damage and disaster. The “we” gathers all those who confront and shatter the myths that do not account for their existence. For Abbas and Abou-Rahme (2017), the “we” represents the young Palestinians collectively returning to the sites of their destroyed villages to surrender to their force and experience their liberating potentialities. Through this act of returning, a new subjectivity emerges from the ruins. As anthropologist, curator, and art critic Esmail Nashif asserts, the Palestinian returning to their ruins is returning to themselves, returning to the core of the Palestinian tragedy to re-engage with it, to be expelled from it (Nashif, n.d., p. 137).

Where Aljafari reads the city as bearer of Palestinian history and living memory inscribed in the city’s urban materiality, Abbas and Abou-Rahme turn to vegetation as a living archive of Palestinian stories. As the artists bring a different mode of decolonial “seeing” or “reading” to bear on sites of ruins, one which requires an openness and receptivity to non-human species, these sites are transformed from sites of tragedy and death to living fields of human-nonhuman relationality. These sites, as the artists express, “emerge not just as places of ruins and trauma, but appear full of an unmediated vitality” (Abbas & Abou-Rahme, 2017). Abbas and Abou-Rahme engage with these sites as social and cultural landscapes, made by a history of human and non-human relations that are inscribed in the native vegetation. Like the walls and stones in *Recollection*, the vegetation in *And yet my mask is powerful* is speaking

forgotten, lost, erased stories, and Abbas and Abou-Rahme are perceiving and recollecting them. For instance, we read in the artists' notes that cacti were used by Palestinians to create a natural border for their villages (Abbas & Abou-Rahme, 2017). Their presence in the landscapes traversed by the artists and the young Palestinians signal the often-hidden remains of the destroyed villages. The cacti fences, both a living material evidence of these villages, and an index of the colonial violence inflicted upon them, become a medium through which Palestinian history, memory and presence are conjured.

If *Recollection* is haunted by the ghosts of Jaffa's Palestinians who were displaced and erased but have re-emerged to find their way to the present, *And yet my mask is powerful* is haunted by a different force, one of non-human life. This resilient force persists in the face of colonial destruction and erasure and still inhabits the sites where Palestinian villages once stood. This non-human life force undoes the double-eradication of these villages: first, their physical obliteration; then, the enclosure and transformation of their ruins into archaeological sites by the Israeli government (Abbas & Abou-Rahme, 2017). Sociologist and scholar Avery F. Gordon tells us that "haunting and the appearance of specters or ghosts is one way we're notified that what's been suppressed or concealed is very much alive and present, messing or interfering precisely with those always incomplete forms of containment and repression" (Gordon, 2011, p. 2). Those sites are not, in any way, dead, as the colonial narrative would have it. Their ruins are not relics from a distant past, remnants of an extinct culture and people. These sites, and the stories they hold, are kept alive by the unruly vegetation.





Figures 16 & 17: Still images from *And yet my mask is powerful*. Courtesy of Basel Abbas and Ruanne Abou-Rahme.

*And yet my mask is powerful* makes this liveliness visible, sensible, legible. The video mediates a “hyper-sensory audiovisual landscape rooted in the real”,<sup>10</sup> which is intensely immersive and experiential. The sites of wreckage represented are experienced viscerally and affectively, their vitality deeply *sensed* and *felt*. The sounds of insects, the smell of wild fennel, the touch of wild thorns, the sight of cactus or a lone pomegranate tree not only haunt the ruinous sites—they also haunt the young Palestinians that visit them, and haunt viewers. Gordon suggests that:

when the repression isn’t working anymore the trouble that results creates conditions that demand re-narrativization. What’s happening? How did it come to pass? What does it mean? When the repression isn’t working anymore the trouble that results creates conditions that invite action. (Gordon, 2011, p. 3).

<sup>10</sup> Description of *And yet my mask is powerful* on the Lincoln Center (n.d.) website: <http://lincolncenter.org/show/artist-spotlight-basel-abbas-and-ruanne-abou-rahme>

This haunted and haunting work, not unlike *Recollection*, reveals the failures of settler-colonialism, and its inability to fully and hermetically contain or erase Palestinian existence. *And yet my mask is powerful* fractures the colonial narrative, and from its fractures, which are aurally rendered through the stutters and glitches of the video's sonic element, visualizes a reality outside of colonial time, space and discourse (Abbas & Abu Rahme, cited in Kabra, 2018). This decolonial reality emerges from beneath the dominant narrative, activated by an alternative mode of perceiving, experiencing and being/becoming in the wreck.

In Rich's poem (1973), a scuba diving mask enables the diver to be under water, and gives her the power she needs to confront the wreck: "First the air is blue and then/it is bluer and then green and then/black I am blacking out and yet/my mask is powerful/it pumps my blood with power" (Rich, 1973). For Abbas and Abou-Rahme, the poem evokes the mask's multiple performative powers: the power to conceal one's identity; the power to enable one to become anonymous, to become other, "to move from the singular to the common;" the power to enable and empower one to do things they normally wouldn't or couldn't do (cited in Kabra, 2018). Like the diver in Rich's poem, the returning Palestinians in the video are wearing masks.



Figure 18: Still image from *And yet my mask is powerful*. Courtesy of Basel Abbas and Ruanne Abou-Rahme.

The masks returning Palestinians wear are copies of Neolithic stone masks dating 9000 years. Excavated and stolen from the occupied West Bank and its surroundings, they are now part of public and private Israeli collections (Busbridge, 2020; El-Haj, 2002; Rjoob, 2009). In 2014, the Israel Museum in Jerusalem displayed the masks as part of an exhibition titled *Face to Face: The Oldest Masks in the World*. The museum describes the exhibition in the following terms:

A rare group of enigmatic stone masks, which were created in the Judean Hills and the Judean Desert and are the oldest human portraits known to us, sketch the cultural and spiritual world of the people who lived in our region during the Neolithic Period, 9,000 years ago.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Exhibition description on the website of the Israel Museum, Jerusalem (n.d.), at <https://museum.imj.org.il/exhibitions/2014/face-to-face/en/index.html>

The revival of the biblical terms “Judean Hills” and “Judean Desert” to refer to the original provenance of the masks reveals the museum’s endorsement of Israeli militarized and ideologized geographic naming practices, and exposes the museum’s active role in the broader and systemic colonial campaign of writing Palestinians out of the history of the land. Further, the “our,” which precedes the term region, discursively performs/upholds Israel’s colonial claim over the land of Palestine.

The colonial narrative is further expanded upon in a publication (Hershman, 2014) accompanying the exhibition, pages of which were scanned, annotated, and republished by Abbas and Abou-Rahme as part of a book that documents the *And yet my mask is powerful* project (Abbas & Abou-Rahme, 2017). The artists’ notes, scribbled in red onto the scanned pages, materially intervene in the colonial narrative to unsettle it, and to rectify it. The red notes, for instance, highlight the colonial claim over the masks, circling the “our” that precedes the word “mask” through the scanned catalogue pages. The red notes also excavate some of the questionable processes through which these masks found their way into Israeli private and public collections. For example, one of them, referred to as the Dayan mask, was “purchased” in 1970 by Moshe Dayan, Israel’s then Defense Minister. Abbas and Abou-Rahme (2017) report that the mask was then acquired along with the Dayan collection of antiquities by Laurence and Wilma Tish in New York, who donated it to the Israel Museum (The artists reference this information from Hershman, 2014). The artists also annotate the map included in the catalogue, adding the missing contour of the West Bank. Abbas and Abou-Rahme’s

intervention exposes the ways in which these masks, as well as the history/culture embedded in them, were appropriated, framed, and instrumentalized to reinforce Zionist myths that lay a colonial claim over the land and its history, eliding and excluding Palestinians from them.

To challenge these practices of colonial cultural appropriation, the artists “hacked” the masks and 3D-printed copies of them. Abbas and Abou-Rahme explain that they gleaned the specs of the masks from the virtual version of the “Face to Face” exhibition, by zooming in on the masks and taking screen shots from different angles. Combining these screenshots with high resolution images of the masks that were released online by the Israel Museum, the artists were able to reproduce the masks with the help of a 3D-designer, and to print them. They also plan to upload the 3D designs online, so people can print their own masks (Basel Abbas & Ruanne Abou-Rahme, personal communication, May 14, 2020). The use of the term “hack” to describe both the work and the process is deliberate and conscious, and inscribes the artists’ decolonial intervention in a political commitment to liberating material culture from relations of ownership and control, and making it freely accessible. As Abbas and Abou-Rahme put it, “we use the word hacking in relation to material living culture that is possessed and privatized by all these collections and museums, we’re hacking the masks to free these materials, free these archives, and to say this is material cultural is for everyone, and should not be owned by anyone” (Basel Abbas & Ruanne Abou-Rahme, personal communication, May 14, 2020).

Abbas and Abou-Rahme’s decolonial and subversive gesture not only ruptures the museum’s material claim on

the masks, but also its cultural framing. The artists engage in de/counter-mythologizing as they generate new myths, their own, around these objects (cited in Kabra, 2018). They imagine a new narrative, semi-real and semi-fictional, for five of these masks (and continue to develop stories for the remaining ones), which they present in the form of a sound recording alongside the masks in a different iteration of this project. Further, they used copies of the masks to create new rituals that they, along with other Palestinians, performed during the journey of return. In this sense, the artists disrupt the dominant colonial mythology surrounding these masks, displacing it to replace it with a counter-mythology. The more Abbas and Abou-Rahme show *And yet my mask is powerful* in its different iterations, the more the counter-mythology is amplified, the more Palestinian existence is made visible, and the more the dominant myth is decentered and displaced.



Figure 19: Still image from *And yet my mask is powerful*. Courtesy of Basel Abbas and Ruanne Abou-Rahme.



By mobilizing techniques of image hacking, freeing, copying, subverting and repurposing both the image of the masks and the image of the museum's catalogue, as decolonial artistic practices, Abbas and Abou-Rahme reinscribe Palestinians into a history from which they have been expunged. The artists reposition the masks and their history, reactivating them within the politics of the present moment. From dead artifacts, the masks are recoded, and recorded, as potent objects that mediate the experience of return journeys. They become powerful tools that empower returning Palestinians to be where they are not allowed to be according to a history that has no place for them. Tools that reinscribe them on the colonized sites of their destroyed villages. Tools that enable them to perform rituals that revitalize and reclaim these forgotten sites. Tools that allow them to disappear their singular identity and to generate a sense of collective experience. Tools that generate a new visual identity which counters the pervasive stereotype of "the masked Arab" (Said, 2006, p. 3). Tools that mediate the imagining of an otherwise. Just like the sites of wreckage, the masks "mutate from dead fossil to living matter"<sup>12</sup> and in that becoming, activate the process of decolonization embodied in/by these returns.

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*Recollection* and *And yet my mask is powerful* mediate radical decolonial practices and politics enacted through the artists' return to sites of colonial occupation and Palestinian dispossession. While Aljafari's return is cinematic and his

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<sup>12</sup> The description of *And yet my mask is powerful*, is available on the artists website: <https://www.baselandruanne.com/And-yet-my-mask-is-powerful-Part-1>

decolonization is semiotically enacted, Abbas and Abou-Rahme's decolonization is embodied, and takes place through the ritualistic form of a physical return. The three artists perform a forensics, returning to the sites of Palestinian tragedy to recollect subdued fragments of Palestinian existence. They mobilize a particular way of seeing and sensing, one that focuses on materiality and interprets it as historical text, to retrieve these traces. Proceeding like archaeologists of memory, Aljafari unearths memories coded in the material form of the city, while Abbas and Abou-Rahme recover stories embedded in the living matter of the vegetation. In that sense, Aljafari, Abbas and Abou-Rahme take the landscape as object of analysis. And yet, despite the similarity of their approaches, and their concern with colonial erasure and Palestinian reemergence, the artists differ in the ways in which they locate their decolonial work in global conversations. While Aljafari returns to a destroyed urban landscape and engages with the politics of architecture and the built environment to expose the violence of colonial urbanization, gentrification, and urban warfare, Abbas and Abou-Rahme return to rural landscapes and, engaging with the politics of ecology, to reveal the potentialities of exploring human-nonhuman entanglements and relationality.

In these works, ghostly traces emerge as semiotic and audio-visual markers of persistent Palestinian presence against colonial violence, destruction, theft and erasure. In and through *Recollection*, Aljafari awakens and reanimates the cinematic traces of a past life in the present moment, whereas Abbas and Abou-Rahme experience and record living non-human traces in *And yet my mask is powerful*. Out of these reclaimed fragments, gleaned from ruinous



landscapes, the artists bring to the foreground, via the medium of the moving image, realities that have been oppressed, marginalized, and erased, and yet were always there. *Recollection* and *And yet my mask is powerful* uncover and visually represent what cultural critic and scholar Macarena Gómez-Barris calls “submerged perspectives.” Situating her analysis within majority indigenous extractive zones in South America, Gómez-Barris (2017) conceptualizes submerged perspectives as alternative modes of perceiving, living and resisting, that are linked to, and yet are outside of, colonial boundaries. Often unperceivable and invisible, the alternative modes of living nonetheless exist within extractive zones—alongside and against colonialism, destructive capitalist extraction, and their visual regimes—reconfigure and expand the conditions of decolonial possibilities. Gómez-Barris argues that, “submerged perspectives”:

...allow us to see local knowledge that resides within what power has constituted as extractive zones. In each of these places, *submerged perspectives* pierce through the entanglements of power to differently organize the meanings of social and political life.... Extractive zones contain within them the submerged perspectives that challenge obliteration...Seeing and listening to these worlds present nonpath dependent alternatives to capitalist and extractive valuation (2017, pp. 11-12).

Aljafari, Abbas and Abou-Rahme see and listen to these submerged worlds. They embody a practice of “perceiving otherwise” (Gómez-Barris, 2017, p. 3) to oppose the ruinous

effects of settler-colonialism, and to visually render decolonial alternatives that trace the contour of a space, time, and narrative in excess of colonization, outside of it. *Recollection*, and *And yet my mask is powerful* articulate “emergent alternatives” (Gómez-Barris, 2017, p. 4) that resist, refuse and reconfigure the terms and effects of colonial violence, destruction and erasure.

The artists practices and politics of decolonization are materialized through subversive processes of image-making. In *Recollection*, Aljafari collects, edits, subverts and repurposes colonial cinematic images taken from Israeli films, to recover the visual traces of a destroyed Jaffa and of its displaced Palestinian community. Reversing the colonial practice of erasure, he erases the Israeli actors, and zooms in on the city’s now lost urban fabric (stones, walls, houses, streets) and makes the Palestinian passerby the main characters of his film. Aljafari recuperates the traces of his destroyed city and its displaced Palestinian community from the colonial violence and erasure they were subjected to, and brings them from the margins to the center, that is, to visibility. From colonial representation, Aljafari extracts and represents an alternative reality, which had always been there, albeit hidden and submerged. Similarly, Abbas and Abou-Rahme recover an otherwise through the (re)appropriation, manipulation and subversion of colonial images. They hack the image of colonized Neolithic masks to copy and reproduce the masks, that is, to free them from colonial material and cultural claims. Further, by inserting the masks into a contemporary Palestinian cultural context, they activate the masks’ liberating potentialities and its ability to mediate a collective experience of a Palestinian space unbound, even if briefly, from colonial time. “Wading

into what lies beneath the surface” (Gómez-Barris, 2017, p. 12) of colonial representation, these three artists countervisualize by lifting and representing submerged perspectives which point to alternative perceived realities that have been oppressed and marginalized. These emergent alternatives evoke the potentiality of the visual as site where new forms of healing, liberation and justice can be articulated and enacted. As Yomaira C. Figueroa (2015) points out, these alternative gestures towards new possibilities of action as “an integral part of imagining new decolonial futurities” (p. 44).

*Recollection* and *And yet my mask is powerful* intimate an alternative way of making art and doing politics under conditions of occupation/colonization—what curator and editor Faye Harvey (2020, p. 2) calls “recollective resistance”, which generate new countervisual grammars for resistance and struggle against colonial violence and erasure. These works attest to the liberating potentialities of the moving image in the Palestinian decolonial struggle: to open a space where alternative modes of seeing, sensing, being and living are activated, where a desire and a politics of liberation are energized, where a new political identity is imagined, where a post-statist Palestinian nationhood is revitalized, and where a sense of futurity is restored. These imaginative works forge new possibilities for making Palestinians visible, and for imaginatively returning to, remembering, and reclaiming Palestine.

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## LEARNING TO BE “GOOD ENOUGH”: HOLLYWOOD’S ROLE IN STANDARDIZING KNOWLEDGE AND THE MYTH OF MERITOCRACY

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**Abstract** Written for teacher educators and pre-service teachers, we analyze education-themed Hollywood blockbusters *Stand and Deliver* (Musca, 1988) and *Dangerous Minds* (Bruckheimer & Simpson, 1995) that were released alongside neo-liberal, classist, racist U.S. education policies of the 1980s and 1990s. We posit that these films boosted mainstream acceptance of the standardized testing industry and thus, the myth of meritocracy. In addition to featuring harmful narratives about racially, culturally, and economically marginalized students, the pictures promote high-stakes testing rather than interrogating the industry’s reliance on marginalized students to “fail” tests so that centered or privileged students have a standard for measuring “success.” We argue that the films continue to influence dominant national attitudes because the film narratives are often passed down intergenerationally from teacher to pre-



service teacher. Countering these messages, we analyze a third feature length film, *Whale Rider* (Barnett, Hübner, & Sanders, 2002), for its dedication to positive (not utopian) depictions of Māori epistemologies. Created outside of Hollywood's financial grip, this picture illustrates how film has the power to expand thinking on the value of Other ways of knowing. Simultaneously, we problematize the picture for its absence of address of colonial oppression.

