

# An Aesthetics of the Commons

Most studies of subversive aesthetics take political modernism as their point of departure. But *political modernism* is hardly the only path to radical aesthetics. Modernism was too often premised on a stagist *mythos* whereby the new simply replaces the old, whereas in fact the old and the archaic can be mobilized in favor of the new and the radical (Gomez-Pena speaks of the “junkies of futurity”).<sup>1</sup> The modernist “cult of the new”—what Alexander Kluge called in a film title “The Assault of the Present on the Rest of Time”—offers diminishing returns in an era when mass media have annexed co-optable features of the avant-garde while evacuating any semblance of political radicalism. Within what might be called **corporate avant-gardism**, intertextual parody and reflexivity have become mass media staples, as common and bland as white bread.<sup>2</sup> The transtemporal editing techniques deployed by contemporary TV commercials—which resemble those that first transfixed the spectators of *Last Year at Marienbad* (1961)—are now used by corporate TV commercials to promote a gravity-free world of consumerist pseudo-freedom. Entertainment capitalism’s **accelerationist aesthetics** favors excess and transgression as motors of capital expansion.<sup>3</sup> The ads of transnational corporations, in this sense, offer a transrealist aesthetic of globally integrated cityscapes, a world without center or borders, conjured up in a hyperkinetic proliferation of deterritorialized simulacra; however, all their wildly dispersive centrifugal energies are ultimately disciplined by the centripetal force of the corporate brand.

## The Aesthetic Commons

The “brand new” often ages badly; it inevitably becomes old, which is why few genres date more rapidly than “futurist films.” Our goal here is not to rescue the avant-garde but rather to shift attention to a more venerable arsenal of stratagems. Alternative aesthetics rooted in millennial traditions such as *Menippean satire* and *carnavalesque inversion*, we will argue, bear perennial relevance; they remain always already available for renewal. Rather than search for “new stories,” “new techniques,” and “new apps,” artists/theorists can make old stories new by reimagining them through alternative artistic traditions with ancient roots.

This vast planetary archive of ideas and strategies forms a kind of **aesthetic commons**. At once archly traditional and hyper-contemporary, the metaphor of the “commons” has appealingly multiple resonances, evoking everything from ancient patterns of communal land ownership—the poet Shelley’s “equal participation in the commonage of nature”—to the contemporary digital commons of the “copy left” movements. For Jacques Rancière, “politics is the sphere of activity of a *common* that can only ever be contentious.”<sup>4</sup> The notion of commonly held land forms a social norm shared by societal formations ranging from the thirteenth-century England of the “Great Charter of the Forest” to the longstanding communal social systems of countless indigenous peoples. The “commons” evokes a cornucopia of socio-political ideals—Tom Payne’s “Common Sense,” Marx’s “primitive communism,” the “Boston Commons,” the “Common Wealth,” the “common people,” the Paris Commune, the “Creative Commons,” and the indigenous “common pot.” The *commons* counters the fetishizing of exclusive proprietary rights that fuels the corporate drive to privatize everything from Amazonian biodiversity to the lyrics of the “Happy Birthday to You” song. Vesting property in the community, the *commons* evokes “communism,” but without its Stalinist baggage, and “socialism,” without the bloodless social-democratism that so easily turns it into capitalism-with-a-human-face.

While it might seem utopian to speak of *the commons* in an age of relentless privatization, the vaguely remembered plenitude and the future possibilities of the commons trope provides a thread that links many social struggles.<sup>5</sup> In a political age where US conservatives keep moving the ideological goalpost to the right by redefining a mild liberalism—seen in many countries as a form of *laissez-faire* conservatism—as if it were socialist radicalism, the idea of the *commons* moves the goalpost to the left by calling for a deep restructuring to restore the common good. Rather than propose a mere tax on oil corporations, it questions the very idea of anyone

such as the Koch Brothers actually “owning” a public good such as oil and exploiting it for profit to the detriment of the populace and the planet. Such utopian ideas are usually dismissed as naïve, but the point is not the immediate realizability of the proposal but rather the directionality of the critique. Currently proliferating in the writing of figures as diverse as Naomi Klein, Slavoj Žižek, Vandana Shiva, Elinor Ostrom, David Graeber, Jacques Rancière, Peter Linebaugh, Michael Hardt, and Antonio Negri, “*the commons*” haunts privatizing neoliberalism with the specter of communalizing egalitarianism. The term evokes resistance to “**enclosure**” in all its forms, from its early proto-capitalist form of fencing in shared European land, to its colonialist form of appropriating indigenous land, on to its contemporary global capitalist form of the “**second enclosure**”—that is, the marshaling of juridical “patent” and “intellectual property” to assert the corporate ownership of ideas. In the wake of the fall of communism and the crisis of capitalism, the “*commons*” calls up the planetary struggle to reclaim the “common wealth.” Many recent protest movements have taken place, revealingly, amidst the leafy vestiges of the traditional commons, in the form of public squares and parks.

The popularity of the *commons* trope was triggered, perhaps, by the disenchantment with nation-state-based forms of socialism and communism, by the crisis in productivist forms of Marxism, by the growing visibility of indigenous-led resistance, and above all by the rapidly worsening climate change, which is generating a widespread consciousness of capitalism as a menace to the planet. Naomi Klein speaks of **Blockadia** as a “roving transnational conflict zone” of resistance to the extractive projects of corporations.<sup>6</sup> From a leftist perspective, meanwhile, David Harvey has delineated the conjunctural complexities of the “*commons*.” Some provisional *enclosures*, he points out, might be necessary to *protect* the commons in a broader sense.<sup>7</sup> Elinor Ostrom has shown that the commons which actually last are not completely “open” or “free,” but rather “stinted” with restrictions.<sup>8</sup> The challenge is to avoid fetishizing private property, and yet preserve creators’ rights to make a living while also protecting privacy as an inalienable right against the panoptical surveillance of corporations or of NSA. Small-scale indigenous societies, paradoxically, might want to “enclose” their collective “privacy,” their biodiversity, their herbal remedies, and spiritual secrets to safeguard them from new-age Indian wannabes and predatory pharmaceutical companies. Free-software enthusiasts sometimes forget that, in many communities, certain kinds of knowledge are restricted to tribal insiders, or to men, or to women, or to the initiated. In this sense, the libertarian metaphor/fantasy of absolutely free circulation can operate in tandem with overly romantic

(often exploitative) attitudes toward indigenous forms of knowledge circulation. In Australia, Aboriginal activists protested the virtual appropriation of a major sacred site (Uluru, in English: “Ayers Rock”) in the virtual world of *Second Life* in 2003.<sup>9</sup> Édouard Glissant speaks of the right to **opacity**, that is, the right of first peoples or other besieged groups not only to represent themselves but also to refuse representation in the name of a communal form of *opacity*.<sup>10</sup>

Contemporary *enclosure* forms a direct threat not only to indigenous people—threatened with the loss of their land, streams, biodiversity, and even knowledge—but also to the ecological sustenance of the entire planet. At the same time, *enclosure* sabotages artistic and political creativity by fencing in the *commons* of artistic ideas and human creativity. A number of films have portrayed the **historical commons** within Europe. Nominally based on David Caute’s 1961 novel *Comrade Jacob*, Kevin Brownlow and Andrew Mollo’s film *Winstanley* (1975) chronicles the eponymous hero’s (Gerrard Winstanley) efforts to maintain a communal experiment in Surrey during the 1640s—the determination to dig up and collectively manure this piece of land exemplifies a rage against the royal enclosure that robbed the English poor of their land. Early on in the film, strategically placed quotations from Gerrard Winstanley’s *The New Law of Righteousness*, thunderously exhorting that the “earth shall be made a common treasury for all,” accompany austere shots of the Surrey countryside. Winstanley’s appeal to an anarchistic ideal of freedom, celebrating “the man who will turn things upside down,” segues to a shot of the mansion inhabited by Winstanley’s main antagonist, the wealthy Parson Platt, the implacable enemy of the Digger commune.

## From Columbus to Indigenous Media

The struggle over the commons links perennial global conflicts that go at least as far back as the conquest of the Americas and the creation of the Red Atlantic. “Contact between the two disconnected halves of the world five centuries ago,” as Paul Chaat Smith puts it, was “the profoundest event in human history... [one that] created the world we live in today....”<sup>11</sup> In this sense, people everywhere live under the shadow of Columbus and 1492. Iciar Bollain’s feature film *Even the Rain* (2010; “*También la lluvia*” in Spanish) links the colonial theft of indigenous land with the contemporary threat to the literal aquatic commons tied to the basic human/animal need for water to survive. Bringing the sixteenth-century debates about Columbus and the Conquista into the present, the film follows Spanish

filmmakers in Bolivia shooting a critical film about Columbus that aims to underscore Spanish exploitation and indigenous rebellion. Columbus' exploitation of the Tainos is juxtaposed with the exploitation of the Quechua people by multinational corporations. While the conquistadores lusted after gold, the multinationals crave for water; what has changed is only the material to be extracted. The film connects the two historical moments through a local man named Daniel, who plays the role of the Taino rebel leader in the film-within-the-film, but whose role in "real life" is that of an activist leading demonstrations against the corporations that would privatize "even the rain." (The rebel is named "Hatuey" in homage to the Taino *cacique* who led the fight against Spanish colonialism in Hispaniola.) Set in the period of the "Water Wars," the film points not only to the general commodification typical of neoliberal globalization where commodification extends even to hitherto public goods such as water, but also to the successful struggle against commodification by groups such as the "Coordinating Committee for Water and Life."<sup>12</sup>

*Even the Rain* portrays a tripartite exploitation: the conquistadores' lust for gold, the multinationals' thirst for raw materials, and, to a lesser degree, the filmmakers' need for extras and cheap labor. While classical Marxism is anticapitalist yet ultimately productivist, the Andean movements portrayed in *Even the Rain* are often more radically anticapitalist in their assertion that "mother earth" should not be commodified. This culturally instilled refusal was the *idée-force* that helped energize the Bolivian movement and enabled it to defeat powerful transnational corporations. The Andean movements are just one example of the **radical indigeneity** expressed in the burgeoning movements among indigenous peoples, variously called "first peoples" or "fourth world," that is, those still-residing descendants—estimates range from 250 to 600 million people—of the original inhabitants of lands subsequently taken over by or circumscribed by European conquest. Indigenous peoples, who have a link to communal ownership of land and who share a history of dispossession by Western colonialism, tend to be minoritized within the various nation-states whose hegemony they suffer, including within the "Third World." Just as English and Irish peasants revolted against the enclosure of communal lands in the early days of capitalist industrialization, so indigenous peoples today are in the forefront of the struggle against the extractive aggressions of transnational corporations.

It is in this context that it becomes imperative to speak of the burgeoning phenomenon of "**indigenous media**," that is, the use of contemporary technologies (camcorders, VCRs, digital camera, the Internet) to foreground the stories, values, and perspectives of indigenous peoples. (Maori

filmmaker Barry Barclay coined the term “**Fourth Cinema**” to refer to the indigenous film movement in his 1990 book *Our Own Image*.) Indigenous cinema is innovative less in aesthetic terms than in terms of being produced by new social actors or subjects of discourse. Within “indigenous media,” the producers are themselves the receivers, along with neighboring communities and, at times, distant cultural institutions or festivals such as the Native film festivals held in many parts of the world. Although indigenous film has come to form a significant branch of what is variously called “world cinema” or “transnational cinema,” **first people’s cinema**, as programmer Jesse Wenté (Ojibwe) notes, fits awkwardly into the usual paradigms. As Wenté explains on the inaugural website of the 2012 “First Peoples’ Cinema: 1500 Nations, One Tradition,” *First People’s Cinema* defies the dominant categories and modes of interpretation. “To see these films,” he writes, “is not only to discover a heretofore neglected wing of film history, but to reconsider what film itself is and can be.”

