UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
SANTA CRUZ

TOWARDS A THEORY OF DIGITAL NECROPOLITICS

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
Of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

FILM AND DIGITAL MEDIA

by

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June 2021

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ABSTRACT

Francesca Romeo / "Towards a Theory of Digital Necropolitics"

"Towards a Theory of Digital Necropolitics," elucidates the intersection of technology, human rights, aesthetics, and testimony through representations of the dead, dying, disappeared, or wounded body. Theorizing interventions into "Digital Necropolitics" highlights how the digital revolution has reconfigured the limits of representation, altering our conception of the "human" at the site/sight of death. It explores how virtual forums and digital reconstructions extend biological death, transforming it into a productive "after-life" that can reanimate the corpse and harness mourning, testimony, affect, and identification as constituent elements of social identities and political movements. Working from the margins, networked, cartographic, and post-human forms of testimony address the spectacle of death, evoking different temporalities while contending with the impact of longstanding histories of oppression. In this manner, testimony works as both an interventionist force and one of accretion in which a multiplicity of voices that produce, circulate, and exchange evidence of violations amplify the devastating effects of trauma, reshaping social movements through an activist mourning. In this way, the body is not solely reduced to its vulnerability and death, creating a chain of reductive signifiers, but rather it enables a way of seeing *through* death and articulating its political relevance in order to project emancipatory visions of life that can viably imagine a future free from violence.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The conception, research, and writing conducted to complete this dissertation occurred on a multiplicity of unceded territories. I would like to acknowledge the Amah Mutsun Tribal Band, the Muwekma Ohlone tribe, and the Central Sierra Me-Wuk. I am indebted to the original stewards of the land that provided me with the resources to complete my doctoral research.

I would like to thank my committee members for their guidance and insight throughout this process.

Thank you to Dr. Kyle Parry, whose brilliance concerning all things digital and progressive is unparalleled. This is perhaps only matched by his empathy, which granted me the space to be myself in his classroom, making him a true rarity amongst academics.

Thank you to Professor Lawrence Andrews, whose spectacular filmmaking provided me with the inspiration to seek new ways of understanding art as a strategy for lyrical interventions.

Thank you to Dr. Shelley Stamp, who has modeled professionalism for me in a manner that surpasses other scholars. Thanks to her as well for being the first

mentor to point out to me that all my research interests are deeply invested in understanding history and that I should not be afraid to chart my own path through it with my scholarship.

Thank you to Dr. Banu Bargu for literally writing the book on necropolitics and for providing me with endless inspiration through everything she writes. It is rare for me to feel such a deep kinship with another scholar's work, and it makes me feel like I have a place in the world when I read her words.

I would also like to thank various friends and colleagues who motivated my research.

Thank you to Dr. Sylvanna Falcón for welcoming me into the Human Rights Investigations Lab and the Research Center for the Americas at UCSC. Building the foundation for the lab together and creating a space of experimentation was one of the richest academic experiences of my time at UCSC and integral to my theory/practice development in open-source investigations.

Thank you to Dr. Bruce Thompson, whose generosity as a scholar, historian, and educator of Holocaust studies allowed me to find my voice with critical reflections when encountering testimonials of great despair.

Thank you to Dr. Rebecca Hernandez for graciously sharing her knowledge of indigenous culture with me.

Thank you to Dr. Alexa Koenig and Andrea Lampros for showing me what egalitarian and participatory politics can look like. Their approach to collaboration granted me much faith during my time at the Human Rights Center at UC Berkeley.

Thank you to Dr. Saskia Dunkell and Dr. Fabiola Hannah, both essential interlocutors with whom I navigated the terrain of human rights and political conflicts in various conversations that informed this dissertation.

A special thanks to Dr. Boreth Ly, whose uncompromising ethics and dedicated spiritual practice serve as a reminder to me to continue pursuing challenging topics yet with an aim to bend towards the light.

Such deep thanks to my friend Star Black who blessed me with her presence in this life. She always faithfully encouraged me when I had doubts about my future and rallied to remind me that a commitment to social justice requires a deep consideration of one's values daily. She passed away in February of 2019. In dying, Star taught me that love is not an expression, an action, or even a feeling. It is a complete and total presence and an immaculate awareness. It is

the grace of simply being there for another when they cannot go on and electing to carry them instead. In this respect, I graduate in her honor.

Finally, there are not enough words to convey my respect and appreciation for Dr. Neda Atanasoski, to whom this dissertation is dedicated.

I would like to acknowledge her extraordinary patience, grace, humor, and intellect, for as my dissertation advisor, she lifted me countless times with her belief in my work. She not only championed my ideas but encouraged rigorous debate, provided avenues of intellectual discovery, and questioned my methodological approaches with acuity. Most importantly, though, she was always willing to engage in the free exchange of ideas without boundaries. Dr. Atanasoski has been a lifeline for me in this respect, and I am so profoundly grateful for this.

INTRODUCTION

Towards a Theory of Digital Necropolitics

"Sean, it's me. I just wanted to let you know I love you, and I'm stuck in this building in New York. A plane hit the building, or bomb went off. We don't know, but there's lots of smoke and I just wanted you to know that I love you always. Bye."[1]

Melissa Harrington-Hughes called her husband in San Francisco from the 101st floor of the World Trade Center's north tower on September 11, 2001. She arrived in New York City the night before, on a one-day business trip, and used her cell phone to leave him this final message.[2] Perhaps the landlines within the building had already gone dark, given the tremendous impact of American Airlines Flight 11 that crashed through the tower's facade, destroying floors 93 through 99 beneath her. Smoke spiraled from the chasm in the building, billowing up to Melissa's floor in columns of ash before curling beyond the tower's spire and stretching across the East River.

September 11th was a cataclysmic rupture and the first mass atrocity of the millennium. The attack on the towers left an indelible sense of loss etched across the faces of New Yorkers who bore witness that day. In the immediate aftermath, survivors walked over bridges and crossed spectral city streets to escape the mayhem, their blank stares betraying a sense of dread at the unknown. In the weeks that followed, impromptu shrines sprung up across the

[1] "Harrowing Final Phone Calls," BBC News, September 13, 2001, accessed April 23, 2021, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/1543466.stm
[2] Ibid.

city's avenues, and miles of handmade flyers were found below it, taped longingly across the wide berths of subway tunnels that ran underneath. Pleading for information about loved ones, each flyer posed the same insistent questions and detailed refrains. Have you seen Christina? Last heard from on the 105th floor at 8:52 am. Jonathan left a message at 9:02 am, and any information about his whereabouts is appreciated. Please contact us. Sarah called at 9:32 am, and we would be grateful for any information. In the aftermath, a palpable incredulity descended over the city as a whole. A stunning material truth translated to the realization that "the buildings were not buildings anymore, and the place where they fell had become a tabula rasa for the United States. Among the ruins now, a large and unscripted experiment in American life had gotten underway."[3]

Occurring on the cusp of the analog/digital divide, 9/11 has been characterized as "the most photographed and videotaped day of the history of the world."[4] Professional photojournalists, documentary filmmakers, first responders, civilians fleeing, and those within view of the towers aflame made images, their collective experience scripting a spectacular and unadulterated rendering of the event from below. These photographs and videos depicted an unimaginably "destructive sublime" as thousands of people turned their cameras

[3] William Langewiesche, "American Ground: Unbuilding the World Trade Center," *The Atlantic Monthly*, July/August 2002, Vol. 290 Issue 1, 48.
[4] Tom Junod, "The Falling Man," *Women and Performance,* 14.1 (2004): 216.

towards the twin towers to document their evisceration.[5] The universe of images rapidly expanded at this moment, indicating that witnesses could rewrite history from their direct experience of it.

Several exhibits attempted to harness this collective impulse, amongst the largest was entitled *Here is New York: A Democracy of Images*.[6] Comprised of over 5000 submissions by approximately 3000 photographers, this "democracy" of images was a testament to the dissolution of amateur and professional boundaries, and the photographs were exhibited anonymously alongside one another, underscoring this point.[7] The iconicity of the buildings was suddenly rendered in personal terms, exposing that photography itself was on the verge of a radical change. A citizenry of photography coupled with the advent of digital cameras and cellular technology threatened to eclipse journalistic norms, marking the beginning of an era in which the phrase citizen journalism would come to reign.[8] By providing an unfiltered view of mass death, witnesses

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[5] Miles Orvell, "After 9/11: Photography, The Destructive Sublime, and the Postmodern Archive," *Michigan Quarterly Review* 45, no. 2 (2006): 246.

[6] The exhibit was organized by Michael Shulan Charles Traub, Gilles Peress, and Alice Rose George and was initially displayed at a vacant storefront on Prince Street in Soho before expanding to other locations and formats, including a book and website.

[7] "Here is New York," 2002, accessed April 27, 2021, https://hereisnewyork.org/gallery/book.asp.html

[8] Ariella Azoulay, *The Civil Contract of Photography* (New York, NY: Zone Books, 2008), 81.

Citizen journalism arose with the advent of digital technologies in conjunction with the internet, allowing witnesses to events of national or global interest to document and share evidence of their experience online. These photographs or videos are often shared with mainstream news outlets, altering our perspective of breaking news by virtue of their immediate proximity to an event. Professional journalistic standards of objectivity and contextualization are bypassed in citizen journalism, for the perspective of the amateur is privileged for its authenticity as a primary document of first-hand experience.

themselves dictated the visual terrain by which the event would be interpreted, forcibly exposing the magnitude of loss through creative interventions that did not privilege a single angle, image, or narrative that could produce a fixed interpretation of the event. This lack of fixity signaled the erosion of totalizing narratives mandated by the state, or promoted by mainstream media, by challenging their power in the form of a civil gaze that opened onto multiple meanings, forming a citizenship or a mode of belonging, primarily enabled by the use of digital technologies.

Ariella Azoulay contends that a citizenry of photography coheres us through the production and circulation of images by which we as civilians tacitly agree to a mutual obligation to one another when we first make an image or the moment we become the subject of one. This relation, through mediatization, allows the citizenry of photography to operate independently of sovereign constraint, forming a supranational power emboldened by images that display our grievances and seek redress within a global public sphere. Azoulay states, "Photography is an event that always takes place among people… It is unique in that no one can claim a sovereign position from which to rule what, of this encounter, will be inscribed in the photograph."[9] Analogous to this statement is Susan Sontag's assertion that "To photograph is to appropriate the thing photographed. It means putting oneself into a certain relation to the world that

[9] Ariella Azoulay, "What is a photograph? What is photography?," *Philosophy of Photography,* 1 no. 1 (2010): 13.

feels like knowledge – and, therefore, like power."[10] It is in the declarative function of the image and the power derived from its unique ability to render the contours of our reality in vivid terms that its capacity to make particular truth claims at the site/sight of death has spurred a necropolitical refashioning of the digital public sphere.

Digital Necropolitics and Digitally enabled Necroresistance

This dissertation examines the merger of digital technologies with representations of the dead, dying, disappeared, or wounded body. Hence, developing a theory of "Digital Necropolitics" is intrinsic to each chapter to elucidate the intersection of technology, human rights, aesthetics, and testimony through different modes of necroresistance. The dissertation as a whole explores how the advent of the internet in combination with these technologies has catalyzed documentation, circulation, and participation as modes of civic engagement in the wake of violence and the importance of digital media in contesting state power. Instead of a scopic regime in which the target of state violence is rendered powerless or politically inert by their subjugation, theorizing interventions into "Digital Necropolitics" exposes a matrix of gazes operating against state power.[11] This shift allows civilians to make truth claims

[10] Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (London: Picador, 2001) 4.
[11] Allen Feldman, "Violence and Vision: The Prosthetics and Aesthetics of Terror," *Public Culture*, 10(1): 30

that contradict state narratives more effectively, highlighting how the digital "universe" has reconfigured the limits of representation, altering our conception of the "human" and affect at the site/sight of death.

The term necropolitics initially gained visibility through Cameroonian scholar and political theorist Achille Mbembe's eponymous essay that outlines the parameters of its force in the postcolonial era.[12] Necropolitics for Mbembe is both an extension and rebuke to Michel Foucault's assertion that biopower is the primary social and political force circumscribing modern lives.[13] While Foucault sees the maintenance and regulation of reproduction at the level of populations and a link between the health of the body politic with that of the state as primary factors in the policing of sovereignty, Mbembe enacts a reversal foregrounding death as sovereignty's most significant regulatory control.

Mbembe identifies the right to kill as the ultimate way sovereignty proclaims itself and how diverse political groups compete for power and exert control over vulnerable populations. In contrast, Foucault describes biopower as the ability of the state to "make live and let die" while Mbembe declares that sovereignty is determined by "the capacity to dictate who may live and who must die." [14] These twin polarities rest along a spectrum of theories that attempt

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[12] Achille Mbembe, "Necropolitics," *Public Culture,* 15, no. 1 (2003): 11–40.
[13] Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978—1979*, (New York: Picador, 2010).
[14] Timothy C. Campbell and Adam Sitze, "Biopolitics: An Encounter," in *Biopolitics: A Reader*, eds. Timothy C. Campbell and Adam Sitze Durham (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013), 11. Achille Mbembe, "Necropolitics," *Public Culture,* 15, no. 1 (2003): 11.

to intervene and reformulate an understanding of geopolitics that considers the effects of both transnationalism as it pertained to Foucault's era of thought and the effects of globalization that are more germane to Mbembe's. Both theorists bore witness to marked global shifts that reshaped not only the circulation of goods, but that gave rise to more porous borders that subsequently prompted large-scale migratory shifts. The rise of a global market also consolidated economic control in the hands of corporations instead of the nation-state. Theories of biopower and necropolitics seek to expose how sovereign power reasserts itself through the regulation of life and death in the wake of these changes.

Applying biopower and necropolitics to the field of representation allows one to address a diverse set of concerns spanning: citizenship, exclusion, recognition, affect, and activism as they manifest in the mediation of political violence. While Mbembe's thesis concerning necropolitics focuses on the infrastructure of contemporary domination in terms of surveillance mechanisms, the rise of diffuse militias, and the forms of violence that they both perpetrate, my agenda differs. I seek to interrogate how images of the dead and dying circulate within various digital contexts, simultaneously inciting and performing violence while inspiring reparative responses and new forms of resistance. Taking necropolitics as a point of departure allows me to theorize its conjunction with the digital, which is an aspect of Mbembe's thesis that is conspicuously absent from his analysis of contemporary political violence.

While Mbembe asserts the rise of a "war machine" that characterizes the nature of postcolonial conflict by its diffusion, ephemeral networks, the extremity of violence, and the multitude of technologies that underpin this, the use of images and digital technologies as an integral component of the machine itself is left un-theorized.[15] I explore this absence and articulate it as an essential component in understanding our global networked society through the proliferation of new forms of visually-oriented testimony to which each chapter addresses resistance enabled in digital terms.

The theorization of digital necropolitics must also incorporate those methods through which resistance to sovereign power arises. Banu Bargu cites necroresistance as a mode by which the weaponization of life in the form of self-starvation and self-immolation can counter state power by transforming the oppressed body into a political weapon that can forge new social circumstances.[16] I look to her work to identify how empowerment can arise from, and be enacted through, the privileging of death as a political tool and draw her concerns into the realm of representation. If necropolitical violence "refers to an entire ensemble of diverse practices that target the dead as a surrogate for, and means of, targeting the living," then the reversal enacted through necroresistance targets the authorities that perpetrate necropolitical

[15] Mbembe, "Necropolitics," 30.
[16] Banu Bargu, *Starve and Immolate: The Politics of Human Weapons*. (New York: Columbia University Press), 2016.

violence and mobilizes the sight of the corpse as a means to sustain and ensure security for the living.[17] In this sense, digital images of death can effectively translate corporeal suffering into social and political change. Thus, what I term, digital necropolitics explores how virtual forums and digital reconstructions extend biological death, transforming it into a productive "after-life" that can reanimate the corpse and harness mourning, testimony, affect, and identification as constituent elements of social identities and political movements, paying particular attention to historical parallels. While the biological corpse may fall out of view, its image acts as a form of preservation, binding its memory to the illusion of presence. In this way, dead bodies express the political and social labor of the living, who derive their momentum from imagining the dead as agential and exploiting their absence/presence. Thus to document death and to relive it through imagery enacts a form of insistence that recognizes that the "dead make social worlds."[18] The dead, in effect, hold powerful sway over the social conscience of our time, and in their invocation online, we create sites of identification that can transcend their digitized representation.

Charting the Digital Revolution, Digital Necropolitics and the Rise of Necroresistance

[17] Banu Bargu, "Another Necropolitics," *Theory & Event*, 19, no. 1 (2016): 3.
[18] Thomas Walter Laqueur, *The Work of the Dead: A Cultural History of Mortal Remains* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015), 1.

Our ability as citizens to author unfiltered testimony and distribute it amongst a broad spectatorship emerges from what has been termed the "digital revolution," comprised primarily of personal computing, cellular devices, and the formulation of the internet.[19] Computers, initially conceived of as calculators, transformed into a communication technology between the decades spanning from 1960 to 1980.[20] Consequently, networked communication as a public feature of the internet became popularized in the 1990s, yet "no single agent guided the system's evolution."[21] What once began as an endeavor initiated by the US Department of Defense Advanced Research Agency to establish interactive computing through ARPANET in which one network interlinked a few number of sites, the subsequent internet that evolved from this consists of multiple pliable networks with the capacity to expand indefinitely.[22] While the practical considerations of the internet occupied the minds of data scientists, computer engineers, and military technicians, the concept of the internet as a repository of collective knowledge and the harbinger of a digital revolution manifested through its public use, reshaping global society in the process. Key to the cultural grammar of the internet is its salient features, distinguishing it from prior communication technologies. These elements

[19]Gabriele Balbi and Paolo Magaudda, *A History of Digital Media: An intermedia and Global Perspective* (New York: Routledge, 2018), 4.
[20] Janet Abbate, *Inventing the internet* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000), 1.
[21] Leonard Kleinrock, "An Early History of the internet," *IEEE Communications Magazine,* 48, no. 8 (2010): 29.
[22] Abbate, *Inventing the Internet,* 113.

include the fact that it allows for both public and private communication on a local and global scale in which both senders and recipients can choose from a range of values to quantify their communication (one to one, group discussion, few to many). Additional features can qualify correspondence (carbon copy, blind carbon copy), determine different temporalities (synchronous or asynchronous), and allow intersecting agendas from corporate, civilian, state, public, and private institutions to interact within the same platform.[23]

A brief statistical survey provides the foundation for examining the contours of the digital revolution and its technical components via their use in a US context. In 2002 62% of Americans owned a cellphone. This percentage rose steadily to 75% in 2007, 85% in 2009, and in 2021 97% of Americans own a cellphone, and 85% of these are smartphones. These statistics are stable across all economic and education levels, races, ethnicities, and geographies, meaning there is no apparent cellular divide in a US context.[24] In comparison, the use of the internet exhibits an even more drastic rise over time. In the year 2000, over half of the American public was online at 52%. In 2005 that rose to 68%, in 2009, it was 76%, and by 2021 93% of the US public uses the internet. While early statistics signaled that the majority of internet users were white in 2000 at 53% as opposed to 38% Black, in 2021, the distribution amongst different racial

[23] Niels Ole Finnemann, "Mediatization theory and digital media," (2011): 83.
[24] Pew Research Center, "Mobile Fact Sheet," *Internet and Technology*, accessed April 29, 2021, https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/fact-sheet/mobile/

groups is nearly even, with 93% of internet use amongst whites, 91% of internet use amongst Blacks, and 95% of internet use amongst Latinos. Again, these statistics show marginal differentiation in use between genders, different economic classes, ages, education levels, and incomes, proving that most Americans enjoy widespread and nearly equal access to the internet.[25] Finally, the adoption of social media displays the most significant change over time. In 2005 only 5% of US adults engaged with social media. By 2009 this had risen to 36%, in 2013, it became 63%, and finally, in 2021, 72% of American adults interact with one or more social media platforms regularly.[26] These statistics reinforce the notion that the digital revolution has indeed filtered into and impacted American society in irrevocable ways.

Under the penumbra of the "digital revolution," it is essential to note the centrality and impact of digital photography and video (which I consolidate with the phrase digital imagery). Two contradictory threads of thought emerged early on during the analog/digital divide at the turn of the millennium, questioning digital imagery's ontological condition and epistemic possibilities. The first was that photography might be "dead" as a result of its digitization. This anxiety arose from the fact that editing software could seamlessly manipulate images eroding their presumed stability, ignoring the fact that

[25] Pew Research Center, "Internet/Broadband Fact Sheet," *Internet and Technology*, accessed April 29, 2021, https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/fact-sheet/internet-broadband/
[26] Pew Research Center, "Social Media Fact Sheet," *Internet and Technology*, accessed April 29, 2021, https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/fact-sheet/social-media/

photography has been subject to manipulation since its inception. Double exposures, long exposures, retouching, composite images, and special effects, amongst other techniques, were synonymous with the invention of photography and film in the late 1800s. Images, in essence, have always invited a set of choices that can produce different visual outcomes, and the digital simply augments these possibilities. A coterminous concern with this augmentation was the notion that digital imagery would dislodge the image's indexical relationship to reality, again, eliding the fact that still and moving images have always maintained a tenuous relationship with the given "reality" that they represent. Instead, the first decade of the 21st century did not witness the "death" of photography or an indexical disruption, but its acceleration and omnipresence. This expansion occurred precisely because of its mutability due to digital affordances. Closing out the decade, in April of 2010, SF MOMA organized a symposium gathering art world luminaries and critics to respond to the proposition, “Is Photography Over?” To put forward such a question against a backdrop of image profusion seemed to be a moot inquiry and an exercise in capitalizing upon extant anxiety rather than quelling it.

Chris Chesher assumes a more productive stance in his clarification of the “new digital paradigm.” Chesher notes that by 2003 digital cameras had supplanted film as the primary method by which images were produced, and in 2007 the iPhone recalibrated the digital landscape through its linkage with

software.[27] This, in turn, affected the "technosocial configurations of mass amateur photography" producing "heterogeneous new existential territories" in which the technical components of digital imagery collide with algorithms, information merges with organs, dynamic materialities and energies recombine, producing a new universe of digital techniques and references that overlap with older media technologies.[28] It is an explosion, not a retraction, that characterizes the production and circulation of digital imagery and its multivalent capacities engendered by the iPhone or what Chesher refers to as "real-time digital transformations, translations and transmissions… [that] enters the realms of media production, information and deixis (it carries information about person, direction, time etc. with its images)."[29] This development has granted us the sense that images are now ubiquitous, seeming to pervade every aspect of daily life.

In its translation from the celluloid surface to the unmoored realm of pixels, the status of the image itself still presents the same ontological questions. The methods and technologies used to alter images have changed through their relationship to software, and yet our relationship to the truth quotient of an image or its indexicality remains. What distinguishes digital imagery is its ability to migrate across multiple platforms, to appear and disappear from digital

[27] Chris Chesher, *Between Image and Information: The iPhone Camera in the History of Photography* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 105.
[28] Ibid, 98-99.
[29] Ibid, 107.

archives and websites, to be sent and received instantaneously, to be manipulated and edited with ease, to change the light, tone, and features within the microcosm of a cellphone's screen, to be uploaded to a cloud, downloaded to a laptop, to be displayed, forwarded, exchanged, liked, commented on, appropriated, and re-mixed. Digital imagery, in essence, is unrestrained, or as Peter Osborne states, "it is in its potential for an infinite multiplication of visualizations that the distinctiveness of the digital image lies."[30] Underscoring this point, Hito Steyerl emphatically suggests, "if images start pouring across screens and invading subject and object matter, the major and quite overlooked consequence is that reality now widely consists of images; or rather, of things, constellations, and processes formerly evident as images."[31] It is this interplay between virtual renderings and lived reality and how they both ricochet off each other, producing endless variations, simulations, and narratives that congeal and diverge, that make digital imagery distinct from earlier photographic processes.

The effects of this revolution in which digital imagery is both an outcome and a centerpiece are that the fourth estate (or the press's duty to hold the government accountable for its truth claims) has been augmented by a civilian vanguard. This vanguard generates images and inquiries that both inform and disrupt mainstream reporting. Testimonial encounters of embodied life and

[30] Peter Osborne, "Infinite Exchange: The Social Ontology of the Photographic Image," *Philosophy of Photography,* 1 (1) 2010: 60.
[31] Hito Steyerl, "Too much world: Is the Internet dead?," *E-flux journal* 49 (2013): 6.

vivid first-hand accounts from within crises have become a normative feature of the digital public sphere. It is in the amplification of visual, textual, and interpersonal associations produced by our interaction with the internet and the technologies that connect to it that creates an expansive forum for the production and circulation of digital media artifacts that enable necroresistance.

The "digital" deployed as a broad term throughout this dissertation is any audio, visual, or textual product created through digital technologies and their intersection with computing software and networked activity. The "necropolitical" addendum is used to examine these multivalent "texts" and analyze how they spur a wide variety of political impulses and aesthetics that generate affective repercussions and cue us to take social action at the sight/site of death. In this configuration, I am drawing upon what has been broadly termed "new media," a genre that translates media as "the storage, dissemination and transmission of experience" reliant upon technological innovations and that recognizes that "by changing the conditions for the production of experience, new media destabilize existing patterns of biological, psychical, and collective life even as they furnish new facilities."[32] It is this "destabilization" and the possibilities for political rebirth as a new facility that can occur from this that I am interested in. I view destabilization as the primary purpose of digital interventions that utilize necroresistance to create new digital

[32] Mark BN Hansen, "New Media," in *Critical Terms for Media Studies,* eds. William Mitchell, John Thomas, and Mark BN Hansen (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010) 172-173.

cultures. Comprised of myriad forms, discourses, and images that evoke different historical eras, digital representations of the dead and dying alter our conception of political potentialities through their invocation and circulation online.

The digital revolution has unfolded into two distinct eras in which digital necropolitics and digitally-enabled necroresistance arise. The first period spans from 1994 to 2009, in which images of political conflicts, natural disasters, and deaths began to circulate online through activists and citizen journalists alike. The second period spans 2009-present and initiates with the death of Neda Agha Soltan and an increase in the circulation of images of death online.

The first period witnessed the rise of social movements that began to cohere through online discourse, forming new modes of assembly in response to state power. Amongst the most notable events of social impact was the Zapatista rebellion, which coincided with the early public use of the internet in 1994. The Zapatistas confronted the Mexican government's oppression of the indigenous peoples of Chiapas concerning the labor they engaged in and the land expropriated from them upon the signing of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). Subcomandante Marcos characterized this agreement as a "death certificate for the Indian peoples in Mexico, who are disposable for the Government of Carlos Salinas de Gortari."[33] Fighting against exploitation and the destruction of indigenous communities, the Zapatista movement was heralded

[33] Tim Golden, "Mexican Troops Battling Rebels: Toll at Least 57," *The New York Times*, January 3, 1994, A9.

as the first digital rebellion of its kind. It capitalized upon listservs and issued online communiques, using networked connectivity to amass support for their contestation of state power. The Zapatistas undoubtedly inspired subsequent social movements, such as the anti-capitalist WTO protests in 1999 that sought global economic reform in defiance against the global turn towards privatization that marked the end of the 20th century and the dawn of a new millennium. The scale, intensity, geographical dispersion, and coordination of such movements would ultimately change as increasing connectivity allowed for greater mobilization efforts through an expanding digital public sphere.

During this initial phase, digital necroresistance was not fully formulated as an express mode of action; instead, it was a nascent practice to document life, death, and the politics that accompanied their visualization in response to catastrophic events as they were unfolding. Footage from the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami captured by citizens and tourists using digital video cameras flooded news organizations and provided raw, unedited, amateur content that became the basis for press accounts of the event.[34] In that same year, soldiers at Abu Ghraib used digital cameras to document their torture and abuse of prisoners, making images for themselves as a form of entertainment. Throughout chronicling the intentional humiliation and desecration of inmates, soldiers also

[34] Sam Dubberley, Alexa Koenig, and Daragh Murray, *Digital Witness: Using Open Source Information for Human Rights Investigation, Documentation, and Accountability* (Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2020), 5.

posed alongside bruised corpses, jeering and nonchalant. They flipped a thumbs up towards the lens in celebration of their malice. Glowering international attention and an impassioned national debate quickly ensued once these images were leaked to the US press. Judith Butler describes the ramifications of their impact as a repercussion of the original scene's extension into multiple forums, of which the internet was a primary conduit in their dissemination. "The scene becomes not just the spatial location and social scenario of the prison itself, but the entire social sphere in which the photograph is shown, seen, censored, publicized, discussed, and debated."[35]

A year later, in 2005, the London bombings and Hurricane Katrina gave way to more images produced from within crises. From private incidents magnified by public exposure or large-scale public tragedies amplified by civilian documentation, the prevalence of digital imagery was beginning to redefine the contours of state power, neglect, and destruction. In response, citizen journalism revealed the psychological and emotional impact of these tragedies while advocating for a political response. From monumental catastrophes to the toppling of regimes and the display of individual deaths in the process, new visual interventions authored from "below" were becoming increasingly common. Further examples of such confrontations were made manifest by the fact that influential figures like Sadaam Hussein and Mu'ammar Al-Qadhdhāfī,

[35] Judith Butler, *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?* (London, New York: Verso, 2009), 80.

who were once portrayed as invincible, were rendered vulnerable through the display of their bodies being beaten and killed.[36]

Yet the consolidation of narrative power in and through images of death, and particularly those images that expose the defeat of sovereign power as a means of altering the regime of representation, have a long history tied to the power of visualization. Let us think, for example, about how Madeleine Albright chose to frame her political evocation to stop the authoritarian impulse emerging in America under the Trump administration. It is no small surprise that she would begin her argument with these words, "73 years ago- Italians hung the corpse of their former dictator Benito Mussolini upside down next to a gas station in Milan. Two days later, Adolf Hitler committed suicide in his bunker beneath the streets of war-ravaged Berlin. Fascism, it appeared, was dead."[37] Albright locates the power of the people and the proverbial "death" of Fascist ideology by linking it to an image of the dead body of the sovereign. The image of Mussolini's death and desecration was intentionally staged for the public. Its power derived from displaying the violated body itself as an emblem of the potential for a new geopolitical imaginary. Contemporaneous press coverage circulated the image widely at the time, and it continues to haunt

[36] Several cell phone videos of Al-Qadhdhāfī being captured and beaten were posted to YouTube including videos of his corpse post-mortem. Though this occurred in 2011, I cite it at this juncture for its parallel relationship to Hussein's execution video and the nature of their reign as ruling elite.

[37] Madeleine Albright, "Will We Stop Trump Before It's too Late?," *The New York Times*, April 6, 2018, accessed June 8, 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/06/opinion/sunday/trump-fascism-madeleine-albright.html

global public memory. Though this occurred in 1945, we can locate its digital counterpart in the execution of Saddam Hussein.

The presentation of Hussein's execution which circulated widely on social media upon its publication on December 30th, 2006, marked a new era in which the image of death would become radically proximate and omnipresent, forging a discomforting and unparalleled intimacy between viewers and subject. The day after the video's release, a writer for The Washington Post called it "The first great Shakespearean death scene of the YouTube generation." and Amnesty International declared, "Welcome to the sordid world of the execution chamber, brought to you by the YouTube generation." [38] The video went viral, encapsulating how the digital age would forever alter death, sovereignty, and the politics of witnessing.

While Mussolini and Hussein's images indicate the fragility of sovereign power when portrayed in decline, images of civilians dying provoke different public sentiments that reorder the visual world in defiance of state-scripted narratives. I identify the year 2009 as a shift towards using digital imagery to mount forms of necroresistance because the death of Neda Agha Soltan and its

[38] Philip Kennicott, "For Saddam's Page in History, A Final Link on YouTube," *The Washington Post*, December 31, 2006, accessed June 8, 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/lifestyle/2006/12/31/for-saddams-page-in-history-a-final-link-on-youtube/963179b9-fb98-41a6-ae34-a76244fa92f1/
Justin Huggler, "After the YouTube Execution, What Now for the Death Penalty?," *Independent*, January 4, 2007, accessed June 8, 2018, https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/politics/after-the-youtube-execution-what-now-for-death-penalty-430705.html

display presented an explicit rupture that resonated worldwide. While the perpetrator of her death has never been identified, it is widely believed that a pro-government sniper was responsible for piercing her heart with a single bullet.[39] The graphic nature of the video shows Soltan at the moment of impact, collapsing to the ground, a haunted expression spreading across her face. The gleaming whites of her eyes register shock, staring back at the videographer before fluttering shut as blood commences to spill out in rapid streams from her nose and mouth. Coursing over her lips, drenching her neck and torso, mercilessly pooling on the pavement beneath her, blood saturates the image, filling the screen at an alarming pace. It is a remarkably vivid and confrontational image of death that is unsparing in its depiction. Before dying, Soltan simply says, "It burned me."[40]

While only 35% of Iranians had internet access, and social media was subject to state censorship at the time of Soltan's death, the image became an iconic representation of the Tehran protests against Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's election nonetheless.[41] Circumventing this censorship, protestors were able to upload real-time footage of their actions to various platforms, and once the video

[39] Ben Goldberger, Paul Moakley, and Kira Pollack, "100 Photos: The Death of Neda," *Time*, accessed April 29, 2021, http://100photos.time.com/photos/death-of-neda
[40] Nazila Fathi, "In a Death Seen Around the World, a Symbol of Iranian Protests," *The New York Times*, June 22, 2009, accessed April 27, 2021, https://www.nytimes.com/2009/06/23/world/middleeast/23neda.html
[41] Mette Mortensen, "When Citizen Photojournalism Sets the News Agenda: Neda Agha Soltan as a Web 2.0 icon of Post-Election Unrest in Iran," *Global Media and Communication* 7, no. 1 (2011): 8.

of Soltan entered the digital public sphere, Western media quickly recirculated it. Soltan was immediately declared a "YouTube martyr" and an emblem of the "Twitter Revolution" seeking to upend the Iranian regime.[42]

I cite Soltan's death as a cultural touchstone, and as Sasha Scott describes it, a moment that marks the ritualization of mourning via digital media. She states that as digital technologies increasingly proliferate, and as digital media come to occupy our lived realities, our "reactions and consequences" are influenced by digital imagery that is "personal, emotionally driven, spatial, patterned, and a fundamental form of expression, particularly in times of trauma and crisis, and they exist in the dense conjunction of the social, the affective, and the digital."[43] While death has been central to the constitution of social movements and is not a new phenomenon contingent upon the digital revolution, the nature of viewing, production, and circulation of such images has drastically changed.[44] Soltan's death was pivotal for it could "pry open even the

[42] Ibid, 6-8.
[43] Sasha Scott, "Images of a Digital Martyr: Neda Agha-Soltan And The Ritual Performance Of Mourning," in *Conference Paper at IAMCR Hyderabad* (July 2014), 2.
[44] If we think about the iconographic photograph of Thích Quảng Đức taken in 1963 and his act of self-immolation in protest of Buddhist persecution by the South Vietnamese government, we understand that it endures as a symbol of unbearable pain and unimaginable valor because of the intensity of his conviction and the measure of his sacrifice. His was an intentional act, and its translation into martyrdom was nearly instantaneous as the image circulated globally. Similarly, a 1970 image of a young girl in despair, Mary Ann Vecchio lamenting the death of college student Jeffrey Wright, killed at the hands of national guard troops during a student-led protest against US involvement in Vietnam, shattered the illusion that democratic expressions of free speech were protected in America. While such representations became pivotal symbols of collective shock and grief, these images also shifted the tenor of social anxieties and concerns about the political conflicts they sought to address. However, their production hewed to the realm of professional photojournalism. Their distribution was contained to mainstream media outlets, pointing to the marked difference that the digital public sphere has enabled, granting civilians the ability to create content and respond to political ruptures in real-time.

most staunchest of regimes," symbolizing how viral content could influence global public perception.[45] The progressive politics of necroresistance imbricated in Soltan's video simultaneously expose state violence while soliciting anti-regime efforts.

Though Soltan's video circulated with the intent to cohere a more liberatory reformist agenda, equally powerful videos that depict death have been mobilized for reactionary aims. During the years following the significant impact of Soltan's video, ISIS coalesced throughout the Middle East, establishing a strong presence on social media to disseminate its particular style of digital necropolitics. Formed in 2007 in Iraq, by 2013, ISIS gained global recognition for its attempt to implement a caliphate that would supplant diverse nation-states. As one ISIS acolyte stated, "God will break the barrier of Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, all the countries."[46] By 2015 ISIS successfully conquered large swathes of Iraq and Syria, commandeering infrastructure, establishing sharia law, designing new currency, and waging numerous battles to defend their newly founded territories. The character of violence enacted in this process included everything from mass executions to human trafficking, largescale kidnappings for ransom, and most pointedly, a multivalent digital media campaign. Heavy investment in digitized propaganda to recruit new members and terrify their

[45] Goldberger, Moakley, and Pollack, "100 Photos: The Death of Neda," *Time*.
[46] Quynhanh Do, "The Evolution of ISIS," *The New York Times*, December 13, 2014, accessed April 29, 2021, https://www.nytimes.com/video/world/middleeast/100000003240417/the-evolution-of-isis.html

perceived enemies consisted of detailed images and videos demonstrating the torture and execution of their captives.

Echoing the staged beheading of American journalist Daniel Pearl by al-Qaida militants in 2002, ISIS exploited the spectacle of death by weaponizing social media to the extent that "So intertwined are the Islamic State's online propaganda and real-life operations that one can hardly be separated from the other."[47] The Pearl video acted as a harbinger of the elaborate displays of violence that would come to define ISIS' social media presence years later. Seth Price locates the significance of this initial video as taking place within a field of "distributed media" or those media oriented towards the internet that "can be defined as social information circulating in theoretically unlimited quantities in the common market, stored on or accessed via portable means."[48] Distributed media, in this sense, denotes an entanglement for our production of, and reaction to, social information transcends discrete categories in its dissemination online. No longer occupying a sole position as producer or viewer, our encounter with distributed media enmeshes us in myriad social formations and subject positions that shift between producer, viewer,

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[47] Emerson T. Brooking and P.W. Singer, "War Goes Viral: How Social Media is Being Weaponized Across the World," *The Atlantic*, November 2016, accessed July 1, 2018, https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2016/11/war-goes-viral/501125/

Daniel Pearl was kidnapped in Karachi, Pakistan. Al-Qaida filmed his death, and the video was later circulated online, though no source has been identified in its release.

[48] Seth Price, "Dispersion," in *Mass effect: art and the internet in the twenty-first century*, eds. Lauren Cornell and Ed Halter (Cambdrige, MA: MIT Press, 2015), 54.

distributer, appropriator, commentator, critic, activist, artist, and the like. This enmeshment also posed incipient questions regarding the viewing of violent content and deaths online. In Price's assessment of the Pearl video, he notes that the commentary accompanying its circulation centered on the morality of choosing whether or not to watch it.[49] This ethical quandary worked to displace the moral culpability of the videographer, projecting it onto the viewer, raising a heightened awareness concerning the lack of content regulation online. Thus, the Pearl video provides us with an early example of how the digital public sphere began to negotiate the limits of representation and its potential transgression in displaying necropolitical violence. With remarkable temerity, ISIS obliterated these concerns by mounting a campaign of graphic violence so aggressive that it could not be ignored.

By 2014 a global audience was stunned by the ruthless violence depicted in ISIS propaganda. The executions of James Foley, David Haines, Herve Gouridel, Steven Sotloff, and others prompted the organization to create increasingly elaborate and participatory modes of propaganda for its executions. The death of Jordanian pilot Muath Al-Kasabeh in 2015 was decided by soliciting advice from ISIS sympathizers via social media who "voted" that he be burned alive. The resulting video begins with a spectacular montage sequence reminiscent of the war film genre, video games, and rock music videos, quoting a

[49] Ibid, 61.

range of global media influences. Lavish descriptions of weaponry are intercut with the pageantry of celebratory jihadists, and religious quotes interspersed. Its apparent artifice underscores the audacity of the content. The world constructed within the video is rife with violence yet highly aestheticized in ways that depart from terrorist campaigns past, emphasizing the power of digital necropolitics to engender new regimes of representation. The video culminates with a jihadist painting a trail of gasoline leading to an improvised jail cell, set alight with a ceremonial flourish. The excruciating spectacle of Al-Kasabeh's death occurs as a wall of flames engulfs him, lacerating his flesh and punctuating his anguished cries. With this video, ISIS transformed Al-Kasabeh's assailed body into a form of creative capital, using it as currency in political negotiations as well as a form of mediated occupation. As one US state department affiliate describes their status, ISIS is "the first terrorist group to hold both physical and digital territory."[50]

The interpenetration of physical and virtual realms is not a seamless geography, for there are "differences-sometimes minor, sometimes significant-between places, peoples, and-in the case of the Internet-within the new virtual spaces that it engenders. Thus a ubiquitous and uniform global digital geography is more rhetoric than reality. Even in its densest parts, the internet is accessed,

[50] Brooking and Singer, "War Goes Viral: How Social Media is Being Weaponized Across the World," *The Atlantic*. November 2016, accessed June 10, 2019, https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2016/11/war-goes-viral/501125/

adapted, and appropriated differently depending on individual and societal imagination, culture, and history."[51] What is salient here is that the internet provides a forum for the assembly of diverse social imaginaries, each of which is culturally situated. To conceive of ISIS as a terrorist organization that deploys digital necropolitics to support its sovereign aims is one interpretation. However, a counter-reading would acknowledge that ISIS views its propaganda as a form of necroresistance to Western imperial domination. Thus, digitally-enabled necroresistance is not ideologically contained to what Todd Wolfson refers to as the CyberLeft, or what Matt Goerzen refers to as the "memetic Right" but rather an image-based practice that centers the body in pain in order to erect a particular social imaginary, however liberatory and inclusive, or reactionary, violent, and disturbing this imaginary may be.[52] Thus both patriotism and dissent can cohere through digital imagery of the dead, dying, wounded, or disappeared body. As Wendy Brown states, "idealization of an eternally deferred elsewhere, of a utopian version of one's polity, surely animates the work of the radical critic just as idealization of the existing state of things, or more often of a polity's past, animates the conservative patriot."[53]

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[51] Matthew Zook, "The Geographies of the Internet," *Annual Review of Information Science and Technology,* 40 (2006): 55.
[52] Todd Wolfson, *Digital Rebellion: the Birth of the Cyber Left* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2014), 4.
Matt Goerzen, "Notes Towards the Memes of Production," *Texte Zur Kunst*, Issue no. 106, 86, June 2017, accessed April 30, 2021, https://www.textezurkunst.de/106/uber-die-meme-der-produktion/
[53] Wendy Brown, *Edgework : Critical Essays on Knowledge and Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 35.

Digital Necropolitics and the Construction of New Social Imaginaries

In its portrayal of the dead and dying, the digital instigates identification with greater intensity and yet derives its power from mechanics that elude perception, thus reshaping sovereign power and extending it into an assemblage of different states, non-state actors, corporations, citizens, and machines. In response to this redistribution of power, civilians have drawn from the margins of representation to foreground activism and summon viewers as political subjects through affective reciprocity catalyzed through digital imagery. If a scopic regime is "an ensemble of practices and discourses that establish the truth claims, typicality, and credibility of visual acts and objects and politically correct modes of seeing," producing a "compulsory visibility," that works to control the subject of the gaze caught within the state's regime, eroding this regime through counter-visual practices is central to contemporary activism.[54]

The kinds of interventions produced by civilians today aim to disrupt homogenous state narratives through a heterogeneity of voices. Moving beyond a singular frame and into multiplicity, circulating images of death has become a means of asserting what Ariella Azoulay terms a civil gaze utilizing a "civil syntax" or grammar of photographs, videos, and data that revolutionize civilians' capacity to rescript resistance to state power.[55] The revitalized political subject

[54] Feldman, "Violence and vision: The Prosthetics and Aesthetics of Terror," 30.
[55] Ariella Azoulay, "The Revolution is the Language, the Photographs are its Writing Paper," *Photoworks* (2011): 60.

born of these actions has exposed the failure of the liberal human subject to account for the modes of racialized and gendered violence to which this resistance has mounted. Working against liberal humanism's imposition of a false universality that promotes individualism, citizenship, and human rights by concealing its ties to colonialism, racialized capitalism, neoliberalism, and globalization, citizens have used digital technologies to interrogate the human subject and stake different political claims through their particular subjectivities.[56] By occupying the digital public sphere with alternative testimonies, neo-colonial and neo-imperialist machinations are laid bare, disrupting the inertia of dominant representational regimes.

These shifts have prompted a recalibration of power and an increasing reliance on digital imagery as a means not only of communication but of securitization, weaponization, and retaliation as well. Within virtual domains, the gaze itself has become fragmented. No longer unilateral or representative of any singular regime, the gaze is now subject to multiplicity and dispersion as it oscillates between empowerment, violation, enablement, reparation, and retribution. This expanded gaze forms a matrix through which we can understand death's spectacle in newly rendered forms. Images are now subject to different registers of politicization, sometimes magnified, often absconded,

[56] Francien Broekhuizen, Simon Dawes, Danai Mikelli, Poppy Wilde, and Gary Hall. "Just Because You Write About Posthumanism Doesn't Mean You Aren't a Liberal Humanist: An Interview with Gary Hall," *Networking Knowledge: Journal of the MeCCSA Postgraduate Network,* 9, no. 1 (2016): 3.

and yet increasingly retrieved and refashioned to suit different political aims and build new social imaginaries.

As defined by Charles Taylor, the social imaginary is a common understanding that underpins and legitimates cultural practices and constitutes a social norm by their ubiquity.[57] The advent of new forms of testimonies circulating throughout the digital public sphere has prompted new practice of looking, articulating, and responding to violence in the first person as a means of overturning the way that such violence can govern one's life. The social imaginary is not a utopian or idealistic rendering of the world but rather a set of formal practices that can encourage social change. Society is empowered through the repetition of such practices and thus capable of envisioning a reparative future. Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar states, "Within the folds of a social imaginary, we see ourselves as agents who traverse a social space and inhabit a temporal horizon, entertain certain beliefs and norms, engage in and make sense of our practices in terms of purpose, timing, and appropriateness, and exist among other agents. The social imaginary is something more than an immediate practical understanding of how to do particular things…It involves a form of understanding that has a wider grasp of our history and social

[57] Charles Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 23.

existence."[58] The social imaginary is thus always rooted in multiple pasts that linger in and inform the present.

