Gazing Outward and Looking Back: Configuring Caribbean Visual Culture

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What is the Caribbean in fact? A multiple series of relationships. We all feel it, we express it in all kinds of hidden or twisted ways, or we fiercely deny it. But we sense that this sea exists within us with its weight of now revealed islands.
—Edouard Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse*

This essay explores the ways a critical engagement with visual culture[1]—as it functions, is created, and circulates—may provide a focus for conceiving the Caribbean as divergent, contested, and globalized with "transnational networks and linkages."[2] I am concerned with ways the term may specifically encompass the work done to date (and to be done in the future) to configure the Caribbean within global, postcolonial, decolonial frames of reference for the examination of imagery and the practices associated with visual material culture. Recent texts, magazines, and websites, including Krista Thompson's *An Eye for the Tropics: Tourism, Photography, and Framing the Caribbean*

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1   The term *visual culture* is often associated with European-centered interdisciplinary studies (prevalent between the 1990s and 2010) developed from earlier writings on visual art, visual studies, and visual literacy, photography, cultural studies, film, and media. See Gen Doy, *Black Visual Culture* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2000); Jessica Evans and Stuart Hall, eds, *Visual Culture: The Reader* (London: Sage and Open University, 1999); Amelia Jones, ed., *The Feminism and Visual Culture Reader*, 1st ed. (London: Routledge, 2003); Nicholas Mirzoeff, *An Introduction to Visual Culture* (London: Routledge, 1999); Nicholas Mirzoeff, ed., *The Visual Culture Reader*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2002); Irit Rogoff, *Terra Infirma: Geography's Visual Culture* (London: Routledge, 2000); and Marita Sturken and Lisa Cartwright, *Practices of Looking: An Introduction to Visual Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).
2   Hazel Carby, Kamari Maxine Clarke, and David Scott, *What Is Caribbean Studies? Prisms, Paradigms, and Practices*, program for the international symposium, 1–2 April 2011, Yale University.

Figure 1. Sheena Rose, *Sweet Gossip: I wonder how she does bathe*, 2012. Performance by
Sheena Rose. Photograph by Adrian Richards.

Picturesque; Patricia Mohammed's *Imaging the Caribbean: Culture and Visual Translation*; *ARC Magazine*; the journal *Small Axe*; and the blog *Repeating Islands*, are referred to here as emergent projects that reflect the exposition of Caribbean imagery and visual perspectives.[3] Writings by cultural theorists such as Kobena Mercer and Lisa Nakamura are also important for exploring the enrichment of visual cultures in relation to diaspora, migration, blackness, race, the Internet, and screen-based media.[4]

Three kinds of cultural practices are presented in this essay to examine Caribbean visual culture. The first section, Topography of Vision 1: Picturesque and Global, explores popular Caribbean imagery in circulation that perpetuates a normative form of aesthetics associated with international media flow and globalized practices of media production. Topography of Vision 2: Alter-Native Imaginaries considers work by Caribbean artists and those of the Caribbean diaspora who emerge from historical trajectories that are embedded in postcolonial discourses or subaltern positions.[5]

3   Krista A. Thompson, *An Eye for the Tropics: Tourism, Photography, and Framing the Caribbean Picturesque* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006); Patricia Mohammed, *Imaging the Caribbean: Culture and Visual Translation* (Oxford: Macmillan Education, 2009); *ARC Magazine: Art, Recognition, Culture*, arcthemagazine.com/arc/; *Small Axe: A Caribbean Journal of Criticism*, www.smallaxe.net; *Repeating Islands: News and Commentary on Caribbean Culture, Literature, and the Arts*, repeatingislands.com/.

4   See Kobena Mercer, ed., *Exiles, Diasporas, and Strangers*, Annotating Art's Histories: Cross-Cultural Perspectives in the Visual Arts (Cambridge: MIT Press; London: Institute of International Visual Arts, 2008); Lisa Nakamura, *Digitizing Race: Visual Cultures of the Internet* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008); and Beth Kolko, Lisa Nakamura, and Gilbert Rodman, eds., *Race in Cyberspace* (New York: Routledge, 2000).

5   I use the term *subaltern* as shorthand to denote discourses that Robert Young describes as being "united by a common political and moral consensus towards the history and legacy of western colonialism." I also acknowledge a critique of the term: Robert Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001); Shalini Puri, *The Caribbean Postcolonial: Social Equality, Post/Nationalism, and Cultural Hybridity* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004); and David Scott, *Refashioning Futures: Criticism after Postcoloniality* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999). Subaltern discourse was conceived and developed by the Subaltern Studies Group, a collective of South Asian scholars, including Partha Chatterjee, Ranajit Guha, and Gyanendra Pandey, who published the *Subaltern Studies Series* 1–12. See www.lib.virginia.edu/area-studies/subaltern/ssmap.htm (accessed 25 July 2012). Gayatri Spivak's writings are also associated

Topography of Vision 3: Envisioning Civility focuses on the family photograph and the social snapshot as reflections of ways visual material contributes to forms of restitution and social memory, visualizing and circulating historical events of civil action and citizenship.

The central tenet for visual culture in this paper is the way imagery—particularly still images or photography—creates, demarcates, and perpetuates events *as* moments to be visualized—in other words, the choices made and practices involved in visualizing.[6] Photography and other screen-based media are instrumental to the practices of visualizing moments, creating indexicality with, and inextricably linked to the events or moments themselves. The exploration of imagery in this article is not only concerned with imagery of momentous historical/officially recognized events as they occur, are syndicated, and are instantly circulated across global media channels and platforms, but also explores self-generated or self-determined imagery taken of everyday circumstances and by ordinary folk, circulated online—in other words, exploring imagery that generates the spectacular, the alluring, the uncanny, the ironic, the tragic, the humorous, and the collective imagination, or that reflects political movements or activism.