*Indigenous media* comprise an empowering vehicle for communities struggling against geographical displacement, ecological deterioration, and cultural annihilation. The three most active centers of indigenous media production are Native North American (Inuit, Yup’ik, Cree, Dineh), Indians of the Amazon Basin (Nambiquara, Waiapi, Hunikui, Ikpeng), and indigenous Australian and Maori “auteurs” such as Rachel Perkins, Taika Waititi, the late Barry Barclay, and Merata Mita. The films of this transnational movement incorporate what Faye Ginsburg calls **offscreen regimes of value** that counter the neoliberal commodification of culture by recognizing indigenously made films as rooted in social relationships, with potential impact on local communities.<sup>13</sup> For Michelle H. Raheja, “**transnational indigenous media**” radicalizes Audrey Lorde’s dictum that ‘the masters’ tools will never dismantle the master’s house’ by insisting that the very foundations of the master’s house are indigenous and should be *reterritorialized* or repatriated.<sup>14</sup> In a very different context, Deleuze writes of the re-appearance of the **missing people**: “The moment the master, or the colonizer, proclaims ‘There have never been people here’,” Deleuze writes, “the *missing people* are a becoming, they invent themselves, in shanty-towns or in camps, or in ghettos, in new conditions of struggle to which a necessarily political art must contribute.”<sup>15</sup> Although Deleuze describes a process of “*becoming Indian*,” it is, in some cases, not a matter of “non-Indians becoming Indian” but rather of “Indians themselves becoming Indian.” In the Amazon, for example, many people formerly described as “mestizos,” or “peasants,” have “come out” as self-identifying “Indians.” In tandem with activism, indigenous film and video production forms an integral part of this movement.

*Indigenous media* has long had to confront the dumb intellectual inertia of Eurocentric trap concepts such as “authenticity,” “tradition/modernity,” and “real Indians.” The default setting of Hollywood films, even in those that portray Indians positively, mandated that they be seen as obstacles to the forward momentum of progress. Indigenous media is subjected to all sorts of double-binds: it cannot be too modern, too avant-garde, or too technically polished, in which case it is “not really Indian.” It must be traditional to be authentic, but if it is *too* traditional, it is judged opaque and inaccessible. An **allochronic politics** (Johannes Fabian) relegates native peoples to historically condemned time, rendering them as “vanished,” or “extinct,” as road-kill splattered on the freeway of progress. But genocides rarely achieve their fantasy of total annihilation. Even the supposedly extinguished Pequot in Massachusetts now have their digitally equipped museums, while the descendants of the “extinct” Tainos appear on websites participating in festivals and family gatherings.<sup>16</sup> Indigenous media, in this respect, proclaims: “We’re here, we’re now, get used to it!”

A related prejudice mandates that indigenous peoples remain pristine and undefiled by “Western” technology. But indigenous peoples have been entangled with technology for millennia. The true history of indigenous people, as Paul Chaat Smith points out, is one of “constant change, technological innovation, and intense curiosity about the world. How else do you explain our instantaneous adaptation to horses, rifles, flour, and knives?”<sup>17</sup> Philip J. Deloria, similarly, speaks of “**Indian Modernity**” to delineate the fraught situation of Native American actors performing “Indianness” within the Hollywood system.<sup>18</sup> At the same time, “*indigenous media*” should not be seen as a magical panacea either for the concrete challenges faced by indigenous peoples or as a salvage operation for an anthropological discipline eager to shed its colonial roots. Indigenous media projects can foster factional divisions, and can be appropriated by international media as facile symbols of the ironies of the postmodern age.<sup>19</sup>

Indigenous media-makers confront what Ginsburg calls a “**Faustian dilemma**”: on the one hand, they use new technologies for cultural self-assertion; on the other, they spread a technology that might ultimately foster their own disintegration.<sup>20</sup> At its best, however, indigenous media transcends the standard conventions of commercial or even so-called independent cinema by producing work literally “grounded” in their own territorial commons. The view that warns indigenous peoples to flee the media to avoid Western contamination, in this sense, denies them the indispensable tools of self-defense in the digital age. Undeterred by Promethean/Heideggerean pessimism, the children of recently contacted

groups—allochronically designated “stone age tribes”—now use Facebook and post YouTube videos to introduce themselves to multiple publics. In the aboriginal film *Ringtone* (2014), the members of an aboriginal community in Northern Australia explain the complex cultural motivations for their choice of cellular ringtones, which mingle ancestral clan songs with hip-hop music, suggesting what one of the film’s directors calls the “**generative power of the ancestral.**”<sup>21</sup> In South America, Mapuche and Aymara activists use the Internet, Facebook, and YouTube to disseminate hip-hop protest songs, while in North America, Native Americans hold “cyber-pow-wows.”<sup>22</sup> Meanwhile, the Internet connects both continents. Bilingual Purépecha speakers in Chicago are now in contact via the Internet with Aymaras in Bolivia, Yanomami in Venezuela, and Guaraní in Paraguay.<sup>23</sup>

Contemporary indigenous youth in North America have also felt drawn to rap and reggae as forms of cultural protest. The rap music video “Indigenous Holocaust,” by native (Anishinabe) hip-hop artist Wahwahay Benais, and directed by Missy Whiteman (Arapaho/Kickapoo), revisits the oppressive history of Indian boarding schools where native children were separated from their parents and shorn of their hair, their language, and their culture. The opening “de-vanishes” the Native American by having the ghostlike artist emerge from the haze into clarity. The artist’s literal coming-into-focus metaphorizes the crystallization of the image of a formerly marginalized cultural identity. Accompanied by archival photos of deeply sad young Indian faces, victims of the ordeal of colonial schooling, the refrain of Benais’ rap goes as follows: “They took his son from his home/Yeah, they pulled ‘em apart/They took her daughter from her home/They were forced to depart ... Another native fell victim to the holocaust.” As Benais raps direct to camera, first against a forest background and then against a starry nighttime sky, the lyrics tell us of “priests stealing children” and “girls raped,” of “women sterilized,” where the Bible served to “teach ‘em and bleach em” and where native mouths were washed with soap if they dared speak in their native tongue. Musically modeling a symbolic red/black/white coalition, the video conjoins a largely black performance style—hip-hop—with “red” percussive chants, together with a largely white musical genre (country) in the form of video samples from the Dixie Chicks:

Forgive, sounds good  
Forget, I’m not sure I could  
They say time heals everything  
But I’m still waiting...

The cited lyrics, from the 2006 song *Not Ready to Make Nice* —the Dixie Chicks’ response to right-wing demonization for having criticized George Bush—on one level offer an homage to fellow musicians combating the same enemy, but they also constitute a native appropriation of country music for the collective purposes of indigenous peoples, who are also “still waiting” for justice and sovereignty. “Indigenous Holocaust” gives audio–visual–musical form to what Lakota scholar Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart calls **“historically unresolved grief and trauma”**—the “cumulative emotional wounding ... across generations, emanating from massive group trauma.”<sup>24</sup>

Hollywood films have loomed large for Native Americans because, as Paul Chatt Smith puts it, “they have defined our self-image” by telling the “entire planet how we live, look, scream, and kill.”<sup>25</sup> Within this picture, native actors have played an ambiguous role. Through a kind of ethnic misrecognition, Will Rogers, a Cherokee, became one of the highest-paid actors in Hollywood, yet was not recognized as Indian, while Iron Eyes Cody, who claimed to be Cherokee but was really Sicilian, became famous playing Indians. A critique of Hollywood stereotypes animates the scene in Chris Eyre’s *Smoke Signals* (1998) where Victor instructs Thomas on how to “look Indian” by being solemn, silent, and stoic, similar to “a movie Indian” who looks as if he just walked off the set of *Dances with Wolves*. When Thomas objects that his ethnic group only caught salmon, Victor suggests adopting a more powerful animal as the tribal symbol, reminding him that the title was “*Dances with Wolves*” and not “*Dances with Salmon*”! When a white racist allegorically “occupies” their seats on the bus, they respond with a satirical John Trudeau song about John Wayne.

Many Native American films perform **perspectival reversal** by examining colonial conquest from an indigenous point of view. Creek/Seminole filmmaker Bob Hick’s *Return of the Country* (1994) also recalls the cultural massacre performed by religious boarding schools. The film opens with a pseudo extract from a parodically colonialist film—*The Magnificent Savages*—but then the film reverses this oppressive situation through a dream–fantasy of reversal; this time, it is Euro-American culture and Christianity that are outlawed (a white child is ordered to destroy his Bible), and the courts, the congress, and the presidency are all in native hands. The “rez” is now reserved for whites.

## First Peoples, First Features

Many indigenous films reanimate connectivities with the land, traditions, and languages by translating ancient genres of storytelling, drawn from indigenous cultural commons, into the idiom of a modern medium. The

story of Chris Eyre's *Skinwalkers* (2002) is constructed around Navajo legends about the *Yea-Naa-gloo-shee*, powerful spirit-beings that take shape-shifting animal form. In the same director's *A Thief of Time* (2004), a mysterious Anasazi spirit-woman protects a native archaeological site. Shirley Cheechoo's *Bearwalker* (2000), the first fiction feature to be directed by an aboriginal Canadian, begins by initiating the spectator into native lore about the powerfully mischievous "darkside" spirit called "bearwalker." A voice-over adds a note of cultural counterpoint: "Christians calls it the devil. My people call it bearwalker." The Maori film *Whale Rider* (2003), similarly, was based on an ancient genealogical myth of origins about a culture hero, Kahutia Te Rangi, who was saved by a whale that transported him to Whangara in New Zealand, where he was renamed *Paikea* in honor of the creature who saved him. For those supposed within the Hegelian tradition to be "peoples without history," these films show that history can also take the oral form of stories, myths, and songs, resulting in a **transgenerational audiovisual archive**. In Vincent Carelli's *The Spirit of TV* (1990), a member of the Waiapi tribe reflects on the transgenerational benefits of the video image: "I didn't have images of my relatives; now ... young people will be able to see the old ones." Within **tribal auteurism**, such filmmakers see themselves as primarily accountable to family and clan rather than to producers or sponsors. In this spirit, videos such as Dean Barclaw's *Warrior Chiefs in a New Age* (1991) and Victor Masayesva's *Itam Hakim, Hopiit* ("We, Someone, the Hopi People," 1982) give a prominent voice to elders. As Leslie Marmon Silko explains, Masayesva's films show the undiminished "power of communal consciousness, perfected over thousands of years ...."<sup>26</sup>

Some indigenous productions have reached large audiences through **televisual indigeneity**. The seven-part, indigenous-directed series *First Australians* in 2008 offered an alternative to settler colonial history, from pre-contact to the present. In the same year, the five-part "American Experience" PBS Series "We Shall Remain," featuring Native American directors such as Chris Eyre (Cheyenne/Arappaho) and Dustin Craig (Apache), explored key moments in Native American history. The hugely successful *Raven Tales*, from the Canadian Aboriginal People's Television Network (APTN), meanwhile, offered a series of half-hour computer-animation-based TV programs targeted at school-age children—portrayed in the series itself as savvy wired kids—in order to disseminate native cultural traditions and legends in an entertaining way. The episodes relate the adventures of the trickster god Raven, who found the first humans hiding in a clamshell and brought light to the world. (Raven might be seen as

fighting enclosure in that he tricks a mean old chief who *boards* the light.) The Mayan people of Mexico, meanwhile, have produced a 21-episode *telenovela*, entitled *Baktun* (2013), performed in Mayan by the residents of Tihosuco, Mexico. The title refers to a megacycle of the Mayan Long Count Calendar that was widely misinterpreted in the media as predicting the “end of the world,” when in fact *Baktun* refers only to the end of one cycle and the beginning of another.