The construction of a new social imaginary through the representation of death, considers the corpus of history and traces through lines that recognize the relevance of the dead body as a social agent in producing political change. In this sense, the visualization of the corpse always exceeds the death it portrays. While death itself implies finality, in that it assumes the cessation of life, as Antoon de Baets notes, "death is a process rather than a moment," and images of death can catalyze collective memory in various ways.[59] It is because the dead are reminiscent of human beings as Baets postulates, that we identify so viscerally with their depiction, while evoking the unique challenges, aspirations, and needs of the living that death erases. Images of corpses imply this complexity and, at the same time, are incapable of adequately portraying it. What remains within the image of the corpse are the potential narratives erected by those that continue to live. Thus, the "after-life" of the corpse acts as a social referendum upon multifaceted needs, such as redemption, repair, or revenge, and the potential for their resolution is contingent upon an image's placement, distribution, and interpretation. The outline of the corpse's figure thus catalyzes

[58] Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar, "Toward New Imaginaries: An Introduction," *Public Culture*, volume 14, no. 1 (Winter 2002): 10.
[59] Antoon de Baets, "A Declaration of the Responsibilities of Present Generations Towards Past Generations," *History and Theory,* vol.43, no. 4 (2004): 134.

communal needs as narratives, imbuing the corpse with symbolic meaning that resonates beyond the frame.

Protest can swell from a single image, and thus the internet is unparalleled in its capacity to influence, persuade, and refashion the limits of representation. Expanding and contracting by the rate of transmission, internet correspondence is subjected to what Marcos Novak defines as "liquid architecture" or a space in which entrance into, and departure from, communication, is contingent upon the receiver's desires. Writing in the early days of the public use of the internet in 1991, when a utopian vision of infinite communication and unregulated transmission would foster new, creative capacities for both experience and interaction, Novak describes digital technology as a space of multiple representations, each of which alters or conditions different facets of our collective, offline reality. In his estimation, the space of the internet radicalizes the potential for information precisely because it allows viewers and readers the capacity to form inter-representational relationships between distinct phenomena that can be viewed simultaneously. Thus, it is in the comparison between representations that new knowledge emerges.[60]

[60] Marcos Novak, "Liquid Architectures in Cyberspace," in *Cyberspace: First Steps*, ed. Michael Benedikt (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991), 278.

Chapter Introductions

Throughout this dissertation, various comparisons are drawn that highlight how different forms of digitized representations have emerged while building upon analog practices of the past to produce new forms of testimony. Chapter one, entitled "Networked Testimony as Necroresistance: Social Media and the Shifting Spectacle of Lynching in America," is concerned with changing modes of circulation and images of racialized violence against the Black body within the United States. It contrasts the production of lynching postcards and their circulation as a nascent form of social media that acted as a precursor to the iconographic videos of police executions of Black citizens that we bear witness to today. These postcards sanctioned racialized violence and induced a form of image production and reception by which white citizens constituted the norm through extreme violations against the Black body. The miniaturized spectacle bound by each postcard's frame functioned as an act of exchange by which whites could comment upon each lynching as an event, remark upon its intricate staging, the size of the crowd, and cultivate a sense of celebration through terrorist spectacles that anti-lynching activists eventually took up as a means of reversing the narratives ascribed to the deaths pictured therein. Such activism, which occurred post-emancipation, utilized images of violence as a means to undo it through mobilizing the affective repercussions of a sympathetic public. This strategy foreshadows and emphasizes how iconic photographs of the civil rights movement would circulate throughout the mainstream media to

showcase the brutality of white police in their effort to quell Black power and liberation. Photographs of peaceful protestors being assaulted with fire hoses and snarling dogs in Birmingham, Alabama in 1963, or the devastating beatings wrought upon marchers from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama in 1965 became templates for turning public consciousness towards injustice. The distribution of such images through conventional media outlets, utilizing analog technologies, presaged how a more radical power to document and distribute images of anti-Black violence through the use of social media and digital technologies would come to leave their impression on contemporary publics in more subjective, immediate, and visceral ways.

In contrast to the excessive and ritualized violence portrayed within the lynching postcards produced post-emancipation and pre-civil rights, the cell phone videos of police executions of Black citizens that circulate today possess a terse logic. The police officer's figure acts as a metonymic expression of unbridled and longstanding forms of state-sanctioned violence founded upon and exercised through white supremacy. These videos circulate within what Jodi Melamed has termed an era of neoliberal multiculturalism in which anti-racism is positioned as a national project promoting inclusion and yet obscuring the link between race and exploitative capitalism, allowing white supremacy to endure.[61] In this context, free markets reign and economic hierarchies are

[61] Jodi Melamed, "Three. Reading Tehran in Lolita Making Racialized and Gendered Difference Work for Neoliberal Multiculturalism," in *Strange Affinities: The Gender and Sexual Politics of*

masked, producing new modes of racial stratification that become subsumed under the rhetoric of neoliberal logic, which posits that all global citizens presumably have access to upward mobility and that those who do not achieve this privilege are culpable of their own demise because of their inherent predilection for "monoculturalism, deviance, inflexibility, criminality, and other [negative] attributes."[62] In this context, "neoliberal codes, which fix human potentials and justify different social fates, interact with preexisting ethnoracial schemes," making the necessity of visual evidence that contradicts this logic a pressing social motivation in producing new forms of testimony.[63]

Thinking through the parallels and discontinuities revealed through the comparison of lynching postcards with the forms of networked testimony that arise from the circulation of videos of anti-Black violence produced today, I expose how necropolitical selfies deploy intimate views as a means of cohering an intense political affect that catalyzes counter publics. This chapter focuses on the live stream documentation of Diamond Reynolds as a form of necroresistance that marks her visceral testimony of Philando Castille's death. This calculated self-staging effectively disrupts the power of hegemonic narratives to circumscribe her experience. Reynolds' self-conscious and prescient ability to press for accountability within a moment of extreme duress

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Comparative Racialization, eds. Grace Kyungwon Hong and Roderick A. Ferguson (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 84.

[62] Ibid, 87.

[63] Ibid.

showcases the changing nature of the subject's role in cases of racialized violence. Simultaneously occupying the role of victim, journalist, protector, and prosecutor, Reynold's assessment of her partner's impending death, interrogates the nature of systemic racism through a confrontation with the necropolitical in real-time. Her authoritative act of self-imaging exhibits the polemics of the self as a radical form of necroresistance that conflates the diaristic with the evidential in an innovative manner.

Chapter two, entitled "Digital Decolonialism: Mapping the personal and collective necropolitics of MMIW," charts the ensemble of critical digital media practices formulated by Annita Lucchesi in defiance of the settler state's framing of missing and murdered indigenous women (MMIW). By establishing data sovereignty over the deaths and disappearances of indigenous women, Lucchesi deploys a wide-ranging set of decolonial strategies that harness digital mapping and database research as a means to repatriate and reimagine the spirits of the dead. By privileging her own experience as a victim of racialized and gendered violence, Lucchesi exposes the inextricable connection between individual and collective suffering as it contends with the enormity of genocide, feminicide, and their constitution through necropower.

While theories that contend with mass death can offer productive views of how violence operates at the level of populations, this can abstract its corporeal experience making it difficult to discern the particular ways it shapes our understanding of the nature of such violence. Statistics, equations, and

timelines can obscure the somatic, psychological, and emotional duress that marks both one's research and embodied knowledge of such violence. The analytical process itself can reflect the clinical nature of settler state power in attempts to rationalize the plight of MMIW. Departing from the conventions of objectivity that would typically characterize an analysis of mass death, Lucchesi's work and my entrance into her research exemplify subjectivity's prominence as a vital mode of inquiry. Thus central to this chapter is an exploration of how MMIW activism has emboldened digital practices that disrupt the logic of settler state institutions by magnifying their spiritual and personal dimensions. By creating private forums through digital reconstructions that allow for a convocation with the dead and the disappeared, Lucchesi deploys cartographic testimony and data sovereignty to revitalize collective belonging in and through their absence/presence. The personal in this instance is cultivated not through the direct exposition of pain but by the reclamation of media ephemera produced by the state and citizens alike, offering an intimate understanding of their relevance through their intentional recontextualization. In this way, Lucchesi penetrates the regime of representation established by settler logic and reformulates the terms by which images and documents should be understood solely in native terms.

The third chapter of the dissertation is entitled "Open Source Investigations as Practice: The Forensic Aesthetics of Post-Human Testimony," and examines civilian-led initiatives that approach the internet as an

investigative matrix that allows for the reconceptualization of evidence of human rights violations and their depiction in post-human terms. I begin by providing a historical overview of the trajectory of open-source governmental initiatives and how this logic is adopted by open-source practitioners and synthesized with conceptual art and tactical media strategies. I focus on Walid Raad's work and his digital archive known as The Atlas Group and its influence on the forensic aesthetics deployed by Eyal Weizman and his agency Forensic Architecture. Both Raad and Weizman make a concerted effort to avoid exhibiting dead bodies as signifiers of social and political unrest. Instead, they seek to attain justice for and recognize human rights violations by producing post-human testimonies that reference the violated body through its conspicuous absence. Post-humanism, in this instance, is concerned with de-emphasizing the body as a means to circumvent the violence inherent in those representations of dead and dying subjects who are inherently prone to marginalization through state misrecognition.

Working between the gaps of witness memory, satellite views, architectural debris, mainstream media reports, and bystander documentation, both The Atlas Group and Forensic Architecture produce re-enactments of violence that intentionally subvert conventional visual tropes. In this process, they denaturalize how to see and understand political conflicts by forging new modes of representation that vacate the body as the locus of suffering. Thus post-human testimony supplants the body in pain, and conventional forms of

affective identification are subjugated to the mechanics of an image as the primary mode of analysis. This strategy creates a dialectical loop that uses the corpse's erasure as an intentional methodology to magnify its recognition by highlighting the infrastructural elements that contribute to its destruction. While this may seem counterproductive at first glance because forensic aesthetics displayed in digital forums seem to mirror the bureaucratic logic and militarized vision of the state, ultimately, Raad and Weizman exploit forensic analysis to embolden the capacity of civilians to assert truth claims. Through careful analysis and reassemblage of open source imagery, post-human testimony establishes a particular kind of "voice" that can challenge state power.

Each chapter utilizes the conceptual framework of testimony to highlight how the evidential weight of images of death is altered by digital practices that shed a history of photography wedded to images of suffering as exploitative. Instead, the strategic use of the violent images explored here open onto "potentialities of seeing and appearing differently" with an insistent "refusal to take one's place in a predetermined field."[64] While once it was simply the photographer that documented a subject, now it is the viewer that appropriates, produces, re-mixes, and alters the image as it courses through virtual forums, changing the dynamics of power. Thus we can think of the image today as a

[64] Gil Z. Hochberg, *Visual occupations: Violence and Visibility in a Conflict Zone* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015), 164.

palimpsest, for it retains a trace of its origins but is continuously refashioned as it succumbs to digital alterations and a multiplicity of exchanges that highlight both its mobility and mutability in the process of rescripting the politics of representation.

By shifting the focus to figures that rest outside the paradigm of the liberal human subject and who are excluded from social protection, each chapter explores how alternative forms of testimony arise to challenge neocolonial binaries and neo-imperialist imaginaries in order to reclaim human rights discourse in a manner that extends beyond Western legal and philosophical conceptions of humanity. While Giorgio Agamben postulates that we are all relegated to the position of homo sacer in a contemporary global society, this conceptual maneuver elides the very ways in which some populations are targeted and made more vulnerable than others.[65] Thus, I argue against Agamben's conception that we are all subject to exclusion by highlighting the forces that work differentially within mediated contexts. In this endeavor, I turn to the body, its corporeality, its fragility, and exposure in an attempt to resist domination by exploring activist strategies that highlight its prominence, repatriation, or intentional absence within virtual domains.

Working from the margins in order to discover and identify the nexus of power, an operable theory of digital necropolitics thus examines how the

[65] Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer* (Redwood City: Stanford University Press, 1995).

spectacle of death operates on both micro and macro scales, evoking different temporalities, and contending with the impact of individual assaults that simultaneously reflect longstanding histories of oppression. In this manner, testimony works as both an interventionist force and one of accretion in which a multiplicity of voices that produce, circulate, and exchange evidence of violations amplify the devastating effects of trauma, reshaping the process of mourning and the potential for community in their distribution. In this way, the body is not solely reduced to its vulnerability and death, creating a chain of reductive signifiers, but rather it enables a way of seeing *through* death and articulating its political relevance in order to project emancipatory visions of life that can viably imagine a future free from violence. To be clear, the image of the corpse can serve a utilitarian politics that demands immediate social changes. However, it can also establish new spiritual unions and inspire different sensorial and affective responses that actively change the nature of a community. Jacques Ranciére states that "Human beings are tied together by a certain sensory fabric, a certain distribution of the sensible, which defines their way of being together; and politics is about the transformation of the sensory fabric of 'being together.'"[66] It is the "distribution of the sensible" that the digital so aptly intensifies because it capitalizes upon an augmented field of reception in which an instantaneous exchange of images allows for testimonies to intercede in, and

[66] Jacques Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator* (London and New York: Verso, 2007), 56.

redefine, the possibilities for belonging. This sensorium has consequently produced an anticipatory logic in which the staging of the dead and dying has become more intentional and more elaborate to procure a more impactful sensibility amongst viewers. The instantaneous nature of production, reception and distribution propels increasingly novel forms of representation while simultaneously producing greater aporia. In response, virtual iconography must continuously reinvent itself to remain relevant within an expanded network of exchange.

As digital imagery is increasingly utilized by a multiplicity of political actors operating at the margins of a global society, a matrix of intersecting gazes has revealed that vision is no longer sutured to hierarchical authority and that it can be both dislodged and usurped. Instead of presenting an omniscient perspective, new methodologies have emerged that adopt, intervene, liberate and extend the gaze, shattering it into a set of hybridized visions, each of which proffers alternate renditions of a given event. While traditional analysis of representation places us into discrete binary categories of coder/decoder or author/reader and producer/viewer, new research methodologies and digital technologies have effectively redefined the embattled notion of visuality.

As the boundaries between producer and viewer diminish, different subjectivities come to the fore, and new publics form through their congregation with images. Images of and against violence not only bind our world to certain realities, but as Sara Ahmed proposes, they instigate entire affective

economies.[67] This exchange between bodies and signs thus enables circuits of emotions to proliferate throughout social bodies creating a digital citizenship of varying causal relationships shaped by their encounter with images of death. Hence a theory of digital necropolitics seeks to examine how activism and reception are revitalized through new forms of testimony and their circuits of exposure. Thus I envision death in the digital age, not as a point of finality, but rather as a catalyst that spurs new social imaginaries and new political movements that are capable of penetrating even deeper into cultural space by virtue of their digitization in an attempt to decisively erode the fortifications of state power.

[67] Sara Ahmed, "Affective Economies," *Social Text* 22, no. 2 (May 14, 2004): 117.

CHAPTER ONE

Networked Testimony as Necroresistance: Social Media and the Shifting Spectacle of Lynching in America

"*We live in a country where Americans assimilate corpses in their daily comings and goings. Dead Blacks are a part of normal life here. Dying in ship hulls, tossed into the Atlantic, hanging from trees, beaten, shot in churches, gunned down by the police or warehoused in prisons: Historically, there is no quotidian without the enslaved, chained or dead Black body to gaze upon or to hear about or to position a self against. When Blacks become overwhelmed by our culture's disorder and protest (ultimately to our own detriment, because protest gives the police justification to militarize, as they did in Ferguson), the wrongheaded question that is asked is, What kind of savages are we? Rather than, What kind of country do we live in?*"[1]

-Claudia Rankine

Introduction

Frank Embree, Allen Brooks, and William Stanely. Names that have largely faded from public discourse but that can never fall entirely out of view. Their lives, or rather their deaths, are weighted down in the silver halide crystals in which they were cast. Encouraged by a crowd of onlookers, documented by a photographer, dispersed by participants, viewed by a concentric networked audience, and tacitly sanctioned by the state, the lynching postcards that record the deaths of Embree, Brooks, and Stanely reveal a nation defined by violence. These images mark an indelible past that seems omnipresent when we confront equally disturbing images of anti-Black violence today, in the form of police

[1] Claudia Rankine, "The Condition of Black Life is One of Mourning," *The New York Times*, June 22, 2015, accessed August 10, 2019, https://nyti.ms/1GD5Qwi.

executions. The names of Eric Garner, Philando Castile, and George Floyd have become ubiquitous shorthand for recalling and mourning such violence. While images of past lynching reveal the multiple and contradictory logics that informed their production and circulation in the wake of emancipation, the cell phone videos of police killings circulating in the post-civil rights era possess a radically different logic. However, the two sets of images are both tied to a recalcitrant history in which Black citizens are excised from the realm of social protections and made prone to violence. The visualization of Black bodies subject to precarity thus endures and continually re-signifies the present, prompting new forms of resistance that mobilize images of anti-Black violence within the digital public sphere.

Representation is a matter of life and death in the digital public sphere, as is what underwrites representation, including its distribution mechanisms that intersect with policy, states, and various non-state actors. These forces operate within a virtual "universe"that penetrate deep into the material world, producing discourse, proliferating destruction, tempering authority, enacting violence, and buttressing power.[2] Functioning within a set of conflicting agendas, images of the dead and dying alter our conception of power and resistance in the digital age. Hence, making anti-Black violence visible within the public sphere through the distribution of such images produces a distinct form

[2] Vilém Flusser, *Into the Universe of Technical Images*, (Minneapolis: Univ Of Minnesota Press, 2011).

of necroresistance enabled by digital networks. By catalyzing the affective sentiments of networked publics through the depiction of death, necroresistance cultivates empowerment at the site/sight of death to enable the security of the living.

Necroresistance is tactical in that it confronts death, not as a limit, but as a productive site that transforms the expired body into a political engagement with the signs, discourses, social desires, and imagined futures that proliferate when images of the dead circulate throughout various networks. Paralleling the necroresistance of the past and present, this chapter conducts a comparative analysis of diverging forms of social media by examining the relationship between lynching postcards and their display of anti-Black violence in contrast to cell phone footage of anti-Black violence produced today. Centered within the chapter is a close reading of Diamond Reynolds' live stream video, which polemicized the execution of her partner, Philando Castile, at the hands of the state in order to examine how networked testimonies and necropolitical "selfies" have altered the discourse concerning racialized violence in a US context. Her networked testimony is both an indictment of this historical legacy, and an overture to accountability, for the video anticipates the multiple narratives that will abound from police reports to the press and their use in a court of law. Reynolds's video differentiates itself from conventional notions of testimony in the struggle for liberation against state violence because her narration is self-reflexive, simultaneously enacting both sousveillance and self-surveillance.

Through this hybrid form of testimony, Reynolds' produces a novel, performative form of necroresistance that centers her networked testimony as a counter-discourse to that of the state and its auxiliary components, including law enforcement and the judicial system. As such, necroresistance via networked testimonies harbor an anticipatory logic, act as evidence of criminal harm, a means of self-exoneration, and provide a forum for public action and mourning via their digital circulation.

The Logic of Lynching Postcards

What the postcards and cell phone videos share is the extent to which they expose the nature of white supremacy, its enduring enactment, and spectacular display of anti-Black violence as a reflection of state power. Images of lynching and, more specifically, lynching postcards carry the valence of white identity and the terror of Black realities in commodified form. As "goods," these postcards displaced slavery as an alternative means by which Blackness was "contained" and act as symbolic representations of the refusal of white publics to assimilate Black citizenry through the display and destruction of Black bodies. The notion of a racial, if not gender-inclusive, representational "democracy" in the post-emancipation era was thus continuously interrupted through their circulation, which sought to cleave publics, transforming an anodyne object into a weaponized form of communication. These postcards and other documents that detail the history of lynching represent an omnipresent threat that haunted

American life from 1882 to 1968, in which 4,743 people were murdered in the course of extrajudicial killings.[3] Of these victims, 3,446 were Black, comprising 72.7% of all those killed.[4] Between the production of lynching postcards that circulated via the social networks of the past and the networked testimonies that reverberate throughout social media of the present, a collapsing history reveals a nation defined by the seizure, torture, and killing of imperiled Black citizens.[5]

As a communication technology, postcard circulation in the US rose dramatically by the end of the 19th century, and by 1908, 670 million postcards were circulated, rising to nearly one billion by 1913.[6] Lynching scholar Mark Simpson characterizes general postcard production as "a signature for mobility in modernity" and "a ritualized practice touching every aspect of early-twentieth century life."[7] As a sub-genre, lynching postcards sought to "commemorate" murderous white mob rule through staging and photographing the torture and desecration of Black citizens, spectacularizing their death in a reprehensible fashion for the viewing "pleasure" of white publics. While in 1908, the government revised the Comstock Act (initially implemented in 1873 to curtail obscene materials), seeking to censor images of violence distributed through the

[3] NAACP, "History of Lynchings," *naacp.org*, accessed January 4, 2019, https://www.naacp.org/history-of-lynchings/
[4] Ibid.
[5] Mexicans and Italians were also specifically targeted as subjects of persecution and the victims of lynching alongside white people accused of crimes.
[6] Mark Simpson, "Archiving Hate: Lynching Postcards at the Limit of Social Circulation," *ESC: English Studies in Canada,* 30, no. 1 (2004): 21.
[7] Ibid, 19-21.

mail, thus targeting lynching postcards specifically and banning their circulation, regardless, they continued to be sent under cover of envelope evading this restriction.[8] The fact that a ban itself was imposed suggests that their circulation was notably widespread, and their use in correspondence constituting a common practice for whites at the time. The initial production of lynching postcards arose in the early 1890s, extending into the 1930s, a decade that saw the decline of lynching's terror, though isolated cases of it continued well into the 1960s and beyond, most notably with the deaths of Michael Donald in 1981 and James Byrd Jr. in 1998.[9]

Images of lynching have served different political agendas and produced various affective repercussions, much in the way that networked testimonies of anti-Black violence operate today. This troubled archive has cast its shadow long into the 21st century, collapsing associations between anti-Black violence past and present. Contemporaneous with their production, lynching photographs were mobilized by anti-lynching activists and reproduced in newspapers, pamphlets, and anti-racist advocacy campaigns, harnessing these visceral images of death to galvanize resistance. Leigh Raiford discusses how activists used these images to destabilize their original meanings and present an alternative construction of race, one unintended by the photographer or primary

[8] Linda Kim, "A Law of Unintended Consequences: United States Postal Censorship of Lynching Photographs," *Visual Resources,* 28, no. 2 (2012): 172.
[9] James Allen, Hilton Als, John Lewis, and Leon F. Litwack. *Without sanctuary: Lynching Photography in America* (Santa Fe, NM: Twin Palms, 2000), 32.

spectator. Raiford clarifies that anti-lynching activists subverted the "received narrative of Black savagery" to transform it into one of "Black vulnerability," therefore displacing "white victimization" and supplanting it with "white terrorization."[10] By exposing the instability of racial codes and roles, activists were meticulous in dismantling white supremacist beliefs in their recirculation of these images. "By returning the gaze of their executioners and those gathered to watch them die, the accused begin to challenge, disrupt and even dismantle the 'corporeal and historico-racial schema' of themselves constructed by 'the white man, who had woven [them] out of a thousand details, anecdotes, stories.' The accused intervenes in their racial making and begins to undo the racial making of their executioners."[11] By unraveling and re-scripting the narrative intent of these images, anti-lynching activists successfully engineered affective responses that contradicted the white supremacist logic that fueled their production.

Through a malevolent and deformed intimacy, lynching postcards act as a nascent form of "social media" that couples the sender and recipient within a closed network of racialized violence. White spectators within the frame identify themselves by peering, pointing, and celebrating their positionality as a foil to ravaged Black bodies staged for display in which the consolidation of

[10] Leigh Raiford, "Lynching, Visuality, and the Un/Making of Blackness," *Nka: Journal of Contemporary African Art,* 20, no. 1 (2006): 24.
[11] Ibid, 25.

whiteness occurs through an identification with the spectacle of Black death. White authors script narratives of revenge, animosity, and at times, ambivalence in messages on the back of postcards intended for a discrete recipient. Shawn Michelle Smith describes the circulation of these postcards as a form of terrifying intimacy and asks, "What can it mean for white individuals to reconfirm sentimental bonds, to imagine communal connections, through images of white violence?"[12] Smith questions the perverse nature of such "sentimental bonds" that proclaim both "I was there and I thought of you while I was there."[13] In a radical inversion of such images, networked testimonies also envision a "you" and stake a claim to being "there" yet with the intent of producing *disidentification* with the perpetrator(s) of racialized violence. While the "you" of the postcard was a discrete individual, the "you" of networked testimonies is broad and dispersed. This anguished correlation between past and present reveals that the bloodlust, anger, and conviction of white supremacists that we see as evidenced in lynching postcards have become transfigured into precise, asymmetrical encounters in which the US police force supplants white mob rule to sanction the killing of Black citizens. Put succinctly, "Once the classic method of lynching was the rope. Now it is the policeman's bullet."[14] Hence, today's

[12] Shawn Michelle Smith, *Photography On the Color Line: WEB Du Bois, Race, and Visual Culture* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 122.
[13] Ibid.
[14] Civil Rights Congress, *We Charge Genocide the Historic Petition to the United Nations for Relief from a Crime of the United States Government Against the Negro People.* ed. William S. Patterson (New York: International Publishers, 1951), 8.

display and distribution of images are fraught with an irreconcilable paradox concerning the necessity of producing visual evidence of anti-Black violence as a means to counter it and the trauma inherent upon viewing such images, which concurrently reinforces the abject as a condition of Black life.

The Emergence of Digital Networked Testimonies

In contrast to the ebullience of lynch mobs and their penchant for cruelty, contemporary police officers' actions that kill Black citizens are distilled, fastidious, and clinical. A single gun, often a solitary officer, and panicked circumstances born of seemingly innocuous encounters have become a recurrent circumstance in which Black citizens are killed. Thus, the police officer's figure has become synonymous with a potent threat that supplants the unruly mob of decades past. Acts of police brutality express the state's active compliance with this contemporary form of anti-Black violence cloaked in the rhetoric of law and order. For Black citizens to attain justice in the United States of America, extraordinary measures must be taken. Radical shifts in the institutionalized nature of such violence must occur, and the pressure to enact this is emerging from social movements that insist upon documentation, facts, and transparency through the circulation of networked testimonies expressing necroresistance. A single testimony can shape a particular case. However, it never functions in isolation, for it is in the increasingly common practice of visualizing the corpse that a chorus of comments, posts, videos, and stills have

come to impress themselves upon the body politic, demanding institutional reform. As digital communication technologies disperse into a greater variety of platforms, the multiplicity of online enclaves enables greater social cohesion. The momentum accrued from this conjoined circulation, a method and practice that exploits corporate entities but evades institutional logic, allows citizens to provide testimony that rests outside the traditional judicial sphere but that effectively influences it from the margins. By turning interiority outward and showcasing one's political transformation at the point of death by documenting and narrativizing the experience as a witness, viewers within new networked publics are spurred to do the same, radically changing the nature of political interventions via digital media. These testimonies infer that by exposing individual crimes against the Black body, a consensus-building and socially cohesive movement can upend institutional power and change the dynamics of racialized life and death in the US.

As this practice becomes increasingly visible, it paradoxically centers the sight/site of anti-Black violence and death as a means of eradicating it. If lynching was a "problem of saving Black America's body and white America's soul," as James Weldon Johnson's described it, then the resolution to the racialized violence of today may rest in elevating the rites of mourning and extending them into virtual domains to express a pointed, powerful, and unrepentant refusal to abscond the dead and to hold their image aloft as symbols

that give way to life-preserving practices.[15] To negate the image of the corpse "is to erase it from culture and from the human community: to deny the existence of the community from which it came, to deny its humanity."[16] Making death visible thus becomes a form of social protest and a way to encourage identification with those that have been targeted and killed.

Cell phone videos that have documented the injury, death, and aftermath of anti-Black violence at the hands of police and self-professed vigilantes form a prominent part of the digital public sphere. Oscar Grant in 2009, Eric Garner and Michael Brown in 2014, Freddie Grey and Walter Scott in 2015, Keith Lamont Scott and Alton Sterling in 2016, and Ahmaud Arbery and George Floyd in 2020. Images of these deaths intertwine with numerous other cases in which police brutality and murder have been exposed through dashcam footage, helicopter videos, and police body cameras. Allissa V. Richardson theorizes that cell phone videos, in particular, have produced a form of mobile mediated Black witnessing that harbor a sousveillant editorial stance.[17] She also acknowledges the power of such images to act as evidence and mobilize protests but advocates for their limited circulation given the trauma they induce upon viewing and their evocation of lynching photographs.[18]

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[15] James Allen, *Without Sanctuary : Lynching Photography in America* (Santa Fe, NM: Twin Palms, 2000), 185.
[16] Ibid, 4.
[17] Allissa V. Richardson, "Bearing Witness While Black: Theorizing African American Mobile Journalism After Ferguson," *Digital Journalism,* 5, no. 6 (2017): 676.
[18] Allissa V. Richardson, "Why Cellphone Videos of Black People's Deaths Should be Considered Sacred, Like Lynching Photographs," *The Conversation*, May 28, 2020, accessed June 1, 2020,

The onset of sousveillant video documentation of police engaging in anti-Black violence is primarily marked by the beating of Rodney King on March 3, 1991, in footage shot by George Holliday from a balcony overlooking the scene. Using a Sony Video8 HandyCam CCD-F77, Holliday captured the assault from his Lakeview Terrace apartment in Los Angeles, producing a video that would rivet the nation and alter the affective, political, and social constitution of America when the four officers involved in the beating were acquitted on charges of excessive use of force by a jury nearly a year later. In the aftermath of the acquittal, Los Angeles burst into a series of riots that ensued for five days. Fifty-four people died, 2400 people were injured, 12,000 arrests took place, and scores of buildings and businesses were torched, looted, and destroyed.[19] The graphic nature of Holliday's video, paired with the broken bones, shattered teeth, and brain damage that King suffered as a result of the attack, combined with the wholesale lack of justice in which the white officers that brutalized him were deemed not guilty, sparked a violent conflagration that shifted from King's pained individual body to a cataclysmic collective fury.

Few cases of anti-Black violence were documented on video before King's beating for the use of digital cameras only became popularized throughout the 1990s when lightweight technologies became available in

https://theconversation.com/why-cellphone-videos-of-Black-peoples-deaths-should-be-considered-sacred-like-lynching-photographs-139252

[19] Sid Garcia, "Rodney King beating: 30 years later, Incident Remains a Seminal Part of LA History," *ABC 7 Eyewitness News*, March 3, 2021, accessed April 22, 2021, https://abc7.com/rodney-king-lapd-anniversary-george-holliday/10385652/

consumer markets and flourished as a trend. Chris Chesher posits that the decade saw digital electronics "challenge the cultural geometry that film photography had dominated."[20] While image-making technology had begun to be embedded in cellular technology in the late 1990s, it was the production of the Nokia 7650 in 2002 that allowed users to share images via text, introducing a networked capacity to the cultural production of images engendered by the cell phone's ascent as a major communication technology.[21] With the founding of Flickr, a photo-sharing website, in 2004 and the video-sharing website YouTube in 2005, the distribution of user-generated content began to reshape the internet's terrain, opening onto increasingly personal narratives occupying the digital public sphere. The digital universe continued to expand into digital imagery applications, higher resolution output, and the introduction of live stream options in 2007. Yet it was not until 2009 that a pivotal moment in the documentation of anti-Black violence via cell phone video would occur, highlighting how mobile technologies had become central not only to documenting and sharing one's life but capturing and circulating images of unjust death as well.

The killing of Oscar Grant III on January 1, 2009, marked the beginning of a new year in Oakland, California, with renewed mourning at the news that

[20] Chris Chesher, *Between Image and Information: The iPhone Camera in the History of Photography* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 104.
[21] Jack Schofield, "Nokia Launches a Phone that Clicks," *The Guardian*, June 5, 2002, accessed April 22, 2021, https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2002/jun/06/internet.gadgets

police had killed another Black man. Grant died at twenty-two years of age, unarmed, face down, with his hands behind his head, as officer Anthony Pirone forcibly restrained him, placing the weight of his knee and hands upon Grant's back while screaming "Bitch ass nigger" at the victim.[22] Grant had been removed from a train stopped at the Fruitvale station BART platform, and witnesses inside it clamored for their cell phones producing multiple vantage points of his detainment and subsequent killing. At the sight of Grant restrained, fellow officer Johannes Mehserle withdrew his gun and shot Grant in the back without provocation. Later in court, Mehserle would claim that he believed he was reaching for his taser and did not intend to shoot or kill Grant.

Grant's fraught death remains an iconic moment of cell phone footage in the documentation of anti-Black violence and marks a shift in the visualization of racialized murders enacted by the state. However, the preponderance of such footage would only accumulate years later, with ever more deaths being captured on video, marking an era in which the digital public sphere shifted towards what Allissa V. Richardson has termed a "Black visual public sphere" engendered by Black witnesses taking up cell phone cameras in the face of inequity and death.[23] Richardson states that "The so-called "selfie generation" has responded to the tragic images of Black death by creating its own visual

[22] Phillip Matier and Andrew Ross, "Bart 'N-word' Bombshell Waiting to Go Off," *SF Gate*, June 29, 2009, accessed April 22, 2021, https://www.sfgate.com/crime/article/BART-N-word-bombshell-waiting-to-go-off-3227397.php
[23] Allissa V. Richardson, *Bearing Witness While Black : African Americans, Smartphones, and the New Protest #journalism* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2020), 137.

vernacular. Devastating images of Black death unquestionably propelled the Black Lives Matter Movement forward, as video after video emerged between 2013 and 2018."[24] Dreadfully, this sphere continues to expand as numerous killings have been recorded in the wake of Grant's producing images from various technologies and perspectives.

Bodycam and helicopter footage of the police killing of Stephon Clark on March 30, 2018, shows officers firing twenty rounds of ammunition at Clark, who was unarmed, paralleling Grant's death. Clark too was only twenty-two years old. The helicopter footage shot in infrared reduces Clark to a ghostly white figure against a nebulous grey background of houses and trees. These aerial images stand in stark contrast to the bodycam footage of police officers running through Clark's backyard in which tufts of bright green grass shift into view illuminated by a single flashlight as officers chase after the victim, rounding the corner of his house and entering his backyard. Even after shooting Clark in the back multiple times and witnessing Clark crumple to the ground, the officers scream, "show me your hands!" at a lifeless body, no longer capable of movement.[25]

I situate the visualization of these multiple deaths in relation to Diamond Reynold's documentation of Philando Castile's murder in order to highlight her

[24] Ibid, 139.
[25] Christoph Koetll and Ben Laffin, "23 Seconds: 5 Critical Moments: How Stephon Clark Was Killed by the Police," *New York Times Visual Investigations*, June 7, 2018, accessed April 28, 2021, https://www.nytimes.com/video/us/100000005832133/stephon-clark-shot-killed-police.html?smid=url-share

provocative use of the selfie as a visualizing tactic that departs from standard cellular practice in the documentation of anti-Black violence and to elaborate upon the testimonial nature of her live stream video. Reynolds' use of a cell phone video is emblematic of an emerging form of networked testimony and is a productive contribution to a much broader social imaginary that challenges sovereign power. The selfie not only works to foreground the everyday circumstances of life, but in its exposition of death, it can propel new social movements. While networked testimonies may showcase devastating moments of death, the way in which Reynolds' has built upon a legacy of videos chronicling anti-Black violence points to the modes of empowerment by which necroresistance is formulated. The seismic impact of her testimony reshapes the digital public sphere by capitalizing upon interiority turned outwards as a form of agency. While the figure of the police officer in the popular consciousness is fraught with contradictory associations, the centrality of networked testimonies has become an essential component in trying to consolidate and sharpen their definition as actors of state-sanctioned violence. As a cultural practice that seeks to intervene in and reshape power relations, the documentation of anti-Black violence in the first-person form can potentially usurp authoritative narratives that elide the truth and compel social justice by providing quantifiable evidence.

When we consider networked testimonies as part of a trenchant visual culture that has mobilized the documentation of anti-Black violence as a political tool for varying ends, we are again confronted by the continuities and

displacements that occur in the visualization of such violence. Whereas the lynching postcards sought to buttress white supremacy by inducing visual pleasure within a white audience through ritualized acts of violence, networked testimonies resituate such terrorist spectacles to cultivate social opprobrium and mobilize the public against such acts. In this way, these two distinct forms of "social media" illuminate a visual syntax that relies upon the violation of the Black body to express political concerns and generate affective responses. These intertwined images of lynching and police killings occupy vastly different temporal realities yet also possess aesthetic parallels as media objects. The truncated sentiments reflected on the back of postcards that chronicle lynching find their analogous form in Twitter posts contained to 280 characters with photographs and videos affixed as illustrations. The mass reproduction and circulation of postcards are mirrored as well in the infinity of re-tweets that abound. Both distinct media migrate across different contexts and platforms in their circulation. The lynching postcards shifted from correspondence to newspapers, activist literature, and later into private collections that became public, prompting gallery and museum exhibitions and eventually catalogs.

Similarly, contemporary images of the police executing Black citizens have traversed every social media enclave, most notably Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, and Instagram. Such images have catalyzed scholarship across disciplines, produced literary interpretations, film adaptations, alternative and mainstream media commentary, and artistic renderings bound for formal

display. Hence, neither set of images is confined to discrete categories as they proliferate widely, conflating historical distinctions and producing a complex semantic field in which their recombination assesses the legacy of Black life and death through different modalities. In an overlapping manner, these images reflect and refract different facets of the collective consciousness of their time.

Diamond Reynolds and The Logic of Networked Testimonies

The evolution of testimony in the digital age compresses the time between event and response, witnessing and reflection, and has also engendered a global forum in which testimony is received. "For the testimonial process to take place, there needs to be a bonding, the intimate and total presence of an *other* - in the position of one who hears."[26] The immediacy of real-time testimonies unfolding via live stream videos can heighten this intimacy by producing discomforting proximity to the violence that such testimonies may display and challenge the "official" rendering of such violence. Such videos anticipate biased interpretations and seek to intervene in the logic of the state and proffer alternative narratives scripted from "below." This phenomenon is not the anticipatory logic of predictive analytics that attempts to secure a future outcome and negate potential threats so familiar to surveillance discourse. Instead, it is a logic that acknowledges historical precedent and the power of the

[26] Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (London, UK: Taylor & Francis, 1992), 70.

state to assert itself through the death of Black subjects—this anticipation of injustice paired with historical recollection positions networked testimonies within multiple temporalities.

Figure 1 New York Times, July 8, 2016. Stills from Diamond Reynolds' Facebook Live stream.

Throughout Diamond Reynolds' networked testimony, the complexity of these different temporal assignations and the anticipatory logic that compels documentation are filtered through Reynolds' voice and actions. At the outset of the video, she declares, "stay with me" to her partner, and the viewer bears witness to the image of Castile's body slumped over the driver side car seat, his white t-shirt saturated with blood extending from his side and across his chest.

It is an image that has been endlessly reproduced across multiple media spheres, from screenshots to social media and the mainstream news.[27] (Figure 1) offering edited segments interspersed with commentary. In the background, the wavering arms of Officer Jeronimo Yanez are outstretched, clutching a gun pointed at Castile's limp body, and we hear him yelling, "I told him not to reach for it, I told him to get his hand out." This scene, in its curt and pointed synthesis of the aftermath of the shooting, directs our attention to the divide between the interior of the car in which Reynolds maintains a sense of autonomy and clarity, carefully narrating what just occurred for posterity, and the panicked reaction of Officer Yanez who attempts to control Reynolds actions. With a tone of admonishment mixed with disbelief, Reynolds dutifully repeats the insistent orders of officer Yanez who yells at her to "keep her arms where they are," to which she responds, "Yes, sir, I will keep my hands where they are. You shot four bullets into him sir. He was just getting his license and registration sir ."[28]

Reynolds' voice itself is a reflection of the multiple positions she occupies throughout the video in which she assumes the cadence of a reporter, the

[27] The front page of The New York Times on July 8, 2016, featured a grid of four stills drawn from Reynolds' video. This quadrant mirrored the format of a Facebook live stream in that each image conformed to the dimensions of a Facebook post, yet offered select moments from the video, including a close up of Reynolds, one of her daughter looking down into the lens of her mother's cellphone perplexed, a hollow-eyed Castile slumped over and bleeding, and Yanez's gun pointing directly into the driver side window. The layout itself, the editorial decisions that went into it, and the aestheticization of networked testimony is still unfolding as this practice becomes ever more naturalized as a visual lexicon. These images accompanied an article entitled, "In 10 Terrible Minutes, A Tale of Race, the Police, and Death".

[28] Lavish “Diamond” Reynolds, “Diamond Reynolds July 6, 2016 Facebook Live Video” YouTube Video, posted June 20, 2017 by Ramsey County Minnesota, accessed November 22, 2019, https://youtu.be/6DUfa4LTgOs

anguish of a witness, and the terror of a victim. She is both participant and observer as she narrates the events that occurred directly before filming in which her partner Castile was shot. She turns the camera toward herself while she speaks in a measured tone, explaining to the audience of Facebook Live that Castile was licensed to carry a gun and that the officer had asked him for his ID. She then shifts the lens towards Officer Yanez standing outside the driver's side window, who is heard anxiously screaming, "Fuck! I told him not to reach for it, I told him to get his hand out". The officer's distress is evident and contrasts sharply with the intonation of Reynolds' voice, whose emotions are temporarily muted in favor of narrating the ongoing circumstances. Only later in the video, once Reynolds has exited the car and is directed to get on her knees and acquiesce to being handcuffed, her tone shifts into one of grave despair. The backup officers then confiscate her phone and throw it to the ground nearby, and the viewer can only see the sky and the power-lines above. The absence of any figures allows the viewer to focus solely on her voice, which rises with traumatic realization as she wails, "Please don't tell me he's gone, please Jesus no! Please no!" As the still shot of the sky endures, the sound becomes distant, and one can discern Reynolds saying, "He started shooting for no reason," and officer Yanez yelling, "Fuck!" in the background as ambulance sirens echo in the distance before drawing near. The expletives become more impassioned and pronounced on the officer's part as someone, presumably another officer, picks up the cell phone and places it in their pocket, muffling the audio and making the

live stream go black. Crying out across a dark screen, Reynolds continues to assail officer Yanez with the facts stating, "We tried to tell you. It was in his wallet, his license and registration. You told him to get it, sir. You told him. He tried to tell you he was licensed to carry and he was going to take it off. Please don't tell me my boyfriend's gone. He don't deserve this, please."[29]

This testimony, so harrowing and compelling, is a calculated effort to intervene in the future narratives that will be fabricated from police updates, news broadcasters, and attorneys that utilize the austere juridical language of prosecution and defense. Reynolds instinctively undercuts and circumvents this process in real-time by offering her own visceral experience of the event and, in this manner, acknowledges a legacy of Black voices negated by the weight of the law. As an act of necroresistance, the video ensures that whatever defense is mounted on behalf of officer Yanez in the courtroom, a corresponding and counter testimony will be accessible to erode it. While the police may follow procedure and produce a report replete with testimony from Reynolds herself, the formulaic questions and answers become subservient to the instantaneous reaction and narration conducted in real-time that offers both judge and jury a semblance of the tenor and fury by which this killing was executed. Reynolds' motivation to document the event in minute detail is reinforced by her claims made independent of the video in her testimony to the Bureau of Criminal

[29] Ibid.

Apprehension (BCA) after the shooting in which she states, “Well make sure they don’t remove his gun offa him and try to make it seem like somethin’ that it wasn’t because I already know how the system is. I already know how they tamper with evidence. I already know how they do. And they took a life.”[30] With these words, Reynolds acknowledges a vast history of cases in which the police conspired to cover up the nature of an officer-initiated shooting in an attempt to transfer blame to the victim.[31] Her testimony to police, combined with her live stream video, emphasizes the necessity of making interventions into state narratives concerning the death of Black citizens and compels Reynolds' innovative use of the selfie as a strategic form. If the fear of misrepresentation is what prompted Reynolds to document Castile's murder, this can only be understood within a recursive temporality in which the horrors of anti-Black violence located in the past come to bear their impression on those of the present. In this way, Reynolds' subconscious acts as an interlocutor, simultaneously reaching back through time while anticipating future injustice, positioning her testimony as an imperative declaration.

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[30] Matt Delong, “Transcript: Diamond Reynolds’ BCA Interview after Shooting of Philando Castile,” *Star Tribune*, June 21, 2017, accessed May 17, 2019, http://www.startribune.com/transcript-diamond-reynolds-bca-interview/429966413/

[31] In Walter Scott's death, which occurred nearly a year before Castile's death, officer Michael Slager was recorded not only shooting and killing Scott but is also seen placing his taser by Scott's body. Many viewers have speculated that Slager did this to stage the crime scene in his favor by falsifying evidence.