Visualizing involves the mobility of images and multiple protagonists—spectators, photographers, subjects' in the photographs—creating unstable points of view. Visualizing involves repetitious circulation, "hits" online, free gifting, syndication, marketing, branding, and promotional culture with explicit and implicit tactics to dominate visual spheres and global media flow. Visualization or visuality is therefore at the intersection of power and visual representation—exploring imagery in conjunction with discourses of power associated with racism, postcolonialism, and blackness; colonial and hegemonic (and most often Western) practices of control and dominance; encompassing feminist perspectives; and critiquing positions of privilege and class. "Globalization (understood as a particular, contemporary configuration in the relation between capital and nation-state) is," Arjun Appadurai explains, "demonstrably creating increased inequality both within and across societies, spiraling processes of ecological degradation and crisis, and unviable relations between finance and manufacturing capital, as well as between goods and the wealth required to purchase them."[7] Appadurai's writings on globalization, commodity culture, and area studies are seminal to exploring visual culture as it relates to the Caribbean. He characterizes globalization as "a world of disjunctive flows" that, as media, flows across state boundaries—"produces problems that manifest themselves in intensely local forms but have context that are anything but local." Exploring imagery associated with global promotional culture as well as that created by Caribbean artists, cultural and social activists about and from the Caribbean provide a focus for exploring visual culture that creates an awareness of the political stakes inherent in what we do and contributing to new forms of pedagogy. In this sense, visualization practices and imagery as objects of research that have

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with the term. See Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak? Speculations on Widow-Sacrifice," *Wedge* 7–8 (Winter–Spring 1985): 120–30.

6   See Mirzoeff, *Visual Culture Reader*.

7   Arjun Appadurai, "Grassroots Globalization and the Research Imagination," in Arjun Appadurai, ed., *Globalization* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), 17.

"acquired international, transnational, or global dimensions" are best considered initially from specific geopolitical and cultural themes.[8]

Edouard Glissant's seminal discourse on relational poetics (aesthetic and political) explores Caribbean creolization and self-defined identity formation emergent from Caribbean island terrains, landscapes, and locations. Culture, imagination, regeneration, and transformative practices are located, specific, and relational to the very textual qualities of the Caribbean.[9] The place or loci of enunciation and knowledges for Walter Mignolo and others forms an evolving trajectory redolent of Glissant's discourse.[10] Decolonization and de-Westernizing concepts have recently reemerged in international academic debates as recognizing discourses that reflect a more complex trajectory for cultural practices as they relate to global art markets; emerging economies, including the BRIC countries (Brazil, Russia, India, and China); and non-Western populations as increasingly potential audiences.[11] Underlying these shifts is the recognition that majority world populations, according to Mignolo, "are no longer claiming recognition by or inclusion in . . . the Western idea of modernity, ideals of humanity and promises of economic growth and financial prosperity."[12] Caribbean artists' work and their current recognition in international exhibitions are explored here and considered in light of creole practices and decolonial aesthetics.

To critically engage with Caribbean visual culture is to recognize ways strategies of consciousness are deployed and in operation by protagonists involved in imagery and visualizing practices. Differential consciousness for Chela Sandoval is a feminist tactic to facilitate mobility among different systems of power. In other words, changing perspectives, points of view, and subsequent action are seen as forms of tactical intervention. This "activity of weaving 'between and among' oppositional ideologies" named by Sandoval is, for Emma Pérez, "that third space where [one can] find the decolonizing subject negotiating new histories."[13] Donna Haraway also contributes to conceiving of this in relation to fields of vision: "Vision is *always* a question of the power to see—and perhaps of the violence implicit in our visualizing practices . . . the topography of subjectivity is multidimensional; so therefore, is vision."[14] It is through the adoption of a multidimensional "topography" of vision that we are able to examine our own positions and those of others.

8   Ibid., 6, 15.
9   See Edouard Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays*, trans. J. Michael Dash (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1989). The quote used as epigraph to this essay is found on 139.
10   See Walter D. Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012).
11   See Saer Maty Bâ and Will Higbee, eds., *De-Westernizing Film Studies* (London: Routledge, 2012).
12   Walter D. Mignolo, "Epistemic Disobedience, Independent Thought, and Decolonial Freedom," *Theory Culture Society* 26, nos. 7–8 (2009): 3.
13   Chela Sandoval, "US Third World Feminism: The Theory and Method of Oppositional Consciousness in the Postmodern World," *Genders*, no. 10 (Spring 1991): 14; Emma Pérez, *The Decolonial Imaginary: Writing Chicanas into History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 5. See also Chela Sandoval, *Methodology of the Oppressed* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000).
14   Donna Haraway, "The Persistence of Vision," in Mirzoeff, *Visual Culture Reader*, 681.

Topography of Vision 1: Picturesque and Global

The Kodak wallet from the 1920s that I found in Trinidad is an object of analog photography when negatives rather than digital files documented family histories (fig. 2). The studio "Pereira—the Kodak Corner" appears as agent for the Eastman Kodak Company in Port of Spain, and the wallet, we can presume, would have been given to Dr. Campariole with his negatives by the Pereira studio.

The appearance in 1888 of the popular Eastman Kodak Brownie camera initiated the popular "snapshot" era in which photography was more easily available to the general public—success had been achieved through technical efficiency and mass production, therefore offering a cheaper product for families to have. Photography in Trinidad became popular and was used to document the lives of the plantation and ruling classes. Kodak's reach and success in the colonies reflects early forms of globalized capital and visual production. The wallet signifies a wider European universalizing aesthetic being determined on a global scale across the empire, establishing conventions and techniques for the practices of photography.

Figure 2. Kodak wallet, given to author, Port of Spain, Trinidad, 2004.

Researching the archives necessitates an interdisciplinary and diversifying approach to visual material in order to learn of the disjunctures, contestations, and protagonists involved in the creation, circulation, and perpetuation of the work.[15] Patricia Mohammed considers this approach to "culture as resource" as being also informed by "incremental reading of culture as 'expediency'" for the Caribbean area.[16] The Kodak wallet as an initial local object of study may be examined for its ability to provoke further understanding of how visual culture functioned as a constituent component of colonialism, and in order to put history to work, we may also consider the Kodak wallet in a historical trajectory to inform current promotional culture as it operates in the Caribbean.[17]

Caribbean visual culture, then, has always been inherently intertwined with corporate capital, global promotional culture, and "branding" of the Caribbean area. Kamala Kempadoo, Patricia Mohammed, and Krista Thompson chart these phenomena in their research of imagery of tourism, tropicalization, and the touristic gaze.[18] European and emergent international investors and tourists (increasingly from the emerging BRIC economies) are targeted through popular, mass produced, repetitively circulated visual material—portrayed as a contested space—with the promise of promiscuity or romanticism, "endearing" Rastafarianism and "hard core" reggae culture, risqué or seductive entertainment, friendly hospitality or an altogether more edgy or extreme tourist experience.