**Keywords:** standardized testing, marginalization, education, Indigenous knowledges, film

## **Introduction**

Public schooling in the United States responds to and often codifies dominant narratives that pervade contemporary culture. These narratives influence curriculum, policy, as well as teacher and student attitudes towards education. One primary narrative stream influencing, reinforcing, and challenging hegemonic ideologies about public education is popular film. With teacher educators and pre-service teachers in mind, our goals for this paper are to reveal intersections between the film industry, standardized testing industry and neo-liberal U.S. education policies that work for capitalist gains at the expense of students. We advocate for popular films about schooling serving as sites of analysis to inform critical conversations in pre-service teaching programs. We specifically engage pre-service and teacher educators because they will/have the greatest capacity to impact educational practices and systems on a day-to-day basis. As such, we hope to inspire teacher educators and pre-service teachers to think—even more critically than ever—about the collusion of these industries in (historically and contemporarily) producing deficient national narratives

about students, particularly marginalized students whose knowledges and worldviews have too often been limited or excluded from national discourse. We encourage readers to consider:

- For whom are films about teaching and learning, particularly within urban settings, typically made?
- Why is it important to investigate popular film narratives about teaching and learning?
- How have filmic messages impacted the way the dominant view the marginalized?
- What “permissions,” justifications and predatory measures do disparaging films about teaching marginalized groups influence how Others are then educated by dominant groups?

As we address, racism and systemic oppression operate at a nexus of multiple institutions. Film has the capacity to act as a document of racist culture or to perpetuate racism. We explore the relationship between U.S. education policies spanning the 1980s – 2000s; this period of education reforms led to the massive privatization and consequent contemporary re-segregation of America’s public schools (Lipman, 2011; Kumashiro, 2012; Ravitch, 2013; Warner, 2018). During this time, the Hollywood film industry produced education-themed blockbuster films featuring harmful narratives about marginalized students. These films still have a prevalent grip on the psyche of the U.S. Americans, even if not seen by current generations of pre-service teachers, because the narratives are often passed down intergenerationally from teacher educator to pre-service teacher. Our analyses of *Stand and Deliver* (Musca, 1988) and *Dangerous Minds* (Bruckheimer & Simpson, 1995)

reveal how many canonical mainstream Hollywood films on education serve as a troublesome platform of “public pedagogy” (Giroux, 2004; 2011). Public pedagogy operates beyond the four walls of traditional schooling allowing public in/formal sites—such as film screening sites—to become educative spaces. Regarding Hollywood films as a public pedagogy, we argue that the medium has often endeavored *not* to challenge upper class, White, male epistemologies, but validated those epistemologies through inspirational messages designed to corral students into a myth of meritocracy. The myth of meritocracy (also referred to as the *bootstrap myth*) is born out of the ideals of the American Dream. The American Dream espouses that social mobility is equally available to all hard working citizens. However, the American Dream and its mutually-constitutive myth of meritocracy masquerades society’s structural imbalances that rely on capital and social gains gleaned from the systemic oppressions (Harris, 2015). These myths support neo-liberal education policies and capitalist notions of achievement as numerical attainment. They further reward students not for working collaboratively or civically to prevent and solve social issues, but for competing in an artificial system that may or may not deem them “good enough” to progress academically and socially as we later describe. To counter these illusions, we offer an alternative analysis via our third film, *Whale Rider* (Barnett, Hübner, & Sanders, 2002), created outside of the Hollywood machine, for its dedication to positive depictions of Māori Indigenous epistemologies.

Our analysis is especially pertinent as the United States continues to face political upset while the Trump administration whittles notions of citizenship and human

value down to a monolithic identity, often reductively defined as White, American-born, Christian, heterosexual and male. We see this through administrative speech patterns that degrade Others and executive orders that target the legitimacy, validity and safety of marginalized communities through a multitude of national policies and practices (e.g. the “Muslim travel ban”; attempts to rescind the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program; the ongoing terrorization of immigrant communities by the Immigrations and Customs Enforcement agency; the deplorable conditions found in immigrant detention centers at the U.S. border, with focused attention on the derogation of female detainees). Such reduced notions of citizenship can be similarly employed by the leadership of Betsy DeVos, who heads the U.S. Department of Education and advises the president on K-20 educational matters including funding, as well as policy and programs that inherently affect all students. Devos and her family are known for their bankrolling of right-wing organizations that peddle their own worldviews including Focus on Family, which supports anti-gay legislation as well as the pseudoscientific practice of conversion therapy<sup>1</sup> (“Public (school) enemy,” 2016). Devos’s worldviews are similarly promoted through “school choice” initiatives that have been criticized for increasing racial and economic segregation (Frankenberg, Siegel-Hawley, & Wang, 2010) while turning focus away from investment in and strengthening of public school systems that serve a majority of students and families in the U.S. In 2019, Devos wrought

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<sup>1</sup> Conversion therapy (also known as reparative therapy) seeks to change an individual’s sexual orientation from homo/bisexual to heterosexual, and/or a person’s queer gender identity to cisgender through spiritual or psychological interventions. The practice has been denounced by the American Medical Association, the American Psychiatry Association, the American Counseling Association, and many others (Human Rights Campaign, n.d.).

results from standardized testing to cite a “student achievement crisis” (Lobosco, 2019). While student test scores were indeed disappointing, Randi Weingarten, President of the American Federation of Teachers contended:

Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos ignores the real issues [of state funding] that plague our classrooms and student achievement, presumably because they disrupt her political agenda to siphon public money into private hands and expand private school vouchers and for-profit school ventures (Lobosco, 2019).

Devos’s construction of the “student achievement crisis” (Lobosco, 2019) turns the lens towards students, administrators, teachers and governmental overreach while obfuscating her own role in benefitting from a system that privatizes education at the expense of public school learners, and especially low-income students. Also of concern is Devos’s ability to use testing outcomes to justify obstructions of funding into “failing” public schools, and thus, increasing public school closures that would yield to greater overcrowding and school segregation.

We begin this paper by mapping a brief historical foundation rooted in coloniality that sought to standardize knowledge and subsequently generated fertile ground for the standardized testing industry to materialize. Then, we address how capitalistic gains made through neoliberal U.S. education reforms relied on narrow constructions of knowledge and the advancement of competitive, individualistic notions of achievement. Next, we analyze the aforementioned films to reveal their complicity with the

standardization of knowledge and the development of a national psyche about what education looks like, and how its messages have aligned with specific educational policies. We complete the film analysis by illuminating “Other” ways of knowing via an alternative filmic model (*Whale Rider*, 2002) which works to unpack and promote the necessity for varied knowledges in the academy and beyond. Lastly, we conclude the paper with reflections.

We write as two educators who have taught in both the k-12 US school system and in US higher education. We position ourselves as recipients of White privilege committed to anti-oppression teaching and learning. The significance of our review is to reveal a set of coordinated factors that normalize oppressively competitive structures that continue to evolve at the nexus of film and education. In doing so, we hope that we teachers, teacher educators, parents, students and communities will be better able to recognize and resist these structures in favor of just educational practices in schools and in our communities. In conjunction with building social and cognitive justice, we propose acknowledging how different communities construct knowledge and how the honoring and integration of varied knowledges can create a stronger educational and societal fabric.

### **Engaging understandings: Coloniality and colonization**

Coloniality pivots from a position that western European logic, including the notion of gender and its bifurcations, is universal and accurate (Lugones, 2007; Lugones, 2016; Mignolo, 2011). Relevant to the points made in this manuscript, coloniality seeks to “dismantle ‘Other’ knowledges and ways of life” (Manning, 2016). Coloniality

can further be described as “a system that defines the organization and dissemination of epistemic, moral and aesthetic resources in ways that mirror and reproduce modernity’s imperial project” (Andreotti, 2015, pp. 195). Alternatively, decoloniality offers a “delink[ing]” from colonial projects and “dispel[s] the myth of universality” (Mignolo, 2011, p. xxvii, and p. xvi, respectively).

Though related, coloniality differs from colonization in that land is central to colonization and to decolonization (Tuck & Yang, 2012). While Indigenous cultures vary, Indigenous peoples have expressed the centrality of land in Indigenous epistemologies (Simpson, 2014; Tuck & Yang, 2012; Wilson, 2008). The centering of land is seen not as a “*concept ... but about centering the land as a metabolism*” (Ahenakew, 2019, p. 14; italics original). As such, decolonization is not “a swappable term for other things we want to do to improve our societies and schools” (Tuck & Yang, 2012, p. 3).

With these articulations in mind, we are intentional about the distinctions we make between coloniality and colonization throughout this article.

### **Mapping the historical foundations for the standardization of knowledge: Colonization, eugenics and standardized testing**

Coloniality, colonization tactics, eugenics and standardized testing have built upon each other to normalize the subjugation of “Other” ways of knowing in order to privilege “dominant notions of what constitutes knowledge and knowledge construction in the academy and beyond” (Osei-Kofi, Shahjahan & Patton, 2010, p. 329). We address how

the practice of standardizing knowledge seeks to funnel learners into co-opted reductive ways of thinking that advance monoepistemological notions of education for the convenience and profit of a few. We engage decolonial and feminist pedagogical frameworks rooted in critical theory to help convey the intricacy of a social system wherein the power of the center depends on the creation and subordination of the margins. The role of capitalism is significant to this discussion because of its reliance on the margins to maintain the power and prestige of the center. We further engage these frameworks for their abilities to articulate and demonstrate the values of “Other” ways of knowing, learning, organizing, re-defining and practicing education. We recognize that decoloniality is not a tidy project with predictable solutions and outcomes. Instead, decoloniality requires flexibility, messiness, discontinuity and a commitment to “look within and undo/rework the colonizing oppressive structures from the inside-out and then look again from the outside-in” (Segalo, Manoff and Fine, 2015, p. 343).

### ***The Eugenics movement***

Though it had multiple iterations spanning generations, eugenics policies proliferated with fervor in the United States at the turn of the twentieth century and, soon after, throughout parts of Europe and Canada. The movement, which paved the way for a more insidious sorting via standardized testing, sought to develop a superior White race through selective breeding and forced sterilization efforts that intended erasure of multiple racial, ethnic and social cultures. Eugenics often relied on the IQ test as a method for determining human inferiority (Martschenko, 2017; Winfield 2007). As the tests were developed via the



reflection of western, White, male, middle and upper class epistemologies, People of Color were likely to score lower. In addition, newly arriving immigrants and anyone else who fared poorly on the tests were targets of the movement which led to mass sterilization campaigns aimed at halting the reproduction of:

the urban poor, rural “white trash,” the sexually deviant, Blacks, Jews, Native Americans, Asians, Latinos/as, the deaf, blind, epileptic, alcoholic, petty criminals, the mentally ill, and anyone who did not fit in with the pseudoscientifically established blonde, blue-eyed “norm” presented by the eugenically glorified “superior” Nordic race (Winfield, 2007, p. xvii).

Additionally, as part of “anti-Mexican sentiment manifested in school segregation and racial housing covenants” (Novak et al., 2018, p. 613), a study revealed that in California, Latina/os (especially Mexicans) were disproportionately targeted by sterilization practices between 1920 and 1945, with Latina women and girls being at an even higher risk than their male counterparts. Stereotypes of Mexican American women and girls as “hyperfertile” were used as justification for forced sterilization. An illustration of how such a stereotype became written into dominant national beliefs through film can be seen in the film *Stand and Deliver* (Musca, 1988) addressed below.

### ***Standardizing knowledge***

We employ the term *standardization of knowledge* to convey the streamlining of dominant cultural knowledge via mass education, including testing practices. The standardization

of knowledge has been “tightly related to the industrial revolution and the development of a nation-state” with goals of recruiting individuals to “serve the needs of the nation-state and its economic structure” (Bekerman, 2008 p. ix; see also Bekerman & Keller, 2003). Bekerman (2008) asserts that, because of such ties, “schools are in no way disinterested arenas within which neutral knowledge or skills are transmitted from the minds of specialists to those of passive individuals” (foreword). With a history of education in the west serving wealthy, White, able-bodied, Christian men, it is apparent that the standardization of knowledge is linked to a greater narrative about *who* is valued in education and *what* types of education are deemed valuable (Archibald, 2008; Teitelbaum, 1989; Yosso, 2005).

Standardized knowledge operates within interpretations of Cartesian logic that insist on divisions and compartmentalizations of our personal and communal existences as opposed to an integration of multiple parts of ourselves, our greater communities and spiritualities. Said monoepistemological understandings of education dangerously assume “cultural neutrality” (Shields, Bishop & Mazawi, 2005, p. 140), rather than acknowledging the multiple cultural ways in which knowledge is circulated and gleaned (Teitelbaum, 1989). Additionally, the standardization of knowledge often affixes a deficit lens that pathologizes marginalized groups for difference (Shields, Bishop & Mazawi, 2005). As one example, Yosso (2005) describes how Students of Color and their families are “fault[ed] for poor academic performance” and that these deficit assumptions lead to the “banking method of education ... with forms of cultural knowledge deemed valuable by dominant society” (p. 75). Yosso’s statement

illuminates how the standardization of knowledge operates in tandem with what Ladson-Billings (2009) refers to as assimilationist teaching. Assimilationist teaching disregards students' cultural characteristics in favor of "ensur[ing] that students fit into [dominant] society" (pp. 24 – 25). As we describe later, filmic representations of Other students are often portrayed through a deficit lens, pathologizing them as unlearned, undisciplined, and troubled individuals ("bell hooks," 1997), and fail to acknowledge said students' abilities to think more critically through their lived experiences beyond the limitations of the dominant cultural spectrum (Yosso, 2005).

### **The standardized testing industry and the narrowing of epistemologies**

In this section, we reveal how standardized testing—a multi-billion-dollar industry—disproportionately affects Students of Color and low-income students. Such testing intensifies social and educational segregation, leaving marginalized groups to fend for themselves in an already precarious educational system.

The standardized testing industry claims to measure both likelihood for students' future success and student achievement. Two primary forms of standardized testing in the American educational system include aptitude tests and achievement tests. Aptitude tests, such as the SAT, claim to predict student performance in subsequent educational settings such as colleges and universities. Achievement tests intend to measure students' knowledge gleaned from classroom instruction and training. While utilized to determine students' grade levels, results are reportedly used to indicate a school's effectiveness to board members and

communities and thus contribute to school closures, as seen through No Child Left Behind legislation.<sup>2</sup>

The standardized testing industry operates under the insistence that thinking can be streamlined, tests can be developed and measured objectively and that predictions of success can be accurately quantified. It camouflages the fact that test-makers are “subjective, value-laden human beings” (Teitelbaum, 1989, p. 329) by promoting notions of *objectivity* and *transparency* (Robertson & Dale, 2013). Critics like Teitelbaum, a test developer and trainer with the Educational Testing Service, contend that standardized testing only reflects “the androcentric model of knowledge by excluding everything that does not fit its definition of 'knowledge' and everything that cannot be tested in a positivistic format” (p. 329).

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<sup>2</sup> No Child Left Behind legislation outlined that by the end of a school’s second year of not meeting adequate yearly progress, the following corrective actions could be taken: “(1) continue to provide all students enrolled in the school with the option to transfer to another public school served by the [Local Education Agency]; (2) continue to provide specified types of technical assistance while instituting any corrective action; (3) continue to make supplemental educational services available to children who remain in the school; and (4) identify the school for corrective action. Requires the [Local Education Agency], in the case of a school identified for corrective action, to do at least one of the following: (1) replace the school staff who are relevant to the failure to make [Annual Yearly Progress]; (2) institute and fully implement a new curriculum, including providing appropriate professional development for all relevant staff, that is based on scientifically based research and offers substantial promise of improving educational achievement for low-achieving students and enabling the school to make [Annual Yearly Progress]; (3) significantly decrease management authority at the school level; (4) appoint an outside expert to advise the school on its progress toward making [Annual Yearly Progress], based on its school plan; (5) extend the school's school year or school day; or (6) restructure the school's internal organizational structure.” (No Child Left Behind Act of 2001).

The testing industry relies on the commodification of students and an illusion that successful test results secure educational advancement and thus future socio-economic security. Connell astutely describes this reliance on commodification and divisions for its proliferation:

[F]or commodification to work in the area of a basic social process such as education, exclusion is vital. There need to be visible losers, if parents are to be persuaded to pay for their children to become winners. ... the losing has to be legitimated, it has to be made credible and not appear a matter of unfair discrimination or bad luck (in Robertson and Dale, 2013, p. 4) .

Furthering Connell's statement, Robertson and Dale (2013) summarize the consequences of standardized testing as "a particularly fierce form of identification of winners and losers" (p. 437). As such, the industry creates and maintains a convincing competition narrative that keeps students, parents, educators, administrators, policy-makers and politicians believing that learners need to participate in order to progress in society.

These tests can further exacerbate divisions between students because those with economic resources can afford preparation materials, tutors and courses marketed toward improving test scores. As such, the structure of the testing industry inherently positions low-income learners and their intersecting identities at a disadvantage. The descriptions offered by the authors above reveal how the testing industry co-opts marginalized and even centered students into a capitalist, competition-laden system that was never created

for their benefit, keeping both marginalized and centered students vying for dominance. Meanwhile, this well-maintained division between polar notions of *success* and *failure* secures the industry's profits.

### **Capitalist control and the cooptation of neoliberal education reforms**

The ongoing standardization of knowledge through standardized testing relies on the roles neoliberalism and economics play in decisions about public education. The compulsory nature of public education produces rapt audiences for the persistence of capitalistic drives and desires to manifest. Kliebard (1995) points to the rise in industrialization as producing an “urgent mission” of public education to prepare youth for social efficiency, stating, “the advocates of social efficiency were educational reformers” (pp. 77-78). While compulsory schooling stands as some semblance of a human right to education in the American imaginary, it often serves the nation's capitalistic interest in providing the social training necessary for corporate economic prosperity (Bowles & Gintis, 1976), as seen particularly in the federal education reforms of the 1980s and again in the early 21st Century.

