The Annual Review of Interdisciplinary Justice Research
Volume 10, 2021

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The University of Winnipeg
Centre for Interdisciplinary Justice Studies (CIJS)
ISSN 1925-2420

Policing Plague and Rebellion in the Carceral Surround

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If the question raised by this special issue, "Pandemic Justice," is of what types of justice are possible in the context of this plague then, writing as I am from my perch in the Northeast of the United States in the closing weeks of 2020, this country's answer seems to be "none at all." In this benighted nation, any "justice" delivered by and in the pandemic is visible only in chiaroscuro — as a wry commentary on the profound miseries built into any and every aspect of the state, civil society, and economy. The facts are stark and are so well known that they bear repeating only insofar as horror requires witnessing and testimonial. So, as of this writing 286,000 people are dead from the novel coronavirus. They are overwhelmingly people of color and the white poor and working class. The mortality rates across the country index directly to the structures of racist trap economics (Woods, 2009) by which the US organizes itself.

Black, Indigenous, and Latinx folks bear the disproportional brunt of our current embrace of apocalyptic nihilism, just as the history of "justice" and "prosperity" here was built for positively racialized white folks on the backs of the acceptable mass death and degradation of those racialized as across the color line. Looking at the data, Anthony Hatch has reached the tentative conclusion that it was precisely the fact that the pandemic's early victims were so overwhelmingly Black and brown that inspired our avowedly white supremacist government to abandon federal administration of a response (Hatch, 2020). Such a conclusion should surprise no one, plagued as we are with evidence of the Republican Party's bloodlust. And, of course, such virulent thirst for devastation runs the gamut of status and power among half the country, as we saw early on with a nearly successful militia effort to intimidate the Michigan state legislature into remanding its meager compulsion to its citizens to please put on a mask (Cohen, 2020). There is no way to read that

particular incident without catching some of the glee that white anti-maskers felt at the prospect of Black Detroiters dying in droves for white suburbanites' commitment to necropolitics with a smile.

In those opening months of the plague, we watched as, under the flag of liberty and certainly not for the first time, white American militants acting in alliance with Americans militantly committed to whiteness — and all armed to the teeth — stormed state houses to demand their god-given right to fully manifest their sovereignty over all peoples and lands. This is, quite literally, the national inheritance. It's all the justice that this particular settler state seems capable of.

In tides of tragedy and farce, the flashpoints of this latest US orgy of white violence are in the most mundane of settings: a right-wing revolution was being waged so that white folks can plague vulnerable service workers. How many clips and videos must we watch of white folks yelling at, spitting on, coughing on, and physically assaulting baristas, fast food workers, cell phone store employees, bus drivers, and countless other people locked into the lower wrung of late capitalism's labor markets before we come to the conclusion that weaponizing the white body is, in this moment, a particular pleasure of what Dubois has called "the psychological wages of whiteness" (DuBois, 1998)?

So far, so quintessentially Uncle Sam. In the wake of Hurricane Katrina — another notable moment in which so much of white U.S. celebrated the mass fatality and dispossession of Black folks — the geographer Neil Smith (2006) reminded us that there is no such thing as a natural disaster. Acts of god happen, yes, but their impact is entirely social (Smith, 2006). In New Orleans, levees broke because Republican administrators had opened up ecologically crucial wetlands to subdivisional development in the faith that the god of the market would sort out the consequences (Woods, 2017). The US' market, built and rebuilt daily as it is on the dispossession of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC), worked as advertised. Almost two thousand people dead, and a city destroyed and depopulated was a necessary sacrifice to crack the place open to the gods of redevelopment. Hundreds of thousands of Black citizens,

blocked from returning, remain in exile the better part of two decades later.