Thompson considers the "tropicalization" of parts of the Caribbean landscape during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as being "imaged for tourist consumption." She suggests that visions of tropical landscapes were engendered through a complex visual history that "conformed to . . . exoticized and fantastic ideals of the tropical landscape. The picturesque denoted a landscape that seemed like the dream of tropical nature."[19] The beach in particular had become a primary signifier for "the tropics" with a proliferation of what Thompson and John Gilmore note as being the "beach and palm tree type of card."[20] By the 1950s, we can see Trinidad being imaged differently through the beach postcard era as Thompson notes. The postcard as an early and visual cultural form with its currency as a mobile object and its value as an early form of *image-as-message* becomes important to informing contemporary and digital online visualization of the Caribbean.

The Goldberg Postcard Collection contains within it the notion of inaccurate curiosity associated with commodification of popular observation in which fixation around race, customs,

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15 Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. Alan M. Sheridan Smith (London: Tavistock, 1972).

16 Mohammed, *Imaging the Caribbean*, 8. Mohammed considers "accelerated globalization" and George Yúdice's recent writings to reflect on ways in which contemporary political and economic expansion and use of culture may be considered unprecedented and commodified.

17 Promotion culture is referred to here as explored in the 1980s, with the expansion of "capitalist forms of exchange . . . in which a widening range of cultural phenomena whose primary function was to communicate a promotional message had become 'virtually coextensive with our produced symbolic world.'" Melissa Aronczyk and Devon Powers, introduction to *Blowing Up the Brand: Critical Perspectives on Promotional Culture*," ed. Melissa Aroncuzkyk and Devon Powers (New York: Peter Lang, 2010), 4; the authors quote Andrew Wernick, *Promotional Culture: Advertising, Ideology, and Symbolic Expression* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1991), 182.

18 See Kamala Kempadoo, *Sexing the Caribbean: Gender, Race, and Sexual Labor* (London: Routledge, 2004); Thompson, *Eye for the Tropics*; and Mohammed, *Imaging the Caribbean*.

19 Thompson, *Eye for the Tropics*, 5, 21.
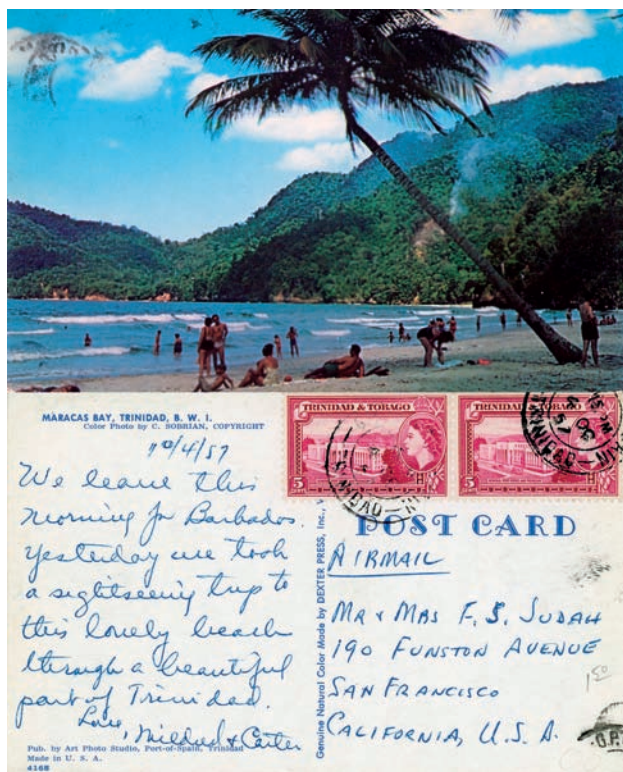
20 John Gilmore, quoted in ibid., 280.

Figure 3. B. Sobrian, *Maracas Bay, Trinidad, B. W. I.*, postcard, 1957. Courtesy Art Photo Studio. University of the West Indies, Alma Jordan Library's Digital Collections, Special Collections, Michael Goldberg Collection, folder 11, postcard 39 C.

landscapes, and fashion are inscribed in the *currency* of the photograph and its postcard context.[21] The postcard *Maracas Bay, Trinidad, B. W. I.* (fig. 3), one of a series whose images were produced by local photographers (albeit printed in the United Kingdom or the United States), also contains an inscription that evokes a historic interrelationship between the United States and Trinidad.[22] The women dressed in fashionable 1950s swimming costumes are reminiscent of US Hollywood popular culture of the beach party films and risqué sexualized fashion. The popular visual trope in the 1950s was associated with Americanization—promoting modern American living, consumerism through global advertising, the rise of television, and a culture in which women were symbolized as both domesticated (for their roles in returning to the home) and feminine (for their roles in seducing and attracting the opposite sex).[23] The image portrayed was idealistic, one emergent in an era of Western expansionist culture through advertising and television. Ironically, the nationalist discourse

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21 Michael Goldberg Postcard Collection, West Indies Special Collection, University of the West Indies Library, St. Augustine Campus, mainlib.uwi.tt/divisions/wi/collsp/summaries/michaelgoldberg.htm (accessed 2 June 2010).

22 For recent research on the relationship between the United States and Trinidad, see Harvey Neptune, *Caliban and the Yankees: Trinidad and the United States Occupation* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007).

