

INTRODUCTION

The Right to Look

Or, How to Think With and

Against Visuality

I want to claim the right to look.¹ This claim is, not for the first or the last time, for a right to the real.² It might seem an odd request after all that we have seen in the first decade of the twenty-first century on old media and new, from the falling of the towers, to the drowning of cities, and violence without end. The right to look is not about seeing. It begins at a personal level with the look into someone else's eyes to express friendship, solidarity, or love. That look must be mutual, each person inventing the other, or it fails. As such, it is unrepresentable. The right to look claims autonomy, not individualism or voyeurism, but the claim to a political subjectivity and collectivity: "The right to look. The invention of the other."³ Jacques Derrida coined this phrase in describing Marie-Françoise Plissart's photo-essay depicting two women in ambiguous pursuit of each other, as lovers, and in knowing play with practices of looking (see fig. 1).⁴ This invention is common, it may be the common, even communist. For there is an exchange, but no creation of a surplus. You, or your group, allow another to find you, and, in so doing, you find both the other and yourself. It means requiring the recognition of the other in order to have a place from which to claim rights and to determine what is right. It is the claim to a subjectivity that has the autonomy to arrange the relations of the visible and the sayable. The right to look confronts the police who say to us, "Move on, there's nothing to see here."⁵ Only there is, and we know it and so do they. The opposite of



FIGURE 1. MARIE-FRANÇOISE PLISSART FROM *DROIT DE REGARDS*
(PARIS: EDITIONS DE MINUIT, 1985).

the right to look is not censorship, then, but “visuality,” that authority to tell us to move on, that exclusive claim to be able to look. *Visuality* is an old word for an old project. It is not a trendy theory word meaning the totality of all visual images and devices, but is in fact an early-nineteenth-century term meaning the visualization of history.⁶ This practice must be imaginary, rather than perceptual, because what is being visualized is too substantial for any one person to see and is created from information, images, and ideas. This ability to assemble a visualization manifests the authority of the visualizer. In turn, the authorizing of authority requires permanent renewal in order to win consent as the “normal,” or everyday, because it is always already contested. The autonomy claimed by the right to look is thus opposed by the authority of visuality. But the right to look came first, and we should not forget it.⁷

How can we think with and against visuality? Visuality’s first domains were the slave plantation, monitored by the surveillance of the overseer, operating as the surrogate of the sovereign. This sovereign surveillance was reinforced by violent punishment but sustained a modern division of labor. Visualizing was next the hallmark of the modern general from the late eighteenth-century onward, as the battlefield became too extensive and complex for any one person to physically see. Working on information sup-

plied by subalterns—the new lowest-ranked officer class created for this purpose—and his own ideas and images, the general in modern warfare, as practiced and theorized by Karl von Clausewitz, was responsible for visualizing the battlefield. At this moment, in 1840, visibility was named as such in English by the historian Thomas Carlyle (1795–1881) to refer to what he called the tradition of heroic leadership, which visualizes history to sustain autocratic authority. Carlyle attempted to conjure the Hero as a mystical figure, a “living light fountain that it is good and pleasant to be near . . . a natural luminary shining by the gift of Heaven.”⁸ If visibility had been the supplement to authority on the plantation, authority was now that light. Light is divine. Authority is thus visibly able to set things in motion, and that is then felt to be right: it is aesthetic. Visibility supplemented the violence of authority and its separations, forming a complex that came to seem natural by virtue of its investment in “history.” The autonomy claimed by the right to look is thus opposed by the authority of visibility. Visualizing is the production of visibility, meaning the making of the processes of “history” perceptible to authority. Visibility sought to present authority as self-evident, that “division of the sensible whereby domination imposes the sensible evidence of its legitimacy.”⁹ Despite its name, this process is not composed simply of visual perceptions in the physical sense, but is formed by a set of relations combining information, imagination, and insight into a rendition of physical and psychic space. I am not attributing agency to “visibility” but, as is now commonplace, treating it as a discursive practice that has material effects, like Foucault’s panopticism, the gaze or perspective. A given modality of visibility is composed of a series of operations that can be summarized under three headings: first, visibility classifies by naming, categorizing, and defining, a process defined by Foucault as “the nomination of the visible.”¹⁰ It was founded in plantation practice, from the mapping of plantation space to the identification of cash-crop cultivation techniques and the precise division of labor required to sustain them. Second, visibility separates the groups so classified as a means of social organization. Such visibility separates and segregates those it visualizes to prevent them from cohering as political subjects, such as the workers, the people, or the (decolonized) nation. Third, it makes this separated classification seem right and hence aesthetic. As the decolonial critic Frantz Fanon had it, such repeated experience generates an “aesthetic of respect for the status quo,” the aesthetics of the proper, of duty, of what is felt to be right and hence pleasing, ultimately even beautiful.¹¹ Classifying, separating, and aestheti-

cizing together form what I shall call a “complex of visuality.” All such Platonism depends on a servile class, whether formally chattel slaves or not, whose task it is to do the work that is to be done and nothing else.¹² We may engage in whatever labor is required to do that work, visual or otherwise, but for us, there is nothing to be seen.

The right to look claims autonomy from this authority, refuses to be segregated, and spontaneously invents new forms. It is not a right for declarations of human rights, or for advocacy, but a claim of the right to the real as the key to a democratic politics. That politics is not messianic or to come, but has a persistent genealogy that is explored in this book, from the opposition to slavery of all kinds to anticolonial, anti-imperial, and anti-fascist politics. Claiming the right to look has come to mean moving past such spontaneous oppositional undoing toward an autonomy based on one of its first principles: “the right to existence.” The constitutive assemblages of countervisuality that emerged from the confrontation with visuality sought to match and overcome its complex operations. I shall gloss these terms here using the radical genealogy of the philosopher Jacques Rancière, whose work has been central to this project, while emphasizing and insisting that they are derived from historical practice. Classification was countered by education understood as emancipation, meaning “the act of an intelligence obeying only itself, even while the will obeys another will.”¹³ Education has long been understood by working and subaltern classes as their paramount means of emancipation, from the efforts of the enslaved to achieve literacy, to nineteenth-century campaigns for universal education that culminated (in the United States) with the Supreme Court case *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954). Education was the practical means of moving on from the work allocated to you. Separation was countered by democracy, meaning not simply representative elections but the place of “the part that has no part” in power. Plato designated six categories of people with title to power: all those who remained, the great majority, are those without part, who do not count.¹⁴ Here the right to look is strongly interfaced with the right to be seen. In combining education and democracy, those classified as good to work and nothing else reasserted their place and title. The aesthetics of power were matched by the aesthetics of the body not simply as form but as affect and need. This aesthetic is not a classificatory scheme of the beautiful but “an ‘aesthetics’ at the core of politics . . . as the system of *a priori* forms determining what presents itself to sense experience.”¹⁵ In this book, these forms center around sustenance and what I shall call the “politics of

eating,” adapting a phrase from African and African diaspora discourse. It might now be described as sustainability. These countervisualities are not visual, you might say. I did not say they were. I claim that they are and were visualized as goals, strategies, and imagined forms of singularity and collectivity. If they do not seem “realistic,” that is the measure of the success of visuality, which has made “vision” and “leadership” into synonyms. It is precisely that extended sense of the real, the realistic, and realism(s) that is at stake in the conflict between visuality and countervisuality. The “realism” of countervisuality is the means by which one tries to make sense of the unreality created by visuality’s authority from the slave plantation to fascism and the war on terror that is nonetheless all too real, while at the same time proposing a real alternative. It is by no means a simple or mimetic depiction of lived experience, but one that depicts existing realities and counters them with a different realism. In short, the choice is between continuing to move on and authorizing authority or claiming that there is something to see and democratizing democracy.

COMPLEXES OF VISUALITY

The substance of this chapter—it is more than an introduction to the rest of the book, although it is of course also that—explores how to work with the interfaces between visuality and countervisuality within and between complexes of visuality from a decolonial perspective. “Complex” here means both the production of a set of social organizations and processes that form a given complex, such as the plantation complex, and the state of an individual’s psychic economy, such as the Oedipus complex. The resulting imbrication of mentality and organization produces a visualized deployment of bodies and a training of minds, organized so as to sustain both physical segregation between rulers and ruled, and mental compliance with those arrangements. The complex that thus emerges has volume and substance, forming a life-world that can be both visualized and inhabited. I consider the complexes of visuality to be an articulation of the claim to authority in what decolonial theory has called “coloniality,” meaning “the transhistoric expansion of colonial domination and the perpetuation of its effects in contemporary times.”¹⁶ As Achille Mbembe has shown, such coloniality is formed by modes of “entanglement” and “displacement,” producing “discontinuities, reversals, inertias and swings that overlay one another.”¹⁷ This sense that the “time is out of joint,” appropriated by Derrida from Hamlet,

has come to be seen as the expression of the contradictions of globalization.¹⁸ Identifying these entanglements and moments of displacement are central to defining the genealogies of visibility and form the material for the chapters that follow. Such networks also remind us that no such genealogy can be comprehensive. Mbembe's emphasis on complex temporality further suggests that one modality of visibility was not simply succeeded by another, but rather that their traces linger, and can be revived at unexpected moments. The present is precisely one such moment, in which the legacies of the plantation complex are once again active in the United States, due to the Obama presidency, while imperial dreams are being worked out globally in full interface with the military-industrial complex. The very emergence of all the modalities of visibility at once suggests an emergency, as both the condition of a critique of visibility and the possibility of the right to look. The symptom of that emergency is precisely the ability to detect the crisis of visibility, such that the visibility of visibility is paradoxically the index of that crisis.