The word testimony is derived from the Latin phrase testimonium that encompasses everything from evidence and proof to witness and attestation.[32] Testimony bears an active relationship to the world, for it interpolates events, people, and places through the prism of personal recollection. The term testimony is closely associated with the Greek word martyr, and in its Christian use, martyr explicitly equates to witness. When the term was incorporated into German languages, and more specifically, Norse of the 14th Century, its definition became "torture-witness" or "one who suffers death or grievous loss in defense or on behalf of any belief or cause."[33] One is a witness who testifies to Christ, faith, the divine, and also to a jury of one's peers, a judge, a king, or a court. Testimony, in its ancient usage, entailed risk, courage, and a defense of the truth. It is poignant to situate Diamond Reynolds' testimony within this history, for her words are ardent and at once speak to her faith, her kin, a future court and jury, and a present defense of her partner, Philando Castile. Networked testimony distinguishes itself from written and oral forms of testimony that have substantiated the term's historical use, for it complicates temporalities, publics, and intentions because of its digitization, and thus, inherent mutability. It is created and circulated outside of conventional venues, and yet through its circulation, networked testimony comes to influence both

[32] Online Etymology Dictionary, 2001, "testimony," accessed December 1, 2019, https://www.etymonline.com/word/testimony
[33] Online Etymology Dictionary, 2001, "martyr," accessed December 1, 2019, https://www.etymonline.com/search?q=MARTYR

courtroom proceedings and mainstream journalism. Such testimonies penetrate "legitimate" forums through the collective momentum that accrues with their rapid circulation throughout networked publics. Thus networked testimony originates outside the judicial realm, not to circumvent it but to anticipate its biases and influence its decisions. Networked testimonies presume interactivity on the part of viewers and mobilize their affect to attain justice. While such testimonies are both self-conscious in that they foreground the producer's own life and self-reflexive in that they do not rely upon an external authority to legitimate their content, they are not intended to be insular testaments but rather a conduit between witness and viewer. This particular form of testimony exerts pressure from outside the legal realm by garnering support from a broad public by establishing credibility through the authenticity of the producer, which is then magnified by the sentiments of the viewer. Without a formal or official mediator such as the press, police, or politicians, such testimonies appeal to the public to verify their authenticity and truth value. They are a direct mode of image governance authored by the oppressed and powered by the public that transcends institutional protocols.

Networked testimonies underpin what Ariella Azoulay calls the "civil imagination" or the forms of citizenship that rise up to challenge sovereign power through solidarity, mutual recognition, and resistance, with the intent to reshape the world and its oppressive mechanisms via the exchange of images. Within this definition, Azoulay makes an essential distinction between "civil"

and "political" by pointing to how faithful citizenship asks each of us to care about and participate in ideas and actions that are mutually beneficial by intentionally operating outside of government-sanctioned realms. She positions photography (and, by extension, video) as a practice that can enable and fortify these relations, thus shaping the civil imagination in direct ways. Images in Azoulay's estimation should be construed as events and not as objects. They are the outcome of an interaction between several protagonists that may be evident within but are frequently located outside the literal frame.[34] Images are subject to interpretation, and in this way, they can elide the desire of authorities to control and assert absolute narratives, and this is what Azoulay believes is the ultimate power of photography for its ambiguity allows for citizenship to coalesce through its production and to determine the credibility of an event that reflects the will of the people. Networked testimonies contribute to this effort by granting shape and form, narrative, and indictments that may be evident within the frame but that aim to create social change beyond it. They depart from traditional testimony, which is written, recorded, or otherwise documented in legible form and circulated by court officials, by surpassing the law as the sole arbiter of justice and make apparent the urgent and persistent conditions that enable anti-Black violence and the actions needed to rectify a crime unfolding in the present to promote structural changes in the future. Networked testimonies

[34] Ariella Azoulay, "What is a Photograph? What is Photography?," *Philosophy of Photography*, Volume 1, Number 1, (2010): 11.

are living testaments to how a sovereign power can threaten bodily integrity. These videos capture the breath, gesture, pauses, despair, fear, and anger that disrupts and destroys the lives of Black citizens, and they are a form of evidence in action, authored from below.

Testimony presumes a witness and attests to the veracity of one's lived experience. The traditional forum for testimony is a court of law in which opposing parties may dispute the facts of a particular case. Testimony centers the individual and preserves their right to lay claim to the boundaries of experience. In this way, testimony presumes a listener as well, for it is intended for those who could not bear witness to an experience. In the digital age, networked testimonies are a primary means by which anti-Black violence has become visible to a broader public. These testimonies speak to the capacity of the witness to produce the site/sight of a different kind of knowledge, one that challenges the authority of the legal realm by making evident the affective dimensions of violence.

The victim's narrative-the very process of bearing witness to massive trauma - does indeed begin with someone who testifies to an absence, to an event that has not yet come into existence, despite the overwhelming and compelling nature of the reality of its occurrence. While historical evidence to the event which constitutes the trauma may be abundant and documents in vast supply, the trauma - as a known event and not simply as an overwhelming shock - has not been truly witnessed yet, not been taken cognizance of. The emergence of the narrative, which is being listened to - and heard - is, therefore, the process and the place wherein the cognizance, the "knowing" of the event is given birth to. The listener, therefore, is a parity to the creation of knowledge *de novo*. The

testimony to the trauma thus includes its hearer, who is, so to speak, the blank screen on which the event comes to be inscribed for the first time.[35]

By acknowledging that the event has not yet come into being until testimony has been given and that "new" knowledge of the event is produced through listening, Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub impart a dialectical relationship to the function of testimony which both produces and reproduces new forms of "knowing" that formulate a process of inscription. Thus, networked testimonies are a mediated version of testimony made to harness an audience comprised of "listeners" and viewers. While the recording itself occurs contemporaneously with the event, this form of testimony differs from the historical understanding of testimony as a record of an event transcribed in its aftermath. The immediacy of networked testimonies grants agency to those who document within crises, for such testimony offers a modicum of control over the subject's circumstances, even if this control rests solely in the act of documentation itself.

Liberal Humanism and Looking Elsewhere

In her analysis of the formation of the liberal human subject, Saidiya Hartman urges readers (and by extension, viewers) to "look elsewhere" to understand the dynamics through which notions of liberty, freedom, and rights obscure forms of subjugation and enact even greater disciplining mechanisms

[35] Felman and Laub, *Testimony,"* 57.

that secure social control. She identifies the dangers of exalting the spectacle of anti-Black violence that can result in forms of disavowal ranging from desensitization to a false sense of identification that annihilates the subject and a fetishistic pleasure derived from gazing upon the Black body in pain.[36] From her perspective, the framework of liberal humanism conditions these dissonant responses while further consolidating dominance by masking how anti-Black violence is embedded in the everyday. The discourse of humanism thus acts as an agent of intensification that allows greater cruelty to be enacted in the name of reform.[37]

In this formation, a travestied liberty is represented by a legal façade that accords rights in name and simultaneously dispossesses them in actions, a mode of dissimulation which consequently pervades social relations, prompting a censure of the self that must perform "humanity" to escape injury.[38] Networked testimonies intervene and attempt to disrupt this edifice by harnessing the spectacle of death as a generative site for political discourse. These testimonies are not made as an appeal to recognize a shared humanity; instead, they are all too aware of the slippage between "full humans, not-quite humans, and nonhumans" that constitutes Blackness within the discourse of "universal

[36] Saidiya V. Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (Oxford University Press on Demand, 1997), 4.
[37] Ibid, 5.
[38] Ibid, 6.

humanity."[39] Instead, networked testimonies recognize the law's incapacity to secure justice on behalf of victims that suffer a dual violation through its bias. The violation of police brutality and the subsequent discrimination common to the courtroom, actions, and forums founded upon racist ideologies. Thus, those who produce networked testimony eschew subjectification via liberalism by acknowledging that it always constructs a racialized other as a site of devaluation. It is to this point that the ubiquity of networked testimonies speak and, in so doing, offer a forum for social cohesion, resistance to state power, and its attendant ideological structures.

One of the dilemmas of networked testimonies is that they are quickly reframed through a liberal humanist paradigm when coopted by mainstream media. This paradigm capitalizes upon images of Black suffering, not as a means of authentic identification but as a mode that reinforces the humanitarian gaze that occludes and oppresses its subject. Neda Atanasoski foregrounds this relationship of evasion in her analysis of those iconic images that "produced" the Vietnam War for US viewers as a humanitarian spectacle. She writes, "Not only does the frozen moment of the other's injury or death highlight our aliveness, but in feeling moral outrage and shock at the pain of others we establish our own humanity. This is, of course, a racialized structure of seeing and feeling."[40] This

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[39] Alexander G. Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014), 3.
[40] Neda Atanasoski, *Humanitarian Violence: The US Deployment of Diversity* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), 97.

orientation towards images is predicated upon the inability of the subject to return the gaze.

In response to how images of racialized violence further consolidate the liberal human subject, several scholars have echoed Hartman's call to "look elsewhere" and away from the violated body. In her analysis of militarized violence in a post 9/11 state, Wendy Kozol discusses visual strategies that can address human suffering but that vacate the body as a site for understanding racialized violence. She questions the possibility of ethical spectatorship and points to aesthetics as the "building blocks of ideological and affective meaning" to advocate modes of witnessing that are not contingent upon spectacle.[41] For Kozol, "looking elsewhere" is what Americans invariably do when contemplating human suffering, examining conflicts abroad from a distant vantage point while remaining secure at home. Yet "looking elsewhere" is also the strategy that Kozol advocates to reconceptualize visual strategies and modes of witnessing. By redirecting the gaze towards more prosaic indications of violence, proponents of "looking elsewhere" seek to decenter the body as the primary site of political meaning to avoid spectacularizing it.

The work of Eyal Weizman and Forensic Architecture is emblematic of "looking elsewhere," for it examines state violence through its material, rather than bodily, destruction. Weizman advocates "reading" the surface of buildings

[41] Wendy Kozol, *Distant Wars Visible: The Ambivalence of Witnessing* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 20.

that have been damaged in political conflicts and interpreting stress fractures, bullet holes, and the destructive impact of bombs as “wounds” that function as material testimony. He states, “Ruins are a form of media. They store and, with some help from 'interpreters,' also transmit the effects of historical processes."[42] Rather than displaying the body in pain, such work asks viewers to identify the coordinates of political actions by inference. Instead of a direct confrontation with the "intolerable image" or that photograph, which makes the degradation of human suffering apparent, we are directed to examine the minutiae of structural elements and topographical markers such as border crossings, fences, and watchtowers instead.[43] The shift towards conceptual approaches to imaging human rights violations and racialized violence posits that bodies themselves should not have to act as conduits for a shattered humanity, for they risk making it ever more fragmented in their depiction.

While a necessary and productive strategy, calls to look elsewhere ignore the powerful capacity of self-imaging to act as a form of political redress. In advocating for different approaches to imaging violence, Jacques Ranciere states, "The issue is not whether to show the horrors suffered by victims of some particular violence. It revolves around the construction of the victim as an element in a certain distribution of the visible.”[44] My argument posits that when

[42] Eyal Weizman, *The Least of All Possible Evils: Humanitarian Violence from Arendt to Gaza* (London: Verso Books, 2011), 110.
[43] Jacques Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator* (London: Verso Books, 2014), 83.
[44] Ibid, 99.

the victim constructs themselves within an image, they uncouple photography from exploitation. Put simply, images do not have to be wed to a power that objectifies and a subject that must submit to a penetrating gaze. As Allen Feldman notes in his discussion of state surveillance against political dissidents in Northern Ireland, "visual appropriation, because it is always pregnant with the potential for violence, has become a metonym for dominance over others: power lies in the totalizing, engorged gaze over the politically prone body, and subjugation is encoded as exposure to this penetration."[45] Self-representations explicitly refute this totalizing gaze and instead wield the power of authorship to contradict, interrupt, and dislodge the hierarchy of seeing that has positioned visuality as a form of violence itself. To "look elsewhere" within networked testimony is to situate the self as the locus of narrative power that combats, interrogates, and directly engages with the power being exerted over one's corporeality. Networked testimonies that emerge at the site/sight of death thus contradict Foucault's panoptic logic because its interlocutors act explicitly as *non-docile* bodies erupting in opposition to being targeted and surveilled. These "undisciplined" bodies respond in modes of self-protection by not only returning the gaze but by narrativizing it.

Networked testimonies offer a different kind of critical framing that acknowledges that sight is invested in power and that power must be made

[45] Allen Feldman, "Violence and Vision: The Prosthetics and Aesthetics of Terror," *Public Culture*, 10(1): 29.

visible. I am arguing that such images do a different kind of work in the cultural, political, and social field and that performative self-representations displace the need to "look elsewhere" because they are self-conscious of the hegemonic structures that traditionally imbue sight with power. They interrupt the field of visuality by redefining its foundation. While the "gaze" is a concept that addresses the controlled perception of a particular population, the concept of visuality expands upon this notion and examines the interconnection between ideology, imagery, and social relations. Nicholas Mirzoeff defines visuality as a historical project that is invested in the authority of looking and securing the parameters of what will be deemed rational and legitimate. Visuality is the capacity "to assemble a visualization [that] manifests the authority of the visualizer" and that works in the service of shaping a particular social imaginary.[46] Intrinsic to visuality is that no one person can exert its power, but rather it is a domain in which various tactics consolidate the ability to render and regulate the real, producing tangible results that affect social relations.[47] Networked testimonies, while singular in their production, are powerful because they act as an accretion of forces that constitute an effective collective practice. Their ubiquity as a mode of identifying and critiquing police violence with the aim to eradicate it has become an integral component in reshaping the American social imaginary. Networked testimonies draw voices from the margin into the

[46] Nicholas Mirzoeff, "The Right to Look," *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 37, no. 3 (Spring 2011): 474-476.
[47] Ibid, 476.

center and reformulate the digital public sphere in their continual exposure of anti-Black violence. Individual testimonies merge and overlap with one another, creating a consensus voice through the particular to script a collective resistance from "below."

Performative Self Portraiture and the Emergence of the Political Selfie

Networked testimony capitalizes upon the ease of distribution that digital media has enabled in the circulation of images and texts. The emergence of the necropolitical selfie that addresses anti-Black violence fuses the documentary perspective of the ethical bystander with the performative capacity of selfies that aestheticize and narrate calls for justice. Central to this process is articulating one's identity in an agential fashion. In the history of photography, self-portraiture acts as a precursor to the political selfies of today. While there is no formal art historical movement associated with performative self-portraiture, its evolution as a means to question the strictures of identity and the expectations of viewers has certainly influenced contemporary selfie culture. Artists such as Claude Cahun, Cindy Sherman, Yasumasa Morimura, Catherine Opie, and Hannah Wilke have utilized performative self-portraits to question and expose gendered stereotypes that attempt to police sexuality. Rene Cox, Tseng Kwong Chi, Niki S. Lee, Ni Haifeng, Carrie Mae Weems, and Zanele Muholi have produced a veritable canon of performative portraits that question the epistemological frames that produce racial and national typologies. By

deflecting racialized and gendered stereotypes and shifting between different iterations of the self, these artists have mobilized performative self-portraits to transgress the bounds of normativity and craft identity itself as an intervention. Similarly, selfies have re-energized the formal nature of self-portraiture while coopting performative strategies to intervene in the digital realm.

While performative self-portraiture sprung from the intersection of feminist performance art and documentary photography that flourished in the 1970s, it is the documentary self-portraiture of Nan Goldin created in the 1980s that correlates explicitly to the performativity apparent in selfie culture today. Fine art as a vehicle for expression often anticipates broader cultural shifts and acts as an experimental ground for producing new states of being in the world. Goldin's photographs made her life explicit. Friends and lovers were portrayed as protagonists and antagonists in an ever-evolving narrative about intimacy, addiction, AIDS, and domestic violence. Goldin's willingness to make the most harrowing aspects of her life visible identifies her work as a precursor to the exposition of private lives made public today. In particular, her adoption of the *snapshot aesthetic* allowed Goldin to portray an immersive world bereft of the constraints of a formal studio practice, relaying an exuberant and unadulterated, embodied experience of life.

The centrality of Goldin's perspective, which foregrounds self-portraiture as a mode of authorship, offers viewers a complex meta-narrative in which she assumes multiple roles. Her subjectivity acts as a means to cohere

disparate instances of personal and state violence while documenting bodies ravaged by AIDS and the domestic abuse she endured. By making an audience privy to her bruised body and battered face, Goldin invites a confrontation between herself and the viewer to refute denial. Her work functions to implicate the necropolitical state by exposing haunted bodies expiring in hospital rooms. She critiques patriarchal domination by acting as both victim and witness in documenting her abuse. Goldin performs for the camera to navigate the interstices between the ideologies that oppress and the way they are internalized and experienced. Amelia Jones describes the impulse behind such performative self-portraiture as "a kind of *technology of embodiment*, and yet one that paradoxically points to our tenuousness and incoherence as living, embodied subjects."[48] Goldin's images flit between recognition and despair, intimacy and rejection, violence, and belonging. The complexity of her stance as an author reveals the impossibility of forging a seamless narrative whole.

Selfies are thus an extension and translation of the impulse evident in the fine art photography of the late 20th century, which utilized self-portraiture to explore the boundaries of identity and that anticipated the dissolution of the private/public divide at the 21st century's digital turn. Yet selfies take up performative and political strategies in a uniquely different manner expressly because they are digital media. Paul Frosh asserts that the selfie "requires

[48] Amelia Jones, "The 'Eternal Return': Self-portrait Photography as a Technology of Embodiment," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society,* 27, no. 4 (2002): 950.

viewers to make inferences about the nondepictive technocultural conditions in which the image was made."[49] Embedded within a broader context, selfie production is contingent upon a host of technological affordances and cultural contexts. While early discourse surrounding the selfie focused on its distribution as a neoliberal model of narcissistic self-reflection, or commoditization of the self, theorists of visual culture have worked ardently to resituate the selfie as a site of empowerment.[50] As Derek Conrad Murray argues, selfies can also be construed as a feminist practice of self-empowerment that can deflect patriarchal notions of objectification.[51] As Stephanie Duguay points out in her analysis of LGBTQ selfies, their production enables greater visibility to establish queer counter-publics. However, the strictures of filters, editing modes, and algorithms can encode heteronormative values into the tools used to produce them.[52] The ease of appropriation which the digital sphere affords also emphasizes the cultural limitations that can impinge upon the capacity for selfies to produce a form of pure agency. Roopika Risam notes that while refugee selfies can act as a powerful tool for post-colonial digital humanities in that they "facilitate inclusion of the unseen experiences of refugees in the process of

[49] Paul Frosh, "Selfies| The gestural image: The selfie, Photography Theory, and Kinesthetic Sociability," *International Journal of Communication,* 9 (2015): 1608.
[50] Edgar Gómez Cruz and Helen Thornham, "Selfies Beyond Self-Representation: the (Theoretical) F(r) ictions of a Practice," *Journal of Aesthetics & Culture,* 7, no. 1 (2015): 2.
[51] Derek Conrad Murray, "Notes to Self: The Visual Culture of Selfies in the Age of Social Media," *Consumption Markets & Culture,* 18, no. 6 (2015): 490-516.
[52] Stefanie Duguay, "Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, and Queer Visibility Through Selfies: Comparing Platform Mediators Across Ruby Rose's Instagram and Vine presence," *Social Media+ Society* 2, no. 2 (2016): 1-10.

migration within the digital cultural record of humanity" their subsequent appropriation by news organizations of the Global North can effectively discredit their original intent by interpreting such images in Orientalized terms.[53] Thus it is imperative to understand the selfie as a fluid cultural object. One that is symbolic of agency yet simultaneously subject to social and technological constraints.

While attempting to defy gendered, racialized, and politicized tropes, the selfie both rehearses and reinvents the ethos of performative self-portraiture. Through their staging, selfies thus invite reciprocity by encouraging others to image themselves. Frosh describes this impulse as "kinesthetic sociability" or a mode of engagement that harnesses the corporeality of the subject to produce social energy that evolves through circuits of exchange.[54] Such exchanges invite communicative actions and gestural responses on the part of viewers.[55] In this sense, Frosh equates the posting of selfies to our embodied encounters in the street in which we nod or wave in recognition of one another performing a form of "sociability [that acts] as a binding affective energy transferred between individuals in interpersonal settings and response is an embodied social reflex – it is hard not to perform it."[56] Thus, selfies reflect a form of digital citizenship or one that draws us into the digital public sphere as a space of not simply

[53] Roopika Risam, "Now You See Them: Self-Representation and the Refugee Selfie," *Popular Communication*, *16*, 1 (2018): 59.
[54] Frosh, "Selfies| The gestural image," 1608.
[55] Ibid.
[56] Ibid, 1623.

communication or contestation but one that promotes subjectivity to produce affective and political affinities through narrative.

Live stream images of the self are thus a form of selfie conducted in real-time, aspiring to construct future social imaginaries. As Aaron Hess writes, "At the moment of capture, a selfie connects disparate modes of existence into one simple act. It features the corporeal self, understood in relation to the surrounding physical space, filtered through the digital device, and destined for social networks. Each of these elements appears in relation to the others, attracting competing logics and languages of belonging and expression into one quick photograph."[57] This complex notion of "belonging" that Hess notes serves as the impetus for Reynolds' selfie, which seeks to mitigate harm and ensure the safety of both herself and her partner within a moment of intense duress. Thus, her use of the selfie produces an anticipatory logic of self-defense, condensing her fear of state violence into a rhetorical act of self-staging that reveals the dynamics of the grave political situation in which she is enmeshed. While the production of selfies in popular culture implies a curated cultural engagement with a broad spectatorship that emphasizes positive experiences, what can we make of the selfie that pierces these conventions, exposing a profound sense of disconnection between self, reality, politics, and place? Ultimately Reynolds' testimony is a meditation on both her circumstance and that of a communal

[57] Aaron Hess, "The Selfie Assemblage," *International Journal of Communication* 9, (2015): 1629.

experience of anti-Black violence in America in which the self that is targeted produces a self-invested in transforming death into the site/sight of resistance. While some may characterize Reynolds' use of live stream video as an instance of pure sousveillance, or the inversion of the surveillant gaze that attempts to police social behavior in a Foucauldian sense, Reynolds' testimony exceeds this definition by the multiplicity of positions that she occupies as a narrator.[58] She is not simply looking back at power but appropriating and transforming it by refusing to consent to a hegemonic narrative and producing her own.

The hybrid authorial voice expressed through her video represents racialized violence, both past and present. Throughout her live stream recording, she simultaneously oscillates between asserting her role as victim and accuser, prosecutor and defendant, mother and girlfriend, reporter, and eyewitness. While the video itself functions as evidence, indictment, public testimony, and a diaristic reflection that synthesizes the legacy of contemporary police brutality, it also stretches back to the farthest reaches of collective memory and the injustices endured by the Black body throughout US history. The manifold intent of the resulting networked testimony exposes Reynolds' conscious attempt to inscribe her impression of the event into the legal realm. She self-consciously addresses the law by asserting the inhumanity of the

[58] Steve Mann first coined the term sousveillance in a 2003 article entitled, "Sousveillance: inventing and using wearable computing devices for data collection in surveillance environments" and has gone on to theorize that such new media technologies can challenge surveillance, or power "from above" through the everyday use of mobile technologies deployed by a networked citizenry.

circumstances surrounding her partner Philando Castile's death. The video thus acknowledges the very impossibility of being enfolded into the legal realm, which necessitates her documentation. Thus her networked testimony becomes a means of necroresistance in which one must find ways to circumvent the traditional spheres of knowledge production by offering a counter-hegemonic record that can contradict the official police record and intervene in any subsequent legal proceedings. It is in the polyphonic expression of her individual experience and the collective historical invocation of this endeavor that marks Reynolds' testimony as a unique intervention within a spectrum of recent videos documenting police violence.

Necroresistance Past and Present: Authorship, Appropriation, and Identification

The digital age has fostered the development of networked testimony as a pervasive phenomenon, and its documentation of anti-Black violence has punctuated the fact that such violence is rarely recorded in exceptional spaces. Instead, the sites of anti-Black violence and death are both pervasive and exceedingly public. One need only recall the crime scene after the killing of Michael Brown in which his corpse was left uncovered in the suburban streets of Ferguson, "After Brown was shot six times, twice in the head, his body was left face down in the street by the police officers. Whatever their reasoning, by not moving Brown's corpse for four hours after his shooting, the police made

mourning his death part of what it meant to take in the details of his story. No one could consider the facts of Michael Brown's interaction with the Ferguson police officer Darren Wilson without also thinking of the bullet-riddled body bleeding on the asphalt."[59] The fact that images of anti-Black violence and death are framed in the quotidian spaces of everyday America suggests that the death of Black citizens is not independent of our national politics but rather intrinsic to it. The fact that Brown's body was treated with irreverence by the police and left exposed to the crowd assembled over and against the wishes of his mother, Lesley McSpadden, showcases the necropolitical violence of US law enforcement. McSpadden decried this variant upon state violence with a simple plea, "All I want them to do is pick my baby up."[60] From her perspective, Brown's body was degraded by its visibility, and the visual and narrative implications of his death were beyond her control. Her loss in this instance was dual fold, for she had to reckon with the inconsolable pain of her son's murder while also relinquishing her right to mourn and care for her son's body in a dignified manner in the direct aftermath of his death. The corpse, in this instance, was subject to narrative limits enforced by the Ferguson police, and as such, constituted a form of necropolitics in which the state exerted control over the body in a manner that directly opposed Brown's kin. As Banu Bargu asserts, necropolitical violence enacts "the dishonoring, disciplining, and punishment of the living through the

[59] Rankine, "The Condition of Black life is One of Mourning," *The New York Times.*
[60] Ibid.

utilization of the dead as postmortem objects and sites of violence."[61] Hence, the question of who has the right to image the corpse, controlling its treatment, display, and narrativization, underscores the importance of digital necropolitics in articulating the everyday circumstances in which Black death is configured.

In fashioning resistance to postmortem practices that desecrate the dead, digital necropolitics again finds its historical parallel in the era of spectacle lynching. In the aftermath of a lynching, the body's recovery became a complicated set of power negotiations and acts of resistance. While whites were active participants in the documentation and death of lynched Black citizens, the removal and burial of the bodies that remained became a site of political action for Black community members that were summoned to retrieve them. Instead of acquiescing to this demand, Black community members responded in different ways to the notion of being responsible for burying lynched victims. As historian Jason Morgan Ward details, the Black press and anti-lynching advocates viewed acts of refusal to recover a lynched corpse as defiance against white supremacy and an indictment of lynching mobs. By refusing to care for violated bodies, Black citizens insisted that white perpetrators take accountability for their barbarity. This denial was especially pronounced in the 1942 case of Ernest Green and Charlie Lang, two young boys who were lynched and hung from a local bridge in Mississippi where a Black employee of the white local undertaker

[61] Banu Bargu, "Another Necropolitics," *Theory & Event* 19, no. 1 (2016): 3.

stated to the press that he would rather "quit or die" than collect the bodies. Others, such as family members, may have been afraid to retrieve the bodies, given that the mortician tasked with preparing the bodies for internment was said to have previously led a lynch mob himself.[62] The contentious nature of postmortem rituals surrounding lynched bodies expresses the emotional and psychological weight that such corpses carried. Similarly, decades earlier, the 1918 lynching of youths Maggie and Alma Howze alongside Andrew and Major Clark was also met with resistance when Black community members refused to collect the bodies. In response to the Howze and Clark murders, the local white newspaper defined this refusal as reticence and disavowal on the part of Black citizens, whereas NAACP activist and writer Walter White reclaimed the narrative and framed the story in terms of social resistance to the vicious actions of white supremacists. Ultimately the four victims were taken by a local white undertaker and buried just outside the white cemetery in town.[63] By forcing whites to attend to the burying of lynching victims and by refusing to harbor these bodies in Black cemeteries whites could not avoid an examination of their actions.[64]

Necroresistance, thus, is not a new phenomenon but rather a means of opposition that disrupts the dominant will through destabilizing funerary

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[62] Jason Morgan Ward, "'A Monument to Judge Lynch': Racial Violence, Symbolic Death, and Black Resistance in Jim Crow Mississippi," in *Death and the American South*. eds. Craig Thompson Friend and Lorri Glover (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 246.
[63] Ibid, 235.
[64] Ibid, 246.

practices in favor of protest instead. The most notable example of this is Mamie Till Mobley's willful exposure of her son Emmett Till's corpse in the aftermath of his being lynched in 1955. Attacked by Roy Bryant and J.W. Milam while visiting Mississippi, Till was beaten, mutilated, and killed for presumably "flirting" with Bryant's wife, Carolyn.[65] After this, his corpse was disposed of in the Tallahatchie River. Three days passed before his body was retrieved, bloated, disfigured, and nearly unrecognizable upon discovery. Mobley's decision to display her son's corpse and the images of his open casket funeral available to the Black press produced a powerful visual indictment of white America's complicity in the lynching of Black citizens. The graphic nature of his corpse reverberated throughout the public discourse, and the image of his body became an iconic rendering of white aggression and Black pain. Mobley's decision to display her son's body intentionally sought to harness necropolitical affect and catalyze social change through its exposition. Upon publishing the image, Mobley stated, "I know that his life can't be returned but I hope that his death

[65] As recounted by historian Timothy B. Tyson in his book "The Blood of Emmett Till" and reported in The New York Times, Carolyn Bryant Donham confessed to lying about the allegations she initially made in 1955 that led to Till's death. Wheeler Parker, Till's cousin, states in the article that "It's important to people understanding how the word of a white person against a Black person was law, and a lot of Black people lost their lives because of it. It really speaks to history, it shows what Black people went through in those days." and expresses relief that Donham admitted to lying, even if her confession comes over sixty years after Till's death. The murder of Till continues to haunt the American public's imagination, and the depiction of his corpse made publicly available at the time serves as a touchstone for contemporary debates concerning race, representation, and images of racialized violence that circulate today both online and within formal institutions. To see more, access: Richard Pérez-Peña's article "Woman Linked to 1955 Emmett Till Murder Tells Historian Her Claims Were False," *The New York Times*, January 27, 2017, accessed November 22, 2019, https://nyti.ms/2kd16uE.

will certainly start a movement in these United States."[66] Consequently, Till's image is believed to have ushered in the civil rights movement because of the public's visceral response to the sight of his corpse.

The reverberations of Till's iconic image continue to mark public discourse today. In 2017, artist Dana Schutz, a white woman, displayed a rendition of Till's funerary photograph painted in an abstract expressionist style. Her painting entitled *Open Casket* was featured in that year's Whitney Biennial, instigating widespread protest. In an open letter to the curators, accompanied by numerous signatories, artist Hannah Black called for the painting's removal and destruction for its appropriation of Black suffering and pain. Black not only called out the artist and the museum but stated that "…a similarly high-stakes conversation has been going on about the willingness of a largely non-Black media to share images and footage of Black people in torment and distress or even at the moment of death, evoking deeply shameful white American traditions such as the public lynching."[67] Fellow artist Parker Bright also mounted a protest by partially blocking the painting's view by standing in front of it wearing a shirt emblazoned with the words, "Black Death Spectacle." Christina Sharpe describes Bright's action as a form of "keeping watch with the

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[66] Josephine Livingstone and Lovia Gyarkye, "The Case Against Dana Schutz: Why Her Painting of Emmett Till at the Whitney Biennial Insults His Memory," *The New Republic*, March 22, 2017, accessed June 1, 2020, https://newrepublic.com/article/141506/case-dana-schutz

[67] Alex Greenberger, "The Painting Must Go: Hannah Black Pens Open Letter to the Whitney about Controversial Biennial Work," *Art News*, March 21, 2017, accessed on May 1, 2020, https://www.artnews.com/art-news/news/the-painting-must-go-hannah-Black-pens-open-letter-to-the-whitney-about-controversial-biennial-work-7992/

dead, practicing a kind of care."[68] Sharpe's thoughts underscore Bright's act as a form of necroresistance. The intimacy with which Bright held a vigil in the name of Till, protecting his life, death, and representation, sought to divest Schutz of her presumed authorship and reclaim Till's memory to honor and protect it from exploitation.

Schutz's statements in defense of her work reveal a lack of depth in acknowledging the disparities between her subject position as a white artist and the context from which she extracted and appropriated Till's image. She states, "I don't know what it is like to be Black in America but I do know what it is like to be a mother. Emmet was Mamie Till's only son. The thought of anything happening to your child is beyond comprehension. Their pain is your pain. My engagement with this image was through empathy with his mother."[69] Yet Schutz's claims seem disingenuous in light of the controversy that the display of her painting materialized. Her point of identification is reductive, for it fails to acknowledge the history of slavery and the violent dispossession of children from their mothers. Schutz's statement also elides the ease with which she assumes an interrelationship with a woman whose child was the subject of anti-

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[68] Siddhartha Mitter, "What does it Mean to be Black and Look at This? A Scholar Reflects on the Dana Schutz Controversy," *Hyperallergic*, March 24, 2017, accessed on May 1, 2020, https://hyperallergic.com/368012/what-does-it-mean-to-be-Black-and-look-at-this-a-scholar-reflects-on-the-dana-schutz-controversy/

[69] Randy Kennedy, "White Artist's Painting of Emmett Till at Whitney Biennial Draws Protests," *The New York Times*, March 21, 2017, accessed on May 1, 2020 https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/21/arts/design/painting-of-emmett-till-at-whitney-biennial-draws-protests.html

Black violence, something that Schutz's own children could never be subject to themselves. Schutz further defended her intentions by situating the painting within the intensity of a political climate made increasingly precarious by continual racialized violence. She states, "I made this painting in August of 2016 after a summer that felt like a state of emergency—there were constant mass shootings, racist rallies filled with hate speech, and an escalating number of camera-phone videos of innocent Black men being shot by police. The photograph of Emmett Till felt analogous to the time: *what was hidden was now revealed*."[70] (emphasis added) To be pointed, networked testimonies of anti-Black violence, as I am translating "camera-phone videos" here, are not revelatory in terms of exposing such violence. They are a mediated claim to agency within a continuum of racialized violence that has *never* been hidden. While such testimonies illuminate anti-Black violence in visceral terms, drawing iconographic connections between Till and contemporary testimonials of necroresistance, Schutz's parallel ignores the fact that such violence has been endemic to American history and visual culture for centuries.[71]

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[70] Brian Boucher, "Dana Schutz Responds to the Uproar over her Emmett Till Painting at the Whitney Biennial," *Artnet,* March 23, 2017, accessed May 1, 2020, https://news.artnet.com/art-world/dana-schutz-responds-to-the-uproar-over-her-emmett-till-painting-900674

[71] To be clear, I do not believe that identity itself should delimit cultural producers. This position would make for a siloed world where we charge identity with so much value that it impoverishes our collective imagination. Instead, I encourage a rigorous self-analysis of the methods and intentions employed in creating a work. This process would require the practitioner to exhibit a depth of awareness (historically, psychologically, emotionally, and aesthetically) of the issue or subject they choose to depict and to consider those representations that invoke traumatic instances carefully.

The Schutz controversy highlights the criticality of authorship and legitimacy in addressing anti-Black violence through its depiction and narrativization. A similar controversy erupted in the wake of Kenneth Goldsmith's public reading of Michael Brown's autopsy report at the University of Pennsylvania in 2015. Standing in front of a largely white audience, Goldsmith, himself white, proceeded to narrate the report as part of his repertoire of "uncreative writing" or his moniker for conceptual poetry. Art critic Brian Droitcour, who attended the performance, characterized Goldsmith's reading as a nuanced reversal of positionality. He states, "The medical examiner's report is an account of another kind of looking, with a physical proximity and emotional remove that invert the looking of those who followed the news from Ferguson at a physical distance but with an emotional immediacy. In reading the autopsy, Goldsmith imagined switching those positions and collapsing the distances, intensifying the affect particular to his own position as a white onlooker."[72] Droitcour's analysis suggests that the reading produced an estranged intimacy, something intimate by virtue of the physical details that the report documents and yet something wholly distant, born solely of the onlooker's curiosity whose race keeps them preserved in the stance of a voyeur. Droitcour also notes that even Goldsmith's choice to entitle his performance

[72] Brian Droitcour, "Reading and Rumor: The Problem with Kenneth Goldsmith," *Art in America*, March 18, 2015, accessed on May 1, 2020, https://www.artnews.com/art-in-america/features/reading-and-rumor-the-problem-with-kenneth-goldsmith-59905/

presumed not only authorship but ownership in claiming, "Kenneth Goldsmith's The Body of Michael Brown (2015)."[73] One can only deduce that Hannah Black's letter to the Whitney in which she calls upon white artists and institutions to stop using "Black pain as raw material" is a necessary clarion call for those whom embodied identification or ethical witnessing cannot be achieved.[74] Goldsmith's reading strips away any pretense of identification with Brown as an individual and abstracts his body. In this process, Goldsmith's reading results in pornotroping, which Hortense Spillers identifies as the distinction between body and flesh, in which flesh is made "that zero degree" that discourse cannot conceal and through which the state apparatus functions to legitimate the violation of Black bodies.[75] Spillers' own articulation of this defilement, meant to elucidate the conventions of white supremacy, is mirrored in the surgical precision with which Goldsmith's performance sought to pull apart and dissect Brown's body in clinical terms, "The anatomical specifications of rupture, of altered human tissue, take on the objective description of laboratory prose—eyes beaten out, arms, backs, skulls branded, a left jaw, a right ankle, punctured; teeth missing, as the calculated work of iron, whips, chains, knives, the canine patrol, the bullet."[76]

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[73] Ibid.
[74] Greenberger, "The Painting Must Go," *Art News*.
[75] Hortense J. Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book." *Diacritics,* 17, no. 2 (1987): 67.
[76] Ibid.

Thus, the question of identification is central to a dominant visual culture that privileges white perspectives and that appropriates images of Black suffering without understanding the complex histories that such images entail and the affective responses they may elicit. As Shawn Michelle Smith states, "A dominant white culture does not force the white viewer into an identification with otherness; indeed, that culture works powerfully against such recognition."[77] This fact is powerfully emphasized when we consider the many accounts of embodied identification that have been produced in response to images of Black suffering and pain. When David Marriott contemplates the life and death of Stephen Lawrence, a young Black teenager that was stabbed and killed in 1993 by a gang of young white men while awaiting a bus, his words enact a form of visual meditation. Marriott places himself within the frame of a photo released by Lawrence's family. An image that circulated endlessly on the news. An image divorced from the context of Lawrence's killing, picturing him as a young man looking hesitantly towards the camera, pregnant with the hope of a life that the narrator knows is foreclosed.

> As you lie awake at night seeing that repeated image of Stephen, you are literally shaken by foreboding. Every time you see the photograph you see one possible version of yourself in the picture. Watching yourself from the screen, or else seeing yourself bleeding copiously by the curb on Dickson Road, you realise your private life is out in the open, barely able to escape. A recognition of congruence and an evocation of superimposition, merged, twinned, and continued in a lifetime spent deciphering racist connotations and symbols. Stephen is displayed in newspaper photographs, he survives in the memories of his family, he remains a presence in your life and the lives of Black people. He accompanies

[77] Smith, "*Photography On the Color Line,*" 144.

you wherever you are exposed to spectacles of Black torture and humiliation, rites of white initiation, and the moral manicheanism of either-or. And why not? You know you could die just by changing a bus, by standing on a streetcorner, by walking outside the frame.[78]

Marriott's passage is rife with the pain of self-knowledge that the threat of being killed as a Black man is both omnipresent and arbitrary. A matter of staying within the frame of an image that preserves life or stepping out into a destiny of incalculable threats. The veritable stranger that is Stephen Lawrence, a man known to Marriott only through postmortem images and news reports, becomes internalized as an intimate psychic reflection, one that mirrors himself and draws upon individual and diasporic histories. Moments of identification, such as Marriott's, indicate a collective experience in which witnessing becomes internalized to the point that it becomes indistinguishable from oneself. This form of identification does not destroy, disavow, objectify, or erase. Instead, it does the work of keeping vigil in a manner that binds self and other to unravel a precarious either/or. Marriott is not eulogizing Lawrence but rather summoning him into a phantasmagorical union. His testimony to witnessing a mediated version of Lawrence's death reveals that seeing and knowing that another body, a body that resembles his own, that feels, desires, lives and dies in ways that his own body can experience, constitutes the basis for a relationality

[78] David Marriott, *On Black Men* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), 124.

enabled through mourning.[79] Marriott's testimony recalls the words of Elizabeth Alexander in discussing the collective trauma of Black publics that bore witness to the cataclysmic video of Rodney King. She describes this witnessing as the production of critical knowledge that "is necessary to one who believes 'it would be my turn next.'"[80]

Aggregating Affective Sentiment

Through harnessing individual points of identification, networked testimonies gain coherence and mount into a collective response. Through an incalculable exchange between bodies, surfaces, signs, emotions, and events that recalibrate social forces, networked testimony foregrounds the capacity of necroresistance to mobilize publics. When Reynolds' testimony was live-streamed, it had an immediate effect. By noon, the morning after (July 7, 2016) Castile's death, Diamond Reynolds' Facebook Live video had been viewed 3.2

[79] I do not mean to suggest that identification is a "pure" state. It can be a momentary crystallization and, with some phenomena, a lifelong engagement. Thus it is essential to note that moments of self-knowledge and interconnection can shift and change throughout one's life. In his encounter with the *Without Sanctuary* lynching postcard collection, Hilton Als' written reflections express a shift between an *ineluctable* identification and, at points, a willful *disidentification*. He moves towards and retracts from these images, illuminating his personal memories cast against collective histories. Asked by white publishers to respond to these images, Als intentionally disrupts the expectation that he *should* identify with such images as a Black author, scholar, and critic, thus refuting the dominant visual culture's assumption that a monolithic consensus subjectivity characterizes Blackness itself. Thus identification is individuated and subject to sudden ruptures, heterodox encounters, and a continually evolving perception of oneself.

[80] Elizabeth Alexander, "Can You Be Black and Look at This?: Reading the Rodney King video(s)," *Public Culture,* 7, no. 1 (1994): 83.

million times on her profile page.[81] By the evening of July 6, 2016, after Reynolds' video had only been up for a few hours, mourners and activists had gathered outside the Minnesota governor's residence, effectively challenging the power of the state to control the account of Castile's death.[82] Reynolds' video thus successfully created and consolidated affective consensus through the instantaneous distribution of her personal, narrativized description of officer Yanez's actions and her own emotions at the sight of Castile bleeding out beside her. As Sara Ahmed describes it, affect creates different social economies, in which "emotions *do things*, and they align individuals with communities – or bodily space with social space – through the very intensity of their attachments."[83] Affect thus is not contingent upon any single factor but rather arises from the conditions of a social world that can propel emotional responses into embodied displays. Through networked testimonies, intimate encounters with the spectacle of anti-Black violence and death render the agency of the subject evident and compel others to take action through the signification of the corpse. The image of the corpse and its redistribution through digital forums thus manifests in a way that synthesizes protests with memorialization, intentionally disrupting official protocol and hierarchical modes of governing the dead.

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[81] Brian Stelter, "Philando Castile and the Power of Facebook Live," *CNN*, July 7, 2016, accessed November 27, 2019, https://money.cnn.com/2016/07/07/media/facebook-live-streaming-police-shooting/index.html
[82] Ibid.
[83] Sara Ahmed, "Affective Economies," *Social Text*, 22, no. 2 (2004): 119.

Martin Bressani refers to affect as "feelings in movement" in turn, transforming space into a "phenomenon of emergence."[84] Those who marched to the governor's house to protest Castile's death reflected what was embedded in the social consciousness writ large. Through the surfaces, streets, and screens that abound, affect cuts across haptic and somatic thresholds, drawing us into impactful visual, aural, and oratory declarations of collective feeling. Bressai describes this as a form of ornamentation that signifies an exchange between the material world and the energies of the people that occupy it, creating a dynamic, immersive reality of sensations that produce an atmosphere from which a "broad emotional climate" can be discerned.[85] Capitalizing upon this "climate," networked testimony has emerged as a fulcrum through which the social lives of the dead exceed the frame by which they are contained to reshape the social imaginary in real-time. It is from this vantage point that Reynolds' networked testimony possesses a powerful agency. By lingering on Castile's wounded body, Reynolds opens up new modes of address that oscillate between two distinct registers: the personal and individuated while also iconic and historical. Her voice and image functions within a recursive history with the desire to cut decisively through time to construct a radically different future. In this sense, Reynolds' testimony echoes the words of Fred Moten when he states, "I believe

[84] Martin Bressani, "Towards a Digital Theory of Affect," (paper presented at the ACADIA Conference, New York, NY, October 2010).
[85] Ibid.

in the world and want to be in it. I want to be in it all the way to the end of it because I believe in another world and I want to be in that."[86]

[86] Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning & Black Study* (Wivenhoe: Minor Compositions, 2013), 118.

CHAPTER TWO

Digital Decolonialism: Mapping the Personal and Collective Necropolitics of MMIW

"Because people everywhere had forgotten the spirits, the spirits of all their ancestors who had preceded them on these vast continents. Yes, the Americas were full of furious, bitter spirits; five hundred years of slaughter had left the continents swarming with millions of spirits that never rested and would never stop until justice had been done."[1]

-Leslie Marmon Silko, *Almanac of the Dead*

Digital Interventions into MMIW at the nexus of Feminicide and Necropower

Annita Hetoevėhotohke'E. Lucchesi's array of critical media practices interrogating MMIW recognize that the courtroom is a compromised space, the police are a potential threat, that medical and psychological services are leaden with disenfranchising mechanisms, and that these forums are intimately linked to the perpetration of feminicide as a form of necropower. To combat these forces, she offers an alternative prism to reconcile life, death, loss, grief, and spirituality through a community-conscious array of digital interventions. Through her establishment of the *Sovereign Bodies Institute* (SBI) in 2015, Lucchesi, a Cheyenne descendent, promotes her work in decolonial mapping and

[1] Leslie Marmon Silko, *Almanac of the Dead* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1991), 421.

data sovereignty through a digital repatriation of the dead and disappeared. Her work explicitly addresses the lacunae in federal statistics by utilizing an indigenous cartographic perspective and data collection to unfasten the forms of necropower that operate through a settler regime of representation. In this process, Lucchesi emphasizes the multiplicity of roles she occupies as a researcher, cartographer, indigenous woman, victim, healer, and activist, all of which inform her critique of state violence, by which coloniality endures while foregrounding a personal approach to necropolitics. This chapter examines the decolonial strategies that she employs to reimagine the spiritual and political dimensions of victim's lives and deaths, producing an alternative set of representations that defy state-sanctioned modes of portraying necropolitical violence while offering a reparative vision of data sovereignty as a form of care. Combining the SBI database with counter-mapping practices as a form of testimonial, Lucchesi intervenes in state narratives that project data and statistics that are inaccurate and seeks to rectify the lacunae that continue the persecution of native women by erasing their identities' complexity, cultures, and experiences. Such a practice recognizes that spatializing the data concerning MMIW can hold authorities to account while asserting indigenous identity in new ways.