*A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform* (1983), published by President Reagan's National Commission on Excellence in Education, determined that U.S. schools were failing and U.S. “preeminence” was “being overtaken by competitors” (n.p.). The following excerpt illustrates the report's reliance on a fear-induced rhetoric of *exclusion* to rally patriotic hopes for *inclusion*:

The people of the United States need to know that individuals in our society who do not possess the levels of skill, literacy, and training essential to this new era *will be effectively disenfranchised*, not simply from the material rewards that accompany competent performance, but also from the chance to participate fully in our national life. A high level of shared education is essential to a free, democratic society and to the *fostering of a common culture*, especially in a country that prides itself on pluralism and individual freedom (n.p.; emphasis added).

The *Nation at Risk* report catapulted a new era of education policies with goals to produce a workforce that could compete with a rapidly globalizing economy (Kumashiro, 2012; Ravitch, 2013). The urgency imbued in this policy produced a subsequent emphasis on standardizing curriculum, enforcing a de-skilling of critical pedagogical practices through the mass adoption of pre-packaged curricula (Ravitch, 2013). This strategic de-skilling of teachers removed the need for critical competencies and forced teachers to focus on “ideological visions of management” (Apple, 1982, p. 114) rather than the promotion of critical thinking and citizen education in the classroom (Kumashiro 2012; Giroux 1988). Thus, the classroom became a reproduction of the factory job site; the teacher served as the manager of a room of workers taught to comply to the standards of behavior, and the teacher prepared students for the social classes of their parents (Anyon, 1981). The social control of curriculum in the 1980s solidified and furthered a foundation for the continued

narrowing of knowledge through the reforms of the next few decades.

*A Nation at Risk* reveals a pivotal moment in the focus on U.S. education: it threatens the psychic, economic, emotional, existential and ultimately the physical security of anyone who does not assimilate. Additionally, despite the report's boastful mention of the country's "pluralism," it whittles notions of American *culture* down to a conflated identity of *productive workers*, promoting America as a capitalist melting pot at the erasure of the cultural, ethnic, religious and other heterogeneous distinctions that comprise the country's identity.

The narrowing of knowledge further gained traction in the education reforms of the 1990s and through the trajectory of the re-authorizations of the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). The 1994 re-authorization, titled "The Improving America's Schools Act of 1994" (IASA), brought the first codified implementation of federal standards to public education. IASA, along with "Goals 2000," established accountability reporting measures on student performance on standardized tests. The 1994 ESEA re-authorization enhanced a competition-based view of schooling wherein standards became normalized measurements of schools' and students' worth. Often manifesting as standardized tests which focused on specific points of knowledge, the scope of learning narrowed as student-to-student competition grew.

The 1994 ESEA re-authorization's focus on standardization set the stage for the proliferation of standards-based reforms that heightened academic



competition during the Bush and Obama administrations. The 2004 re-authorization of ESEA, commonly called No Child Left Behind (NCLB), attached federal funding directly to performance outcomes based on achievement tests. Many achievement tests were outsourced to large profit-bearing corporations like Pearson and McGraw-Hill (Picciano & Spring, 2013; Miner, 2004; Bracey, 2005), creating a conflict of interest: if corporate contracts relied on the misfortune of low-performing schools, what incentive would exist to thoroughly “improve” schools? Simultaneously, the reliance on capitalism in the public education sector reveals the corporate advantage in minimizing culturally relevant curricula in favor of assimilationist curricula.

A key attribute of the NCLB legislation included penalties for poor performing schools. Title I schools, schools concentrated in many low-income, urban areas, serving predominantly Students of Color, that failed to meet federal achievement standards received sanctions for poor performance. Sanctions included: providing students the option to choose another school, such as a charter school; connecting with external, often for-profit, agencies that would provide supplemental educational services to students such as tutoring; adopting a new curriculum, often one that was prepared by a corporate education company; and finally, closing a traditional school and re-structuring it as a charter school, forging further relations with corporate philanthropic arms (Bracey, 2005). The sanctions established in NCLB created a mushroom cloud of profits for educational testing and curriculum corporations where some companies stood to make over \$2 billion in the course of the first few years of the law’s enactment (Olson, 2004). As public schools failed to compete in the knowledge

marketplace, they were turned over to turn-around businesses that provided profitable interventions and boundaries of what could be considered useful knowledge.

The Race to the Top (2009) initiative implemented by the Obama Administration called for continued competition, pitting states and districts against each other for grant money to improve educational opportunities that aligned with particular standards. These grant dollars often go to contracts with educational services companies to help schools improve certain processes or to introduce new technologies to schools, further blurring the lines between public schools and private companies.

The significance of the initiatives and laws we have described that redirect public school funding and attention away from public schools toward private and profitable institutions speaks to the U.S. government's prioritization of corporate power and profit over the interests of schools and communities, a phenomenon that has flourished since the Reagan era.

### **Hollywood's perpetuation of the achievement gap through visual narrative**

*The media, as well as the culture they produce, distribute, sanction, have become the most important educational force in creating citizens and social agents capable of putting existing institutions into question and making democracy work—or doing just the opposite.*

*Henry Giroux, 2005, p. 45*

Film is significant to the critique of standardizing knowledge because it has the power to create, influence and/or solidify national attitudes about *who* and *what ideas* are to be valued in a particular society. It can inaccurately inform identity production through various gazes including male, White, patriarchal and the colonial gaze which perpetuates “caricatur[izations] of non-European civilizations” (Gonick, 2010, p. 306). Conversely, film can work through a lens of decoloniality via the production of “more expansive understandings of diverse peoples, their struggles, and world views” (Gonick, 2010, p. 306).

In film, deficit and achievement gap discourses about marginalized communities are advanced through script writing that camouflages state violence through portrayals of specific communities as problematic. It also does so through casting. Films such as *Dangerous Minds* (Bruckheimer & Simpson, 1995) cast White actors as knowledgeable, disciplined students or teachers, but cast Brown and Black actors as unruly, disobedient students from bad communities in need of a White savior. Viewers’ constant repetitive exposure to these contrasting racial stereotypes normalizes racism sub/consciously. Simultaneously, the narrative creates a thriving platform for competitive ideals about meritocratic education: those who work hard enough will master the test and secure their futures; *all others will have failed by choice*.

We review *Stand and Deliver* (Musca, 1988) directed by Ramón Menéndez and *Dangerous Minds* (Bruckheimer & Simpson, 1995) directed by John N. Smith, two formative films that paralleled aforementioned macro-level education reforms in the 1980s and 1990s which sought to standardize

knowledge through segregative policies. These films served as commercial drivers for the social acceptance of such reforms. We posit that these films are especially relevant to investigation by pre-service teachers because they have been central in regenerating an international and intergenerational sub/consciousness about the aesthetics of education including what comprises education, who is educated and who is teachable. In these films, what is overtly expressed are meritocratic values. Operating insidiously just beneath the consciousness of mainstream (White, middle/upper class) movie-going audiences is that Students of Color should assimilate entirely into western, White, androcentric knowledge—despite its erasure of Other cultural ways of knowing.

### **Stand and Deliver**

The film *Stand and Deliver* (Musca, 1988) offers a complexity of issues presented in concert with the Reagan Administration's education policies. We analyze this film for its role in providing an epistemological foundation for subsequent films that perpetuate notions of racism, sexism, and classism in education.

Loosely based on a true story, *Stand and Deliver* (Musca, 1988) tells the story of educator Jaime Escalante, played by Edward James Olmos, who teaches calculus in a low performing high school in East Los Angeles. The film portrays Escalante teaching students—who were otherwise mathematically illiterate and rebellious—how to accelerate in calculus in one school year. Nearly all of Escalante's students appear to be People of Color with the implication that all the students are from working class families. Escalante drives his students to success through high

expectations, a no-excuses policy and rigorous training that includes test preparation before and after school, as well as during the sweaty, non-air conditioned summer months, and during holiday breaks. Escalante and his students come under the suspicion of the Educational Testing Service when the entire class passes the Advanced Placement Calculus exam. Students are in a bind: if they do not re-take the exam, they will be falsely incriminated by the allegations of the Educational Testing Service; if they re-take the exam which will likely be more difficult, they not only risk failure, but also concede to a racist (and classist) system. While racism is assumed to be at the root of the allegations, the students agree to re-take the exam to prove their innocence. The film fails to highlight how testing industry profits are tied to the competitive delineation between insiders—those who pass the exam—and outsiders who fail the exam. This hype that surrounds passing and failing exams secures the industry's futurity.

*Stand and Deliver* (Musca, 1988) is an interesting film to problematize because its portrayals are not entirely negative as it arguably presents some positive narratives of Students of Color in an urban school. In one regard, it projects a different picture of the academic, social and familial abilities of Students of Color rarely portrayed in Hollywood films during its time period. For example, Pancho works hard at honing his skills as a mechanic after school and Lupe studies extensively despite her responsibility to take care of her siblings while her parents work the night shift. However, the film promotes sexism and the male gaze (Mulvey, 1975) in multiple ways: the portrayal of men in positions of power and women as inhibitors to their advancement (see for example, Escalante's wife; also, a

female school administrator) as well as the hyper-sexualization of Latina characters.

One key scene where the male gaze subjugates Latina characters takes place in the classroom. Escalante teaches the students algebra using a word problem involving the number of girlfriends Juan, Pedro and Carlos have. When Claudia, one of Escalante's active students, proposes a way to solve for this heterosexist word problem, Escalante replies, "You're good now, but you're gonna end up barefoot, pregnant and in the kitchen" (Musca, 1988, 00:34:39). This non-sequitur suggests that Claudia's current "good" looks will lead her to a predetermined destiny full of limitations and serves no other purpose than to undermine the student's contributions to the class. While it may be seen as a joke to the class, the statement publicly reinforces a societally limiting view of Claudia's future, belittling her to a set of stereotypes about Latinas. Escalante further peddles the male gaze through heterosexism. When a male student who does not entirely conform to gender binaries tries to solve for X, the student asks, "Is Pedro bisexual or what?" to which Escalante retorts, "I have a terrible feeling about you," suggesting that the student himself might be gay or bisexual and it is terrible (Musca, 1988, 00:34:37). These two judgments made by Escalante advances heterosexuality and masculinity as the gold standard. In doing so, the character reinforces a heteropatriarchal male gaze too often ascribed to representations of Latinos in mainstream films.

In addition to the perpetuation of stereotypes, our critique of the film is that it uncritically promotes an inspiring view of standardized testing and fails to dismantle the racism, ableism and classism upon which the industry

is reliant. By romanticizing competition through meritocratic narratives, the film seduces viewers' expectations that Others ought to proudly bootstrap into the dominant culture's educational system instead of challenging it. Rather than unpacking these crucial issues, *Stand and Deliver* (Musca, 1988) reinforces limited options: students can either assimilate into the educational system by mastering and acing the test, or "choose" failure. We liken this to Audre Lorde's (2007) contention that "the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house" (pp. 110-113). That is, mastering and acing the insider's test will not dismantle survival-of-the-fittest thinking that deters diverse voices and worldviews from entering and contributing to the academy; rather, it validates and promotes hierarchies and marginalization that maintain distinctions between the academy's insiders and outsiders.

### **Dangerous Minds**

*Dangerous Minds* (Bruckheimer & Simpson, 1995), though met with criticism (Ebert, 1995; McCarthy, 1995) at its release, fared well at the box office and persisted as a White cultural artifact, buttressing the moral panic around violence of the mid-1990s. Starring Michelle Pfeiffer, the narrative advances a particular cultural imaginary of the White female teacher who changed careers to help save the lives of Youth of Color from the perils of their low-income neighborhoods. While based on LouAnne Johnson's (2007) *My Posse Don't Do Homework*, the film deviates significantly from the book, providing a "feel-good oversimplification] of two of its themes, pedagogy and race" (Harris, 2015). Johnson (played by Pfeiffer in the film), disclosed to a student who was inquiring about negative student

depictions in the movie, that it is “at times so far removed from fact as to be ridiculous.”

The depiction of urban Students of Color as “dangerous” pervades from the opening credits, as film viewers are introduced to seedy images of drug dealers and back-lit characters walking graffiti-riddled streets. Movie-goers witness students boarding a school bus which drives them from their neighborhood (shot in grainy black-and-white film) to a brightly colored school campus. The school, like we see in Johnson’s character later in the film, is portrayed as “the light” for the “darkness” of urban students’ lives.

Viewers first meet Johnson entering the school as a student teacher who is quickly offered full-time status after a string of substitutes are driven out by students. After a defeated initial day in which Johnson is addressed by some of her students as “white bread,” she confides in her White male friend and colleague, Hal, that she can’t teach her pupils. Despite her declaration, Louanne (spelled differently than the book author) returns with a sharpened approach, donning a leather jacket, heeled-boots and a no-mess attitude to attempt to effectively win over her students.

Most notable about Johnson’s character is how it is positioned to normalize assimilationist teaching in the movie-goer’s psyche. Assimilationist teaching “operates without regard to the students’ particular cultural characteristics” and seeks only to “ensure that students fit into [dominant] society” (Ladson-Billings, 2009, p. 24). Louanne is the picture of the 1990s IASA teacher champion, pulling students away from the diverse knowledges of their home communities (Yosso, 2005) in order to assimilate them



into White epistemological futurity. In one instance, Louanne centers a grammar lesson around the threat of death that looms in the lives of her low-income Students of Color. Challenged by her students on her disconnect from their communities, Johnson delivers a heated monologue steeped in the myth of meritocracy, that centers individual student *choice* as the gateway for self-saving while simultaneously burying multi-institutional societal oppressions from viewer consciousness. Simultaneously, Johnson re-centers whiteness and furthers her attempts to “homogenize students into one conflated ‘American’ identity” (Ladson-Billings, 2009, p. 38) through the pedagogical engagement of White folk lyricist Bob Dylan, who sings of *dignified* death. Johnson enrages:

There are a lot of people in your neighborhood who *choose* not to get on that bus. What do they do? They *choose* to go out and sell drugs, they *choose* to kill people, they *choose* to do a lot of other things. .... The people who choose to get on that bus—which are you—are the people who are saying ‘I will not carry myself down to die when I go to my grave, my head will be high.’ That is a *choice*. There are no victims in this classroom! (1995, 00:48:40)

As in *Stand and Deliver* (Musca, 1988), we see the illusion of “choice” pedaled throughout the film. Through a discourse of “choice” the film works to secure a bias in viewers that never questions systemic dysfunction but assumes individual and cultural guilt through a rhetoric of *bad choices*. This theme colludes with the implementation of the Gun-Free Schools Act of 1994, one of the primary actors in the development of a school-to-prison pipeline (Hanson,

2005). These zero tolerance policies expanded beyond a safety measure to a profiling measure, creating criminals of students based on assumptions of danger (Meiners, 2007).

A final imperative to our connection between Hollywood and the testing industry is the neo-liberal plexus from which they operate. Neo-liberalism works beyond overtly political aims and emerges covertly through rhetoric, technologies, “discourses, institutions and practices that construct ‘truth’” (Raddon & Harrison, 2015, p. 138), thereby endeavoring to “persuade populations to discipline themselves economically and/or enterprisingly” (Webb, Gulson, & Pitton, 2012, p. 3). As we have seen in the preceding analyses, neo-liberal depictions of educators in films work in a twofold manner. First, they develop a White savior mentality often depicting middle class, White teachers working with “troubled” teens “in the hood” as if they are a public service project. Said teachers administer educational discipline through bootstrap ideologies that negate Other cultural ways of knowing. In this sense, savior teachers are portrayed as ever-giving: they pay for students’ school supplies, events and personal items out of their own pockets; they work overtime and weekends without compensation; they sacrifice time with their families and give up relationships with their partners. These teachers often appear as radicals working inside the system. But if we shift the Hollywood narrative from the screen to political and social reality, we see the other element of neo-liberalism at work in these films: teachers are agents who contribute to the “privatization of aspirations” through their deep belief that mastering the test will create economic advancement (Robertson and Dale, 2013, p. 435). The teacher as neo-liberal agent allows the government to fulfill an illusion of

reduced overreach while asserting more governance over its people through their own self-policing. In short, as the Hollywood imaginary furthers divisions between insider and outsider student groups, it also promotes teachers as saviors, martyrs and “manag[ers] of social risk ... tasked with social control and with delivering public services” (Raddon and Harrison, 2015, p. 139). Teachers are at once individuals and entrepreneurs as well as businesses charged with the responsibility of “innovat[ion]” so as to solve social problems” (Raddon & Harrison, 2015, p.139).

### **“Other” ways of knowing and an alternative filmic representation on education**

*When Aboriginal people say ‘no’ to aspects of Western education that clash with our cultural knowledge and ways of knowing, we often feel assaulted by the continued pressure to conform through new forms of colonization such as government policies and procedures. But ... we stand upon the ground—the land—of our cultural knowledge, which has sustained us since time immemorial: we prevail (Jo-ann Archibald |Q'um Q'um Xiiem, 2008, p. 92).*

Much of what is stripped away in conventional western education is cultural knowledge. “Other” or alternative ways of knowing can refer to various cultural groups which are diverse in both their knowledge and in their practices. Other ways of knowing may include the lived experiences of Indigenous groups, women, queer folks, immigrants, differently-abled folks, People of Color, people experiencing poverty and/or homelessness, artists, and so forth. Though

varied and different, we situate Other ways of knowing as the nexus of multiple intersecting knowledges that exceed the limitations of strictly linear logics. Alternative ways of knowing rely not on capitalist notions of achievement such as standardized testing's numerical attainment wherein students become the numbers that they score, but rather recognize that "[t]he story of one cannot be understood outside of the story of the whole" (Lavallée, 2009, p. 24); students may be seen as part of a greater life and ancestral network, for example.