But, if Katrina exemplifies a moment in which the racial organization of our economic structure was leveraged to fissure open the floodgates for white capital and Black dispossession (Woods, 2009), COVID-19 has taken a different route. In *this* not-natural disaster, the racial disproportion of vulnerability and premature death practically ignores class differentiation. The reasons for this are overdetermined. They run the gamut from environmental racism's amplification of comorbidities to the discriminatory impact of housing policy to labor structures (in which, for instance, the Black middle class is disproportionately employed in high contact and unionized industries that are less easily moved to remote locations compared to their white counterparts). But the point is that, insofar as COVID-19 is, like all not-natural disasters, a reflection of the social organization of the polities they impact, it drives home the obvious point (to play off Sora Han [2015]): the US is not *in* a racial crisis, the US *is* racial crisis. And so it follows that the pandemic's management primarily falls to the country's front-line violence workers in the maintenance of racial hierarchy: the police (Seigel, 2018).

In thinking through U.S. pandemic justice, I'm going to move the focus of the study from spaces of carceral control that stand out most strongly in the imagination to a supposed bastion of the country's progressivism, my adoptive City of New York. The dueling plagues of pandemic and police violence that threaded together so intensely during our apocalyptic spring and heterotopian summer are complexly intertwined. In order to make sense of these dynamics, I'll introduce in germinal form a concept that I have been working through for some time and is the organizing principle of my current book project: *the carceral surround*. My concept takes a cue and a name from Fred Turner's now-classic *The Democratic Surround*, a study of mid-century countercultural efforts to realize democracy in practice through the multi-mediated organization of the lived environment (Turner, 2015). However, instead of a study about the promulgation of democratic practices and norms, carceral surround is an effort to make sense of how the twenty-first century lived experience of a world composed of ubiquitous and mobile media

(Daubs & Manzerolle, 2017) is thoroughly mediated by carceral power.

Perhaps any such concept is a media theory, but it is also a theory of noncommunication. In a break with a tradition in surveillance studies scholarship that understands the surveillant role of police during periods of crisis to center on efforts to communicate risk and control the communication of risk (Ericson & Haggerty, 1997), I argue that the police project of media war (on which more later) in the context of the carceral surround is precisely an effort to leverage the intimacy of twenty-first-century technologies to achieve an *ontoepistemological* end. Police power is what it is, as natural as air, water, and cellular infrastructure, and it is immovable. In the context of the Black Lives Matter rebellions of the summer of 2020, New York City police agencies were not utilizing Twitter as a means of public communication and information sharing, and they were *certainly* not interested in dispelling rumor and innuendo (Procter et al., 2013). Rather, from the semiotic micropolitics of covering up badge numbers on Twitter icons to the systematic misinformation of social media posts, the point of police media was to project police power's immutability and to foreclose any, even the imaginative possibility, of those other freedom horizons of pandemic justice that rebels on the streets were marching into being.

But first, some context.

Dueling Plagues

To reiterate a long-standing observation: over the last fifty years, neoliberal policies at all levels of government have produced an intended double effect of gutting and eliminating state systems of social welfare and mutual support while turning over the management of populations to policing agencies (Hinton, 2016). It is not for nothing that 40% of Chicago's operating budget is spent on its police force (La Spata et al., 2020), or that the New York Police Department (NYPD) (between its operating budget and centrally allocated expenses) absorbed *$11 billion* of tax revenue in 2020 (CBCNY, 2020). This has had the absolutely predictable effect of transforming police agencies into de facto coequal branches of

government granted tacit veto power over civic policy and reordering the logics of government so that police work, which is to say violence work, sits at their center. If, twenty-five years ago, James Scott could characterize his critique against botched state "improvement projects" in the terms of "seeing like a state" (Scott, 2008), today the situation has transformed. Now, states see like police departments, and the improvement projects are subject to the cops' approval.

New York City is an outsized and delirious place, and its civic dynamics reflect that. Nominally governed by Bill de Blasio, a self-styled "progressive" friend of the working class and champion of police reform, the city is instead a functional police state organized around the comfort and protection of transnational high rollers and their white-collar service workers. This system works for the explicit benefit of the real estate and banking industries (who Jack Newfield termed the "Permanent Government" in 1981 [Newfield & Brul, 1981]), without whose acquiescence nothing can happen. I don't mean this as a crude armchair Marxist quip, but instead point to the deliberate cultivation of this dynamic as civic policy since the 1980s under successive mayors and state governors of both political parties (Brash, 2011; Smith, 1996).

