

Editorial

Pandemic Publishing: Year Two

As we move deeper into our second winter of pandemic publishing, the question of how crisis inscribes itself on our scholarship is never far from mind. Aside from the surge of publications on COVID-19, public health, and the pandemic's communicative and datafied dimensions, and aside from a heightened awareness of the disinformation that plays on our anxieties, one wonders if the quiet absences, forgotten details, and missing bodies might figure more prominently in defining our situation. If we accept this as a time of planetary entanglement, as Achille Mbembe (2019) names it, and if the question of this time is how we expose others to harm, violence, and death, then today's lockdowns and the forthcoming climate change migrations are more easily recognized as part of our commitment to historical processes that separate and divide us. Mbembe's (2019) approach, indebted to Frantz Fanon, suggests that a revaluation of vulnerability and care could engender crucial transformations in the relationality that constitutes human existence. If, that is, we recognize the white supremacist insurrections of our present less as effects of social media-inspired alt-right ideologies than an element of the history, epistemology, technology, cultures, and political organizations that inform what we think humans to be.

Surprisingly, these thoughts occurred while perusing the collection of Marshall McLuhan's books held by the Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library at the University of Toronto. In a conversation published in this issue, Armond Towns discusses the presence of Fanon's books in McLuhan's library while situating his way of bringing Black studies and media theory together around questions of the human. Interestingly, McLuhan's copy of Fanon's (1967) *A Dying Colonialism* connects this book to a forgotten report from the global environmentalist organization Worldwatch Institute (Newland, 1980). Fanon's classic work on anti-colonial revolution in Algeria requires no introduction; the brief document from the Worldwatch Institute is one of an endless string of warnings from the U.S.-based forecaster of environmental crisis (famous for its annual State of the World and Vital Signs reports). When read today, the document is surprisingly familiar, and a precursor to an Anthropocene discourse that situates societal disruption within themes of urban population growth, resource extraction, and technology. McLuhan's library, if not his own work, resituates this discourse with respect to a

key text in Black studies and anti-colonial scholarship; it is an archival nudge to embrace shifts in the orientations and priorities that structure the field of media and communication studies.

The conversation with Towns published in this issue, “Black Studies and/as Media Theory,” is the first in a series of discussions the *Canadian Journal of Communication* (*CJC*) hopes to publish with scholars working at the intersection of Black studies and media and communication studies. These conversations recognize the truth of C.L.R. James’ (1970) claim that Black studies is not a special topic, perspective, or a concession given to Black students but an essential contribution to the study of civilization; and, as Towns reminds us with reference to the lectures and reading clubs that were organized to explore James’ thought in Canada, to this country as well (see also Austin, 2009). It is encouraging to find this belief present in work recently published on the pandemic by our colleagues at *TOPIA: Canadian Journal of Cultural Studies* (Ironstone & Bird, 2020; Jiwani, 2020; Walcott, 2020).

CJC also has an open call to scholars to address alt-right movements in Canada as mediated and communicative phenomena, an initiative that is guided by an editorial collective of Natalie Coulter, Greg Elmer, Ganaele Langlois, and Fenwick McKelvey. If you are willing to contribute research or peer reviews of manuscripts, please be in touch to assist with this important project.

A special issue entitled “On the Margins of Margins: Racism and Colonialism in Canadian Communication Studies” is in development. It is being edited by the collective of Faiza Hirji, Yasmin Jiwani, and Kirsten Emiko McAllister (2020); their article “On the Margins of the Margins: #CommunicationSoWhite—Canadian Style” is a must-read. The *CJC* was fortunate to have the opportunity to sit down with them last summer, and the conversation will be published in the *Journal* later this year.

The *CJC*’s next issue addresses the media and materiality of infrastructure. The collection of articles compels us to consider our theories, objects of study, and Canada itself as an infrastructural accomplishment, often by engaging with the consequences of our colonial history. Many thanks to Aleksandra Kaminska and Rafico Ruiz for editing this upcoming issue.

As a last update, the *CJC* Playlist initiative has been launched. It is an open call to scholars to curate collections of articles from our archive around a theme, topic, or keyword that addresses the contemporary moment in some way. Guidelines and examples are available on our website under the tab “Playlists” for anyone interested in contributing. The *CJC* archive is open access and easily searchable, so please explore and be in touch if you wish to develop a playlist.

Finally, the *Journal* is pleased to present the contents of our current issue, which take up questions of Black studies and media materialism, changement cli-

matique (climate change), digital access, disability in the journalistic profession, and the promotion of cannabis in Canada.

In “Black Studies and/as Media Studies,” **Armond Towns** and **Chris Russill** discuss Towns’ approach to questions of materialism, politics, race, Black life, and humanism in the context of Sylvia Wynter, Fanon, James, and McLuhan’s work, among others. Touching on a wide range of topics, including digital activism, media materialism, and the ways we read, Towns illustrates how a historically grounded and philosophical approach to Black studies and media studies is contributing to urgent questions of the moment.

“La science du climat au prisme de la culture : une typologie symbolico-éthique de la recherche en communication” by **Oumar Kane**, **Alexia Pilon Diabaté**, **Arnaud Francioni**, **Ahmed-Al Rawi**, and **Aimé-Jules Bizimana** brings the cultural dimensions of climate change science to the forefront. While discussions of climate change often prioritize questions of economics, technology, and regulation in seeking to decarbonize energy systems, this article recognizes the importance of imaginaries in constituting climate change and its scientific discourses. Building on humanistic approaches to climate change, including the work of Mike Hulme, the work allows questions of culture, religion, and ethics to shape our considerations of science and a climate changed future.

