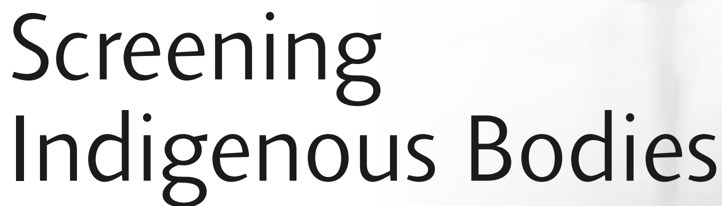
Screening Indigenous Bodies



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This issue acknowledges the work of Rosalie Fish (Cowlitz), Jordan Marie Daniels (Lakota), and the many others who refuse to ignore the situation that has allowed thousands of Indigenous women and girls to be murdered or go missing across North America without the full intervention of law enforcement and other local authorities. As Rosalie Fish said in an interview regarding her activism on missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls (MMIWG),

> *I felt a little heavy at first just wearing the paint. And I think that was . . . like my ancestors letting me know . . . you need to take this seriously: "What you're doing, you need to do well." And I think that's why I felt really heavy when I first put on my paint and when I tried to run with my paint at first. . . . I would say my personal strength comes from my grandmas, my mom, my great grandma, and I really hope that's true, that I made them proud. (Inland Northwest Native News interview)*

Activists such as Fish and Daniels are literally putting a face on the devastating problem of MMIWG and remaking their bodies into signifiers of the trauma of the current situation. Painting red palms across their mouths and competing in public track and field or long-distance running events, women such as Daniels and Fish are protesting not only the disappearances of these women and girls, but also the silence that surrounds their cases across the United States and Canada. In 2016, alone, more than 5,700 Indigenous women and girls were reported missing or murdered across the United States. Only 116 of those cases are currently under investigation by the US Department of Justice. Redeploying their bodies as signifiers of this situation, Fish and Daniels do not simply evoke the issue in general: watching them run or speak in their face paint becomes an affective moment not just of reading or hearing their protests but of experiencing them as well. The red painted handprint speaks what is forbidden to speak; it refuses the silence that haunts law enforcement and Indigenous communities. It also alters a tradition of face and body painting and non-native assumptions about the belligerency of that tradition—one with many attributes and variations often grouped under the misnomer "war paint." These are not

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statements of war or belligerency, but of ancestry, connection, witnessing, and empowerment.

In this Issue

Screen Bodies 4.1 is centered on a Screen Shot dedicated to screening the Indigenous body. In this section, guest editor Sol Neely, associate professor of English and philosophy at the University of Alaska Southeast, collects an interview with Ishmael Hope and Will Geiger on "house screens," an article by Joshua D. Miner analyzing video-game design techniques, and an article on the postcolonial reception of the film *Rhymes for Young Ghouls* (Jeff Barnaby, 2013). Across these texts, Neely argues, we can begin to experience "an unsettling movement in the development of an Indigenous phenomenology" with regard to screen display and perception. These texts, he explains in his introductory essay, "build rich ecumenical perspectives in the service of decolonial justice and pedagogy" in responding to a particular political moment in the history of colonial-settler culture that inspires as much as it resists the intellectual authority of an Indigenous intervention. Here, in this volume, is an Indigenous cosmopolitan call to non-Indigenous readers to hear otherwise a phenomenology and corporeal interruption of their traditions that opens to the possibility of unsettling the current condition and the ways in which we understand it.

In "Within the Whole Body: An Interview with Ishmael Hope and Will Geiger on Tlingit House Screens and Indigenous Phenomenology," Neely opens our ways of thinking about screens to include not only technologies of projection and display but also ones of carving and architecture by investigating with Hope and Geiger the history and meaning of certain aspects of Tlingit house screens and focusing that investigation on the corporeal aspects of their creation, inhabitation, and significations. Through this deep intervention into the ancestry and form of two house screens in particular—the "Rain Screen" (an image of which appears on the cover of this issue) and the "Raven Screen" from the "Frog House"—Neely, Hope, and Geiger are able to elucidate to non-Native readers some more complicated qualities of Pacific Northwest Coast art and history. As well, by rendering this knowledge through an appeal to different phenomenological apertures, these scholars are able to introduce the perspectives and lived experience of colonization with reference to the bodies of the colonized in an appeal to the bodies of the colonizers. This is not a one-way street, though, where the colonized work to teach culture and aesthetics to the colonizer but, rather, a dialogic encounter where genealogies and embodiments are staged to be experienced, *to inspire*, in a phenomenological sense, bodies and minds to be able to "hold it in their hands and listen."