Lucchesi's work embraces the sentiments of María Lugones, who promotes a "movement toward coalition that impels us to know each other as selves that are thick, in relation, in alternative socialities, and grounded in tense,

creative inhabitations of the colonial difference.[2] For Lucchesi, living an alternative sociality is drawn through the retrieval, recognition, and honoring of the dead and disappeared, and in so doing, occupying the duality of both recognizing and shedding the expectations, strictures, and performativity that colonial logic demands of her. By engaging in acts of digital repatriation, foregrounding embodied knowledge, defending data sovereignty, and promoting temporal sovereignty, Lucchesi's work testifies to an alternative model of imagining death in the digital age proposed in decolonial terms.

To disentangle the symbolic, physical, historical, temporal, and spiritual fissures produced by colonialism and to heal the enduring legacy of its impact, contemporary indigenous activists have sought to contend with the nexus between feminicides enacted in the present, contrasted with the memory of genocides past, while navigating the formulations of necropower intrinsic to both. Mbembe states, "necropolitical power proceeds by a sort of inversion between life and death, as if life was merely death's medium."[3] As such, activism that recuperates the slain body, which reinvigorates and empowers life through the depiction of death, has become a strategy to reformulate interstices of anguish in the service of liberation. Taking coloniality as an enduring sense of internalized rupture and imagining its remedy at the most critical points of pain

[2] María Lugones, "Toward a Decolonial Feminism," *Hypatia* 25, no. 4 (2010): 748.
[3] Achille Mbembe, *Necropolitics* (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2019), 38.

thus compels anti-feminicide activists to invent modes of defiance and healing that rest outside the dominant paradigms offered for redress.

Feminicide is ongoing and diffuse, a permeating force that marginalizes women over extended periods utilizing methodologies of violence that continuously reproduce themselves by altering form, functioning in an elaborate, and nuanced manner. It is a state-sanctioned act in which Death-making rests beneath the surface of both ideological and material infrastructures that point to the state's "legitimate" enterprises. For example, the maquiladoras that proliferate along the US/Mexico borderlands were not erected to kill and yet explicitly contribute to the mass death of women through a multivalent set of policies that enable their death. The exploitation of low-cost labor via neoliberal economic policies, complicit and corrupt law enforcement officials, border militarization, and the rise of narco-trafficking and gang warfare have contributed to an atmosphere in which violence against women is normalized. The overarching ideology of free trade promoted by globalization that underpins the creation of the maquiladoras does not overtly target women, cordoning them off into a disposable population through rhetoric, but instead creates indirect conditions that perpetuate direct violence. Rosa Linda Fregoso characterizes this phenomenon as one in which the global is filtered through the national, and that combines with a longstanding history of “misogyny and hypersexism” that links feudal era Mexico in which women were emphatically subordinated to a new necropolitical order that reveals multiple and intersecting forces of

domination.[4] Fregoso articulates these forces as a merger between "the state (state actors), organizations of uncivil society, in alliance with the ruling economic and political elite, and a secret police" that fuse with "a globalized network of international underground industries involved in the trafficking of drugs, weapons, pornography and humans" producing a "shadow economy" that "operates under the same neoliberal logic of decentralized and flexible sovereignty, insofar as it moves away from the centralized operational monopoly toward private, polymorphous and diffused organizations."[5] These are the specific and interlocking structures and social configurations that produce an "ensemble of violations of women's human rights," that operate through the internal structure of a society and that validate the mechanisms that perpetuate sexism, racism, and classicism, and thus produces an infinite array of causes for and modes of killing.[6] Thus feminicide encompasses everything from the malevolence of domestic violence to the ravages of human trafficking and enforced prostitution, denial of sufficient health care in crisis scenarios, police brutality and discrimination ending in death or disappearance, and honor killings, to chart a few of the methods by which women are subject to annihilation. The fact that these modes of violence migrate seamlessly between

[4] Rosa Linda Fregoso, "'We Want Them Alive!': The Politics and Culture of Human Rights," *Social identities,* 12, no. 2 (2006): 109-113
[5] Ibid, 113.
[6] Marcela Lagarde y de los Ríos, "Preface: Feminist Keys for Understanding Feminicide," in *Terrorizing Women : Feminicide in the Américas,* eds. Rosa Linda Fregoso and Cynthia L. Bejarano (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), xv.

public and private contexts underscores feminicide's pervasiveness. What obscures the phenomenon of feminicide is its very imbrication within the fabric of state operations and its numerous methodologies.

The discourse surrounding feminicide emerged from its initial conceptualization as femicide. As an originating term, femicide attempted to distinguish itself from homicide and highlight a gendered dynamic that propelled "the killing of women by men *because* they are women" or "being killed for no reason other than being female." [7] Sharon Marcus conceptualizes this schema as a "gendered grammar of violence [which] predicates men as the objects of violence and the operators of its tools, and predicates women as the objects of violence and the subjects of fear."[8] As a nascent concept emerging from an analysis of rape culture through the feminist scholarship of the 1970s, "femicide" produced a necessary and critical shift, although one that hinged solely upon the singular axis of gender. The term feminicide, by contrast, advocates for an expanded understanding of gendered violence culminating in death that also accounts for the specificity of different "class, racial, religious, judicial, legal, and political or cultural violence" that determines the character and modes by which such violence is enacted. [9] For example, Nadira Shalhoub-

[7] Jill Radford and Diana E. H. Russell, *Femicide: the Politics of Woman Killing* (New York: Twayne, 1992), xiv.
[8] Sharon Marcus, "Fighting Bodies, Fghting Words: A theory and Politics of Rape Prevention," in *Feminists Theorize the Political*, eds. Judith Butler and Joan W. Scott (New York: Routledge, 1992): 393.
[9] Lagarde y de Los Ríos, "Preface," xix.

Kervorkian and Suhad Daher-Nashif argue that honor killings against Palestinian women occur when "a national 'politics of exclusion' collude with a localized 'culture of control' to generate the context within which violence against colonized women in colonial zones is fueled, strengthened, and even justified, by colonized and colonizer alike."[10] The specificity with which Palestinian women are targeted is thus understood within the context of Palestinians as a whole living within an apartheid state that restricts mobility, housing, health care, and the potential for free development moving from general oppression to "localized manifestations of patriarchal and masculine logics that are empowered by the politics of exclusion."[11] Similarly, when Victoria Sanford analyzes the causes of feminicide in Guatemala, she identifies "impunity, silence, and indifference," as key factors driven by a state which actively refuses to protect women through "commission, toleration, or omission."[12] In widely disparate contexts, these interrogations of feminicide expose that states are not merely complicit but are active in making violence against women permissible.

Advocates for a decolonial and intersectional understanding of feminicide focus on the historical continuities underpinning contemporary manifestations of gendered violence while emphasizing that such violence is differential in both

[10] Nadera Shalhoub-Kervorkian and Suhad Daher-Nashif, "Femicide and Colonization: Between the Politics of Exclusion and the Culture of Control," *Violence Against Women* 19, no. 3 (2013): 296.
[11] Ibid.
[12] Victoria Sanford, "From Genocide to Feminicide: Impunity and Human Rights in Twenty-First Century Guatemala," *Journal of Human Rights,* 7, no. 2 (2008): 112.

its distribution and intensity by stratifications that affect how diverse populations of women are valorized or denigrated. The colonization of the Americas forcibly instituted what Lugones terms "hierarchical dichotomies and categorical logic" in order to separate the human from the non-human, facilitating the subjugation of indigenous and Black peoples who, as Sylvia Wynters asserts, were "Invented Human Others" over and against a conception of "Man" as a "rational citizen."[13] Wynters further clarifies that this subordination operated by displacing and erasing how native peoples self-conceptualized their relationship to the land and life, positioning such conceptions as an expression of an "irrational humanity" instead of the rational political subject who epitomizes the "integrity" of the nation-state.[14] Through an imposed discursive and institutionally mandated inferiority, the Human Other Role would come to reify the Western bourgeoise model of humanity that could effectively repress and deny any alternative conceptions of life, thus producing a symbolic death through positioning native values and customs as non-evolved elements that must be biologically and forcibly de-selected.[15]

Overlaying the colonial project of categorization gendered forms of discrimination became intrinsic to destroying indigenous culture. Within the

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[13] María Lugones, "Toward a Decolonial Feminism," *Hypatia* 25, no. 4 (2010): 742.
Sylvia Wynter, "On How We Mistook the Map for the Territory, and Reimprisoned Uurselves in Uur Unbearable Wrongness of Being, of Desêtre: Black Studies Toward the Human Project," in *A Companion to African-American Studies,* eds. Lewis R. Gordon and Jane Anna Gordon (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2006), 125.
[14] Wynter, "On How We Mistook the Map for the Territory," 125.
[15] Ibid.

context of African colonial projects, sociologist Oyerónké Oyewumí emphasizes that a twin process consolidated colonial power, "The first and more thoroughly documented of these processes was the racializing and the attendant inferiorization of Africans as the colonized, the natives. The second process … was the inferiorization of females. These processes were inseparable, and both were embedded in the colonial situation."[16] This intertwining was tactical and used physical and psychological strategies that targeted women in particular ways. Breny Mendoza states, "Through sexual violence, exploitation, and systems of concubinage, the colonizers used gender to break the will of indigenous men and women, imposing new hierarchies that were institutionalized with colonialism."[17] By the violent imposition of structural changes, colonialism attempted to reshape conceptions of gender, seeking to dissolve any gender expressions that did not conform to a male/female binary.[18] The impact of these gendered divisions, paired with racialized discrimination, thus prompt a move towards understanding "coloniality" as the social, psychic, and affective repercussions that manifest within contemporary self-subject formations, as opposed to the "event" of colonialism which is made up of intentional actions enforcing a particular structure of power.[19]

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[16] Oyèrónkẹ́ Oyěwùmí, *The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 152.
[17] Breny Mendoza," Coloniality of Gender and Power," in *The Oxford Handbook of Feminist Theory,* eds. Lisa Disch and Mary Hawkesworth (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 18.
[18] Lugones, "Toward a Decolonial Feminism," 748.
[19] Mendoza," Coloniality of Gender and Power," 15.

The prominence of sexual violence as a tool to enforce colonial domination and formations of power is well documented. Andrea Smith discusses how rape, sexual mutilation, and the sexual surveillance of indigenous women by colonial men were innately linked to genocidal campaigns against native populations, she states, "What's happening then, in this process, is that colonizers are not just trying to kill Indian people, but to kill our sense of even being a people."[20] The fact that the point of erosion to shatter indigeneity is located in and through the destruction of women's bodies emphasizes the binaries by which colonialism operated. Smith notes that the contrast between "dirty" and "pure" is consistently deployed to mark native bodies as inherently disposable over and against white women's imagined virtue.[21] The role of white women as progenitors cast them as synonymous with the foundation and perpetuation of the colonial state and secured their place in a racialized and sexualized ordering of the "new" world as bearers of the nation itself. Thus, enhancing the binary was imperative for the colonizer, which cast "native women as bearers of a counter-imperial order" that threatened the state, fusing a "symbolic and literal control over their bodies" as a primary form of warfare.[22] Thus, the death and disappearance of indigenous women enacted in the present forms part of a protracted state campaign in which overlapping temporalities,

[20] Andrea Smith, "Conquest: Sexual Violence and American Indian Genocide," (Lecture, CMC Media and Democracy Lectures, Wealthy Theatre, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2011).
[21] Andrea Smith, "Not an Indian Tradition: The Sexual Colonization of Native Peoples," *Hypatia,* 18, no. 2 (2003): 73.
[22] Ibid, 74.

racialized and gendered hierarchies, and the memory of genocides past extend into the present, forming a continuum of violence that persists today.

A Necropolitics of Elision

To build a world conjured by absence is to reverse time and advance beyond destruction through mining the edges of loss. Mark Rifkin writes, "What does it mean to be recognized as existing in time? The representation of Native peoples as either having disappeared or being remnants on the verge of vanishing constitutes one of the principal means of effacing Indigenous sovereignties."[23] Native scholar, activist, and lawyer Sarah Deer writes, "It is impossible to have a truly self-determining nation when its members have been denied self-determination over their own bodies."[24] The link between the body and time, the dominated body, and subsequently the body that has been killed or disappeared, is a primary force of settler logic that intentionally obscures the active presence of the living indigenous through a disavowal of the indigenous dead. This is not an active necropolitics of the kind that Banu Bargu asserts. It does not target dead bodies and formulate them into abject displays to terrorize the living, nor does it enact punitive measures that attempt to censure the memorialization of the dead.[25] This form of necropolitics operates through

[23] Mark Rifkin, *Beyond Settler Time : Temporal Sovereignty and Indigenous Self-Determination* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017), 5.
[24] Sarah Deer, *The Beginning and End of Rape: Confronting Sexual Violence in Native America* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), xvi.
[25] Banu Bargu, "Another Necropolitics," *Theory & Event,* 19, no. 1 (2016): 2.

elision and attrition. It is a passive form of death making and, in certain respects, death-inducing through intentional neglect. It is not the "to make live and to let die" that Foucault postulates in which particular segments of a population are vaunted, and others abandoned, for to elide is a conscious act that harbors malicious intent.[26] Elision is thus a punitive measure that weighs the propensity for a group's death and uses passivity to fuel it. This methodology is much more akin to Lauren Berlant's conceptualization of "slow death," which she distinguishes from necropolitics as a process embedded in the ordinariness of life and from which human life and its attrition are indistinguishable from governmentality that both regulates and kills.[27] Berlant attempts to bridge the differentiation between biopower and necropower by suggesting that the administration of life cannot be separated from those mechanisms of state violence that operate through facilitating "life's wearing out," which results in death and yet is not a decisive event such as war or genocide.[28] Slow death thus recognizes that the decimation of a target population can occur in modes that are more diffuse, as is apparent in the enactment of feminicide, which has multiple causes and rests on varying factors without a single event that characterizes it or a single mode of execution. What is enabled through this is an "environment" of death rather than a cataclysmic event that makes it

[26] Michel Foucault, "17 March 1976 Lecture," in *Society Must Be Defended": Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975–1976* (London: Picador, 2004): 241.
[27] Lauren Gail Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 96.
[28] Ibid.

recognizable.[29] It is to this point that the state can circumvent statistics and shield itself by claiming "jurisdictional complexity" to avoid any resolution to cases of MMIW. Such an elision still falls within the frame of necropolitics, for it allows the state to operate with impunity through the neglect of indigenous women's lives, but it might best be understood as a necropolitics of convenience rather than being assertive. Such death-making arises from an environment that legitimates racist fueled attrition, allowing indigenous women's bodies to accumulate on the margins of society. Ignoring the dead and continuously disappearing bodies of indigenous women is not the outward barbarity of a state that aims to kill, as Mbembe describes, but rather a reflection of a state that desires to operate through a temporality that relegates the status of indigenous women as predisposed to extinction.

In a 2004 report issued by Amnesty International documenting discrimination and violence against native women in Canada, a summary of case studies provides ample evidence of a tactical use of elision deployed by the police, the courts, and the government when investigating the rape, murder, or abduction of indigenous women. The disparity between the distribution of charges ending in convictions is egregious. Only 54% of murders in which the victim is an indigenous woman lead to charges of homicide as opposed to the national average of 84%. Compounding this fact, indigenous women are 4.5

[29] Ibid, 101.

times more susceptible to being murdered, and even though they make up only 4% of the population, they represent 25% of its homicidal fatalities.[30] These statistics are parallel to those reflected in the US regarding the high rates of violence and state disavowal, even though the total indigenous populations of each country differ significantly.[31] The patterns of violence and discrimination that are endemic to both countries reveal that while domestic abuse perpetrated by native men is a factor, it does not amount to the overwhelming fact that 70% of all violence committed against the indigenous is by non-indigenous perpetrators and that non-indigenous men commit 90% of all sexual assaults against indigenous women.[32] Systematic neglect underpins these statistics.

In the 1991 disappearance of Shirley Lonethunder, the Saskatoon Police could not locate the missing person's report upon request of her family.[33] In the

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[30] Royal Canadian Mounted Police, "Missing and Murdered Aboriginal Women: 2015 Update to the National Operational Overview," Ottawa, accessed January 12, 2021, https://www.rcmp-grc.gc.ca/en/missing-and-murdered-aboriginal-women-2015-update-national-operational-overview

[31] The overall indigenous population in the US as of the 2018 census stood at 6.9 million people, comprising 2.11% of the total population. In contrast, the latest statistics available from Canada's census of 2016 places the indigenous population at close to 1.7 million people comprising 4.7% of the total population.

Data for the US derived from: United States Census Bureau, accessed February 12, 2021, https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?q=indigenous%20population%20percentage&tid=PEPPOP2019.PEPANNRES

Data from Canada derived from: Canada Census Profile, accessed February 12, 2021, https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/prof/details/page.cfm?Lang=E&Geo1=PR&Code1=01&Geo2=&Code2=&SearchText=Canada&SearchType=Begins&SearchPR=01&B1=All&TABID=1&type=0

[32] Amnesty International, "Canada Stolen Sisters: A Human Rights Response to Discrimination and Violence against Indigenous Women in Canada," (October 2004) 15.

[33] Ibid, 24.

1995 murder of Pamela George, the police aggressively pursued indigenous men as suspects while neglecting to seek out non-indigenous suspects. When the perpetrators were finally identified, the white judge repeatedly reminded the all-white jury that George was a prostitute, hailing from a world entirely different than their own, and the two men who mercilessly raped, beat, and killed George, leaving her in a ditch, received six and half year prison sentences for manslaughter rather than homicide. In testimony delivered by a friend of one of the perpetrators, the assailant had reportedly said of George, "She deserved it. She was Indian."[34] It seems as if the court itself concurred in their deliberation by delivering a nominal indictment. When Sarah de Vries went missing in 1998, it took the police ten days to interview her family members.[35] When Cynthia Lousie Sanderson was killed by a white man who called her an "Indian whore" before gunning his truck and running over her, the prosecutor refused to classify her murder as a hate crime. She died alone in the hospital, and even though her family member's contact information was listed in a daily planner in her purse, no one bothered to contact her family while she was still alive.[36] When 16-year-old Felicia Velvet Solomon went missing in 2003, the police were immediately notified and yet refused to pursue her case. As with many cases of missing persons in native communities, Felicia's family took it upon themselves to

[34] Ibid, 26.
[35] Ibid, 30.
[36] Ibid.

distribute missing person posters in an attempt to publicize her disappearance, but neither the police nor the media assisted their efforts. Felicia's severed body parts were eventually found along the bank of a local river, and no one has ever been convicted of her death.[37]

Many of these cases reveal different facets of neglect, including intentional investigative delays, racist discrimination on the part of both perpetrators and police, a court system rife with apathy, and a general de-prioritization of indigenous victims. Elision functions efficiently for the settler state, for it can magnify or obscure the issue of MMIW at will. The severity of the crime does not matter, nor the jurisdiction in which it occurs, nor the year it took place. Systematic refusal to defend indigenous women's rights, shield them from the perpetual harms they encounter, or do justice to their memory in a court of law is emblematic of Agamben's conception of bare life in which a subject is stripped of their social protection, cast out from society, and whose body is made violable with impunity.[38]

Amnesty International's Canadian report on MMIW exposes the composite forces that have actively sought to persecute, abandon and kill thousands of women over centuries by reducing them to bare life. This structural lack of protection includes "deaths of women in police custody;

[37] Ibid, 33.
[38] Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Redwood City: Stanford University Press, 1998).

[Canada's] failure to protect Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people from exploitation and trafficking, as well as from known killers; the crisis of child welfare; physical, sexual, and mental abuse inflicted on Indigenous women and girls in state institutions; the denial of Status and membership for First Nations; the removal of children; forced relocation and its impacts; purposeful, chronic underfunding of essential human services; coerced sterilizations; and more."[39] The report also detailed how central to the pervasiveness of MMIW was the methodological lack of progress, reform, or accountability on behalf of Canadian police departments. Mirroring the conclusions established in the Amnesty International Report published *fifteen years* earlier, the Canadian National Inquiry (published in 2019) details the following repercussions of police neglect: families left to conduct searches for the missing on their own, insufficient monitoring of women held in custody leading to their death, a lack of cultural awareness on the part of officers and the procedures implemented to respond to gendered violence against indigenous women, victim-blaming, stereotyping and falsifications inscribed within official police reports reflecting a presumption of criminality being ascribed to indigenous women and threatening to arrest victims that risk reporting their violation, delays in searching for victims, absence or deletion of missing persons reports being filed, and a total lack of oversight or accountability mechanisms for police departments that have

[39] Canada MMIW Commission, "Reclaiming Power and Place: The Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, "Volume 1a, (2019): 53.

engaged in such acts.[40] These procedural strategies underscore the centuries of occupation that strengthened the tenacity of state neglect, emboldening maltreatment, crushing survivors, and occluding the true narratives of those who have been lost.

Coupled with neglect are the erroneous terms used to situate MMIW in Western discourse. Sarah Deer points out the misidentification of MMIW when it is labeled an "epidemic" in headlines that serve to place the settler public on a feigned "high alert." An epidemic, she claims, is that which suddenly catalyzes our attention through its urgency, as if it is a short-lived crisis whose resolution may be pending but is inevitable.[41] Instead, she asserts that the fact that indigenous women are raped, killed, or go missing at higher rates than the general population has been an ongoing dilemma tied to the very foundation of the "state" and its colonial logic.[42] An epidemic conjures images of a thunderstruck public paralyzed by the sublime nature of contagion. The term epidemic, as Deer claims, relieves the perpetrator from accountability and displaces blame onto the victim by implying there is no identifiable cause for the violence enacted against them. Framing Indigenous women's violation as an epidemic implies a permanent "present" that erases the past definitively. "The word suggests that the problem is biological, that the problem originated

[40] Canada MMIW Commission, "Reclaiming Power and Place: The Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, "Volume 1a, (2019).
[41] Sarah Deer, *The Beginning and End of Rape: Confronting Sexual Violence in Native America* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), ix.
[42] Ibid, x.

independent of longstanding oppression, that it has infected our society, twisting human relations."[43] Feminicide, in all its manifestations, has become normalized because it is *intrinsic* to society, rather than an external force that distorts social relations or a transitory administration that arises to endanger human rights. Rosa Linda Fregoso writes of the feminicide in Mexico that it is not "simply a problem *for* the state, an aberration but is in fact endemic to it."[44] Thus finding new ways to confront state power and unravel these dynamics in digital terms requires restructuring the institutional frameworks and semantic fields that perpetuate the death and disappearance of native women.

Spatializing Injustice

To combat feminicide, cartographic testimony asks us to consider place, and more specifically, the possession and dispossession of land alongside the death or disappearance of bodies and their revivification through critical mapping practices. Such maps testify on behalf of the dead by creating valued, legible, and accurate representations. Maps act as a counterpoint to semantic evasions such as "epidemic" for they are a direct illustration of the logistics of death, revealing the simultaneity of causes and their longstanding attribution to colonial and state-sanctioned enterprises ensconced in violence. In this way,

[43] Ibid, ix.
[44] Rosa Linda Fregoso, "'We Want Them Alive!': The Politics and Culture of Human Rights," *Social Identities,* 12, no. 2 (2006): 110.

cartographic testimony seeks not only to reveal and understand the lives of the dead, to pay homage to them, to resurrect them for public view but to indict the state by drawing it into a discussion concerning its accountability for the loss of indigenous women's lives. In this way, critical decolonial mapping as cartographic testimony is about expressing a collective reality through personal sentiments. The information mapped acts as a rebuke to official figures and reveals the lacunae that produce federal data gaps and the misrepresentation of native women in mainstream media. Spatializing injustice, making it locatable in virtual terms, allows for a form of transparency that conjoins resistance with representation in a manner that makes personal grief and political statements synonymous with one another. Mapping as a strategy allows for an expanded understanding of the interlinking phenomena that engender feminicide and exposes the parallels and continuities between the regimes that consent to its occurrence. In this way, cartographic testimony crosses physical borders through virtual encounters that visualize the coordinates and the sentiments of women affected by violence.

The impetus for mapping that tracks and identifies violence against native women is rooted in a pervasive sense that there is no escape from its omnipresent force. The wounds of every native woman reflect the wounds of the collective whole, for as Deer asserts, political sovereignty and personal sovereignty are inseparable for indigenous tribes given that the rape of native

women is akin to the destruction of, and dispossession from, native lands.[45] Thus, the prospect of self-determination and self-governance is contingent upon eradicating violence against native women. The process of accomplishing this must be in identifying the underlying issues to propose resolutions that Deer posits as direct reflections of sovereignty.[46] Thus, critical decolonial map-making is not merely an exercise in making violence visible but a methodology that fuses intergenerational trauma with extant and emerging technologies, bonding blood memory to present-day iterations of violence and doing so in an imaginative way that not only identifies violence but proffers healing justice.

Mishuana Goeman cites literary interventions as a critical component of realizing new spatial ontologies through indigenous women's mapping of space within writing. She states that literary projects can produce new geographies by producing "imaginative modes to unsettle settler space" and that this "must happen through imaginative modes precisely because the 'real' of settler-colonial society is built on the violent erasures of alternative modes of mapping and geographic understandings."[47] Reproducing indigenous understandings of space involve an intricate understanding of how the land itself was never considered an inert or passive object but rather an entity animated with spirits. Geography, in this sense, was imbued with both cosmological and utilitarian

[45] Deer, *The Beginning and End of Rape*, xv.
[46] Ibid.
[47] Mishuana Goeman, *Mark my Words: Native Women Mapping Our Nations* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), 2.

significations, providing a psychic space illuminated by influential markers such as mountains, lakes, rivers, and rocks that produced a corporeal knowledge linking one's inner spirit to external manifestations and collapsing any distinction between the two. Gerald A. Oetelaar and David Meyer note that movement throughout the landscape was an integral feature of not only arriving at spiritual landmarks for ceremonial use or accessing natural resources for survival, but that the journey itself was reflective of tribal history. Specific geographical features translated to important events in a tribe's history, thus serving as crucial elements in promoting continuity between past and present, infusing the collective with a sense of temporal unity.[48] Thus landscapes were marked with concrete social referents as much as places through which myth and ceremony could be realized, promoting a unified sense of cosmic integration.

Diverging from the landscape as a set of cosmological significations, European conquest sought expansion throughout the Americas by mapping in concrete terms. Colonial cartography "provided the conceptual coordinates that made a western continent imaginable" while also rationalizing a conception of space that positioned it as a resource of colonial occupation.[49] While mapping is often theorized as synonymous with Western imperialism and unique to colonizers, indigenous mapping practices existed pre-contact, and in fact,

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[48] Gerald A. Oetelaar and David Meyer, "Movement and Native American Landscapes: A Comparative Approach," *Plains Anthropologist,* 51, no. 199 (2006): 358.
[49] Stephanie Pratt, "From the Margins: The Native American Personage in the Cartouche and Decorative Borders of Maps," *Word & Image,* 12, no. 4 (1996): 349.

indigenous cartographic logic was subsequently shared with early settlers to assist their navigations.[50] Independent of the graphic maps that colonizers prized, indigenous processual cartography was long practiced prior to settler arrival. Processual cartography incorporated the landscape and consisted of inscriptions on trees and rocks, drawings on the ground, or dance and ceremony. Indigenous processual cartography also emphasized the significance of storied place names and the recitation or visiting of those named places to recollect situated stories. Finally, Indigenous processual cartographies also differ from Western cartography in that they emphasize experienced space or place, as opposed to the Western convention of depicting space as universal, homogenized, and devoid of human experience.[51]

Drawing upon a vast history of mapping practices, Indigenous cartography in the modern era has flourished with the development and use of geospatial technologies from the 1970s onwards, and maps have been integral to defining and defending both territorial and cultural sovereignty.[52] More recently, the advent of open-source mapping software and crowd-sourced map initiatives have produced creative decolonial cartographic interventions in digital space. For example, Mapping Indigenous LA reimagines cartographic space and time by including visual and textual documentation of Latin American,

[50] Louis De Vorsey, "Amerindian Contributions to the Mapping of North America: A Preliminary View," *Imago Mundi,* 30, no. 1 (1978): 71.
[51] Margaret Pearce and Renee Louis, "Mapping Indigenous Depth of Place," *American Indian Culture and Research Journal,* 32, no. 3 (2008): 108.
[52] Ibid.

Oceanic, and Pacific Islander diasporas and their convergence in Los Angeles alongside Native American tribes that were forcibly removed, and sacred sites that Gabrielino/Tongva and Tataviam identify with throughout the city.[53] Myaamia researchers have spearheaded a language preservation effort in the form of a digital database seeking to retrieve the Algonquin tribal idiom known as Miami and have utilized linguistic-based software to rebuild its vocabulary, tenses, and expressions in the form of oratory maps.[54] Rebekah R. Ingram has developed an analysis of the spatial knowledge embedded in Mohawk place names and how ethnophysiographical mapping can visualize etymological genealogies and signify indigenous knowledge in cybercartography terms.[55] Thus the connection between landscape, language, and sovereignty are facilitated by mapping practices that mobilize digital technologies to co-create spiritual and cultural realms of interconnection. Marisa Duarte speaks of this in an alternative vein by exploring the institution of broadband network capabilities on native lands. She writes, "I needed to see the landscapes around me as an overlay of digital interactions interlacing landscapes cultivated by the hands of Native peoples working together over centuries."[56] In this way, the

[53] "Mapping Indigenous LA," UCLA, accessed February 1, 2021, https://mila.ss.ucla.edu/
[54] "Myaamia Center," Miami University, accessed February 1, 2021, https://www.miamioh.edu/myaamia-center/index.html
[55] Rebekah R. Ingram, "Mapping Indigenous Landscape Perceptions," (paper presented at *Endangered languages and the land: Mapping landscapes of multilingualism; Proceedings of FEL XXII/2018,* Reykjavík, Iceland, 2018) 30.
[56] Marisa Elena Duarte, *Network Sovereignty: Building the Internet across Indian Country* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2017), 29.

infrastructure of ICT's, the laying of cables interwoven through native lands, and then their subsequent use by indigenous communities is a process of enmeshment. Thus, the digital becomes a reflection of tribal epistemologies offering the opportunity for creative uses that can proffer new visions of testimony, sovereignty, and justice that reconceptualize the land, body, and liberation.

Mapping a geography of violence enables a forum of voices to arise and confer upon landscapes of death as a mode of social organization. Maps speak to what can be rendered visible and decolonial mapping practices challenge, subvert, or entirely circumvent settler constructions of visibility and invisibility. Decolonial mapping strategies deploy numerous tactics, and there is no singular methodology that expresses an indigenous perspective in a coherent or unified manner. This is, in fact, the strength of decolonial strategies in that they are often hybridized and malleable, taking on new forms as needed and inaugurating new ways of being in the world through visualizations that actively defy logics of containment. Author Mishuana Goeman grasps at the ramifications of this when she states, "The state has marked our lands and our bodies through the process of creating a geopolitics in which 'borders' enforce state violence and enact settler-colonial biopolitics that materialize in the interpersonal."[57] Part of Lucchesi's digital maps is a reworking of how bodies are perceived and for

[57] Goeman, *Mark My Words,* 205.

whom they should perform rights of healing, reversals of settler narratives, and how they can reconvene collectives in the service of indigenous forms of life making through responding to death. In this instance, a community forms around envisioning necro geographies that unravel the semantic field by which maps "speak" to viewers and reorganize the forms of testimony that are viewed as "legitimate" discourse. Operating outside the strictures of legal discourse, the testimonies that Lucchesi inscribes emphasize collectivity through recognizing death and utilizing digital technologies to engender a form of reverence for those spirits that have been desecrated by settler narratives that defame their subjectivities. In this way, Lucchesi's construction of cartographic testimony summons what are conceived of as disparate and isolated cases from the settler perspective into a constellation of shared narratives that speak from a collective indigenous perspective. This representational logic works against the imperial understanding of maps as a way to conquer and control territory. Maps that represent settler ideals have primarily functioned "in the atomistic context, which aptly describes modern rationalist thought, the environment is secularized and 'atomized' – existing as a 'resource' rather than as part of an interrelated system of being."[58] Conversely, decolonial mapping recognizes the multiplicity of life worlds that coincide, both those embedded in the land

[58] Wendy S. Shaw, R. Douglas K. Herman, and G. Rebecca Dobbs, "Encountering Indigeneity: Reimagining and Decolonizing Geography," *Geografiska Annaler: Series B, Human Geography,* 88, no. 3 (2006): 269.

expressing the complexity of ecosystems and those that arise conceptually from the assertion of those lifeworlds that colonial power has negated. Decolonial maps also highlight the spirit world which animates all that exists—weaving together various forms of confrontation and re-articulation in a manner that is intentionally defiant of settler logic. Lucchesi's maps epitomize the assertion of Tuck and Wang, who state that "decolonization is not accountable to settlers, or settler futurity. Decolonization is accountable to Indigenous sovereignty and futurity" for they spatialize the injustice committed against an individual and draw links to place as a point of departure for decolonial imaginaries.[59] The map's authorial stance evokes multiple temporalities by exposing the interrelationship between victims throughout time and their ties to extant collectives. Decolonial efforts are not static but rather an overlapping process of continuously responding to past inequities to overturn present ones.

In mapping projects such as Lucchesi's, which seek to restructure the point at which power over the objectified subject is leveraged most vehemently, a layered representational field becomes a strategy by which reverberations throughout time showcase the longevity of settler media tactics that deform the representation of victims. Numerous scholars have written about how press coverage, documentary films, photographs, and images of indigenous women presented in courtrooms both in life and death are positioned as marginalized,

[59] Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, "Decolonization is not a metaphor," *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society,* 1, no. 1 (2012): 35.

deviant, and prone to violence due to their negligence. Yasmin Jiwani and Mary Lynn Young theorize that stereotypes of indigenous women oscillate between a presumed degeneracy and the projection of respectability that is magnified by a public sphere that reflects colonial legacies and wages war against the women portrayed within that sphere.[60] Sherene H. Razack conceptualizes the racialized and sexualized violence that indigenous women endure as a scopic regime of terror that exploits the mutilated bodies of MMIW victims to consolidate their disposability.[61] She states, "The violence that is written on the flesh tells the colonial story of whose bodies have value."[62] Katherine Morton writes of how violence against indigenous women is naturalized and legitimized by deploying a revised version of the colonial binary of civilized/savage. In this paradigm, victims of MMIW are weighed against a beautiful/ugly binary in which their labor is considered indecorous, the spaces they occupy as marginalized, and their bodies are marked as diseased or otherwise damaged. This framework's aesthetic and political dimensions operate to enforce "social exclusion, subordination, and power inequality."[63] Morton emphasizes that the billboards and posters used to "raise consciousness" amongst the general public in Vancouver and deployed by state agencies portray unsympathetic

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[60] Yasmin Jiwani and Mary Lynn Young, "Missing and Murdered Women: Reproducing Marginality in News Discourse," *Canadian Journal of Communication,* 31, no. 4 (2006): 895.
[61] Sherene H. Razack, "Gendering Disposability," *Canadian Journal of Women and the Law*, 28, no. 2 (2016): 291.
[62] Ibid.
[63] Katherine Morton, "Ugliness as Colonial Violence: Mediations of Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women," In *On the Politics of Ugliness* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 261.

representations of MMIW victims. These billboards utilize mugshots or otherwise negative imagery as opposed to those images circulated by friends and family to memorialize or advocate for victims. Morton posits that this divide illuminates the structural racism and sexism that underpins representations of native women.[64] The insistent and structural manner in which indigenous women are portrayed as degenerate, undeserving of protection, inviting danger, and inherently lawless, erects boundaries to their social visibility. Lisa Marie Cacho argues that racialized and sexualized bodies are constructed as inherently criminal and thus cast out from the purview of the law's protection which rests upon a conceptualization of morality that privileges white subjects.[65] The preponderance of negative imagery within the press and disseminated throughout courtrooms and public spaces buttress a regime of representation that portends to care for indigenous women, and attend to the violence mobilized against them, yet consistently dehumanizes them, casting them out from domains of care and redress, thus compounding the traumas they suffer.

Speaking against mediated narratives that cordon off and stereotype indigenous women's lives and deaths is to reclaim the dignity of those lives and simultaneously expose the mechanisms by which they were demeaned and that contributed to their death. Lucchesi maps the institutional data points that

[64] Ibid, 263.
[65] Lisa Marie Cacho, *Social Death: Racialized Rightlessness and the Criminalization of the Unprotected* (New York, NY: NYU Press, 2012), 5.

segregate and minimize press coverage of indigenous women's deaths and that contribute to their illegibility as victims. By providing an alternative aesthetic format to elucidate indigenous women's deaths, Lucchesi also alters the discursive possibilities that would typically foreclose such deaths in mainstream news narratives. In an analysis of two victims, both of whom were found murdered by strangulation on Sandy Beach, in what is now known as Thunder Bay, Canada, in 1966, Luchessi contextualizes the life of Jane Bernard and Doreen Hardy, though mapping their life trajectories against the lack of coverage or care provided by the media and the state.[66]

Recovering the sole images available in press reports, two faded and grainy photographs, Lucchesi situates Jane and Doreen's faces as circular portraits overlaid upon the outline of Animbiigoo-zaaga'igan (Lake Nipigon), which acts as a focal point for the reservations that each of the victims came from. Along the SouthEast coast of the lake, Doreen's image is identified by what was once known as the Rocky Bay First Nation – Biinjitwaabik Zaaging Anishinaabek. Alongside the central west coast of the lake, Jane is identified Kiashke Zaaging Anishinaabek. A perforated line marks each of their journey from their origin points in first nation territories to a numerical box asserting the first data point that charts their migration to Animeki Wikwed (Thunder

[66] Annita Hetoevėhotohke'E. Lucchesi, "Mapping Geographies of Canadian Colonial Occupation: Pathway Analysis of Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls," *Gender, Place & Culture,* 26, no. 6 (2019): 9.

Bay), in which Lucchesi notes that the media exhibited a lack of care for the lives of these women before their deaths. The map includes a legend that illuminates key dates in the media and legal narratives circumscribing their deaths, and this is visualized as a perforated thread weaving through the coastline of Animeki Wikwed, condensing the afterlives of these women into their mediated neglect. Subverting the original intent of a map's legend, Lucchesi uses it as an indictment of the state and the media, making the key symbols on this map a reflection of their absolute negligence.[67]

From the time of their deaths in August of 1966, the only identifying feature that granted Jane and Doreen visibility with the press was the keyword phrase "murdered aboriginal woman," which Lucchesi identifies as a reductive framing that portrays their death as inevitable.[68] The data point that underpins this conclusion is that Lorraine Rivers, another woman murdered a few days earlier than Jane and Doreen, who was not identified as aboriginal in the media, received undue attention in comparison.[69] By 1976, their conjoined murders are considered a cold case, and it is only forty-four years later, against the backdrop of a rise in consciousness concerning MMIW, that the Ontario Provincial Police reopened the case and offered a substantial reward for any information leading to the resolution of their cases. Nothing substantial arose from this renewed

[67] Ibid, 7.
[68] Ibid, 6.
[69] Ibid, 8.

action, though, and subsequently, in 2016, the families of both Doreen and Jane were set to testify before the Canadian national inquiry into MMIW.[70]

These data points act as a form of cartographic testimony that makes explicit that necropolitical geographies are embedded within the landscape. They are activated through racialized and gendered representations that obscure that indigenous women are victimized and terrorized at higher rates than the dominant population. Lucchesi intervenes by initiating a re-archival process in which she retrieves the dead to imbue them with life via their renewed visualization in cartographic terms. The death worlds these women inhabited were minimally reconstructed and largely obscured by the press and the police by reinforcing negative stereotypes or entirely ignoring the complexity of their lives in the assessment of their deaths. Lucchesi targets the paucity of media coverage and the absence of any substantiating details that could chart their lives and uses this absence to indict the state. Her map thus acts to conserve what can be known about the victims, to sustain the memory of their life and death within the public sphere by chronicling the course of media coverage and state interventions, over sixty years later, and to correlate their spirits to all who suffered similar fates. The background of the map comprises gradated images of multiple indigenous women who also died in Thunder Bay and to whom Jane and Doreen are intrinsically connected. This visualization

[70] Ibid, 9.

does not collapse the distinction between each woman's story. Instead, the images underlying Doreen and Jane's trajectories suggest a communal experience of violence that cannot be uncoupled from the pervasive forms of discrimination that encompass all of their deaths. There is an intimacy relayed here, one that transcends time and insists upon recognition, not before the eyes of the state, but before the eyes of all those that identify with the kinds of violence that have marked the lives and deaths of indigenous women.

The continuities that Lucchesi charts reflect her defiance of and negation of a chronological understanding of time. "Rather than unifying reality, the movement of linear time has been used to alienate individuals and divide groups into intelligent and slow, saved and unsaved, believer and heathen, developed and undeveloped, and civilized and primitive, thus excluding most of the world's people and their knowledge from history and thus metaphysical interest."[71] By drawing from the margins of desolate and incomplete archives to reanimate the specific kinds of temporal amnesia that had allowed Doreen and Jane's lives and death to become submerged and seemingly irretrievable, Lucchesi turns these gaps into a form of testimonial that implicates those forces that effectively killed them. She transforms analog ephemera such as tactile press clippings, the fraying remnants of microfiche that remain, and black and white prints that have faded from view and reanimates them through composite digital graphics that

[71] Jefferey D. Anderson, "Chapter Six: Space, Time and Unified Knowledge: Following the Path of Vine Deloria, Jr." *Counterpoints,* 379 (2011): 100.

simultaneously reclaim the physical landscape as well as the representation of indigenous life and death.[72] By contrasting large color portraits of contemporary victims of MMIW found within the same environment and positioning them underneath the miniature, grainy portraits of Jane and Doreen, the continuum between the kinds of violence that underpin their lives is made evident. In her analysis of the abuse of bodies and the landscapes and modes in which they are made violable, Kristine Stiles writes, "Where such continuous peril exists, trauma is constant. The task is to undermine its invisibility. For its concealed conditions, its silences, are the spaces in which the destructions of trauma multiply."[73] It is precisely to this point that Lucchesi's work mobilizes and seeks to mitigate and ultimately eradicate the conditions that perpetuate trauma for both the victims and their survivors by mapping the "silences" and transforming them into a decolonial vision of cartographic testimony.

Digital Repatriation of the Dead and Disappeared

Frantz Fanon writes, "Decolonization, which sets out to change the order of the world, is, obviously, a program of complete disorder."[74] Yet, in approaching the decolonial efforts of Lucchesi, I suggest that it is not a disorder but an alternative order that is erected to disavow the systematization of settler

[72] Lucchesi, "Mapping Geographies of Canadian Colonial Occupation," 6.
[73] Kristine Stiles, "Shaved Heads and Marked Bodies: Representations from Cultures of Trauma," in *On violence: A reader,* eds. Bruce B. Lawrence and Aisha Karim (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), 524.
[74] Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1965), 36.

logic and its institutions. Instead of an anti-colonial effort that consistently returns to thinking about the colonizer's power, decolonial efforts maintain their integrity by constructing channels out of these power structures to produce enclaves in which indigenous knowledge, indigenous lifeways, indigenous defiance, and indigenous futures are empowered. Such decolonial efforts move beyond post-colonial theories of recognition concerning a dual-consciousness and its double-bind in order to externalize colonial harm rather than internalize it.[75] A decolonial approach to a genocidal regime acknowledges that history has inflicted "a wound to the soul of Native American people that is felt in agonizing proportions to this day," but that this anguish can be mobilized in impassioned and creative ways to construct a future devoid of suffering through an invocation of the dead.[76] The memory of countless massacres from Wounded Knee to Sand Creek, Washita, Camp Grant, Bridge Gulch, and Marias overlap with an estimated 13 million native deaths in the US and 175 million in the Western Hemisphere in the Americas under colonial rule and have prompted critical reflections on the necessity of mourning as intrinsic to healing.[77] Jack Norton writes of his return to the grounds upon which settlers of the gold rush killed 153 Native Americans

[75] W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Bantam Books, 1989).
[76] Eduardo Duran and Bonnie Duran, *Native American Postcolonial Psychology* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1995), 27.
[77] David Michael Smith, "Counting the Dead: Estimating the Loss of Life in the Indigenous Holocaust, 1492-Present," (paper presented at the proceedings of the Twelfth Native American Symposium, Southeastern Oklahoma State University, 2017) 13.

at the Natural Bridge site near Weaverville, California. The intensity of his emotions in their recollection stemmed from his view that genuine mourning was thwarted at the moment of death. He writes,

> There had been no time to hold the dying ones' hands to ease their journey. Not time for simple acts of love, of wiping the brow or sitting quietly beside them. No time for moments or acts of love in life for those going from life…There had been no ceremonies, no rituals by survivors for the necessary mourning. There was no one to help move one's spirit song to the vibrant stirrings of the greater song…unmourned, disrespected, and perhaps trapped, these tragic forms hovered above a quiet spot one hundred and twenty-five years later.[78]

Norton's reflections illustrate the concept of blood memory which proposes that an indigenous individual's life experience is sensually and psychically connected to one's ancestors' experiences. That embodied knowledge transcends individual lived experience and filters through time to touch all aspects of native life, coloring it with a collective sense of belonging and realization. That the rituals of the past reside within an individual regardless of whether or not they may practice them, that ancient memories come to bear their weight upon the present moment, that topographies of land and sky are already imbricated within an individual on a cellular level, and that blood and time perpetually intermingle in concentric ways to instill this intergenerational connection. As Nancy Marie Mithlo defines it, the concept of blood memory moves beyond biology and evokes

> …in an expanded sense, the internalized memories of communal history, knowledge, and wisdom. Blood memories are powerful political tropes

[78] Jack Norton, "Traversing the Bridges of Our Lives," *American Indian Quarterly,* Vol 13. No. 4 (1989): 351

mobilized to call attention to colonialism's legacies in contexts as diverse as battlefields, boarding schools, and sacred sites. This common tribal value of multigenerational remembrance runs directly counter to prevailing Western traits of individual achievement, lack of transgenerational memory, and transcendence of one's genealogical fate and place of origin.[79]

Thus, blood memory oscillates between collective and individual thought and operates in contradistinction to the blood quantum theory used to identify tribal affiliation and justify colonial categorizations of native "authenticity." Blood memory, instead, recognizes that colonial violence ties the land, body, sovereignty, and memory together in complex configurations while linking past crimes and present realities to one another through tribal kinship. This is especially relevant to how Lucchesi addresses MMIW, for she draws attention to the indistinction between "my" body and that of victims killed or disappeared. This approach is echoed in Linda Hogan's memoir of how violence lives inside and throughout a collective body. Hogan writes, "Terror, even now… is remembered inside us, history present in our cells that came from our ancestor's cells, from bodies hated, removed, starved, and killed."[80] It is as if there is a permanent infrastructure of affect that binds and coheres disparate temporalities with repercussive memories that interlock past and present in an infinite continuum, making the experience of the dead indistinguishable from that of the living who succeed them.