At this point, indigenous filmmakers have made scores of feature films, many of them successful, for example, the Native American *Smoke Signals*, the Inuit-produced *Atanarjuat: The Fast Runner* (2001), and the aboriginal *Bran Nue Dae* (2009).<sup>27</sup> *Atanarjuat: The Fast Runner*, directed by Zacharias Kunuk, is set in the ancient past, retelling an Inuit legend about love and revenge, passed down through centuries of oral tradition, whose origins predate European conquest. Thanks to digital cameras, the spectator is initiated into the daily rhythms of pre-contact Inuit life. A key movement in the film—Atanarjuat’s desperate naked sprint across the gleaming Arctic ice—involves spirit-guidance and a magical leap. Yet, the film does not glorify a “natural” pre-modern people unsullied by technology; the closing credits show the indigenous cast and crew outfitted with headphones and cameras. We are far from the constructed naïveté of the putatively low-tech Indian of *Nanook of the North* (1922), where Flaherty had his Inuit protagonist bite into the gramophone record, even though Nanook (aka Allakarialak) was well-versed in technology. Paul Chaat Smith credits *Atanarjuat: The Fast Runner* with turning “Igloolikians into movie stars,” and elevating an isolated Indian town “to the first rank of international cinema.”<sup>28</sup>

Rachel Perkins’ **aboriginal musical** *Bran Nue Dae* (2009), similarly, defied the myth of aboriginal themes and actors as “box-office poison” by achieving immense artistic and commercial success. The film invests a *Grease* (1982)-style high school musical with the critical energies of Spike Lee’s *School Daze* (1988), treating the theme of aboriginal dispossession in an upbeat style marked by black-inflected (and country) musicality. That almost all the performers—except Geoffrey Rush as a cartoonishly villainous priest—are aboriginal invests the musical genre with fresh meaning. The male protagonist (Willie) responds to the priest’s racist remarks with music: “There’s nothing I would rather be/than be an aborigine/and watch you take my land away.”

As liminal figures both inside and outside the borders of the imagined nation, the “Indian” has been endlessly romanticized, allegorized, nationalized, and instrumentalized, with little consideration of an indigenous point of view. Despite their cruelly reduced demographic presence,

“Indians” have played a primordial role in how the colonial settler-states of the Americas imagine themselves. Thus, indigenous media in Brazil, for example, must be seen against the longer historical backdrop of the venerable archive of Indian stereotypes, often superficially “positive” yet still paternalistic, exemplified by such figures as the *romantic Indian* of silent cinema (*Iracema*); the *harem-fantasy Indian* (*I Married a Xavante*, 1955); the *soft-core Indian* of the pornochanchadas (*A Índia*, 1980); the *ecological Indian* (*Taina*, 2000); and the infantile “Let’s Play Indian” of the Xuxa children shows.

One of the most prolific of the *indigenous media* movements is *Video nas Aldeias* (“Video in the Villages”) in Brazil, which since 1986 has been affirming indigenous cultural identity and supporting indigenous struggles by protecting territorial and cultural patrimonies. Video in the Villages has trained scores of native filmmakers and generated almost a hundred films representing some 37 indigenous peoples of the Amazon, such as the Kayapo, the Xavante, the Ashaninka, the Ikpeng, the Guarani, the Waiapi, and the Kuikuro. Video in the Villages projects such as *Xina Bena* (“New Era,” 2006), *Prinop: My First Contact* (2007), and *De Volta a Terra Boa* (“Back to the Good Land,” 2008) **repurpose the archive** by using non-native footage to their own ends. In *Prinop: My First Contact*, Ikpeng villagers, in conjunction with the screening of a film by the Villas-Boas Brothers about their encounter with the Ikpeng in the early 1960s, re-enact their first experience of whites arriving in planes. In *Ja me Transformei em Imagem* (“I’ve Already Become an Image,” 2008), Huni Kui tribal leaders reenact their version of first contact, and community members watch and comment on footage screened in their own village. Mingling the declarations of the elders, photographs, archival footage, and first-person narration, the Huni Kui relate their own history as a series of traumatic ruptures, from the communal “time of the *malocas*” (thatched-roof longhouses) when they lived in peace, followed by the disruptive “time of first contact,” followed by the time of massacres when the whites tried to “clear” the land, followed by “the time of captivity,” condemned to being a semi-enslaved workforce engaged in rubber extraction. Western “progress,” for the Huni Kui, has meant dispossession, solitude, exploitation, debt peonage, and the loss of collective festivity. The only relatively happy note comes with the final period of the “time of rights,” characterized by the struggle to reclaim land, natural resources, and traditional means of survival. The future lies in the recovery of the past.

Many indigenous films present “**bottom-up**” history conveyed through popular memory, legitimizing oral history by “inscribing” it on the screen. George Burdeau’s *Pueblo Peoples: First Contact* (1990), for example, offers

the Zuni (Pueblo) peoples' version of the arrival of the conquistadores in what is now the US Southwest. The film has a Zuni elder renarrate the initial encounter between the conquistadores and the Zuni, giving pride of place to Zuni narratives within a communal atmosphere of domesticated storytelling. Seen from a Zuni perspective, the invaders become abstracted, depersonalized Goya-esque figures of menace and looming catastrophe. As Steven Leuthold points out, Burdeau forges a graphic connection between the Zuni people and the land through dissolves from an elder's wrinkled face to light reflected in water, or dissolves from still photos of ancient structures to similarly formed landscapes.<sup>29</sup>

Mexican indigenous filmmaker Dante Cerano Bautista (Purépecha), meanwhile, incorporates the literal **agricultural commons** into his experimental short video *Xanini*. Inspired by his grandfather's warning that the corn would take revenge if it were not taken care of, the film offers a **vegetative gaze**, in that the story is told from the point of view of wild corn. In Amalia Cordova's account, the film opens with a point of view relaying the perspective of a mestizo bureaucrat surveying the cornfield. A shift of perspective then unfolds the same scene from the corn's point of view. Speaking Purépecha, the corn stalks warn each other of danger and expel the bureaucrat. In the end, the corn ponders the haunting question—when will the native people who have migrated to El Norte return?"<sup>30</sup> For Michelle Raheja, such works constitute "**virtual reservations**," or imaginative sites of physical and imaginary *reterritorialization*, where indigenous people can develop indigenous epistemologies and contest and reconfigure media representations.<sup>31</sup>

*Indigenous critique* is usually less concerned with inclusion within the settler colonial nation-state than with sovereignty apart from it or alongside it. Nor is Western "freedom" necessarily attractive. For indigenous consensus societies, the West was not the teacher of freedom: rather, it deprived those societies of a freedom they already enjoyed and were fighting to keep. Rather than a tokenistic "inclusion," on the one hand, or a passive "**bare life**" (Agamben) of merely physiological survival exposed to the lethal power of the modern state, indigenous peoples seek what Anishinaabe writer Gerald Vizenor calls "**survivance**," a word that fuses survival and resistance, a trickster-style outwitting of domination through a reciprocal use of nature that enables indigenous peoples to survive while changing. Alanis Obomsawin (Abenaki), the *doyenne* of First Nations filmmaking, provided a filmic celebration of *survivance* in her inspirational film *Kanehsatake: 270 Years of Resistance*. For Aileen Moreton-Robinson, such films forge an **embodied sovereignty**, which is at once "ontological (our being) and epistemological (our way of knowing), and ... grounded

within complex relations derived from the intersubstantiation of ancestral beings, humans and land ... [in contrast with] Western constructions of sovereignty ... predicated on the social contract model, the idea of a unified supreme authority, territorial integrity, and individual rights.”<sup>32</sup> Indeed, many indigenous critics propose a multi-leveled idea of sovereignty, variously termed “**intellectual sovereignty**” (Robert Warrior, Osage), “**visual sovereignty**” (Jolene Rickard, Tuscarora), or a “**cinema of sovereignty**” (Randolph Lewis), defined as “the ability for a group of people to depict themselves with their own ambitions at heart.”<sup>33</sup>

## The Storytelling Commons

In Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri’s expansive view, the “common is not only the earth we share but also the languages we create, the social practices we establish, [and] the modes of sociality that define our relationships...”<sup>34</sup> To expand on Hardt and Negri, the *common* is also the collective inheritance of artistic and narrative practices bequeathed to humanity. There is a link, we would argue, between reinventing the *common* in a political sense and reinventing artistic theory and practice in an aesthetic sense. Just as it is often said that human beings use only a tiny portion of their brain power, so mediatic storytellers have used only a tiny proportion of the world’s stories, and only a tiny proportion of cinema’s potential as a medium to tell those stories. Speaking of his film *Jom* (1982), Ababacar Samb-Makharam envisions storytelling as “an endless source where painters, writers, historians, filmmakers, archivist, and musicians can come and feed their imaginations.”<sup>35</sup> Just as the indigenous natural world harbors much of the planet’s biodiversity, so the indigenous cultural world could be said to harbor much of the world’s of **bio-narratological diversity**.

Some of the most innovative literature in Latin America has drawn on the **storytelling commons** of indigenous myths and legends. Miguel Angel Asturias’ Nobel Prize-winning novel *Hombres de Maiz* (1949) draws on the *Popol Vuh* (the Mayan encyclopedia of theogony, cosmogony, and astrology that Asturias himself had translated). Leslie Marmon Silko’s *Almanac of the Dead* (1991) revolves around an attempt to retrieve a Mayan almanac hidden from the Spanish by a native guardian. Mário de Andrade’s 1928 novel *Macunaíma*, and the 1968 film adaptation, in this sense, form an example of **archaic modernism**, in that both novel and film innovate artistically by drawing on the *bio-narrational* energies of the dense forest of Amazonian myth. To create his novel, de Andrade drew on the primordial magma of Amazonian cosmos of myth and legend, seen as

an indispensable source of the world's narrative oxygen. The astounding *freedom of invention* of *Macunaíma* derives on the one hand from *artistic modernism* and on the other from the animistic matrix of Amazonian myths, creating a mytho-poetic universe where characters metamorphose into animals and heroes turn into constellations after death. De Andrade's principal source was the **indigenous corpus** of legends as collected by the German anthropologist Theodor Koch-Grünberg in the headwaters of the Orinoco between 1911 and 1913 and published in his two-volume *Vom Roraima zum Orinoco* (1917).<sup>36</sup> In a creolized anthology of folklore, de Andrade scrambles together oaths, nursery rhymes, and proverbs. Macunaíma himself is a cultural bricolage, a "hero" without psychological depth or biographical density; his "backstory" is not familiar or generational but rather ancestral and millennial.

Anticipating Foucault's notion of a "pervasive anonymity of discourse," Bakhtin argues that "autographed literature" forms merely a drop in an ocean of anonymous folk literature. De Andrade, in this sense, "interbreeds" tales from one **legendary commons** (e.g., Amerindian) with tales from another *legendary commons* (e.g., African or European) within an exuberant artistic miscegenation. Folktales become part of a productive combinatory by which the collective language of the tribe is transformed into literary *parole*.<sup>37</sup> De Andrade himself, within this communal transtextual spirit, repeatedly claimed that his revolutionary novel had invented nothing new; that he had merely woven indigenous and African tales into a tapestry informed by the tradition of Apuleius, Rabelais, and Lazarillo de Tormes. A teeming rainforest of invention, *Macunaíma* offers an Amazonian proliferation of narrative life forms. Characters literally turn into stars, as they do in indigenous legends, becoming allegorical constellations to be deciphered by the amazed "readers" contemplating them from planet earth.

