Editors’ Introduction

Building Things Not to Last Forever

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GRATITUDE

We have tried to begin each of our editorials over the past three years with conveying our gratitude. Conveying gratitude only at the end can be risky, because we can forget what was done along the way. We can be too tired to say things in a good way. We can be filled with the feeling of something being over rather than the feeling of appreciation for the way things came to be. This is the final issue for which we are serving as editors. When we decided/agreed/came into relation with this journal as editors, we said from the start that it would be a three-year term. We believe that this is an appropriate length of time. It has been just enough without being too much. In a field like critical ethnic studies, in which many conversations, ethics, and perseverations might be curated, it is good to share this labor, to spread it around in order to share both the commitment and the influence.

We leave feeling very grateful for the writings that have been entrusted to us, and thankful for the chance to pass them from our care into the journal public. We are thankful for receiving this journal, which has been no small charge, and we are thankful to be able to relinquish it.

Trevor Phillips, Métis scholar and host of the podcast At the Edge of Canada: Indigenous Research, described holding a piece of writing “very gently,” making room for its ideas still in formation in order to open possible flight lines of thought rather than to foreclose arguments. This generosity—this close engagement with a writing—feels akin to how the work of editing Critical Ethnic Studies has been for us. Rather than considering this a forum for debate that results in the furthering or diminishing of academic capital, we have treated the journal as a place for writing that we might all be in relation to. In this way, we have tried to hold this journal very gently.
The labor of making a journal is in a different part of the beat than we thought it would be. What we thought would be the down beat was not. We thought it might be in imagining the themes and the sketching out of concerns. Yes, this has been important, but there has been immense pleasure in crafting the themes to which we have attended in our duration as editors. We convened works asking *what justice wants* (issue 2.2), hoping that this question would be helpful in cracking open the contradictions and collaborations within the scope of what CES might be. Issue 3.1 asked *what has identity done for us lately* (in the tradition of the crucial social theorist Janet Damita Jo Jackson) to try to think through the ways the identity is called upon to do much more than it possibly can do as a concept, and as an intervention. We also worked with Ashon Crawley to curate works on *what can be done with the academy* (issue 4.1), done in terms of both made to happen and made to be over. The creation of these themed issues was a labor that had its own momentum.

The labor of engaging with reviewers and their immensely detailed and theorized reviews was also a particular kind of labor, but it turned out not to be as heavy as we thought it would be at the outset. In part, this is because of the spectacular efforts of our managing editor, LeKeisha Hughes, who also completes her time in this role with this issue. Keisha’s unwavering attention to the writings submitted and to the relationships with the press, the reviewers, and ourselves provided a rhythm to this work. The reviewers have been superbly generous with their time and intentions toward this journal becoming a unique platform for scholarly work.

We are grateful to Nisha Toomey for collaborating with Keisha in managing this issue, and for serving as managing editor for the next issue, 5.1. And to Hina Shaikh, thank you for convening conversations on the CES Twitter and blog. To the editors at the University of Minnesota Press, thank you for your patience and affirmations. To the Critical Ethnic Studies Association Publications Committee—thank you for stepping up to make this transition to the future editors and future form of the journal. To our board—thank you for lending us your presence, for associating your name with this endeavor, and for giving suggestions for themed issues, reviewers, and manuscripts. Our next issue, 5.1, will be guest edited by some of our board members and their collaborators, on the theme “Solidarities of Nonalignment.”

The *tatum*: we did not know that one important, often overlooked labor would be to finally—after the papers are in, the reviewers are heard, the revisions are engaged, and the careful proofreading is complete—reread an article and quietly reflect on what it is doing in order to write the descriptive
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overviews that are part of every editorial introduction. This is not an unfamiliar task for us—we have edited books and guest edited special issues of other journals. As editors of a book series, we frequently need to describe the work of other scholars. We frequently describe the work of the students whom we mentor to other scholars in letters, or more spontaneously at a conference. But every time, it is hard. It is hard because it requires a form of attention that can be difficult to gather and sustain. It requires a kind of presence to summon this attention. Every time, it requires an unseen ethic of close description, one that maybe we cannot always get right. We have learned that we need to rest occasionally to do this well.