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[79] Nancy Mithlo, "Blood Memory and the Arts: Indigenous Genealogies and Imagined Truths," *American Indian Culture and Research Journal,* 35, no. 4 (2011): 106.
[80] Linda Hogan, *The Woman Who Watches over the World: a Native Memoir* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton, 2001), 59.

Lucchesi's construction of a digital database that amasses and documents MMIW cases is an intentional strategy to redesign the forums in which death is represented, drawing them out of settler domains and into a sacred indigenous space. Quintessential to Mbembe's articulation of necropower and the politics that underlie it are the emergence of death spheres that determine new calibrations of resistance and sacrifice. He refers to these domains as "death worlds" that constitute "topographies of cruelty" in which whole populations are subjugated to the status of "the living dead."[81] Lucchesi's database charts these worlds by explicitly identifying the terrain upon which bodies are discovered, the enclaves in which they go missing, and the socio-political dynamics that demarcate spaces in which bodies are violated. Thus, the database speaks to the inherent grief and evident loss of community members while testifying on behalf of the victims by identifying patterns that link native women's deaths to longstanding forms of colonial violence and erasure. As such, Lucchesi engages in a form of digital repatriation or bringing the body "home" by refusing to allow non-native media coverage, federal agencies, and police discrimination to narrativize MMIW victims or act as the sole stewards of documents that detail their deaths. In this way, Lucchesi is enacting a critical media practice analogous to the indigenous-led movements initiated in the late 1980s and extending into the 1990s that sought the physical repatriation of human remains.

[81] Achille Mbembe, "Necropolitics," *Public Culture,* 15, no. 1 (2003): 39.

The 1990 Native American Graves and Repatriation Act was a significant piece of legislation that circumscribes the discovery, retrieval, and restitution of human remains, funerary objects, and sacred items and that mandates that both their discovery and delivery upon any native or federal lands is to be identified and allocated to the appropriate tribe or lineal descendent to whom such remains belong.[82] The Act sought to, in part, rectify the exploitative practices of cultural, anthropological, academic, and medical institutions of the settler state from claiming ownership over native remains and objects. Similarly, the 1989 National Museum of the American Indian Act targeted the Smithsonian specifically with a wholesale request to return any human remains or funerary objects belonging to indigenous tribes. These acts, which sought to begin the process of reversing ownership claims to post-mortem bodies and objects, were also in part a rebuke to the violent racist ideologies that sought to criminalize and violate the bodies of indigenous peoples.

The impulse to collect and preserve human remains to ratify Western culture over and against indigenous lifeways found its "scientific" rationale in constructing ethnological theories. A clinical gaze committed to categorizing and dividing racial, ethnic, and gendered differences and assigning moralistic assumptions emerged from such theories. "Depersonalized and desacralized, the

[82] US Congress, House, Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act of 1990, HR 5237, 101st Congress, Introduced in House July 10, 1990, https://www.congress.gov/bill/101st-congress/house-bill/5237

body became data. It was redefined symbolically, politically, and scientifically and was seen more as a specimen for observation than as the temple of the soul."[83] This ideological approach to the body worked to justify the plundering of native burial grounds and disseminate native artifacts into a network of settler institutions. Curators, archeologists, geneticists, and others subjected the death-ways of Native Americans to a clinical gaze. Ignoring the ceremonial value and spiritual beliefs imbricated within their "collections," Western institutions ascribed false narratives to the representations they constructed around native culture, relegating indigenous remains to a consistent procedural analysis, thus disrupting indigenous after-lives. In this way, the plundering of native burial grounds damns the body and the spirit to the realm of disciplinary procedures that Foucault describes as a "micro-physics" of power that creates docile bodies of subjection.[84] That such relations of power would also be practiced post-mortem attests to the intensity and scrutiny with which settler logic vacates any possibility of ethical or compassionate care regarding the indigenous dead.

In contrast to the compilation of archives, case files, and exhibitions that negate their subject's spiritual content, Lucchesi engages in acts of forensic recuperation, in which "repatriation" occurs in digital terms. While the broad concept of digital repatriation has gained currency over the last twenty years, it

[83] Robert E. Bieder, "The Representations of Indian Bodies in Nineteenth-Century American Anthropology," in *Repatriation Reader: Who Owns American Indian Remains,* ed. Devon Abbott Mishesuah (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000), 165.
[84] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage, 2012), 139.

has primarily involved returning cultural ephemera to indigenous communities from museums, archives, libraries, and other cultural institutions born of the settler state. Indigenous designed databases that receive repatriated images of objects overlap with analog repatriation processes, enriching the modes by which indigenous communities gain greater sovereignty over those cultural artifacts stolen from them. Digital repatriation ties to data sovereignty in that it allows indigenous communities to resituate the spiritual, cultural, and intellectual content of artifacts in the modes they were intended to be utilized. While some objects may have lost their centrality to an indigenous cultural paradigm in their absence, their return can spark new associations that reshape a particular tribe's orientation towards the world. As Kim Christen writes, "…digital (or digitized) cultural materials provide an alternative form of and dynamic life for many physical objects. These newly digitized and repatriated materials may stimulate linguistic or cultural revivals, spur contention and disagreement, prompt new cultural forms or popular products, incite new collaborations, and/or forge new types of performances or artistic creations. In every case, however, these materials are inserted into overlapping understandings of access and preservation."[85] Lucchesi's work is thus an innovative endeavor along a spectrum of digital repatriation projects, for her database is not object-oriented in the conventional sense but instead harnesses

[85] Kimberly Christen, "Opening Archives: Respectful Repatriation," *The American Archivist,* 74, no. 1 (2011): 187.

representation itself and reclaims it as an act of spiritual preservation. In this respect, Lucchesi's approach to digital repatriation actively subverts the digital necropolitics of the state by promoting an intentionally *non-civic* engagement with settler institutions and ideologies. Ultimately the information she collects may stem from many of these institutions, and yet she resituates them in a manner that denies settler access.

Drawing from social media profiles, government documents, police reports, and press coverage, Lucchesi has amassed 3000 victim profiles but estimates that she is missing 25,000 cases dating back to 1900.[86] Her collaborator Abigail Echo-Hawk states, "Over the past century, thousands of indigenous women and girls in the US and Canada have gone missing. In life, in the media, and in the data."[87] Data collection and digital repatriation as a critical practice respond to these lacunae by fusing public domain information with personal testimonies in order to inject existing data sets with more extensive evidence and as a form of defiance against mediated erasure or exploitation. Such a practice redirects settler attention away from the native body as a site of interrogation and utilizes the creative reimagining of the case file to reinscribe the narratives of MMIW in a manner that makes their stories a privileged domain rather than a cause for sensationalist headlines. By mapping MMIW

[86] "Why are the Cases of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women Being Ignored?," *Huffington Post,* video, 8:03, November 14, 2018, https://www.huffpost.com/entry/why-are-the-cases-of-missing-and-murdered-indigenous-women-being-ignored_n_5bed90b0e4b0dbb7ea684bab
[87] Ibid.

victims' fate and tracking their cases over time, Lucchesi refuses to relegate their post-mortem existence to visual, legal, journalistic, or scholarly arenas determined by settler-colonial logic. Retrieving disparate representations of MMIW is a form of care in which Lucchesi's identity as an indigenous woman, as a victim, as a scholar, activist, and cartographer shapes the political and spiritual methods of her undertaking, coloring her work with intimacy and conviction.

As a survivor of assault and human trafficking herself, Lucchesi's investment in exploring the necropolitical elements of settler logic and its ramifications for indigenous women across the US and Canada is born of an embodied knowledge. She states that the impetus for compiling the SBI database stems from the fact that, "I just felt so frustrated that if my abuser did end up killing me, the violence that I experienced that would have taken my life wouldn't have even been counted in a meaningful way."[88] Thus, her data-driven representations are not just a form of resistance or practicality but a form of defiance that links her potential death to the corpus of cases that are at once distinct from her own and yet spiritually united. By refusing to allow the deaths of thousands of women to slip away into unopened files that languish for decades without resolution, Lucchesi reasserts her autonomy by retrieving and collaborating with the spirits of women she chronicles. She attenuates the circumference of "death worlds" by literally remapping the boundaries that

[88] Ibid.

circumscribe victim identities in the mainstream media, imbuing them with dignity in the process. In this way, Lucchesi transforms her personal investment in necropolitical violence into a collective endeavor that places her in an intimate relationship with the machinations of death as practiced by the settler-colonial state, but also the spirits of those women to whom she is linked. Lucchesi states, "There have been different times in this journey where the women whose spirits are in the database, you can really feel their presence very strongly, and they all have their own personalities and their own way that they carry themselves and you can feel that when they're in the room…So when I think of good memories, I think of the times when the work felt like a lot, and I just couldn't carry it anymore and they were there in the room to kind of pick me up."[89]

In Cheyenne culture, several dynamics determine the ease with which the dead can rest and how another's death impact surviving tribe members. The spirit-self exists independent of the body and continues to engage in Cheyenne culture as an evocation by name or reappearing in dreams.[90] In deaths where the body is violated beyond recognition, the spirit-self may be relegated to the domain of wandering, unable to locate a "home" to rest and consequently

[89] Amy Byers, "Creator of Missing and Murdered Women Database Seeks Justice," *New Mexico News Port*, April 29, 2019, accessed January 15, 2021, https://newmexiconewsport.com/missing-and-murdered-indigenous-women-database-heals-relationship-with-its-creator/

[90] Anne S. Straus, "The Meaning of Death in Northern Cheyenne Culture," *Plains Anthropologist,* 23, no. 79 (1978): 4.

eviscerate into nothingness.[91] Ultimately, the most significant concern for Cheyennes in considering their own deaths is "the possibility of dying in a bad way, of not finding the way [in the spiritual realm], and thus of isolation and loneliness."[92] While Lucchesi's database is not a direct reflection of Cheyenne culture in that she is archiving the fates of indigenous women from many different tribes, nations, and mixed backgrounds, her relationship to these archival materials draws the spirit world into the physical realm by providing a substantial "home" guarded with care. The SBI database is impervious to settler inquiries, and that establishes a protective status for spirits by placing them in community one with another, rather than dispersed, atomized, and objectified within settler-controlled archives. The symbiosis between the spirit world that is provoked through the repatriation of MMIW lives and deaths into the hands of a woman whose own life nearly met a similar fate transcends institutional knowledge and situates Lucchesi's efforts as a deeply personal, metaphysical endeavor, as much as it is one of expressing political concern and attaining justice.

Considering the concept of home as the basis of Lucchesi's work, it is essential to note the metaphysical conception of space that the term invokes. "The objective space of a house – its corners, corridors, cellars, rooms – is far less important than what poetically it is endowed with, which is usually a quality

[91] Ibid, 5.
[92] Ibid, 6.

with an imaginative or figurative value we can name and feel: thus a house may be haunted or homelike, or prison-like or magical. So space acquires emotional and even rational sense by a kind of poetics process, whereby the vacant or anonymous reaches of distance are converted into meaning for us here."[93] In Edward Said's conception of home, it is the poetics of what it provides the inhabitant and how this is psychically and emotionally experienced that determines its value. I contend that Lucchesi's database produces an imaginative rendering of a home that transcends its contents and design. It is not the structural elements of the database that imbue it with its significance per se, though certainly the documents and information recording each woman's death are important. However, it is placing each victim in relation to one another in a shared digital space that lends the database a greater, transcendental significance, for it returns the dead to a space governed by love, care, respect, and healing through which indigenous community members can convene with the dead. As an emblem and constituent part of the MMIW movement, it provides a conscious reordering of necropolitical elements that were tied to state violence and neglect and reconstructs each individual's fate as part of a continuum instead of isolated cases. The SBI database, in this sense, provides a comprehensive sanctuary. It is not a virtual cemetery in the way that some might posit via analogic comparison, but rather a means of putting spirits in

[93] Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 55.

communion with one another through their disparate stories and united fates. Helga Leitner states, "Social movements often seek to strategically manipulate, subvert and resignify places that symbolize priorities and imaginaries they are contesting; to defend places that stand for their priorities and imaginaries; and to produce new spaces where such visions can be practiced, within that space and beyond."[94] The resignification of digital space in a manner that places the dead and disappeared in relation to one another, to draw together disparate nodes of partial histories spread out across newspaper articles, social media accounts, police reports, and government files, is to create both a practical archive that can be used to assess the interrelationship of causes that unite their fates and propose policies and resolutions that mitigate future violence. Most importantly, though, the SBI database produces a cosmological rendering of digital space in which the gathering of spirits reflects an indigenous approach to inquiry in which "Everything is considered to be 'alive' or animated and imbued with 'spirit' or energy…Everything is related, that is, connected in dynamic, interactive, and mutually reciprocal relationships. All things, events, and forms of energy unfold and infold themselves in a contextual field of the micro and macro universe."[95] Lucchesi draws from the macro universe in this instance and formulates a micro-universe of relationships through the shared injury of

[94] Helga Leitner, Eric Sheppard, and Kristin M. Sziarto, "The Spatialities of Contentious Politics," *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers,* 33, no. 2 (2008): 161.
[95] Gregory Cajete and Leroy Little Bear, *Native Science: Natural Laws of Interdependence* (Santa Fe, NM: Clear Light Publishers, 2000), 75.

thousands of women and places them in an interactive configuration in which they are no longer, ostensibly, alone. The database thus resignifies space in a manner that testifies to an individuals' loss but restores their spirit through collective belonging. It is a decolonial gesture that utilizes digital space to redraw boundaries and claim a different kind of sovereignty while producing an alternate form of testimony. While "Colonial occupation itself consisted in seizing, delimiting, and asserting control over a geographical area – of writing a new set of social and spatial relations on the ground,"[96] Lucchesi's database decolonizes the relationship of the dead and disappeared by reclaiming them from neocolonial enclaves – the mediated realms by which cultural imaginaries are formed (the newspaper, the police report, the social media platform) and asserts a sovereignty of spirits.

Data sovereignty is an essential aspect of preserving native cultures, and that affects other forms of sovereignty, including land rights, bodily integrity, and protecting specific forms of cultural expression from appropriation or theft. "Indigenous data sovereignty refers to the right of Indigenous peoples to govern the collection, ownership, and application of data about Indigenous communities, peoples, lands, and resources. Indigenous data is defined here as data in various formats, including digital data and data as knowledge and information. It encompasses data, information, and knowledge about Indigenous

[96] Achille Mbembe, "Necropolitics," (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2019), 25.

individuals, collectives, entities, lifeways, cultures, lands, and resources."[97] In opposition to this, Desi-Rodriguez Lonebear characterizes data dependency as a set of interrelated phenomena that distort indigenous data ecosystems through the continued extraction of data from indigenous communities without assisting them. Rodriguez-Lonebear identifies inconsistency of data sets, irrelevant or inaccurate data, non-indigenous ownership of indigenous data, a scarcity of support for infrastructure to maintain data and ensure its integrity within indigenous communities, and data used to portray indigenous peoples in deficient ways superimposing a hierarchical structure upon data as a means to oppress.[98]

Data sovereignty and data dependency are essential aspects of Lucchesi's MMIW database construction, for she culls from open sources to compile case files and then creates a closed archive that works primarily to serve indigenous communities and surviving family members. The information she collects from the public domain becomes privileged upon its entry into the database. Lucchesi shares this information solely on a "request access" basis filed through the SBI website because while government agencies portend to want to assist in cases of MMIW and resolve its pervasiveness, they do not do the fieldwork themselves to

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[97] Stephanie Carroll Rainie, Tahu Kukutai, Maggie Walter, Oscar Luis Figueroa-Rodriguez, Jennifer Walker, and Per Axelsson, "Data Sovereignty," in *The state of open data: Histories and horizons*, eds. Tim Davies, Stephen B. Walker, Mor Rubinstein, and Fernando Perini. (Cape Town and Ottawa: African Minds and International Development Research Centre, 2019), 301.
[98] Stephanie Russo Carroll, Desi Rodriguez-Lonebear, and Andrew Martinez, "Indigenous Data Governance: Strategies from United States Native Nations," *Data Science Journal,* 18 no. 31 (2019): 3.

close enormous data gaps. The National Missing and Unidentified Person database (NAMUS), which tracks such cases within the US, has consistently produced impoverished case files concerning MMIW. Native women are often misidentified in terms of their tribal affiliation, their indigenous status is ignored, or they are entirely absent from the database. Lucchesi's database, in response, acts as a community-based rejoinder to this federal neglect and one that operates from, as she asserts, a "decolonized space" that recognizes "that an indigenous approach to data is all about relationships."[99] This contradicts Western modes of knowledge acquisition and dissemination, which frequently promotes open access as a direct reflection of the American ethos concerning individual liberty. Conversely, indigenous methods of knowledge production and dissemination prize an intersubjectivity based on an inclusive notion of indigenous needs and lifeways. As Stephanie Russo Carroll, Desi Rodriguez-Lonebear, and Andrew Martinez state in their definition of data sovereignty, self-determination is not only about the governance of beliefs, customs, practices, and records, but also about the reclamation of facts and making them work in the service of indigenous communities in a manner that counteracts both historical and ongoing modes of colonial violence perpetrated by the nation-state.[100]

[99] Annita Lucchesi, "The Sovereign Bodies Institute Interview with Native News," *Native News*, 2019, accessed January 5, 2021, https://nativenews.jour.umt.edu/2019/sb-institute/
[100] Carroll, Rodriguez-Lonebear, and Martinez, "Indigenous Data Governance," 3.

While Lucchesi does not actively share the information collected by SBI with governmental agencies, the impact of her research is widespread and is used for the basis of recommendations to federal and state agencies. In a 2019 congressional hearing to address MMIW, Sarah Deer cited crucial elements from the SBI database to support her policy recommendations. The range of MMIW cases represented by SBI includes indigenous women who have gone missing, are murdered, cases in which suspicious circumstances underlie a woman's death, deaths in the state's custody, and unidentified human remains presumed native.[101] Deer also illuminated the most pressing statistics related to MMIW drawn from the causes and patterns tracked by SBI. This data includes the fact that more than 436 tribes harbor one or more cases of MMIW, that 50% of these cases are murders, 40% are unresolved missing person cases, and that 10% possess an "unknown" status. In terms of patterns, 75% of girls that go missing or are murdered who resided in foster care had reported abuse before their abduction or death, and more than 85% of MMIW victims are mothers.[102] From this information provided by SBI Deer extrapolates that while the causes of MMIW are numerous, that the irresolution of MMIW cases stems from "jurisdictional barriers, indifference from government officials, the lack of cross-jurisdictional communication and planning, failure to fund tribal justice systems

[101] US Congress, Senate, Committee of Natural Resources, Unmasking the Hidden Crisis of Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women (MMIW): Exploring Solutions to End the Cycle of Violence: Hearings before the Subcommittee on Indigenous Peoples of the United States, 116th Congress, 1st sess., 2019, 7.
[102] Ibid.

adequately, and the problem of sex traffickers and other predators targeting Native women specifically."[103] Thus while maintaining closed access is a salient aspect of Lucchesi's research, the representation of her database by indigenous community members functions as a form of counter-archival practice that can intervene in and reform state narratives, improving prospects for justice and resolution at the state and federal level. While "Indigenous methodologies are a separate methodological paradigm; not the opposite or a derivative of Western methodologies,"[104] the repercussions of such paradigms are that they are woven through and against Western institutions, inflecting and unraveling how such institutions maintain power. By putting forth a counter-archive, Lucchesi shifts the dynamics of information sharing and enacts a form of digital repatriation that recasts the terms of when, how, and why her data can be used. These restrictions highlight that sovereignty is not simply about defying the settler state's regulation of spaces and bodies but about producing alternative models that can circumvent and contradict settler regulation of *information* about spaces and bodies.

Data Sovereignty as Care

A flexible and relational form of care arises from the construction and sharing of the SBI database with indigenous communities over and against the

[103] Ibid.
[104] Rainie, Kukutai, Walter, Figueroa-Rodriguez, Walker, and Axelsson, "Data Sovereignty," 300.

representation of the database as a set of facts used to persuade settler state entities to pay attention to the plight of MMIW. Lucchesi states, "We bring the database into ceremony," and in so doing, greater clarity and potential solace are provided to those whose lives are affected by MMIW deaths. While an eliminationist logic pervades settler constructions of race, gender, and place, the SBI database produces a generative logic drawn from the exposition of death that transforms data sovereignty into a form of care. This conceptualization of the database as a form of healing relies on repatriation of media representations, government documents, social media posts, dates, locations, and identifying data concerning the victim to the people for whom the victim embodies a legacy, both in terms of their individual lives and a pattern of colonial and neocolonial violence enacted against the collective. When such information is utilized to persuade settler institutions to authorize policy changes, a shift occurs in which the victims become a representation of atemporal data for the neocolonial regime. The settler institution itself cannot make itself accountable for the historical crimes of colonialism, for, in that recognition, it would have to eschew its power and dismantle its institutions. Even if victims are contextualized in historical terms (meaning that the plight of MMIW is presented as a continuum stemming from the moment of first contact with settlers), lawmakers' focus is always occupied by a present urgency. Thus, the law focuses on resolving injustice in the present moment to divorce itself from a past that it would need to be accountable for. Thus, lobbying policymakers becomes beholden to

presenting quantifiable statistics devoid of meaning apart from their ability to substantiate a case for change translated into settler terms. In opposition to this, the SBI database explicitly ties data to history. It is used to mend indigenous communities by reaffirming that transformative healing is born of recognizing that the processes that determined a victim's death are ongoing and simultaneously tied to the initial foundations of colonial violence. So while restorative justice is one aspiration of the database, it cannot produce restorative healing.

Healing, in this instance, is about assimilating, redefining, and ultimately overturning a disrupted history. It is about reaching back to pre-colonial modes of understanding kinship, values, and customs and acknowledging that they must be modified to contend with the ongoing and continual permutations of violence that affect native identities. One cannot "cure" the ravages of colonialism but instead work to recognize the nuanced ways in which it aims to disintegrate indigenous identity. By making such social ills apparent, the body politic or the collective of indigenous culture can integrate pathos with the possibility of an emancipatory future. Transformative healing is thus about acknowledging a "shared cultural schema or symbolic system" that attempts to both understand and surmount the "continuing antagonistic relationship with the forces or processes that initially caused the problem."[105] A restorative

[105] James B. Waldram, "Transformative and Restorative Processes: Revisiting the Question of Efficacy of Indigenous Healing," *Medical Anthropology,* 32, no. 3 (2013): 194.

healing model would envision a pre-colonial state with a desire to return to an original moment in which the body, mind, and practices of indigenous culture are reestablished without the distorting influence of settler logic. The SBI database exemplifies a transformative approach to healing by rearticulating the terms and methodologies by which trauma is invoked, represented, and attended to in defiance of settler ideologies of care that seek to capitalize on indigenous traumas. Lucchesi notes that entire economies of trauma are erected through the Western perception of indigenous people as always, already, suffering and sacrificial, and as subjects to be pathologized and saved.[106] "This view of Indigenous people allows the legitimacy of the settler state to go unquestioned and casts it as benevolent rather than genocidal."[107] Thus, mainstream services promoting education, social welfare, and psychological assistance perpetuate the very stereotypes that harm indigenous people and can further traumatize individuals working towards healing while vacating responsibility for colonialism's original crimes.[108]

Similar to the movement towards relational aesthetics initiated in the fine art world, Lucchesi works against the reification of social relationships that commoditize and harm indigenous women. In Nicholas Bourriaud's assessment

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[106] Annita Hetoevėhotohke'E. Lucchesi, "Indigenous Trauma Is Not a Frontier: Breaking Free from Colonial Economies of Trauma and Responding to Trafficking, Disappearances, and Deaths of Indigenous Women and Girls," *American Indian Culture and Research Journal,* 43, no. 3 (2019): 57.
[107] Ibid.
[108] Ibid.

of art as a social practice, he points to the hollow way in which art as commerce has become a predictable array of spectacles that subsequently disintegrate social bonds in the interest of commodifying representation.[109] Art on the cusp of the millennium, he posits, is a response to this stagnation, and contemporary artists interested in opening new channels that could derail the strictures of the art world sought to revive intersubjectivity, communal discourse, and being together as key elements of a new relational form.[110] Similarly, Lucchesi responds to the economies of aid that claim to alleviate native trauma while solely commodifying it by changing the approach to the representation of indigenous suffering that has worked to erect these economies. She instead institutes a database that explicitly seeks to pierce this regime of representation and its attendant institutions to forge a form of relational care that operates entirely outside of them. Just as artists that utilize relational aesthetics consciously seek alternative venues that deprioritize the museum and create art that is experiential rather than representational, Lucchesi's database operates external to the closed spaces of settler institutions that seek to objectify indigenous communities and foreclose communal experiences. Instead, the database offers a therapeutic encounter in which representation itself is secondary to the social relations that it enables. The images and documents held within the database contain practical information, but the premise for their

[109] Nicholas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics* (Dijon: Les Presses du Reel, 1998) 9.
[110] Ibid, 15.

collection is to catalyze interactions between indigenous survivors, activists, and kin. In this manner, Lucchesi is facilitating social interstices in and through the database and using it as a method to contend with the privatization of settler economies that capitalize upon indigenous suffering, transforming it into artifice. In opposition to this, Lucchesi's form of relational care centralizes the communicative act enabled by those who interact with her database as a forum for healing that surpasses the aesthetic construction of the database itself. Relational care is thus concerned with creating the conditions by which new socio-political configurations can arise that both circumvent and challenge the sense of alienation that is inevitably produced by indigenous encounters with the settler state. Such a form of care is invested in producing "new models of sociability" in which the symbolic value of the dead and disappeared are capable of acting as remediating emblems.[111] This mode of sociability seeks to reverse the depersonalization that can occur when the very same representations housed within the database are encountered in settler media realms. In this way, Lucchesi is able to invert domination and enable transformative healing simply by coopting and resituating the original regime of representation that circumscribes cases of MMIW, consequently disabling it.

Towards a Sovereignty of Spirits

[111] Ibid, 28.

Lucchesi's work as a cartographer conflates the distinction between one who testifies and one who bears witness for both her database and her maps recall and refract a multiplicity of voices that simultaneously represent a collective experience of violence that is synthesized by her personal experience, compelling the production of her work. In this way, mapping supplants the traditional methods by which testimony is transmitted as a performative speech act or a literary reflection and asserts composite digital data in the form of an archive, and composite digital images in the form of maps, as a methodology of visualizing collective memory and forming a distinct, unique, language that oscillates between the singular and the whole. Whereas Shoshana Felman and Dorain Laub define testimony as "bits and pieces of a memory that has been overwhelmed by occurrences that have not settled into understanding or remembrance, acts that cannot be constructed as knowledge nor assimilated into full cognition, events in excess of our frame of reference,"[112] Lucchesi's cartographic testimony is about charting the cognitive parameters that attempt to invalidate indigenous women's experience of violence. The "bits and pieces" of memory that Felman and Laub identify are not located in a single person when addressing MMIW, and thus testimony in the conventional sense of the word cannot be transmitted by an individual; it can only be accurately portrayed through a collective reordering of the "event" as one born of multiplicity. In

[112] Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 5.

drawing together the deaths and disappearances of native women into a database and highlighting their interrelationship through cartography, Lucchesi is invested in reversing a symbolic, material, and cultural violence that has circumscribed the plight of MMIW by exposing explicitly how the indigenous experience of feminicide is *not* in fact in "excess" of any indigenous woman's frame of reference. It is precisely that "excess" which forms of mediated violence make entirely tangible, thus producing an inescapable, omnipresent reminder of how indigenous women are subjected to what Paulina García-Del Moral identifies as a technology of violence that reifies the abject through representation.[113] It is the opposite of Felman and Laub's definition of testimony because the "excess" entailed by colonialism, the seemingly incomprehensible violence that marks its force, is, in fact, assimilable through its documentation via mapping, data collection, shared testimony, and witnessing, which lends coherence to what is typically thought of as a traumatic, fragmented, memory. To relegate traumatic memory to that which cannot be fully retrieved is to depoliticize its impact by suggesting it has ended and that one can only recall an event that occurred in the past, rather than constituting ongoing violence with contemporary manifestations. Instead, the convergence of multiple forms of testimony in the form of territorial and temporal representations that critique

[113] Paulina García-Del Moral, "Representation as a Technology of Violence: On the Representation of the Murders and Disappearances of Aboriginal Women in Canada and Women in Ciudad Juarez," *Canadian Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Studies,* 36, no. 72 (2011): 37.

settler media paradigms and police negligence propose an integrated way of thinking about how to preserve the integrity of the dead, to honor them, dignify their representations and reverse their desecration in the dominant public sphere.

When Mbembe situates the analytic of necropower as that which is discoverable in the body, he asks, "What place is given to life, death, and the human body (in particular the wounded or slain body)? How are they inscribed in the order of power?"[114] When Indigenous scholars respond and elucidate the contexts that define MMIW, they point to the predatory visualizations, police abuse, and press malformations that devalue indigenous women's bodies and inscribe them in reductive terms. These different registers intersect and produce what Razack deems an "optic of vulnerability" in which the victimization of indigenous women is magnified at the expense of understanding that they are intentionally targeted because the settler state aims to annihilate native sovereignty in its entirety.[115] As Lucchesi states, "Upon arrival, it became clear to settler forces that the way to dominate an Indian nation was to dominate its women." Thus, the empowerment of indigenous women is anathema to settler state logic, and an active reinscription of the body within the order of power via cartographic testimony denies the state the possibility of nullifying the slain bodies of MMIW, the land upon which they rest, and the

[114] Mbembe, "Necropolitics," *Public Culture*, 12.
[115] Razack, "Gendering Disposability," 292.

representations that circulate within the public sphere. Given that the "death world" in this instance is not the plantation, or the colony, or any discrete encampment, but the entirety of the nation-state, unfastening the settler's regime of representation can only be done by operating outside of its ideological bounds and institutional logics. In this way, mapping is not an act of resistance but one of defiance.

By synthesizing colonial violence in its extreme to expose its widespread effects and then translating this into its most personal repercussions by articulating her own story, Lucchesi shifts the set of optics and data that seek to deny her personhood and, by extension, all of indigenous women. This constant shift between the whole and the individual marks the testimonial aspect of her work, simultaneously speaking to a history of genocidal and feminicidal violence while drawing it back into herself and charting how words, images, and locales have violated and impacted her. In describing a map she created to address the difficulty of establishing decolonial love in light of the rhetoric that destroys it, Lucchesi states, "each of the words printed on the map are emblematic of extremely hurtful behavior that occurs in our communities. They were not placed on the image lightly. Many of the words are insults and violence that have been hurled at me personally—descendant, slut, ghetto, half breed, whore, bad family, blood quantum, rape, misogyny, domestic violence, classism."[116] These

[116] Annita Lucchesi, "-Hóhta'Hané: Mapping Genocide and Restorative Justice in Native America," MA Thesis, Washington State University, 2016, 87.

words lacerate as epithets, defining the derealization of one's soul in relation to the categorical dismissal of the whole.

Yoking personal pain to collective degradation, Lucchesi exposes the coordinates of her own relationships in a cartographic testament to the men that have abused her, who have loved her, and that have intermittently made attempts to save her. Exploring the precarious transition between intimacy and abuse, she translates the stories of her lovers, acknowledging their narrative histories as integral aspects of their resulting paths. The map portrays multiple layers of symbols that shift between emblems of their lives including guns, tipis, handcuffs, and books, while interweaving images of abusive texts she received, jail records, and defamatory social media posts attacking her.[117] Deeply ingrained within the strata of the map is an image of each man, nearly imperceptible, an indication of her respect for their privacy, while at the same time harboring a desire to expose their crimes. Having been trafficked, raped, and nearly killed, Lucchesi dares to chart the ramifications of her personal encounters all the while knowing this is indicative of a collective violence that extends beyond herself.

In assessing a history of colonial violence and its impact on indigenous women, Luchessi writes, "It did not require hours and hours of poring over dusty records in an archive, making sense of colonial recordkeeping, or lengthy

[117] Lucchesi, "-Hóhta'Hané," 99.

searches for citations. Much more difficult than that, it required me to turn inwards, and share the data I carry within myself."[118] This self-collective dialectic established in Lucchesi's cartographic testimonies distills the essence of displacing the settler regime of representation by mapping an interpersonal communion with the dead, the disappeared, and then turning their voices inward to translate her own experience of embodied violence. In this manner, her mapping practice embodies what Irit Rogoff terms "the critical process of geographical spatialization" through a translation and depiction that acknowledges "the multi-inhabitation of spaces through bodies, social relations, and psychic dynamics."[119] For Lucchesi, any such translation and its visualization is the reinscription of a self-collective and a refutation of the paradoxical hypervisibility that stereotypes and surveils indigenous women while simultaneously enforcing their violent erasure. This fluidity of sight and negation demands a process of reinscription that both witnesses and testifies to violence but that ultimately engenders forms of redress that can overturn neocolonial binary logic. Andrea Smith addresses this pervasive dichotomy highlighting how settler surveillance monitors what it deems aberrant bodies while intentionally "not-seeing" indigenous territories to facilitate their expropriation and assimilation into the nation-state.[120]

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[118] Ibid, 78.
[119] Irit Rogoff, *Terra Infirma: Geography's Visual Culture* (London: Routledge, 2000), 23.
[120] Andrea Smith, "Not Seeing: State Surveillance, Settler Colonialism, and Gender Violence," in *Feminist Surveillance Studies,* eds. Rachel E. Dubrofsky and Shoshana. Magnet (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015), 26.

The concept of testimony itself is born from the witness who assumes an expert relationship to an event that they recall from memory. The witness, in essence, becomes the primary source that can relay the sensorial, affective, and observational parameters of an event. Testimony about mass death has primarily been seized in the popular consciousness by witnesses at trial and in the literature of bearing witness to the Holocaust. Primo Levi's concept of the drowned and the saved predominates as a lens by which the subsumption of bodies that perished cannot be retrieved.[121] The one who bears witness to death cannot account for, or describe, the experience of the drowned in its dimensionality. However, paradoxically, the saved, implicitly, must account for and testify to the absence of those they witnessed dying, an actual state unto which they cannot possess any factual knowledge. Carolyn Dean characterizes this obligation as the construction of "the moral witness" or one who "embodied the Western imagination of collective violence and determined whose injuries should compel our attention, whose testimony was most credible, and whose deaths we should grieve."[122] Witness testimony, in this sense, became about establishing an ethical compulsion to address crimes against humanity by instilling our belief in not just the facticity of the witness but their virtue in having survived the incomprehensible trauma of genocide. Their survival itself

[121] Primo Levi, *If This Is a Man; and, the Truce* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979).
[122] Carolyn J. Dean, *The Moral Witness - Trials and Testimony after Genocide* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2019) 1-2.

becomes a testament to their capacity to endure and grants them a privileged status that the viewer, the audience, or the reader, cannot ever ostensibly comprehend. This concept of testimony places the witness as the sole arbiter of visceral truths that then parlays the significance of mass death from an individual's perspective back to the uninitiated collective in a manner that attempts to make atrocity intelligible.

In contrast to the privileged individual as the primary source that makes genocide legible to a broader public, the kind of testimony that Lucchesi's work produces exhibits the nuances of feminicide as a collective experience that can never rest solely upon any one individual. Testimony in this instance is not oriented toward a single event such as an isolated genocide, framed by years with beginning and end dates, but rather, it speaks to a continuum that articulates mass death as a series of various refrains. The blood memory of a genocidal past, drawing colonialism's influence forward to expose its relationship to current iterations of gendered violence and how necropower cordons off indigenous women through systematic exploitation in the media, political, and cultural domains, relegating them to mediated death worlds and physical sites to which they are assigned by default. Lucchesi takes the intersection of these forces and subverts them as an act of reclamation. In her database and maps, the dead and the disappeared are not distant and unrelated constellations of unique, individual cases; they are communal spirits whose revivification provide the lifeblood to construct an alternative imagined space

that allows for decolonial defiance, data sovereignty, and digital repatriation as a spiritual endeavor, to emerge. Lucchesi is not the narrator of these women's lives and deaths, but she is both a witness and a survivor, that has forged a unique form of collective testimony that allows the dead to convene through their representation. The digital database, in this instance, is a sanctuary in which spirits are housed together. Their exploited media images, neglected police reports, and the locations of their deaths which have largely been erased are recouped and arranged into a collective of discordant harmonies. In essence, their stories do not make sense without each other because they are intimately bound up in both the longue durée of historical forces and the immediate need to rectify their contemporary impacts. Thus the collective testifies as a presence through a multiplicity of absence. Lucchesi overturns the metaphor of the drowned by making death an active presence that at once provides freedom for the spirits of the dead by the fact that they continue to haunt the living to eradicate the violence enacted against them. "I think that these spirits are very hurt," Lucchesi recounts, "It feels good to them to be counted."[123] Through recognition and repatriation, Lucchesi has erected a digital space that oscillates between the pragmatism of case files and the divinity of the spiritual interconnections that arise from their union in virtual space.

[123] Christa Hillstrom, "The Invisible Victims," *Marie Claire*, June 10, 2019, accessed January 2, 2021, https://www.marieclaire.com/politics/a27560457/native-american-women-missing/

In assessing the distinction between the drowned and the saved, those who died and those who managed to survive the ravages of the camps, Levi writes, “If the drowned have no story, and single and broad is the path to perdition, the paths to salvation are many, difficult and improbable.”[124] He is speaking to the incapacity of survivors to salvage the hell by which those who died in desperate circumstances are damned to obscurity as a collective. How their stories are lost to the massive and overwhelming edifice of death that the Holocaust produced, and that was structurally and socially engineered. The survivor who was tasked with unbelievable compromises to secure their survival makes it through and cannot go back and effectively account for all those who were lost, even though they attempt to. When we consider Lucchesi's work, in contrast, her efforts not only overturn the anonymity of the drowned, but she restores their dignity by shielding their representations from the media, police, and bureaucratic enclaves in which they are traditionally marginalized and devalued. Agamben characterizes Levi as one "who bears witness to the drowned, speaking in their stead, is the cartographer of this new terra ethica."[125] Moreover, it is interesting to draw that parallel through-line to Lucchesi's work, for it is precisely an ethics of cartography and ethics of data that she formulates in respect to the spiritual reconvening of the dead and the disappeared that she

[124] Levi, *If This Is a Man,* 101.
[125] Giorgio Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz : the Witness and the Archive* (New York: Zone Books, 2000), 69.

enacts. By placing their stories in concert, she does not have to *speak* on their behalf. Instead, she allows their collective representation to engender a different form of testimony in and of itself.

Lucchesi writes, "In the Cheyenne language, the verb to 'tell a story' (-hóhta'hané) can also mean 'to testify.' Indeed that word is often used to refer to someone who is providing testimony in court, and the Cheyenne word for 'courthouse' directly translates to 'story-house.'"[126] I suggest here that Lucchesi's conscientious evasion of the traditional courthouse, making the testimony she conjures impervious to judicial inquiries or scions of the state, is a form of decolonial practice that embraces multiplicity in order to make MMIW lives grievable as a collective. Thus, testimony here reflects Judith Butler's assertion that our mutual precarity unites us and compels us to recognize our shared humanity through mourning.[127] Lucchesi innately knows that such social cohesion, such recognition, is not possible within a settler state erected to deny indigenous personhood. Instead, her work draws distinct boundaries, visually, spiritually, and digitally to enable a form of grieving for indigenous loss, only through the whole's resurrection. Thus her work proposes an ethics of mourning and ethics of representation that reflects native cosmologies through an emphasis on interrelationship and cyclical time. Lucchesi notes that "colonialism fundamentally altered this cycle [creation and dissolution in native

[126] Lucchesi, *-Hóhta'hané,* 2.
[127] Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London: Verso, 2004).

cosmologies] by redefining Indigenous deaths at massacres as unmourned, and so quick that the fundamental right to come to terms with their own mortality was stolen."[128] Restoration of the right to mourn, the right to grieve, the right to heal, and the right to a decolonized future is enacted by interceding in the realms of disappearance and death that the settler state prescribes. Not only do such interventions produce a particular form of data sovereignty at the point of erasure to reanimate all those that have been lost, but it creates a profound investment in what Sarah Deer calls the sovereignty of the soul. Perhaps it also allows for a sovereignty of spirits and an alternative form of justice and freedom to reign for both the living and the dead. Lucchesi states, "my work as a whole is my attempt, in part, to assist these spirits to move beyond."[129]

[128] Annita Hetoevėhotohke'E. Lucchesi, "Spirit-Based Research: A Tactic for Surviving Trauma in Decolonizing Research," *Journal of Indigenous Research,* 7, no. 1 (2019): 2.
[129] Lucchesi, *-Hóhta'hané,* 76.

CHAPTER THREE

Open Source Investigations as Practice: The Forensic Aesthetics of Post-Human Testimony

"There is a power that aesthetics have but I don't think it's the same kind of power that politics have, inherently. I think, 99.999% of the time these things are completely conjoined, and are, in order to do some kind of ideological work, or do some kind of political work, but I don't think they are necessarily the same thing. I do think that there is a something to aesthetics which is in excess of power, and is in excess of the political, although 99.999% of the time it's so wrapped up with the political that you can't tell the difference."[1]

-Trevor Paglen

Figure 2 Trevor Paglen, *Unmarked 737 at "Gold Coast" Terminal, 2006. Distance ~ 1 mile.*

[1] Trevor Paglen, "Trevor Paglen in Conversation with Tyler Green," Lecture, Altman-Siegel Gallery, San Francisco, CA, July 30, 2020.

The plane is small and compact, with a red stripe running the length of its body extending towards the cockpit. (Figure 2) To any casual observer, the man standing on the tarmac, ready to ascend the flight of stairs, might very well be the pilot running a last-minute check on the exterior features of the aircraft. The sky is pitch black, and the white contours of the plane stand out against an anonymous background. Numerical markings on the aircraft are blurred, indicating that the farthest reaches of the lens could not grasp its details from a distance. This is the "limit telephotography" of Trevor Paglen, and this image entitled *Unmarked 737 at "Gold Coast" Terminal, 2006. Distance ~ 1 mile* is one fragment of an expansive project that charts the "dark geography" of the US government's extraordinary rendition program. [2]

Blending investigative journalism with fine art production under the self-created rubric of "experimental geography," Paglen documents the shadow world of material traces that point to the covert operations of the US government.[3] In isolation, this image infers clandestine activities. However, within a corpus of digital photography examining the visible remnants of purportedly "invisible" programs, Paglen discloses a network of civilians, government administrators, and military officials for whom the "blank spots on

[2] Limit telephotography is a term Paglen uses to address the difficulty of photographing at great distances with clarity. It is both a technical term referring to the limitations of a telescopic lens to render distant landscapes in focus and a conceptual framing concerning the limitations of visualizing state secrecy.

[3] Experimental geography is a phrase that Paglen invented in 2002 to describe his art practice as an amalgam of unconventional approaches exploring the relationship between the production of space with its cultural and ideological significance.

the map" or black sites are remarkably clear.[4] By photographing the infrastructure of state secrecy, a seemingly innocuous plane becomes a representational strategy to address the kidnapping, torture, and the methods by which necropower operates. By sifting through public flight logs, examining the redacted portions of the US Department of Defense budget, and interviewing former captives, Paglen's work launches a dragnet examination of the global surveillance state, the war on terror, and its victims.

While the Gold Coast terminal is where military officials and contractors are transported to and from secret military bases, this plane, in particular, is a part of a fleet of private aircraft leased by the US government from unidentified civilians that have been used to kidnap suspected terrorists and render them to black sites dispersed throughout the world. While the image itself is undramatic, the seats aboard such planes have been filled with countless ghost detainees, absent from official records, intentionally written out of history, and cast into a groundless world in which flights depart and land in relative obscurity.[5] Their destination an unmarked prison, and the extent of their torture and subsequent admissions determining their fate.

[4] Black sites refer to undisclosed locations used by the government to conduct highly classified military operations.
[5] Ghost detainees are those persons held at black sites whose identities are concealed by the US government. By rendering these persons anonymous, military personnel and government officials are shielded from any legal consequences concerning the abusive practices deployed during detainee interrogation.

Paglen's work on the extraordinary rendition program is an early example of open-source investigative research conducted in a post 9-11 era in which artists sought to amalgamate investigative skills, journalistic inquiries, digital technologies, and conceptual paradigms to produce digital media projects that defied categorical boundaries. Using the art world as a premise to position the politics and regressions of the "war on terror," Paglen sought to unravel the necropolitical conditions of modern state power by depicting its material traces. Positioned within the art world, his research, lectures, images, and installations extend beyond it by addressing different publics. Like many open-source investigation practitioners, Paglen delivers lectures to a broad audience from geography departments, to tech conventions, and in human rights forums. While he is recognized primarily as an artist, the multitude of venues in which his work produces discourse and influences political ideas illuminates an activist stance that transcends mere aesthetics.