Just as human social life is embedded in a common ecology, so artistic life is embedded in the shared ecologies of the *aesthetic commons*. In his discussion of Shakespeare as the heir of cumulative artistic bounty, Bakhtin speaks of "**embeddedness**." The "semantic treasures Shakespeare embedded in his works," Bakhtin writes, "were created and collected through the centuries and even millennia: they lay hidden in the language and ... in the diverse genres and forms of speech communication ... shaped through millennia."<sup>38</sup> The "global village" of the media, similarly, is "embedded" in the larger history of the *aesthetic commons*. The notion of *embeddedness* goes far beyond the literary-historical philological tradition of tracing "influences" to embrace a more diffuse dissemination of ideas energized by the deeper currents of global culture. Film aesthetics, to

borrow Bakhtin's words about literature, also forms "an inseparable part of culture [that] cannot be understood outside the total context of the entire culture of a given epoch."<sup>39</sup> Just as individuals cannot be understood purely as autonomous individuals but only as wrapped in an envining sociality, so art cannot be understood apart from its surrounding social ecology.

Oxymoronic formulations such as "**revolutionary nostalgia**"—Walter Benjamin's idea that the past can be mobilized as a vital resource for renewing the present—and Negri's "**futur antérieur**," or Bennet and Blundell's "**strategic traditionalism**" as referring to indigenous media,<sup>40</sup> all convey the paradoxical temporality of using the old to construct the new. In the artistic equivalent of a backward tracking shot combined with a forward zoom, some of the most innovative artistic works have also been the most stubbornly traditional. The surrealists' **absurd enumerations**—heterotopic lists of incommensurable items—go back to the tongue-in-cheek erudition of the Menippeia and Rabelais; the taboo-shattering avant-garde draws on the taproot of carnivalesque inversion, and so forth. Some of Pasolini's films, similarly, practice **atavistic modernism**, whereby the ancient world, with its rich lode of myth and ritual from the Bible and Sophocles and *A Thousand and One Nights*, is used to revivify alienated modernity.<sup>41</sup> Pasolini modeled his visual style, meanwhile, on the frescoes of Masaccio and Giotto.

As we move from hieroglyph to the quill pen to the smartphone, the stratagems persist but morph through technological remediation. There are few "new techniques" that cannot be traced, at least conceptually, to some earlier precedent. Our concern here, then, is with a paradoxical **archaic innovation**, the creation of the new on the foundations of the old. Just as the European avant-garde became "advanced" by drawing on the "archaic" and "primitive," so non-European artists have drawn on the most traditional elements of their cultures, elements less "premodern" (a term that embeds modernity as telos) than "**paramodern**," that is, the tradition of the new existing alongside the modern, not in subordination to it but rather participating in a different temporal logic. Implicitly defying the "progressive" stagist view of art, Laura Marks, in *Enfoldment and Infinity: An Islamic Genealogy of New Media Art* (2010), notes the uncanny similarities between the hypnotic experience of a twenty-first-century experimental artwork (Ulf Langheinrich's *Hemisphere*) and that of the dome of a fourteenth-century mosque in Yazd, Iran, both of which feature shimmering firmaments of astronomical geometric complexity.<sup>42</sup> Marks draws on Deleuze's Leibnizian concept of **the fold**— *le pli* in French, a word

that, for Deleuze, is redolent of the creases of fabric, the origins of existence, the intersections of time, the layering of thought, and the folding or doubling of one writer's thought "into" the thought of another."<sup>43</sup>

The temporalities of art, in this sense, are necessarily enfolded and temporally mixed. The distinction of archaic/modern, for example, is often not pertinent, in that both modernist and para-modern aesthetics challenge the protocols of mimetic realism as the verisimilar imitation of phenomenal appearance. In their attempts to forge a liberatory language, alternative film traditions make artistic use of *paramodern* materials such as popular religion and ritual magic—phenomena that exist outside of the tradition/minority binarism. It is thus less a question of juxtaposing the archaic and the modern than of deploying the archaic in order, paradoxically, to innovate, within a **dissonant temporality** that combines a past imaginary *communitas*—the memory of the commons—with an equally imaginary future utopia. A more adequate formulation would thus speak of a planetary **palimpsestic time** to refer to the scrambled temporalities operative everywhere, where the premodern, the modern, the post-modern, and the paramodern, along with the colonial, neocolonial, and postcolonial, coexist globally, although the "dominant" might vary from region to region.

*Artistic modernism* was usually defined in contradistinction to realism as an outmoded norm in representation. However, outside of the West, realism had rarely been the dominant aesthetic. Thus, non-Western cultures became the catalysts for the supercession, within Europe, of a culture-bound verism. Modernism as a reaction against realism, therefore, can be seen as a rather provincial, site-specific rebellion. In India, the *rasa aesthetic* (Sanskrit for "flavor" or "taste" or "savor"), which is more than 2,000 years old, was articulated in the *Natyashastra*. Usually attributed to the sage Bharata, the *Natyashastra* is often compared in its historical positionality to Aristotle's *Poetics*, in that it provided a foundational matrix for a theory of performance arts, and generated an endless series of revisions and commentaries. Unlike *Poetics*, *Natyashastra* was based not on *mimesis* (representation) or *mythos* (story) or character (*ethos*), but on the subtle "culinary" orchestration of feelings and tastes. At once mystical and practical, the *Natyashastra* combines spirituality—each *rasa* has a presiding deity—with very practical recommendations about stagecraft, makeup, costume, music, and dance. Rather than discuss dramatic structure, the treatise elaborates eight (later nine) *rasas* such as love, pity, anger, heroism, terror, comedy, and so forth. For many scholars, the *rasa aesthetic* not only shaped the forms of classical Indian

music and dance but also the modalities of Indian cinema. Indeed, Indian director Shyam Benegal has recently spoken of a **pan-Asian *rasa* aesthetic** that he himself had been practicing unawares, one shared by the popular entertainment cinemas of much of Asia.<sup>44</sup> (Richard Schechner, meanwhile, has developed a theory of **Rasesthetics** in relation to contemporary performance theory.)<sup>45</sup>

We find a strikingly **literal reanimation** of Hindu classicism in the 2008 Internet feature *Sita Sings the Blues*. Written, directed, produced, and animated by American artist Nina Paley with the help of a computer in her Chicago apartment, the film might be called a **digital blockbuster**, an epic film created not with millions of dollars and a cast of thousands but only with 2D computer graphics and flash animation. *Sita Sings the Blues* counterpoints a feminist version of the *Ramayana* story, about the relationship between Prince Rama and the endlessly patient and devoted Sita, and the story of the artist's breakup with her husband, in such a way as to link Sita and the author as two women tormented by the slings and arrows of male insensitivity. The two stories are then interwoven with a third "series"—the 1920s jazzistic scorned-love crooning of Annette Hanshaw—"sung" (in the Bollywood "playback" manner) by a simulacral Sita, visually presented, thanks to vector graphic animation, as a reincarnation of Betty Boop.

This already layered and multi-temporal construction is then interspersed with amicably impromptu voice-over commentaries by three Indian friends, incarnated on screen as silhouetted shadow puppets who debate the validity of different versions of the story. Episodes with dialogue are enacted through painted figures of the characters in profile in a manner resembling the eighteenth-century tradition of *Rajput* brush painting, a tradition historically associated with illuminated manuscripts telling epic stories such as the *Ramayana*. The syncretic dialogue shifts temporal and stylistic registers by mixing the noble epic stylistic register with vulgar colloquialisms such as "Your ass is grass." The deliberate lack of composition-in-depth reminds us of the modernity of the traditional, in that modernist painting too eschewed the Renaissance perspective in favor of flatness and de Ciriaco-style contradictory perspectives.

Downplaying "originality," Paley alluded to the *artistic commons* by stressing that she had pilfered ideas "that have been around for thousands of years." But just as germane as the film's relation to the literary commons is its quite literal relation to the **digital commons**. As an artist-activist, Paley made the film available on the Internet under the free distribution

model so it could be copied, shown, and broadcast legally and for free. The credit to the producer of the film reads “You” and the financier is “Your Money.” Thus, the film forms the meeting ground of the *artistic commons* and the **creative commons**—the non-profit organization devoted to expanding the range of creative works available for others to build upon legally and to share. At the same time, the film triggered another form of *enclosure*—the **religious enclosure** claimed by Hindu fundamentalist critics demanding what Kevin Dodd called “sole hermeneutic custody” of the sacred text.<sup>46</sup>

## Revisionist Adaptation and the Literary Commons

We spoke earlier of the *embeddedness* of art within the deep geological strata of artistic creation. The semiotic study of widely shared narrative structures and cultural topoi called **narratology** can, in this sense, be regarded as a somewhat impersonal and scientific unpacking of the archeological layers of artistic embeddedness and the **narrative commons**. Henry Fielding referenced the **literary commons** in *Tom Jones* (1749) when he compared the work of the ancient writers to “a rich Common, where every Person who hath the smallest tenement in Parnassus hath a free right to fatten his muse.”<sup>47</sup> Building on Bakhtin’s “**dialogism**”—or the philosophical–linguistic–literary concept of the necessary relation between any utterance and other utterances—and Kristeva’s “**intertextuality**,” Gerard Genette, in *Palimpsestes* (1982), proposes the umbrella term “**transtextuality**” to refer to everything that “puts one text in relation, whether manifest or secret, with other texts.” Genette posits five types of *transtextuality*: (1) “**intertextuality**,” or the “effective co-presence of two texts” in the form of quotation, plagiarism, and allusion; (2) “**paratextuality**,” or the relation between the text proper and its “paratext” (postfaces, epigraphs, dedications, illustrations), in short, all the accessory messages surrounding the text; (3) “**metatextuality**,” or the critical relation between one text and another; (4) “**architextuality**,” or the generic taxonomies suggested or refused by titles or subtitles; and (5) “**hypertextuality**,” or the relation between one text, which Genette calls “hypertext,” to an anterior text or “**hypotext**,” which the former transforms, modifies, elaborates, or extends.<sup>48</sup>

We find *hypertextuality* in the winding twists and transtextual turns that leads from Greek oral-epic recitation to Homer’s *Odyssey* (eighth

century BC) to Virgil's *The Aeneid* (29–19 BC) to Joyce's *Ulysses* (1918–1920) to Godard's *Contempt* (1963), on to the Coen Brothers' *O Brother Where Art Thou?* (2000) and Guy Maddin's *The Keyhole* (2011), which compresses Odysseus's journeys across the wine-red sea into the narrow confines of a single domicile. Much of the history of the arts has been caught up in this ongoing whirl of texts generating other texts in an endless process of recycling, transformation, and transmutation, with no clear point of origin. In the broadest sense, **transtextual dialogism** refers to the infinite and open-ended possibilities generated by the entire matrix of communicative utterances within which the artistic text is situated, and reach the text not only through recognizable influences, but also through a subtle process of what Derrida calls **dissemination** or the process of semantic slippage by which signs enter new contexts to become signifying terms within a spiraling proliferation of allusive transformations. To paraphrase an anonymous *boutade* about postmodernism, *dissemination* means, in a textually transmitted disease, that any text that has slept with another text has slept with all the other texts that that other texts have slept with. Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, meanwhile, propose "**remediation**" as part of their argument that the so-called "new digital media" actually gain their cultural significance by absorbing and refashioning earlier media and artistic practices. Before one spoke of **intermedia**, writes Alain Badiou, cinema was itself its own intermedia.<sup>49</sup> Here, we are not far from McLuhan's **rear view mirror theory**—that the content purveyed by each new medium is drawn from antecedent media. For Bolter and Grusin, *remediation* brings into the media age the Foucauldian view of **genealogy** as a matter not of origins but of affiliations and resonances.<sup>50</sup>

We find a non-Eurocentric version of transtextual theory in Brazilian **modernist anthropophagy**, which proposes the cannibalistic devouring of the European historical avant-garde corpus as a way of absorbing its power without being dominated by it, just as the Tupinamba Indians devoured the bodies of European warriors to appropriate their strength. Brazilian modernist Oswald de Andrade's 1928 *Anthropophagic Manifesto* posed the challenge to Brazilian artists: "Tupi or not Tupi: that is the question," that is, whether Brazilian artists should be proud Tupi "Indians" or be servile mimic-men parroting metropolitan culture. (The North American 1950s version of this Indianist metaphor pitted literary "redskins" against "palefaces.") This cannibalistic twist on the most famous phrase from *Hamlet* was reenacted in 2009 in a 6-hour version of the Shakespearean play by Brazilian *dramaturg* Jose

Celso Martinez Correa. The play, available in its filmed version in a box set of DVDs, begins with all the performers, and the audience, singing a musical version of the “Tupi or not Tupi slogan.” Further amplifying the hybridities already present in the play itself, the performance turns the play into an **anthropophagic musical** by interspersing original musical numbers related to the themes and characters: “Ophelia’s *Fado*,” “Polonius Blues,” “Guildenstern’s Ballad,” “Canticle of the Furies,” and so forth. Tupinizing Shakespeare, the lyrics celebrate the rebel Indian, the one who does not drop his bow and arrows when the conqueror arrives.