The second article in the Screen Shot is Joshua D. Miner's analysis of Indigenous video game design, "Biased Render: Indigenous Algorithmic Embodiment in 3D Worlds." In this unprecedented study, Miner challenges the notion that

higher-resolution graphics and more articulate game display rendering necessarily align with postcolonial political statements in the realm of 3D game building. By critically evaluating the technical/formal aspects of "low-res" and "hi-res" design and biased and unbiased algorithms, Miner is able to critically examine the image-rendering process at an almost inscrutable level of perception, taking into account screen/image texture, light and shadow, and simulation. Against photorealist rendering, which deploys an algorithmic bias against Indigenous bodies, Miner proposes the assets of "low res" rendering. Thus, he challenges mainstream game producers at the core level of their game builds—design and rendering—and not just at the level of content—avatar modeling, storyline, and characterization. This perspective makes Miner's one of the most original studies of gaming available.

Closing the Screen Shot on screening Indigenous bodies with his article "Unsettling Monstrosity in *Rhymes for Young Ghouls*," Neely returns to the question of a phenomenology of decolonization that appraises two ways of responding to Mi'kmaq filmmaker Jeff Barnaby's 2014 film. The more common way of regarding *Rhymes for Young Ghouls* is to see it as a *revenge fantasy* where the fictional Native characters win out against the imperious colonial descendants. For many of these critics, it is a film that opens the possibility of teaching about the history of Indian schools and the many crimes committed against Indigenous people in the name of "civilizing them." Against this response, though, Neely contends that the film may not so much open a dialogue—especially a dialogue that does little to alter the lived experience of genocide and "percepticide" and what comes after—as it may offer the opportunity of a "phenomenological transformation," especially for non-Indigenous audiences. Experiencing the film, taking inspiration from the film, they may begin to be able to read important decolonial imperatives. They may be ethically and politically altered by it in a way beyond just developing a better, deeper understanding of colonial history and their place in its present trajectory.

In addition to this Screen Shot, issue 4.1 of *Screen Bodies* also contains a general interest research article, a report, and several reviews.

Mari E. Ramler's "The Guilty Brelfie: Censored Breastfeeding Selfies Reclaim Public Space" addresses one aspect of the public–private debate over nudity and social media. Here, Ramler asserts that "brelfies"—selfies taken and shared by breastfeeding women—position "nursing mothers and their babies . . . simultaneously in public but hidden from public view." While social media networks such as Facebook and Instagram could potentially become sites for normalizing attitudes toward public breastfeeding (and breastfeeding in general) because they could render such sights mundane and ubiquitous by exponentially increasing their visibility, network censorship policies and enforcement of such policies work against what Ramler calls such "progress." Thinking through theories of "undecidability" and "nakedness," Ramler examines how brelfies signify through

social media, which impediments seek to restrain their effects and affects, and how their exposure has worked to increase "breastfeeding's accessibility and acceptability in the material world."

In "Altered Landscapes and Filmic Environments," his report from the 13th Asian Cinema Studies Society Conference (held in Singapore in June of 2019), Tito R. Quiling, Jr., examines the various ways the papers, panels, screenings, and events of the gathering engaged with the theme of "the environments of Asian cinemas." Quiling begins by exploring the significant number of settings, atmospheres, and historical milieus produced and evoked by these cinemas. The setting of Asian cinemas is vast, indeed. Then, he questions the relations between those landscapes, spaces, and locations and the bodies that move through them. By situating these cinematic sites and these bodies within the eco-critical and ecological conditions of their creations, he develops a new perspective on the affect of these produced sceneries, characters, and narratives.