The authority of coloniality has consistently required visibility to supplement its deployment of force. Visibility sutures authority to power and renders this association "natural." For Nelson Maldonado Torres, this colonial violence formed a "death ethic of war," meaning the extensive presence of war and related social practices, such as mass incarceration and the death penalty, to which I would add slavery, understood as being derived from "the constitutive character of coloniality and the naturalization of human difference that is tied to it in the emergence and unfolding of Western modernity."¹⁹ This decolonial genealogy means that it will not be sufficient to begin a critique of visibility in the present day, or in the recent past, but that it must engage with the formation of coloniality and slavery as modernity.²⁰ As Enrique Dussel has aptly put it: "Modernity is, in fact, a European phenomenon but one constituted in a dialectical relation with a non-European alterity that is its ultimate content."²¹ In order to challenge the claimed inevitability of this history and its hegemonic means to frame the present, any engagement with visibility in the present or the past requires establishing its counterhistory. In fact, I suggest that one of the very constitutive forms of visibility is the knowledge that it is always already opposed and in struggle. To coin a phrase, visibility is not war by other means: it is war. This war was constituted first by the experience of plantation slavery, the foundational moment of visibility and the right to look. In antiquity, authority was literally a patriarchal modality of slavery. The modern hero's

authority restates the ancient foundations of authority as slave-owner and interpreter of messages, the “eternal” half of modern visuality, to paraphrase Baudelaire, the tradition that was to be preserved.

Authority is derived from the Latin *auctor*. In Roman law, the *auctor* was at one level the “founder” of a family, literally the patriarch. He was also (and always) therefore a man empowered to sell slaves, among other forms of property, which completed the complex of authority.²² Authority can be said to be power over life, or biopower, foundationally rendered as authority over a “slave.”²³ However, this genealogy displaces the question: who or what empowers the person with authority to sell human beings? According to the Roman historian Livy, the indigenous people living on the site that would become Rome were subject to the authority (*auctoritas*) of Evander, son of Hermes, who ruled “more by authority than by power (*imperium*).” That authority was derived from Evander’s ability, as the son of the messenger of the gods, to interpret signs. As Rancière puts it, “The *auctor* is a specialist in messages.”²⁴ This ability to discern meaning in both the medium and the message generates visuality’s aura of authority. When it further becomes invested with power (*imperium*), that authority becomes the ability to designate who should serve and who should rule. Such certainties did not survive the violent decentering of the European worldview produced by the multiple shocks of “1492”: the encounter with the Americas, the expulsion of the Jews and Islam from Spain, and the heliocentric system of Copernicus. At the beginning of the modern period, Montaigne could already discern what he called the “mystical foundation of authority,” meaning that it was ultimately unclear who or what authorizes authority.²⁵ As Derrida suggests, “Since the origin of authority, the foundation or ground, the position of the law can’t by definition rest on anything but themselves, they are themselves a violence without a ground.”²⁶ Authority’s presumed origin in legality is in fact one of force, the enforcement of law, epitomized in this context by the commodification of the person as forced labor that is slavery. This self-authorizing of authority required a supplement to make it seem self-evident, which is what I am calling visuality.

The ancient Greek historian Herodotus tells us that the Scythians of antiquity blinded their slaves. As the Scythians were horse-riding nomads, modern historians have concluded that this practice was designed to prevent the slaves from escaping.²⁷ It cannot but also suggest that slavery is the removal of the right to look. The blinding makes a person a slave and removes the possibility of regaining the status of a free person. While chat-

tel slavery did not physically blind the enslaved, its legal authority now policed even their imagination, knowing that their labor required looking. For example, in the British colony of Jamaica the enslaved were forbidden even to “imagine the death of any white Person.”²⁸ By contrast, in the metropole it became a capital offence for subjects to imagine the death of a king only during the revolutionary crisis of the 1790s.²⁹ The difference in these laws suggest that any white person in the plantation colony was the equivalent of the sovereign in the “home” nation. Such laws became necessary when authority feared that the enslaved or feudal subject might act on such imaginings, the always possible revolutionizing of the plantation complex. This anxiety moved from plantation to metropole. In the North American context, “reckless eyeballing,” a simple looking at a white person, especially a white woman or person in authority, was forbidden those classified as “colored” under Jim Crow. Such looking was held to be both violent and sexualized in and of itself, a further intensification of the policing of visibility. As late as 1951, a farmer named Matt Ingram was convicted of the assault of a white woman in North Carolina because she had not liked the way he looked at her from a distance of sixty-five feet.³⁰ This monitoring of the look has been retained in the U.S. prison system so that, for example, detainees in the Abu Ghraib phase of the war in Iraq (2003–4) were forcefully told, “Don’t eyeball me!”³¹

In short, complexes are complex. They are divided against themselves first as configurations of visibility against countervisibility and then as material systems of administering authority interfaced with mental means of authorizing. In tracing a decolonial genealogy of visibility, I have identified three primary complexes of visibility and countervisibility in this book, from the “plantation complex” that sustained Atlantic slavery, via what was known to certain apologists for the British empire as the “imperialist complex,” to President Dwight Eisenhower’s “military-industrial complex,” which is still very much with us. Each responded to and generated forms of countervisibility. The clash of visibility and countervisibility produced not just imagined relations but materialized visualizations as images of all kinds, as natural history, law, politics, and so on. The extended encounter between the right to look and visibility created a “world-generating optic” on modernity, such that “modernity is produced as the West.”³² What was at stake was the form of the real, the realistic, and realism in all senses. From the decolonial perspective used here, it is the way that modernity looks when seen from the places of visibility’s application—the plantation, the

colony, the counterinsurgency—back toward the metropole. That look is not a copy, or even a reverse shot, but is equally constitutive by means of its own reality effect of the classified, spatialized, aestheticized, and militarized transnational culture that in its present-day form has come to be called “globalization.” Indeed, the contradiction that has generated change within the complexes of visibility has been that while authority claims to remain unchanged in the face of modernity, eternally deriving authority from its ability to interpret messages, it has been driven to radical transformation by the resistance it has itself produced. This force has applied to visibility and countervisibility alike as what Michel Foucault called “intensity,” rendering them “more economic and more effective.”³³ Under the pressure of intensification, each form of visibility becomes more specific and technical, so that within each complex there is, as it were, both a standard and an intensified form. That is the paradox glimpsed by Carlyle, in which history and visualization have become mutually constitutive as the reality of modernity, while failing to account entirely for each other.³⁴ It is that space between intention and accomplishment that allows for the possibility of a counter-visibility that is more than simply the opposition predicated by visibility as its necessary price of becoming.

In significant part, therefore, these modes of visibility are psychic events that nonetheless have material effects. In this sense, the visualized complex produced a set of psychic relations described by Sigmund Freud as “a group of interdependent ideational elements cathected with affect.”³⁵ For Freud, the complex, above all the famous Oedipus complex, was at first the name of the process by which the internal “pleasure principle” became reconciled with the “reality principle” of the exterior world. Following the experience of shell shock in the First World War, Freud revised his opinion to see the psychic economy as a conflict between the pleasure drive and the death drive, leading to a doubled set of disruptions. For Jacques Lacan, as Slavoj Žižek has described, the subject was constituted by the inevitable failure to overcome this lack: “The place of ‘reality’ within the psychic economy is that of an ‘excess,’ of a surplus which disturbs and blocks from within the autarky of the self-contained balance of the psychic apparatus—‘reality’ as the external necessity which forces the psychic apparatus to renounce the exclusive rule of the ‘pleasure principle’ is correlative to this inner stumbling block.”³⁶ The diagram that visualizes this process is an arrow that travels around a circle until it is blocked at the last minute. The pleasure principle cannot quite fulfill its wish because something from outside its

domain intrudes and prevents it from doing so. For Lacan that “thing” was epitomized by the Oedipus complex in which the law of the father prevented the infant from achieving its desire to possess the mother. Authority thus counters desire and produces a self-conscious subject who experiences both internal desire and external constraint as “reality.” In this book, I take the existence of this doubled complex to be the product of history, as opposed to a transhistorical human condition, specifically that of the violence with which colonial authority enforced its claims. From the dream-world of the Haitian and French Revolutions and their imaginaries to the imperial investigation of the “primitive” mind and Fanon’s deconstruction of colonial psychology, producing and exploring psychic complexes and complexity was central to the labor of visualization. Needless to say, visualization has in turn now become part of the labor of being analyzed.