Shakespeare’s plays have inspired a rich vein of *revisionist adaptations*. In *Une Tempête* (1969), Aime Cesaire turned Shakespeare’s *Tempest* into a **Fanonian manifesto** merely by tweaking the text for anticolonialist purposes. Caliban became the revolutionary “Caliban X” (as in Malcolm X), Ariel becomes the mulatto Uncle Tom intellectual, and Prospero the colonialist patriarch. Indeed, Shakespeare has often been “multiculturalized,” whether through non-traditional casting (the Julie Tyamor version of *The Tempest*) or through indigenous rewriting, as when Cherokee writer William Sanders, in his “The Undiscovered,” has Shakespeare shipwrecked off Virginia and ultimately adopted by the Cherokee who rename him “Spearshaker” and who teach him the Cherokee language and stage a revisionist version of *Hamlet* as a comedy.<sup>51</sup> *Tē Tangata Whai Rawa o Weniti* (“*The Maori Merchant of Venice*,” 2002), the first feature film spoken in the Maori language, meanwhile, is, according to its director (Don Selwyn), an attempt to “colonize Shakespeare.” In Houston Wood’s account, the film calls attention “to the parallels between how the Jews and the Maori have been treated by white Christians.”<sup>52</sup> In this sense, the film correlates the twinned oppressions of Europe’s internal and external others, through what we have elsewhere called, riffing on Raymond Williams, “**analogical structures of feeling**.”<sup>53</sup>

Many filmic adaptations draw on the taproot of the **literary commons**. Adaptation in this sense can be seen as a form of **textual poaching**, a metaphor redolent of the agricultural commons, described by Michel de Certeau in *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984) as comparable to nomads poaching their way across fields, and borrowed by Henry Jenkins to apply to the subcultural appropriation of mass culture. As a form of cross-artistic file-sharing, film adaptations “stretch” their verbal source-texts to fit a multi-track medium that draws on all the arts integral to the cinematic medium, resulting in the **amplification of intertexts**. An insistence on strict fidelity in adaptation, in this sense, can constitute a form of

hermeneutic “*enclosure*” that asserts ownership on the meaning of a text, as opposed to a view open to transtextual remodelings of a source text. Bakhtin speaks of the “**surprising homecomings of the text**” as it is reinterpreted over “great time.” Film adaptations, in this sense, are almost necessarily “unfaithful,” not only because of the change from a single-track verbal medium into a multi-track medium, but also because of the passage of time or change of context. Alessandra Raengo speaks of a **biocultural dimension of adaptation** as a way to reconceptualize the relation between literary source and derivative text as a never-completely-realized assimilation. Filmmaker Claire Denis compares the relation between her films and their literary sources—for instance, between her *Beau Travail* (1999) and Melville’s *Billy Budd, Sailor* (1924)—to **grafts**, analogous to a heart transplant, a negotiation between two immune systems.<sup>54</sup>

**Revisionist adaptation**, or the critical adaptation of canonical texts, in this sense, draws on the *literary commons*, available to be borrowed, stolen, transformed, and re-invoiced for the aesthetic and social needs of the present. Some film adaptations perform the **radicalization** of their source texts, thus recapitulating on another level a process already commonplace within literature itself, where many well-known novels have been rewritten from the perspective of secondary or even imaginary characters. Miguel de Cervantes’ *Don Quixote* (1605) has thus been re-envisioned from a female perspective (Kathy Acker’s *Don Quixote: A Novel* [1994]), and Margaret Mitchell’s *Gone with the Wind* (1936) from the perspective of the enslaved (Alice Randall’s *The Wind Done Gone* [2001]). Herman Melville’s *Moby-Dick; or, The Whale* (1851; henceforth referred to as “*Moby-Dick*”), meanwhile, has been recast from the point of view of the wife of the monomaniacal captain (Sena Naslund’s *Ahab’s Wife: Or, The Star-gazer* [2005]). One could easily imagine other revisionist adaptations of *Moby Dick*, from the point of view of Queequeeg, for example—how did that homoerotic love-fest in that Nantucket inn look to him?—or from the point of view of the whale.

Although not an adaptation of *Moby Dick* from the whale’s point of view, Lucien Castaing-Taylor’s and Véréna Paravel’s documentary *Leviathan* (2012) does follow in the literal wake of a whaling ship not unlike Melville’s *Pequod*. By registering the sometimes sordid processes of industrial fishing off the coast of New England, the film offers the perspective, if not of the whale, then at least of the whaling ship. Inspired by the *Book of Job* and Hobbes’ *Leviathan or The Matter, Forme and Power of a Common Wealth Ecclesiasticall and Civil* (1651; henceforth referred to as “*Leviathan*”) as much as by *Moby Dick*, the film imbues what is purportedly a documentary on the fishing industry with a rich, allusive texture that

reflexively incorporates a number of other genres and approaches to filmmaking. With the aid of 11 digital cameras handed back and forth between the filmmakers and the fishermen, the film details life at sea in a non-naturalistic style that evokes abstract expressionism and the films of Stan Brakhage. On another level, the piscatorial carnage resembles a horror film, where the blood from a day's catch mingles with ominous shots of gulls reminiscent of Hitchcock's *The Birds* (1963). While this modernist documentary offers a plunge into Hobbes' "state of nature," it is, for the most part, **anti-anthropomorphic** and **anti-anthropocentric**; although the result of labor is at the film's epicenter, human beings only play a marginal role in *Leviathan's* universe of discourse.

In the colonial and postcolonial eras, literature and film have often practiced the critical rewriting of canonical European texts. Jean Rhys's *The Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966), for example, retells Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847) as the story of Bertha Mason, Mr. Rochester's first wife (and the by-now celebrated "madwoman in the attic" of feminist criticism), leading us to reassess the racialized presentation of Bertha as a "Creole savage." Filmic adaptations obviously exist on a continuum with these other "rewritings." We find **transtextual subversion** when a recombinant text challenges the socially retrograde premises of preexisting hypotexts or genres, or calls attention to their repressed subversive features. Given the almost three centuries separating Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) from its latter-day film adaptations, it is hardly surprising that the Defoe novel has been repeatedly subjected to revisionist critique. For politically conscious directors, colonialist and misogynistic novels such as *Robinson Crusoe* trigger a kind of **obligatory infidelity**, or reading "against the grain." We see this revisionist process already within the literary field (Michel Tournier's *Vendredi, ou les limbes du Pacifique* [1967], J. M. Coetzee's *Foe* [1986]) as well as in poems (Derek Walcott's *Castaway* [1965]). The conventional schoolmaster's view of Crusoe that makes him the embodiment of practical courage, ingenuity, and perseverance completely "edits out" *Robinson Crusoe's* status as perhaps *the* paradigmatic capitalist and colonialist novel. The narrative not only recapitulates the history of colonialism and slavery, but also stages a Crusoe–Friday relationship marked by linguistic, religious, and economic subordination. Crusoe imposes on Friday his language (English) and his religion (Christianity), while relegating Friday to what amounts to slave labor, an enslavement euphemized and prettified so as to resemble a cheerful collaboration.

The filmic adaptations of the novel, going back to the first *Crusoe* in 1902 up to *Castaway* (2000) and the reality show "Survivor," have at times "written back" against empire. Jack Gold's *Man Friday* (1976), for example, takes a very irreverent stance toward the Defoe source novel.

Made at the height of the international “counter-cultural” movement, in the 1970s, after the formal demise of colonialism, *Man Friday* can be seen as a “**proto-postcolonial film**,” that is, a text that touched on post-colonial themes before the advent of postcolonial theory per se. Within this adversarial optic, Defoe’s colonial romance mutates into a counter-cultural anticolonialist allegory. While *Man Friday* endorses a communal narrative, it also literally engages the issue of *the commons*, albeit in a somewhat superficial manner. First, by having the village chief authorize Friday to tell his story, the film designates Friday’s story as a **collective narrative**, a communal tale belonging to the entire tribe. Second, specific sequences revolve around rival conceptions of property. When Friday “borrows” Crusoe’s hat, Crusoe tries to explain the laws of ownership, but Friday fails to understand why any one would be so deranged as to believe in individual property. (Here, the film unfortunately reverts to a “positive” stereotype about indigenous peoples, imagined as enjoying a golden age innocent of “mine and thine,” when in fact it is usually *land* that indigenous people hold in common, not personal objects such as clothing.)

What is most promising in this film, which is problematic in many ways, is its groping toward what Bakhtin called the “counterpointing of chronotopes” and what Edward Said calls “**contrapuntal readings**”—that is, the mutual haunting, within the larger arc of colonial domination, of one set of times, spaces, histories, and perspectives by another set of times, spaces, histories, and perspectives. Friday becomes a lucid, broken-English Montaigne, the native exegete of cultural relativism. In this sense, the film links narratological procedures to ideological issues through a recurring shuttle between Crusoe’s perspective and Friday’s, or, to be more precise, between (1) a patently satiric version of Crusoe’s perspective, and (2) a generally sympathetic version of the perspective of Friday and his community, seen as a kind of (anti) Greek chorus commenting on the action. Patrick Keiller’s *Robinson* trilogy (*London* [1994], *Robinson in Space* [1997], and *Robinson in Ruins* [2010]), finally, follow the odysseys of an eponymous protagonist—really Keiller himself, with a subtle nod to Defoe’s famous castaway—crisscrossing the English landscape on a kind of Baudelairean jaunt and pausing to contemplate the relics and ruins of globalization, (post-)industrialization, and nuclear armament found along the way.

Other *revisionist adaptations* practice **epidermal subversion** by casting actors of color in roles usually assumed to be white—a practice going at least as far back as Orson Welles’ all-black “Voodoo Macbeth” in 1936—thus triggering subtle changes in representation and reception. Most adaptations of Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights*, for example, portray Heathcliff as a stormily Byronic (implicitly white) rebel personified by

actors such as Laurence Olivier and Ralph Feines, ignoring the novel's cues that Heathcliff was a person of color. Heathcliff is described as a dark-skinned gypsy found wandering the streets of Liverpool, a key port in the slave trade frequented by runaways of many races. By casting two actors of Afro-Caribbean ancestry as Heathcliff, the Andrea Arnold version brings to the surface the submerged ethnicity of the novel, subtly transforming its affect and drift. The illicitly transcendent passion uniting Catherine and Heathcliff becomes as much about overstepping boundaries of race as well as of class. The Arnold version privileges Heathcliff's subaltern perspective through a constantly moving subjective camera accompanying his agitated zigzag across the moors, accompanied by the close-in anxious sounds of his breathing. A Fanonian reading might see this new Heathcliff as casting a colonial-style "look of envy" on the relatively comfortable lily-white world. In a return of the historical repressed, the whippings, the insults, and Heathcliff's reduction to the status of a virtual slave come to evoke colonial slavery and thus take on a broader **Black Atlantic** civilizational meaning.<sup>55</sup>

## Cultural Indigenization

Many African films practice **revisionist Africanization** by indigenizing prestigious European source texts. Djibril Diop Mambety's *Hyènes* ("Hyenas," 1992) radically "recasts" a modernist touchstone by offering an ingenious Senegalese adaptation of Friedrich Dürrenmatt's classic absurdist play, *The Visit* (1956). As with the play, the film too revolves around a wealthy old woman's vindictive return to the village where, years earlier, she had been "seduced and abandoned." The desolate town of Colobane, with its rapacious petite bourgeoisie, forms a microcosm of the contradictions of Senegalese society in the era of the eroding of revolutionary hopes and of traditional solidarities.