As illustrated in Lavallée's (2009) quote above, Indigenous ways of knowing—though varied—may value connection with self, community and Elders, spirituality, creativity, sensory experience, intergenerational and ancestral knowledge, spirit, memory and the unknown (Archibald 2008; Lavallée 2009; Linklater, 2014). Knowledge may further resonate through dreams, intuition and symbols, in dialogue with others and through storytelling. Indigenous epistemologies may recognize that deeply meaningful and profound learning is likely to occur in spaces outside of the "academy," such as in nature (Archibald, 2008; Simpson, 2014). Lavallée (2009) (as gleaned from Kovach, 2005) further summarizes Indigenous epistemology as "fluid, non-linear and relational" (p. 23). She states that "many Indigenous ways of knowing accept both the physical and the nonphysical realms as reality. In accepting the nonphysical, one must accept that reality cannot always be quantified" (23). This description differs from institutional practices born out of western epistemologies that rely on "narratives that deal with the sequences of events in a linear progression ..." (Archibald, 2008, p. 83). Indigenous and Other knowledges have been

historically and contemporarily dismissed and villainized by western institutions for providing alterity to White, western, androcentric pedagogies. We see this in Hollywood films particularly when Indigenous knowledge and Other ways of knowing are frequently objectified, essentialized and exoticized.

### **Whale Rider**

One film that potentially counters Hollywood's narratives around Other ways of knowing is *Whale Rider* (Barnett et al., 2002), directed by Niki Caro. The screenplay is based on the book similarly entitled *The Whale Rider* (1987) by Māori novelist Witi Ihimaera. In response to his daughters' observation of the overrepresentation of male protagonists and helpless female counterparts in Hollywood action films, Ihimaera wrote the book with the intention of making the protagonist a girl child (Grimm, 2016).

Set in Aotearoa/New Zealand, the film features an eleven-year-old Māori girl named Paikea ("Pai"), who believes she is destined to be the next chief of her community. This honor had been strictly reserved for Pai's twin brother who died alongside their mother during childbirth. For Pai, living in what is portrayed as a patrilineal society means that she will have to convince her grandfather, Koro, the current chief (a duty which includes political as well as spiritual leadership), that she is worthy of the responsibility. Koro disregards Pai's intentions to become the next chief, often blaming her for the afflictions of the community<sup>3</sup> which he notes began when she was born. Koro summons the eldest

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<sup>3</sup> The afflictions of the community—though unexplained—are mostly portrayed through visual representation of a generation of young Māori men lacking direction or cultural engagement.

boy children in the village to attend a sacred school where they will learn ceremony, song and warrior techniques of the *taiaha*, or fighting stick, used in *mai rakau* (stick fighting). At this school, the boys' spirits will be tested to determine the next leader. Despite being prohibited from participation in the sacred school, Pai watches the instructions in secret and recruits her uncle to teach her how to use the *taiaha*, at which she becomes strikingly adept.

The aforementioned is just one of many storylines in which Pai outwits the boys in the sacred school and exhibits innate leadership abilities. It is apparent to viewers that Pai's abilities are grounded in her connection with land, rather than patriarchal protocol. For Pai, "the land is more than a backdrop, space, or a location; it is a sustainer, speaker, and archive" for the stories of her people (Sium & Ritskes, 2013, p. VII). Pai connects, listens, and communicates with land, respects her elders, challenges patriarchy and finds ways to glean cultural and ancestral knowledge despite the sexism that impedes her from partaking in the sacred school.

In many ways, *Whale Rider* (Barnett et al., 2002) operates as a pedagogical tool through its negation of the colonial gaze that might otherwise depict the community as helpless or misguided by their cultural beliefs. Despite the portrayal of unspecified social and economic challenges, much of the Māori community is portrayed as agentic and living in congruence with each other (Gonick, 2010). The film further portrays a young female leader who "ensur[es] cultural survival" not through advancement of her own individuality, but through the community collective (Gonick, 2010, p. 317). Through several instances in the film, viewers come to understand that Pai's intelligence is deeply

connected with her ability to read signs from land—particularly the whales. When at the end of the film, multiple whales are beached on the local shore, the community comes together to physically pull the whales back into the ocean. Unfortunately, their efforts are in vain and the community members attempt to comfort the whales as death ensues. Yet it is Pai who understands that mighty physical power will not move the whales: connection and communication will. Like her grandfather, Pai is able to independently identify the leader whale. She knows that in assisting this whale back into the ocean the others will follow. Pai's successful leadership—which has always been evident to the film viewer—becomes clearer to her community, and eventually her grandfather too. Pai sits atop the leader/chief whale, massaging and encouraging its return to sea. The whale begins to move. At this point, the film viewer witnesses the success of a different kind of leadership. Whereas Koro led with forceful, rigid, patriarchal values, Pai's leadership proves to be relational. In *Whale Rider* (Barnett et al., 2002), viewers see that moving beached whales back into the ocean is beyond any linear western logic that can be taught in the formal academy. The message is not only about beached whales: if the beached whales represent old (stuck) ways of thinking, what becomes evident is that moving heavy, arduous thoughts from overtaking space requires more than force; it requires communion, nuance, remembrance, intuition and collaboration. Said differently, knowledge that is intended to solve local or global societal issues ought not be inflexible, standardized, packaged and force-fed for mass consumption because one size will not fit all (Apple, 1982). In Pai's story, knowledge culminates intuitively and relationally—and likely along lines of ancestry—through the encouragement of her

community who accepts connection with self, nature and land as truth. This provision of safety and encouragement in learning is shared intergenerationally, through time and within relationships.

Unlike the other films we review, *Whale Rider* (Barnett et al., 2002) was produced in Aotearoa/New Zealand, outside of Hollywood's financial influence. Caro, a non-Māori New Zealander not only directed the film but adapted the story to a screenplay. Caro attempted ethical storytelling in multiple ways: she shot the film in the village of Whāngārā, where the story is situated; she collaborated with the Māori people of Whāngārā; and other than principle actors, Māori people from Whāngārā were employed as a majority of the actors throughout the film. It could be argued that Caro's accountability to the community was embedded in her filmmaking methods as she told the story *of* the people *in front of* the people stating in the film's special features, "I was very attracted by the potential to work within a Māori community, to work collaboratively, and to collectively create something that we could all be proud of in Aotearoa" (Caro, 2003, "Behind the scenes," 00:02:38). Endorsing Caro's work, Ihimaera, the book's author, reflects on the success of the book's adaptation to screenplay:

Niki [Caro] created a [marvelous] transformation and she updated the story so that it is very relevant beyond the year 2003. It's not just about a community that is faced with a particular problem of ancestry and succession, it's also about women and how they need to find and make their way in society. Pai has become this iconic young girl who is desperately trying to seek her own sovereignty



and her own destiny in a male-oriented world (Film Education, 2003).

Ihimaera's account, albeit cloaked in the individualism associated with White liberal feminism, is particularly pertinent as the film's endorsement comes not only from the book author, but from a member of the community portrayed in the film. Yet perhaps the most striking and significant affirmation of the film comes from Hone Taumaunu, Chief of the Ngati Konohi people of Whāngārā. In the film's special features, Chief Taumaunu reflects on the collaboration between the cast, crew and the people of Whāngārā, stating "we have built up a beautiful relationship, and the relationship is built on mutual trust, mutual respect, and a lot of give and take" (Caro, 2003, "Te Waka: Building the canoe," 00:10:22). Chief Taumaunu further shares that what has been "enshrined on the heart will remain" (Caro, 2003, "Te Waka: Building the canoe," 00:10:39).

Our inclusion of *Whale Rider* (Barnett et al., 2002) as a pedagogical tool is not uncomplicated. In one sense, the film offers a break from pathologization of non-dominant communities that the Hollywood films reviewed here perpetuate. Alternatively, astute criticism of the film brings into relief some potential risks associated with the portrayal of a non-dominant group by a member of a dominant group. For example, while it might be assumed that the hardships of the community—of which Koro blames Pai—stem from colonial oppression, there is an almost eerie absence of dialogue about such a likelihood. Similarly, as Hokowhitu (2008), a Māori scholar from the Ngāti Pukenga tribe (Sorensen & Diaz, 2015) notes, with the exception of a non-

speaking German woman near the film's end, Pākehā (non-Māori White people) are missing from the storyline. While this absence could be interpreted as centering the Māori community, Hokowhitu (2008) suggests that this tactic "offers the illusion of spatial isolation" allowing presumably White viewers "to escape into a world where images of themselves are not present" (p. 128). Consequently, "Pākehā and other Westerners [can purge themselves] of any responsibility for the oppression of indigenous peoples" (Hokowhitu, 2008, p. 129). Statements such as these require us to consider—as stated in the introduction—for what social locations were this film made? It seems unlikely that the filmmakers were targeting a Māori audience, but instead intended to enthrall middle class White westerners to theatres. The contrast between Ihimaera (Film Education, 2003) and Chief Taumaunu's (Caro, 2003, "Te Waka: Building the canoe,") perspective versus that of Hokowhitu's (2008) perspective (admittedly, all men) offers a tension that is relevant for exploration in the classroom.

The opportunity to screen and discuss *Whale Rider* (Barnett et al., 2002) with pre-service teachers provides a formative dialogic space to consider how "the production and transmission of knowledge is always a contested process" (Steinberg & Kincheloe, 2010, p. 144) without tidy boundaries. Not only can *Whale Rider* (Barnett et al., 2002) be used to circulate discussion about the risks of standardized thought, the film offers other ways of imagining education and critical thinking. For example, education that values critical thinking, creativity, ancestry, community and connection with land challenges neoliberal education values that rank business prowess and economic gains over long-term environmental sustainability that could otherwise

support all communities. *Whale Rider* (Barnett et al., 2002) is not about the standardization of knowledge and its mass consumption, but the opposite. It shows how communing with the land and “trust[ing] a more-than-human intelligence” (Jimmy, Andreotti, Stein, 2019, forward) benefits the earth’s inhabitants. Furthermore, the imbrication of endorsements and criticisms of *Whale Rider* (Barnett et al., 2002)—such as the ones shared here—offer an opportunity for pre-service teachers to unpack and live with the untidy tension that no single perspective can fully represent one issue (in the case of *Whale Rider*, whether it was produced with integrity). This loosening of rigid ways of knowing can help usher in more collaborative ways of thinking, being together, and approaching world issues that desperately need our attention. In this sense, teaching necessarily acts as a political commitment to the social world (Glick, 2020).

### **Reflection and conclusion**

The popularity of Hollywood films on education produced from the 1980s to the 2000s aided in the acceptance and development of corporate futurity in the public curriculum. Corporate futurity was aided by Hollywood’s repetitive and thus normalizing narrative about Students of Color and students from low-income earning families being in need of “saving” from their “deficit-riddled” lives through education reforms that actually worked to disenfranchise them. Teaching how these films align with the discriminatory historic and governmental policies is key not only to future teachers, but also to future filmmakers who wish to focus on schools as sites of inquiry. Utilizing canonical Hollywood films about education serves as a critical site for developing socially-conscious and self-reflexive pre-service teachers

committed to dismantling systems of oppression that play out in traditional classroom narratives.

Monoepistemological standardizations of knowledge erase the personal, communal, spiritual and the imagination in learning. Instead, standardizations of knowledge promote assessments of students by how well they follow institutionalized definitions of knowledge acquisition (Freire, 2000). The myth of meritocracy in Hollywood, coupled with mainstream notions of standardized education and individual success, denies the importance of working in community with self and others. Knowledge centered in standardized testing disregards the necessity of Other ways of knowing. Other ways of knowing are necessary for developing community, skills of diplomacy, negotiation, emotional intelligence and generosity—skills necessary in global and local peace-building initiatives. Such denials make it difficult to imagine creating a new era of thinkers that will promote the well-being of students and families regardless of their cultural and social backgrounds. The greatest risk of teaching to the test is that it can limit learners' knowledges, robbing them of their abilities to co-develop holistic communities in the future.

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## **FESTIVALS OF FILMS, DECOLONIAL SPACES, AND PUBLIC PEDAGOGY: SOME PRELIMINARY REFLECTIONS**

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**ABSTRACT** The present paper offers reflections on festivals of films as potential spaces for public pedagogy, decolonization, and emancipation. The aim is to examine some dilemmas inherent to spectatorship, which overlap with pedagogical dilemmas around the establishing of communities and the recognizing of students — the oppressed, the individual, the collective — as persons. Drawing on the works of Brazilian educationalist Paulo Freire, French philosopher Jacques Rancière, Carol Roy, Elizabeth Ellsworth, and others, I offer ways in which film and its deployment within festivals might open up generative spaces of imagination for students, educators, community members, and festival programmers. In order to do this, I argue that watching films and attending festivals should be considered along their collective and individual correlates; that the human dimension of festival participation differentiates it from isolated spectatorship; and that festival programmers can help to place viewers in positions of potential emancipation if they take care to organize films around dialogue, understanding that a key educational dimension of festivals is that they call us into

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<sup>1</sup> This work has benefitted immensely from comments by two Anonymous Reviewers, as well as through key discussions with this special issue's Guest Editors.

relation with others. In attempting to “demythologize” film and festivals of films in this manner, I make a preliminary attempt to redeem or reconceptualize the festival as a decolonized space of politics, culture, and solidarity building.

**Keywords:** film festivals, public pedagogy, emancipation, decolonization, spectator

## **Introduction**

As the son of Indian immigrants to Canada, I work as a humanities educator in a Canadian suburban school district in which questions of identity, diversity, equity, decolonization, and Indigeneity are paramount. In my work, I witness how film can frame some of these questions for students and teachers, young and old alike, and from diverse backgrounds. In broader settings, I have organized film screenings as part of community outreach initiatives<sup>2</sup> alongside my teachers and peers. I have recounted documentary film festivals as a student journalist, watched animated films with children, and I have played editorial roles for film-studies periodicals. I have consumed and been consumed by films to the extent that films, in all their genres, are particularly powerful for me today, as I work to incorporate them into my teaching of adult students, many of whom are recent immigrants finding themselves in unfamiliar and precarious systems of schooling in which the question of emancipation is central. The power of films is

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<sup>2</sup> I am indebted to my teacher, Professor Greg Chan, from the Department of English at Kwantlen Polytechnic University, who also serves as Community Outreach Director of KDocs Documentary Film Festival, Metro Vancouver’s premier social justice film festival <<http://www.kdocsff.com>>. Professor Chan made possible my initial interactions with film studies and public pedagogy through film and festivals of films. About his work, refer to <<http://www.greg-chan.com/>>.

clear to me; they speak to us in profound ways, in ways texts do not. Films presume only that we can perceive, not that we can write, read, or even necessarily hear. This power of films makes the organizing of viewing activities challenging, particularly considering the socio-cultural and political dynamics of schools and students. In this paper, I wish to take on some of these challenges and questions I confront in my work, so that film and its deployment might open up generative spaces of imagination for students, educators, community members and, not less, programmers.

My point of departure is that attending film festivals represents both a collective and individual act, each grounded in its own, yet intersecting dynamics. The phenomena of watching a film and participating in a film festival should be considered, simultaneously, along their collective and individual correlates. Though we participate in festivals with others, understanding the roles of affectivity in collective pedagogical experiences, that “emotions work to secure collectives”,<sup>3</sup> we ultimately watch, read, and interpret films within the intimacy of our being (Ahmed, 2004, p. 25). Notwithstanding, there is a human dimension of festival participation that differentiates it from mere, isolated, spectatorship of film. A core premise of the present paper is that film festival programmers need to consider these individual and collective dimensions of film viewing, and their intersections. How might programmers frame the collective viewing of films by individuals, and how might viewers be placed in positions of potential emancipation?

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<sup>3</sup> Sara Ahmed, in ‘Collective Feelings Or, The Impressions Left by Others’, argues that emotionality “as a responsiveness to and openness towards the worlds of others [...] involves an interweaving of the personal with the social”—that “what separates us from others also connects us to others” (2004, pp. 28-29).

What are some issues around a decolonising public pedagogy of film festivals that programmers should consider, whether in schools, community centres, or other public arenas? Clearly, organizing of film festivals cannot be reduced to scheduling films in some arbitrary way. There is far more to the craft of envisioning emancipatory film festivals as practices of public pedagogy, particularly when it comes to identifying practices that seek to decolonise the audiovisual stimuli that present themselves to our senses, in what are often fundamentally diverse and pluralistic societies.

I begin by considering some general dimensions of festivals, trying to put them in some relation to the concept of ‘film’. In a second instance, I lay out some initial pedagogical dilemmas around organizing festivals using the specific medium of film, some of which I have encountered in my own work. In the third and fourth sections, I consult primarily Brazilian educationalist Paulo Freire, to articulate a notion of education in relation to film festivals that is emancipatory and, dare I say, decolonising. In the fifth section, I examine viewership from the perspective of the spectator by drawing on the work of French philosopher Jacques Rancière. To conclude, in the final section, I return to my initial, anticipated ‘educational’ challenges and reflect on what it means for film festival programmers to consider. Throughout, in framing things in terms of relevant educational theory and their relations to film festivals, I draw on the works of Elizabeth Ellsworth (1997) and that of Carole Roy (2016), which focus on viewing film as a “scene of address” that is fundamentally positioned in relation to the practice of transformative learning.



## **Festival of film: Dimensions, definitions, problems**

The 2019 *Routledge handbook of festivals* begins with editor Judith Mair offering a slightly reluctant ‘definition’ of festivals:

[...] short term, recurring, publicly accessible events that usually celebrate and / or perform particular elements of culture that are important to the place in which they are held or the communities which hold them; that provide opportunities for recreation and entertainment; and that give rise to feelings of belonging and sharing. (2019, p. 5)

Because the term ‘festival’ escapes a narrow definition, Mair (2019) finds it appropriate instead to think about “dimensions” of festivals (p. 4). The primary dimensions or characteristics of festivals she speaks to include their short term and recurring nature, that they are publicly accessible, celebratory of culture, community-driven and place-based, often contain performative elements, and are recreational in spirit (p. 5).