THE PLANTATION COMPLEX: AUTHORITY, SLAVERY, MODERNITY

Visualized techniques were central to the operations of the Atlantic world formed by plantation slavery and its ordering of reality. The plantation complex as a material system lasted from the seventeenth century until the late nineteenth, and affected primarily those parts of the globe known as the Atlantic triangle: the European slave-owning nations, Central and West Africa, the Caribbean and the plantation colonies of the Americas. The plantation complex designates the system of forced labor on cash-crop plantations, in which the role of authority was described by historian Phillip Curtin: “The [slave] owner not only controlled his work force during working hours, he also had, at least de facto, some form of legal jurisdiction. His agents acted informally as policemen. They punished most minor criminals and settled most disputes without reference to higher authority.”³⁷ Sovereign authority was thus delegated to the plantation, where it was managed in a system of visualized surveillance. While the overseer was always confronted with revolt large and small, his authority was visualized as the surrogate of the monarch’s and hence Absolute. The overseer, who ran the colonial slave plantation, embodied the visualized techniques of its authority, and so I call them collectively “oversight.” Oversight combined the classifications of natural history, which defined the “slave” as a species, with the spatializing of mapping that separated and defined slave space and “free” space. These separations and distinctions were enabled by the force of law that allowed the overseer to enforce the slave codes. This

regime can be said to have been established between the passing of the Barbados Slave Code, in 1661, and the promulgation of Louis XIV's *Code Noir*, in 1685. This ordering of slavery was interactive with the "order of things" famously discerned as coming into being at the same period in Europe by Foucault. A certain set of people were classified as commodifiable and a resource for forced labor. By means of new legal and social codes, those so enslaved were of course separated from the free not just in physical space, but in law and natural history. Once assembled, the plantation complex came to be seen to be right. In his justifications for slavery, the nineteenth-century Southern planter John Hammond turned such stratagems into axioms of human existence: "You will say that man cannot hold property in man. The answer is that he can and actually does all the world over, in a variety of forms, and has always done so."³⁸

Under the plantation complex and in the long shadow of its memory, a moment that has yet to pass, slavery is both literal and metaphorical: it is the very real trauma of chattel slavery and an expression of a technically "free" social relation that is felt to be metaphorically equivalent to slavery. So, too, is abolition literal and metaphorical. It expresses a moment of emancipation, but also a condition in which slavery of all kinds would be impossible. As early as the mid-eighteenth century, the enslaved had devised counters to the key components of oversight. Maroons, or runaway slaves, had established settlements in many plantation colonies, sometimes signing formal treaties with colonial powers and thereby remapping the colony. The enslaved had a superior understanding of tropical botany and were able to put this knowledge to good effect in poisoning their masters, or so it was widely believed. Finally, the syncretic religions of the plantation complex had produced a new embodied aesthetic represented in the votive figures known as *garde-corps*, literally "body guard." The revolt led, in 1757, by François Makandal in Saint-Domingue, now Haiti, united these different techniques into an effective countervisuality that came close to overthrowing slavery. The plantocracy, as the ruling planter class was known, responded by intensifying slavery. By the time of the revolution, in 1791, Saint-Domingue was the single greatest producer of (colonial) wealth in the Western world. Huge numbers of people were imported as forced labor as the planters sought both to achieve autonomy for the island from the metropole and to automate the production process of the cash crops, especially sugar. This intensification in turn produced the world-historical event of the Haitian Revolution (1791–1804), the first successful act of de-

colonial liberation and the key transformation in producing modern visibility. This intensification in the countervisuality of antislavery produced the revolutionary hero as the embodied counter to the sovereign authority represented by the overseer. The popular hero, such as Toussaint L'Ouverture, incarnated democracy as the representative of the people, embodying a willed emancipation that was at once education and, in his or her symbolic form, an aesthetic of transformation. Almost immediately, the hero was subject to its own intensification within the new imaginary of the "people." This pressure produced a cleft within the revolution: was the priority now to be the imagined community of the nation-state or the sustainable community at local level? In the events covered by this book, this question has been persistently resolved by force in favor of the nation-state from Toussaint's 1801 Constitution for Haiti, to the ending of Reconstruction in the United States, in 1877, and the reconfiguration of the Algerian revolution, in 1965. The shared subsistence economy claimed by subaltern actors in each case, most familiar now in the Reconstruction slogan "forty acres and a mule," was presented as naïve, even reactionary, as it still is today in the face of the disaster of climate change. The perceived necessity to restate national authority opened the way for the imperial appropriation of the revolutionary hero in the figure of Napoleon Bonaparte, the archetype of the modern Hero for Carlyle.

The specter of Haiti haunted the long nineteenth century that ended with decolonization. The images of Dessalines cutting the white section out of Haiti's flag, in 1804, even as he declared it illegal for "whites" to own property on the island were, to use Michel-Rolph Trouillot's trenchant term, "unthinkable." The permanent alienation of "property" by the formerly enslaved in Haiti claiming their own right to autonomy forced the remaking of visibility as a permanent war, visualized as a battlefield map. These two-dimensional representations of the array of forces as they confront each other became the visualization of history in Carlyle's imagination. Given this separation, I will describe the forms of visibility and countervisuality separately from this point forward. Visualizing was the hallmark of the modern general from the late eighteenth century onward, as the battlefield became too extensive and complex for any one person to physically see. The general in modern warfare as practiced and theorized by Karl von Clausewitz was responsible for visualizing the battlefield. He worked on information supplied by subalterns — the new lowest-ranked officer class created for this purpose — and by his own ideas, intuitions, and images. Carlyle

and other defenders of authority appropriated the hero from the Atlantic revolutions and merged it with military visualization to create a new figure for modern autocracy. Although Carlyle liked to assert that visibility was an attribute of the hero from time immemorial, he was above all haunted by the abolition of slavery. In his monumental history of *The French Revolution* (1837), all revolution from below is “black,” a blackness that pertained to the popular forces in France, described as “black sans-culottes,” from the storming of the Bastille, in 1789, but especially to Saint-Domingue, “shaking, writhing, in long horrid death throes, it is Black without remedy; and remains, as African Haiti, a monition to the world.”³⁹ This “blackness” was the very antithesis of heroism that Napoleon finally negated. For Carlyle, to be Black was always to be on the side of Anarchy and disorder, beyond the possibility of Reality and impossibly remote from heroism. It is precisely, then, with “blackness” and slavery that a counterhistory of visibility must be concerned. The function of the Hero for Carlyle and other devotees, appropriated from those revolutions, was to lead and be worshipped and thereby to shut down such uncertainties. His visibility was the intensification of the plantation complex that culminated in the production of imperial visibility.

IMPERIAL COMPLEX: MISSIONARIES, CULTURE, AND THE RULING CLASS

Carlyle’s attempt to embody visualized authority in the Hero might have appeared somewhat marginal in the immediate aftermath of the emancipation of the enslaved and the envisaged self-determination of many British colonies, to which India, as a dependency, was understood as an exception. However, the multiple shocks generated by the Crimean War of 1856, and the return to a centralized model of empire following the Indian “mutiny” in 1857, and other acts of anticolonial resistance from Aotearoa New Zealand to Jamaica, reversed the position. Direct rule became the favored model of British imperial administration, emancipation and self-rule were out of favor, and Carlyle’s views became mainstream. The crisis of imperial rule caused the opening of what became known as the “ruling class” in Britain to certain sectors of the educated middle-classes, who would be central to the governance of the immense empire. The “eminent Victorians” debunked by Lytton Strachey were emblematic of that class, as was Strachey himself, as part of the Bloomsbury group. As Edward Said famously pointed out, by 1914 some 85 percent of the world’s surface was under the control of one

empire or another.⁴⁰ Nonetheless, the imperial complex was presented as if it were a form of mental disorder. In 1883, the historian J. R. Seeley described the British empire as having been acquired in a “fit of absence of mind.”⁴¹ The term “fit” is striking, as if the mental condition of “absence of mind” was closer to epilepsy than to forgetfulness. The phrase soon entered political language. For example, the Labour newspaper the *Daily Herald* argued, in 1923, having cited Seeley: “It was only when we found ourselves in occupation of vast expanses of territory in all parts of the world that we developed what psychoanalysts would call the ‘Imperialist complex.’”⁴² This modality of denial produced its counterpart in the colonized, as Fanon argued in a well-known passage of *Black Skin, White Masks*: “By calling on humanity, on the belief in dignity, on love, on charity, it would be easy to prove, or to win the admission, that the black is the equal of the white. But my purpose is quite different: What I want to do is help the black man to free himself of the arsenal of complexes that has been developed by the colonial environment.”⁴³ The contest of visibility and countervisibility is not, then, a simple battle for the same field. One sought to maintain the “colonial environment” as it was, the other to visualize a different reality, modern but decolonized.