Linguère Ramatou, the film's vengeful elderly woman, agitates Colobane's populace to the point of frenzy by promising a future of untold wealth. "Ramatou is coming back ... richer than the World Bank!" The local politicians and clergy view Ramatou's largesse with her "sovereign funds" as the only possible solution to the never-ending cycle of poverty and exploitation. The film's **transnational allegory** creates an analogy between individual resentment and debt-collecting with neocolonial dependency and the suffering imposed on African countries by "structural adjustment," and the IMF's attempt to control the internal polices of debtor nations by coercing them to increase exports and curtail social spending, thereby ensuring social misery. In the final analysis, however,

Mambety's thematic tapestry is geared more toward narrative polyphony than toward moralistic oppositions; as in all complex parables, the interpretive work of decipherment is left to the audience.

In his comprehensive survey of African oral literature, Isidore Okpewho shows how writers such as Ousmane Sembene and Wole Soyinka subvert traditional **trickster narratives** for the purpose of radical social critique. In works such as *The Road* (1965) and *Kongi's Harvest* (1965), traditional solidarity with victims is transformed into barbed attacks on entrenched power. *Hyènes*'s parodic, tragicomic stance is less prescriptive and programmatic than Sembene or Soyinka's fictional jeremiads. With a skillful deployment of what Bakhtin termed "**double-voiced discourse**"—that is, a discourse that introduces into a pre-existing discourse a semantic intention directly opposed to the first voice—*Hyènes* expertly frames motifs from both the oral tradition and from more earnest, hopeful African films. *Hyènes* also arguably exhibits "**double consciousness**"—W. E. B. Du Bois' term to evoke a dual existence as American person and as oppressed black minority, two conflictual ideals within the same corporeal consciousness. While Du Bois was describing African-Americans' anguished oscillation between black identity and American selfhood, filmmakers such as Mambety must delicately balance African identity with a modernist legacy that influenced an earlier generation of African intellectuals, most notably the founders of the journal *Présence Africaine* (founded in 1956 in Paris).

In a formulation rich in implication for filmic adaptations, Bakhtin suggested that "every age **reaccentuates** in its own way the works of [the] past."<sup>56</sup> Often based on novels written decades or even centuries earlier, the *reaccentuations* of revisionist adaptations provide **ideological barometers** that register the shifts in the social/discursive atmosphere. Women filmmakers, for example, have reenvisioned Victorian heroines through a feminist grid. In the initial sequence of Jane Campion's adaptation of Henry James' *Portrait of a Lady* (1996), contemporary young Australian women speak rapturously of first love; their embrace of romantic clichés becomes linked to the fate of Isabel Archer—the film's nineteenth-century heroine, a woman ultimately trapped by her capitulation to insidious assumptions concerning romantic love. Many adaptations are invested in "filming back" against a source text or genre by giving voice to characters or subject positions silenced in the original. Thus, *Brokeback Mountain* (2005) "**queers**" the Western genre, much as *Thelma & Louise* (1991) feminizes the road movie.

Every cross-cultural adaptation of a novel, by the same token, filters its source-text through a national or regional culture. Ketan Mehta's *Maya*

*Memsaab* (1993)—an Indian rewriting of Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* (1856)—offers an example of **cultural indigenization**, whereby the French culture of the source novel is mediated through by the adapting Indian culture.<sup>57</sup> The double-edged effect is both to universalize and “provincialize Europe” (Chakravarty). Transposed names indigenize Flaubert's story; “Maya,” for example, shares the same phonemes as “Emma” but brings a philosophical note since “maya” is Sanskrit for “illusion.” Within the indigenizing process, Mehta systematically substitutes things Indian for *la chose française*. He replaces Flaubert's Rouen with the picturesque resort town Shimla, exploiting the town's association with the British Raj and with adulterous playboys and mistresses. Rouen cathedral is replaced by “Scandal Point,” while Flaubert's indefatigable tour guide is replaced by a hustler pushing drugs and cheap hotel rooms. The religious associations of the Rouen Cathedral's Last Judgement tableau, as Flaubert's ironic commentary on a sordid affair, give way to a merely secular sleaziness in the film. In Flaubert, Leon and Emma's lovemaking takes place in a horse-drawn carriage, but in the Mehta version the carriage becomes a train, with shades drawn down as in Flaubert, while sexual congress is evoked through a cinematic *clin d'oeil* to the climactic train entering the tunnel of Hitchcock's *North by Northwest* (1959).

While relatively realist within Bollywood norms, *Maya Memsaab* also features the extravagant musical production numbers typical of Bombay cinema. Through a generic division of labor, the non-musical episodes represent life in a fairly verisimilar manner, while the songs represent life as dreamed and fantasized. While the plot resembles life, as Ratnapriya Das puts it, the songs represent dreams.<sup>58</sup> Along with Govind Nihalani, Mrinal Sen, and Shyam Benegal, Mehta belongs to the “**third way**” **Indian cinema**, a style that negotiates between apparently antagonistic traditions. Mehta strives for a “**middle cinema**” **aesthetic** located between the fantastic, colorful, dance-dominated, and very popular Bollywood cinema, on the one hand, and the austere, low-budget, independent, and programmatically realist “new Indian Cinema” on the other. Mehta's foiling of genres and style forms an apt correlative to Flaubert's artistic procedures, to wit, his orchestration of multiple styles, perspectives, and centers of consciousness. By pitting the exalted, romantic, metaphoric, and grandly literary style against the flat, banal, metonymic style, all translated and filtered through specifically cinematic techniques and genres, the Mehta version forges the equivalent of Flaubert's stylistic counterpoint between mimetic realism and bookish fantasy.

*Maya Memsaab* can be seen, on one level, as a **postcolonial adaptation**, a genre subdividable, according to Sandra Ponzanesi, into four subgroups: (1) **adaptations of colonial novels** (e.g., *A Passage to India* [1924] or *Out of Africa* [1937]) that are not necessarily postcolonial in spirit; (2) **postcolonialized classics** (the already cited *Mansfield Park* [1814]); (3) **art film adaptations of postcolonial texts** (*The English Patient* [1992]); (4) **doubly postcolonial films** (novels adapted by postcolonial filmmakers—such as Deepa Mehta’s *Earth* [1998] or Shirin Neshat’s *Women without Men* [2009]).<sup>59</sup> As an example of the second category, Patricia Rozema re-envisioned Jane Austen’s *Mansfield Park* through Edward Said’s analysis of the novel in *Culture and Imperialism* (1993). The adaptation counterpoints middle-class England with the colonized Caribbean, using the Sir Bertram character to foreground the slavery backgrounded in the novel. The film’s audacious reimagining of the novel through an anti-Orientalist grid outraged critics who found its emphasis on slavery “unfaithful” to the novel. The scene in which Fanny Price discovers Tom Bertram’s pornographic sketchbook of brutal scenes from the Antigua plantation was seen as an anachronistic and politically correct rubbing of slavery in the noses of (the presumably white) fans of the novel. However, as Tim Watson points out, the novel can be productively seen within the context of two cross-historical debates, those about slavery at the time of the novel’s production, and those about reparations at the time of the film’s release. The adaptation simply “unsilences” the critique of slavery elided in the novel, where Fanny’s question about slave trade remains unanswered.<sup>60</sup>

In *Bride and Prejudice* (2004), meanwhile, Gurinder Chadha not only contemporizes the original but also casts a **postcolonial-feminist** look at another canonical Austen novel, blending, as Ponzanesi puts it, “successful commercial strategies with mildly subversive narratives.”<sup>61</sup> The film hybridizes two popular traditions through a **masala** (spicy mix) of Bollywood and latter-day musicals such as *Grease*. While hardly as inventive as *Maya Memsaab*, *Bride and Prejudice* practices **cross-cultural analogies** by suggesting certain subterranean affinities between Austen’s England and Chadha’s India: the similar sexual modesty; the strategic role of dance balls in charting the trajectories of romance; and the comparable role of wealth in marriage, whether in the form of Western marriages for financial convenience or in the form of Indian arranged marriages. The intra-national class differences that mark the Austen novel transmute into the transnational cultural differences of the Chadha adaptation, so that the romance between the American Darcy and the Indian Lalita come to homologize the geo-political romance of India and the United States in

the period of the film. In a perhaps unduly reciprocal portrayal, both American and Indian have to abandon some of their prejudices.

A number of revisionist adaptations perform **actualization/relocalization as critique**, whereby a change in period and setting generates revelatory differences between the source text and the film. In the wake of *West Side Story* (1961), which sets *Romeo and Juliet* in a stylized Manhattan “slum,” Lúcia Murat’s *Maré, Nossa História de Amor* (2007) resets *Romeo and Juliet* in the actual Rio de Janeiro slum named in the title. Abdellatif Kechiche’s *L’Esquive* (English title *Games of Love and Chance*, 2003), meanwhile, stages a modern-day adaptation of an eighteenth-century play, Marivaux’s *Les Jeu de l’Amour et du Hasard* (“The Game of Love and Chance,” 1730), as a springboard for exposing the social fractures of contemporary French society. In a reflexive move, Kechiche does not adapt the play, but rather stages the process of adaptation of the play in a surprising contemporary location—a present-day high school in the marginalized *banlieux* of Paris, literally “suburbs,” but, more accurately, low-income housing projects inhabited by immigrants and their children. The French expression “*Marivaudage*” suggests highly articulate flirtation and identity disguises against the backdrop of class relations between noble rich and servant poor, where the rich pretend to be poor and the poor pretend to be rich. For the film’s high-school drama teacher, the point of the play is that the rich should fall in love with the rich and the poor with the poor, without any pointless cross-class masquerade. The restaging of Marivaux’ dialogue by *banlieu* adolescents dramatically transforms the meaning and affect of the play, however. Since the students are *all* relatively poor, the class contrasts central to the play become less pertinent, while other issues, such as religion, nationality, color, ethnicity, and police harassment, come to the fore.

In *L’Esquive*, the **symptomatic time-gap** in centuries between the source play and adaptation transmutes into an ethnic-cultural gap—the all-white French of the play have become the multi-racial children of a postcolonial France transformed by the historical karma of massive immigration from the former colonies. The contrast now is between the class structures relayed by the play, where noble and servant share a common world, but one structured by clear social hierarchies, and those of the film, where the most salient differences reflect the divide between the wealthy French center and the impoverished *banlieu*, or what some have punningly called “the place of the banned.” The playful romantic banter of the eighteenth-century comedy gives way to the pungent street argot of the adolescents, an immensely creative rush of obscenities, *verlan*,

gangster French, Black American English, Arabic, and Wolof. Within a thoroughly creolized contemporary French, the film foregrounds what Glissant, in *Poetics of Relation* (1990), calls the “internal multiplicity of languages.”<sup>62</sup>

## The Archival Commons and the Ab-original Musical

We have spoken in this section of artistic strategies that engage the *aesthetic commons*, the long-standing archive of genres, techniques, and texts perpetually available for recombinant creativity. It is in this perspective that we turn to two very different, literally antipodal, examples of appropriation of the *artistic commons*, the first by a European auteur addressing an imagined community of cinephiles, the second by an aboriginal Australian woman director signifying on two classical Hollywood film genres for the transformative purposes of her own community.