Above all, it is the final dimension I am most drawn to: the participatory and collective aspect of festivals that give rise to community, sharing, “belonging and identification” (Mair, 2019, p. 8). The capacity for festivals to “[reinforce] personal and social identity” (p. 26) recalls perhaps the key ‘educational’ or formative component of festivals: their capacity to put us into relation with others. The voluntary desire of individuals to attend recreational events that place them into some relation with others, in my mind, is in part what makes festivals open to some investigation through educational theory. How film figures into this image of the

festival is in some ways secondary to this educational dimension or characteristic of festivals. Whatever their title, festival programmers seem to be aware of the educative dimensions associated with their role. For them, film would only deepen these dimensions. Therefore, to put ‘festival’ and not ‘film’ in the foundational and leading role, is to refer not to a film festival, but to a festival *of* films. The relational, collective, educative dimensions of festivals can perhaps be made more apparent when ‘festival’ is perceived as the leading concept.

That festivals (of films or otherwise) “perform elements of culture” in a public manner ensures that they are educational sites in broad senses of both “culture” and “education” (Mair, 2019, p. 5). Following Antonio Gramsci, Stuart Hall, and more recently Henry Giroux, culture entails change, interpretation and contestation; culture plays roles in transforming identities, enacting power, and can initiate imaginings for “oppositional social change” (Giroux, 2004, p. 60). Moreover, culture may be understood as a force for establishing communal norms of habituation, that is culture can be educational, in moral and practical terms, particularly salient for the present study in the context of modes of viewership or the reading of filmic items as “expansive teaching [machines]” (Giroux, 2004, p. 67). We may say, in other words, that the culture of festivals of films are inherently concerned with public pedagogy. Considering Giroux’s rendering of public pedagogy and culture in *“Cultural Studies, Public Pedagogy, and the Responsibility of Intellectuals”*, we find that pedagogy “becomes a defining principle of a wide-ranging set of cultural apparatuses” (2004, p. 63) with political and existential implications. In my reading of festivals of films as educational and cultural

sites, I take Giroux's point that public pedagogy is a commitment to "deliberation and struggle" against the remaking of contexts and meanings "often within unequal relations of power" (2004, p. 65). Following Giroux, what I will try to show is a dialogic dimension of pedagogy: "pedagogy as a form of production and critique [offering] a discourse of [possibilities]" (Giroux, 2004, p. 73), ways of linking meaning to commitment for social transformation through dialogue.

At the same time, a festival of films entails, by definition, the filmic items themselves. Corrigan, White, and Mazaj (2011) assert that, taken at face value, a film represents an inherent contradiction. Different films have been employed by different people at different times for entirely different purposes. Even at a single point in time, films are read from divergent points of view. Film, therefore, as multifaceted and interdisciplinary, is at least a construction of various art forms as well as a configuration of "commercial, artistic and social interests" (p. vii). Film is like the image for Rancière: not a duplicate record of some other thing, but under our gaze a continually altered "complex set of relations between the visible and invisible, the visible and speech, the said and the unsaid" (2009, p. 93). To be clear, under the gazes of viewers, films as representations of reality come (or should come) into question. For Freire, the dialogic character of film as a communicative medium opens opportunities to understand films as problems "to be solved" by audiences (Freire, 2005, p. 123). Programmers, or anchors of the educative situation that films initiate, understanding that films are not innocent, provide viewers with thematic foci that facilitate dialogue, fill gaps between themes, or "illustrate the relations between the general program content

and the [views] of the world held by the people” (Freire, 2005, p. 120). As a result, being staged within a festival further complicates and potentially enriches the affective, dialogic, and educative role of film.

Like ‘festival’, at its outset the film comes under scrutiny. Leaving aside how to neatly define ‘film’, how film relates to reality, and how films operate on us is peculiar if we consider that they are configurations of various—and at times warring—interests. Films are at once products of the entertainment industry, a form of “show business”, for example; but also they are “used to propagate important national and societal messages” (Bhattacharya, 2013, p. 175); and so, films are potentially educational in that, for one, ‘education’ can be wrapped in ‘entertaining’ and ingratiating packages. The leisurely or entertaining dimension of films, in other words, may be seen to overlap or align with their inherent “elements for learning” (2013, p. 181) in some paradoxical sense. That films provide us entertainment is not on its own a basis upon which we can dismiss films or even television as unworthy of analysis using educational theory. As a result, the purposes and effects of films within a festival may not necessarily be taken for granted. This is due in part, as well, to the “direct or indirect educational dimensions” (Bhattacharya, 2013, p. 182) of film production and viewership. Considering film as a distinct “aesthetic form and social institution” (Corrigan et al., 2011, p. vii), then, we might wonder how to conceptualize film and position it between entertainment, ‘made-for-pleasure’, and something far more, potentially ‘offering a critical vision of reality’. Which types of film should an organizer include or work to exclude? The variety of filmic types may not in any obvious way help our conceptualization

of the filmic item, for so many films even of the same genre pose questions, paradoxes, and seem to instruct us in such contradictory ways.

One potentially useful approach to film, from the perspective of the festival programmer, is that reluctant disposition, alluded to above, which does not in advance over-determine the ultimate affective, moral, or aesthetic quality of a particular film and of film in general. This approach might maintain a slightly open-ended conceptualization of film as textual item within the context of festivals, at once potentially emancipatory and potentially harmful for adult education and education broadly speaking.

To begin with, part of the difficulty faced by educators in screening films is figuring out what sorts of effects the viewing of films might have on students, an impossibly complex but potentially worthwhile consideration. When it comes to viewership, Rancière is not in favor of any corporate monopoly on filmic expectations, or their intended effects. He writes that modern multiplexes have stripped some of the spirit of cinema, in that films are now carefully commercialized and formatted for audiences to produce intended consumeristic effects. “Film-festival material”, we are told, is too often “reserved for the exclusive enjoyment of a film-buff elite” (2009, p. 81). While we might tentatively concede these points, the general questions are open: can watching film, big-budget or otherwise, be a form of therapy? Does watching film improve the quality of one’s life? Should film be countered, its effects not easily accepted? Or ought students yield to the on-screen content they watch and try to extract from the film what is valuable? What can we say

about the agency of our viewers, our students, as “the spectator *must see* [...] what the director *makes her see*”? (Rancière, 2009, p. 14). An organizer cannot possibly anticipate a viewer’s potential reaction to a film. So, for the reasons given and in light of the questions posed, conversation around the effects of film within festivals does not always yield to straightforward answers.

Free or not, we can at least presume that the concept of viewership itself, like the other associated concepts, yields on its surface a number of crucial questions. How might we instruct viewers to watch film, or should we? Should students not be taught how to watch film before watching, or might there be something peculiar to viewership that students or spectators already know? Does the truly free spectator simply close her eyes or drift into sleep to avoid the film being played before her? Does she question and criticize the production to demystify and reject it? Within the context of film festivals, and those organized in a non-arbitrary fashion, viewership comes under some justifiable inspection. As I try to show, viewers who are empowered as subjects are pushed to engage in “critical consciousness” and who, in intervening in the world, not passively watching, may change it for the better (Freire, 2005, p. 73). Such a perception should never assume that being a spectator is a “passive condition that we should transform into activity” (Rancière, 2009 p. 17). The insight here is that festival programmers should recognize that the being of a spectator involves its own activities and intelligences peculiar to itself (2009 p. 17). As such, spectating appears always-already interrupted and never at ease, for spectating involves linking “what we see to what we have seen and said, done and dreamed” (2009 p. 17). Spectating is a given capacity to

perceive, to liken our lives to those of others (2009 p. 17). Rancière's spectator, as we will see later, is not passive, thanks to the equalizing nature and intervening power of spectating. Ellsworth similarly notes that the 'viewing experience' is inherently "relational" in that the manner in which a film addresses us, its particular "mode of address", ranges and is negotiated (Ellsworth, 1997, p. 25). What one makes of films, Ellsworth writes, is a "projection of [...] relations" between the self and between "others, knowledge, and power" (1997, p. 25). In this way, even before they are publicly available, films presuppose, or "think", much about who the intended spectators are (1997, p. 25).

To summarize this introductory section, let us condense the various points of departure and dilemmas in relation to the pedagogical potential of film and film festivals. In the concluding section, we return to some of these points and offer questions in response to some of them:

1. There are both collective and individual dimensions of film festivals that programmers should attend to.
2. Programmers need to consider how to nurture the collective quality of watching film as well as the location of the individual persons attending festivals as spectators. In that sense, festivals of films – as distinct from mere "film festivals" – are premised on the configuration of the individual, participatory and collective aspects of viewing that gives rise to community, sharing, and "belonging and identification" (Mair, 2019, p. 8), yet also their contestation.

3. As a media that engages our audio and visual senses, film, in and of itself, represents some inherent contradictions. It is a product of many interests, implicit and explicit, that can be used to further different goals and political agendas. As a result, film complicates and potentially enriches the already-educational dimension of festivals.
4. How educators should teach or instruct viewers to watch or read film is an open question because spectating is a complex activity. Spectators already deploy their own ‘methods’ of spectatorship. In that sense, a film represents a “scene of address” that remains “mysterious” in terms of its effective (and affective) influence on viewers.

### **Festivals of films, education, emancipation**

Is it possible that festivals of films can challenge the mainstream flow of information to highlight and interrogate the struggles of everyday persons, and encourage others “to dare to act” with the oppressed *against* domination (Roy, p. 10)? To address this question, I consult Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (2005), Roy’s *Documentary Film Festivals Transformative Learning, Community Building & Solidarity* (2016), and Ellsworth’s *Teaching Positions* (1997). My aim is to claim that educators, as programmers of festivals of films, can find inroads to establishing communities for dialogue and for a decolonising emancipation, if they deploy films “to fuel imagination” in the direction of noticing ourselves and others *in relation* to the greater world and our struggles in it (Roy, 2016, p. 9). It is this continued reliance on our acknowledgement of relations that underpins Freire’s



community-orientation with respect to education as (or for) emancipation. This is 'education' that attends to a more pressing call to love one another and love the world, precisely by decolonising the practices that underpin its audiovisual politics of representation.

Freire's approach to pedagogy begins in love and moves through the establishment of relationships of dialogue into community and humanization. In this paper, I am not analyzing each facet of his approach to education, as this has been undertaken fully by scholars (Mayo, 2012). Rather, I discuss Freire in relation to my re-envisioning of the festival of films. Freire's approach is upheld and fortified by a trust, firstly, in the oppressed to reflect and to act *for* themselves and, secondly, in the work "leadership and people" do "*with*" the oppressed (not "*for*" them) (Freire, 2005, p. 69, 67). Following this approach to education, festivals might be organized in ways to cultivate their surroundings to best capture film in this emancipatory and educational sense. This is a question of cultivating and nurturing discussion and the possibilities for community that might themselves grow around screenings, not establishing authoritative and all-encompassing readings of the film that close or curtail discussion.

For Freire, emancipation, in the educational sense, sees teachers-as-students and students-as-teachers, teaching *each other* and striving for betterment through dialogue and a collective responsiveness to each other and to the world (2005, p. 80). The emancipated educational situation begins in some sense of community in motion, in striving and in reconciliation of the common teacher-student dilemma, where a teacher only exists in relation to an ignorant

student. An emancipated classroom, a festival of films in our case, is therefore a space where one “strives for the *emergence* of consciousness and *critical intervention* in reality” (2005, p. 81). This is where we can stand on eye-level with our peers, oriented toward thought and action in our facing of the obstacles that the world presents us. In this scenario, dialogue is our vehicle to overcome domination.

Freire locates the radical nature of the activity inherent to education in “praxis”, where education is “constantly remade” (2005, p. 86). A praxical approach to education in the context of a festival of films accepts neither a straightforward and one-dimensional present “nor a predetermined future” (2005, p. 86). Instead, in praxis, we find a fixation on the “dynamic present”, not only on what is but what continues to be and become, what is representative of the unfolding and “transformational character of reality” (2005, p. 86). Freire’s is an emphatically hopeful vision for education and humanity, one that is oriented toward the building of a new world and toward the upward mobility of its most powerless inhabitants to be recognized as persons and community members.

Whether as students, or as viewers, Freire’s message is that human beings *can* initiate an overcoming of domination, but that this is an iterative and collective process, one that employs dialogue and sees love as a guide for making impressions of others and of the world. Love as an abstraction is immediately deflated for Freire, as he writes in his preface that he anticipates some readers’ dismissal of ‘love’, even hope and humility, as foolish concepts or emotions. But love, not of oneself but of another, also represents an existential and concrete risk for Freire,

because the oppressor is “solidary with the oppressed” only when the oppressed are no longer abstractions but “persons” (Freire, 2005, p. 50). This movement from abstraction to personhood is one grounded in the existential quality, the “praxis”, of love (2005, p. 50). “Love”, as well, is Freire’s foundation for dialogue; it is a courageous “*commitment*” of subjects to each other as they struggle against domination (2005, p. 89). There is another sense in which we can consider the concept of “love” as a collective value, and paradox, one that both compliments and challenges Freire’s universalism. Specifically, under some feminist readings of the role of affectivity in pedagogical experiences, love is both a force for globality, attachment, the establishing of “the skin of the collective” or global personhood, as well as a force for establishing distance, a method for reading the “proximity of others” who are more or less like me (Ahmed, 2004, pp. 30, 39). In other words, it appears we may only be a collective if others “stay put” as locals, as we seem most moved to love those like us (2004, p. 38). Sara Ahmed, in this instance, tries to demonstrate, like Freire, that the emotion of “love” has some capacity for mobility, for a coming together and not only a passing through, for recognition of the other as part of a collective “we”, that is, “like me”, “with me”, “able to be loved by me”, and therefore not “against me” (2004, p. 36). On the other hand, and at the same time, through her analysis of Nussbaum’s “Patriotism and Cosmopolitanism”, Ahmed cautions against the notion of perceiving all as “world [citizens]” and that notion’s appeal to universal reason, which presupposes “the neutrality of reason as the foundation of the global community” (Ahmed, 2004, p. 36). Here, Ahmed substitutes universal love for Nussbaum’s universal reason, arguing that others “become members of the community only insofar as they take form in a way that

I recognize as ‘like me’” (2004, p. 36), that is, we can find a fetishistic dimension of identity-based love, wherein love is crucial to the “delineation of the bodies of individual subjects” (2004, 25). Both universal appeals, love and reason, it seems, are involved in concealment. To be clear, one insight that Ahmed provides here on affectivity in general is that our dominant feelings of “love” or “compassion” for the other can be “cut off from histories of production”, consumption, and exchange (Ahmed, 2004, p. 36). In this way, our feelings for the other can work to conceal realities. Freire’s human love, then, cannot be detached from the human bodies, both individual and collective, of the world as Nussbaum’s appeals to human reason are or appear to be for Ahmed (2004, p. 36). With respect to ‘love’, this is my interpretation of Ahmed’s anticipated criticisms as they might relate to Freire’s universalism.

At this stage, some immediate implications for festival of films programmers are rather straightforward: a constant remaking or reimagining of film is made possible by opportunities for dialogue, both before and after the screening of a particular film, allowing viewers to ‘remake’ or rethink their interpretation of what they have ‘seen’ through dialogue. Building on Freire’s conceptualization of praxis, programmers should therefore be sensitive to the unending filmic experience. That is, programmers should acknowledge that what may take place at one particular festival is only part of a single beginning, perhaps for a single viewer, that might spark something within that viewer long after the credits have rolled. Simultaneously, we locate apparent paradoxes in the concept of love that begin to show

limitations around true, global viewership and, by extension, citizenship.

It is not difficult to imagine these qualities of collectivity and striving, those that Freire is after, within the context of a festival of films, where persons of various stripes come together to embody the connection between art and community through intervening dialogue that flanks the film screenings (Roy, 2016, p. 78). To the extent that the dialogic, communitarian, and humanistic spirit of festivals can be preserved, we can imagine a less oppressive and less exploitative film festival that may rise to meet Freire's standards. Here, in terms of decolonising potential, I point not to film itself but to the affirmative and dignified events taking shape before, after, and between the screenings, which elicit commentary from audience members. This is where filmgoers take on, not the spectacle of film, but the relationalities and their concomitant dialogic articulations. In that sense, a festival of films does not simply (or just) screen films for audiences, they might rather employ film as an educational instrument, by surrounding film by opportunities to establish relationships of dialogue or community. This idea is well captured in Leslie Roman's (2015) engagement with Stuart Hall's thought. Hall refuses to consider "publics" as given. Rather, for him, the major challenge facing educators is how 'to move' people from being an audience to 'making' and fostering an active public, "to suture together alliances with specific marginalized groups as part of his extraordinary commitment to education as public thinking and teaching publicly" (Roman, 2015, p. 200). For example, consider panel-discussions and town-hall meetings where film is a necessary component for the sparking of discussion. This, in part, is why film may be

understood as only a small part of what a festival of films represents: perhaps film is instrumental to the higher goods of collaboration, love, dialogue, community, and freedom that can be sought after in festivals. Festivals of films are thus places where the singular gaze of spectator, as non-spectator, faces necessary intervention by dialogue with others. The aim is to shape an environment of a “supportive and non-threatening atmosphere” of celebration or wonderment inspired by film (Roy, 2016, p. 9).