In this second alignment of visibility, an imperial complex had emerged, linking centralized authority to a hierarchy of civilization in which the “cultured” were necessarily to dominate the “primitive.” This overarching classification was a hierarchy of mind as well as a means of production. Following Charles Darwin’s proposal of the theory of evolution, in 1859, it was now “culture” that became the key to imagining the relations of colonial centers and peripheries, as visualized by the colonizers. In 1869, Matthew Arnold famously divided British modernity into tendencies toward desired culture and feared anarchy, while giving unquestioned support to the forces of law: “While they administer, we steadily and with undivided heart support them in repressing anarchy and disorder; because without order there can be no society, and without society there can be no perfection.”⁴⁴ With an eye to the political violence in London in 1866, Arnold claimed “hereditary” authority from his father for his remedy, namely “flog the rank and file,” even if the cause were a good one, such as the “abolition of the slave-trade.” Ending slavery itself would not by 1869 take priority over maintaining authority. The classification of “culture” and “anarchy” had become a principle of separation whose authority was such that it had become right in and of itself.

Political divides at home between the forces of culture and those of anarchy were subsequently mapped onto the distinctions between different layers of civilization defined by ethnographers. So when Edward Tylor defined culture as the “condition of knowledge, religion, art, custom and the like” in primitive societies, he was clear that European civilization (as he saw it) stood above all such cultures.⁴⁵ This dramatic transformation in conceptualizing nations as a spatialized hierarchy of cultures took place almost overnight: Arnold’s *Culture and Anarchy* (1869) was followed by Darwin’s *Descent of Man* and Tylor’s *Primitive Culture*, in 1871. Tylor presented Darwin’s description of the evolution of humanity as existing in real time, with the “primitive” being separated only by space from the “civilized.” Whereas Carlyle’s hero was a literally mystical figure, it was now “civilization” that could visualize, whereas the “primitive” was ensconced in the “heart of darkness” produced by the willed forgetting of centuries of encounter. In this way, visibility became both three-dimensional and complexly separated in space. As Western civilization tended, in this view, toward “perfection,” it was felt to be aesthetic and the separations it engendered were simply right, albeit visible only to what Tylor called “a small critical minority of mankind.”⁴⁶ That minority was nonetheless in a position to administer a centralized empire as a practical matter in a way that Carlyle’s mystical heroes could not have done. The “white man’s burden” that Rudyard Kipling enshrined in verse was a felt, lived, and imagined relationship to the imperial network, now visualized in three dimensions. Its success was manifested in the visualization of the “primitive” as the hallmark of the modern, from Picasso’s *Desmoiselles d’Avignon* (1903) to the recent monument to the French president François Mitterand’s imperial ambition that is the Musée du quai Branly, a museum of the primitive in all but name.

The foot soldiers of this labor of imperial visibility were Christian missionaries, who directly represented themselves to themselves as Heroes in the style of Carlyle, bringing Light into Darkness by means of the Word. One of the distinguishing features of imperial visibility was its emphasis on culture as language, or more precisely on the interpretation of the “signs” produced by both the “primitive” and the “modern.” As W. J. T. Mitchell among others has long stressed, word and image are closely imbricated, and this relation forms a field in itself, central to the understanding of modernism.⁴⁷ Rancière understands this as the “sentence-image . . . in which a certain ‘sight’ has vanished, where *saying* and *seeing* have entered into a communal space without distance and without connection. As a result, one

sees nothing: one does not see what is said by what one sees, or what is offered up to be seen by what one says.”⁴⁸ This chaos of the “civilized” was articulated in relation to the excavation of the “primitive” as a resource for the understanding of modernity and its civilization. Just as the plantation was the foundation of discipline, so can we see the missionaries as the agents of what Foucault called the “pastorate,” the model for governmentality. The Christian pastorate moved beyond territory, operating “a form of power that, taking the problem of salvation in its general set of themes, inserts into this global, general relationship an entire economy and technique of the circulation, transfer and reversal of merits.”⁴⁹ The global pastorate proceeded by specific techniques for the care and production of souls. Whereas in the West, the priority was from the first the conduct of souls, imperial visibility sought first to create them from the raw materials of the “heathen.” There is an entanglement that could be developed here with the genealogy of imperial visibility in the Americas, with the difference that the Carlyle-inspired missionaries never imagined the conversion of entire peoples so much as the delegated control of populations by means of targeted Christianizing. In this process, the colonized had to be made to feel and visualize his or her deficiency or sinfulness. This awareness would both lead them to Christianity and generate desires for the consumer goods of civilization, such as Western-style clothing. Only then could the newly minted “soul” be subjected to discipline, and these subjects, the mimics of the colonizers, were always a minority within the colony. The emblematic new souls were the indigenous baptized and especially the priesthood. Within the former plantation complex, the “souls of black folk” were, to borrow W. E. B. Du Bois’s famous phrase, subject to a “double consciousness” across the primary mode of division and separation in the twentieth century, the color line.

In this book, I explore these entanglements via the concept of *mana*, so central to modern theories of the “primitive” from Durkheim to Lévi-Strauss, which was reported to Britain’s Royal Anthropological Society, in 1881, by the missionary R. H. Codrington. Relying on two indigenous priests as “native informants,” Codrington had elaborated a theory of *mana* as that which works by the medium of spiritual power. This majesty and force then attached itself to specific individuals, the precursors of the modern hero. In short, the primitive mind was used as a source of, and justification for, the imperial theory of domination. Almost at once, by virtue

of the prevalent uniformitarianism, *mana* became central to the modern theory of the global primitive. However, *mana* has since been shown to be a verb, not a noun, expressing an abstract state rather than a spiritual medium. Imperial visuality was based on a set of misrecognitions that nonetheless sustained and enabled domination. In an often-overlooked moment in 1968, under pressure from radical students, Jacques Lacan admitted that the Oedipus complex was a colonial imposition. The Oedipus complex, complex of all complexes, instigator of the unconscious being structured as a language, stood refashioned as a tool of colonial domination, just as Fanon and others had insisted, marking a certain “end” to the imperial complex.

The viewpoint from which imperial visuality contemplated its domains was first epitomized in the shipboard view of a colonial coastline, generating the cliché of gunboat diplomacy—to resolve a problem in the empire, send a gunboat. This view was represented in the form of the panorama and told in the form of multi-destination travel narratives. Just as the theorist of the “primitive” relied on information supplied by missionaries that was actually obtained from a handful of local informants, imperial visuality displaced itself from the “battlefield” of history itself, where Carlyle had romantically placed his heroes. The place of visualization has literally and metaphorically continued to distance itself from the subject being viewed, intensifying first to that of aerial photography and more recently to that of satellites, a practical means of domination and surveillance.⁵⁰ The calm serenity of the high imperial worldview collapsed in the First World War. Far from being abandoned, it was intensified by bringing colonial techniques to bear on the metropole and the aestheticization of war, a merger of formerly distinct operations of visuality under the pressure of intensification. In this vein, the formerly discarded concept of the mystical hero-leader was revived as a key component of fascist politics, but, as Antonio Gramsci properly saw, this leader was the product of the centralized police state, not the other way around. In this context, fascism is understood as a politics of the police that renders the nation, the party, and the state as one, subject to the leadership of the heroic individual, defined and separated by the logics of racialization. The combination of aestheticized leadership and segregation came to constitute a form of reality, one which people came to feel was “right.” Fascist visuality imagined the terrain of history, held to be legible only to the fascist leader, as if seen by the aerial photography used to prepare and record the signature bombing campaigns of blitzkrieg. Fascists

from Manchester to Milan acclaimed Carlyle as a prophet and a predecessor, just as decolonial critics from Frantz Fanon on have seen fascism as the application of colonial techniques of domination to the metropole.