23 In a recent interview with Emma Brockes for the *Guardian Weekend*, Toni Morrison explains that she was exploring a different image for the 1950s in her recent book *Home*: "I was trying to take the scab off the '50s, the general idea of it as very comfortable, happy, nostalgic. . . . There was a horrible war you didn't call a war where 58,000 people died. There was McCarthy." See Emma Brockes, "Toni Morrison: 'I Want to Feel What I Feel. Even If It's Not Happiness,'" *Guardian*, 13 April 2012.

during this period of Caribbean history by politicians and intellectuals including Eric Williams and Michael Manley was never really far away from these photographs of the picturesque, contributing to what was to become a differently configured image of the Trinidad nation and its population.

The contemporary, highly sexualized black female body continues as a signifier for goods and the mediated object of capital. In the case of the visual rhetoric associated with the "globalized franchise" of Caribbean carnival, for example, we witness her visually constructed and embedded in the economic force of global tourism in a particularly pernicious and competing market. She is caught in the crossfire as a source of digitized bytes, in the privileged site of profit—digitally inscribed as the object of consumption who is continuously reconfigured in digitally mediated spaces. In the move to create heightened fetishized referents, difference and race have become the substitute signifiers for the multicultural status of government, company, and education projects; of MTV, *Big Brother*, and other reality TV series. The black, urban, youthful body and cultural expression is considered funky, cool, and seamlessly connected to and associated with cool digital stuff and the "street tecchie."[24] Black music and voices are heard everywhere. Coco Fusco, in her more recent writings on whiteness, echoes the notion of a hypervisualized sense of blackness in stating that this "sheer volume of racial imagery" suggests that "we like to *see* race."[25] In other words, there is a heightened desire for the consumption of racial imagery.[26]

© Marlon Griffith

MARLON GRIFFITH IS AN ARTIST WHOSE PRACTICE IS BASED UPON A RECIPROCAL DIALOGUE BETWEEN MAS (THE ARTISTIC COMPONENT OF THE TRINIDAD CARNIVAL) AND ART AS A MEANS OF INVESTIGATING THE PHENOMENOLOGICAL ASPECT OF THE EMBODIED EXPERIENCE; IT IS SITUATED AT THE INTERSECTION OF THE VISUAL AND PUBLIC PERFORMANCE.
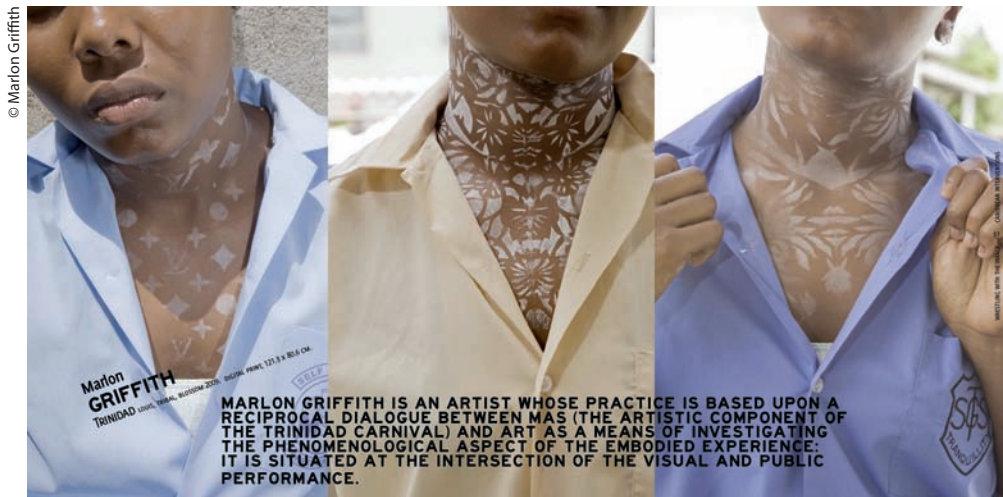
Figure 4. Marlon Griffith, *Louis*, *Tribal*, and *Blossom*, from *Powder Box (Schoolgirl Series)*, 2009. Digital prints, 121.3 × 80.6 cm each; reproduced in *Wrestling with the Image: Caribbean Interventions*, 2011, exhibition catalogue, 56–57.

24 See Roshini Kempadoo, "Interpolating Screen Bytes: Critical Commentary in Multimedia Artworks," *Journal of Media Practice* 11, no. 1 (2010): 59–80.

25 Coco Fusco, "Framing Whiteness," *emisférica: Race and Its Others*, no. 2 (December 2008): 1, hemisphericinstitute.org/hemi/en/e-misferica-52.

26 For a discussion of Marlon Griffith's work (fig. 4) elsewhere in this issue of *Small Axe*, see Michelle Stephens, "What Is an Island? Caribbean Studies and the Contemporary Visual Artist," 21.

Topography of Vision 2: Alter-Native Imaginaries

New York in 2012 had "tropical ambition." The exhibition *Caribbean: Crossroads of the World*, of some 379 artists' works, was curated across three institutions in New York.[27] The type of exhibition and its curation practices, ambition, and reach is symptomatic of a current trend in the art world toward creation of "blockbuster shows." These survey shows and their substantive online and printed catalogues build on a tremendous international circulation of and focus on work by current and past generations of Caribbean artists and selected artists of the Caribbean diaspora.[28] This includes the recent exhibitions *Infinite Island: Contemporary Caribbean Art*, Brooklyn Museum, New York, 2007; *Kréyol Factory Exposition*, Paris, 2009; *South-South: Interruptions and Encounters*, Toronto, 2009; *Global Caribbean*, Florida and Sète, France, 2010; *About Change (World Bank Programme of Exhibition of Latin America and Caribbean Art)*, Washington DC (2009–2012); *Wrestling with the Image*, Washington DC, 2011; *Into the Mix*, Louisville, US, 2012; *Who More Sci-Fi Than Us: Contemporary Art from the Caribbean*, Amersfoort, the Netherlands, 2012; and *I Is AnOther*, Nottingham, UK, 2012.

Whether artists' work is created through the support of "officially" state-endorsed programs or events, such as the Caribbean regional festival Carifesta; through private/corporate sponsorship, such as the Trinidad and Tobago Film Festival (ttff); or created as an artist-led initiative, such as the Alice Yard project in Port of Spain, it is through the close "reading" and willingness to engage with visual projects that we have a more enriched and critical sense of what might constitute the Caribbean, or indeed whether we might consider the Caribbean as a matrix of cultural formations.[29] Contemporary visual artwork reflects the complex and contested aspects of perceiving, signifying, and defining the Caribbean self in relation to others.