As a consequence, New York suffers from the type of dystopian demographics that should give anyone pause: as of this writing, over half of New Yorkers live in high-poverty areas, 115,000 *children* are homeless, and 1 in 4 people are food-insecure. Public housing has deteriorated to the point of actively endangering residents as the city continues to fail to clean up endemic lead problems, ensure reliable heat and hot water, or invest in sufficient maintenance to address chronic black mold. The overwhelming majority of the city's poor and publicly housed are people of color, and the level of residential segregation is among the nation's highest (Fuleihan & Thamkittikasem, 2020).

When the pandemic struck New York City in late February 2020, the (overwhelmingly white) wealthy decamped to second homes in the Hamptons, long-term Airbnb rentals, or parents' houses in suburbs. Certain elite neighborhoods, like the Upper East Side, became overnight ghost towns, with even more multimillion-dollar

apartments sitting empty than is usually the case[1]. It was largely the Black, Latinx, and Asian poor, working, and lower middle class who remained resident and it was they who filled out the *twenty-four thousand* body bags that were *directly* attributable to COVID-19 in spring 2020. We know that that number, ghastly as it is, is an undercount. And through it all, there was the NYPD waging an undeclared counterinsurgency campaign on the traumatized city.

The NYPD is a complicated organization. It is by far the largest and most powerful police force in the US. About half of its uniformed officers are white in a city that was, in 2010, 33% white (and is now assuredly less so). The agency's officer class is *overwhelmingly* white and male, and rules with a deep and virulent culture of white supremacy. Moreover, the city's dynamics of race, class, and ethnicity are such that, even if we were to believe the liberal lie that diverse police departments are inherently less racist, in NYC being an officer of color is no guarantee in advance of being nonracist. To survive in the department requires at least tacit acceptance of its racial logics, as any number of lawsuits and whistleblower cases have demonstrated (Goldstein & Southall, 2020). And yet, when overtime is taken into account, officers are also among the best paid civil servants in NYC, with the average total pay of a police officer without rank hovering slightly over $90,000 per year (CBCNY, 2020).

More than that, fully 51% of the total force are not city residents (Cruz 2020). This combination of factors alone would lead an indifferent observer to conclude that it is a functional force of racial occupation. Fair or not, a prevailing image of the NYPD is that of (mostly) white officers rumbling into neighborhoods that they disdain in order to harass and arrest young people of color. After work they take their generous city salaries to their homes nestled in suburbs

[1] Part of NYC's real estate strategy, cultivated under Giuliani but raised to an art form under Bloomberg, rests on turning luxury condominiums into capital investment for the global investor class. So, in the bizarrely through-the-looking glass world of neoliberal New York, a significant percentage of luxury housing sits purchased and vacant for most of the year, quietly accruing value and driving up housing prices for the rest of the city. This leads to truly bizarre outcomes like fully "inhabited" plutocratic glass towers without any residents while hundreds of thousands of working New Yorkers are living out of shelters, which have, in turn, become NYC's new form of public housing (Thompson, 2020).

literally built on the principle of white supremacy, racial exclusion, and tax flight (Rothstein, 2018). NYPD leadership, of course, claim that such a characterization is tantamount to slander and libel. But it would be much easier to substantiate that were it not for the overwhelming historical evidence and serial judicial decisions that the NYPD operates as an organization with absolute impunity that understands its mission primarily as one of ongoing campaigns of racial violence, and zero tolerance for any who reject their approach. Given this, it was small surprise that, when our mayor decided to put the NYPD in charge of maintaining social distancing ordinances at the height of the pandemic, a chaos of racist and often physically violent enforcement ensued.