We find a cinephiliac embodiment of the *aesthetic commons* in Godard’s monumental **metafilm** *Histoire(s) du Cinema*, his collage-essay film about the history of cinema and about history *tout court*. For Godard, cinema, in all its forms, is the medium where the history of the twentieth century is rendered palpable and made flesh. This historicity is not restricted to the most obvious site of the so-called “historical film”—often little more than a collection of formulaic signs about how history itself is envisioned at a specific moment—but rather in the entire range of audiovisual productions. For Godard, all films bear the marks of history. In this sense, the film clips form archival-geological time capsules, exempla of a time and a place and its technologies of expression and representation.

A decade in the making, *Histoire(s) du Cinema*, constitutes an **archival epic** that works over the materials contained in Godard’s video archive of some 3,000 cassettes embracing all genres: fiction films, documentaries, archival materials, and TV shows. The film hyperbolizes many recurring features of Godard’s work—the orchestration of citations, the hybridization of media, the recombinant absorption of the other arts, and the endless permutations of *intellectual montage*. All have in common the idea of archival *remediation*. The quotes are *transartistic*—literary, philosophical, cinematic, theatrical, and musical. Christopher Pavsek compares the result to a “junk-heap of cultural history ... available for ... utopian collective recycling.”<sup>63</sup> Godard displays the creative sparks that occur when a film juxtaposes, or rather fuses, in an undecidable *polysemy*, the image of a Monet painting with a text about the Holocaust and underscored by the

music of a Schoenberg. Dipping into the ocean of antecedent creativity, cinema becomes the infinite combinatory of the pre-existing that we have called the *artistic commons*.

At the same time, the excerpts are never simply quoted; all are transformed through voice-over narration, reframing, superimposition, and the insertion of new sounds or snippets of music. Godard creates an **anachronistic transtextuality** by weaving and overlaying snippets and moments and sounds from different time periods, genres, and countries. The fascination, with Godard's film, is not only with the cited films *qua* films, but with the possibilities of crossbreeding they open up. *Histoires*, moreover, not only raids the *artistic commons* but also explicitly engages questions of intellectual property. As a long-time advocate of cinematic pilfering, Godard has often said that one should put "whatever one likes in a film"—whether an Aznavour song, an Eluard poem, or a shot from *Joan of Arc*. In this same vein, Godard has long proposed, and realized, Walter Benjamin's ambition of a **text entirely composed of quotations** through films without newly written dialogue but with only orchestrations of transtextual fragments. Through a kind of **cine-electro-shock**, Godard explodes, fragments, disperses, and recontextualizes the texts that go into his audio-visual collage.

Such a practice was not designed to please the corporate advocates of intellectual property rights, and when Godard first screened sections of *Histoires(s) du Cinema* in 1988 at Cannes, the assembled journalists obsessed over how he had obtained the rights. Godard argued "fair use" and "educational purposes" while also making all the citations very brief. Although one of the founders of **auteurism**—a romantic individualist theory that sees a film as belonging to the director whose unique personality it expresses—Godard has nonetheless given public support to the idea of the *artistic commons*. The "socialism" of his *Film Socialism*, he has said, lies precisely in its undermining of the idea of intellectual property, beginning with that of artworks. At the same time, Godard's films proliferate in cinematic "footnotes"; he does not borrow without acknowledgement. Significantly, Godard concludes *Film Socialism* with a shot of the well-known FBI copyright warning, joined with a quotation from Pascal: "If the law is unjust, justice proceeds past the law." Godard offered a different critique of private property in his earlier film *Weekend*, through a citation of Engels's essay "The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State," where Engels, drawing on Lewis Henry Morgan's work in *Ancient Society*, praised the profoundly democratic organization of the Iroquois League. For Marx and Engels, the Iroquois meshed a communal economic system with a democratic political organization, thus

offering a model of economic equality achieved without state domination, in a society devoid of nobles, kings, governors, soldiers, and police, and where all, including women, were free and equal.

In the context of indigenous media, meanwhile, aboriginal Australian activist-anthropologist Marcia Langton speaks of **Ab-originality** as “a field of intersubjectivity ... remade over and over again in a process of dialogue, of imagination, of representation and interpretation.”<sup>64</sup> Indigenous films often constitute an “*ab-original*” form of *archaic innovation*, in the sense that they are concerned with the generation of what Ginsburg calls **future imaginaries** based partly, paradoxically, on the recuperation of a past linked to a sense of **intergenerational responsibility**.<sup>65</sup> A key issue separating colonizing modernity from indigenous cultural values had to do precisely with the issue of property. A particularly powerful critique of Western notions of “enclosed” land as private property marks aboriginal Australian filmmaker Rachel Perkins’ 1-hour fiction, *One Night the Moon* (2001). If Godard is preoccupied with the *intellectual commons*, Perkins’ **aboriginal musical** is concerned with the **literal commons** in the form of land, an issue very much in the news in the wake of the 1992 Mabo Decision that overturned the Australian founding doctrine of *terra nullius*. The film is based on actual events that transpired in Australia in 1932 and more specifically around the aboriginal tracker Riley, whose scouting skills in the service of the Australian police won him a King’s Medal. Perkins’ musical drama revolves around a young white child who follows the moon and goes missing in the Outback. The father, out of racist arrogance and an exacerbated sense of private property, refuses the proffered help of a savvy Aboriginal tracker. Ultimately, the father’s scorn for alternative forms of knowledge (**subaltern gnosis**) leads to the death of his own child, since the tracker, given his intimate familiarity with the land, could have saved the daughter’s life.

But what is most striking in aesthetic terms is the film’s revisionist orchestration of two genres—the Western and the musical—to make a point about the commons in an almost literal sense. From the perspective of colonized people of color, both genres might well be seen as suspect examples of what Maori filmmaker/theorist Barry Barclay calls the “**invaders’ cinema**” typical of colonial settler-states. A submerged settler-state ethos/ethnos haunts both genres. The Hollywood Western consecrated the dispossession of native peoples by narrativizing Manifest Destiny, while the Hollywood musical choreographed this narrativization, as when the lyrics of the theme song of *Oklahoma!*—a state ripped out of traditionally native territory, bearing an indigenous name—tell us that “We [whites] know we belong to the land/and the land we belong to is grand.” The hybrid Western musical *Calamity Jane*, where natives are called

“painted varmits,” has white settlers singing the glories of the Black Hills—the sacred lands of the Sioux—as belonging to whites. Ironically, this lyrical act of appropriation borrows from Indian conceptions of “belonging to the land.”

In both the United States and Australia, settlers butted up against indigenous peoples as part of what Glissant calls “**straight-arrow**” **conquest**. In both countries, nation-states destroyed long-standing systems of communally held land in favor of Dawes Act-style deeds of private ownership. There is nothing that divides the Western worldview from the indigenous worldview as much as the conception of the land as what Thomas King calls the “defining element of Aboriginal culture,” which “contains the languages, the stories, and the histories of a people [and] provides water, air, shelter, and food.”<sup>66</sup> As a revisionist amalgam of musical and Western, *One Night the Moon* tells the story of an Australian *contact-zone* through indigenous eyes. The film hybridizes the Western with the musical, furthermore, by showcasing the country-and-Western music popular not only in the American Southwest but also in the Australian interior. This technique reaches its paroxysm in an open-air production number alternately sung by the white settler and the aboriginal tracker. In a form of **musical-socio-ideological antiphony**, the lyrics counterpose two views of the land, As the two men stride off in opposite directions, the settler’s refrain is “This land is mine,” owing to his having “signed a deed on the dotted line,” which is answered by the tracker’s refrain: “This land is *me*... this land owns me,” culminating in a claim of indigenous knowledge and of settler alienation: “You only fear what you don’t understand.”

Voiced in the most direct monosyllabic terms, the production number stages a discursive duel in the sun, an ideological standoff over competing views of the land. The tracker gives voice to what Chadwick Allen calls **native indigeneity**, or the aboriginal collective view of the land as sacred and communally owned, while the white farmer voices **settler indigeneity**, or the Western view of newly cultivated land as alienable private property.<sup>67</sup> The question evoked in the lyrics goes far beyond an individual piece of farmland; it was at the very heart of Western colonialism and the Lockean doctrine of *terra nullius*, which decreed that the land did not rightfully belong to the indigenous people unless they had fenced it off and practiced sedentary agriculture. To merit ownership, those who had lived on and cared for the land for millennia had to mix it with their labor in order to make it productive of commodities. What is ultimately a philosophical/political/epistemic confrontation here takes the form of a well-choreographed musical number staged as

part of a Western-style genre and set against the backdrop of the very land where sovereignty is in dispute.

Franny Armstrong's drama-documentary-animation-essay film *The Age of Stupid* (2009), finally, links the digital commons to the planetary commons in its discussion of climate change. The film was highly innovative in its funding, production, and distribution, just as it was innovative its style and its mix of genres and formats. A kind of **cyber-blockbuster**, the film's methods were the polar opposite of the Hollywood version. Working in collaboration with NGOs and organizations such as Greenpeace, Move-On, and the performance group Yes-Men, the filmmakers encouraged public involvement through an interactive website. In order to have full independence, the film was financed independently through the crowdfunding model and pioneered a new distribution system called Indie Screenings, a web-based form of film distribution, whereby anyone, anywhere could screen the film publicly and keep whatever profits ensued. Rather than procure profit, the filmmakers multiplied screenings. Linked by satellite to scores of cinemas around the United Kingdom (and later around the United States and elsewhere), the premiere received the Guinness World Record for being the largest film premiere in history, for an estimated total of a million spectators, a feat rarely achieved by a leftist documentary.

In aesthetic-narrative terms, the film borrows a very old literary frame-device—**shipwreck narration**—where a sole survivor of a disaster, *à la* Ishmael in *Moby-Dick*, remains to tell the story, with the difference that the shipwreck, in this case, is not of a single ship but of spaceship earth. The narrator, played by Pete Postlethwaite, lives in a 2005 post-apocalyptic world, where he presses on the icons and rubrics of his computer screen in a high-tech tower called The Global Archive. The Archive gives him access to the **intellectual-mediatic commons** in the form of a vast repository of everything that has been written or filmed, which he probes for clues as to how the planet earth and its people somehow managed to commit collective suicide. In this sense, the narrator is the keeper of the flame of memory, a planetary *griot* or custodian of the surviving store of art and knowledge.

After an evocation of the beginnings of the universe—conveyed in minimalist fashion through the slow-motion stirring of milk in a glass—the opening animation reveals a planet devastated by climate change—Las Vegas swallowed up by the desert, Sydney in flames, the Alps transformed into a snowless desert, and the Taj Mahal consumed by vultures in a war-devastated India. Also innovative in narrative terms, the film transposes the interwoven stories of the “network narratives” (Bordwell) of a film such as Soderberg's *Traffic* (2000) into a documentary format. As a

futuristic retrospective Cassandra, the narrator marshals evidence for an indictment of the short-sighted passivity that allowed the apocalypse. A polyphony of voices intermingles individual tableaux of characters from seven countries: an Alpine climber in despair of the disappearing snow, a Nigerian woman afflicted by the polluted water generated by corporate-owned oil, a wind-farm developer fighting corporate lobbyists, and a literal life saver in the wake of Hurricane Katrina.

Despite its gloomy subject, *The Age of Stupid* manages to be both entertaining and reflective by mingling the star power of Postlethwaite, the music of Mobe, combined with witty graphics, video clips, lively animation, pleasurable bike-riding protests, and interviews with leading figures of the anti-globalization movement. In an ethic/aesthetic of global connectivity, the film politicizes the network narrative to reveal Brecht's "causal network of events," and specifically the emerging central political issue—the connection between private ownership, the dominance of fossil fuels, and the devastation of our common planet.