In considering topologies of vision and "Caribbeanness," of interest here is the exploration of work by artists, including photographers, graphic designers, and filmmakers, who identify themselves as from the Caribbean, living and working in various Caribbean islands, temporarily or permanently resident there. The work is often created during artist residencies and journeys to various international venues that include Johannesburg, Dakar, and Tokyo, and the work is global

27 *Caribbean: Crossroads of the World*, an exhibition across three locations in New York: El Museo del Barrio, the Queens Museum of Art, and the Studio Museum in Harlem, 2012, caribbeancrossroads.org/ (accessed 13 July 2012); Tom Freudenheim, "Tropical Ambition," *Wall Street Journal*, 8 August 2012; "Three Museums Partner on Major Caribbean Exhibit," repeatingislands.com/2012/02/12/three-museums-partner-on-major-caribbean-exhibition/ (accessed 2 September 2012).

28 A selection of publications catalogues, online presence, and brochures include: *Global Caribbean: Focus on the Contemporary Caribbean Visual Art Landscape*, 2010, theglobalcaribbean.org/gc1.php (accessed 21 December 2011); *About Change in Latin America and the Caribbean*, 2009, go.worldbank.org/8YUH6CRAT0 (accessed 3 June 2009); *Kréyol Factory Exposition*, 2009, kreyolfactory.srv841.sd-france.net/exposition/les_partenaires.html (accessed 7 June 2009); *Wrestling with the Image: Caribbean Interventions*, 2011, www.artzpub.com/sites/default/files/pdf/wwtil.pdf (accessed 30 May 2011).

29 Carifesta is a regional cultural festival that has been taking place in various Caribbean cities since 1972 and organized by the member states of CARICOM (the Caribbean Common Market Association, constituting some twenty nations and states mostly derived from the English-speaking Commonwealth). Carifesta is perceived as significant to the Caribbean in demonstrating the cultural wealth of the region. The Trinidad and Tobago Film Festival (ttff) was founded in 2006 and is currently presented by the communications company Flow. It has grown in popularity, gaining mostly corporate and some diplomatic funding nationally and from other states in the Caribbean region. See www.ttfilmfestival.com/sponsors/ (accessed 2 September 2011). Alice Yard is the backyard space of the house at 80 Roberts Street, Woodbrook, Port of Spain, Trinidad, once the house of architect Sean Leonard's great-grandmother. Since late 2006, Sean Leonard, Chris Cozier, and Nicholas Laughlin have been organizing and inviting artists to use the space creatively. See "Archive for the 'Alice Yard,'" Small Axe Project, smallaxe.net/wordpress3/works/category/alice-yard/ (accessed 2 September 2011).

in its reach and visibility. These artists reflect a continuous mobility and migration and diasporized experience, reflecting the complexity and networks of the Caribbean. This generation's work visualizes the Caribbean as seen by persons who are sometimes temporary, mostly continuous or permanently journeying to and from North America (rather than Europe), often having studied in the United States or Canada. The work has made increasingly significant contributions to refashioning and visualizing the Caribbean in a global cultural arena.[30] Online environments are important modes of network and promotion, to stay connected with international curators and critics and to "speak to" international audiences and other artists, including artists of the Caribbean diaspora in the United States, Canada, and Europe. As Chris Cozier comments, "For all, [the Internet] becomes a dialogue about visual vocabularies, sensibility and even a particular social awareness."[31] Artists such as Nicole Awai, Terri Bodie, Richard Bolai (1962–2010), Chris Cozier, Marlon Griffith, Abigail
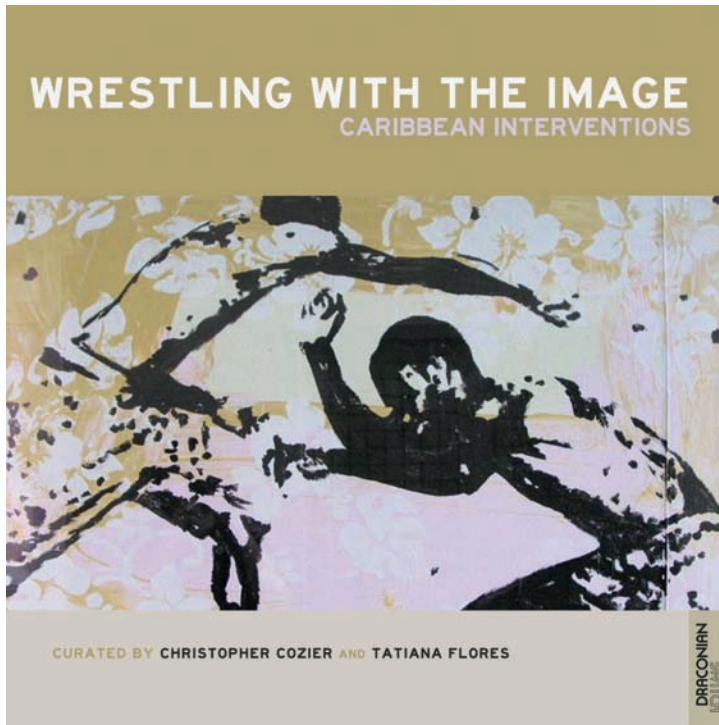

Figure 5. Exhibition catalogue cover, *Wrestling with the Image: Caribbean Interventions*, 2011, Museum of the Americas, Organization of American States, and Draconian Switch. Cover art: John Cox, *Boxer Series*.