By insisting upon a distinction between politics and aesthetics, that confines art production to a relatively apolitical stance due to its inclusion in a market-driven economy, the surreptitious nature of projects such as Paglen's become obscured. In a world rife with discourses that erect arbitrary boundaries between the kind of political work that art, and more specifically, images can accomplish, Paglen underscores the fact that "art and activism are not mutually exclusive, and when mobilized within a meaningfully complex form of life—the kind that desperately needs to be reinvented today—they might not

only coexist, but challenge each other's autonomy and representational conventions in provocative ways."[6] This challenge is thus met by Paglen, who refuses to be consigned to categorical specificity. His work exemplifies how art can move within and beyond the confines of galleries and museums, at once influencing the politics of those venues while simultaneously transcending them.

Given that Paglen's oeuvre largely consists of digital photographs, his work is consistently positioned within what Azoulay characterizes as rigid conceptual parameters that sequester photographs and enfolds them within "the aegis of art discourse" that foregrounds a fabricated opposition between the aesthetic and the political.[7] This opposition is unreasonable in her view, for it negates the genuine encounter between viewer, subject, and photographer that is the proposition of all photographs, but especially those made under duress, with the intent to address political ills. The subject of the photograph, in this instance, is always "co-present" at the moment that the viewer bears witness to their pain.[8] In this equation, the power of the subject is a necessary element imbued with an agency that art historical discourse concerning photography has worked to foreclose. Paglen's images, alongside others that engage in open-source research, has elevated and reconceptualized how the politics of display can empower the proverbial "subject" of the image, which is implicitly those

[6] T. J. Demos, *The Migrant Image: The Art and Politics of Documentary During Global Crisis*. (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2013), 91
[7] Ariella Azoulay, "Getting Rid of the Distinction Between the Aesthetic and the Political," *Theory, Culture & Society,* 27, no. 7-8 (2010): 3.
[8] Ibid.

subjects who have been tortured or killed through necropolitical schema. So while Azoulay writes of subjects in the conventional sense, of people displayed within a photographic composition, the fundamental contradiction that this chapter addresses are images that speak to corporeal violence enacted by the state, without representing the wounded body itself.

Although Paglen's images are implicitly pejorative in their assessment of human rights violations in that they seek to unravel and expose state abuse, entirely absent are the faces or names of those who suffered under the dominion of the American state positioned at the margins of the globe. The extraordinary rendition program centers on bodies. Kidnapped bodies, blindfolded, masked, shackled, deported, tortured, and killed. Anonymous bodies designated as "ghosts" for whom Paglen constructs images that outline the infrastructure of their demise, imparting the gravity of their circumstances, and yet rehearsing their fates in material terms. This lack of human figuration is an intrinsic feature of the work explored in this chapter, signifying a turn towards post-human testimonies via digital imagery that assess human rights by examining the infrastructural elements that negate them.

The absence of any figuration, in some ways, points to the very efficacy of the extraordinary rendition program itself. By shielding the public from the exercise of torture and supplanting its nomenclature with euphemisms such as "enhanced interrogation tactics" against "enemy combatants" that were subject to "indefinite detention" without proper recourse to either national or

international law, the US government was able to defy international protocols concerning human rights and abandon any adherence to the Geneva convention statutes pertaining to the capture, detention, and treatment of prisoners of war.

Redefining war with the very proposition of terror as its coda took place in an atmosphere of palpable fear alongside real and imagined threats that endured for years after the initial shock of the state and its citizens emerged into a post 9/11 era. The rendition program's transgression of legal norms complemented the limitations instituted by the Patriot Act's restrictions of civil rights to privacy, casting patriotism to a certain extent as a will to submit to these new strictures.[9] However, the blatant abuse enacted under the rendition program encapsulates another kind of will, a will on the part of the US government to surrender the vision of human rights that it had helped to shape post-WWII. "What is 'extraordinary' about this more recent form of rendition is the role of torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading (CID) treatment reportedly involved in such transfers: US officials reportedly are seeking opportunities to transfer terrorist suspects to locations where it is known that they may be tortured, hoping to gain useful information with the use of abusive interrogation

[9] The Patriot Act was congressional legislation enacted in 2001 and designed in response to 9/11. Created with the intent to detect, monitor, and thwart potential acts of terrorism, it greatly expanded the surveillance capacities of the US government, allowing law enforcement greater access to personal information, warrants, wiretaps, and the bank or business records of anyone identified as a potential terrorist suspect. The controversy surrounding the Act concerned its expansion of government power versus a citizen's right to privacy.

tactics. At best, they appear to be turning a blind eye to abuses."[10] With access to a proliferation of digital technologies, artists working on the cusp of the new millennium began to expand their aesthetic critiques of the state, transforming a governmental "blind eye" into one of transparency to raise public awareness and redefine how human rights violations are visualized, interpreted, and resolved.

While open-source investigations could broadly entail any approach to research that utilizes public domain information, the kinds of artists and theoreticians that engage in open-source investigations that have gained prominence in the post 9-11 era foreground an ethics of witnessing that is reliant upon both the construction of new digital imaginaries as well as the practicality of digital verification. Thus, my concern in this chapter is examining how a conceptual artist such as Walid Raad became an early adopter of public domain resources to construct a digital archive of the Lebanese Civil Wars and how his aesthetics and theoretical innovations have been appropriated by open-source agencies such as Forensic Architecture (FA) founded by Eyal Weizman.

Forensic Architecture refers to the practice of examining material evidence of political conflicts to address state violence and resolve human rights violations through assembling a panel of researchers from different disciplines

[10] Center for Human Rights and Global Justice, "Torture by Proxy: International and Domestic Law Applicable to Extraordinary Renditions," (2004): 4.

that employ creative methodologies. Weizman describes his agency's work as such,

> Our investigations employ pioneering techniques in spatial and architectural analysis, open source investigation, digital modelling, and immersive technologies, as well as documentary research, situated interviews, and academic collaboration…We present our investigations in international courtrooms, parliamentary inquiries, United Nations (UN) assemblies, as well as in citizens' tribunals and truth commissions. We also present our work in keynote lectures, seminars, publications and exhibitions in art and cultural institutions. We use these forums to reflect on the political and cultural context of our work.[11]

I cite these practitioners as the inheritors of government or military efforts in the open-source domain to show how they use the same resources to empower civilians in the exposure of and resistance to necropolitical violence. Thus I begin the chapter with a detailed history of the evolution of the US government's open-source investigative efforts to provide a genealogical history of the practice that stands in contrast to the kinds of interventions that open-source practitioners are enacting today. Such investigations find their historical precedent in monitoring foreign broadcasts leading up to and throughout WWII. Contemporary iterations of open source investigations have capitalized upon digital technologies to transform the notion of authority, for they have enabled civilians and government agencies alike to reach into digital databases and to exploit various tools to conduct more potent and incisive visual analytics. By appropriating and subverting the bureaucratic, sovereign logic of open-source

[11] "Forensic Architecture: About-Agency," *Forensic Architecture*, accessed May 1, 2021, https://forensic-architecture.org/about/agency

government agencies, open-source investigation practitioners have deployed innovative visual techniques to deconstruct and reassemble alternate renditions of mass death. Through these interventions, open-source investigators make truth claims in a variety of contexts ranging from the art world to courtrooms, academic forums, the independent press, and the digital public sphere.

I use the term *open source investigation practitioners* (OSIP) as a way of acknowledging the varied individuals, agencies, and approaches that this practice can entail and that have arisen independently of government entities.[12] In this context, a practitioner constitutes someone invested in developing a methodology that transforms public domain information into evidence of criminal activity and the work of bad social actors to engineer justice. The word practitioner arose in the 1540s and is based on the notion of "practicus" or one that is fit for action. This definition is conjoined with the notion of a parishioner, or one who partakes in a community or parish. However, the definition that most curiously suits contemporary open-source practice stems from Samuel Johnson's seminal dictionary, which describes a practitioner as "one who uses any sly or dangerous arts."[13] By nature, OSIP are attempting to unearth that

[12] While I focus on the open-source endeavors of Walid Raad and Eyal Weizman in this chapter, there are multiple open-source initiatives that span academic, architectural, legal, human rights, and journalistic contexts. Most notable amongst these efforts are Bellingcat, SITU, the Human Rights Investigations Lab at UC Berkeley and UC Santa Cruz, the Visual Investigations unit of the New York Times, and Amnesty International's Digital Verification Corp amongst others.
[13] Online Etymology Dictionary, 2001, "practitioner," accessed August 1, 2020, https://www.etymonline.com/search?q=practitian

which is not readily visible, and this involves a certain amount of risk in their engagement with state power. OSIP also cultivate an expansive networked community. The structure of their investigations is contingent upon numerous contacts and vast resources that can span a multitude of digital databases and geographical locales in the service of political agendas. In this way, the state power that manifests through traditional open-source investigations led by government entities, and the civilian initiatives that attempt to critique or subvert them, are enfolded within a matrix of differing interventions into the public domain.

I use the term "practitioners" to demarcate between the state use of open-source investigations and that of artists or agencies to expose how different methodologies, visual ephemera, and their presentation in multiple contexts reflect an interplay of ideologies that influence, overlap, and frequently challenge one another. Through OSIP, the use of the internet has come to symbolize a new terrain in which progressive politics become pointed case files, digital archives, museum exhibitions, tactical media, journalism, and courtroom evidence, intentionally expanding the contexts in which their work can be viewed and understood in order invite broader public interest. The allure of such investigations is that they hold the promise of civil innovations that can reinvigorate political debate and empower the proverbial layman to have a say in disrupting malevolent state power. In this way, progressive OSIP (as opposed to the hegemony of the state) seek to exploit the fragmented and

decontextualized nature of information available online and map out the constellations of often obscure ephemera so that they may cohere and reveal the true nature of necropower.

In conducting such investigations, progressive OSIP are often siloed into recognizable genres such as artists, investigators, journalists, or academics to present their work in public venues. However, their most salient characteristic opposes such clear positionality, for the one trait that unites these practitioners is their desire to question the boundaries between research, art, architecture, materiality, digitality, legitimacy, and authority. Interdisciplinarity is fundamental to the practice of progressive OSIP, and thus conflating or evading ideological boundaries constitutes a political position unique to their endeavors. While the work of Walid Raad's The Atlas Group and Eyal Weizman's Forensic Architecture both challenge the truth claims put forth by state entities, their respective approach to veracity and visibility are markedly different. The creative projects that I examine in this chapter each harbor their particular agendas and incentives. While much is written about these OSIP that frame their collective work in terms of binary tropes such as visibility/invisibility, material/immaterial, fiction/reality, and surveillance/sousveillance, little has been written about how these practitioners have transformed human rights discourse in novel ways. The digitization of human rights discourse becomes most evident in their approach to the visualization of torture and death by implication rather than through the corpse's direct representation. As such, the

body of those subjugated by state power may be absent from the image, but the material traces of its devaluation are foregrounded to expose state violence. In this process, OSIP transform evidence through the application of forensic aesthetics, and produce new forms of post-human testimony that defy conventional representational strategies to depict the dead.

This chapter aims to show how both Raad and Weizman triangulate the post-human, forensics, and aesthetics by deploying pliable representational strategies. Their work infers the presence of a corpse or multiple fatalities and even mass death while simultaneously circumventing the body's physicality. Between science and justice lies a broad and imaginative landscape of reconstructing the history of the dead and their connection to the present. By drawing upon the field of forensic anthropology and reconceptualizing its aestheticization, Raad and Weizman both formulate a clinical counterpart to Mbembe's poetic yet candid description of skeletal remains. Mbembe writes, "Their morphology henceforth inscribes them in the register of undifferentiated generality: simple relics of an unburied pain, empty, meaningless corporealities, strange deposits plunged into cruel stupor…what is striking is the tension between the petrification of the bones and their strange coolness on one hand, and on the other, their stubborn will to mean, to signify something."[14] With this statement, Mbembe strikes at the very paradox of the skeletal corpse as an

[14] Achille Mbembe, "Necropolitics," Public Culture 15, no. 1 (2003): 35.

emblem rife with symbolism and simultaneously a mundane object, a set of ossified remains that speak nothing of the life, culture, or spirit that was once hinged to its frame.

By changing the conditions through which mass death is represented and shifting away from the corpse as the ultimate emblem of human rights violations, OSIP confront the necropolitical endeavors of states by suturing together and rearranging data and images, offering a new model of intervention into and against state power. OSIP efforts refashion the terms of transparency for the digital age. In this way, they exploit the capacities engendered by the digital revolution to reimagine our encounter with political conflicts. By making publicly available data actionable in various ways and legible in a variety of contexts, the work of Raad and Weizman offers compelling material translations of the necropolitical in activist terms. By drawing together data and images that would harbor negligible value in isolation and producing interconnections that offer a comprehensive view of state power, OSIP synthesize and translate the material conditions through which death is enacted.

A History of Open Source Espionage

Examining the evolution of national intelligence efforts in the open-source arena allows us to better understand the impact of contemporary OSIP working today. The history of open-source investigations is marked by a bureaucratic, sovereign logic that is both a precursor to civilian open-source

initiatives and an invitation to experiment with methodologies that can upend this logic. Tracing a shift from analog to digital encounters with open-source information in which the primary site of inquiry transforms from radio broadcasts and press clippings into satellite views, social media accounts, and cell phone footage allows us to understand the new ways in which OSIP are changing the field. In turn, discovering, verifying, and preserving digital content in innovative ways has produced an era in which the "digital witness" can provocatively challenge sovereign power.

Sovereignty presumes borders through which power can contain and control or support and enhance its populace's capacities. Espionage is conducted in the name of securitizing sovereign interests and defending the republic through a sprawling network of bureaucratic structures. In the US, the nation's political interests are represented by the three branches of government and the numerous agencies that function as auxiliary extensions of its power. American national security currently operates through a tandem relationship between the Department of Defense and the Department of Homeland of Security, each of which acts as an umbrella organization housing a multiplicity of bureaus, centers, administrations, and sub-agencies addressing everything from the military to reconnaissance, finance, health, space development, immigration, and technology amongst other concerns. Within this sprawling bureaucracy, what is currently designated as the Open Source Enterprise (housed within the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) under the Director of National Intelligence

(DNI)), is dedicated to the collection of open-source intelligence (OSINT) and concentrates area studies, international affairs, linguistic and politics experts alongside librarians and information technology professionals in order to cull information from public domain sources for intelligence purposes.[15]

The Open Source Center was established in 2005, and the Open Source Enterprise in 2015, but these efforts were amply preceded by their wartime counterparts, the Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS) in 1942, which evolved from the Foreign Broadcast Monitoring Service (FBMS) established in 1941. These early services initially fell under the Federal Communications Commission's auspices before being transferred to the CIA through the National Security Act of 1947.[16] Though the nomenclature used to categorize these united agencies have changed, their purpose and intent have shared a unique goal that has varied little over time – to exploit open-source intelligence (OSINT). Whether considered an intelligence discipline, a collection discipline, tradecraft, or an amalgamation of this triumvirate, the definition of OSINT enjoys consensus approval. In summary, it can be understood as "the collection, processing, analysis, production, classification, and dissemination of information derived from sources and by means openly available to and legally accessible and

[15] US Central Intelligence Agency, Open Source Center, advertisement.
Steven Aftergood, "Secrecy News: Open Source Center (OSC) becomes Open Source Enterprise (OSE)," Federation of American Sciences, October 18, 2015, accessed April 4, 2020, https://fas.org/blogs/secrecy/2015/10/osc-ose/
[16] Ilana Blum and Heather J. Williams, "Defining Second Generation Open Source Intelligence (OSINT) for the Defense Enterprise," RAND Corporation, 2018, 4.

employable by the public in response to official national security requirements."[17]

While espionage is commonly understood as a clandestine activity, what I am referring to as open-source espionage is compiling public domain information, assessing previously undetected interconnections amongst data points, and deploying the intelligence revelations that these connections make evident in the service of national security. In essence, this practice could be construed as spying in plain sight, for it involves a rigorous examination of existing information, utilizing public-facing methodologies and accessible technologies without procuring or exploiting closed sources. OSINT has thus played an integral role in 20th Century intelligence advancements by providing a supplement to covert intelligence operations and even accounting for nearly eighty percent of the CIA's intelligence database.[18]

The centrality of OSINT as a form of espionage flourished when US intelligence analysts realized that the foreign press production of the axis powers harbored valuable clues to military operations and ideological programming during WWII. By monitoring, translating, and interpreting radio broadcasts and print articles, the FBMS could decipher enemy intent and anticipate military maneuvers by analyzing the propaganda disseminated to

[17] Florian Schaurer and Jan Storger, "The Evolution of Open Source Intelligence (OSINT)," *Journal of US Intelligence Studies*, vol. 19, no. 3 (Winter/Spring 2103): 53.
[18] Arthur S. Hulnick, *Fixing the Spy Machine: Preparing American Intelligence for the Twenty-First Century* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1999), 8.

German, Italian, and Japanese citizens. The benefits of open source espionage were summarized by Lawrence Fly, the chairman of the FFC, in 1942 as such, "Fever charts of Axis propaganda lines are plotted. Trends of enemy diplomacy or military operations are often foreshadowed in clear outline."[19] Open sources could also corroborate closed sources such as short-wave radio interceptions on the battlefield, thus reformulating the allies' approach to warfare.

It is important to note that the civilian-led open-source investigations that this chapter addresses stem from these early military initiatives because they have subsequently inflected the logic, mechanisms, language, and structuring of contemporary OSINT initiatives even when these initiatives may subvert the militarized and bureaucratic tenor of early open-source espionage. Whereas the communication technologies intrinsic to WWII characterize first-generation OSINT practices (circa 1940-1990), this chapter focuses on second-generation OSINT endeavors that arose in the wake of the internet and the development of networked communication enabled by personal computing, search engines, digital archives, social media, instant messaging and the broadband technology that supports these innovations (circa 1990-present). However, even though this schism between pre-internet and post-internet defines the first and second generation of OSINT practice, and though the

[19] by Joseph E. Roop, "US Central Intelligence Agency, Foreign Broadcast Information Service History Part I: 1941-1947," Classified Report 1969, Declassified 2009, 47. https://www.cia.gov/library/center-for-the-study-of-intelligence/csi-publications/books-and-monographs/foreign-broadcast-information-service/

methodologies utilized to harness OSINT today have radically changed, there are several critical facets of this discipline that echo across the generational divide. Both first and second-generation analysts have been attuned to the pernicious nature of propaganda and how misinformation can alter public perception of political norms in irrevocable ways. The same impulse to label our current media environment as enabling a post-truth society and a prominent factor in the erosion of democracy was feared by FBIS analysts who viewed axis propaganda as a threat that could eventually subvert American democratic freedoms.[20] Thus, radio communication itself came to be seen as an element that could penetrate borders, constituting a weapon that needed to be diffused before reaching the American public and causing ideological harm.

However, it was not national security that first prompted the rise of listening centers to translate foreign broadcasts, for it was US media companies themselves looking to receive dispatches quicker than traditional news reporters could provide them.[21] This effort prompted universities to follow suit and erect listening centers of their own, amongst them the Princeton and Stanford Listening Centers, established in 1939 to track the now evident threat of axis propaganda. To disengage intelligence efforts from private entities, the Secretary of State negotiated with President Roosevelt to establish a government listening center that could reflect the State, War, Navy, and Treasury

[20] Joseph E. Roop, "Foreign Broadcast Information Service History," 3.
[21] Ibid, 5.

departments' conjoined interests by drawing upon the technical strength of the FCC.[22] The special defense budget was tapped to set up inaugural listening posts in various locations spanning six states. Ultimately, the government recruited several of the scholars and technicians working at the Princeton Listening Center to help forge the infrastructure of the newly inaugurated FBMS by 1942.[23] The bulk of the Service's hires, though, were not from academia but rather translators that could fuel the active listening and interpretation required to parse through countless hours of foreign broadcasts before passing their reports on to editors and analysts. The FBMS favored applicants that possessed an intimate knowledge of the countries whose language they spoke, and this presented an obstacle to the hiring process given that foreign nationals could not work for the US government.[24] Eventually, though, the agency took on 220 translators in that initial year and began the process of tuning in and analyzing foreign press content that ostensibly posed a threat to the American way of life.[25]

This model of open-source espionage comprised of hundreds of government personnel housed in listening centers dispersed across the US, recording millions of hours of broadcasting, typing thousands of pages of reports, and focused on the singular goal of thwarting foreign ideological

[22] Ibid, 7.
[23] Ibid, 10.
[24] Ibid, 16.
[25] Ibid.

influence is radically different from the flexible, intuitive, near real-time digital verification and analysis that is conducted by civilians enacting open-source investigations today. The massive, coordinated effort that the FBMS undertook in order to produce actionable intelligence products can now be synthesized into a single person, utilizing a single laptop, connected to a single cell phone, that exploits a vast decentralized network of contacts, databases, and profiles, to produce alternative intelligence products that can effectively challenge sovereign power.

Tasked to protect US sovereignty from foreign influence, the discrepancy between the sprawling bureaucracy established by the FBMS and the plasticity of contemporary open-source agencies provides a stark contrast. Hewing closely to Max Weber's definition of modern bureaucracy as a methodology that functions to organize labor and society in a manner that reflects the interests of the nation-state, the FBMS vested its power in its top officials and formed a hierarchical organization comprised of twenty monitoring stations (bureaus) worldwide after its Portland, Oregon Bureau opened in 1941. Its headquarters in Reston, Virginia, was concurrently established in the same year. By 1992, the FBIS disseminated information to 700 US government and military agencies, scanning over 3000 foreign newspapers and magazines, employing 700 translators as independent contractors, and distributing volumes of published

reports to 12,000 individuals.[26] Prolific in its production and pervasive in its global reach, the agency has remained an integral component of the US intelligence community for decades. Possessing an "ideological halo" of protecting American democratic freedoms from the contamination of foreign ideologies, this "mission" that effectively compels its employees' labor masks the tedious and largely mundane process of translation and transcription that constitutes the bulk of the agency's tasks.[27] If impersonality is characteristic of modern bureaucracies, as Weber asserts, this manifests within the FBIS most pointedly in its translators' anonymous nature, who constitute the proverbial front line of OSINT collection.[28] While the history of FBIS is replete with a detailed analysis of agency leaders, little is known about the men and women that comprised the agency's essential infrastructure. The hallmarks of bureaucracy that Weber outlines defined its operation. Such points include the professionalization of expertise as a prerequisite for employment and the systematic and monotonous nature of the work conducted in an office setting. Weber also reviews the intensity of the hierarchical structure that scrutinizes the actions of each member of the "bureau," the production of tangible files and documents that act as a constituent part of the bureau's "body," the

[26] J. Niles Riddel, "Remarks by Niles Riddel, Deputy Director Foreign Broadcast Information Service, on Open Source Intelligence and the FBIS" (speech, First International Symposium on "National Security and National Competitiveness: Open Source Solutions," Mclean, Virginia, December 2, 1992).
[27] Max Weber, *Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, eds. Hans Heinrich Gerth, C. Wright Mills, and Bryan S. Turner (Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2009), 199.
[28] Ibid, 208.

implementation of rules, its penchant for official secrets, and the careerist mentality that develops out of this assemblage. The most salient facet of his argument that underlies the continued success of the FBIS as an institution, though, is the indestructible nature of bureaucracy itself.

Once established, a bureaucracy effectively governs its laborers, reducing all but its top officials to purely utilitarian components that function automatically under an "internal rationalized structure."[29] It is a form of rationality that dictates both the bureau's tangible operations and its employees' psychic disposition. This extreme regimentation came to be quantified by the FBIS in terms of daily, weekly, and monthly word counts, celebrating the voluminous number of translations produced as a sign of accomplishment, regardless of whether or not the content itself provided actionable intelligence. Extending into a massive edifice of archives, the FBIS and its successor agencies generated daily reports spanning the Middle East, Africa, Latin America, Asia, Europe, and the former Soviet Union, prompting one analyst to state, "OSINT is at times the 'INT' of first resort, last resort, and every resort in between."[30]

As the practice of open-source collection became integral to the intelligence community, its efficacy was valued by the speed at which the US government could inform itself and anticipate foreign nations' geopolitical

[29] Ibid, 230.
[30] Stephen C. Mercado, "Sailing the Sea of OSINT in the Information Age," in *Secret Intelligence: A Reader*, eds. Christopher Andrew, Ricahrd J. Aldrich, and Wesley K. Wark (Oxfordshire: Routledge, 2009), 49.

strategy ahead of US media outlets. It was the work of the FBIS that first picked up Mussolini's speech broadcast to a roaring crowd gathered in Rome, declaring the consolidation of the axis powers stating, "Today the tripartite alliance, proud of its moral and material means, has a powerful instrument for war. It is sure of victory."[31] Monitoring foreign radio broadcasts was also how the US learned of the assassination attempt on Hitler and Germany's eventual capitulation to Allied troops. This trend continued throughout all the major conflicts of the 20th Century as the FBIS learned of Mao's Cultural Revolution, the USSR's withdrawal from the Cuban crisis, and Ho Chi Minh's death in advance of other outlets procuring intelligence culled from open sources.[32] Throughout wars, revolutions, and peace talks, the FBIS tracked the emotional tenor of speeches from foreign leaders to monitor hostile intentions and prevent ideological infiltration. As a "service," its practice remained consistent, even if its perceived foes espoused differing ideologies. From Nazism and Fascism through to Communism, the principle of diffusing propaganda and alerting the US of ideological threats remained the agency's primary goal. Writing in 1967, Joseph Roop reflects on the continuity in methodologies applied across the decades. Roop states,

> A superficial examination might suggest that the Foreign Broadcast Information Service of 1967 is a radically different organization from the Foreign Broadcast Monitoring Service of 1941, or even from the Foreign Broadcast Intelligence

[31] United States, Foreign Broadcast Information Service, *FBIS in Retrospect: 30 Years of the Foreign Broadcast Information Service* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Library, 1971), 1.
[32] Ibid, preface.

Service that emerged from World War II…Yet in its fundamental organization and responsibilities, its basic operations and methods, the change is not great…The basic operation of monitoring foreign broadcasts were learned and almost perfected before 1947. Monitoring is performed today very much as it was then, despite the vast improvements in technical equipment during the past 20 years.[33]

It was only with the advent of the internet and the radical shift it spurred in networked communication that the structure and intent of the FBIS would markedly change. It was in the late 1980s that the term OSINT itself came into common use.[34] It originated with the US military's increasing awareness that all viable sources of information would need to be plied to retain global dominance as the imminent collapse of the Soviet Union was becoming apparent. With the Cold War nearing its end and the rise of an increasingly sophisticated communication network enabled by personal computing, the distinction between public broadcasting and personal communication producing their inevitable merger was on the horizon. Throughout the 1990's several reforms to the Intelligence community acknowledged the value of open-source data. The 1992 Intelligence Reorganization Act sought to overhaul the nation's intelligence management and collection because it had not changed since WWII.[35] In 1994 the Community Open Source Program Office (COSPO) was created within the CIA, followed in 1996 by the Aspin-Brown Commission, which sought to evaluate how open data and its sources could be integrated more comprehensively into

[33] Roop, "Foreign Broadcast Information Service History," 1.
[34] Schaurer and Storger, "The Evolution of Open Source Intelligence (OSINT)," 54.
[35].2198 Intelligence Reorganization Act of 1992: Statements on Introduced Bills and Joint Resolutions (Senate, February 5, 1992).

various sectors of the intelligence community.[36] Alongside these initiatives, the internet itself was witnessing its most crucial period of growth worldwide. In 1991 an analysis of 160 countries revealed that 49% enjoyed some measure of internet connectivity, whereas, by 1995, an analysis of 174 countries revealed that 80% had come online.[37] While much of early online usage was spurred by research and development teams in the private sector alongside academia's adoption of the internet as a research mechanism, a growing public of cyberspace also emerged. These users spurred digital interventions that challenged the use, methodologies, and ethos of the internet to exploit its most valuable features – the dissolution of geographic boundaries, the seemingly democratic exchange of information, and their enactment in real-time. If the intelligence reports produced by the FBIS were, in fact, "media verité" contingent upon their real-time efficiency as Atlantic columnist Alan Tonelson characterized them in 1988, by 1998, such reports were nearly obsolete in the face of amateur tacticians, translators, and activists that were able to mount successful interventions into cyberspace.[38] At that time, the public use of the internet heralded the promise of a utopia in which infinite access to information could transform our social, political, and cultural engagement with the world through civic-minded initiatives.

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[36] Florian Schaurer and Jan Storger, 54.
[37] Deborah R. Hollis, "Measuring Worldwide Connectivity: Expansion of the Internet," *Journal of Government Information*, 23, no. 4 (1996): 504.
[38] Alan Tonelson, "Media Verite: the inside story on the whole world," *The Atlantic*, February 1988, 36.

Art and Open Source Investigation Practitioners

Capitalizing upon the wealth of public domain information made available through the internet and fusing this endeavor with the ethos of electronic civil disobedience, visual interrogations at the turn of the new millennium have flourished and transformed contemporary art into a form of evidential analysis. Approaching open-source research from a distinctly different theoretical perspective than that of government entities, OSIP appropriate methodologies utilized by the state and combine this with a set of references drawn from the history of art and visual culture.

Between Net Art and tactical media, conceptual art and forensic analysis, Walid Raad's work via The Atlas Group archive and Eyal Weizman's research agency, Forensic Architecture, has marked a new terrain of digital interventions into political conflict and the establishment of new aesthetics. Their respective artistic engagements have utilized the web as a resource for engagement in innovative ways and have characterized a post 9/11 aesthetic that probes the capacity of imaginative reconstructions to redefine visuality. Through blurring the boundaries between fact and fiction, representation and reconstruction, historical memory and imagined futures, art and advocacy, both Raad and Weizman effectively question the position of the "artist" as a producer of cultural artifacts by fluidly traversing different academic disciplines and institutional contexts.

As a testing ground for experimental art practices, early use of the internet provided a flexible domain for an imaginative repositioning of the artist as an activist. Given that the internet was, and is, a continually evolving "medium," it has been especially alluring to artists because its utilitarian features enable multiple modes of engagement. In contrast, the etiquette for its "appropriate" use has never become fully codified. With new users gaining access to online forums and new web pages being established alongside this, the internet's ever-expanding capacity has proved to be its greatest asset. This was especially true in its earliest incarnations, for it welcomed a near democratic use of its nascent digital topography.

Net art (also known as "Net.art, internet, and web-based art) was a fertile practice throughout the internet's earliest public use, primarily from 1993 to the early aughts.[39] Its plasticity as a medium encouraged experimentation and, amongst early net artists, an ideal platform to question the validity of art as an object-oriented process destined for traditional spaces such as museums, galleries, biennales, and auction houses. The seemingly immaterial quality of the web, an invention that relied upon both hardware, software, and a great many technicians, but whose existence was shaped by code that transformed into

[39] Dieter Daniels and Gunther Reisinger, "Introduction," in Net Pioneers 1.0: Contextualizing Early Net-Based Art. Eds. Dieter Daniels, and Gunther Reisinger (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2009), 6.
"What is Net Art?" *Net Specific*, accessed February 1, 2021, https://netspecific.net/en/netspecific/what-is-net-art#:~:text=Net%20art%20terminology%20can%20be,94%20to%20the%20early%2000s.

visual and literary encounters that could appear and disappear with a keystroke, appeared as a sprawling, unbound, entity that was impossible to replicate in its totality. The very fact that the web was not tethered to geography, flexible in its construction, harboring a decentralized structure, lent itself to revolutionary modes of praxis and interconnection. The creative subversion of mailing lists, chat rooms, hyperlinks, and video transmissions, created a fervent sense that new, globally-minded, political alliances could be contained therein. Inspired by utopian visions of a civic-minded, democratic culture that defied the market-driven impetus of conventional institutions, net art sought to contain itself to the purely digital realm within which it was created.

In their anthology examining net art pioneers, Dieter Daniels and Gunther Reisinger link the advent of net art to its precursors such as the electronic art of Nam June Paik, Fluxus, mail art, and conceptual art.[40] Of these movements that took place throughout the 1960s to the 1980s, conceptual art harbors the most prominent influence upon the aesthetics of OSIP working today. Stripping away an overt emphasis on aesthetics in favor of foregrounding ideas, conceptual art spans a remarkably broad set of categories, including minimalism, feminist art, earth art, and performance art in its earliest incarnations, all the way through to the notion of art as a social practice that continues to characterize the field of

[40] Ibid, 21.

contemporary art today.[41] All of this is to say that conceptual art may still utilize conventional representational strategies such as photography, sculpture, or video, but its primary goal is to provoke the viewer to recognize thought itself as the most salient part of an artwork. This is most notably evident in the work of OSIP, whose goal is to make transparent the social conditions and political interconnections between acts of violence and their repercussive effects on various populations through their aestheticization. By harnessing digital space as a field of investigative inquiry, OSIP intentionally make transparent the thought process that underlies each of their investigations. The aesthetic strategies of OSIP often point to the elements of material infrastructure that can indicate ideological content and the violence that is contained in a particular set of ideals. As a conceptual endeavor, OSIP value transparency concerning the methodology of inquiry, conceptual framing, and aesthetic output, including any software developed and applied in the process.

Fusing the heady recognition of the internet as an ideal forum for creativity that propelled net art with the refined approach of conceptual art, OSIP also draw inspiration from the political engagement expressed in the notion of tactical media. Arising out of net art and intersecting with media theory, tactical media entails another broad category of artists and activists

[41] Robert Atkins, *Artspeak : A Guide to Contemporary Ideas, Movements, and Buzzwords, 1945 to the Present* (New York: Abbeville Press Publishers, 1997), 103.

seeking liberation through communication as an intervention. Radicality underlined the progressive politics of tactical media practitioners who sought to provoke social change through subverting internet protocols or what Geert Lovink and David Garcia define as a "hit and run" type strategy that could be used to alter the power structures that were beginning to constrain the internet.[42] Envisioned as an ideal "type," the tactical media practitioner is most easily recognized as a hacker who exploits the backdoors that companies and governments set up to secure their confidential documents. Lovink and Garcia also characterize tactical media as a reflection of the migrant culture in which the digital nomad slips easily across the porous boundaries of the internet, defining a world in which physical geography becomes irrelevant.[43] Interference, disruption, and reversal define the ethos of tactical media practitioners, and their stature is determined by their ingenuity, irrespective of status or wealth. Many of these characteristics compel the work of open-source investigators who could be characterized as an advanced iteration of the tactical media practitioner in that OSIP view the internet as a field rife with the possibility of extraction and recombination. OSIP intentionally draw together constellations of information to reveal state propaganda and lies, corporate malfeasance and greed, or illicit violence sanctioned by government figures. In

[42] Geert Lovink and David Garcia, "The ABC of Tactical Media," May 16, 1997, accessed October 20, 2020, https://www.nettime.org/Lists-Archives/nettime-l-9705/msg00096.html
[43] Ibid.

this way, the "hit and run" strategy advocated by Lovink and Garcia is transformed into the "long game" of sourcing many data points over time to build extensive evidential case files. Disruption from the OSIP perspective is uncovering the truth in an era in which information disorder has occluded the possibility of taking online information at face value. Exploiting databases of all kinds, including archives, mapping applications, and flight trackers, are standard procedures. Determining the routes of maritime vessels, identifying private passwords made public in data breaches, tracing phone numbers, and mining the personal comments and connections on social media platforms are also intrinsic to this new form of electronic civil disobedience that seeks to harness digital culture and mobilize it for the public good. Like tactical media, open-source investigations exploit the gap between the ostensibly "free space" of the internet and highly regulated media platforms to produce alternative renderings of events that assert more salient truth claims. And akin to tactical media, geography is an afterthought for OSIP, who connect across borders, working in concert with each other to mine details drawn from a set of global platforms. In this way, OSIP further the free exchange of information in the interest of promoting the truth. The field positions itself as a non-competitive civic-minded enterprise that seeks justice and transparency as an antidote to an increasingly convoluted information landscape.

Walid Raad's The Atlas Group: Traces of Spectacle

Walid Raad's work is born of these various creative practices that utilize the internet and open source information to conduct a political critique. While Raad's work cannot be categorized as a traditional open-source investigation because he subverts the very truth claims that such investigations aim to make, it is the development of his signature aesthetic strategies that presage and influences the work of OSIP like Eyal Weizman and Forensic Architecture. This factor makes Raad's artwork a vital contribution to the field of open-source research.

Raad's unique approach coalesces various historical "artifacts" under the rubric of "The Atlas Group," creating a para-fictional archive of images and texts that address the nature of the Lebanese Civil Wars from 1975-1991. The primary representation for Raad's archive is a website he constructed as a repository for The Atlas Group's ephemera. Though he has exhibited this work in the form of performative academic lectures and as a series of archival images within art institutions, his digital translation of analog "evidence" is most easily accessed online. The original site, created in 1999, consisted of an understated, streamlined set of "case files" positioned as desktop folders forming a column on the left-hand side of an otherwise blank homepage. Each folder harbored links that opened onto the ephemera that he created to address the Lebanese Civil Wars, and the project was presented as an anonymous organization dedicated to

preserving historical remnants of the wars. The current iteration of the website explains that The Atlas Group was a project undertaken by Raad and exposes his relevance as an author of the artifacts contained within each file. This shift from anonymity to revealing his identity as a creative producer exposes the parafictional nature of his endeavor. Carrie Lambert Beatty defines this approach as such, "in parafiction real and/or imaginary personages and stories intersect with the world as it is being lived. Post-simulacral, parafictional strategies are oriented less toward the disappearance of the real than toward the pragmatics of trust. Simply put, with various degrees of success, for various durations, and for various purposes, these fictions are experienced as fact."[44]

The Lebanese Civil Wars have become entangled in the collective memory of the Lebanese yet obscured by its intricate complexities, resulting in an ambiguous historical record. Thus, the parafictional nature of Raad's online archive that reconstructs key facets of the era is aimed at exposing the intersection between a personal experience of both ideological and physical harm while at the same time questioning the implied veracity of the historical document. By fabricating documents that analyze historical truths but subverting them through fictional renderings, Raad's oeuvre addresses the inability to historicize an event fully or effectively, revealing the slippage between fact and memory, event, and interpretation. Raad himself posits that

[44] Carrie Lambert-Beatty, "Make-Believe: Parafiction and Plausibility," *October* (2009): 54.

the fabricated documents within his archive are "hysterical symptoms" that reflect Lebanese culture's inability to synthesize its fragmented history, prompting the construction of an alternative history in which everyday objects and experiences are transformed into fantasy born of delirium.[45] While his work grasps at the fantastical, it does so through a deliberate inversion of public domain information in the service of addressing loss in intimate terms. His concern with creating a digital archive of death and its material components makes his work relevant to a trajectory of open-source investigations as a practice.

Whereas traditionally, we associate corpses with the notion of loss, it becomes ever more difficult to discern their import when images of death are rendered without its direct figuration. What does the absence of spectacle make available to us when the corpse is absconded from view? How do the politics of the dead translate into effective advocacy when addressed in a circuitous manner? Does the absent corpse or the implication of death by examining its material traces relieve us as viewers from the moral implications that accompany viewing images of death? Such questions have compelled the work of OSIP in their depiction of state violence and its aftermath. While many critics, scholars, and fellow artists alike have turned to Raad's work as a template for

[45] Tess Takahashi, "Walid Ra'ad and The Atlas Group: The Photograph and the Archive in Experimental Documentary," *The Moving Image Review & Art Journal ,(MIRAJ)* 2, no. 1 (2013): 72.

assessing geopolitical imaginaries, little has been written about how his work reveals a latent concern with violence and death through the prism of human rights.

To even trace an outline of the Lebanese Civil Wars is nearly an exercise in futility that underscores Raad's project's relevance, which acknowledges its own impossibility via the use of parafictional elements. The complexity of the intrastate alliances and enemies that operated within the theater of the Lebanese Civil Wars and the impact of multiple foreign states' interference has generated a sense of chaos for those attempting to map the nuanced ways in which violent clashes proliferated throughout the country. From sectarian divides to countless massacres, the victims of the Lebanese Civil Wars have been buried under an avalanche of factions, each claiming legitimacy to the historical account that suits their particular view. In many ways, the Lebanese Civil Wars represents a series of wars within wars and occupations within occupations.[46] Internal displacements led to refugee camps, high-profile assassinations stoked anxiety, and countless militias formed and dispersed, creating a sense of ever-shifting and multiple realities. Against this maelstrom of violence, a set of

[46] In conversation with critical media practitioner and Lebanese scholar Fabiola Hannah, the concept of "occupations within occupations" arose as a way to address the complexity of the Lebanese Civil Wars because many intricate factions, alliances, and foreign interventions endlessly shifted into different configurations. A repeated refrain throughout our discussions was the impossibility of ever discerning a fixed historical perspective on the wars and how even those who lived through them are left impossibly bereft of any comprehensive understanding of what took place. Essentially, no one can agree on what took place, and because of the constant shifts in warring factions, it was as if Lebanon was continually being "occupied" by a series of forces, both foreign and domestic.

temporary, regional alliances pledged numerous ceasefires, accords, and peace treaties that all inevitably failed, consolidating the utter destabilization of Lebanese society, which then extended into the post-war period.

In many ways, the war(s) produced what art historian Chas Elias refers to as a "widespread amnesia" that emerged in response to the innumerable dead because survivors simply could not reconcile themselves with the realities of the material, physical, spiritual, and historic loss on the scale in which it occurred.[47] The missing civilians who became victims of the wars constitute an ambiguous count of eighteen thousand, who are assumed to be kidnapped or murdered between 1975 and 1990.[48] The compulsion to recuperate a culturally specific and historically accurate past that could honor the opacity of this loss motivates Raad's impulse to draw the wars into some clarity. It is a project that courts the fantastical because, ultimately, the dead have been proven to be incalculable and irretrievable in this context. Raad mobilizes this project's very impossibility by highlighting intentional fissures, producing an "archive" of fractures that depict bombs, explosions, and their detritus as emblems of deaths unknown. As an imagined repository, Raad's work points to the fictive legitimacy that circumscribes all archives in their arbitrary selection of privileged documents

[47] Chad Elias, "Captive Subjects: On the Geopolitics of Sex and Translation in Walid Raad's Hostage: The Bachar Tapes," In *Posthumous Images: Contemporary Art and Memory Politics in Post–Civil War Lebanon* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018) ,94.
[48] Ibid, 95.

that portend to encapsulate a particular subject. In this way, the lacunae of the Lebanese Civil Wars are brought into view.

In the absence of a state archive accounting for the wars and the dead, Raad's work aligns with Shaina Anand's assessment of the archive as a conscious rendering of the present moment by noting that which remains unstable in a society.[49] She writes, "The task of creating an archive is neither to replicate nor to mimic state archives but to creatively produce *a concept of the archive*."[50] (emphasis added) In essence, by its nature, an archive is a malleable form through which an individual, or a collective, consciously arranges material evidence to frame particular perspectives and produce new knowledge. The archive as a concept reveals its plasticity, and it is to this which Raad's work speaks. If we consider The Atlas Group archive as a form of activist testimony that refutes historical oblivion and that resurrects material indications of violence and death in order to challenge hegemonic power structures, we see that the archive as a concept is less about constructing a truth-bearing claim, and more about what Pelin Tan identifies as a "discursive concept that points to both an active practice and an emancipatory practice "producing "an archive that is an action itself, rather than simply a container or database; an archive that aims to convey a multitude of actions where heterogeneous narratives exist, and by

[49] Shaina Anand, "Thesis on the Archive," in *Autonomous Archiving*, eds. Pelin Tan, Özge Çelikaslan, and Alper Sen (dpr-barcelona, 2016), 80.
[50] Ibid.

re-assemblage, they emancipate each other."[51] It is in the specific interweaving of factual material elements (bombs, buildings, cars, clouds of smoke) through highly personalized and diaristic reflections that conflate fact and fiction, memory and history, that the process of the archive as a concept is made apparent, and for Raad explicitly it fosters a prismatic understanding of an internalized geopolitics.

As art critic Lee Smith notes, Raad's concern is subverting claims to "authority and authenticity" by turning inward and fashioning something impervious to either Western hegemonic claims about the Arab world or the Arab rendering of a history that disappears the victims of the Lebanese Civil Wars.[52] However, to what aim does this archive aspire? Certainly, Raad's work does not portray the truth in any absolute sense of the term. If anything, his archive exposes the very plasticity of "truths" as constructs that harbor ideological constraints and political ambitions and that the Lebanese Civil Wars can only be characterized as an open-ended narrative told through inconclusive representations. In this manner, Raad addresses the "historical," this broad overarching notion that assumes legitimacy via primary texts, witness accounts, and certified historians and reveals how the "story" of history can be subjectively experienced as hallucinatory, fragmented, and achingly incomplete.

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[51] Ibid.
[52] Lee Smith, "The Art of the Atlas Group/Walid Raad: Missing in Action," *Artforum*, 41, no. 6 (February 1, 2003): 129.

By producing an atypical archive of events, Raad examines state violence by deploying personalized aesthetics, thus conjuring a digital diagnostics of war. By drawing out, diagrammatically, the traces of bullet casings, the various smoke clouds from detonations, the circumference of bomb craters, and the remnants of car engines left in the wake of explosions, Raad images the materiality of a battlefield that has become internalized and the countless deaths that underlie his psychic geography that can never be erased.

Underpinning the various artistic components of Raad's "Atlas" is a desire to confront what Raphael Lemkin originally termed "cultural genocide," or the eradication of symbols, artifacts, customs, and ideas that encompass the history of a people as a means to deny their existence. Within this framework, the erosion of social bonds occurs through the destruction of material cultures that symbolize group cohesion and that carry traditions, values, and beliefs into the future, ensuring continuity of communal expression. Extrapolating from this definition, which demarcates itself from the prototypical definition of genocide as rooted in the targeted physical or biological destruction of a group we can assert that cultural genocide shares an intimate relationship to a collective's historical memory.[53] In the absence of history, such a collective memory cannot be retrieved, for it cannot be summoned without the touchstones of emblems

[53] Lars Berster, "The Alleged Non-Existence of Cultural Genocide: A Response to the Croatia v. Serbia Judgment," *Journal of International Criminal Justice*, 13, no. 4 (2015): 678.

that signify it. Thus, while the Lebanese Civil Wars do not typify a genocide in the conventional sense, they intersect with and epitomize a form of cultural genocide via the absence of the historical and produce a time vacated in which the years 1975-1990 are held in suspension. These decades await forms of documentation, testimony, evidence and archives to illustrate their impact and deliver a coherent sense of national identity to those that survived their aftermath. In this sense, the term "cultural genocide" can make us consider a cogent history as a cultural right, for it is imperative for society's health.