Coming full circle, we can link the commons as conceived by indigenous *Red Atlantic* cultures to the theory and praxis of the commons within the West itself (going back to the "Charter of the Forest" section of the Magna Carta), all part of a multi-pronged struggle against various forms of "enclosure." While asymmetrical, the two enclosures—the colonial enclosure of the indigenous world, and the capitalist enclosure of the commons in the West—are metaphorically and metonymically linked. Henry George's cry that "we must make land common property" in *Progress and Poverty* (1979) echoed the cries of the Native American leader Tecumseh, who argued in 1810 that the only way "to check and stop this evil [of landgrabs]—is for all the Redmen to unite in claiming a common and equal right in the land [which] belongs to all for the use of each."<sup>68</sup> The expulsion from their land of millions in the Global South recalls the enclosures of the commons elsewhere. In *La Revolución India* (1969), Bolivian indigenous writer Fausto Reinaga lauded an "immortal pre-American socialism" as a "luminous concrete reality" that existed thousands of years before Marx, Engels, and Lenin had been born."<sup>69</sup> In a spirit of revolutionary nostalgia, Reinaga argued that the future of humanity must be communal as with "our ancient indigenous communities."<sup>70</sup>

Unlike the peasantry for Marx, first peoples *are* now capable of representing themselves. In the Granada TV documentary *Kayapo: Out of the Forest* (1989), the Kayapo and other native Amazonian peoples stage a mass ritual performance to protest the planned construction of a hydroelectric dam that would flood their communities. The Kayapo

chief Raoni appears with the rock star Sting in what turned out to be a successful attempt to capture international media attention and cancel the World Bank loan that would have financed the project. Two decades later, native activists are opposing yet another attempt to dam the Xingu River—the Belo Monte Dam—shrewdly taking advantage of the worldwide success of *Avatar* to enlist James Cameron into their cause and describing themselves as the Na'vi of the Amazon. In the Amazon, “First Contact” is still occurring, but this time the “Indians” come armed not with bows and arrows but rather with books, computers, digital cameras, websites, blogs, and listserves; the *indigenous commons* meets the *digital commons*.

## Notes

- 1 Guillermo Gomez-Pena, *Conversations across Borders* (London: Seagull, 2011), p. 120.
- 2 Decades ago, avant-gardist Kenneth Anger complained that every advertising agency in New York had pilfered from *Scorpio Rising* (1963); such are the wages of co-optation.
- 3 See Steven Shaviro, “Accelerationist Aesthetics: Necessary Inefficiency in Times of Real Subsumption,” *E-flux* (2013) <<http://www.e-flux.com/journal/accelerationist-aesthetics-necessary-inefficiency-in-times-of-real-subsumption>>.
- 4 Cited in *Ibid.*, p. 350.
- 5 Fredric Jameson, *Marxism and Form: Twentieth Century Dialectical Theories of Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), p. 82.
- 6 Naomi Klein, *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. the Climate* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2014), p. 294.
- 7 See David Harvey, “The Future of the Commons,” in *Radical History Review*, Issue 109 (Winter 2011): 101–107.
- 8 See Astra Taylor, *op. cit.*, p. 173.
- 9 See Faye Ginsburg, “Indigenous Counterpublics,” in Meg McLagen and Yates McKee (eds.), *Sensible Politics: The Visual Culture of Nongovernmental Activism* (New York: Zone Books, 2012), p. 563.
- 10 See Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1987), 189.
- 11 Paul Chaat Smith, *Everything You Know about the Indian is Wrong* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), p. 71.
- 12 By way of background, in 1998, a conservative Bolivian government, in conjunction with corporations such as Bechtel and Suez, and with the support of the World Bank, had privatized water in Cochabamba. After water prices skyrocketed and service was eliminated for those who could not afford water, massive demonstrations in April 2000 forced Bechtel out of the country and ushered

- in socialist and indigenous president Evo Morales, who argued that water must be free. On April 22, 2010, the tenth anniversary of victory in the Water Wars, the government issued the "People's Agreement on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth."
- 13 From a talk by Faye Ginsburg, "Screening Disabilities: Visual Fields, Public Culture, and the Atypical Mind in the 21st Century," May 16, 2011, at Porter College, University of California, Santa Cruz.
  - 14 See Michelle Raheja, *Reservation Reelism: Redfacing, Visual Sovereignty, and Representations of Native Americans in Film* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2010), p. 18.
  - 15 Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time Image* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), p. 217.
  - 16 See Maximillian C. Forte, "Amerindian@Caribbean: Internet Indigeneity," in Kyra Landzelius (ed.), *Native on the Net: Indigenous and Diasporic Peoples in the Virtual Age* (London: Routledge, 2006), pp. 132–151.
  - 17 Paul Chaat Smith, op. cit., p. 4.
  - 18 See Philip Deloria, *Indians in Unexpected Places* (Lawrence: University of Nebraska Press, 2004), p. 68.
  - 19 For a critical view of indigenous film projects, see James C. Faris, "Anthropological Transparency: Film, Representation and Politics," in Peter Ian Crawford and David Turton (eds.), *Film as Ethnography* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992). For a critique of the Faris critique, see Terry Turner, "Defiant Images: The Kayapo Appropriation of Video," in *Anthropology Today*, 8(6) (December 1992): 5–16.
  - 20 Faye Ginsburg, "Indigenous Media: Faustian Contract or Global Village," *Cultural Anthropology*, 6(1) (February 1991): 92–112.
  - 21 See Jennifer Deger, "The Jolt of the New: Making Video Art in Arnhem Land," *Culture, Theory, and Critique*, 54(3) (November 2013): 355–371.
  - 22 Indeed, Dan Umstead, the founder of the Oneida Indian web site proudly joked that they founded the site even before the White House homepage was up. See Landzelius (ed.), *Native on the Net*, p. 292.
  - 23 Gomez-Pena, *Conversations across Borders*, p. 81.
  - 24 Quoted in Amy Lonetree, *Decolonizing Museums: Representing Native America in National and Tribal Museums* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), p. 5.
  - 25 See Paul Chaat Smith, op. cit., p. 37.
  - 26 Leslie Marmon Silko, "Videomakers and Basketmakers," *Aperture* 119 (Summer 1990): 73.
  - 27 See Faye Ginsburg's piece on the film, "Beyond Broadcast: Launching NITV on Isuma TV," at: <<http://mediacommons.futureofthebook.org/imr/2009/05/03/beyond-broadcast-launching-nitv-isuma-tv>>
  - 28 See Paul Chaat Smith, op. cit.
  - 29 See Steven Leuthold, *Indigenous Aesthetics: Native Art, Media, Identity* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998), pp. 110–112.

- 30 See Amalia Cordova's PhD-in-progress dissertation (NYU) on indigenous media, provisionally entitled "Nomadic/Sporadic: The Pathways of Circulation of Latin American Indigenous Media."
- 31 See Michelle Raheja, *op. cit.*, p. 238.
- 32 Moreton-Robinson (ed.), *Sovereign Subjects: Indigenous Sovereignty Matters* (Crows Nest: Allen ad Unwin, 2007), p. 2.
- 33 Randolph Lewis, *Alanis Obomsawin: The Vision of a Native Filmmaker* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2003), p. 175.
- 34 See Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Commonwealth* (Cambridge, Harvard: 2009), p. 350.
- 35 Cited in Mark Cousins, *The Story of Film* (London: Pavilion, 2011), p. 429.
- 36 See Theodor Koch-Grunberg, *Vom Roroima Zum Orinoco: Ergebnisse einer Reise in Nord Brasilien und Venezuela in den Jahren 1911–1913*. Vol. II, *Mythen und Legenden der Taulipang und Arekuna Indianer* (Stuttgart: Strocker & Schroder, 1924).
- 37 Haroldo de Campos, *Morfologia de Macunaíma* (São Paulo: Perspectiva, 1973).
- 38 M. M. Bakhtin, "Response to a Question from the *Novy Mir* editorial staff," in M. M. Bakhtin et al. (eds.), *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986), p. 5.
- 39 *Ibid.*, p. 2.
- 40 See Bennett, T. and Blundell, V. "First Peoples: Cultures, Policies, Politics," *Cultural Studies*, 9 (1995): 1–24.
- 41 As a proto-transnationalist, Pasolini's embrace of disparate traditions is somewhat stymied by his tendency to reduce the cultural traditions of Africa and the Middle East to idealist constructs and thereby paper over their complexity.
- 42 Marks, *op. cit.*, p. 1.
- 43 See Gilles Deleuze, *Le pli—Leibniz et le baroque* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1988).
- 44 Benegal made his remarks about pan-Asian *rasa* aesthetics in a public interview at the "Subversive Film Festival" in Zaghreb (May 2011) and in conversations with Robert Stam. He remarked that he had not published anything on the subject.
- 45 See Richard Schechner, "Rasaesthetics," *The Drama Review* 45(3) (Fall 2001).
- 46 See Kevin Dodd, "Film Review: *Sita Sings the Blues*," *Journal of Religion & Film*, 13 (2) (October 2009).
- 47 Quoted in Lewis Hyde, *Common as Air: Revolution, Art, and Ownership* (New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 2010), p. 46.
- 48 Gerard Genette, *Palimpsestes: La Litterature au Second Degree* (Paris: Seuil, 1982).
- 49 Alain Badiou, *op. cit.*, p. 346.
- 50 See Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999).
- 51 See Jodi A. Byrd, *op. cit.*, p. 42.

- 52 Houston Wood, *Native Features: Indigenous Films from Around the World* (New York: Continuum, 2008), p. 169.
- 53 The idea of analogical structures of feeling is explored in Shohat/Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentrism* (London: Routledge, 1994).
- 54 See J-P Renouard and Lise Wajeman, "The Weight of the Here and Now: Conversation with Claire Denis," in *Journal of European Studies*, 34 (2004): 1–2.
- 55 The Kate Bush music video of *Wuthering Heights*, meanwhile, performs trans-generational female identification, proclaiming Bush's trans-generational solidarity with the Catherine character.
- 56 Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* (Austin: University of Texas at Austin, 1982), p. 421.
- 57 Robert Stam treats this film in *Literature through Film* in less detail. This version, unlike the video without subtitles on which the earlier discussion was based, is based on access to the DVD of the film.
- 58 Unpublished paper written for Robert Stam's "Film and Novel" course.
- 59 Sandra Ponzanesi and Marguerite Waller (eds.), *Postcolonial Cinema Studies* (London: Routledge, 2011).
- 60 See Tim Watson, "Improvements and Reparations at Mansfield Park," in Robert Stam and Alessandra Rengo (eds.), *Literature and Film* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005).
- 61 Sandra Ponzanesi, "Postcolonial Adaptations: Gained and Lost in Translation," in Sandra Ponzanesi and Marguerite Waller (eds.), *Postcolonial Cinema Studies* (London: Routledge, 2011).
- 62 Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997), p. 119.
- 63 Christopher Pavsek, *The Utopia of Film: Cinema and its Futures in Godard, Kluge and Tahimk* (New York: Columbia, 2013), p. 47.
- 64 Corinn Columpar, *Unsettling Sights: The Fourth World on Film* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois Press, 2010), p. xiv. Marcia Langton, "Aboriginal Art and Film: The Politics of Representation," *Rouge* (2005).
- 65 See Faye Ginsburg, "Australia's Indigenous New Wave: Future Imaginaries in Recent Aboriginal Feature Film," Adrian Gerbrands Lecture (May 29, 2012).
- 66 See Thomas King, op. cit., p. 218.
- 67 See Chadwick Allen, *Blood Narrative: Indigenous Identity in American Indian and Maori Literary and Activist Texts* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002).
- 68 Quoted in Peter Linebaugh, *The Magna Carta Manifesto: Liberties and Commons for All* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), p. 246.
- 69 Fausto Reinaga, *La Revolución India* (La Paz: Hilda Reinaga, 1970), pp. 15–16.
- 70 Ibid.