Our understanding of the practice of close description comes from a book on teaching and evaluation practice called Starting Strong (2001), by Patricia Carini. Eve learned about this book, and about developing a practice of close description in her graduate work with composition scholar Sondra Perl. Carini emphasizes the need to spend time describing a work before moving to categorize it. Carini writes,

Describing I pause, and pausing, attend. . . . Describing makes room for something to be fully present. Describing is slow, particular work. I have to set aside familiar categories for classifying or generalizing. I have to stay with the subject of my attention. . . . Describing I am in relation to. What I am in relation to cannot be easily or lightly dismissed. It stays.¹

Close description as a way to become in relation to has been the approach with which we have tried to approach the honor of describing the work of the authors who appear in this journal. For Carini, describing is itself a creative act, an act of respect, of calling a work forth. It is this labor—this describing that we now know to be so important in our caretaking of this journal—that feels important to pass to someone else at this time. We have loved it, and love it so much that we know when it is time to let go.

To all the authors of manuscripts that were submitted but not given space in this journal: we hope that they have found other platforms, and have expanded the spaces of critical ethnic studies beyond the printed space in this journal.

FOR YOU, WHO LIKE TO CREATE A MESS OUT OF COLONIAL APPARATUSES

In A Third University Is Possible, la paperson (a name by which K. Wayne Yang sometimes ghostwrites) signals the importance of the “scyborg,” a
conceptualization learning from works by Donna Haraway, Joy James, and Roderick Ferguson to refer to “the structural agency of persons who have picked up colonial technologies and reassembled them to decolonizing purposes.” In the book, paperson argues that by virtue of the labor of us scyborgs, a decolonizing university is already in many ways existing within the colonial formations that so startlingly shape everyday life. This is not to say that anything is guaranteed but that things are close, insofar as almost everything falls apart. As he explains,

Nothing is too dirty for scyborg dreaming: MBA programs, transnational capital, Department of Defense grants. Scyborgs are ideology-agnostic, which creates possibilities in every direction of the witch’s flight—not just possibilities that we like. This is why some of you are not always decolonial in behavior. Thankfully, your newly assembled machine will break down. Some other scyborgs will reassemble the busted gears to drive decolonial dreams. To dream it is to ride the ruin.

paperson is clear that they are advocating not for the rescue of the university but for the work of scyborgs to create other kinds of machines, decolonizing machines, rematriating machines, other assemblages for disturbance, for schemes, for ruins. paperson offers a theory of change that renounces permanence: “Only the bad guys build things that last forever,” he reminds us. For us scyborgs, we might instead learn, as Ruth Wilson Gilmore challenges us to do, about what (and who) makes liberatory structures work, and fall apart.

We came to our role as editors with a commitment to publishing the work of activists, artists, students, and scholars unaffiliated with universities, alongside the work of university-affiliated scholars. This issue presented some of the challenges of moving works presented in film formats to the linearity of a journal article, and some of the challenges of making work that engages closely with a poem or song lyrics. These challenges are tied up with both close description and the work of scyborgs. Images are published in grayscale in this journal, and though they may be in a dynamic relationship in other formats, chunks of text and images take on the shape of a singular through-line within the style requirements of this journal.

Copyright standards often preclude the reprinting of poems or song lyrics, especially in substantial amounts. As we wrote the first draft of this introduction, we still did not know the outcome of whether lines from a poem would be published in an article about the important conceptual
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work about that same poetry. How do we write about a film without the reader having seen the film, without making the film more available? How do we write about a poem without the poetry?

In Eve Tuck’s ongoing collaboration with artist C. Ree, in a series of installments called “A Glossary of Haunting,” they write as a singular composite narrator of a glossary that appears without its host text: An appendix without the book. An appendix without the body.6

It occurs to us that Critical Ethnic Studies may at times have that same function. It is a conversation happening in the eaves, happening at the sides of the stages so that the sounds it is making are still audible to those making the scene at the center. It is another kind of machine to plug into, a stage whisper that does not care if it is overheard—it is designed to perform its dislocation in a way that attracts attention. Critical Ethnic Studies may be serving as a glossary to the world, the civil society that plots the early deaths of Black people, Indigenous people, migrant people, trans people, people of color, queer people, and all the people that we love. The host is implied. What needs to be intervened upon is implied.

This issue is heavy in interdisciplinary methods that center aesthetics, performance, film, and literature. In different ways, it troubles borders, and it can be in conversation with those for whom the need to abolish borders is now in full clarity. The reach of antiblackness across time and continents is considered across these articles. The ontologies that Black people and Indigenous people have crafted while facing unrelenting forms of harm are featured here.

To the authors: we are glad to go out with your papers.

