UC Santa Cruz

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Letter from the Editor

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Letter from the Editor

It may come as no surprise that *Refract*'s third volume emerges out of incredibly difficult circumstances in Santa Cruz, California, and beyond. As we were sending out the Call for Papers for this issue titled "Hauntings and Traces," a group of graduate students at the University of California, Santa Cruz began calling for a Cost of Living Adjustment to offset the egregiously low income we are paid as Academic Student Employees, which does not cover the minimal cost of living in an increasingly unaffordable Santa Cruz and San Francisco Bay area. The campaign was not without its problems, creating schisms within the graduate student body and even within *Refract*'s editorial board.

Much of this tension remains unresolved, and one reason is that the COVID-19 pandemic forced the UCSC campus to close for the Spring 2020 quarter. As the *Refract* team was beginning to receive submissions for volume 3, we had to move toward meeting remotely. We no longer had the luxury of checking in with each other as people tend to do when they, for instance, arrive early for a meeting, casually greeting each other and asking "how's it going?" These small, seemingly benign moments are a crucial way the *Refract* board functions. We are editors, students, and scholars, yes. But we are also people. We are stressed, we are often hungry and tired, we have fun weekends that we can't wait to tell each other about, we have pictures of our family that are worth sharing. It is these small moments of humanity, of kindness, of support in all the ways that go unnamed that are missing from *Refract*'s day-to-day operations in the time of COVID-19.

And yet, we kept pushing to continue our work, to contribute to the field of visual studies with critical, robust scholarship. The peer review process was complete and we had begun the stage of revisions and editing when George Floyd was murdered by Derek Chauvin in Minneapolis on May 25, 2020. Along with

Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, and so many others,¹ this recent murder of an innocent person of color is just one of many instances of institutionalized racism that intersects with the militarization of the police force, the failings of the justice system, and rampant white supremacy that is bolstered by the Trump administration. Like so many other organizations releasing statements of solidarity with people of color and disavowing white supremacy, the *Refract* team recognized that we needed to act. We needed to take a look at what we envision our journal to be doing, and how we can support people of color, community organizers, and power building at the grassroots level in our everyday operations.

This conversation continues as we maintain our mission to uphold scholarly and artistic inquiry that dismantles institutional barriers and prioritizes diverse voices and subject matter. We are asking ourselves some difficult questions about our own relationship to the University of California, a settler colonial institution that upholds many of the structural inequalities that depend on a militarized police force and extractive and exploitative capitalism, and acts as a gatekeeper to knowledge production and education. In our efforts to do better, we recognize this is a long-term project and cannot be easily reconciled by a simple statement on our website. Some of these conversations are reflected in the statement that opens this volume, while other efforts are less visible but no less imperative for the impact we want to have on the world of academic research, artistic production, and education.

For instance, the table of contents for the current volume was intentionally shaped to include a diverse range of voices from different career stages, who come from different backgrounds and speak different languages, and whose research engages with a multitude of subjects, time periods, and cultures. We worked closely with our contributors during the editing process to create a less hierarchical, more collaborative approach to research, writing, and publication. We are working on making our publication more accessible—not just in terms of open access publishing but also in terms of screen-reader-friendly PDFs and other initiatives to include diverse audiences and dismantle the many barriers to education and knowledge production. This is neither a comprehensive nor a static list of the efforts we are making, and as we continue to publish rigorous, original scholarship, we will continue to question our own privilege and our role in the fight for radical social change.

On behalf of the editorial board, I would like to thank the department of History of Art and Visual Culture (HAVC) and the Arts Division at the University of California, Santa Cruz for their financial support. We are particularly grateful to the former director of graduate studies of HAVC, Professor Boreth Ly, for advocating on our behalf and to the amazing staff in the HAVC department, including

Ruby Lipsenthal and Meredith Dyer. Thanks also to Professors Carolyn Dean, Derek Conrad Murray, and Kyle Parry for serving as our advisory board. Thank you to the team at eScholarship for answering our many questions and for making our open access mission a reality. We also appreciate all the peer reviewers for their time, and Paula Dragosh for copyediting. We are thrilled to include in this issue guest contributors whom we invited to participate in this volume, and we are so grateful for their participation: Christina Maranci; Boreth Ly with Catherine Ries, Michelle Yee, and Christina Ayson Plank; and Katerina Martina Teaiwa. We are also hugely grateful to Michael Conlee, our amazing intern, and to Porter College at UCSC for funding the internship. Thanks to Kate Korroch, the founding managing editor, and all past editorial board members at *Refract* for ensuring our project has lasting power. And finally, we wish to thank the numerous colleagues and mentors who engage with visual studies and have encouraged this project from the start, as well as the amazing thinkers and makers who contributed to this volume.

Finally, as managing editor, I want to acknowledge the incredible team that makes up *Refract's* editorial board. This journal is a truly collaborative effort, and it would not have been possible without the amazing energy each person brings to the project. Thank you to Leslie McShane Lodwick for always being there for me and for tirelessly stepping up to help the team whenever needed. Thanks to Maureen McGuire and Stacy Schwartz for their incredible work transitioning *Refract* to a new web platform and for making issues of accessibility more at the forefront of what we do. Thanks to Susanna Collinson, Kelsey McFaul, and Matthew Simmons for establishing our long-term vision, seeking funding, and keeping our accounts in check. Thanks to Madison Treece and Rachel Bonner for being the public face of *Refract* on social media and outreach. And thanks to the entire board for dedicating so much time and energy to the editorial process and working with our contributors at every step of the way. Thank you so much, team!

Maggie Wander

Notes

¹ <https://sayevery.name/>.