THE MILITARY-INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX: GLOBAL COUNTERINSURGENCY AND POST-PANOPTIC VISUALITY

While in Western Europe the end of the Second World War marked a break in this domination, these conditions were not changed in the colonies. This continuity was exemplified by the violent French repression of a nationalist demonstration, in 1945, in the town of Sétif, Algeria, on V-E Day itself (8 May 1945), with estimated casualties ranging from the French government figure of 1,500 to Fanon's claim of 45,000, following Arab media reports of the time. However, the war of independence that followed (1954–62) was not simply a continuance of imperialism. For the French, Algeria was not a colony, but simply part of France. For the resistance movement, led by the Front de Libération Nationale (FLN), much energy was expended in trying to gain the sympathies of the United Nations, including the legendary general strike known as the “battle of Algiers.” Algeria marked the failure of the imperial aesthetic to convince its subject populations that their domination was right. As part of the wave of decolonization, it was a central moment in the failure of the classification of “civilized” and “primitive” that was asserted as clinical fact by colonial psychology of the period. Despite their best efforts, the French were unable to sustain the physical and mental separation between the colonizer and the colonized. Counterinsurgency in Algeria began the practice of “disappearing” those suspected of aiding the insurgency in material or immaterial fashion, beginning the sorry genealogy that reaches from Argentina and Chile to today's “renditions” of suspected terrorists to so-called black sites by the CIA and other U.S. government agencies. Yet today French cities and villages are increasingly decorated with monuments and inscriptions to what are now called the wars in North Africa, marking the consolidation of global counterinsurgency as the hegemonic complex of Western visibility.

The emergence of the Cold War division between the United States and the Soviet Union almost immediately forced metropolitan and decolonial politics into a pattern whereby being anticolonial implied communist sympathies and supporting colonial domination was part of being pro-Western.⁵¹ This classification became separation in almost the same

moment, at once aestheticized as “freedom.” The Cold War quickly became a conflict so all-enveloping by 1961 that even President Dwight Eisenhower famously warned of the “total influence—economic, political, even spiritual” of what he called “the military-industrial complex.”⁵² In 1969, the novelist and former president of the Dominican Republic Juan Bosch, who had been deposed in a coup seven months after his election, in 1963, warned that “imperialism has been replaced by a superior force. Imperialism has been replaced by pentagonism.”⁵³ Bosch saw this “pentagonism” as being separate from capitalism, a development beyond Lenin’s thesis that imperialism was the last stage of capital. In common with the Situationists, Bosch envisaged a militarization and colonization of everyday life within the metropole. While his analysis is rarely remembered today, the global reach of counterinsurgency since 2001 and its ability to expand even as capital is in crisis has borne him out. The tactics of the now notorious COINTELPRO, or Counter-Intelligence Program (1956–71), of the FBI have now been globalized as the operating system of the Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA). Launched at the end of the Cold War, the RMA was at first conceived as high-technology information war, but has intensified into a counterinsurgency whose goal is nothing less than the active consent of the “host” culture to neoliberal globalization.

The entanglements and violence of counterinsurgency that began in Algeria and continued in Vietnam and Latin America have intensified into today’s global counterinsurgency strategy, known to the U.S. military as GCOIN, which combines the cultural goals of imperial strategy with electronic and digital technologies of what I call post-panoptic visuality. Under this rubric, anywhere may be the site for an insurgency, so everywhere needs to be watched from multiple locations. Whereas during the Cold War, there were distinct “battle lines” producing “hot spots” of contestation, the entire planet is now taken to be the potential site for insurgency and must be visualized as such. Thus Britain, the closest ally of the United States, has also produced a steady stream of violent insurgents. Despite this literal globalization, visualizing remains a central to counterinsurgency. The Field Manual *FM 3-24 Counterinsurgency*, written at the behest of General David Petraeus, in 2006, tells its officers in the field that success depends on the efficacy of the “commander’s visualization” of the Area of Operations, incorporating history, culture, and other sets of “invisible” information into the topography. This visualization required of the commander in Iraq or Afghanistan—of the flow of history as it is happening, formed by

past events with an awareness of future possibilities—would have been entirely familiar to Carlyle, even if the digital metaphors and technologies would have eluded him. GCOIN is an entanglement of nineteenth-century strategy with twenty-first century technology. The counterinsurgency commander is further recommended to read T. E. Lawrence (of “Arabia”), whose First World War heroics were the apogee of imperial visuality, and such works as *Small Wars*, by a nineteenth-century British general. Today’s counterinsurgent is encouraged to see him or herself in a continuum with wars ranging from Algeria to Malaya (as was) and Latin America, and cognitively part of a history that is held to begin with the French Revolution, in 1789. In a further amalgam of past strategies of visuality, the distinction of “culture” that spatialized the imperial complex has now become the very terrain of conflict. Anthropologists are attached to combat brigades under the rubric of Human Terrain Systems so as to better interpret and understand local cultures. It has been with the counterinsurgency phase of the military-industrial complex that the “soul” of the (neo)colonized has most fully entered the frame. In this form of conflict, the counterinsurgent seeks not simply military domination, but an active and passive consent to the legitimacy of the supported regimes, meaning that regime change is only the precursor to cultural change. This desire for consent reaches across the entire population. As Carlyle would have wanted, today’s global hero wants both to win and to be worshipped.

The post-panoptic visuality of global counterinsurgency produces a visualized authority whose location not only cannot be determined from the visual technologies being used but may itself be invisible. This viewpoint can toggle between image sets, zoom in and out of an image whether by digital or optical means, and compare them to databases of previous imagery.⁵⁴ It is able to use satellite imagery, infrared, and other technologies to create previously unimaginable visualizations. In everyday life, the prevalence of closed-circuit television (CCTV) surveillance marks this switch to post-panoptic visualization, with its plethora of fragmented, time-delayed, low-resolution images monitored mostly by computer, to no other effect than to make the watching visible. For while CCTV has been able to track the path of the 9/11 or 7/7 terrorists after the fact, it did nothing to prevent those attacks, let alone reform those observed, as the panopticon was intended to do. The signature military technology of GCOIN is the Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV), a computer-controlled drone armed with missiles that is manipulated by operators at any location, usually in safe spaces within the

United States, rather than in proximity to the battlefield itself. The rise of the UAV has caused controversy among the theorists of GCOIN, such as David Kilcullen, who feel that the tactic undermines the strategic goals of winning the consent of the population. As James der Derian has eloquently argued: “The rise of a military-industrial-media-entertainment network (MIME-NET) has increasingly virtualized international relations, setting the stage for virtuous wars in which history, experience, intuition and other human traits are subordinated to scripted strategies and technological artifice, in which worst-case scenarios produce the future they claim only to anticipate.”⁵⁵ Ironically, the script of using cultural understanding from history and experience to win consent has now simply been declared to have been enacted. The 2010 campaign in Afghanistan was marked by extraordinary theater in which General McChrystal announced his intention to capture Marja and Kandahar in advance, hoping to minimize civilian casualties, but this tactic also reduced Taliban casualties, so that it is entirely unclear who is really in charge on the ground. This suggests GCOIN is now a kind of theater, with competing stunts being performed for those who consider themselves always entitled to see. The U.S. military are having an intense internal debate about which form of GCOIN is the future of military tactics. It is clear that UAV missile attacks in Pakistan and Afghanistan have been notably accelerated. These tactics increasingly resemble those of the Israeli Defense Force, in which the real goal is maintaining a permanent state of crisis, rather than achieving a phantasmatic victory. In the game context in which war is now visualized, the point is less to win than to keep playing, permanently moving to the next level in the ultimate massively multiplayer environment.

