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Derelict Visions: An Introduction

Jason U. Kim

It is with great honor that I welcome you to the inaugural issue of *nineteen sixty nine*. As I greet you, however, I find myself in the unenviable position of having to simultaneously introduce this journal as an intellectual project and the theme of this issue. Fortunately, these two things are connected, and it is the goal of this introduction to make these connections transparent.

In writing this introduction, I echo Fanon's opening remarks in *Black Skin White Masks*. Fanon begins *Black Skin White Masks* with a critique of the tradition of introducing academic works. He writes, "It is good form to introduce a work in psychology with a statement of its methodological point of view. I shall be derelict. I leave methods to the botanists and the mathematicians. There is a point at which methods devour themselves."¹ It is important here to not take the sentiment expressed by Fanon in these opening lines as being anti-intellectual or even anti-method in intention. Rather, Fanon continues his introduction with an impassioned overview of his decolonial methodology, providing the reader with the tools necessary to understand the critical truth that is to follow.² Likewise, we will also be derelict in this introduction.

First, I must speak a bit about the genesis of this project. The journal's name refers to the year in which Ethnic Studies was established at the University of California, Berkeley (UCB) as a direct result of student activism through the Third World Liberation Front in the 1960s and '70s.³ Thus, *nineteen sixty nine* simultaneously reminds us of our origins and gestures towards the critical possibilities of Ethnic Studies for the present and the future.

The idea for starting a student-led Ethnic Studies journal was first conceived during various feedback sessions held between students and the Department of Ethnic Studies at UCB

during the 2009-2010 academic year. Due to student interest, the Department appointed yours truly to head this initiative in 2010 and the journal officially began operations in late 2011.

The theme of the inaugural issue, “the future(s) of Ethnic Studies,” prompted contributors by asking the following questions: How has the field of Ethnic Studies transformed within the last 40 years? What are some current examples of innovative and emerging work within the field? How do you envision the future of Ethnic Studies for the 21st century?

Our questions attracted a wide array of responses from different segments of the activist, creative, and scholarly communities, and so each and every work contained in this issue represents a unique perspective on the above questions. In including these differing perspectives, we hope that this issue is emblematic of how Ethnic Studies critically redefines what it means to study race, and how the field engages with and is enriched by the multiplicity of knowledge-makers that work within it. After all, if we are to take the production of critical knowledge seriously, we must begin with reconsidering what is permitted to be published in an academic, peer-reviewed journal in the first place. In short, we feel that each work featured in this issue challenges how both the academy and the general public engage with issues of race, gender, and class oppression. But on the whole, what do the many visions represented in this volume mean?

Read collectively, the works contained in this volume suggest that there are many possible future(s) for Ethnic Studies. Though each of the works are quite different in their envisioning of and engagement with the field, there are convergences in the analyses that suggest a coherent and vibrant Ethnic Studies methodology. Central to this methodology is the concept of relationality, where social, political, economic, and emotive relations – and the meanings attached to and informing such relations – are thought about as being in constant flux and mutually constitutive. There are four ways in which the featured works engage in this critical, relational thinking.

First, we in Ethnic Studies think relationally through interdisciplinarity. We do not privilege any particular discipline’s methods, or the knowledge that such disciplines produce. Barthes said that:

Interdisciplinary work, so much discussed these days, is not about confronting already constituted disciplines (none of which, in fact, is willing to let itself go). To do something interdisciplinary it’s not enough to choose a “subject” (a theme) and gather around it two or three sciences. Interdisciplinarity consists in creating a new object that belongs to no one.⁴

Elaborating on this idea, for us in Ethnic Studies, interdisciplinarity is more than just the creation of an elusive object as Barthes suggests, but an ethical and epistemological position. It is the idea that the “object” of study is always/also a subject that generates its own knowledge(s), and in doing so, transforms and shakes the very boundaries of our ideas. This is why we have consciously chosen to include literary, creative, and visual works in the journal, in addition to scholarly articles.

Second, we think relationally through intersectionality. Many of the works contained herein assume that subjects are complex and multiple in their subjectivities, that people are

multiply imbricated through race, gender, sexuality, class, and other social markers, and that such imbrications create highly specific conditions and experiences of oppression and resistance.

Third, we think relationally by comparing across and between racialized groups. We know that race and racism is deeply relational – for example, that whiteness is always articulated in relation to and against other racial categories. We also know that colonialism, racism, patriarchy, homophobia, etc. diminishes all of our shared humanity.

Last, we think relationally by being sensitive to the linkages, circuits, and movements of people, ideas, capital, and feelings across various times and spaces. We know that borders are not containers for these things, nor are the past, present, and future.

Thus, the critical methodology of Ethnic Studies is not simply derived from the haphazard nailing together of different kinds of wooden planks to form some kind of coherent framework. Rather, when taken together, these axes of relational thinking operate as if peering through a prism – several refractions occur and what is revealed continually changes as one changes the angle. And changing the angle produces no definitive Truth, but only differing sets of refractions each time. Thus, in articulating the many possible future(s) of Ethnic Studies, it is hoped that this volume creates an opening for you to participate in producing and thinking about what these refractions might mean.

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Notes

1. Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam Markmann (New York: Grove Press, 1967), 12.
2. For an extended discussion of this passage, see Nelson Maldonado-Torres, *Against War: Views from the Underside of Modernity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 99.
3. A more detailed account of this history is provided by Xamuel Bañales in this volume.
4. Roland Barthes, "Juenes chercheurs" in *Le Bruissement de la langue* (Paris: Le Seuil, 1984), 97-103. Quoted in Avery Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 7.