While the Lebanese Civil Wars are thought of as a factionalized conflict with a multiplicity of agendas set forth by each, the destruction of Lebanese cultural history throughout the wars has created a psychic lacuna, the weight of which haunts its citizens and exiles. By producing an archive that retrieves fragments of this history, repositioning them as credible artifacts that speak to the fabrication of memory and internalized wounds, Raad's work lays the groundwork for a new digital forensics that foregrounds death, memory, and civic identity, influencing the work of OSIP to follow. In the process of building a digital archive of the fantastical out of analog forms, Raad also forged an ethics of witnessing that produced a particular form of diagrammatic aesthetics, pinpointing traces of war as a means to excavate the personal while tying this to a national history of erasure.

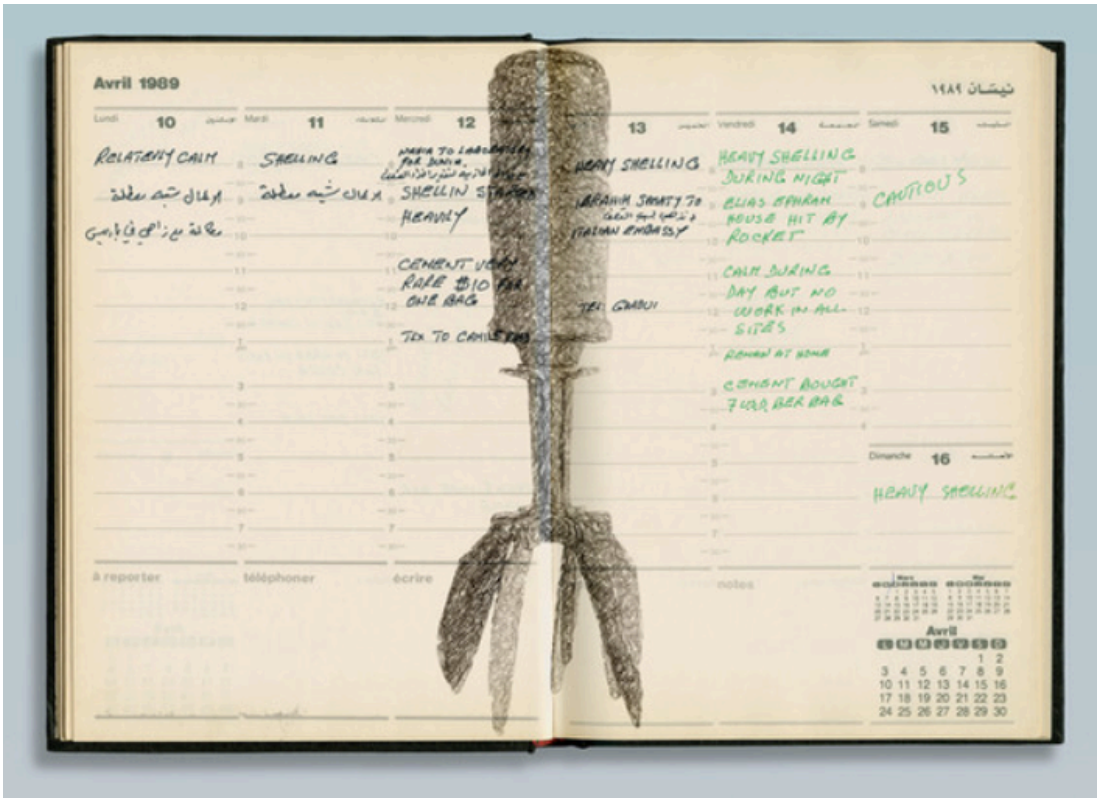

Figure 3 Walid Raad, *I want to be able to welcome my father in my house again*, 1993.

Underlying Raad's work is the figuration of absence. The vacated corpse symbolizes the impossibility of its retrieval, and to supplant this, his archive intimates death through a form of fabricated material testimony that can parlay the social-psychic dimensions of loss. Raad transforms the evidential into intimate, diaristic encounters with material traces of violence that point to mass death without ever actually displaying it. He intertwines the familial, the political, and the factual in a manner that illuminates the hollow ache of grief that can never attest to the multitudes that have died. In his piece entitled, *I want to be able to welcome my father in my house again*, 1993, Raad "submits" as

evidence to The Atlas Group archive a daily planner that portends to belong to his father. (Figure 3) The planner tracks the fluctuations of Lebanon's unstable economy throughout the war, the cost of construction materials, and daily bombings through impressionistic renderings that “attest" to their detonation throughout the week. Each drawing is centralized within the page, collapsing into the fold of the planner and outsize in magnitude in relation to the brief textual notes that mark daily entries around it. Using humble materials, the banality of the planner is matched by the different colored ballpoint pens used to execute these drawings. Raad's materials emphasize the casual nature of his "father's" observations, each of which indicates the regularity and ubiquity of the bombings as if the repercussive nature of such violence was synonymous with daily errands, the two mutually indistinguishable. This recognition of the war's complete and utter penetration of daily life renders a kind of latent sadness on the part of the artist that speaks of quiet anger at being unable to circumvent its continual destruction.

Figure 4 Walid Raad, *I want to be able to welcome my father in my house again*, 1993.

Terse statements such as "heavy shelling during night," "general strike protesting Syrian shelling," and "tank burning," indicates the nature of warring action and public response. Contrasted with this, more personal yet similarly, objective statements concerning domestic life seem jarring because they are phrased as perfunctory statements such as "calm but paralyzed," or "father passed away 6:10 morning," followed by "father funeral" marking the next day. (Figure 4) There is little to contextualize these notes and hence ambiguity concerning whether or not the "father" that "passed away" was a victim of a warring attack, died from natural causes, or if this is simply an imaginative detail on the part of the artist to lend credence to the planner's proposed facticity. Such notes paired alongside the towering drawings of torpedoes, artillery shells,

missiles, and other ordinances work to conflate pain with the perfunctory and what might be misconstrued as doodling while creating a determinate record of events.

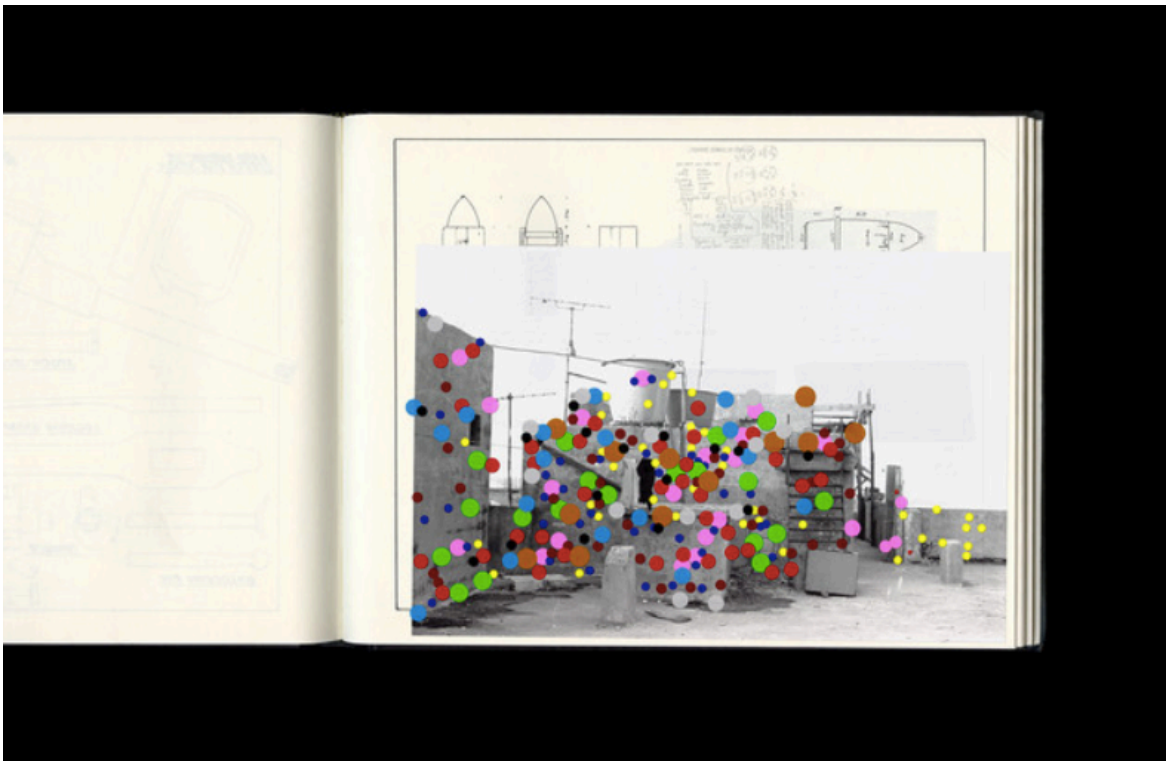

Figure 5 Walid Raad, *Let's be honest, the weather helped*, 1998.

In another component of Raad's archive, a file entitled, *Let's be honest, the weather helped* traces the geopolitical influences upon the Lebanese Civil Wars, transforming this into a deconstruction of the architectural landscape rendered in pop art terms. (Figure 5) Through circular inventory labels affixed to black and white photographs, the artist approaches the patterns and indentations created by bullet holes in buildings and the detritus of bullet shell casings left

behind as furtive data sets waiting to be dissected. It is nearly an absurdist exercise, for the bullet holes are so profligate and so varied that they are impossible to trace in full, and in fact, many of the images in this portfolio show numerous fissures left uncategorized. However, what does become apparent is the intricate web of foreign powers that produced, supplied, and fired these ammunitions, the traces of which become the source of Raad's indictment of the seventeen countries whose impact shattered the lives of Lebanese civilians living under a blanket of fire. The altered photographs, encoded as inventory, betray a stripped-down elegance, for the circular stickers create layered constellations of color that elevate the quiet grainy black and white images of destruction to kitschy grandeur. The playful nature of Raad's intervention into the images seems less of a devaluation of the deaths incurred by the evident destruction but rather a sign of the prevalence of the corroded landscape, perpetually assaulted by mortar and gunfire.

Figure 6 Walid Raad, *My Neck is Thinner than a Hair*, 2001

There is a poetic undertone to the different components of The Atlas Group archive in which Raad transforms the representation of death into an exposition by inference. He speaks to a collective remembrance of the dead that would traditionally be depicted by monuments and cemeteries and instead represents their absence/presence through a form of material dissection. In two separate "files" of The Atlas Group, Raad uses the preponderance of car bombs throughout Beirut as a way to explore the representation of death through a material extension of it. In a piece entitled, *My Neck is Thinner than a Hair*, an examination of car engines molten and distorted, which left pockmarked remains along the city streets are rendered as snapshots that he posits as being taken by unknown photojournalists. (Figure 6) The file details that 3641 car bombs exploded between 1975-1990 and that the engine is the sole part of a car that remains intact in the aftermath of these events. Raad also notes that often the engine would launch like a projectile, landing far from the original explosion, and were found strewn alongside adjoining streets, hanging from balconies, or even landing upon roofs.[54] In numerous photos, witnesses and officials gather around the engine, peering closely at it, assessing the metal carcass, the damaged street, and seemingly trying to determine from which particular make and model it emerged. In a related file, Raad chronicles the cars that were altered and

[54] Walid Raad, "My Neck is Thinner than Air," *The Atlas Group,* accessed November 1, 2020 https://www.theatlasgroup1989.org/neck

deployed as weapons, affixed with bombs, noting the "exact" make, model, and year of each one that exploded throughout the wars.

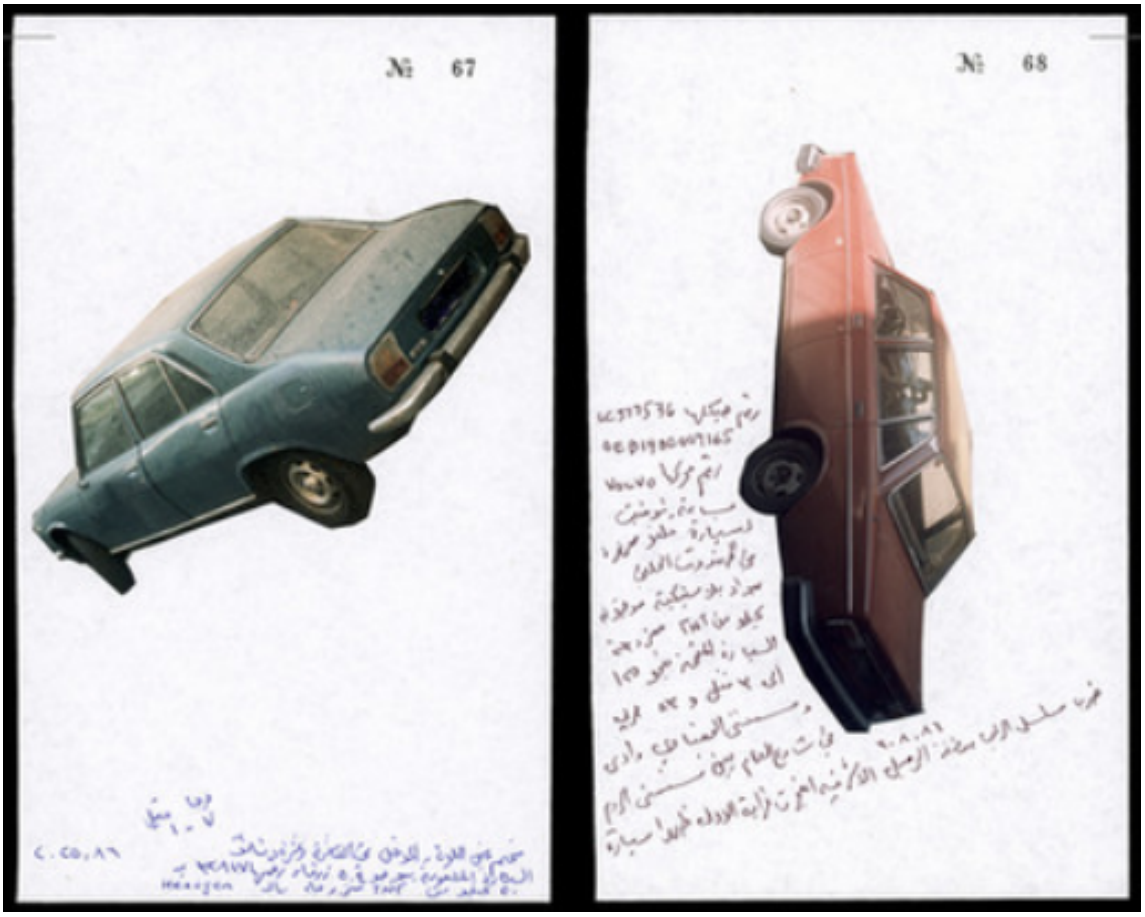

Figure 7 Walid Raad, *Notebook Volume 38*, 1991.

In *Notebook Volume 38*, Raad creates a series of collages, assembling them into what resembles a detective's journal. (Figure 7) Each page of the notebook is dedicated to a different car model, viewed floating on the page at a diagonal, upside down, or seeming to spiral upward. The pages present cars suspended in

space and time by their skewed position on the page as if to indicate that this is not, in fact, an authoritative document but rather a series of phantasmagoric memories of the destruction intrinsic to each image. Nevertheless, these dreamlike compositions, collages of objects transformed into weapons, are also imbued with the factual content of how many people died, the date, time, and location in which the explosion took place, and detailed notes describing the scenes that draw from open sources such as newspapers and journalist's accounts in order to add gravitas to the levitating compositions. In this way, Raad fuses the clinical eye of a reporter with the creative impulse of an artist, who is keenly aware of the impossibility of representing the totality of the Lebanese Civil Wars. Raad engages in dissection by whittling down to the minute details of infrastructure to build up and assert a mode of analysis. This process develops into a form of forensic aesthetics through the interconnections established between each archive's files.

While Raad claims that each file is "submitted" to The Atlas Group by a credible bystander, a state officer, a historian, or the artist himself, the characters behind Raad's work are irrelevant. The authorial claim made by their naming, which lends the premise of legitimacy to the archive, is yet another signal that Raad must create placeholders for a history that cannot be known. It does not matter whether Dr. Fakhouri or camera operator #17 are real or based on an actual figure. What matters is how their "projects" illuminate the inconsistencies within historical records and how there is always an unknown

protagonist lurking behind each image created about the world. As viewers, we have been primed to encounter such documents as "facts" even though, in reality, such documents are implacably devoid of the essential "truth" we seek to ascribe to them. The corpus of The Atlas Group files is meant to unravel and expose the way that we, as audience members, are willing to suspend our disbelief in an ever-generative mediated environment. As we attempt to parse through photographs of "evidence," we find how elusive they can be, and this prompts us to question our capacity to know any event in its totality. It is a way of making partial sense of the magnitude of insensible deaths.

The Evolution of Forensic Aesthetics

Critical to the development of forensic aesthetics is the notion of aftermath photography. Underpinning this endeavor is a guiding question - how does one recoup loss and resurrect the dead to assert a particular view of the political? How does the artist, investigator, or photojournalist signify a death in a post-conflict environment without bodies? Much of Raad's work is invested in this stance and seeks to draw out the Lebanese Civil Wars' particularities without directly showing the conflict. Raad positions himself directly between the world of fine art, forensics, and photography as a means of occupying a liminal space that defies simple tropes. By staking out a hybrid position, the work he presents in The Atlas Group remains intentionally elusive, and it is this very ambiguity that allows for the development of a new aesthetic frontier.

Raad's internalization of the war and its destructive mechanisms appear paradoxically as contemplative musings and categorical indexing. Such components of The Atlas Group archive highlight the analog, tactile, and personal aspects of Raad's creative methodology. It prefigures the highly aestheticized and digitized approach to the same ephemera that would appear in the evidential case files produced by Weizman and Forensic Architecture. While Raad's work attempts to recoup the physical evidence of harm and translate this into intimate observations, Weizman's agency approaches such evidence as a form of forensics that seeks to directly shift our interpretation of mass death and human rights by imbuing the material itself with the privilege of the juridical witness. As an ideological trope, Weizman interrogates the material world from a post-human perspective, not to displace oral testimony, but to suggest that the human and non-human, organic and inorganic, are intertwined, thus expanding the corpus of possible testimonies available to prosecutors and defendants in a court of law. Whereas Raad exposes the plasticity inherent in the recollection of violence, creating personal artifacts and testimonials to the ravages of war, Weizman focuses on the very physicality of such artifacts to develop an innovative aesthetic and theoretical approach to mass death and political conflicts.

The act of forensic analysis is most commonly associated with the evidence presented in a court of law. Whether it be a biological or inorganic material, forensics is the act of analyzing the surface, infrastructure, and cellular

attributes of any substance pertinent to an event to reveal its provenance and analyze what its material traces signify. In essence, forensics is about discovering what has transpired upon a material substance and what events potentially impacted its physicality to reveal a history of how and why it became evidentiary. The analysis of material traces, in this instance, is the signification of what an object endured.

The term forensic opens up into a broader concept of a space in which the public convenes, or a forum, as per its conjugation forensic.[55] Between the two definitions in which forensics applies to a court of law and as a sphere that facilitates assembly, forensics as a discipline has widespread applications. Forensic medicine, forensic law, forensic psychology, forensic biology, forensic toxicology, and forensic odontology are amongst the most commonly known practices. However, it is forensic anthropology that most closely aligns with the evolution of forensic aesthetics, for it is in the discovery, exhumation, and analysis of the corpse that has prompted the representation of death to migrate from physical body to material structure, shifting the point of analysis in the deconstruction of violent conflicts.

Forensic anthropology revives the social, political, and cultural implications of human remains and refutes the categorization of bones as mere objects, transforming them into parables of history through scientific inquiry.

[55] Forensic, "Etymology online," accessed November 10, 2020, https://www.etymonline.com/word/forensic

Forensic anthropologists must weigh the psychic-social-religious and metaphysical import of human remains as they carry out their work. This is a complex endeavor that seeks to respect the memory of the dead and the wishes of any living kin while also transforming the corpse into an object of knowledge devoid of sentimental attachments. This is a precarious navigation, for trauma and mourning encircle any encounter with human remains and especially for those subjects that died in violent circumstances due to political strife. Anthropologists Francisco Ferrandiz and Antonius C.G.M. Robben describe mass graves as "caches of bones" that act as "crucial testimony to the wounds of history" as well as "a sophisticated technology of terror" that "aim to erase the memory of violence, and at the same time consolidate regimes of fear that might last for decades."[56] They describe the process of exhumation and forensic analysis as one that allows for the reactivation of social memory and a force of accretion that confronts the terrorization evoked by mass death in order to reshape the public sphere. Such a shift leads to new narratives and rituals, impacting several arenas from political and technical to legal, academic, and everyday contexts.[57] In this instance, mass graves act as a collective repository of memory that is only evoked once the remains are excavated and revealed. Bones are at once objects and symbols, conflating their significance. Bones can

[56] Francisco Ferrándiz and Antonius C. G. M. Robben, "Introduction: The Ethnography of Exhumations," in *Necropolitics: Mass Graves and Exhumations in the Age of Human Rights*, eds. Francisco Ferrándiz, Antonius C. G. M. Robben and Richard Ashby Wilson, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), 1.
[57] Ibid.

testify to the violence that transformed them into naked objects, bereft of the flesh and life that they were once imbued with. At the same time, they are articles of scientific knowledge whose histories can only be revealed through examination, chemical testing, and microscopic inquiries to extrapolate their violent past.

The intense scrutiny that is applied to such remains becomes a touchstone for cultural shifts. As Ferrandiz and Robben describe it, history, personal revelations, and proof of crimes become intertwined in an evidentiary assemblage that moves toward establishing transnational justice while altering a collective social memory.[58] This process is instigated by forensics and offers the potential for resolution through the correct determination of the political factors, perpetrators, and conditions contemporaneous with the event that led to the death of the victims being exhumed. Here the corpse acts as a form of retrieval, not only through the physical act of being disinterred but through scientific analysis and the social restructuring of political narratives, becoming an object of memorialization while forging a future that attenuates the power of a traumatic event.

Catalyzed by the post-socialist era, the exploration of mass graves and their translation from individual bodies into collective bodies of evidence became a practice that established new human rights dictums. From Argentina

[58] Ibid, 2.

to Angola, Brazil, Guatemala, Ethiopia, Morocco, Iraq, Sierra Leone, Bosnia, and Kosovo, alongside numerous other countries, the establishment of forensic teams and institutions wed to their backing, have proliferated as a means to combat political violence.[59] Even in the US, which actively denies its foundational violence in the form of slavery and genocide, efforts have been made to recuperate the body in its absence, drawing upon the potential remnants of bodily injury in the soil of lynching sites. At the *National Memorial for Peace and Justice*, rows of glass urns are neatly stacked within cases identifying the names, dates, and circumstances surrounding the thousands of Black citizens lynched in America. These urns exhibit the rich hues of red, brown, and mineral flecked earth collected from terrain stretching across nearly every state in the union. This display, while muted in its capacity to evoke the visceral suffering of the slain victims in its representation, is an effort to link body and earth, evoking the memory of irretrievable corpses and provoking a forensic imagination.

I raise the example of the *National Memorial for Peace and Justice* urns because it epitomizes the absence/presence of the dead that continue to inflect the social memory of the living and to illustrate the importance of a variety of forensic impulses that bind art, science, and evidence together. Forensics, by its very nature, is a multi-disciplinary practice, and its significance is tied to the

[59] Ibid, 7.

legal and political spheres that it impacts, but it is also multi-faceted in the sources of testimony that it elicits. Blood, DNA, bones, teeth, the personal objects that may have accompanied a victim to their grave, the living relatives that may speak to events, the witnesses that may have seen their slaughter are all elements used in forensic investigations. The weather that may have affected the burial site, the composition of the earth or ice that may have preserved or decayed the remains, the technology used to excavate the corpses, and the cultural understanding surrounding the practice of forensics are all factors in determining evidentiary success.

It is in the intentional blurring of boundaries between a multiplicity of categories that forensics opens unto open-source investigations. OSIP have created an addendum to the term forensics in the form of aesthetics. By emphasizing visual studies, they forge a new trajectory through human rights discourse. As utilized by Raad and Weizman, the aesthetic foundation of forensics draws upon photography, video, and architecture derived from open sources to substantiate its claims, a markedly different perspective than forensic practices that solely produce empirical evidence. This is not to say that OSIP are not interested in empiricism, but rather that they take a creative approach to calculating and representing facts derived through visual and material elements divorced from the body or its molecular verification. Instead, the molecules are supplanted by pixels, the corpse is supplanted by the ruinous elements that surround it, and the process of analysis and verification is deduced from either

analog materials and their transformation into digital archives, or purely digital modeling, reconstruction, and investigative processes into various media spheres.

When we talk about bodies here, or rather, corpses, it is important to remember that as an object of inquiry at a trial, skeletal remains appear very different than they do when first discovered. The labor of their retrieval is often painstakingly conducted via dividing terrain into quadrants, using rakes, probes, shovels, and hands to shift the soil. Brushes are used to reveal remains without disruption, clearing away debris from bones, and observing them under fluorescent lights and microscopes, isolating them from the environment they were found and subjecting them to enumerable tests from carbon dating to DNA sampling. The object of bones, as such, has a provenance of procedural enactments that determine their arrival into the legal sphere and their authenticity as evidence. Bones testify, but they do so only when granted a narrator to illuminate their provenance and supply a convincing determination. Weizman refers to this rhetorical act as one of prosopopeia, or the act of speaking on behalf of inanimate objects and grating them a "voice."[60] The voice of the dead, derived from their remains, may animate a courtroom with scientific terms, but as Weizman notes, it is the act of persuasion through their representation that bears the most impact. It is this critical point that compels

[60] Ibid, 28.

the work of FA, which focuses on forensics as a tripartite endeavor comprised of examining the relationship between "an object, a mediator, and a forum "with the intent to magnify the significance of material objects to transform them into forms of post-human testimony.[61] In this genealogy, the excavation, and analysis of human remains, with the corpse as the locus of evidential logic, we see that bones are the precursor and analog counterpart that inspires Weizman's digital verification of inanimate objects. This fact is crucial to the evolution of forensic aesthetics that divests the body from its place at the apex of forensic testimony and supplants it with buildings, bombs, and material ephemera that provide the semblance of a more stable object of analysis.

Aesthetics is concerned with the surface of things, their appearance, and how representation elicits viewers' reactions and produces knowledge in tandem with ethical, political, social, and cultural configurations. Raad and Weizman's work produces forensic aesthetics that render the body secondary, tertiary, or even negligible when producing testimonials that visualize conflict. Their work is often conducted at a distance from the actual event and relies upon open-source information such as photojournalism, user-generated content, surveillance footage made public, and mainstream press accounts. Most significantly, though, their work accesses the history and theory of photography to revise how the visual world is constructed and interpreted.

[61] Ibid.

The quintessential photojournalist is typically invested in the "decisive moment" as defined by Henri Cartier Bresson, in which lighting, composition, and action converge to create a unique and unreproducible, visionary expression representing a moment's ultimate gestalt. In contrast, forensic aesthetics deploys the signature style of aftermath photography, or that form of photojournalism invested in providing evidence of a conflict, rather than capturing it as it unfolds. Both Raad and Weizman utilize such images to illuminate what has been categorized as the "forensic turn."[62] As Paul Lowe, photojournalist and conflict researcher, posits, the intrinsic nature of being a photographer is to act as a witness that testifies to an event, and yet this is complicated by the fact that the photographer rarely intervenes directly in the circumstances that they document, posing ethical quandaries.[63] Because the act of aftermath photography positions the photographer external to the actual moment of violence, this is considered "post-factum witnessing" entailing a different set of ethical considerations and often evading the kind of shocking imagery that gives rise to such considerations in the first place.[64]

Lowe isolates the characteristics of aftermath photography as parallel to the forensic photography deployed by police, including the framing of close-ups, the multiplicity of angles used to document a potential crime weapon or a body,

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[62] Paul Lowe, "The Forensic Turn: Bearing Witness and the 'Thingness' of the Photograph," in *The Violence of the Image : Photography and International Conflict,* eds. Liam Kennedy and Caitlin Patrick (London: IB Tauris, 2014), 211.
[63] Ibid.
[64] Ibid, 213.

the foresight weighted towards building a case file of potential evidence, and the interplay between the photographer's role as photojournalist making images for mass media and that of a visually oriented interlocuter with human rights workers and by extension the potential judge, jury, prosecutor, and defendant who may rely upon their images as evidence.[65] He argues that this is a significant shift in how photojournalists operate in conflict zones that have ceased to be active. Most notably, he cites the work of Gilles Peress' coverage of Bosnia in the 1990s and how Peress gravitated towards shooting still life images with little emphasis on beauty or aesthetics in favor of facts and that detailed images supplanted overarching compositions that traditionally try to encapsulate an entire story in a single image, thus generalizing people, places and events.[66] This approach is also a hallmark of open source investigations which aim for specificity, drawing in closer to visible objects, deploying an aesthetics concerned with facts and dissection. Rather than appealing to the viewer's implicit expectation that images should be moving or possess an inherent beauty, open-source research expands into a network of interlocutors, opening up to an array of experts that interact with, modify, analyze and utilize evidential imagery. Thus, forensic aesthetics, for OSIP, borrow the elements of aftermath photography established by photojournalists and draw this impulse into a multi-disciplinary, hyper-technologized endeavor.

[65] Ibid, 219.
[66] Ibid, 221.

From analog forensics to forensic aesthetics, there is a continuum of practice that translates earlier forms of forensic anthropology and aftermath photography into media archeology. Similar to the way that anthropologists may divide the earth into quadrants, sectioning off terrain with rope and spikes, open-source investigators divide digital images into quadrants, seeing the visual plane itself as an archeological site/sight to be excavated and mined for detailed information that could easily elude viewers without such guidelines. By sectioning off and examining each quadrant of a frame, investigators are prone to pay more attention to the particular details that rest within each section. Similarly, borrowing from aftermath photography, open-source investigators expose their work to a whole host of experts, from lawyers to scientists, filmmakers, and artists, to determine the factual content of images found online and to geolocate and chronolocate potential evidence accurately.[67] In this sense, forensics is a process of interpolating an image through a wide variety of perspectives to best hypothesize the veracity of its content. Hewing to the notion that "To expose, to make public, to make visible is to thereby make real"

[67] Geolocation is a term used in open-source investigations to stipulate the exact or approximate coordinates of where an image was shot as a verification mechanism to ensure that the image can be used as evidence in a court of law. Chronolocation refers to the exact or approximate time frame in which an image was shot. This can be determined via shadow analysis, signage on buses, gas stations, or other infrastructure tied to seasons, months, or even specific days. Chronolocation in more cases than not tends to be approximate and geolocation more precise.

open-source investigations proffer that visibility is necessary, but verification is essential to persuade the public of state crimes.[68]

Forensic aesthetics also crafts an approach to image production and analysis that attempts to elide the ethical dilemmas that have plagued conflict photography since its inception. While Lowe states that "the presence of an optical trace of the atrocity has become almost an essential prerequisite for its acknowledgment by society" this process is complicated because the reception of such images is often met with denial, revulsion, anger, and further politicization, often to the detriment of the victims portrayed.[69] Who is imaged and to what extent they have been rendered abject catalyzes social and political repercussions that extend beyond the picture plane.

In Susan Sontag's famed treatise *Regarding the Pain of Others*, she cautions not that viewers can become inured to representations of human suffering or that such images should be considered irredeemable given their shock value, but that the representation of death is a stark reminder that we cannot know what a victim endured. This chasm haunts those viewers who take the time to contemplate the dead through their image, and Sontag notes that it is not a lack of compassion or morality that stupefies an audience, but their inability to repair the circumstances imaged. This moment of realization is what

[68] Barry Bergman, "'Soul of the New Machine Confab Geared to Human Rights," *Berkeleyan*, May 7, 2009, accessed March 1, 20201 https://www.berkeley.edu/news/berkeleyan/2009/05/07_soul.shtml
[69] Lowe, "The Forensic Turn," 212.

tears at those who view representations of violence because it establishes a relationality devoid of reciprocation. As Sontag states,

> These dead are supremely uninterested in the living: in those who took their lives; in witnesses – and in us. Why should they seek our gaze? What would they have to say to us? 'We' this 'we' – is everyone who has never experienced anything like what they went through – don't understand. We don't get it. We truly can't imagine what it was like. We can't imagine how dreadful, how terrifying war is; and how normal it becomes. Can't understand. Can't imagine…and they are right.[70]

No viewer can truly identify with a representation of death, and Sontag underscores this point by exposing the paltry ways in which all the collective work undertaken in the aftermath of an atrocity can only intimate the gravity of what occurred as it unfolded. Susie Linfield remarks upon the failure of images to rectify the suffering we witness in them and shifts the point of emphasis away from the viewer and towards the tautological logic of images that expose pain. She writes, "In fact, we cannot transform the dead into anything at all; once again, we are too late…By offering us glimpses of a reality we can neither turn away from nor grasp, photographs teach us that we will never master the past. They teach us about human limits and human failures."[71] From Linfield's perspective, a death portrayed opens unto humanity's intrinsic characteristics, that of fallibility, betrayal, and anguish. The photograph from this vantage point

[70] Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York, NY: Picador, 2004), 125.
[71] Susie Linfield, *The Cruel Radiance: Photography and Political Violence* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 98.

is inert, and though it can beseech us to contemplate suffering, it cannot grant justice to those that have perished.

Post-human testimonies

The weight of the corpse as an ethical, political, and existential dilemma has prompted OSIP to pursue alternatives to its representation in the pursuit of truth and justice. The post-human turn underpins this effort, for it asks us to consider the failure of the liberal human subject to encompass the kinds of subjectivity that have emerged alongside the digital and its technicity.[72] It prompts us to ask what new forms of enlightenment can, or have, emerged from the technological advancements that merge humans with machines, codes with identities, and data with consciousness. Furthermore, the post-human turn presents the world as an entanglement of organic and inorganic, conscious and unconscious, animal, plant, human, machine, and materials into, substrates atoms, molecules, minerals, and beyond into the infinitesimal composition of the universe. In this sense, post-humanism is not merely about decentering the human but about reorienting ourselves to the phenomenological and ontological possibilities in all matter that the humanist paradigm has long occluded. While post-humanism interrogates matter at its most fundamental level and considers hybridity, fusion, and interdependence the mainstay of its philosophical

[72] Katherine N. Hayles, *How We Became Post-Human: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 3.

outcomes, it is an emphasis on the combinatory that compels the aesthetics of artists like Raad and theorists like Weizman. Their conjoined work is emblematic of Katherine Hayles' assessment which states, "The post-human subject is an amalgam, a collection of heterogeneous components, a material-informational entity whose boundaries undergo continuous construction and reconstruction."[73] In their elaborate renderings of conflict, Raad and Weizman expose human life and death through post-human interrogations that deploy continuously evolving representational strategies reflecting the ethos of Hayles' definition.

Post-humanism also challenges the narrative of progress so intrinsic to enlightenment thought. Instead, it promotes interconnectedness, circularity, and transitions as more perceptive ways to consider the history of matter. Writing an alternative "history" that recounts the evolution of materiality from a broad perspective, Manuel De Landa penned *A Thousand Years of Non-Linear History* as a way to show how geology, linguistics, and social institutions themselves are merely ephemera that shift into and out of different states. Even those institutions that we deem fixed periods of human development such as market economics, agrarian cultures, or other socio-political configurations are subject to entropy and reconfiguration, taking on material dimensions that are never quite about advancement as much as they are about a reconfiguration of parts in

[73] Ibid.

an ecosystem that simply takes on new elements. In this vein, a post-human theory is about expanding the prism through which we understand the flows and rearrangement of matter, a point intrinsic to Weizman's work as his approach to forensic aesthetics highlights both the deterioration of matter in physical terms and its reconstruction in digital modes. The digitality of his approach also intersects with discussions in post-humanism that center on technicity and emergent variants of consciousness. Luciana Parisi focuses on the inhuman embedded within computation itself to stipulate that a technological consciousness has developed independently of the human agents that have developed the algorithms and codes that underpin digital output. Transcending the human-machine feedback loop, Parisi posits that we must consider this consciousness a mechanized perception with its own cognitive functions, thus producing an agency with a different understanding of temporality, data, and aesthetics through its functioning.[74] This shift from technology being encoded with human plans to produce a specific outcome to adaptive technology that functions independent of any human-designed protocols is the foundation of machine-to-machine communication. Parsi views this independent consciousness as necessitating a paradigm change in architectural design that ushers forth new discourses and modalities.[75] It is to this point that Weizman's

[74] Luciana Parisi, "Against Nature: The Technological Consciousness of Architectural Design," in *New Geographies: Posthuman* (Estonia: Printon, 2017), 35.
[75] Ibid, 38.

formulation of Forensic Architecture speaks, for it attempts to meld humanitarian logic with post-human notions of architecture and to allow techno-consciousness to invent new ways of interrogating and transforming material infrastructures into digitized evidence and, thus, techno-legal forms.

The notion of post-humanism thus is one that challenges not only viewing the world through an anthropocentric prism but acknowledges that other forms of consciousness exist or are emerging and that they are integral to world processes. This idea allows for a set of distributed agencies to be considered both independent of the human and yet impacting it through variant logics that extend beyond human consciousness. In many ways, post-human discourse is about the failures of Western man's rigid epistemic category and the failure of the liberal human subject to effectively represent *all* humans, exposing how the term human and, by extension, humanity is prone to contestation. The post-human critique of the "human" is about searching for an alternative approach to enlightenment thought and how it excludes particular bodies. When considering the epistemological value of post-human theory and whether or not it is valuable, Francesca Ferrando states, "If you think that sexism, racism and any other form of discrimination are impediments in the realization of desirable futures, the answer is: yes."[76] In her genealogy of post-human theory, she notes feminist theory as its precursor and innovator. Post-humanism implodes the

[76] Francesca Ferrando, "Posthumanism," *Kilden Journal of Gender Research*, 2, (2014) 169.

binary model of man/woman, gay/straight, nature/machine and the divisions born of enlightenment thought and its empirical rationale nurtured by colonial conquest.[77] Following suit, Alexander Weheliye suggests that post-humanism should draw from those subjects that the liberal human trope has always marginalized because they already formulate the basis of a post-human critique having been tacitly excluded from the realm of humanity to begin with.[78]

I note these various approaches to post-humanism because they also interlink with existing critiques of human rights discourse, which compels both Raad and Weizman's work. The fragility of the term humanity is one of the catalysts that have prompted a shift towards post-human forms of testimony. The phrase humanity forms one of the four core principles of humanitarian assistance alongside neutrality, impartiality, and independence.[79] As such, the term humanity has become enshrined as a humanitarian principle implying a consensus understanding of its definition as a form of collective belonging. While it is often deployed politically to appeal for humanitarian aid, its ideological force is derived from how invoking humanity can mask asymmetrical power relations and the consequent harm that humanitarian missions can impart. In the global humanitarian discourse, humanity has become a strategic rhetorical device used to support such endeavors. In his critique of

[77] Ibid.
[78] Alexander G. Weheliye, "After Man," *American Literary History,* 20, no. 1-2 (2008): 321.
[79] Marc DuBois, "The New Humanitarian Basics," *Overseas Development Institute (ODI), Humanitarian Policy Group (HPG). London: HPG Working Paper* (2018), 3.

humanitarian missions, Didier Fassin acknowledges how such assistance is framed as a "noble" pursuit, for it seeks to ameliorate others' impoverished conditions.[80] Yet this very impulse becomes a means of subjugation, for it sets up a relation of domination between the giver and receiver. Thus, Fassin characterizes humanitarianism as a system of governance that reproduces this inequity.

The problem of inequity is a reoccurring strain throughout scholarship that interrogates the notion of humanity as a collective ideal and a natural state. In Egypt, Samara Esmeir notes that the shaping of the human "subject" was performed through the institution of legal reforms that sought to distinguish between the "civility" of the law and colonial violence's barbarity. However, Esmeir's work shows that the law itself did not secure a common humanity for its subjects but rather subjugated Egyptians and perpetrated a new form of violence by inscribing their humanity into the law's teleology.[81] Thus, the law became a means of bifurcating citizens into legally recognized "humans" while simultaneously producing "nonhuman" entities illegible to the Egyptian legal system. This conundrum is what Esmeir defines as "juridical humanity," which enabled a particular legal visibility for certain subjects while producing others' erasure. Noting the continual discrepancies between the constructed nature of

[80] Didier Fassin, *Humanitarian Reason: A Moral History of the Present* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011).
[81] Samera Esmeir, *Juridical Humanity: A Colonial History* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2012), 11.

the category of "human" and the "nonhuman" subjects it seems to engender, the extent to which humanity is deemed a universal condition is undoubtedly an aspirational stance.

Fassin and Esmeir's positions reflect the preoccupations evident in both Raad and Weizman's projects. They attempt to reimagine power relations and construct the legal subject through open source projects that center communities marginalized by Western discourse. As both of their work emerged and evolved in a post 9-11 state, it is deeply influenced by the geopolitical fissures that grew prominent in this era. As each of them attempts to unravel the stereotypes bound to non-Western bodies and seek justice for the victims they represent, they do so against a backdrop in which the Arab body is perpetually demonized and policed by Western entities while producing cultural, political, and religious misinterpretations in its representation. As Talal Asad notes, the Western perspective of 9/11 immediately linked the hijackers to Palestinian suicide bombers and conflated terms like jihad and martyrdom, claiming that Islam itself represented a culture of death.[82] Or, as Jasbir K. Puar posits, what emerged in post 9-11 was a set of "terrorist corporealities" in which the Arab body became an imagined repository for all that is monstrous and terrifying while intersecting with ideologies such as colonialism, orientalism,

[82] Talal Asad, "Thinking About Terrorism and Just War," *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 23, no. 1 (2010): 3.

xenophobia, and the repercussions of the rise of the global surveillance state.[83] All of this amounts to what she characterizes as "emphases on bodies, desires, pleasures, tactility, rhythms, echoes, textures, deaths, morbidity, torture, pain, sensation, and punishment…" buttressing a post-modern notion of empire that characterize a necro-political moment bound to constructing a racialized other.[84] It is from within this moment that the strategic use of US propaganda concerning "freedom" and "democracy" are used as justifications for the acquisition of natural resources and the establishment of military bases abroad, through which the US claims to "better" humanity through a neo-colonial "civilizing" discourse that seeks to draw non-Western subjects out of presumed antiquity and into modernity. All of these ideological forces, from the conscripting of the legal subject to the figure of the terrorist and an omnipresent Arab "threat," play out within the context of humanitarian wars, and as Antonio De Lauri posits, such wars "are a primary means of globally affirming a specific model of humanity, one that is built according to the cultural, moral, and economic standards of Western democracies."[85]

The Western model of humanity that underpins such wars is derived from Christian principles and yet is deeply complicated by its unethical application. As Didier Fassin describes, Christianity erects a notion of what he

[83] Jasbir K. Puar, *Terrorist assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Tmes* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018) ,204.
[84] Ibid.
[85] Antonio De Lauri, "The Taliban and the Humanitarian Soldier: Configurations of fFeedom and Humanity in Afghanistan," *Anuac*, 8, no. 1 (2019): 48.

terms biolegitimacy, which emerges in modernity as a reaffirmation of life as the pinnacle of sacredness and value.[86] It is in the consecration of life and the preservation of life that biolegitimacy asserts moral claims on a global stage and acts as the ideological framework for humanitarian actions. Whose life is granted value, though, is under the constant assault of shifting geopolitical ambitions. Fassin notes that this dynamic is endowed with a "structural fact" that establishes a helpless victim that must summon gratitude for any assistance received and a benevolent and obligated humanitarian who functions as a political and theological representative of the state.[87] In this equation, the victim remains a nameless, faceless other, whose life is only redeemed by the actions of their "savior."[88] Thus the consecrated life is constructed out of what Fassin calls humanitarian reason, a logic that inflects all social relations by occluding not the violence or the tragedies that befall certain subjects, but that such injustice stems from the fact that all life is not valued equally even if the impulse to alleviate suffering is derived from the idea of a common, shared, humanity.[89] Thus, humanitarian reason oscillates between the desire to recognize inequity and stem the violence that ensues from this while simultaneously reaffirming the hierarchy between the damned and the saved by virtue of its application.

[86] Fassin, *Humanitarian Reason*, 249.
[87] Ibid, 253.
[88] Ibid, 254.
[89] Ibid, 252.

Humanitarian "reason" or logic is precisely what Weizman explores in his discussion of the elaborate equations used to justify collateral death or those victims who are deemed of negligible value within this hierarchy. Weizman describes how early Christian theology positions suffering as a necessary byproduct of "the collateral effects of the good" and how this ideal has been used to rationalize structural inequities. It is by transferring divine ideals into secular practice that humanitarianism, in his view, sets out to moderate violence and tolerate "necessary corpses," establishing an economy of violence that rests upon an infinite array of calculations.[90] This is a lethal maneuver for it inevitably weights humanitarian missions with the foreknowledge that victims are inevitable, placing greater value on humanitarian workers' lives than the actual subjects at risk, thus becoming an extension of the state violence that such missions proclaim to quell. "State violence in this model takes part in a necro-economy in which various types of destructive measures are weighed in a utilitarian fashion, not only in relation to the damage they produce but to the harm they purportedly prevent and even in relation to the more brutal measures they may help restrain."[91] Most importantly, it is the counting of bodies that serve as the basis for any humanitarian equation. The bodies of survivors are tabulated as a success against the victims that died at the hands of the state. The

[90] Eyal Weizman, *The Least of All Possible Evils: Humanitarian Violence from Arendt to Gaza* (London: Verso Books, 2011), 3.
[91] Ibid, 9.

deaths born of ineptitude during an intervention are conveniently rationalized, while other bodies are identified as heroic in opposition to those bodies deemed unsalvageable. The necro-economy that Weizman asserts is one that intentionally obscures the intricate political, theological, and cultural interstices that fashion the subject of salvation as disposable. Such equations mask the fact that when a population's rescue does not benefit the neo-imperialist aims that underlie humanitarian missions, they are expediently discarded. Thus, the vexed paradigm of the "human" and its shifting value contingent upon its political utility or disposability becomes the gateway to imagining the potential for post-human testimonies to evade this conflicted logic.