In sum, the revolution in military affairs has designated the classification between insurgent and counterinsurgent as the key to the intensified phase of the military-industrial visuality. The separation to be enacted is that of insurgent from the “host” population by physical means, from the barriers separating the newly designated “Shia” and “Sunni” districts of Baghdad to the Israeli defense barrier in the Occupied Territories and the wall between Mexico and the United States, where border agents now use the rubrics of counterinsurgency. With the triumph of *The Hurt Locker* (dir. Kathryn Bigelow, 2008) in the movie awards ceremonies in 2009, counterinsurgency has achieved an “aesthetic” form. In this view, duty is its own narrative, giving pleasure in its fulfillment, as one bomb after another must be defused. The “enemy” are largely invisible, motiveless, and entirely evil. The

film's closing scene depicts Staff Sergeant James (Jeremy Renner) striding off, not into the sunset, but to defuse yet another bomb, opening an imagined unending future of counterinsurgency. In its aestheticization of sacrifice and duty, *The Hurt Locker* gained the recognition that had eluded the many films that attempted to critique the war, even though it failed to achieve much success at the box office. Whether this alignment of counterinsurgency is any more stable than its predecessors remains to be seen. What seems likely is that the overarching project of designating a global will to power as counterinsurgency will remain active for some considerable time to come, even though, as I complete this book, it is being challenged by a new form of revolutionary politics across North Africa and the Middle East in early 2011.⁵⁶

CONCEPTUALIZING COUNTERVISUALITY

Carlyle presented visibility as naturally authoritative while being aware not only of opposition, but of foundational defeat during the Atlantic revolutions. However, not all opposition to visibility can be considered counter-visibility, a point which will help us to understand the difficulties involved. Considering the development of globalization around the end of the twentieth century, Arjun Appadurai noted the “split character” of the globalized work of imagination: “On the one hand it is in and through the imagination that modern citizens are disciplined and controlled—by states, markets, and other powerful interests. But it is also the faculty through which collective patterns of dissent and new designs for collective life emerge.”⁵⁷ In the case of visibility, we need to introduce a similar distinction. As a discursive organization of history, visibility was never able to achieve its goal of representing totality, because “history” itself as a form of the historicopolitical was not monolithic, but structured as conflict. In his study of Marx's theory of capital, Dipesh Chakrabarty has described two modes of history as it was formed under capitalism. History 1 is that history predicated by capital for itself “as a precondition” to its own existence, whereas History 2 is that which cannot be written into the history of capital even as prefiguration and so has to be excluded.⁵⁸ Chakrabarty has sought to recover that History 2 without privileging it either as the new dominant mode of History, or as the dialectical other to History 1. Rather, he suggests, “History 2 is better thought of as a category charged with the function of constantly interrupting the totalizing thrusts of History 1.” This doubled interaction

offers a model for thinking about visibility that incorporates its embodied dimension at an individual and collective level, together with visibility as cultural and political representation.

In these terms, Visibility 1 would be that narrative that concentrates on the formation of a coherent and intelligible picture of modernity that allowed for centralized and/or autocratic leadership. It creates a picture of order that sustained the industrial division of labor as its enactment of the “division of the sensible.” In this sense, photography, for example, contributed to Visibility 1 in the manner famously critiqued by Baudelaire as the tool of commerce, science, and industry.⁵⁹ This form of visibility, one proper to the docile bodies demanded by capital, developed new means of disciplining, normalizing, and ordering vision, ranging from the color-blindness tests that were introduced for industrial workers in the 1840s, to state-funded compulsory literacy and the public museum. Consequently, the modern production process that culminated in Taylor’s and Ford’s systems came to rely on a normative hand-eye coordination, trained in sport, managed by the distribution of corrective lenses, and controlled with sight tests.⁶⁰ In visual representation, its dominant apparatus would become the cinema, understood in the sense of Jonathan L. Beller’s “cinematic mode of production,” which creates value by attracting attention.⁶¹ Its logical endpoint was what Guy Debord famously called the “spectacle,” that is to say, “capital accumulated to the point where it becomes an image.”⁶² In this sense, then, a certain history of visibility—or at least Visibility 1—has already been written and is not unfamiliar. This book does not revisit that story for several reasons. The History that Chakrabarty describes as being the precondition for capital is not exactly the same as the History visualized by visibility (and this is, of course, no criticism of Chakrabarty—quite the contrary). Whereas it may be said that capital will do anything to preserve and extend its circulation, so that even carbon emissions are now being formulated into a market, visibility was concerned above all to safeguard the authority of leadership. So whereas Chakrabarty established a diachronic binary distinction between the two modes of History under capitalism, I have tried to define a successive set of synchronic complexes for visibility and countervisibility from slavery to imperialism and global counterinsurgency.

How should we conceptualize, theorize, and understand countervisibility in relation to this divided visibility? It is not simply Visibility 2. If Visibility 1 is the domain of authority, Visibility 2 would be that picturing of the self or collective that exceeds or precedes that subjugation to centralized

authority. Visuality 2 was not invisible to authority and has been figured as the barbaric, the uncivilized, or, in the modern period, the “primitive.” In the imperial complex, an army of self-styled “hero” missionaries generated an epistemic apparatus to discipline and order it, whereas the “primitives” in the metropole were to be controlled by the new imperial Caesar and his command of imagery. The leading taxonomies of such “primitive” visuality were idolatry, fetishism, and totemism, in order of seniority.⁶³ This definition of Visuality 2 was enacted in the colonial and imperial domains that Conrad called the “blank spaces of the map,” the blind spots of visuality. Within the metropole, an artistic version of Visuality 2 was that “irrational modernism. . . that escapes . . . appropriative logic,” such as Dada and Surrealism, often of course using the forms and ideas of indigenous art and culture from colonized domains.⁶⁴ By now, surrealism in particular has nonetheless been thoroughly appropriated, especially by advertising and music videos. For Visuality 2 is not necessarily politically radical or progressive; it is only not part of authority’s “life process.” There are multiple forms of Visuality 2, because that difference “lives in intimate and plural relationships to [authority], ranging from opposition to neutrality.”⁶⁵ The two modes of visuality are not opposed in a binary system, but operate as a relation of difference that is always deferred. So not all forms of Visuality 2 are what I am calling countervisuality, the attempt to reconfigure visuality as a whole. For example, many forms of religion might deploy some mode of Visuality 2 without seeking to change the perceived real in which that religion is practiced.

Countervisuality proper is the claim for the right to look. It is the dissensus with visuality, meaning “a dispute over what is visible as an element of a situation, over which visible elements belong to what is common, over the capacity of subjects to designate this common and argue for it.”⁶⁶ The performative claim of a right to look where none exists puts a countervisuality into play. Like visuality, it interfaces “formal” and “historical” aspects. The “right” in the right to look contests first the “right” to property in another person by insisting on the irreducible autonomy of all citizens. Autonomy implies a working through of Enlightenment claims to rights in the context of coloniality, with an emphasis on the right to subjectivity and the contestation of poverty.⁶⁷ By engaging in such a discussion, I am implicitly rejecting the dismissal of rights as a biopolitical ruse presented by Agamben.⁶⁸ There is no “bare life” entirely beyond the remit of rights. Hardt and Negri powerfully cite Spinoza to this effect: “Nobody can so

completely transfer to another all his right, and consequently his power, as to cease to be a human being, nor will there ever be a sovereign power that can do all it pleases.”⁶⁹ Ariella Azoulay has expressed the legacy of revolutionary discourses of rights as precisely “struggles pos[ing] a demand that bare life be recognized as life worth living.”⁷⁰ Azoulay rightly sees these demands being enacted in feminism from Olympe de Gouges’s *Declaration of the Rights of Woman and the Citizen* (1791) on. As Rancière points out, de Gouges’s insistence that if women have the “right” to be executed, they are foundationally equal, also shows that “bare life itself is political.”⁷¹ Precisely the same argument can be made with regard to the enslaved, who were subject to legal codes specifying punishments. In following what you might call “Carlyle-ism” (a pattern of discourse concerning the visualization of imperial autocracy) to shape this book, I was at first concerned that his emphasis on heroic masculinity would engender a similarly masculinist project. However, I came to notice that all the efforts at countervisuality I describe here centered on women and children both as individual actors and as collective entities. The actions and even names of individual women and children (especially of the enslaved) have to be reclaimed from historical archives that are not designed to preserve them and have not always done so.

THE RIGHT TO THE REAL

The claim of the right to oneself as autonomy further implies a claim of the right to the real. The Italian political organization Autonomia, which was active in the 1970s, defined autonomy as “anti-hierarchic, anti-dialectic, anti-representative. It is not only a political project, it is a struggle for existence. Individuals are never autonomous: they depend on external recognition.”⁷² By the same token, the right to look is never individual: my right to look depends on your recognition of me, and vice versa.⁷³ Formally, the right to look is the attempt to shape an autonomous realism that is not only outside authority’s process but antagonistic to it. Countervisuality is the assertion of the right to look, challenging the law that sustains visibility’s authority in order to justify its own sense of “right.” The right to look refuses to allow authority to suture its interpretation of the sensible to power, first as law and then as the aesthetic. Writing of such refusals of legitimation, Negri points out: “It is once again Foucault who lays the foundation of this critical experience, better still of this unmasking of that (in our civili-

zation) ancient Platonism that ignores the right to the real, to the power of the event.”⁷⁴ The right to look is, then, the claim to a right to the real. It becomes known by genealogical investigation that is here always repurposed as decolonial critique. It is the boundary of visibility, the place where its codes of separation encounter a “grammar of nonviolence,” the refusal to segregate, as a collective form. Confronted with this double need to apprehend and counter a real that did exist but should not have, and one that should exist but was as yet becoming, countervisuality has created a variety of “realist” formats structured around such tensions. Certainly the “realism” usually considered under that name in the mid-nineteenth century is one part of it, as is the neorealism of postwar Italian visual culture, but countervisuality’s realism was not necessarily mimetic. To take a famous example, Picasso’s *Guernica* both expresses the reality of aerial bombing that was and is central to contemporary visibility, and protests against it with sufficient force that American officials asked for the replica of the painting at the United Nations to be covered when they were making their case for war against Iraq, in 2002.