This issue of *Screen Bodies* closes with reviews of three new books.

Elizabeth Jochum reviews *The Robotic Imaginary: The Human and the Price of Dehumanized Labor* by Jennifer Rhee and raises the question of ethics and shared vulnerability at the start. According to Jochum, Rhee explores the human–robotic matrix in a way that asks as many questions about the human as it does about robots, especially with regard to human–robot relations and the new ethical imperatives that continue to arise from these evolving relations. In Jochum's view, Rhee provides an ample discussion of the historical-cultural contexts of human anxiety and delight in response to the literary/sci-fi visions of robotics and artificial intelligence. And, in this light Jochum finds Rhee's argument—that these texts could lead us to a shared human–robot "ethics of care"—convincing. However, Jochum cautions that media and film scholars might wish for more examples from movies and television programs before they are persuaded.

Graeme Stout calls Soraya Murray's *On Video Games: The Visual Politics of Race, Gender and Space* "a much-needed addition to the critical literature" of the steadily growing study of video games and lauds, especially, her balanced reading of specific game elements in relation to contemporary popular culture. As well, Stout notes the benefit of Murray's engagement with "key thinkers and theories" from within the field of cultural studies in her critical assessment of contemporary single-player video games. Interestingly, as well, for this issue of *Screen Bodies*, the inclusion of Stout's commentary on Murray's book adds another layer to the discussion of the politics of subjectivity involved in the varieties of video-game creation and reception raised by Joshua D. Miner in his critical article, "Biased Render." One wonders how Murray and Miner might embark upon a conversation comparing "hi res" and "low res" game design.

Finally, in a review of Ari Larissa Heinrich's *Chinese Surplus: Biopolitical Aesthetics and the Medically Commodified Body*, I return with the author to

questions of coloniality and postcoloniality and the line between the humanities and the sciences in the context of the history of the biopolitics of Chinese and other bodies. Overall, Heinrich's book is an ethical-political-aesthetic study reminiscent in approach to much of Walter Benjamin's work, where the author maintains the particularity of the object immediately under study while extrapolating broadly from it. Here, Heinrich argues that massive advances in biotechnology do not necessarily equate to great transformations in the social and cultural hierarchies (Chinese and otherwise) that produce them. In fact, such advances may often mirror or replicate systems of oppression and displacement and more often even amplify or exaggerate them. This is why, asserts Heinrich throughout the book, we need to study the particular circumstances of the biopolitics of surplus Chinese bodies while remembering that we can find parallel examples of such techniques in "*any* context where art and popular science use biotechnological innovations to describe historically disenfranchised groups." In this way, thinking about Heinrich's study of Chinese bodies might return us to thinking anew about the biopolitics of Indigenous bodies, especially the biopolitics of the bodies of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls, and of colonized and hierarchalized bodies around the world.

Forthcoming

Ira Allen, Assistant Professor of Rhetoric, Writing, and Digital Media Studies at Northern Arizona University and Assistant Editor of *Screen Bodies*, is the guest editor of *Screen Bodies* 4.2, which will focus on surveilled bodies. Surveilled bodies come in all shapes and sizes, as do the devices through which we encounter them. In this forthcoming issue, we will begin with the question of whether or not it is possible for our bodies to no longer be surveilled: is there any way out of corporeal surveillance, or has it become (or has it always already been) ubiquitous? Then, in the various articles, we will take up the specific questions of borders, virtual reality, security, and witnessing; torture and the time of surveillance; prison reform and new opportunities to surveil inmates; wearable surveillance; and the space and time of digital alter egos. Throughout these articles, we will return to the idea that "nowhere is *not* the panopticon" and everywhere is the "exemplary project of the public–private governance partnership."

Since 2014, *Screen Bodies* has considered how we experience, display, and perceive bodies on, behind, and in front of screens. In this forthcoming issue, we will expand our scope to include not only the bodies we consider but also the way in which we define and delimit the screens through which we engage with them.

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