The aesthetics of a techno-consciousness that acknowledges post-human modes of address and uses materiality as its epistemic category inevitably betrays a certain skepticism of the body. To evade the re-inscription of biolegitimate notions into forensic aesthetics, Weizman instead chooses to focus on the proverbial wounds, ruptures, and fractures visible within buildings. His vision scans across the perimeter of craters using digital technology to examine detonations upon the earth. Software translates plumes of smoke projected into the air to symbolize conflict without having to reference the body as its actual wreckage. It is anxiety about the body that prompts this endeavor. The indeterminacy of blood as a marker of identity. The way that cultural affiliations offer up hybrid ambiguities. How gender is a mutable construct and subject to ideological constraints that ask bodies to perform in particular ways. The very

fragility of the body with its flesh can be punctured, lacerated, and disambiguated. The way corpses rot and give way to ominous skulls that betray nothing of the expressions a face once possessed. Both physically and ideologically, the body is not a secure site of interpretation, and this very instability alongside the social and political forces that project ascriptions on to their surface compel a forensic aesthetics that seeks greater reliability in all that encircles the human rather than accounting for the heterogeneity of signifiers embodied by the human itself. While post-humanism hosts many anxieties from cyborg fantasies to the environmental crises and apocalyptic threat wrought by humankind's actions, it is in the fusion of technicity and empiricism that Weizman transforms testimony and finds his place amongst post-human imaginaries. By decentering the human, the magnitude of flesh and the fallibility of memory is displaced in favor of tracing the coordinates of political violence through physical emblems that chart histories, conflicts, alliances, and crimes against humanity in presumably, more objective terms.

The body not only elides a singular form of identification in terms of its social registration, but it is also equally challenging to inhabit the visceral experience of pain and death that characterizes violent conflicts. As Elaine Scarry posits, the portrayal of wounds and weaponry are the associative mechanisms by which we come to understand another's pain, even if we cannot experience it ourselves. This objectification is a necessary trait in her view, for without these referents and their exposure to public view, malevolent power can

usurp their interpretation, creating political and perceptual conflicts.[92] She also notes that "…in order to express pain one must both objectify its felt-characteristics and hold steadily visible the referent for those characteristics…While the advantage of the sign is its proximity to the body, its disadvantage is the ease with which it can then be spatially separated from the body…Given the fact that actual weapons ordinarily hurt rather than heal persons, it would be surprising if the iconography of weapons ordinarily worked to assist those in pain, and of course it does not."[93] And yet, this is precisely what Weizman's work attempts to accomplish. To assist the body in pain not by making pain visible but by transforming the iconography of all that is destroyed as a means to salvage humanity. Thus forensic aesthetics is a process of transliteration, in which the body's intolerable incalculability is offered forms of repair via the analysis of the environment that ensconced it at the moment of violence. Seeking out an empirical equivalent to the body, a concrete surface that can be "read" and dissected without the difficulty of having to dismantle the logics that value bodies differently or to parlay the "sentient distress" that bodies are subjected to allows for a forensic aesthetic that simultaneously critiques the logics that dehumanize bodies and produce their pain while absenting the body as the critical site of interpretation.[94]

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[92] Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 14.
[93] Ibid, 17.
[94] Ibid, 13-17

How do the demolished remains of sites riven by violence testify to the violence enacted against the bodies located therein? If testimony is about the recollection of an experience, how does this manifest on and within material surfaces? Susan Schuppli accords matter itself the status of a "material witness," reimagining the term's legal use, which identifies a person whose testimony will significantly impact a trial's outcome and whose inclusion is necessary for its integrity. She conceives of "material *as* witness" to open up forensic aesthetics as an imaginative space in which material is accorded a valued status equivalent to, albeit alien to, human testimony.[95] Schuppli asserts that "Where there is material evidence, there is the possibility of testimony without it necessarily being contracted to the conventions of legal speech, or indeed that of human language. This involves a conceptual realignment away from 'speech' toward an engagement with the *expressive* technicity of matter"[96] (emphasis added) Extracting testimony from this "expression" is the function of forensic aesthetics, which seeks to enliven objects and imbue them with a "voice" and then to compose and arrange a series of "voices" that can articulate an entirely different viewpoint that rests outside of human experience.

The work of Weizman and Forensic Architecture as a whole proposes these "compositions" as creative, political engagements with phenomena to

[95] Susan Schuppli, *Material Witness: Media, Forensics, Evidence* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2020), 10.
[96] Ibid, 11.

illuminate the latent meaning embedded in the surfaces we may overlook. It is not so much that forensic aesthetics endows material with meaning; rather, it illuminates them by synthesizing their relationship to other materials, surfaces, bodies, processes, and technological applications. This is the crux of post-human testimony, for it is an articulation of hybridity that foregrounds materiality and binds it to discursive forums that consequently reshape evidential logic. The resulting "voice" that emerges from this is wholly separate from its components, and it is a synthesis that recalibrates evidential logic. At first glance, it may seem as if FA is intent upon appropriating a bureaucratic and sovereign logic to produce a parallel inversion by using state methodologies and statecraft against itself in the vein of sousveillance. However, what Weizman's work accomplishes is more akin to suturing together disparate elements to produce an entirely new way of applying deductive reasoning to political conflicts. Weizman himself articulates this as a form of "counter forensics" that disrupts the terrain of visuality and seeks ways to evade surveillance by shifting between opaque positions and transparency, allowing activists to effectively interfere with the monolithic view of the state.[97] Critical to this evasion is also the recognition that the forums in which activists, human rights defenders, and the digital technicians who formulate such interventions operate are themselves flawed, often heeding the mandate of states that speak of justice as a means to veil

[97] Eyal Weizman, *Forensic Architecture: Violence at the Threshold of Detectability* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017), 68.

violence. Thus, Weizman asks us to consider how the law operates in frontier zones where national jurisdiction is not readily apparent. When a refugee is cast into the vast Mediterranean sea, who is accountable for their life and death, and within which forum is their very existence legitimated or contested? The practice of counter-forensics operates in these nebulous zones where political interstices erode. Hence, liminal figures emerge, and it becomes incumbent upon the open-source practitioner to possess an acute awareness of their subject position as an investigator, activist, and aid worker in order to forge productive channels of social change that can potentially operate both within and external to, normative forums of justice.

Post-human Projects: A Comparative Analysis

Through their elaborate reconstructions, the work of FA produces digital after-lives that foreground an assemblage of materiality. Latent within this aesthetic approach are direct references to the analog equivalents produced by Raad, that though presented within a digital archive online, remained handcrafted in production. By comparing their two distinct bodies of work representing bomb clouds, I trace the evolution of their aesthetic interconnection and the advancement of forensic aesthetics as a form of post-human testimony that shifts from imaginative to empirical forms of evidence.

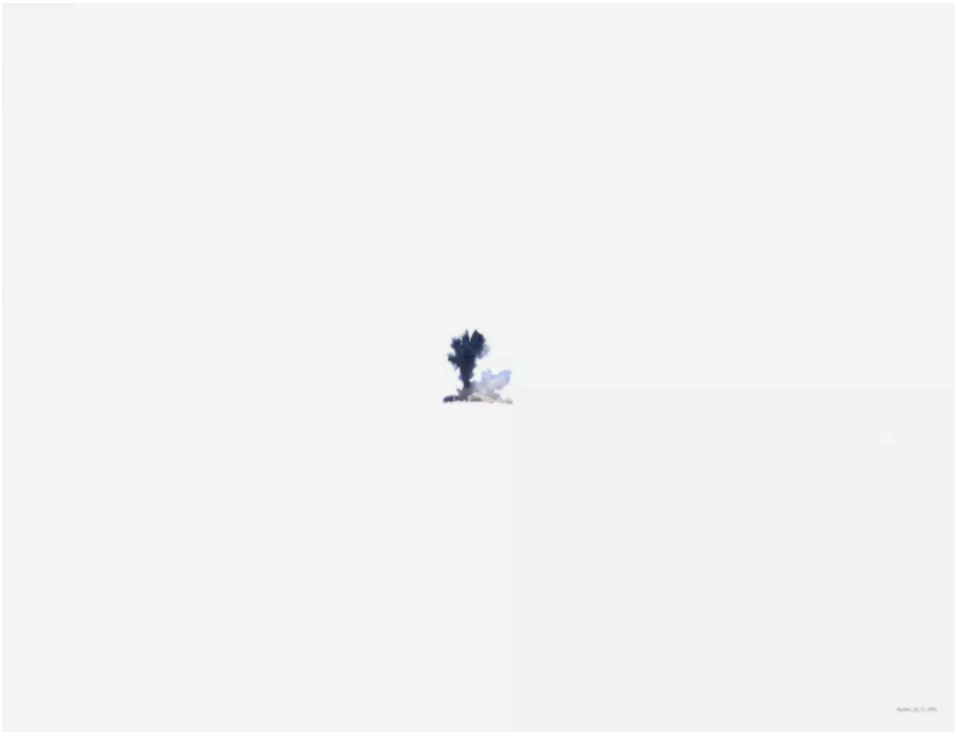

Figure 8 Walid Raad, **"**Oh God," she said, talking to a tree, 2004.

In The Atlas Group project, Raad presents a case file entitled, *"Oh God, "she said, talking to a tree*. His title grasps at the psychic domain of the presumed "author" of the file, in this case, a "senior topographer in the Lebanese Army's Directorate of Geographic Affairs" named Nahia Hassan.[98] In the story that Raad crafts, Hassan, upon being dismissed from her post, proceeds to paint hundreds of images of bomb clouds chronicling the detonation of missiles that she observed over her lengthy career. The paintings themselves are minuscule and intricate, renditions of smoke clouds that gleam red, purple, yellow, and orange, incandescent with the colors of the volatile materials that generated them, and in

[98] Walid Raad, "'Oh God,' she said, talking to a tree," *The Atlas Group*, accessed December 15, 2020, https://www.theatlasgroup1989.org/talkingtree

some cases sheer black, attesting to the toxicity of their contents. (Figure 8) Their formal presentation reduces massive explosions into miniature abstract shapes, transforming the intensity of their molten heat and voluminous expansion in the air and reducing them to delicate studies. Each painting constrains the intensity of a blast in favor of illuminating its beauty. A kind of obsessive repetition plagues Raad in his need to account for the many shapes, patterns, and textures evident in these cloud formations. Of all mediums, he selects watercolors, known for their difficulty of use, for watercolors bleed, expand, and often saturate the picture plane beyond the parameters of an artist's intentions. It is as if he selected a medium that at once reproduces the ambiguity and instability of clouds themselves. And yet, these watercolor paintings are precise. They exhibit a fixity, a perfection, and a stillness that betrays their dynamic content. They are analytical paintings meant to reframe the repercussions of war in a manner that allows for scrutinizing the abstract forms that emerge from smoke clouds in flux. Above all, these paintings formulate an atlas of destruction and one that wrestles with the very ambiguity that a cloud's ethereal nature represents. We can track missiles and their detonations, identify and bandage wounds, recover bodies and bury them, but harnessing the transience of smoke that evolves and changes in unpredictable ways becomes a test of forensic acuity. While Raad's paintings capture the ethos of these shifts, Weizman's work attempts to lend solidity to the vaporous configurations that light the sky of battlefields through new forms of analysis.

Figure 9, Forensic Architecture, timecode still from *The Bombing of Rafah,* video.

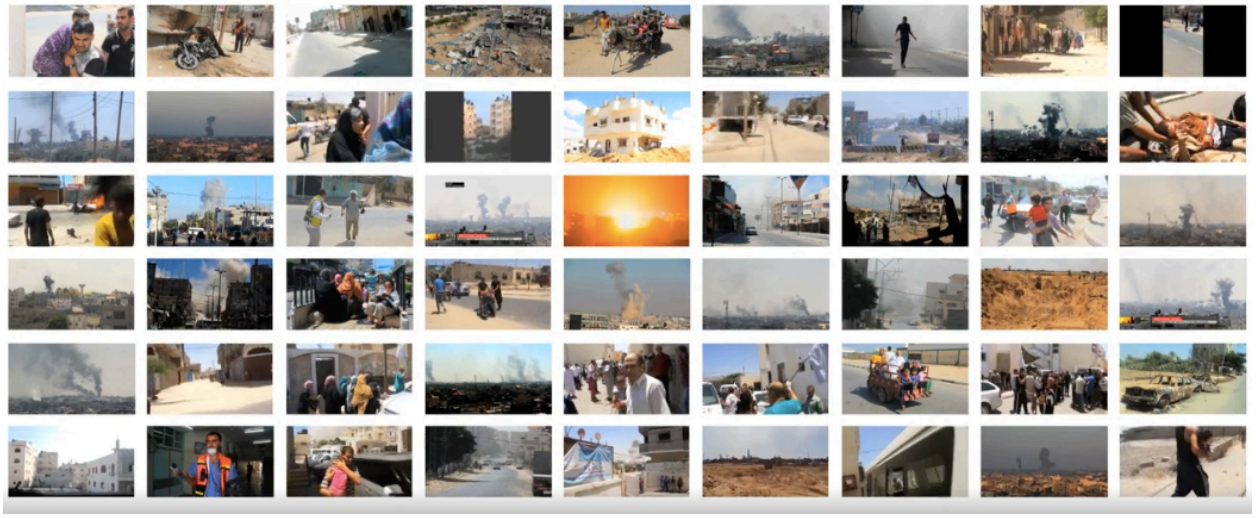

Figure 10, Forensic Architecture, user-generated content still from *The Bombing of Rafah,* video.

Smoke clouds that arise from detonations attest to nonhuman realms. That is, they are an amalgamation of air, construction materials, soil, and even flesh when discharged in populated areas, and they materialize into a

recombination of diverse particles that defy recognition of any one component. In this sense, they relay the aftermath of violence in ethereal terms, but for Weizman, such clouds contradict their diffusion by becoming temporal anchors. (Figure 9) Throughout July and August of 2014, the Israeli/Palestinian conflict erupted into war. To track the amount, location, and impact of Rafah's bombing by Israeli forces, FA launched a widescale analysis of user-generated content from within the heart of the conflict. (Figure 10) Akin to aftermath photography and its forensic approach, the analysts who worked on understanding the patterns, force, and specificity of the bombings that took place, sought out multiple angles of the same ephemera to create a timeline of events.

The bomb clouds that hung heavy in the sky were a common sight that victims photographed from rooftops, windows, balconies, and streets, turning phones and cameras upward to capture the onslaught of dust and debris that obscured what was an otherwise clear sky. Journalists and witnesses both contributed further evidence in visual form, allowing FA to triangulate time, space, and event as a means to interrogate the IDF's actions and disassemble the Israeli state narrative that sought to minimize the severity of the bombings. In this process, Weizman referred to the clouds as a form of testimony that bespoke the survivors' conditions. He states,

> The bomb clouds helped anchor media with testimonial evidence. Many testimonies were organized around the bombing incidents that people recalled – could not forget – because of what happened to their homes or families. They often described their movement through the city as a sequence of events punctured by bombing incidents. The bomb clouds could thus function as

anchors for the events of the day, grounding testimony and evidence, meteorology, buildings, and ruins in a forensic assemblage was at once the product of media, memory, and material reality.[99]

It is this intermixture that Weizman describes which characterizes an approach to the forensic that uniquely pertains to digital necropolitics. The bomb clouds themselves signify blasts that reach upward into the atmosphere. They seem intangible, delicate and porous, constantly shifting with the changing winds, and yet they function as emblems that represent grounded information born of witnesses, survivors, and combatants moving through a conflict zone and navigating a spectrum of harm and safety. Cast against satellite images, such bomb clouds become markers independent of and interconnected with the human realm. The clouds become an admixture of what was once intact, tangible, and utilitarian, and yet they signify all that has been transformed by violence. This signature trace of conflict is then further transformed by its computation, analysis, and recombination with other images that confer evidential validity. The methodology employed renders the cloud atlas that FA constructed to narrativize the Israeli attack in technical terms. From remote sensing to synchronization, geolocating images, 3D modeling, pattern analysis, and building complexes of images that at once validate human testimony and move beyond it, the resulting analysis is a form of post-human testimony that

[99] Weizman, *Forensic Architecture: Violence at the Threshold of Detectability*, 196.

blends technicity with the ethereal, producing an exceptionally calculated analysis bordering on the sublime.[100]

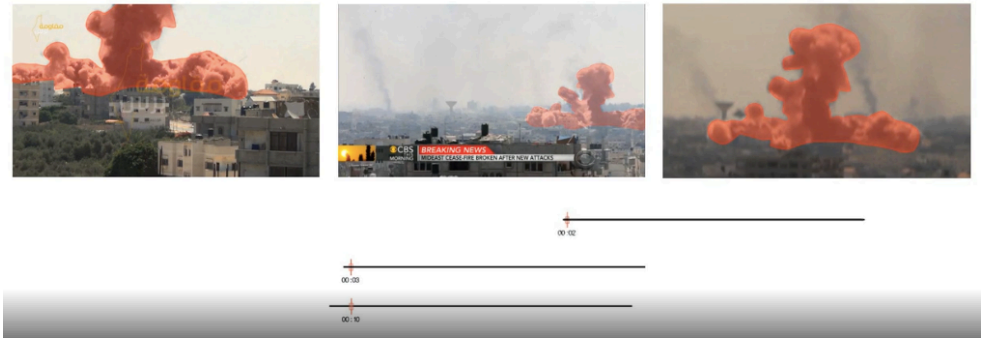

Figure 11 Forensic Architecture, bomb cloud analysis still from *The Bombing of Rafah,* video

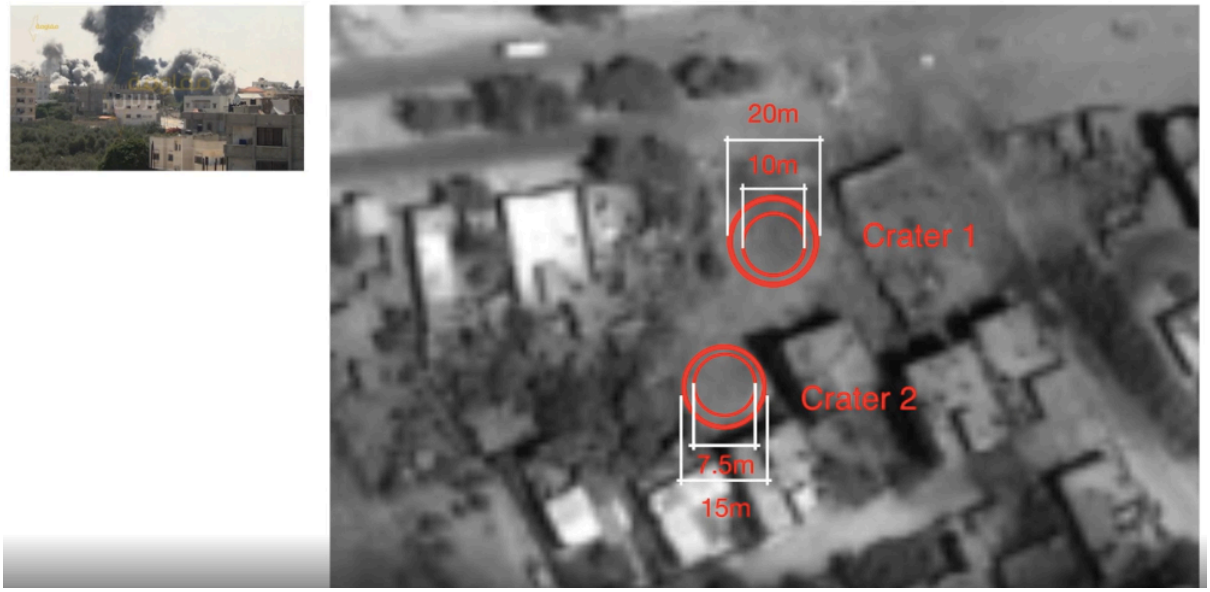

Figure 12 Forensic Architecture, crater analysis still from *The Bombing of Rafah,* video.

[100] Forensic Architecture, "The Bombing of Rafah," July 31, 2015, accessed October 23, 2020, https://forensic-architecture.org/investigation/the-bombing-of-rafah

The synchronization process is drawn from multiple still images taken from videos exposing a bomb cloud at different angles. (Figure 11) Detecting each person's position that captured a video is conducted by identifying landmarks in each image via satellite views. Determining each camera's axis that shot the same bomb cloud allows forensic analysts to determine the precise location of the bomb, creating a synthesized image that makes the sightlines visible. Furthermore, shadow analysis allows for a secure timestamp to be assigned to the images since much user-generated content is stripped of its metadata when posted to public platforms. The more images produced of a conflict, the greater the accuracy of the analysis. Multiple images of a conflictual event allow more sightlines to be established, greater accuracy determining time and place, and then extrapolating from this, the distances, landmarks, shadows, and topographical analysis of bomb craters allow the analyst to confirm the size of each missile that appears in an image. (Figure 12) In this process, technicity privileges a rigorous empiricism that transforms coordinates, sightlines, and shadows into elaborate visual equations. Ultimately this set of deductions leads to identifying the make of a bomb and who manufactured it, allowing for geopolitical tracing. The relationships that constitute support for conflict actions reveal the interwoven nature of global alliances. This is ultimately the unraveling that many forensic analysts and open source investigators desire, for in exposing state actors' networks, accountability can be identified with the result of potentially severing those alliances and mitigating future harm.

Figure 13 Forensic Architecture, missile analysis still from *The Bombing of Rafah,* video.

Like Raad's tracing of bullet holes in buildings and the collection of shell casings abandoned around a particular property, Weizman's determination of the missiles used in the Rafah attack reveals that the US manufactured the artillery used in Gaza, and that was deployed by the IDF. While this is not a shocking revelation given the long-term political cooperation between the US and Israel, identifying the US's direct influence in terms of military assistance provides a more nuanced understanding of how such conflicts are tacitly endorsed. The MK84 missiles provided by the US resulted in numerous deaths. (Figure 13) One missile alone killed sixteen people, many of whom were children, the youngest of whom was five months old.[101] An MK84 harbors one

[101] Ibid.

ton of explosive material and, as such, creates enormous craters in the earth.[102] These craters can be detected by utilizing remote sensing and creating a normalized difference vegetation index that essentially displays where plants, trees, and shrubbery were eviscerated by the explosion, thus confirming that the missiles signature craters are indeed what they appear to be from above. This visual analysis is then recombined with eyewitness accounts, cross-checked against mainstream media footage and user-generated content, before being further aestheticized by the case file presentations used to disseminate FA's work in legal, academic, journalistic, and fine art contexts.

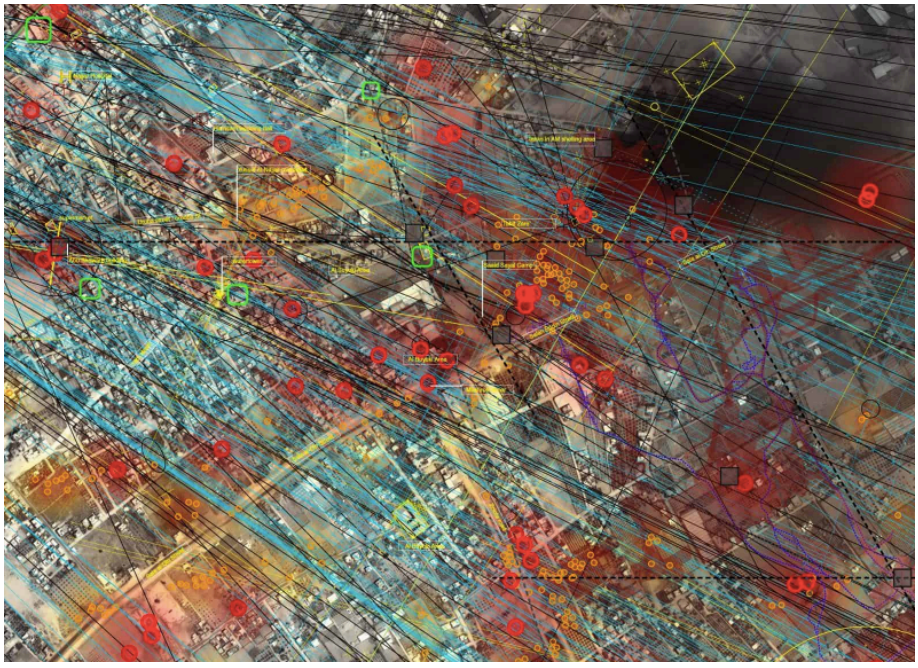

Figure 14 Forensic Architecture, composite spatial analysis, *The Bombing of Rafah*.

[102] Ibid.

While FA's presentations are intentionally created to exist in multiple spheres, their most persuasive work does not abstract the representations of violence that they construct but instead makes transparent the modes of analysis and technical applications utilized throughout their process. The results emphasize technicity while simultaneously proposing a new vision of forensic aesthetics that foregrounds the digital methods by which open-source investigations are now conducted. However, by avoiding the body as the locus of conflict, victims are marginalized, producing an invisible subtext to what is displayed. As much as forensic aesthetics decenters the body and human testimony, it circles back around to these touchstones and addresses them in different ways. The Rafah bombings are detailed in Weizman's book *Forensic Architecture: At the Threshold of Detectability* as a means to support the impetus for his efforts, and explicit testimony grants the conference of fact through eyewitness accounts. Thus the bomb cloud as "anchor" in terms of evidence is only legitimized through survivor accounts such as that of twenty-year-old Mohammed Abu Duba. In the process of fleeing countless tanks engulfing his neighborhood and the threat of bombs drawing closer, Duba states,

> I can't describe what we saw. It was as unrecognizable as our area. They weren't our streets. The cemetery is better by a million times than those streets. There were bodies…on the street and there was not enough room in our car to carry them…I looked and saw three trucks drawn across to block the street, their windows covered in bullet holes and the tires punctured. There were bodies in there. They (Israeli army) had killed the drivers…I looked out left and right and saw bodies every three or four meters. Every three or four meters a child, a

woman, a young boy, a young girl. All dead. We were looking to see if there was anybody moving. But they were all dead. None of the bodies was intact.[103]

Duba explicitly flees his house after witnessing the bombings from his roof. The key signal that he must escape was his view of the bomb clouds rising in the distance, and yet it is his testimony of the carnage on the ground that compels us to understand the conflict's effects. Alien streets, the disassociation he feels encountering his neighborhood, and its transformation into an impromptu burial ground with bodies shattered alongside windows and buildings makes Duba's statement a visceral testament of fear, pain, and loss. The implied visuality in the graphic description of streets littered with bodies lends the dimensionality of pathos to the austere 3D modeling, digital synthesis of images, and detailed timelines that overlay the evidence presented by FA. (Figure 14) As a rubric, such accounts are rarely included in FA's visualizations but are documented in writing used to support their case files. It is as if FA seeks to abscond human testimony, not because it is illegitimate, but because its potential imprecision contrasts sharply with the empirical reasoning foregrounded in their work. Survivors of trauma are prone to lapses in memory, distorted recollections, and piecemeal reconstructions of events. Yet, it is not only the presumed empirical value of materiality and post-human testimony that prompts Weizman and FA to avoid firsthand accounts. It is the very history of representation that positions the Palestinian subject as an already assumed

[103] Weizman, *Forensic Architecture: Violence at the Threshold of Detectability*, 185.

abject interlocutor and an aggrieved subject prone to violence. Their bodies can be blasted open, their homes reduced to ruins, and their existence acts as an inevitable foil to the Israeli state's power that exploits these visual tropes. By using eyewitness testimony as corroborating evidence that supports post-human testimonies, Weizman pointedly refuses to reinscribe the power relations that position dominant force over an impoverished victim, or the binary of assumed hero versus assumed terrorist, that so often characterizes the coverage of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict.

The highly politicized dyad of Israeli-Palestinian relations has consistently been framed as a conflict between aggressor or aggrieved, and it is only one's political affiliation that determines which category either party belongs to. Thus, human testimony becomes null and void when presented betwixt the two, given that each side believes that the violence they enact is justified and that the violence they suffer is unwarranted. This rift corrupts either party's capacity to learn from the other's testimony when it is expressed in the public realm. If testimony is "fundamentally a social capacity" as Benjamin McMyler posits, and “perception, memory, and inference” the tools that we use to discern the veracity of a given testimony which are “fundamentally solitary capacities,” then the allure of post-human testimonies is that the evidence presented does not have to conform to evoking an individual's trauma and thus require the listener to attune to or identify with another's

pain.[104] Instead, post-human testimonies attempt to offer both sides the ability to deconstruct events through materiality rather than personal prejudice. It is less volatile to debate materials than it is to dispute corpses. In this way, post-human testimonies embody the transference of pain onto objects that then render humans' physical pain in muted terms. When Elaine Scarry writes, "To have pain is to have certainty. To hear about pain is to have doubt," she highlights the fundamental conundrum that plagues embodied conflicts and the repercussions of violence, especially those rife with polarized sentiments.[105] While one feels pain intensely, to attest to that pain in public does not concretize its significance but rather makes apparent the inability of our subjective experience of physical pain to be made communal. Thus suffering and its agony are relegated to the realm of feeling, and as such, cannot be transferable. What Forensic Architecture reveals is that other epistemological resources can augment our understanding of conflict and transcend the ethical debates that interpret, misinterpret, and catalyze or castigate particular bodies within political discourse, and instead look to infrastructure and earth as forensic resources that ultimately function to reveal human pain without its direct representation. In this way, retrieving material elements from the domain of visuality, recombining them with software, and creating assemblages that express their factual content, are in fact, human rights enterprises. Thus even

[104] Benjamin McMyler, *Testimony, Trust, and Authority* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 3.
[105] Scarry, *The Body in Pain*, 13.

though post-human testimonies expressly absent the human, they are mobilized to promote humanistic aims.

Conclusion

The rise of OSIP combines different strains of fine art practice, forensics, tactical media, and technicity to disseminate new forms of post-human testimony in legal, academic, artistic, and journalistic realms. Civilian-led investigations also harken back to the forms of electronic civil disobedience prevalent at the inception of the internet's public use. Yet instead of abiding by the Rawlsian notion of civil disobedience in which social actors engage in "a public, nonviolent, and conscientious act contrary to the law usually done with the intent to bring about a change in the policies or law of the government" OSIP exploit radical obedience itself to upend violent state entities' expectations that such practitioners will operate outside the law's bounds.[106] OSIP do not hack into closed source caches such as confidential government files in the style of Anonymous or publish leaked government and military correspondence in the vein of Wikileaks. Yet OSIP do share a kinship with those that practiced electronic civil disobedience in the early days of the internet. As Ricardo Dominguez notes of the Zapatistas, their most important contribution was creating "new types of political subjects and new conditions for agency on a

[106] John Rawls, "Civil Disobedience and the Social Contract," in *Morality and Moral Controversies*, ed. John Arthur (Upper Saddle River: Prentice, 1996), 356.

global scale."[107] Whereas OSIP have forged a new political subjectivity and have activated global networks of resistance to state-engineered violence, their methodologies do not assault networks but rather interrogate them, utilize them and rearrange them. OSIP hew more closely to the definition of electronic civil disobedience articulated by the Critical Art Ensemble, which states, "Exits, entrances, conduits, and other key spaces must be occupied by the contestational force in order to bring pressure on legitimized institutions engaged in unethical or criminal actions."[108] If we consider this definition in relation to Weizman's bomb cloud analysis in which NGO's and FA were denied access to the physical landscape in which the conflict was unfolding, a new kind of "occupation" was enabled by viewing the digital ephemera emerging from Rafah. This "occupation" at a distance allowed for a combinatory set of "exits" and "entrances" with those actors on the ground forming "conduits" through which FA could provide evidential support. Whereas the Critical Art Ensemble considered their actions as part of a "performative matrix" the OSIP equivalent is an *investigative* matrix enabled by multiple perspectives, networks, GIS, GPS, satellite views, drone footage, user-generated content, software applications, and forensic insight.[109] Through remote sensing that collapses distant aerial

[107] Dominguez, Ricardo. "Electronic Civil Disobedience: Inventing the Future of Online Agitprop Theater," *PMLA* ,124, no. 5 (2009): 1807.
[108] Ibid, 1806.
[109] Ibid.

views into palatable desktop images, investigators can compress time and space through their digitization.

In a sense, the work of OSIP eviscerates the presumed omniscience of the "gods eye view" of state surveillance that has operated to transform individual bodies into informatics that police people in both physical and virtual realms. OSIP work under the premise that such micro assessments of the body, often rendered from macro "views" such as big data analysis and satellite imagery, have become naturalized. It is their vocation to interrupt the monolith of hegemonic powers that monopolize these technologies. Recognizing as well that the liberal human subject that precedes a cyborg fantasy of liberation are both flawed concepts, OSIP begin with the premise that neutrality is an impossibility. OSIP acknowledge that the kind of omniscience that surveillance portends to harbor is a tactic used to induce fear in populations and that objectivity is not fostered by technology but rather that it is most frequently mobilized as a corporate and governmental sleight of hand to seduce users into participation, entrapping them in a panoptic grip. Instead of the presumed empiricism of new digital technologies as passive, inert, amoral extensions of human capacities, the OSIP of today are invested in rewriting and reinventing the governmental and bureaucratic strategies used to build and utilize such technologies and mobilize them to forge radical inversions that place power in the hands of constituents by reclaiming facts in a post-truth landscape. It is not so much that OSIP steps outside the bounds that such technologies and investigative approaches connote

from a statecraft perspective, but rather that they apply the same methodologies as states to an extreme, with fewer resources and less power, but more ingenuity. They take the bureaucratic methodology of dispersed networks hyper-focused on the same task and redistribute the "mission" amongst citizens as a studio-based practice. They defy the status of the "expert" hired for the bureau and instead ask citizens to become independent analysts themselves. Through experimentation and recombination, OSIP proffer new versions of state narratives that were crafted to deceive the public as a way to assert the "surprising, refreshing power of truth claims."[110]

In contending with state narratives of violence, the most significant aspect of OSIP is that they circumvent the direct depiction of violence and address the spectacle of death without exposing the human element of corpses. Instead, they emphasize the imprint of crimes cast in those structures that evidence bodily destruction to mount a critique that evades a visual syntax of bodies in pain. By doing so, they avoid semantics fraught with emotions and instead proffer a vision of violation that is ascetic in its place. Forensic aesthetics thus privileges impersonal empiricism with the intent to unravel a "top down imperial positivism."[111] While initially this may be perceived as analogous to a bureaucratic vision or an aesthetics of objectivity because the

[110] Eyal Weizman, "Forensic Architecture," lecture, Platform Speaker Series, Cal State University, Webinar, November 12, 2020.
[111] Ibid.

resulting images emphasize technicity, the goal and intent of such work directly counters state power by deploying a "diffused and multi perspectival practice that weave(s) together" different elements in the interest of challenging who has the right to create such visions.[112] "Expertise is something we're trying to undo" Weizman states, in the interest of "opening up rather than closing down" on information within the digital public sphere.[113] In so doing, Weizman asserts that aesthetics "is not a human property at all. It's a property of all matter. So matter senses any surface in a world, whether it's the surface of a table, or facade of a building or a street, senses the world around it and to a certain extent records it. So aesthetics is a kind of imprint of things on other things."[114] Harnessing matter thus "speaks" against state harm and "speaks" for the subject of its violence, but it does so through post-human testimonies that evade corporeal terms. Even when perchance a body is imaged in these reconstructions, it is most often used merely as a vehicle to showcase a bullet's trajectory with surgical precision rendering the forensic subject mute in the process of visualization. This technologized gaze that is remote from the victim subsequently provokes an analytical distance in the viewer as well. To anesthetize death and transform it into a diagram of weapons, architecture, and infrastructure that point to perpetrators and politics certainly does the work of

[112] Ibid.
[113] Ibid.
[114] Ibid.

unraveling crimes against humanity in an effective manner. However, the paradox lies in the fact that such work is done in the name of humanity and yet consistently obscures the human in its process. Thus, by examining the vicissitudes of state violence and the permutations of its reach both on the ground and in virtual space, OSIP are forging a new era in which post-human testimony shifts away from compassionate identification and instead reveals infrastructures of domination as a means to recompose and alter our perception of human life and death.

EPILOGUE

The Testimonial Turn

"All of our phrasing – race relations, racial chasm, racial justice, racial profiling, white privilege, even white supremacy – serves to obscure that racism is a visceral experience, that it dislodges brains, blocks airways, rips muscle, extracts organs, cracks bones, breaks teeth. You must never look away from this. You must always remember that the sociology, the history, the economics, the graphs, the charts, the regressions all land, with great violence upon the body."[1]

-Ta-Nehisi Coates

"The great force of history comes from the fact that we carry it within us, are unconsciously controlled by it in many ways, and history is literally present in all that we do. It could scarcely be otherwise, since it is to history that we owe our frames of reference, our identities, and our aspirations. And it is with great pain and terror that one begins to realize this. In great pain and terror one begins to assess the history which has placed one where one is and formed one's point of view. In great pain and terror because, therefore, one enters into battle with that historical creation, Oneself, and attempts to recreate oneself according to a principle more humane and more liberating; one begins the attempt to achieve a level of personal maturity and freedom which robs history of its tyrannical power, and also changes history." [2]

-James Baldwin

"The Invisible Victims" was the title.[3] Published June 10, 2019. Ashley Heavy Runner Loring was missing. The article retraced her last days and the perseverance of her family's search. This story was my introduction to the crisis of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women. Parched golden plains, desolate

[1] Ta-Nehisi Coates, *Between the World and Me* (New York: Spiegel & Grau, 2015), 10.
[2] James Baldwin, "White man's guilt," *Ebony magazine* 10 (1965): 47.
[3] Christa Hillstrom, "The Invisible Victims," *Marie Claire*, June 10, 2019, accessed April 20, 2021, https://www.marieclaire.com/politics/a27560457/native-american-women-missing/

train tracks, snowcapped mountains, and a steel arch announcing the Blackfeet reservation were the images that granted me insight into the land that Ashley traversed. Still lifes of her prom dress, an abandoned car pockmarked with bullets, her high school ID, missing person posters, and police department pamphlets entitled "The Criminal Justice System and You" emphasized the despair I experienced gazing at a fragile snapshot of Ashley torn into shards and taped cautiously back together. The photograph rested underneath a painting of a young Native American woman holding a cross, gazing up at something potentially divine, just beyond the frame.

Ashley stands, hips askance, lithe, with sinewy muscles, between the folds of the torn image, her hair windswept and her stature strong. The researcher in me felt as if I was inept when I could not discern the text emblazoned upon her tank top in full. Glasses, brunette hair, a sincere but guarded smile spread out across her face. Here was a body that I could read but that I could not know. Somewhere within the 1.5 million acres of the reservation, or perhaps just beyond that frame in the vast, barren folds of Glacier National Park, her body most likely lies. Her corpse. Upon that terrain are those still looking for Ashley, waking up early in cold winter dawns stretching out into deep summer nights. With coffee and flashlights, keychains dangling, and SUV's. Friends, family, and officers scan the land, parsing for clues, searching for a whisper of why she disappeared. I know that they are still searching to this day.

Just beyond the frame is how I think of it for myself as well. As a scholar invested in the permutations of political violence, how it emerges, how it affects us, and what points of crystallization can contract into enough evidence that resolutions can be found, I was troubled by the fact that this issue was so prominent throughout the Americas and yet so obscured in the course of my particular studies. And it was not, in fact, the conspicuous leaders of the movement that pierced through me and beseeched me to write about this issue. Instead, it was the silent tears of a young woman at a small gathering, presenting the plight of MMIW to the UCSC community. Here I witnessed the impact of loss in visceral terms. Jemzi Ortiz. She stood tall and confident while explaining to everyone in attendance the ramifications of MMIW. This is what you should read, and this is what you should look at. Filmmakers and novels and reports that granted us numbers and perspectives and paths through this enduring conundrum.

Somewhere in that liminal space between heartbreak and composure, Jemzi spoke of her cousin who had recently been killed and the impossibility of justice. I could feel her pain cascading onto me. A movement of affect that was voluminous in measure but quiet in its expression. Upon the screen behind her was a massive grid of photographs. Indigenous women that had gone missing, Indigenous women that had been murdered, and amidst those quadrants was her cousin, a luminous face that would have been unknown to me had Jemzi not begun to cry. The room fell silent when she did until very softly, the barely

perceptible lilt of a song began to emerge from a woman seated on the periphery. It was a Native American chant whose words I cannot recall and whose significance I'm sure would have been entirely lost on me had I even known them, but there was something in the resonance of that voice that carried us all into communion with Jemzi, her cousin, and the desire to heal their disrepair. We were all ushered into one of those pristine moments that render everyone mute because reality has a way of intervening when one's grief is all too palpable. We were collectively *present*, providing a momentary salve, and the hope enshrined in its healing. Achille Mbembe writes, "for a large share of humanity the end of the world has already occurred. The question is no longer to know how to live life while awaiting it; instead it is to know how living will be possible the day after the end, that is to say, how to live with loss, with separation. How can the world be re-created in the wake of the world's destruction?"[4]

Ariella Azoulay responds in part to Mbembe's inquiry, attempting to tackle the aftermath of imperial disorder, which she posits as the original moment of violence from which differential citizenship was established in the name of "Man," and that fails to account for marginalized populations in its universality. Through her writing, she limns the contours of a "disappeared world" in which Enlightenment-era history overwrites those populations

[4] Achille Mbembe, *Necropolitics* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2019), 29.

deemed of negligible importance in the construction of "humanity" and asserts that we must contend with this "manufactured absence" so that we do not "surrender to Man's memories, but rather…rewrite their meanings in conversation with the memories of others."[5] In some ways, what I am proposing as the "testimonial turn" is a collective effort to exchange these memories and rewrite those histories of exclusion through an imaginative praxis that insistently asks us to see beyond the state.

Through the digital public sphere, we convene in and through images that inspire us to conceive new social imaginaries that can be both reparative and revolutionary. The digital interventions explored throughout this dissertation propose a set of emancipatory visions and a more robust version of human rights through the reclamation of those images of the dead, dying, and disappeared that continue to haunt us. As an act of defiance, these interventions refuse to consign the victims of state violence to the spectral. Instead, these interventions reanimate the lives of those lost to secure a future free from violence for the living. The strategies deployed across each chapter differ significantly, but they are united in forming practical methodologies that reorganize the material emblems of violence from architecture to police reports while translating misrepresentations into powerful testimonies that map corridors towards social change. In this process, they deploy tactics that

[5] Ariella Azoulay, "Potential History: Thinking Through Violence," *Critical Inquiry* 39, no. 3 (2013): 550.

reinvent belonging, constructing alternative polities through visual reconstructions of violence in defiance of the norm. "The right to have rights," as Hannah Arendt's axiom reminds us, is conferred upon us by belonging to a polity, which affords us the promise of security and protection.[6] The subjects explored here form alternative polities through an activist mourning that reimagines loss at the margins, producing testimonies as an expression of communities that seek to be whole.

Images of death forge unbearable intimacies. In writing on the value of testimonial accounts of violence, I found myself asking, *what is our commitment to one another?* Diamond Reynolds made her commitment known in extraordinarily courageous terms. In documenting Philando Castile's death, she risked her own life to challenge the state's authority. Annita Lucchesi's commitment to indigenous rights comes from examining indigenous deaths in the most brutal and graphic forms. Throughout this process, she has suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder, the symptoms of which flash up unexpectedly, translating into anger, depression, stress, terror, illness, nightmares, and embodied memories of countless assaults. For Lucchesi, enduring trauma-based research necessitates the development of spirit-based research, reaffirming her commitment to healing herself by dedicating this

[6] Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Publishers, 1973) 296.

process to restoring a collective whole.[7] Walid Raad and Eyal Weizman confront the weight of nations that bear down upon their subjects with such intensity that they distort the possibility of accurate historical recollections. Investigating fragmented conflicts, they suture back together the remnants of monumental loss so that the state cannot deny them. What, indeed, is at stake in our commitments to one another in our confrontations with death? Can we afford to "surrender to Man's memories," or can we script a resistance that re-writes the multitudes of those lost back into existence, that in turn propels us into a future without regret?

As the digital public sphere continues to expand, inviting new testimonies and new interventions, it also calls us to reflect upon our relationship to each other at the limits of representation. When we witness a man being mercilessly beaten on the ground for nine minutes, how do we reconcile with this? When we witness a man die by the force of a knee to his neck on the ground, and those eight minutes and forty-six seconds extend into eternity, how are we to reconcile with this? When the chasm of nearly twenty years between the images of Rodney King and George Floyd collapses into the grief of centuries, how are we to reconcile with this? Darnella Frazier made a commitment to George Floyd when she bore witness to his death, which transformed into millions of people committing to the streets to collectively uphold the valor of her testimony and

[7] Annita Hetoevėhotohke'E Lucchesi, "Spirit-Based Research: A Tactic for Surviving Trauma in Decolonizing Research," *Journal of Indigenous Research,* 7, no. 1 (2019): 1.

the memory of Floyd's sacrifice. These testimonies documenting unbridled violence refuse to be relegated to a social periphery where state power and its corporeal force can conceal itself. These images demand that the boundary of that periphery be redrawn, wrenching us into communion with one another at the most damaged and injurious sites/sights of suffering and harm. In so doing, digital necropolitics met with visions of necroresistance offer us virtual incantations that summon us into recognition in order to transform embodied states of being. Testimony as necroresistance thus effectively threads itself through the capillaries of receptive publics, proffering alternative visions of what can or should constitute life, reflected to us through images of death.