Michaela Django Walsh’s article, “Burlando la migra: Shifting Conceptions of the U.S.–Mexico Border,” tells the story of a multiyear ethnography of caminatas hosted by Hñähñu people seven hundred miles from the U.S.–Mexico border. The caminatas, or strenuous, emotionally and politically demanding “night hikes,” allow guests—including students, journalists, adventure-seekers, and researchers like Walsh—to experience the sensations of crossing the border from what is called Mexico to what is called the United States. Walsh notes that the article is also an attempt to determine an approach to writing that is a match with the “vivid corporeality” of the caminata. The author theorizes the ways that the night hike “enacts a connectedness to the land that instantiates both Indigenous cosmologies and embodied epistemologies that promote the transmission of cultural memory as the hike affirms Hñähñu belonging to a pueblo from which 80 percent of the community has migrated to the United States.” Walsh offers layers of theorizing,
including the theorizing made evident in the design by Hñähñu people of the caminata—in the poking-fun words of those playing the border agents, such as a coyote named Poncho—offered in moments crouching behind walls, and before running again, and Walsh’s own theorizing of the ways that the nation-states are both exacted and refused in this weekly Saturday night simulacrum.

Naomi Rincón Gallardo’s article is a companion to her film and performance work called The Formaldehyde Trip. A mix of imagery from the past and the future, from the realities of state violence to fantastic depictions of the underworld, from the grief and fury and hope and aspiration of people’s resistance to ecocide and genocide, this film and performance theorize the dilemmas and triumphs of narration, of representation, of magic-making, and of building the world. The Indigenous Education Network (IEN) of the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, at the University of Toronto, was fortunate to host a screening and performance of The Formaldehyde Trip in February 2018, as part of its State Violence and Indigenous Resistance film screening series. The performance, in each instance, is entirely one of a kind, involving Rincón Gallardo’s appearance as an axolotl narrator, and audience participation. It is a musical juxtaposing multiple genres, saturating the audience in sound, in color, in connections between colonial exploration that required the invention of museums over there, to extractive industries, to the ongoing murders of Indigenous peoples here. In the companion publication appearing in this issue, Rincón Gallardo shares some of the theorizing that the film and performance work engages, and then, (unspeakably) generously, a description of the visual work in the film, and the lyrics of the songs in the film and the performance.

Belinda Kazeem-Kamiński’s article, “Unearthing: In Conversation: On Listening and Caring,” is a written companion to her piece Unearthing. In Conversation, which was initially a performance piece and is now a short film. The film was screened as part of the same series by IEN, along with Rincón Gallardo’s film. Featuring stills from the film and portions of the spoken text of the film, this article is one way to bring the experience of viewing the film—not yet, or perhaps not ever to be widely distributed—to Critical Ethnic Studies readers. Kazeem-Kamiński discusses her approach to engaging the photographs made by Paul Schebesta, an Austro Czech missionary and ethologist, of himself posing with the Indigenous communities he “discovered” in the former Belgian Congo, today known as the Republic of Congo, a century ago. Kazeem-Kamiński, encountering the images in a museum, then in archives, uses the space of the performance and film to
consider modes of contestation and redaction of the photographs, so that the people in the images are kept out of reach of the colonial gaze, and so that Schebesta is unable to escape scrutiny. The film shows Kazeem-Kamiński thinking aloud as she considers different forms of redaction, including cutting out the profile of the people with the exception of Schebesta, covering their bodies with tape, and other attempts to redirect the viewing away from the bodies of the people and toward the harm of Schebesta’s presence and documentation.

Kazeem-Kamiński credits her reading of Saidiya Hartman’s *Scenes of Subjection* (1997) with informing the work, along with the influence of Ken Gonzales-Day’s *Erased Lynching* (2006) photographic series. Yet she also notes that since beginning to share her film, she has been encouraged by many people to also read and engage Christina Sharpe’s *In the Wake* (2017; reviewed by Cornel Grey in CES 4.1) and Tina Campt’s *Listening to Images* (2017). Kazeem-Kamiński does the relational citational work of connecting her film and performance to works that she could not have possibly read before making her work (her film came out the same year) but that helped her understand what she has made, and that she wants to continue to think and learn from. This making sense of that which is related but not prior, that which informs but not necessarily precedes, is a compelling approach to citational practices that might make an important contribution to the work of *Critical Ethnic Studies*. The founder of the Black/Land Project and member of the *Critical Ethnic Studies* editorial board, Mistinguette Smith, made this observation when first reading Katherine McKittrick’s *Demonic Grounds* (2006): works that make related arguments without being aware of one another are often informed by an older, deeper place from which these works come. A direct line between Kazeem-Kamiński, Sharpe, and Campt may be Hartman’s *Scenes of Subjection* (1997), but likely so many other threads and routes link these works. The way that they are in relation will continue to thicken, especially as we read them and retrace these routes.