Although an unearned national mythology around our governor Andrew Cuomo's competence has arisen since the spring, the fact is that New York, both the city and the state, were slow to recognize the seriousness of the pandemic. The incompetence of our governor and mayor almost certainly led to thousands of preventable deaths, and in concrete terms it produced a March and April of unremitting terror and trauma (Duhigg, 2020; Goodman, 2020). During the peak of the crisis, the wail of ambulance sirens was constant, a 24-hour reminder of the nearness of death or paralyzing illness. The months were cold, and the luckiest New Yorkers spent them huddled in their apartments learning how to work remotely, while "essential workers" had to brave packed subways to make their way to low-paying and high-contact jobs. The MTA workers who kept the trains and buses running were devastated. In a city where the vast majority of infected people were never able to get a test, 2,000 MTA workers had tested positive by the end of May, and 132 had died (Martinez, 2020).

Policing Pandemic

The distribution of death and disease was, of course, uneven. For all the talk of "equal opportunity infection" at the beginning of the crisis, the sick and dying were primarily Black and Latinx essential workers and their families. These were the same people who, unsurprisingly, suffered the brunt of the economic devastation once the economy was finally shut down in late March 2020. They were also targeted by the NYPD. Between March 15 and May 5, over 90% of people arrested

for violating social distance rules were Black and Latinx. Only about a quarter of New Yorkers are Black, but they made up about two-thirds of those arrested (Offenhartz, 2020).

But what spoke much louder than the numbers were viral videos. As the weeks under lockdown stretched, videos of NYPD officers brutally assaulting Black and Latinx New Yorkers for apparently failing to maintain social distancing, and countless anecdotes of officers indifferent to racially motivated attacks against Asian American New Yorkers piled up on social media feeds. The first brutalization to generate widespread revulsion was captured in the Lower East Side on May 2, 2020, when NYPD Officer Francisco Garcia brutally beat a New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) caretaker, and restrained him on the ground by placing his knee on his neck (Southall, 2020). The officer was not wearing a mask. The next day, in East New York, a group of white officers pinned and cuffed a fifteen-year-old, punching him in the back of his head as he lay on the sidewalk (Duggan, 2020). They arrested him and the person who filmed the encounter for not properly social distancing. The officers were not properly wearing masks. On the May 14, a video circulated showing officers assaulting and arresting a young mother in a subway station in front of her child (ANNESE, 2020). She was arrested for improperly wearing her mask.

Against the backdrop of this (once again) compounding evidence of racial state violence, an entirely different picture of the city emerged. As the siren wails started to abate and the frigid spring abruptly flipped to balmy summer weather, New Yorkers ventured outside en masse. Whereas parks, playgrounds, and basketball courts in predominately Black and Latinx neighborhoods like Bed-Stuy and Washington Heights remained locked down (Winfield, 2020), in wealthier neighborhoods, white people streamed into open park space where they often flagrantly ignored social distancing and mask requirements (*Welcome2theBronx™ on Twitter*, 2020, p. 2).The difference in the NYPD response was stark. Instead of beating, pinning, and arresting white people, cops handed out masks and gently reminded park-goers to maintain six feet of distance (Dorn et al., 2020). Zellie Imani captured the difference starkly in a viral tweet on May 3 (Imani, 2020).

On May 28, the first small protest over the Minneapolis Police Department's murder of George Floyd took place in New York City. Within days, the city erupted into the largest demonstrations against racism in at least fifty years. Within weeks, the protests were the most sustained that the city had experienced. The gravity and size of the rebellion against the Racial State (Goldberg, 2002) in New York is often described as a combination of the trauma and economic impact of the pandemic intersecting with the unresolved demands of the Black Lives Matter movement in 2015. And, certainly, the similarities between Floyd's murder and Eric Garner's were too many not to see a pattern. And, *certainly*, the lesson that the NYPD took from the last Black Lives Matter movement was that their impunity would remain intact in the face of national rebuke. But two matters seem crucial (if often overlooked) in explaining the suddenness and explosivity of the Black Lives Matter movement in the spring and summer.

The first is that New York City — which is *always* functionally operating under a racialized state of exception — had, since the end of March, prosecuted mundane violence under the recontextualized aegis of enforcers of public health. The standard police operating procedures of harassing, arresting, and assaulting young people of color seemed suddenly incongruous with a mission that was *supposedly* meant to encompass the totality of the commonweal. Why, if the idea was to maintain *universal* public safety, in a context in which what was *known* about the virus was that it spread primarily through proximity to maskless persons, was the NYPD systematically treating BIPOC folks and neighborhoods radically differently from white ones? The answer was always already there, but the specifics of the situation produced a sort of Theater of Cruelty (Artaud, 1994) that was beyond what the usual cognitively dissonant sublimations and justifications could bear.