The realism of the right to the real highlights the “struggle for existence,” meaning a genealogy of the claim of the right to existence, beginning with the enslaved, via the banners claiming the “right to life” in the Paris Commune of 1871 and the “new humanism” of decolonization sought by Aimé Césaire and Frantz Fanon. Throughout the struggle to abolish chattel slavery in the Atlantic world, countervisuality endeavored to construct what I call “abolition realism,” in homage to Du Bois’s concept of abolition democracy, where there would be no slavery, rendering what seemed unimaginable into “reality.” This realism represented the “enslaved” as being of equal status with the “free,” while also showing the realities of slavery for what they were, as opposed to the benign picture of paternal leadership presented by apologists like Carlyle. This picturing therefore created and worked in realist modes of representation from painting to photography and performance in an intense moment of challenge to visualized authority. The defeat of Reconstruction in the United States together with that of the Paris Commune marked the defeat of abolition in the Atlantic world as an index of reality, as indicated by the persistence of racism.

Autonomy has also expressed the indigenous desire for self-government or regulation. In this book, I take the transformation of Aotearoa into New Zealand (1820–85) as a key site of entanglement and displacement in this process because James Anthony Froude, Carlyle’s biographer and succes-

sor as the dean of British historians, saw it as the place from which a new “Oceania” could be launched, meaning a global Anglophone empire. For the Polynesian peoples living in Aotearoa, a wide-ranging series of adjustments had to be made in their imagined communities, resulting from their interpellation as “native” and “heathen” by the missionaries and settlers. Following prophets and war leaders like Papahurihia (?–1875), the Maori imagined themselves as an indigenous and ancient people, the Jews of the Bible, the ancient bearers of rights, rather than “primitive” savages. They deployed their own readings of the Scriptures to assert that the missionaries were in error, created rival flags to those of the British, and imagined themselves to be in “Canaan.” This imagined community compelled the British Crown to sign a land-sharing agreement known as the Treaty of Waitangi (1840), which, although nullified by legal fiat within two decades, has proved decisive in shaping modern Aotearoa New Zealand into a bicultural state. In both metropolitan and colonial contexts, the performative act of claiming the right to be seen used the refusal to labor as one of its key strategies, from written accounts that considered the Israelites leaving Egypt as a general strike, to the campaign for May Day holiday, and the contemporary politics of the refusal of work. Although the general strike was adopted by the Confederation Générale du Travail, the French trade union, in 1906, and was famously endorsed by Rosa Luxemburg in her pamphlet of the same year, the failure of the Second International to resist mobilization for what became the First World War ended the hope that it might in fact be the revolutionary form for the twentieth century. Emblematic of the transformation in Europe of the period was the shift of the once-anarchist Georges Sorel, whose *Reflections on Violence* (1908) had contained the most elaborated theory of the general strike as a means of creating the “general image” of social conflict, to an anti-Semitic Royalism, which Mark Antliff has called a “proto-fascism.”⁷⁵

Writing in the 1930s with a full awareness of fascism’s dominance, both W. E. B. Du Bois and Antonio Gramsci came to see the need for a new point of view that both in different ways called the “South.” For Du Bois, the South was the southern part of the United States that practiced segregation under so-called Jim Crow laws, whereas for Gramsci it was the Italian *mezzogiorno*, a mix of feudal rural areas and unregulated modern cities like Naples. The South was, of course, intensely contested, rather than some imagined point of liberation, but for both thinkers no strategy could be successful that did not imagine itself from the South. Understood in

this sense, fascism did not end in 1945, as the names Franco, Pinochet, and many others attest. Antifascism has had, therefore, to create a neorealism that could counter fascism's sense of ordering engendered by subjugation and separation. It must do so from within the "South" and as the South opposed to the North. This doubled realism can be hard to see. In *The Battle of Algiers*, the resistance leader Ben H'midi tells Ali la Pointe that if it is hard to start and sustain resistance, the hardest moment of all comes when you have won.

We might take Bertolt Brecht's caution about working with "reality" and realisms to heart here: "Reality is not only everything which is, but everything which is becoming. It's a process. It proceeds in contradictions. If it is not perceived in its contradictory nature, it is not perceived at all."⁷⁶ This creation of reality as a perceptual effect is not the same as realism as it has usually been defined in literature and the visual arts. The realist painter Gustave Courbet, for instance, is supposed to have said that he could paint only that which he could see with his eyes, making it impossible for him to render an angel. Realism has largely been understood in this sense as meaning the most sharp-edged, lens-based representation of exterior reality possible, from photography to the 35-millimeter film and most recently high-definition video. In the terms that I have sketched here, that would be a realism of Visuality 1, the sensory training and standardization required by industrial capital. Countervisuality seeks to resituate the terms on which reality is to be understood. If, as Barthes famously formulated it, all reality is an "effect," then that effect can be subject to change. For Freud, the ego engages in a persistent reality-testing which, as Avital Ronel elucidates, "should in the best of worlds, confirm and countersign the satisfaction of our wishes but in fact put the self at risk."⁷⁷ In this sense, all realisms are an attempt to come to terms with the tendency of modernity to exceed understanding in its permanent revolutionizing of conditions of existence. As the poet Pier Paolo Pasolini later mused in his consideration of Antonio Gramsci, "Perhaps we should, in all humility and with a bold neologism, simply call reality that-which-must-be-made-sense-of."⁷⁸ Countervisuality is not, as this example suggests, simply a matter of assembled visual images, but the grounds on which such assemblages can register as meaningful renditions of a given moment. Thinking the genealogy of visuality and its countervisualities produces both a sense of what is at stake in present-day visualizing and a means to avoid being drawn into a perpetual game in which authority always has the first move. This book

is a claim for a different form of visualizing by those who would oppose autocratic authority. This visualizing would take the planetary viewpoint in giving priority to the biosphere and the survival of all forms of life over the continuance of authority. The image of the biosphere is a countervisuality to the partisans of the “long war” against terror and the permanent state of emergency. The vernacular countervisuality of the “South” has centered on democracy, sustainable production, education, and collective solutions to social problems as a different mode of visualizing cultural possibilities since the Atlantic revolutions of the 1790s. While this approach has for just as long been condemned as impractical by leaders of Left and Right, it has come to seem like the last option remaining. In the aftermath of the earthquake that struck Haiti in 2010, sustainable local agriculture was finally advanced as the best solution for the country.⁷⁹ Nonetheless, the emergence of government strategies such as “climate security” shows that this position offers no guarantees of success. Here we take the measure of the long success of visibility. It seems “natural,” or at least reasonable, that visibility should visualize war and that different groups of people should be physically separated. This project hopes to call such assumptions into question and make us take a second look at some old choices.

One response to my claim for the right to look might be: so what? In other words, while these issues may be of importance, what difference does my claim make and why should you care? I take it that many of my readers will be in some way engaged with universities and academic life, so my response is shaped in that domain. In March 2003, a law professor at the University of California, Berkeley, named John Yoo, who was then working in the Justice Department as a deputy assistant attorney general, wrote a memorandum regarding the interrogation of so-called enemy combatants. Relying on his interpretation of “the President’s authority to successfully prosecute war,” Yoo notoriously concluded that there were in effect no limits on what could be done, claiming that “the Framers understood the Commander-in-Chief Clause [of the Constitution] to grant the President the fullest range of power recognized at the time of the ratification as belonging to the military commander.”⁸⁰ From this academic interpretation of authority, stemming, like visibility, from the eighteenth-century general, resulted the scandals of Guantánamo and Abu Ghraib, the renditions of suspects to places where torture is openly practiced, and, more broadly, the hubris of presidential authority. In the summer of 2009, faced with a difficult financial situation the chancellor of the University of California,

Mark Yudof, had the regents ascribe to him hitherto unknown “emergency powers,” resulting in redundancies, tuition raises, class cancellations, and “furloughs” (meaning days for which one would not be paid for work) for all staff, including, one hopes, John Yoo, who has returned to his academic job. In 1988 I happened to visit the University of California, Berkeley, and what I saw then was the inspiration that led me to an academic career in general and to one in the United States in particular. The new deployment and interpretation of authority by academics in government and in the university has changed the world we live and work in. Networks long in the making are rapidly being undone, while new ones are being made. Attention should be paid.