30 Dennis Conway describes Caribbean migration to the United States and Canada since the 1960s as "temporary sojourning and circulatory 'visiting.'" In other words, there is now a complex migratory relationship between the Caribbean region and the United States and Canada, based on work, studies, better opportunities, and visiting, including permanent migration (particularly as it relates to asylum sought by Haitians and Cubans, for example), the return of pensioners and working adult populations to the islands, extended familial stays, irregular overstaying in the islands and the United States, and long-term business arrangements between the continent and the region. See Dennis Conway, "The Complexity of Caribbean Migration," gtuwi.tripod.com/conwaymigr.htm (accessed 23 September 2010).
31 Christopher Cozier, "Notes on Wrestling with the Image," in *Wrestling with the Image: Caribbean Interventions*, exhibition e-catalogue (Artzpub/Draconian Switch, 2011), www.artzpub.com/sites/default/files/pdf/wwtil.pdf, 13 (accessed 15 March 2013).
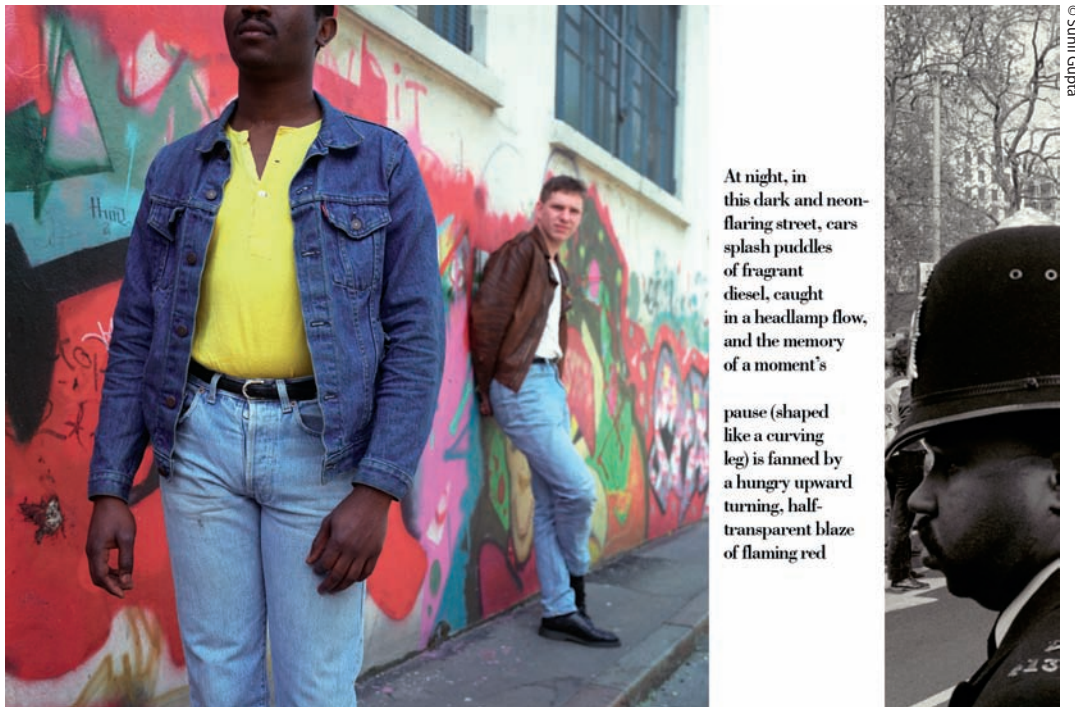
At night, in this dark and neon-flaring street, cars splash puddles of fragrant diesel, caught in a headlamp flow, and the memory of a moment's

pause (shaped like a curving leg) is fanned by a hungry upward turning, half-transparent blaze of flaming red

© Sunil Gupta

Figure 6. Sunil Gupta, *Untitled 2*, from the series *"Pretended" Family Relationships*, 1988. C-print, text on paper, and silver print; 36 × 24 in. Poem by Stephen Dodd.

Hadeed, Marcel Pinas, Ebony Patterson, Richard Rawlins, and Sheena Rose reflect an altogether more complex and contradictory relationship to the space and location of the Caribbean islands and Caribbean identity. Annie Paul's use of the term "alter *natives" to describe* Chris Cozier's work is appropriate to the artists mentioned here, with "alter *natives* [being] . . . the illegitimate children of the nation who by virtue of differing race, class, gender, or sexual variables find themselves on the wrong side of nation stories in opposition to the majority groups that assert ownership of the national or Caribbean space."[32]

Their visual aesthetics coexist with, and yet intervene in, the popular imagery in circulation. As Chris Cozier, cocurator of the 2011 exhibition *Wrestling with the Image: Caribbean Interventions* at the Museum of the Americas, Washington DC, notes: "The Caribbean continues to expand and shift. In this manifold space, experiences produced through the visual create meeting-points breaking through a multiplicity of barriers. . . . This entanglement or engagement of the other-self, a shadow or mirror image, is an ongoing story. . . . The Caribbean artist is always in competition with a long history of expedient labelling of their world and their very selves—externally and also internally."[33]

32 Annie Paul, "Christopher Cozier," *BOMB* (2003), bombsite.com/issues/82/articles/2524 (accessed 26 September 2010).
33 Cozier, "Notes," 7, 8.

Figure 7. Roshini Kempadoo, from the series *Presence*, 1990. Multiple exposure silver gelatin print, 50.8 × 50.8 cm.

Stuart Hall's seminal writings on cultural identity in relation to Jamaica, the Caribbean, and the United Kingdom in the 1990s, in which he describes the notion of representation that positioned "the black subject at the centre" and implicates "the positions from which we speak or write—the positions of *enunciation*," resonates with the work by artists who situate and locate a different engagement with the notion of Caribbean identity and signification.[34] He was referring mostly to imagery created by black UK artists of the diaspora (politically defining the term *black* to signify persons of African, Asian, and Caribbean heritage) whose work responded to the social, cultural, and economic conditions of Margaret Thatcher's Conservative government. Their visual practices were strengthened and stimulated through dialogue and exchange with African American and Latino visual works, mainly in the United States and more recently by artists in the Caribbean, such as those mentioned earlier. This generation emerged from what Hall and David A. Bailey described as the "critical decade," spanning the late 1980s to the late 1990s. The 1992 special edition of *Ten.8* with the same title begins with a quote by C. L. R. James: "These people who are in Western civilization, who have grown up in it but yet are not completely a part, have a unique insight . . . and something special to contribute."[35]

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34 Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," in Jonathan Rutherford, ed., *Identity: Community, Culture, and Difference* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990), 222 (italics in original).