As more and more evidence from phones mounted of the explicitly racist tactics of NYPD enforcement in the midst of the racist outcomes of plague, the two became wedded in New Yorkers' minds. Under siege, the city seemed to double down on venting its anxieties on its own residents of color. This was compounded by the insane logics of penal enforcement, in which the NYPD continued to arrest

people for petty crime and throw them in cramped detention cells where officers often didn't deign to wear masks, where the incarcerated were often not provided with masks, and where social distancing was impossible (Speri, 2020). As COVID-19 ripped through our jails and holding cells, and the the NYPD and the Department of Correction vetoed any efforts to release prisoners, it seemed as though the city's plan was to seed the virus in poor communities and leave them to their fate. By the time Floyd was killed, the city was already primed to burst, and the NYPD riot at the beginning of the protests felt like the logical conclusion of pandemic justice.

The second is that the experience of the coronavirus was *thoroughly mediated from the beginning*. The explosion and management of COVID-19 was a relentless media event. New Yorkers, locked inside, experienced by scrolling through feeds, where the visible evidence of catastrophic failure of government shared equal time with half-hearted state excuses and blatant denials of reality. In the context of policing, this dynamic amplified. For each video and anecdotal account of racist policing, for every lived and filmed experience of NYPD officers refusing to wear masks while interacting with the public, the city responded with denial and redirection. The effect was to delegitimize the claims of the state in real time. By the time George Floyd's murder had reverberated to the East Coast, the city had utterly lost its claim to legitimacy. All that was left was brute force, which is what would define the summer of violence, and the media war that the NYPD launched to expand its power.

Media War

On Friday, August 7, the NYPD laid siege to a 28-year-old organizer and co-founder of the non-violent protest organization Warriors in the Garden. For five hours, while Derrick Ingram locked himself in his room, the NYPD deployed around thirty police officers, K-9 units, and helicopters in and around Ingram's apartment building, including on his fire escape. The police did not initially produce a warrant, though they seemed to be led by the Warrant Squad. Instead, the units demanded that Ingram submit to arrest for a crime they did not identify, only vaguely referencing an altercation with an officer

that Ingram did not recall (Offenhartz et al., 2020). We know about this because Ingram livestreamed it, drawing protesters and press to the scene.

Many of the officers involved in the siege were members of a specialized unit, the Strategic Response Group (SRG), that was formed in 2015 in the midst of the first wave of racial justice rebellions to march under the banner of Black Lives Matter. SRG is supposedly tasked equally with responding to "citywide mobilizations" ranging from terrorist attacks and bank robberies to the papal visit and parades (Special Operations—NYPD, n.d.). But they are known locally as the unit that targets demonstrations. The SRG has been notorious among New Yorkers who noticed such things for years, but they achieved a new level of notoriety earlier in this hot summer when, on June 4, they led the brutal kettling and assault on a march in the Mott Haven neighborhood in the Bronx (Offenhartz et al., 2020). The NYPD there created a parade of bruised and broken bodies, and the litany of images and videos documenting the brutality shocked many civilians. But mayor Bill de Blasio, a Democrat who ran on police reform, praised the department's conduct. He agreed with his police commissioner that the police action was "executed flawlessly" (Offenhartz et al., 2020). Such were the dynamics of politics and protest during the city's plague summer.

SRG are this particular city's shock troops, but as anyone whose social media feeds are turned on and tuned in could tell you, they are hardly extraordinary in their recourse to violence. Nevertheless, the SRG's presence at Derrick Ingram's siege was symbolic as much as it was practically threatening. Their primary work as an anti-demonstration unit seemed to signal that the effort to intimidate Ingram was as much a response to his organizing and activism as it was to any crime he may have committed. The NYPD appeared to be looking for a political prisoner and, eventually, they got one. Although the NYPD relented in its siege after five hours of intense blowback on social media and negative coverage in the local press, Ingram turned himself in the next day (G, 2020).