CHAPTER PLAN

I conclude this opening section with a brief chapter plan. The first four chapters deal with the plantation complex and its transformation into the imperial complex. In the first chapter, I describe the ordering of slavery by means of visual technologies and surveillance under the headings of mapping, natural history, and the force of law. In the British and French Caribbean, a rapid revolution created the possibility of this regime in the years either side of 1660. In the generations that followed, the enslaved learned how to counter each aspect of oversight. In the second half of chapter 1, I describe first the attempted revolution led by François Makandal on Saint-Domingue, in 1757, and then the planters’ attempt to create an independent slave-owning republic in the early years of the French Revolution. These mutually contradictory claims to autonomy opened a space for a different revolutionary imaginary, which I explore in chapter 2. Throughout I counterpoint the metaphorical slavery being challenged by revolutionaries in France with the revolution against chattel slavery in Saint-Domingue. I stage this interaction in five moments, beginning with the visualization in popular prints first of the “awakening” of the French Revolution, in 1789, and next the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen. I emphasize that the Declaration at once claimed to end “slavery” and defined racialized and gendered exclusions from the category of rights. These exclusions led to a new claim to a “right to existence” embodied in the hero as the leader of the “imagined community” of the postmonarchical nation-state. The revolt of the enslaved in Haiti successfully used the tactic of the hero to focus their resistance to the authority of oversight. Slave-owning sover-

eignty found itself confronted by a person invested with authority by those it claimed had none to give—the people, the enslaved, and women. During the revolution, a further contest emerged between the national hero as Great Man, who incarnated authority, and what I call vernacular heroism, whose primary function was to make enslavement impossible. These different claims could not and did not cohere. I end chapter 2 by looking at the violent confrontation between Toussaint L'Ouverture and the subaltern rank-and-file in Saint-Domingue over the question of land. The formerly enslaved wanted self-sufficiency, while the leadership demanded the maintenance of cash-crop agriculture to fund the emergent nation-state. At the same moment, the first person to ask for a position as an anthropologist, the Frenchman François Péron, was engaged in an encounter with the aboriginal people of Tasmania that foreshadowed the hierarchy of “culture” that was to shape imperial visibility. I counterpoint these chapters with a reading of the double vision of reality in the paintings of José Campeche, the Puerto Rican painter, perhaps the first artist to emerge from slavery that we can name.

In the early nineteenth century, radicals imagined new strategies like the Jubilee and the National Holiday to advance their claim to represent the nation. In response, visibility, named and deployed by Thomas Carlyle in 1840, appropriated the revolutionary tactic of the national hero as leader to reclaim the altered terrain of history into a renewed system of domination (chapter 3). His model was the visualization of the battlefield by the modern general, epitomized by Napoleon, in order to gain tactical advantage over a closely matched enemy. It was the visualization of a revived sovereignty that might again own slaves, as decreed by Napoleon, or, that might, as in the case of British imperialism after the so-called Indian Mutiny of 1857, reassert a centralized colonial authority. Inspired by its desire to prevent all challenges to authority, Carlyle's visibility claimed boundless dominion for its heroes and refuted all emancipations. As a result, leaders like Sojourner Truth and W. E. B. Du Bois actively contested this “heroism” with different modalities of heroism. The nineteenth century saw a protracted struggle as to whether and how a reality could be shaped that did not sustain and support slavery. In chapter 4, I look at this interpenetrated history of metropole and colony around the Atlantic world, from the abolition of Danish slavery witnessed by the future impressionist painter Camille Pissarro to the Civil War and Reconstruction in the United States and the Paris Commune of 1871. The reality and realisms of modern Paris, Benjamin's capital of the

nineteenth century, are placed in counterpoint to the reality and realisms of the abolition of slavery. I look first at the visualized policing of “emancipated” plantations, followed by the visualization of freedom during the Civil War in the United States. Then I survey the contradictions of realism and abolition in 1867 in artistic visualizations by Pissarro, Manet, and Degas. I conclude chapter 4 with the attempt to institutionalize autonomy during Reconstruction and the performance of autonomy during the Commune. The counterpoint to these chapters is a reading of Francisco Oller’s masterpiece *El Velorio* (1895), or *The Wake*, which I interpret as a mourning both for the hopes of abolition, achieved in Puerto Rico in 1873, and also for the lost opportunities of realism.

By this point the “imperial complex” had become the dominant form of visibility. In chapter 5 I examine how visibility became imperial visibility as an impersonal form of power, generalized and globalized within an Anglophone network of power sustained by naval domination. Here I take Aotearoa New Zealand as the key point of entanglement, as described above, both because Froude had seen it as the key to his Oceania, the global empire of visibility, and because Maori resistance in the form of self-identifying as “Jews” was so notable a claim to autonomy. The bishopric of New Zealand was also the site of the ethnographic “discovery” of the concept of mana, held to be what one might call the aura of authority. Introduced to European anthropology in 1880, the idea took hold at once and has continued to play a role in recent debates about the state of exception. This empire was subject to a new Caesar, more imagined than actual, but distinguished by his ability to dominate the mass population by means of the image. Within imperial nations, radical movements similarly sought to challenge the authority of imperial capital by claiming a genealogy from what they called the “ancient lowly,” meaning the workers of ancient Greece and Rome. Heroes like Spartacus were taken both as a validation for modern claims and as a means of creating a history for those without it. This countervisuality used this history to claim a “general picture” of the social by means of new institutions, such as museums of labor, and new actions, such as the general strike.

After the First World War, the collapse of high imperialism brought down the Austro-Hungarian, Ottoman, and Russian empires and transformed Caesarism from a theory of imperial leadership into a violent exaltation of the leader as Hero in fascism (chapter 6). As noted above, anti-fascism must find a means to render a neorealism capable of resisting fascist

ordering. After analyzing the turn to the “South” made by Gramsci, Du Bois, and other intellectuals, I take the fifty-year-long crisis of decolonizing Algeria (1954–) as a case study of the entanglement of the legacies of fascism, imperialism, the Cold War, and decolonization. I concentrate on the battles for Algiers in psychiatry, film, video art, and literature that have been fought almost without a break over this period. I set the legendary neorealist film *The Battle of Algiers* (dir. Gillo Pontecorvo, 1966) into the context of innovative film practice in the Algerian revolution, including a remarkable short film documentary made in 1961 and inspired by Fanon’s work with children in Algerian refugee camps in Tunisia, as well as the “ciné pops” movement of popular film and the first features created in independent Algeria. Since the invasion of Iraq, Fanon’s experience in Algeria has generated new visualized responses from the Finnish video artist Eijeli-Liese Ahtila and the African American novelist John Edgar Wideman, while the Algerian revolution haunts recent films like *Caché* (dir. Michael Haneke, 2005). This entanglement of decolonization and independence with its many displacements is counterpointed by *Pan’s Labyrinth*, a film about Spain, directed by a Mexican–American, which spoke as strongly to its own time as the fascist period under Franco it depicted.

If antifascism quickly became anticommunism in the Allied nations, especially in the United States, the resulting military–industrial complex linked the antislavery with new antiterror rhetoric to justify its formation of what Paul Edwards has called “the closed world.” In this closed world, every enterprise is linked to the central struggle to separate and defend the “free” world from the terror of the communist world to prevent it becoming enslaved. As General Douglas MacArthur declared to Congress, in 1951, this threat of slavery meant that communism had to be resisted everywhere.⁸¹ From the outset, the classification of separation was not only right, but justified any action in its name. The resulting counterinsurgency against communism spanned the globe from Algeria to Indochina and Latin America. Visualizing became a key strategy of what the U.S. military has termed the Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA) since 1989 (chapter 7). The RMA is the intensification of the Cold War. It makes information the key tool of war, visualized by the commander to gain control of the area of operations. Drawing at once on imperial era heroes like T. E. Lawrence and postmodern theorists of nomadism, the RMA found its high point of revolution in the war in Iraq. An active neovisuality has been enshrined as a key part of United States global counterinsurgency strategy, supported

by an entire discursive apparatus from the Ivy League universities, to the media, to military theorists, many of whom are connected to the Obama administration. This apparatus rejects Guantánamo Bay and other such visible means of punishment as both unnecessary and jeopardizing to the mission of winning full and permanent cooperation. Neovisuality is a doctrine for the preservation of authority by means of permanent surveillance of all realms of life, a *Gesamtkunstwerk* of necropolitics. Needless to say, it not only expects but needs resistance to its visualizing of the geopolitical as always already potential terrorism. In its current manifestation as counterinsurgency, it has developed a new radicalism, resisting challenges to its authority from within and without the military. Paradoxically, visualized information war depends increasingly on making the visible invisible, provoking a crisis of visibility itself. The simple fact that a counterhistory of visibility can be written suggests that it has lost its force as “natural” authority. A tremulous moment of opportunity awaits to set aside visibility for the right to look, to democratize democracy. Or to once again authorize authority. It’s up to us.