John Gillespie’s article, “Black Dada Nihilismus: Theorizing a Black Radical Aesthetic,” begins and ends with the idea that radical Black art makes and articulates a grammar, an aesthetic that is incomprehensible to (white) civil society. Attending to Amiri Baraka’s 1964 poem “Black Dada Nihilismus” as a conceptualization of what Black radical art is and does, Gillespie layers a reading of Baraka and Black dada as an interrogation and rupturing of the anti-Black world. Such work, Gillespie claims, “must aim toward not a different orientation of the current structure but rather a disorientation, a disintegration, of the fundamental constituent elements of the World as-is.”
Taking seriously Hans Richter’s description of dada as having “invited, or rather defied the world to misunderstand it,” Gillespie’s article places significance in ways that Dadaism is a refusal to be singularly defined, all the while it is an expansion, an eclipsing of what is meant to refer to art. Black dada, according to Gillespie, involves a critique of the interruption of dada that does not also interrupt antiblackness, and the simultaneous recognition that “Black inclusion in the world of art under the regime of modernity is a priori Dada.” Near the conclusion of this article, Gillespie offers an analysis that is both a diagnosis and perhaps a hint of a pathway to something else: “The Black artist is coerced into faking her subjectivity in order for her art to be contextualized as art from within civil society.” To notice the coercion, the limits of what gets known as art, and the attendant violences of civil society—to decide to rupture all of it: this is what we might dream in reading this work.

“To Get Here?: The Onscreen/Offscreen Relations of Biopower and Vulnerability in Frozen River” by Laura Sachiko Fugikawa considers the 2008 film Frozen River, by Courtney Hunt, a non-Indigenous white woman filmmaker, which was nominated for numerous awards and received a Sundance Grand Jury Prize. The film, located on Mohawk land at the otherwise known U.S.–Canadian border, features the tangled relationships between a white settler woman and a Mohawk woman, both poor, and the Asian and South Asian undocumented immigrants they help to cross the border. Taking the critique by Tuscarora scholar and artist Jolene Rickard of the film’s capacity to illustrate the economics of coloniality while making them unseen, and Dean Spade’s conceptualization of uneven distributions of vulnerabilities as the starting points, this article describes and theorizes the film. In doing so, Fugikawa engages biopolitics as an intersectional and comparative analytic, as a site of difference rather than a state of shared domination, in this way compellingly drawing as much from Spade as from Michel Foucault. In tracing the relative vulnerability for poor white women, migrant Asian women, and a Native mother, Fugikawa makes clear how uneven distribution of vulnerabilities is exposure not only to exploitation but to early death. In our estimation, by engaging and extending Rickard’s critique and by placing biopolitics and biopower on Indigenous land, the long-lasting contribution of this article is in its revealing of how analyzing the film benefits from an Indigenous studies approach that “also allows for an acknowledgment that the biopolitical web is taking place on Indigenous land currently occupied by a white settler colonial government.” Fugikawa’s article uncovers the absence-presence of the border, such as the 1924
Johnston-Reed act, which impacts Asian immigration but also citizenship for Native Americans and attempts to negate treaty rights, thus raising the specter of sovereignty: the supremacist sovereignty of the white settler state, and the presumed contestability of Akwesasne Mohawk sovereignty.

Nicolás Juárez’s “Each of Us Is a Council House: Talking to Spirits, Psychoanalysis, and Language” borrows its title from a story by Woody Hansen, retold in Christopher Teuton’s book *Cherokee Stories of the Turtle Island Liars’ Club*. In this retelling, each person is a council house in the style of the Cherokee council houses, located atop a mound made of earth in the center of a village. Here, people gather to discuss politics and do ceremony. To say that each one of us is a council house is to say that we are a place of memory, in which our thoughts and teachings help us to know how to proceed, how to know and believe. In this article, Juárez takes the reader through the paces of a critique of how Western psychology, built upon dismissals of Indigenous ontologies and epistemologies as savage, has discarded important conceptualizations of language, the unconscious, and configurations of power that could offer important ways to consider healing and activism. Juárez begins with the stark proposition that “the Native is a psychopathological being in an incredibly real sense insofar as political ontology has overdetermined what is ‘real,’” which is to say not “that the Native is falsely misdiagnosed as insane but that the condition of the Native is insanity.” This article makes its way in several moves, via an initial discussion of subjectivity that is rooted in Lacanian analysis. Through this, Juárez attends to what is possible when language is understood as comprising and also ascribed subjectivity, when we come to know all the ways that language is a person. The article turns to a discussion of prayers of the Diné and susto in Mexican folk healing *curanderismo*. In making these moves, Juárez takes it all into a direction perhaps not predicted by Jacques Lacan, which is the multiple subjectivities of languages, spirits, and knowledges in the “insane” Native person.