As it turned out, the police charged Ingram with second-degree assault, a felony. The assault in question had occurred in a June

action in which Ingram yelled into a bullhorn too close to an officer's head, apparently causing some ear damage. The Manhattan DA reduced the charge to a misdemeanor and chastised the department for having "unjustifiably escalated conflict between law enforcement and the communities we serve" (Offenhartz, 2020).

Although the DA's sentiment was probably genuine, it was confusing. Just a week before the siege, the Warrant Squad had driven an unmarked car into the middle of a march and snatched a protest leader, Nikki Stone, off the street in broad daylight, clearly duplicating the federal government's tactics in Portland, Oregon, at the height of the confrontation there (Offenhartz & Hogan, 2020). The NYPD abducted Stone for spray painting police cameras near the Occupy City Hall encampment. Originally organized around forcing the City Council to cut a billion dollars out of the police budget, and in doing so reducing it to its level five years ago, Occupy City Hall had, by the end of July, largely transformed into a semi-permanent camp for unhoused folks that included medical and psychiatric care (Kim & Alfiky, 2020). Given those conditions, New York City's gleefully violent approach to its tens of thousands unhoused people, and its catastrophic incarceration-first policies towards neurodivergent folks, spray painting surveillance cameras linked to facial recognition systems seems a necessary act of self-protection rather than a malicious destruction of city property. At any rate, the NYPD had (also spectacularly) destroyed the encampment just the week prior (Chung et al., 2020). The NYPD would not have launched these made-for-Instagram assaults against well-known organizers if they were interested in defusing tensions. They were waging a media war.

I mean "media war" here in ways that intertwine with and reinforce one another. Together the processes I describe have been at play for years, but the compounded crises of plague, poverty, and police violence have accelerated and standardized the dynamic at the heart of the relationship between policing and the public. I call the calcification and normalization of the elements of this media war "the carceral surround." I will return to the carceral surround at the end of this essay. First, I will lay out two salient theoretical concepts, remediation and premediation, describe their relevance to

understanding the dynamics of policing during a pandemic, and then move to outline the elements of the media war playing out across screens, bodies, and infrastructure.

In their 2000 book, *Remediation*, Jay Bolter and Richard Grusin defined the term as the capacity of new media to "refashion prior media forms." Digital media, in particular, is a remedial media par excellence, as its transmedial capacities afford it a chameleonic ability to simultaneously draw from prior technologies while occluding their particularities, or more specifically, subsuming them into code (Bolter & Grusin, 2000). The digital media player, for instance, draws from its antecedent analogue mediums like cassette decks and turntables in its function as audio delivery service while occluding and remediating the specificities of those mediums — in essence, the haptic and haecceitic qualities of engaging with a particular physical instantiation of the recorded object. So then does the digital file destroy the music industry while delivering a version of the selfsame object to the listener.

While Bolter and Grusin's concept is useful for understanding digital media's affordances, Jacqueline Wernimont's deployment of the concept in her study of the historical work of recording "life and death in quantum media" is more apt for our purposes (Wernimont, 2019). For Wernimont, the key point of remediation is less the technical way in which new media refashions prior media forms than quantum media's capacity to remediate social dynamics onto delimited spaces of lists and numbers. In other words, remediation is the (often disavowed) violent and political act of rendering complex social and human processes into legible and calculable effects. Drawing on the work of Black feminist scholars like Katherine McKittrick (2006, 2014) and Hortense Spillers (Spillers, 1987), Wernimont points in particular to the remediating labor of the Middle Passage as preeminent example of said remediating violence. As we know, the condition of possibility of that trade was the transformation of human lives into commodified property and financial instrument organized under the aegis of New World slavery. Thus, we might slightly rework Sylvia Wynter (1984) a bit to argue that the whole of racial capitalism is predicated on the violence of remediation.