In “A Learning Opportunity for TVO,” **Steven May** revisits the imaginary, public communication, and institutional machinations that continue to inform ideas of digital transition in the context of a proposal by the Ontario Educational Communications Authority (known as TVO) to eliminate all but one of its digital over-the-air transmitters. Utilizing an inventive methodological approach to this question, May studied citizen submissions to the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission regarding the proposal, before following up with 25 of these viewers to discuss how they understood digital access. A more complex and qualitatively rich notion of digital access resulted, one in which questions of education, government, and marginalized opinions decentred industry-dominated discourses of the digital.

Chelsea Temple Jones, **Sheyfali Saujani**, and **Anne Zbitnew** share a roundtable discussion on disability, news, and media production that is both informative and urgent. “Journalism and Disability in Canada: Blind and Visually Impaired Journalists Weigh In,” raises a series of questions about ableism that demand attention and should not be sidelined by more technologically or economically determined accounts of journalism’s decline in the face of platform monopolists. The participants demonstrate that the pragmatic experiences of disabled journalists are diverse and hold knowledge that is crucial for bringing critical disability studies and communication studies into better and more sustained forms of collaboration, among many other insights.

“Branding Cannabis in Canada: Challenges for the *Cannabis Act*’s Promotion Restrictions” by **Kyle Asquith** opens questions of advertising, branding, and promotion in the context of regulatory efforts to address the sale of cannabis in Canada. By collecting digital and social media from 20 cannabis brands, Asquith illustrates how the shifting relationship of branding and regulation within a volatile media environment has challenged the effectiveness of the strict prohibitions on promotion that were envisioned by the 2018 *Cannabis Act*.

The question of promotion brings to mind the *Journal*’s new initiative: *CJC* Playlist. In “Annals of Promotional Culture,” **Melissa Aronczyk** brings together articles from the *CJC* archive that span five decades. Pairing historical work with contemporary issues, Aronczyk makes visible the historicity of myriad aspects of promotional culture and its scholarly discontents, while charting our growing awareness of advertising as a cultural form and political force.

Yukari Seko’s “Annals of Communication and Disability” recovers the faint traces of disability in communication scholarship and urges us to reconsider the ableism of contemporary calls to resume normalcy, whether old or new. Importantly, she illuminates the diversity within disability and the potential of extending scholarship that takes up its representations, legislations, identities, agentic voices, and embodied experiences. The playlist draws our attention to crucial work and to the insufficiency of our engagements with disability to date.

The more DJ-inspired list “Curating Care” by **Rianka Singh** takes a different approach to pairing archival works and contemporary issues. She selects from decades of scholarship to illuminate the relations of care constituting the conditions of communication studies, often recognizing that the best examples of care do not always announce themselves as such. If the field is understood in this way, as it must be, the history of feminist contributions to Canadian communication studies is more easily recognizable as one of its most essential and durable features.

In Singh’s playlist, we are returned to the themes of vulnerability and care explored in Mbembe’s (2019) work, and it reminds us that the questions of care that underpin the field of communication studies are pressing into the foreground in an especially intense way. Despite the brilliant and gracious contributions of the works referenced above, the field’s engagement with the present moment is deeply diminished by the absence of those who lack adequate support, who are on health-related leaves, or who are too overwhelmed with care, work, and other obligations to engage with the usual scholarly mechanisms of research and publication. This is not a new experience for everyone, nor are the patterns of gendered and racial discrimination that shape it unknown or undocumented. It is with this in mind that I would like to not only thank everyone who has contributed work to our new initiatives and publications through manuscripts, peer reviews, book reviews, playlists, roundtables and conversations, editing, copy-editing, layout, and tech-

nical assistance but also those who were unable to do so, as you have helped us better understand the nature of our field.

References

- Austin, David. (Ed.) (2009). *You don't play with revolution: The Montreal lectures of C.L.R. James*. Chico, CA: AK Press.
- Fanon, Frantz. (1967). *A dying colonialism*. New York, NY: Grove Press.
- Hirji, Faiza, Jiwani, Yasmin, & McAllister, Kirsten. (2020). On the margins of the margins: #CommunicationSoWhite—Canadian style. *Communication, Culture and Critique*, 13(2), 168–184.
- Ironstone, Penelope, & Bird, Greg. (2020). Our COVID conjuncture: Critical essays on the pandemic. *TOPIA: Canadian Journal of Cultural Studies*, 41, 5–10. doi:10.3138/topia-001
- James, C.L.R. (1970). The black scholar interviews: C.L.R. James. *The Black Scholar*, 2(1), 35–43
- Jiwani, Yasmin. (2020). The intersecting violence(s) of a pandemic. *TOPIA: Canadian Journal of Cultural Studies*, 41, 114–122. doi:10.3138/topia-014
- Mbembe, Achille. (2019). *Necropolitics*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Newland, Kathleen. (1980). *City limits: Emerging constraints on urban growth*. Washington, DC: Worldwatch Institute.
- Walcott, Rinaldo. (2020). Nothing new here to see: How COVID-19 and state violence converge on black life. *TOPIA: Canadian Journal of Cultural Studies*, 41, 158–163. doi:10.3138/topia-019

Chris Russill, Carleton University