35 Stuart Hall and David A. Bailey, editorial in "Critical Decade: Black British Photography in the Eighties," *Ten.8* 2, no. 3 (1992): 4. The quote was republished from a contribution by C. L. R. James to an earlier issue of *Ten.8*. See C. L. R. James, "Africans and Afro-Caribbeans: A Personal View," in "Black Image, Staying On," *Ten.8*, no. 16 (1984): 54–55.

Topography of Vision 3: Envisioning Civility

The continued expansion of social media forms of communication; the increased access to online networked environments; the capabilities of large public and private screens for viewing national and international events simultaneously across and within countries; and the convergence of lens-based technologies with communication and screen-based PDAs, including laptops, smartphones, e-book readers, and computer tablets, increasingly change culture practices as we create, consume, encounter, interact with, and determine visual material.[36] Media flows such as these are transnational, global, cutting across national boundaries and therefore impacting on visual perceptions of citizens, communities, nations, or regions such as the Caribbean. The practices of such contemporary imagery encourages us to extend the ontology of photography into a more current hypervisual context to recognize the displacement of the primacy of the photograph as object, the challenge to the authority of the photographer, and the field of vision. In other words, as Ariella Azoulay in her recent writings has proposed, we might focus on reading and engaging with imagery that "enables one to look at whatever is inscribed in the frame as not being a consequence, application or implementation of the photographer's point of view but, rather, as resulting from an encounter between several protagonists that might take on various forms."[37]

Visual culture, then, is concerned with social and political visual representations that emerge from self-determined, self-created photographic practices that also involve the potential for multiple points of view and infinite potential by protagonists to inscribe meanings. Two approaches to photography are explored here to consider ways imagery contributes to such alternative visual perspectives as practices of *envisioning civility*. Reaffirming family photography as an important dimension for the study of visual culture enriches narratives of gendered politics, diasporic histories, and cultural memory.

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Figure 8. Roshini Kempadoo, *Mrs. Procope's family photographs— Mrs. Procope's Mother*, 2006, Port of Spain. Digital photograph, 21.5 × 32 cm.

36 Imagery is increasingly experienced via screen technologies. Screens as material technologies are equally important to the practice of consuming visual culture, particularly as it relates to geopolitics and global energy resources. See Oliver Grau with Thomas Veigl, eds., *Imagery in the Twenty-First Century* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2011), especially Sean Cubitt, "Current Screens," 21–36.
37 Ariella Azoulay, "What Is a Photograph? What Is Photography?," *Philosophy of Photography* 1, no. 1 (2010): 12.

Women photographers and theorists—Marianne Hirsch, Patricia Holland, Ann Laura Stoler, and Deborah Willis, in particular[38]—have long explored the family photograph for the ways it reflects the aesthetics, experience, and function of family life, family ceremonial junctures, domesticity, intimacy, and family myths.

The framed portrait of the woman in *Mrs. Procope's family photographs—Mrs. Procope's Mother* is surrounded by a series of other photographs of parents, grandparents, a husband, and other family members to form an intricate *web of relations* on the wall of Mrs. Procope's modern apartment in Port of Spain (fig. 8). As an image collection, the photographs are the family album writ large and a personal archive on display. The photographic memories maintain familiarity with the symbolic representations of the mother, grandmother, and other relations. Mrs. Procope is reverent toward the images of her family in the group of photographs, which are enshrined in the hallway of the apartment, arranged as a memorial on the wall. Over the years, Mrs. Procope has acquired the photographs from her various relations (creating copies when the originals have been damaged). The photographs function as a palliative for her personal losses, the death of her parents, and her memories of childhood. They are an example of photography's ability to function as an antidote and to represent a lifestyle, in this case that of the urban population of Port of Spain. They signify a particular era, social class, and community. The photographs connote a restitution process, valorizing the subject in the image and presenting a way of "looking up to" the image of the plantation workers and their descendants.

The composition of the portrait of Mrs. Procope's mother reflects the photographic conventions used in high street photography studios in Port of Spain from the 1900s. In the three-quarter-length image, the sitter is positioned slightly askew to the camera, with her arms crossed and resting comfortably on her lap; in a slightly "coy" demeanor, her head and face tilted slightly downward, she looks full into the camera with a small reserved smile. It presents her in the 1940s as symbolic of the first generation of a family born in Trinidad, rather than as an indentured migrant from India. It is unlike the other portraits on the wall, previous generations who are dressed mostly in more traditional clothing, including *saris*, *dhotis*, and *orhanis*.[39] Her dress, hairstyle, and jewelry are European and reflect a more "modern" personification of someone removed from both the plantation space and the image of her ancestors. The pose of the sitter in the portrait is known to us; it connotes familiarity and nostalgia.[40]

38 See Marianne Hirsch, *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997); Marianne Hirsch, ed., *The Familial Gaze* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1999); Patricia Holland and Jo Spence, eds., *Family Snaps: The Meaning of Domestic Photography* (London: Virago, 1991); Patricia Holland, "'Sweet It Is to Scan . . .': Personal Photographs and Popular Photography," in Liz Wells, ed., *Photography: A Critical Introduction*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2000), 117–64; Ann Laura Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); Deborah Willis, ed., *Picturing Us: African American Identity in Photography* (New York: New Press, 1994); and Deborah Willis, "A Search for Self: The Photograph and Black Family Life," in Hirsch, *Familial Gaze*, 107–23.

39 I am using Trinidad Hindi terms to describe Indian clothing that is worn for formal occasions in Trinidad and associated with ex-indentured workers of Indian ancestry. See Kumar Mahabir, *A Dictionary of Common Trinidad Hindi* (San Juan, Trinidad and Tobago: Chakra, 2004).

40 From the original Greek definition of the term *Nostalghía*, which Seremetakis describes as to evoke "the desire or longing with burning pain to journey." Nadia Seremetakis, "The Memory of the Senses, Part I: Marks of the Transitory," in Nadia Seremetakis, ed., *The Senses Still: Perception and Memory as Material Culture in Modernity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 4.