Drawing on insights from Freire, Hall, Roy, and Ahmed, festivals of films can be understood as the active building of “grassroots coalitions”, “of collaborative local networks between organizers” of different backgrounds, offering attendees opportunities for public engagement with others on pertinent issues. In this context, film becomes the informal guide to both conversation and leisure (Roy, 2016, p. 78-79). As Roy writes, film festivals have historically provided “effective means of communication and outreach” even where literacy rates are low (2016, p. 2). This is due, at least in part, to the collective qualities of festivals, as social movements and open gathering places: they are community-reliant; non-threatening; engaging; discourse-heavy; intervening and, above all, they have the potential to be liberating in Freire’s sense of education (2016, p. 2).

The notion of neighborhood cinema forums—essentially festivals of films by other names— as communicative, political, and educational sites where individuals can form relationships “with new people” have been the subject of ethnographic case-studies around the world (Castro-Varela, 2018, p. 405). Simply put, social discussions around the present issues have always existed. The Occupy Cinema

Forum of Barcelona, for instance, part of anti-austerity social movements in Spain, was taken up by Aurelio Castro-Varela in “‘Going researcher’ in the Occupy Poble Sec Cinema Forum: listening to the screenings and tracing a fluid assemblage of learning and care” (2018). When local area assemblies, namely, in Poble Sec, close to Barcelona’s “historic centre”, took to protest, various committees were established to organize and spread information (Castro-Varela, 2018, p. 396). Monthly film forums, one such organization, each followed by public debates, put the images and sounds of films into pressing local contexts: some films led viewers to “consider how political struggles had been [dampened] during the Spanish transition to democracy and subsequently ignored in later official accounts”, for example (Castro-Varela, 2018, p. 396). In this case, film was instrumental to educational and political ends. Opening spaces for film as pedagogical apparatus—in the spirit of Ellsworth— helps to “[reshape] different venues [...] for the [purposes] of thinking, speaking, and being together differently” (Castro-Varela, 2018, p. 397). These venues can take on a “logic of care”, in that they enable discussion in ordinary yet substantive ways through, among other things, the offerings of “drinks and snacks prepared by part of the organizing group and other members of the Poble Sec assembly” (Castro-Varela, 2018, p. 405). The wide-reaching appeal of these forums of films was apparent in the heterogenous social makeup of the audience members: immigrants, “precariously employed young people, unemployed adults, activists” and “old-age pensioners” begin to describe some of these persons. Further examples in the relevant literature are illustrative of different artistic fora as political and educational sites. Take, for instance, the notion of community developers employing educational

techniques, as is explored in English and Mayo's *Learning with Adults* (2012). Specifically, readers are told of Federico Garcia Lorca and his participatory theatre, involving his University troupe, *La Barraca*, who would "tour various remote and impoverished Spanish towns and villages, and also Afro-American quarters in New York", "eliciting ideas and knowledge from groups", in attempts to bring "theatre back to the people" (English & Mayo, 2012, p. 136). Both these and further examples invoke the primacy of the human person in such educational, political, communicative, and artistic situations.

Central to Freire's human-centered education stands the self-aware human subject, or person, who inscribes herself in history through her "quest for human completion" enabled by dialogic relationships, personal and common reflection and action that might be cultivated by good leadership (Freire, 2005, p. 47). In that sense, festivals of films "call us into relationships" with others. They are not reduceable to the passivity of regimented and mechanical education or instruction as they are commonly located within institutions of mass and state schooling, testing, or vocational training (Roy, 2016). It is worthy to note, on this very point, that 'new' film festivals are distinct from 'old' places of training or schooling, or passive watching, akin to Rancière's old theater, which for Plato, too, is where "ignoramus are invited to see people suffer", and where "true community" never lives (Rancière, 2009, p. 3). It is where, for Freire, the world remains veiled, one might say colonised, and where we remain prisoners of an "old, paternalistic teacher-student relationship" (Freire, 2005, p. 13).



All that said, we do not need to lose sense of our places in history. Viewers can appreciate film as historic artefact, too, representative of a particular time and place. Educators can turn to festivals of films as sites of transformation towards new possibilities around learning, knowledge, and action. Notwithstanding, programmers can also provide viewers a historical sense of how a film has been produced as a response to particular social circumstances. This is where dialogue mediates the “encounter among men and women who name the world”, who in doing so take part in this “act of creation” and re-creation that facilitates or enables their emancipation and establishment of relations (Freire, 2005, p. 89). Freire prefaces his radical call to transform the world with a prior, necessary, and more personal commitment to one another; to love one another, and to employ dialogue as mediation, for humanity. Freire’s liberty (or education), then, is entangled with the fostering of communities and dialogue; in fact, it assumes that education is “the practice of freedom [...] as opposed to [...] the practice of domination” (Freire, 2005, p. 81). Therefore, a fully-realized Freirian festival of films cannot be designed and organized in human isolation, alienation, fatalism, or historical inevitability. If festivals of films can be educative in Freire’s sense of things, they must be collectively emancipatory in their appeal to shared and universal desires for community, where opportunities for freedom are deployed in and through our relations with others and our engagement with the larger world. In that sense, festivals of films are parts of the larger world and reality “in process, in transformation” and, hence, not “static” entities (Freire, 2005, p. 83).

Freire maintains that the human desire (or, more accurately, struggle) for freedom is oppressed when not appreciated alongside its basic preconditions: love for humanity and the world, community, and dialogue. These are 'educational' issues for Freire to the extent that education is the human project of radical betterment and the practice of struggling for emancipation. "Pedagogy", to be clearer, is "a social relationship": it is deeply personal; it "gets right in your brain, your body, your heart, in your sense of self, or the world" (Ellsworth, 1997, p. 6). This is part of the experience of public pedagogy in the festival, which is robust and inspiring. The educative focus of such a festival may not follow any blueprint, produce tangible goods, or even be understood, measured, or forecasted in worldly terms. We can begin to see how Freire's notion of education for freedom naturally finds itself in film festivals, as the educative component of films is not always clear, both to opponents of films and those of festivals, as well as to their supporters.

What is clear, by now, is that in an arbitrarily designed and organized 'film festival', the struggle of the 'oppressed' individual or neoliberal agent, the ideal *spectator* as consumer-client, to break free and turn to witness their oppression, to keep alive the prospect of emancipation, is kept illusory as a 'non-issue' for the continued prevalence of hegemonic propaganda and civic and political hopelessness and helplessness. In contradistinction, dialogue, or pedagogy as human or social relation, might enable films screened at festivals *to do* educational work. Educators can then point, not to film, but to its context of approach, to its screening or to the "mode of address" of festivals of films as instrumental to educational ends (Ellsworth, 1997, p. 8). As

a result, the prospects for human emancipation might reveal themselves as an end to be fought for and not something to be granted or gifted (within the moment-to-moment experience of watching, of being entranced or dominated by some substantive spectacle). Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* presents an aversion to domination that he asserts is needed for the oppressed to consider "arts as alternative information channels" (Roy, 2016, p. 9), arts as vehicles to alternative and enduring modes of being.

### **Demythologizing festivals of films**

Programmers of festivals of films need to recognize the human person, the other, the oppressed, the student, the viewer, the individual, the collective, and so on, in all their movements, complexities, strivings, and perceptions at the very centre of the entire endeavor. One opportunity that festivals of films provide programmers is the chance to attempt to reinvigorate the commitments of attendees to engage authentically in the radical work of being and becoming human. This is an opportunity to demythologize the festival and the film and, therefore, indirectly, and potentially, the human person. As persons "increase the scope of their perception", as they direct their energies to "previously inconspicuous phenomena" associated with the drama they are observing, they gradually "develop their [powers]" to appreciate critically their place in the world, "*with which* and *in which* they find themselves", and their visions for it (Freire, 2005, p.83). Opening up spaces for reading films and other texts, let us presume, is central to the issues at hand: an emancipatory festival of films could be one where these abilities to see humans and reality as "unfinished" are developed in a manner that can better focus our critical energies (Freire, 2005, p. 84). For Freire, this

process holds that “authentic [forms] of thought and action” are found within one another and are maintained as such to “demythologize” the world and the human beings who, finding themselves reinvigorated within it, might achieve “their ontological and historical vocation of becoming more fully human” (Freire, 2005, p. 84). This is another sense in which festivals of films might be reclaimed by Freire’s theory: could festivals play an educational role in helping students develop their skills in demythologizing the very institution of the film, as media, and thus opening up new spaces for re-reading the world? That is, can films, configured as part of a ‘festival’, be redeemed of their potential commercialized ends; to be approached critically in relation to humanity’s predicaments; to be decolonised as a space of politics and solidarity building? An approach to a festival of films that demythologizes the very institution it promotes does not allow film to stand on its own (as Hollywood productions, might). Rather, it opens spaces for viewers to make their own meanings and judgements over the backdrop of the historical contexts around the film and its ‘making’, ‘creation’, or ‘production’. Similarly, programmers can update viewers on the status of the film at present, on its reception in the larger communities, by providing many avenues for discussion and opening the film to a wider array of readings, commentaries, and to the plurality of wide-ranging criticism.

The individual challenging of human perception, ‘love’, in both Freire’s and Ahmed’s senses, as a result, becomes inherent to the activity of viewership. I introduce these points as a marker of departure to potential paradox because it will help us transition to the topic of Rancière’s spectator which, I argue, is not far away from Freire’s

conception of the student. Freire (2005) tells us that those “subjected to domination must fight for their emancipation” (p. 86), and that the “naming of the world [...] is not possible if it is not infused with love” (p. 89). To understand this point, we need to realize that, through their formal and “hidden curricula” (Luckett & Shay, 2017, pp. 10-12), classrooms are spaces of domination which must be subverted. Their fundamental educational presuppositions must be questioned so that love and community can flourish, and so that students can be located and empowered as human persons. To that end, some model of film presentation, wherein revolutionary or emancipatory aspirations are muffled, “justified on grounds of expediency”, can be inherently non-dialogic, without love and, therefore, may not overcome “authoritarianism and [...] alienating intellectualism” that dehumanizes students (Freire, 2005, p. 86). We might consider, then, how a well-intentioned film festival might not play out as a festival of films, rather dissolving into a hegemonic environment, wherein viewers are spoon-fed propaganda and forced into submission.

Festivals of films, as Freire might have perhaps imagined how to organize them, would have relied on community and dialogue to flank the screenings. Engaged students and spectators are not seen to sit idle. They are rather understood to come into relation with others through their questions, wonder, and dialogue. Spectators and students are neither persuaded to some grand vision by programmers nor passively filled as receptacles, they are instead located in a space, the Festival, where they are offered opportunities to think, act, move, be moved, and be. The dialogic and communal component of festivals make them what they are

and separate them from arenas that propagate passive modes of viewership. Festivals of films are neither only action-oriented, “action for action’s sake”, nor just illusory “verbalism” (Freire, 2005, p. 88). Rather, they reflect spaces of “existential necessity” for community building and solidarity, for the hope of human freedom to remain living (2005, p. 88).

Freire’s universal concept of humanization, the primary task of *consctentização*, or the raising of critical consciousness, is necessary for humanity to act *and* reflect upon reality to transform it. As has been made clear, Freire’s blanketing approach has been read by some as offering an ahistorical narrative, lacking the context and concreteness for such purposes as real revolution or decolonization (Tuck and Yang, 2012, p. 20). Part of the reason for this might be found in Freire’s conceptualization of history in relation to the human person (Freire, 2005, p. 32). History as relational activity requires humankind, and of course, there can be no humankind without humanization. Therefore, until the oppressed have been humanized by themselves and by their oppressors, they cannot fully participate in the human activities of history, advocacy, activism, and transformation. Put another way, there is no reflection that has not been unified with action, just as there are no movements of persons without prior movements in their minds, that is, stirrings in their hearts and souls. I, like Freire, make no attempt to detach these hearts, minds, or souls from persons. Instead, we might see action embedded within reflection, just as we might see action inherent to film viewership, or minds within (that is, essential to) persons.

## **Rancière's spectator and the problematic of solidary spectatorship**

In “*The Emancipated Spectator*”, Jacques Rancière takes aim at the “paradox of the spectator” (2009, p. 2). He seeks to *restore* spectatorship (and theatre) to what he considers representing their essential virtue. The paradox, he writes, is easily formulated: there can be no theatre without spectator (Rancière, 2009, p. 2). This places a great burden on the spectator to uphold the theatre. To soften this, we can say that both entities rely on each other: the theatre is at the same time created by the spectator and needed for theatre. Theatres are places where drama (or action) is moved “to its conclusion by bodies in motion” (2009, p. 3), but this action must be watched and interpreted by viewers who themselves are engaged in movement. In the same way that film can be employed, we know that these theatrical actions carry power (political, social, and so on) in animating and enlivening those “living bodies” (2009, p. 3) yet to be so moved. For the purpose of this paper, I draw on Rancière’s approach to theatre in order to address the festival of films as a theatre of a different kind. The student, or spectator, of the festival is essential to the festival itself; the student upholds the festive or celebratory dimension of a festival. There can be no conception of a “festival” without a foundational conception of the student, or human person, to *animate* it. Festival of films programmers need to recognize that reciprocal dependency as a primary task underpinning their work.

For Rancière, the drama of theatre can call a spectator in many directions—to activism, apathy, and other actions and thoughts. This is theatre “striving for its own abolition”, continually calling to something beyond itself, taking part in

the ordinary work of communication (2009, p. 8). We might extrapolate from this that films, too, attempt to call the spectator to something beyond themselves. Notwithstanding, Rancière's treatment of theatre in particular shows that there are elements that a film on its own cannot address. The "spectacle" for Rancière includes many forms, which perform before an audience, such as performance art, dance, mime, and drama (2009, p. 2). Moreover, the communicative quality of Rancière's theatre places it perhaps more easily within the 'educational' realm of Freire's pedagogy than film. Theatre simply cannot be viewed in the same manner as film, as theatre presupposes at least two individuals be physically present, while film presupposes only one. Yet, to reflect on the drama they witness (in the shape of film or theatre) is for the spectator to imagine new potential for these two media, and for a radical new spectator, who at festivals is never alone. Might this new theatre take the shape of an 'educational' festival of film, an exemplary community form, where the theatre of real dialogue replaces the drama of Rancière's theatre? It is plausible, in Rancière's reading, particularly given that "intellectual emancipation" takes shape in the same "self-vanishing mediation" that we notice both in theatre and in the "logic of the pedagogical relationship" (2009, p. 8), as well. It is worthy to note that Rancière gives special privilege to theatre as "community site", and not to film, because theatre is more than the sum of the action on stage, while film could be reduced to all that is on screen. "Theatre is in and of itself communitarian", he writes, unlike film, which amounts to "spectators in front of projected shadows" (2009, p. 16). This is something programmers should keep in mind: the wanting nature of films themselves, on their own, when compared to theatre. As communicative and educative



media that might call viewers in many contradictory directions, film should be attended to as if it contains some potential for power. Indeed, the limitations of filmic items can open up space for the festival of films, which recognizes the human and communal dimensions of participation in festivals and of the public pedagogy of festivals, these are dimensions that mere spectatorship, whether it be of film, television, or the like, never accomplishes without some intervening act. Festival, in this sense, is the intervention that film calls for; festivals might theatrically mediate what would otherwise be plain spectatorship. It is at least curious then, that Rancière does not mention festivals explicitly in his analysis of the spectator, collapsing spectatorship to an individual dimension.

Some critics of Rancière's spectator maintain that spectators are doubly compromised: they are "separated from both the capacity to know and the power to act" (Rancière, 2009, p. 2). In other words, it is sometimes said that viewing cannot amount to knowing: drama, for instance, produces some appearances that conceal reality, and so through seeing we can never truly *know* anything thanks to a dramatic performance (2009, p. 2). Critics of spectatorship hold that the viewer is ignorant with respect to the production or machinery of the appearance. Secondly, viewership is opposed to acting, as the former is passive, unlike the latter. Immediately, here, we recall Freire's praxis: what the oppressed and the passive spectator have in common is that their struggles concern thought *and* (in)action—how is one to act in the face of a film that persuades them to a new vision of life? How might film empower or otherwise inspire human emotion *and* action? From these questions about the spectator and theatre,

Rancière asserts that we are led to some conclusions: firstly, that the old theatre, theatre as we know it, as “absolutely bad thing” should be abolished and replaced with what it prohibits: “the action of knowing and action guided by knowledge” (2009, p. 3). The theatre of old, as various performances that present illusions and transmit the “illness of ignorance”, never allows for a true and empowered community to flourish (2009, p. 3). This is because, for Rancière, true community appeals not to “theatrical mediation” but to the “energy” generated by actions and intelligences inherent to watching itself, that is, watching as a living act (and the spectacle as substantive) (p. 3). The theatre of old does not uphold such a living spectator. One reason in support of the existence of festivals of films, as educative sites, is that they are devoted to the creation and cultivation of such human energies and potentials—we are not merely talking about the filling of vessels with water; or with “stultifying” pedagogy, the “logic of straight, uniform transmission”; or the presentation of film without intervening commentary (2009, p. 14). In committing ourselves, we assume, as Rancière does, in Freire’s spirit, that “words and images, stories and performances”, when genuinely attended to, “can change something of the world” for human social relations (2009, p. 23). Film on its own might fail, or it may succeed from the point of view of producer, in which case it might fantastically or perversely influence generations of watchers. However, film in the context of a festival, or alongside the intervening force of dialogue, can play a more prominent and potentially emancipatory, educative role. Film, in festivals of films, can make it clear that watching is imbued with life.