We are anticipating that the article written by Bedour Alagraa, titled “*Homo Narrans* and the Science of the Word: Toward a Caribbean Radical Imagination,” will be a much-cited, much-assigned essay in a variety of disciplinary conversations. Even in the establishing of a baseline from which Alagraa will begin her analysis, the article makes a generous contribution—Sylvia Wynter’s discussions of Man1, Man2, and the possibilities of *homo narrans* are discussed by Alagraa with a sophisticated clarity that will make this a highly circulated piece. Beyond these opening pages, Alagraa attends to the questions proffered by Anthony Bogues in his foundational work,”And
What about the Human?" (and questions therein about how the articulation of freedom as a core project came to be), by considering how Caribbean theory and theory-in-fiction has possibilities for and is already bringing about Fanon’s “Third Event.”18 Deftly reading Jamaica Kincaid’s Autobiography of My Mother and Patrick Chamoiseau’s Texaco for ways that storytelling and narration in these novels bring about new understandings of the constitution of “we,” Alagraa gestures toward the many ways that radical imagination and storytelling bring about a sociogeny and a science that are co-constituted not by violence but instead by the how of our being.

Mark Redondo Villegas has written a carefully considered review of Vince Schleitwiler’s Strange Fruit of the Black Pacific: Imperialism’s Racial Justice and Its Fugitives.19 Characterizing the book as music, Villegas provides a thorough description of the book’s chapters and a sustained discussion of its goals and approach. Perhaps most importantly for those wanting to understand the book’s relation to their own inquiries, Villegas notes how the book helps him to think through his own work on cultural production with regard to Filipinos’ shifting racial status.

WHAT CES MAY BE

We noted in a previous editorial (issue 3.2) that academic journals make for very poor time machines. As we worked through all the preparations for this issue, it has been Black Panther (the film) season; it has been the time of the March for Our Lives; it has been the time for the Me Too campaign, which has toppled many icons of misogynist abuse, and yet, many more still stand confident in their power. When this issue is published, another slogan will be on our lips and our Twitter feeds. With an eighteen-month timeline, we publish a bit too slowly to be “timely” and a bit too quickly to be effective long-term prognostications of how the past trends into the future. Yet we feel the responsibility to think about what Critical Ethnic Studies has not been, what it has tried to be, and what it may yet be.

Critical ethnic studies (as a named movement) appeared in 2011 with the inaugural conference at the University of California, Riverside, concerned with how “ethnic studies paradigms have become entrapped within, and sometimes indistinguishable from, the discourse and mandate of liberal multiculturalism.” Critical ethnic studies meant to highlight activist intellectual traditions and trajectories that unthink the nation-state through committed analyses of antiblackness, settler colonialism, heteropatriarchy, and capitalist extraction. Organizers then created the Critical Ethnic Studies
Association (CESA), which founded this journal and has held several major conferences under such themes as genocide, decolonization, sovereignties, and critical insurrections.

Maybe critical ethnic studies (the movement) overpromises and under-delivers. As paperson notes, scyborgs “inherit a lot, and a load.”20 We remind ourselves of the note by Robin D. G. Kelley, in “Robin D. G. Kelley and Fred Moten in Conversation” (published in CES 4.1), that at one time, Ruthie Wilson Gilmore had wanted to rename ethnic studies and call this work “liberation studies.”21 At this early part of the arc, this movement has decidedly occupied itself with troubling the line between academic and activist intellectual work. Critical Ethnic Studies (the journal) was conceptualized as dancing on this very troubled line, as a peer-reviewed academic journal with a university press. It was to be the same but different. It was not beyond the academy. It was to reinvigorate political commitments within the academy to decolonization, abolition, and life beyond empire.

For this we do not only open with gratitude; we stay with it, too.

NOTES

2. la paperson, A Third University Is Possible (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), xiv.
3. la paperson, 65.
4. la paperson, 70.


20. la paperson, *A Third University*, 70.