While the family portrait of Mrs. Procope reflects reverence, stasis, and permanence associated with personal memory, including loss and ceremonial remembrance, contemporary digital family photography reaffirms photography's continued importance in acts of giving and connectedness. Gillian Rose's *Doing Family Photography: The Domestic, the Public and the Politics of Sentiment* explores the relationship between the photograph and another common trait associated with family photography: its mobility. The currency of family photographs is their ability to perpetuate familial bonds as a "portable kit of images that bears witness to a family's connectedness."[41] As they are exchanged and pass from one family member to another via social networking websites, social media applications, and e-mail, the photograph, Rose suggests, accrues and intensifies value—based on exchange and "free gifting," carrying "indexical traces of the people it shows . . . [where] their value lies in part in that indexicality."[42] The contribution of family photographs to Digital Diaspora Family Reunion (DDFR), by Guyanese social and cultural activist Grace Ali, is illustrative of the way family photography accrues an intensity of value, used as a means of communication and operating within different visual economies.[43] The photographs portraying her mother's early life in Guyana had been gifted to her; Ali in turn has made them public as collective social memory inherent to the documentation of the Caribbean diaspora in the United States. The photographs are inextricably linked to the responses of what they show and the acts of sending and presenting them. As digitized imagery is made available online and through the practice of public sharing as part of a social project, the photographs also contribute to a wider collective process that allows them to be inscribed with meanings by multiple protagonists.

Figure 9. Photographs belonging to Grace Ali, for the online project Digital Diaspora Family Reunion (DDFR): *Grace Ali Keeps Her Photos Safe* (2012).

41 Susan Sontag, quoted in Gillian Rose, *Doing Family Photography: The Domestic, the Public, and the Politics of Sentiment* (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2010), 8.

42 Rose, *Doing Family Photography*, 64.

43 See "Grace Ali Keeps Her Photos Safe," DDFR.TV, ddfr.tv/grace-ali-keeps-her-photos-safe/2848 (accessed 16 March 2013). Digital Diaspora Family Reunion (DDFR) and DDFR SocialNet are projects directed by Thomas Allen Harris. See ddfr.tv/ and ddfrsocialnet.ning.com/ (accessed 3 March 2012). Grace Aneiza Ali is the founder and editorial director of the online magazine *Of Note*; see ofnotemagazine.org/ (accessed 3 March 2012).

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Figure 10. Roshini Kempadoo, *9.09.09. Health-care speech, Washington DC. This body, here, kissed her teeth, indignant at what they did*, from the series *State of Play*, 2011. Pigmented inkjet print, 60 × 33 cm.

Photography events are increasingly found as digital imagery and circulated on the Internet via social media software, blogs, websites, and e-mail, allowing for a recognition that photography is inscribed by meanings made by multiple persons and multiple perspectives—that it is an unstable point of view with the potential to accommodate what Azoulay proposes as "civil imagination"—constitutive of social thought and action as a practice for exploring photography as visual culture.[44]

Conclusion: Criticality and Visual Configurations

"What the election and the global embrace of [Barack] Obama's brand proved decisively," Naomi Klein posits, "is there is tremendous appetite for progressive change—that many, many people do not want markets opened at gunpoint, are repelled by torture, believe passionately in civil liberties, want corporations out of politics, see global warming as the fight of our time, and very much want to be part of a political project larger than themselves."[45]

Exploring Caribbean visual culture, then, is to extend and encourage forms of pedagogy about imagery and visualizing practices that are active and transformative. Caribbean visual culture may be considered in light of contemporaneous civil movements, recognizing globalized practices as contaminating most circuits of social life. Central to research and exploration of criticality for Caribbean visual culture is a frame of reference that continues to reflect the decolonial project of dismantling colonialism beyond independence, which has not precluded "neocolonial dependency

44 Azoulay, *Philosophy of Photography*.
45 Naomi Klein, "Naomi Klein on How Corporate Branding Has Taken Over America," *Guardian*, 16 January 2010.

Figure 11. *Walter Rodney's Funeral, 23 June 1980, Georgetown.* Working People's Alliance Archive. Photograph by Karen de Souza. Courtesy of Eusi Kwayana, Georgetown, 2003.

under global capitalism."[46] The premise is to continue to reorient thoughts, ideas, knowledge, and creativity as emergent and embedded in Caribbean visual sensibility.

The continuous challenge for Caribbean studies is to critique, to bring into consciousness popular visualization, as it is espoused through promotional culture construes and perpetuates the imagery of racialized and sexualized Caribbean bodies historically and contemporaneously, sustains the problematic imagery of the picturesque, and continues an association with stereotypical practices of visual language.

Visual culture equally takes into consideration Caribbean artworks and political and social imagery created as counternarratives to popular and promotional media. Such works continue to define fields of vision to reflect a vigilance against what Ella Shohat sees as the "voracity of a 'mythical' West with an almost providential sense of historical destiny" to have the right to all knowledge.[47] Exploring an archaeology of global dialogue, interconnectivity, and interstitially that is inherent to Caribbean imagery is necessary to a pedagogy of Caribbean visual culture. Work by southern and diasporic artists such as Fatoumata Diabaté, Berni Searle, and Zineb Sedira is pertinent to this premise.[48] These artists are among those conceptually, ideologically, and politically exploring a

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46 Paul Allatson, *Key Terms in Latino/a Cultural and Literary Studies* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2006), 94.
47 Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, "Narrativizing Visual Culture: Towards a Polycentric Aesthetics," in Mirzoeff, *Visual Culture Reader*, 37.
48 See Fatoumata Diabaté, "Photographing the Social Body: Malian Portraiture from the Studio to the Street," Carleton College, apps.carleton.edu/museum/socialbody/artists/fatoumata/ (accessed 5 July 2012); bernisearle.com/; and zinebsedira .com/.

range of perspectives that reflect collective and individual activism, notions of freedom, justice, civil rights and racism, independence, autonomy and self-determination, and social inequality and invisibility. An ambition to being "civil spectators" is concerned here with how and what we learn to see, with an active commitment and obligation to intervene and contribute to changing perspectives.[49]

Acknowledgements

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49 See Ariella Azoulay, *The Civil Contract of Photography* (New York: Zone, 2008), 14.