In considering these things, we might, at the very least, locate a student as an active subject (not a simple spectator) in universal terms. Film, as we have described it, can be not only viewed, but discussed and contemplated at different levels of complexity, in a particular community and non-commercial arena, where programmers have moved to empower and enable oppressed or suppressed images, voices, and visions, opening up spaces for them to come to the forth, to appear on the screen, to be screened. The empowering of oppressed spectators might produce what Rancière has termed the ‘emancipated spectator’, or the non-spectator, which points to an equality among spectators to dissent from what they perceive. To be clear, Rancière is interested more so in “equality of the intelligences” (2009, p. 1) as a way of thinking about emancipation, an idea he develops in, among others, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* (1987), as opposed in some ways to Freire’s universal concept of empowerment through humanization (May, 2009, p. 3). The two concepts do, however, supplement one another and can therefore be linked: both are concerned with the mobility of oppressed classes of persons, those at the bottom of social hierarchies; and both take their concepts to be necessary presuppositions for human action, like dissent from social order, which is not granted and must be taken, directed at social change. Todd May (2009), in “*Democracy is Where We Make it: The Relevance of Jacques Rancière*”, shows that Rancière’s “equality of the intelligences” (p. 7) is a presupposition necessary for all humans, not a political dream or destination. Rancière’s equality of the intelligences is understood to be a social and communal reality, apparent in peoples’ abilities to create “meaningful lives with one another”, to talk with, reason with, and understand one another (May, 2009, p. 7). This

breaking with our assumptions about the abilities of our students and viewers can help us in seeing the “structure and justification of a social hierarchy”; once dissenting from these assumptions, we create spaces, or festivals, for a more liberated understanding of the spectator or non-spectator (May, 2009, p. 8).

For Rancière, spectators as non-spectators or anti-spectators, have been conceptualized in many ways. Different conceptualizations are different transformations of the old spectator. One of these conceptualizations maintains that spectators, “enthralled by appearances”, should be awakened to their “stupefaction” in a critical fashion (2009, p. 4). In so being awakened, spectators will seek the meaning of the spectacle before them. In seeking meaning, they are compelled to switch from “passive spectator” to “scientific investigator”, disinterested observer or “experimenter” (2009, p. 4). An alternative to this first formulation, Rancière writes, holds that spectators offered an “exemplary dilemma”, or paradox, may be persuaded to a new vision of life which requires that they reconsider their fundamental presuppositions for seeing and living in the world as they currently do (2009, p. 4). Both conceptualizations are extensions of a single idea; namely, that there is some distance between a spectator and the illusory drama onstage that can be surmounted by reasoned reflection, inference, or logical deduction. Supposed embodiments of inequality are the forces at work that keep alive these distances.

In observing an educational scenario, we can similarly see the distance between student and her liberation, between her present ignorance and potential knowledge, which is a space occupied and controlled by the teacher

(Rancière, 2009, p. 12). There is some separation between student and reality that is maintained by the teacher, for one's "inability" is so commonly the first thing assumed about students and taught to them (2009, p. 9). The student or spectator must then overcome and surpass her teacher, in order to realize her true desires in decolonizing the ways in which she reads the world as experienced. This movement from perceived ignorance to wisdom is similar to Freire's conception of our approaching the oppressed, which should be infused with dignity and respect as opposed to ignorance. Dignifying both the student and the spectator might allow programmers to commit to non-arbitrary or non-ambiguous behavior (Freire, 2005, p. 60). Therefore, it may very well be that good theatre, like good education, is "one that uses its separated reality in order to abolish [itself]" (Rancière, 2009, p. 7). There is a call resonating through these works: both Freire and Rancière call to subvert our dominating reliance on our inherited, or in other words, colonized, ways of approaching a spectacle in order to transform, renew, or re-envision our purposes for organizing.

Like Freire, Rancière cautions against thoughtless action, mere action for action's sake, for the sake of "immediacy and routine" or transformation of the spectacle or spectator (Rancière, 2009, p. 12). In doing so, he aligns himself with Freire, who always packages action alongside reflection. In my estimation, Rancière goes one step further when he reconceptualizes viewing, seeing it primarily as an action involving the making of associations; interpretation; observation; comparison; even invention (Rancière, 2009, p. 13). Here, we inch closer to the "emancipation of the spectator" (2009, p. 17). Spectators, he writes, are *already* embedded in action, are already persons of action in the

world, in their own stories, and therefore should not be transformed into actors or scholars or anything else (2009, p. 17). What Rancière calls the “hyper-theatre”, one that seeks to “transform representation into presence and passivity into activity”, could be made from an “emancipated community”, like a festival of films, looking to bring the experience of spectator closer to the reading of a book or the sharing of a story (2009, p. 22).

What I have tried to allude to is a new, emancipatory space for art to be staged, where self-affirming educational scenarios can take shape. This is a place where spectators are “active participants” who learn from and struggle with the appearance that manifests itself before them; no longer “passive voyeurs” seduced by them (2009, p. 3). This is, ultimately, a theatre “without spectators” as we normally appreciate them (Rancière, 2009, p. 4). We are again moved to recall Freire’s classroom, where teachers can become students and where students can become teachers. This is where the entire classroom dynamic as it has been commonly construed for the masses is subverted. This is where students as teachers are no longer just students but persons. Students having a hand in their education is akin to spectators participating in or being responsive to their viewership. In these senses of the terms, we can imagine a student and spectator that have contrived themselves in ways to struggle for their emancipation or education. For our purposes in re-imagining the festival of films, there are some insights in light of this section that we can return to in the conclusion.

## **Towards decolonized festivals of films**

In imagining the potential for a festival for films to bring forth new visions of education, we can look to Freire's vision of education for freedom, as well as to Rancière's rendering of an emancipated spectator, his universal vision of human intelligences. In both cases, the greatest burdens are placed on both the programmers and spectators (or students): the former must recognize the irreducibly human and relational at the centre of the educative endeavor; and the latter must struggle to see, think, re-think, interpret, reclaim, decolonize, speak, and act *for* others. Film, therefore, should be conceptualized within the sphere of education, particularly to the extent that we can involve ourselves in building a new social reality *with* the oppressed *through* communication that is drummed up by film. Festivals of films, as I see them, offer us some backdrop upon which we might attempt to transform the wider conversations around art and solidarity into decolonial action. The visions and theories that I have described and tried to build on, can help us in a preliminary way in thinking in clearer terms about the potential of festivals of films, rather than simply "film festivals", to be emancipatory sites for public pedagogy. We can find the grounds for a celebratory education in festivals of films, if we acknowledge the unseen drama inherent to new types of viewership, and the responsibilities (and possibilities) that engaged spectators (or 'non-spectators') might assume, or uncover, as decolonizing moments of engagement. This educative potential, then, holds within it a power against domination, the self-affirming power that individuals employ to imagine, to question, to act, and to dream in the face of oppression. It is that power which could possibly drive a student (or spectator) to become more "wholly themselves", to *discover* themselves, as mobilized

persons through engagement with art (Freire, 2005, p. 48). It is my hope that programmers can do their work while keeping in mind their commitments to mobilize persons, to transform popular discourse around film, and not to simply arrange screenings and be done with it.

The question to ask is not ‘should film festivals and other outreach initiatives that make use of film be included in critical pedagogies?’ or, even whether film festivals could be educational. Rather, the core questions that emerge are: how can programmers nurture the collective quality of festivals of films and broaden their appeal while maintaining, if not expanding, their utopian and decolonial spirit? How can programmers conceive of empowered and liberated spectators, along both individual and collective dimensions of decolonising? These are important questions particularly as we seek to interrupt the hegemonic frameworks of power that dominate the “political aesthetics of the sensible” and the “system of a priori forms determining what presents itself to sense experience” (Rancière, 2004, p. 13).

Film is already established and appreciated as a social practice, in a culture which has been saturated with audiovisual and semiotic systems. Hence, might we, as teachers, programmers, and students, locate the student-viewer in her striving between freedom and resistance? Attending to the questions and dilemmas raised in this paper would inform further study of festivals of films as decolonial educational and emancipatory spaces that can affirm “men and women as beings in the process of becoming” (Freire, 2005, p. 84.).



The orientation of the literature explored above has not to do with a “private revolution” of the spectator, but with the restoration of humanity, by moving audiences from mere spectators to collective and solidary publics, by the oppressed for themselves *and* for their oppressors (Freire, 2005, p. 48). Within that context, festivals of films, as spaces of public pedagogy, can lay the groundwork for social transformation as modes of action, not only liberation of the viewer in isolation as a one-off, cerebral exercise. The enrollment of students and spectators into their dignified search for self-affirmation, making it possible for them to enter the “historical process”, must be grounded in love of others and of the world (Freire, 2005, p. 36). Therefore, there is no purely solipsistic love, and no simple reduction of the vast human person into “mind”. Following this, my first tasks as educator and programmer of festivals of films is to relate to my students as persons, to empower them with skills to enter into new dialogues with the world, and hopefully to inspire in them, through film, the recognition of their own powers to transform their realities. My condensation of Freire, Rancière, and others regarding the prospects of a decolonial festival of films makes this reconceptualizing project a practical and pressing educational undertaking.

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## **CÁMARA DE COMBATE. EL FESTIVAL DE CINE LATINOAMERICANO COMO REFLEXIÓN- ACCIÓN**

### **(Cámara de Combate. Latin American Film Festival(s) as reflection-action)**

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**Abstract** *Cámara de Combate* is an artwork composed of series of banners inspired by revolutionary cultural movements originated in Latin America, namely, Third Cinema and Latin American conceptualism. I graphically rendered citations onto the robust material of banners, all taken from Third Cinema filmmakers, who first emerged in 1960s in an era of political upheaval in Latin America. They used the camera as a political weapon to engage revolutionary social, cultural, and political ideas in the region and to incite political consciousness and action. I made a direct correlation with Latin America's contemporary political context as it relates to American, Canadian, and European interventionism and oppressive regimes, with Latin American Film Festivals situated outside of Latin America. *Cámara de Combate*, was exhibited in the patio of Vancouver's Cinematheque as part of the seventeenth edition of the Vancouver Latin American Film Festival in 2019. Some of the questions explored within this artistic inquiry are, what is the role of artists living in the diaspora vis-à-vis Latin American political consciousness? What is the role of Latin

American film festivals outside of Latin America in relation to audience and community participants? This text offers a reflection on my artwork and its line of investigation within a diaspora film festival space. I explore some of the philosophical and theoretical currents and political contexts that influenced this work and how it was received within the festival space.

**Keywords:** Latin America, Film Festival, Art, Cinema, Neocolonialism, Third Cinema

# DARLE LA VOZ AL OTRO

**Marta Rodríguez**

**Give the Voice to the Others**

*Figure 1: Marta Rodríguez. Banner. Screen printing. 90 x 120cm. 2019. © Carlos Colín, 2019.*

In their album, *La voz de los '80*, released in 1984 during Pinochet's dictatorship, the Chilean rock band *Los Prisioneros*, ironically expressed in their song *Latinoamérica es un pueblo al sur de Estados Unidos* that, we are “*un sitio exótico para visitar. Solo un lugar económico, pero inadecuado para habitar*” (An exotic place to visit. Just an affordable place, but inadequate to inhabit). The history of Latin America is chaotic, always in constant transformation and suspense. It seems that nothing changes while always changing. Paradoxically, it is hard to explain what Latin America is. The term connects even the most incoherently lucid aspects of the time-space *Sur* (from México to Argentina, including the Caribbean), linked with the *migrante-Sur*, the so-called diaspora. To explain what Latin America is, is like trying to express what is beyond the gravitational singularity of a black hole. To paraphrase the *Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (EZLN)*, Latin America is a world where many worlds coexist. These multiple worlds create a sublime hyperspace. To understand *Latinoamérica*, you must live it, not only live inside it. *Latinoamérica es una cosa latinoamericana*.

In physics, it is said that to escape from the black hole's event horizon,<sup>1</sup> because of its force of gravity, you need to travel faster than the speed of light to avoid being absorbed. According to this view, if someone falls into the black hole's event horizon, they will inevitably continue their way through the singularity (the entrance to the black hole) where explanatory power of the laws of physics are useless. In Latin America, the neoliberal forces act as a

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<sup>1</sup> On Black Holes, see Thorne, Kip S. *Black Holes & Time Warps: Einstein's Outrageous Legacy*. W.W. Norton & Company; New e. edition. 1995.

force of gravity to engross society aggressively to a singularity that twists our conceptions about what society, culture and democracy means. It is like seeing Latin American reality through Hollywood film production or BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation) documentaries. In the 1960's, *Tercer Cine* (Third Cinema), a revolutionary film movement originated in Latin America,<sup>2</sup> demonstrated that, metaphorically, the speed of light is not a problem for Latin America. To avoid being absorbed by the force of gravity of the black hole, filmmakers pulled the trigger on their Super 8 and 16mm cameras to film the realities in the region. These Third Cinema filmmakers let the light that exposed their film and Latin Americas realities to be projected for public viewing on the big screen, to not only show their audiences what was happening in their region, but to incite the public to political consciousness and action. *Tercer Cine* was first theorized by Octavio Getino and Fernando Solanas in Argentina in the 1960's as a counter position against neocolonial dependency, dictatorial oppression, and subjugations of *los pueblos latinoamericanos*. This cinematic movement was possible through a series of revolutionary, ideological cultural categories with films that were often screened in clandestine and underground locations in both rural and urban settings with a combative force in favour of the liberation of Latin American societies.

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<sup>2</sup> On *Tercer Cine* (Third Cinema), see De Taboada, Javier. "Tercer Cine: Tres Manifiestos." *Revista De Critica Literaria Latinoamericana*, vol. 37, no. 73, 2011, pp. 37–60; the manifesto *Hacia un Tercer Cine* (Toward a Third Cinema) by Octavio Getino and Fernando 'Pino' Solanas in: Mackenzie, Scott. *Film Manifestos and Global Cinema Cultures: A Critical Anthology*. University of California Press, 2020, pp. 230.



A  
CÂMARA  
é um objeto que  
MENTE  
GLAUBER ROCHA

Camera is an object that lies

*Figure 2: Glauber Rocha. Banner. Screen printing. 90 x 120cm. 2019. (c) Carlos Colín, 2019.*

The decolonial basis of *Tercer Cine* and *Conceptualismo Latinoamericano*,<sup>3</sup> were conceived in the second half of the

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<sup>3</sup> On Conceptualismo Latinoamericano (Latin American Conceptualism), see: Camnitzer, Luis. *Conceptualism in Latin American Art: Didactics of Liberation*. University of Texas Press, 2007.

20<sup>th</sup> century for socio-political intentions. Third Cinema and Latin American Conceptualism established the idea of a public domain social art, capable of creating a dialectic and critical analysis on the socio-cultural and political situation in the region. These decolonial praxes are conceived and incorporated *arte-acción* within everyday life in the middle of foreign cultural policies, governmental politics, and interventions such as coups d'état, dictatorships, neo-colonization, genocides, and acculturation. Both *Tercer Cine* and *Conceptualismo Latinoamericano* aim to be part of the transformation of social development, public resistance, and subversive activities. Specifically, *Tercer Cine* instituted a cultural-cinematographic concept against First Cinema, meaning Hollywood film production; and Second Cinema, in reference to the individualistic author's cinema associated with European art house films.



Figure 3: Fernando Birri. Banner. Screen printing. 90 x 120cm. 2019. © Carlos Colín, 2019.

My project *Cámara de Combate* displayed during the 2019 Vancouver Latin American Film Festival (VLAFF), included a series of banners linked with the philosophies and praxes of *Tercer Cine* and the *Conceptualismo Latinoamericano*. *Cámara de Combate* explores a critical thinking about Latin American film festivals, that exist outside of Latin America. These banners, aim to build dialogue and didactics as a crucial factor within the Latin American diaspora. They allow new audiences attending the festival, as well as regular festival filmgoers, to understand that one part of cinema and contemporary art

production in Latin America was (and still is) committed to social movements, resistances, and subversions in the *Sur*. At the same time, *Cámara de Combate* seeks to create a dialogue with the audience, volunteer crew, and organizers of the festival to reflect on the role, and the position of Latin American film festivals outside of Latin America in relation to current socio-political and religious events unfolding in Latin America. In designing this project my aim was to engage the current political moment of Latin America, such as the macho-military regime of Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil; the interventions in Venezuela of the United States, Canada, and the European Union personified by Juan Guaidó; the neoliberal legacy by Mauricio Macri in Argentina; or the recent soft coup d'état executed against Evo Morales and instigated by the United States, to name a few of the unfolding events in the region at the time of making this work. As a result of Latin America's ongoing struggle for liberation (from the grips of the neoliberal world order and modern patriarchal capitalism), I believe that it is critical that Latin American film festivals assume a political consciousness towards Latin America as a region. *Cámara de Combate* attempts to highlight this critical obligation for political consciousness and political action, as did the films and artworks of the Third Cinema filmmakers, and Latin American conceptual artists.

The series of banners in *Cámara de Combate*, reproduces the aesthetic of banners used in strikes, social movements, and popular manifestations in Latin America. The banners were hung outside of Vancouver's Cinematheque, one of VLAFF's main venues. They contained quotes from some of the prodigious Third

Cinema filmmakers from Latin America such as Marta Rodriguez, Glauber Rocha, Jorge Sanjinés, Fernando Birri, and the cinematic Latin American project known as the *Comité de Cine de la Unidad Popular* from Chile.<sup>4</sup> These quotes by the filmmakers mentioned before were expressed during interviews, conferences, or published as part of manifestos that engaged the possibilities of a new formula for cinema, and how cinema itself could and should be in the region. Among the quotes that I used, and which I consider as the most significant one, was written by the *Comité de Cine de la Unidad Popular*. It stated:

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<sup>4</sup> The Cinema Committee was part of the political alliance between left-wing political in Chile called Popular Unity. To read the manifesto of *Comité de Cine de la Unidad Popular*. Mackenzie, Scott. *Film Manifestos and Global Cinema Cultures: A Critical Anthology*. University of California Press, 2020, pp. 250.

Consideramos que un cine  
alejado de las grandes  
masas se ha convertido  
en un producto inevitable  
para el consumo  
de una pequeña burguesía de élite  
que es incapaz de construir el motor  
de la historia.

Comité de Cine de la Unidad Popular

We shall regard a cinema removed from the great masses to have  
become inevitable a product for the consumption of an elite petit  
bourgeoisie which is incapable of constituting the motor of history.

*Figure 4: Comité de Cine de la Unidad Popular. Banner. Screen printing. 90 x 120cm. 2019. © Carlos Colín, 2019.*

This statement, taken from the manifesto of the Chilean *Unidad Popular*, allowed me to juxtapose three aspects of interest. The first aspect is the aim of *Tercer Cine* to foster a popular cinema; *por el pueblo, para el pueblo, y con el pueblo*. This Third Cinema ideological position, which sought to bring cinema to all social sectors, seems not to have flourished in some diasporic film festivals around the globe. Many diasporic festivals lack a socio-political position, probably because of the interests between festivals, the involvement of consulates or foreign Latin American political representations who participate in these festivals.

The second aspect is to highlight the establishment and the dominance of an elite petite bourgeoisie, which does not contribute anything to the festivals, or to its growth. This elite petite bourgeoisie, has converted small festivals into commodities, and, as the *Unidad Popular* observes, they are “incapable of constituting the motor of history” (Mackenzie, 2020, p. 250), thus losing the reflection-action component expected from both the audience and the organizers. The third aspect concerned the lack of a popular proposal from diasporic film festivals, which does not reach out to workers and/or to farm workers living abroad, coming yearly to carry out seasonal migrant work far from home. By popular proposal I mean, to create a festival enjoyable by a large number of people, mainly the Latin American sector. In addition to this lack of community approach, many Latin American film festivals outside of Latin America do not incorporate educational opportunities such as conferences, workshops, and roundtables that would allow the audience to critically engage with current Latin American events, philosophical



currents, and the films screened within the film festivals. For these reasons, *Cámara de Combate* seeks to provide a response to the lack of a socio-political position, the establishment of an elite petite bourgeoisies, and the lack of a popular proposal, attempting to open dialogue to create new perspectives on the role of diasporic film festivals, for filmmakers, and for artists. *Cámara de Combate* is a reminder about our commitment, reconciliation, and responsibility within the *Latinoamericano* ethos abroad.



Figure 5: *Cámara de Combate*. Banners. Screen printing. 90 x 120cm. 2019. (c) Carlos Colín, 2019.



One of the questions I raised as part of this artwork, interrogates the purpose of diasporic film festivals and the contributions to the Latin American community. While this artwork project was exhibited during the course of the VLAFF, I observed festival goers reading the quotes and taking photos with the banners. Yet, very few people came forward to discuss their reactions with me. Some of those who did come forward were interested in clarifying the meanings behind the quotes. This gave me the opportunity to exchange ideas around Latin American cinema and discuss my preoccupations as a Latin American artist living in Vancouver. Latin American artists living abroad need to understand and think about what they seek to accomplish, what role does a festival such as the VLAFF play, and to be clear about our social commitments regarding a diasporic multicultural Latin American society. As an artist as part of this diaspora community, we need to collectively question what are the needs and factors that brought us here far from the *Sur*, and how we can reconcile past, present, and future in a better understanding about *Latinoamérica*, through cultural production that serves our communities at large.

To conclude, I share this quote from one of the most outstanding dialogues in the *Tercer Cine* film *Sur* (1988) directed by Pino (Fernando) Solanas:

*“Mire General. Si ustedes no saben lo que es el sur, es por que son del norte.”* (Look General. If you don’t know what the South is, it is because you are from the north.) (Solanas, 1988).

I aim my *cámara de combate* (combat camera) towards Latin American film festivals with this citation in mind.

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## REVIEWS

### Books and other publications

#### Book Review

**imagineNATIVE. *On Screen Protocols & Pathways: A Media Production Guide to Working with First Nations, Metis and Inuit Communities, Cultures, Concepts & Stories*. Toronto: imagineNative, 2019, 78 pages.** Retrieved from <https://imagenative.org/publications>

*On Screen Protocols & Pathways: A Media Production Guide to Working with First Nations, Metis and Inuit Communities, Cultures, Concepts & Stories* is a comprehensive guide commissioned by imagineNATIVE, a non-profit institution based in Toronto, Ontario, that presents the world's largest Indigenous film festival. The guide was prepared by consultant Marcia Nickerson and provides cultural principles, key findings from a national consultation process and best practices for filmmakers, production companies and funders, when depicting Indigenous content on-screen. It also explores how communities, organizations and individuals can act as collaborative partners, while providing practical steps and ongoing resources for Indigenous and non-Indigenous people wishing to engage with Indigenous stories. As the Director of Programming for The Documentary Media Society, a non-profit organization that produces an annual film festival called DOXA Documentary Film Festival, I will reflect on the educational and decolonial potential, as well as the limitations, of this guide through the lens of a film festival curator and non-profit arts manager,

as well as from the perspective of a woman of mixed Icelandic and Métis heritage.

From 2008-2015, the Government of Canada founded the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). The purpose of the commission was to document the history and lasting impacts that the Canadian Indian residential school system had on Indigenous students and their families. In 2015, the commission concluded that the residential school system amounted to cultural genocide, and released a final report outlining several “call to actions” meant to improve the lives of Indigenous people, as well as pave the path to recondition with non-Indigenous governments and Canadian settlers. Several of the “call to actions” in final report relate to language, culture, education as well as the media and arts, so it is no surprise that the core funders of this initiative include a range of government funding agencies, including the Canada Media Fund, National Film Board of Canada, Telefilm, Ontario Creates, Creative BC, as well as one private foundation, the Inspirit Foundation. While this guide may begin to fulfil the call of actions as outlined in the final TRC report, its purpose reaches far beyond simply checking a box for government officials.

At 79 pages, the guide is organized in eleven sections: the first few sections outline the purpose of the document as well as guiding principles related to on-screen protocols. The following sections each pertain to a specific area of film and media production, and the guide concludes with two extensive appendices that provide information about the historical context in which this document was prepared as well as additional resources for communities. The guide, inspired by Screen Australia’s protocols document,

describes how decolonizing practices includes developing production models that promote narrative sovereignty and “allow for us to be more indigenous.” Jesse Wenthe, director of the Indigenous Screen Office in Toronto Canada, sums up the significance of narrative sovereignty, and how it relates to the larger project of decolonization:

When I talk about narrative sovereignty what I’m really talking about is the ability of the nations to have some measure of control over the stories that are told about themselves... Throughout the entire history of filmmaking, the overwhelming majority of stories told about Indigenous peoples – both fictional and documentaries – have been told by non-Indigenous people (p. 7).

According to the guide, there are four principles that are fundamental to the execution of on-screen protocols: respect, responsibility, consent and reciprocity (p. 10). Reflecting on each of these principles the DOXA programming team already follows several of the suggestions outlined in the guide. For example, when considering a film about an Indigenous community directed by a non-Indigenous filmmaker, we make an effort to learn as much about the intention and filmmaking process as possible. We do this by asking for artist statements and, when appropriate, testimonials from community members to ensure the process was consensual and collaborative. One of the most important things we do throughout the year is to ask for, and listen to, feedback from Indigenous filmmakers, colleagues and audience members. Some examples of the feedback we have received, and incorporated, include presenting land acknowledgment on

the screen during the introduction of some film events (rather than just reading off a script). We also make sure to ask Indigenous filmmakers if they would like the name of their nation/territory to be listed in the program book and website instead of listing the country of Canada.

While the guide offers an extensive overview of the many complexities involved in developing and implementing protocols, there is limited discussion of how our current economic structure (neoliberalism) creates systemic barriers. Several sections offer recommendations that more funds be given to productions in order to promote proper protocols around cultural safety, consent and respect, however there is very little said about the challenges related to the overall funding structures in Canada. From the perspective of a director of a non-profit arts organization, there are many financial challenges we face that can make it difficult to engage fully with the protocols. Currently, film festivals in Canada rely on a mix of revenue sources from government grants to ticket sales as well as private donations and corporate sponsorship. One thing we have struggled with at an organizational level is whether or not to accept funds from major banks or resource extraction companies. Accepting money from institutions that are often tangled in continued land displacement and colonialist practices would not seem to offer much by way of trust and reciprocity.

While applications for public grants now regularly require detailed descriptions of cultural safety protocols, funding levels remain stagnant, with modest increases at best. Without significant additional financial resources, it can be difficult for organizations to deeply engage with

proper protocols outlined in the document, such as paying for cultural competency training and paying mentors and mentees, for example. The precariousness of funding, and increasing cost of operations, such as venue rental fees, often means that paying for additional initiatives can be difficult, despite remaining entirely necessary. While the guide does not look specifically at funding models, the inherent contradiction between implementing these recommendations and the corporate bottom line of seeking profit by many in the mainstream industry is identified throughout. Acknowledging that protocols are unique and specific to each community, proper consent of sharing stories requires unique care as many oral storytelling traditions stem from a relationship with the land. One poignant example explored in the guide relates to the common practice of signing away story rights when making a deal with a broadcaster or distributor (p. 17), which often goes against community protocol where stories belong to elders, or to the communities at-large.

After engaging with the guide, I cannot help but wonder if it will ever be possible for the mainstream film and television industry to fully embrace these protocols when revenue is their primary bottom line. Non-profit film festivals and other alternative distribution/exhibition markets, on the other hand, offer an environment where protocols can thrive, as they do not require the same legal rights as broadcasters and streaming monopolies. For example, when DOXA screens a film theatrically, we do not require that the artist or filmmaker sign away any copyright to their work. Rather, the film is screened for the public and in exchange for an artist fee, while the artist or distributor maintains the full ownership of their project. Furthermore, the non-profit

mandate of such organizations, including DOXA, is often educational which means that while revenue is an important factor, the end goal of such organizations is to promote arts and education and a social good, allowing space to fold in values such as reciprocity and community responsibility as outlined in these protocols.

While funding remains a challenge, ultimately the development of innovative and decolonial structures as suggested in the guide have the potential to challenge the notion that revenue is the primary marker of success, paving a path towards long-term economic reconciliation. Overall, this guide is necessary reading for media arts professionals across the sector, including students and even audience members. I believe that all non-Indigenous people working in the media arts, regardless of if they are working with Indigenous creators or not, should be encouraged to consult this document. The pedagogical impact of this guide as a tool for folks across the media arts sector would encourage, not only a deeper understanding of the impacts of colonization, but also a flourishing of new narratives rooted in the recognition of Indigenous ownership and control over their rights to their intellectual and cultural property and heritage.

**Selina Crammond**

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**Gabriela Aceves-Sepúlveda. *Women made visible: Feminist art and media in post-1968 Mexico City*. Lincoln, NE: Nebraska University Press, ISBN 978-1-4962-1385-3, 2019, 408 pages.**

*Women made visible: Feminist art and media in post-1968 Mexico City* is a seminal work, encompassing outstanding and in-depth research, argumentation and theoretical frameworks. The debates the book advances are pertinent to our current era and they explore uncharted territory. This is a complex book, which discusses issues pertaining to embodiment, performance, and the dichotomy of public and private spaces, which are all part of my own research interests. I am also committed to the plight of feminism, inclusion, and to addressing gender inequalities in my work.

One of the questions that comes to mind upon reading this book is: what does this book make visible? Women's issues, of course, are made visible, but Aceves-Sepúlveda's detailed discussion of feminist art and the plight of women in Mexico City goes well beyond that struggle. The book accomplishes many tasks. It renders women's art history in Mexico and beyond visible, and it also renders the importance and the intricacies of the archive visible. It particularly examines power dynamics, women's struggle for equal rights—such as reproductive rights, protection and the criminalization of violence against women. In addition to engendering visibility the book also gives voice to women who had been silenced and censored in Mexican history, and who had been ignored or erased from art history, and even from the history of global feminisms. Aceves-Sepúlveda also refers to “the perils of inaccessibility,” investigating mechanisms

of accessing archives of a feminist art and media in post-1968 Mexico City. In that sense, issues on the importance of archival preservation, management, maintenance and access are prevalent. And it is worthwhile to mention that one of the chapters is a fascinating exploration of the official secret services police archives on women, which Aceves-Sepúlveda had the chance to study after the records were released.

The book is divided in three parts of three chapters each: Feminizing the City, Archival Practices, and Protesting the Archives. In the broader scope, these three parts trace the history of feminism in Mexico, and create links with transnational and international art networks. Specifically, the first part of the book addresses notions of urbanity within three aspects: urban planning regulations, media and embodiment. The chapters are “The Official City,” “The Media City,” and “The Embodied City.” The city is scrutinized here according to official records and legislation, as well as to media representations. The chapter shows how the city itself becomes a site of corporeality and embodiment.

The second part of the book probes the very notion of the archive as a location of contestation and as a political arena, dissecting the official battles behind the scenes of the art world. The chapters are “The Archival and Political Awakenings of Ana Victoria Jiménez,” “Secret Documents and Feminist Practices,” and “Performing Feminist Art.” In addition, in this section the author traces links between the political origins of legislation and the regulations of archives, and discusses the unexpected role of law officers in preserving artists’ archives. The section also discusses performance as an archive in itself. In addition, in this section the author traces links between the political origins of legislation and the regulations of archives, and discusses the

unexpected role of law officers in preserving artists' archives. The section also discusses performance as an archive in itself. The third part of the book is dedicated to protest and resistance, where art becomes political, willingly or accidentally. The chapters are "Interrupting Photographic Traditions," "Feminist Collaborations in 1970s Mexico," and "POLArizing the Archive." Different artistic expressions are discussed here, specifically photography and video, as well as collaborative efforts among the artists in question. Each part of the book engages with transnational and international art networks through the examination of international feminist artists beyond Mexico in other parts of the world. The author also demonstrates that the Mexican artists in question were not working isolated from a global art scene, but were completely inserted within international art circuits through art production and dialogue.

Aceves-Sepúlveda calls the women studied here "visual *letradas*," who are "self-identified women who, by the second half of the 20th century, became more openly concerned with performing and recording audiovisual information about how their bodies were visually construed and politicized" (p. 6). The term references the contrasting context developed by critic Ángel Rama who posed the notion of *letrados*, or urban lettered men, "who held power over written discourse and by the central role of the city in deploying and reproducing that power" (p. 6). The four artists whose art production and archives are discussed in the book are: Ana Victoria Jiménez, Rosa Martha Fernández, Pola Weiss, and Mónica Mayer. Aceves-Sepúlveda probes the complexities of each artist within well-discussed and very specific contexts, and within diverse artistic forms and manifestations, and she delineates and problematizes how these four artists defied the invisibility of women in Mexico City's arts and socio-

political contexts. In addition, many other feminist artists are discussed, in dialogue with the contexts established.

One of the elements investigated is the city. Aceves-Sepúlveda examines how the “feminization of the cultural geographies” (p. 290) takes place through the art work and activism of the artists in question. The book is about Mexico City, but its discussion resonates with international circuits of art and feminism. It indicates complex transnational and relational networks, and heterogeneous perspectives within global feminism. Aceves-Sepúlveda’s strong contextualization presents the processes through which Mexico City underwent modernization and expansion, sometimes with the high price of state violence, particularly in the case of the student protests that resulted in the massacre of innocent students.

In the works of the women in question, there are multiple reinterpretations and occupations of the public space of the city—space is explored in terms of visibility and invisibility. Along the lines of feminism, the visibility of private matters within public spheres is highly political. From this lens, the public actions of some of the artists under scrutiny defy old definitions of public and private, always in dialogue with a feminist struggle. This is evident in the multiple discussions of women’s urban interventions and public protests. The city as public space is also important in relation to photography and documentation of protests, and the representation of women in relation to, for example, ethnicity, as well as photos of women’s actions in public spaces, and in how “public performances are in and of themselves claims to citizenship” (p. 89). As Aceves-Sepúlveda defines it, “embodied citizenship refers to the ways in which public performances of dissent invite passerby and their audiences to imagine change and the terms through which

change can be articulated while enabling the negotiation of competing ideas of community” (p. 89).

Another essential aspect is an ongoing discussion of the body. Questions of embodiment pertain to the entire book, and the exploration of the body and women’s agency is crucial. These four artists question “the ways female bodies were construed and represented in public discourses,” and in urban spaces of the city (p. 6). Women’s bodies and embodiment are essential for understanding how feminism is at stake. The importance of the body to these artists cannot be stressed enough. The body is a site of experience, oppression, and violence, but also for more nuanced ways in which visibility relates to acts of recognition depended on the gaze, the gestural and spaces (physical, conceptual, ideological and political) occupied by women’s bodies, especially when considering the obvious (but elusive) idea that performance is an embodied artistic practice, and that it requires presence. Finally, the book provides an overview of how these women artists used humor in their art work, humor being a form of embodiment.

In examining the city and the body and their interrelatedness, the book scrutinizes tensions between two structuring forces: the social body and the individual body. To stress the importance of this relationship, I refer to Marcel Mauss’ term on the notion of the habitus, (which Pierre Bourdieu later developed) to refer to tacit and structuring social dispositions embodied in human action. Aceves-Sepúlveda’s book in many ways examines how these feminist artists break and subvert the habitus through their artistic and media actions, in social and subjective transformations, and in the “feminization of the cultural geographies of Mexico City and the concomitant emergence of new regimes of media and visibility” (p. 290).

This book is a tour de force that creates and holds an archive in itself; the book functions as an archive in form and content in order to remediate historical erasure and invisibilities. Aceves-Sepúlveda's book creates possibilities for presence, for acknowledging the contribution and possibilities these women generated in their art and activism. This book makes an invaluable contribution to multiple fields, and it would be of interest to scholars, students and artists interested in Feminism, Media Studies, Art History, and Latin American Studies. This book is a tremendous asset to teachers, educators, and adult education community leaders, as well as to community organizers and activists. The history the book traces can help educators who are teaching the history of feminism, or who are promoting the main tenets of equality and equity, and are fighting against gender oppression. The book can help highlight and elucidate the crucial role educators play in social justice and human rights.

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