Revisiting remediation after September 11 and the launch of the War on Terror, Grusin (2004) introduced a new twist on the concept that he called premediation. Whereas remediation did the work of refashioning historical media forms and social formations, premediation works to mediate the future. That is to say that, for Grusin, the trauma of 9/11 marked the end of American media's dot.com bubble interest in immediacy and marked a turn towards bringing possible futures into the present to ensure that any futural event has already been experienced.

In other words, 9/11 can be seen to have marked an end to (or at least a repression or sublimation of) the US cultural desire for immediacy fueled by the dot.com hysteria of the 1990s and to have replaced it with a desire for a world in which the immediacy of the catastrophe, the immediacy of disaster, could not happen again — because it would always already be premediated. In a kind of cultural reaction formation, the desire or demand since 9/11 has been to make sure that when the future comes it has already been remediated, to see the future not as it emerges immediately into the present but before it ever happens (Grusin, 2004, p. 21).

In traditional media campaigns, antagonists struggle to control the public's relation to and understanding of events, normally understood as "controlling the narrative." But in 2020's ongoing struggle over racist police violence, the narrative gives way to the intensities of audio-visual dynamics. The images, videos, sounds, and affects that define these dynamics are always already circulating everywhere and begin to bleed into one another and any coherent a narrative fails to materialize. The police violence, the rebellion, and the crackdown are all exactly the same everywhere, and one becomes lost in the anti-specificity of the circulating evidence. Am I looking at Portland or Philadelphia? New York or New Orleans? Are these videos from 2020 or 2015? August or May? Unmoored from specific catalysis and local context, dynamics of confrontation supersede that which is contested, and the aim of action is to interrupt the logical flow of the image (Steyerl, 2019). We're always already living through a future that has been mediated (and perhaps here we can extend Marx's famous Brumaire critique into the post-postmodern twenty-first century and say that all that remains is tragedy and farce, together in

a Gordian embrace). Snatching protesters off the street or laying siege to a 28-year-old's apartment breaks the monotony of tear gas and mace, of plywood shields and bike walls. It also feeds forward the images of the rebellious into the infrastructure of carceral violence.

Carceral Surround

That infrastructuralism (Easterling, 2016) of racial state violence built into surveillance media that penetrate all elements of the lived environment is the second element of the media war. Mark Hansen (2015) has called these sensory devices "twenty-first-century media," and in his argument that they feed forward the sensory into the sensible, we can find a miniaturization and saturation of Grusin's premedial claims. But it is Simone Browne's point that the deployment of sensory media designed to measure and "know" a body always occurs within a context of ontological destabilization that is centered on white prototypicality and, therefore, anti-blackness that is most relevant to us (Browne, 2010). For it is that dynamic that closes the circuit between (un)official state racism and the sensory media of the everyday and that, in doing so, generates the conditions of a carceral surround.

In the context of ubiquitous environmental surveillance like cameras, microphones, and drones, coupled to vastly powerful analytical software systems like facial recognition, and predictive policing suites, racist policing becomes built into *media* infrastructure. The ubiquity of twenty-first-century media works to premediate racial violence. Or, rather, the premediation of "crime" and "criminality" via tactics and techniques of projection, prediction, and mapping transform state violence into its inverse — that of a sort of carceral care — because the social field in which state agents operate is preemptively understood to be criminal, and the police to be in a perpetual state of siege. This is quite different than the dynamic of police communicativity that Ericson and Haggerty (1997) identified in *Policing the Risk Society*. For Ericson and Haggerty, the work of the police becomes defined by "communicating risk" and "policing communications about risk" (Ericson & Haggerty, 1997, p. 70). But in the carceral surround, the aim of police media is *noncommunicative*. Instead it is something closer to an *ontological*

politics (Laclau & Mouffe, 2014). The role of police media is to establish the carceral as *fact*, as immutable, incontestable, and fully immanent to the dynamics of the living and the lived (Laruelle, 2017).

And so, the brief and focus of policing drills deeper and deeper into the micropolitics of daily life and transforms the lived environment into a carceral medium. This is exacerbated and accelerated by the pandemic, which has (more so than was even true before) transformed any and all social space into a zone of virtual infraction.

Under conditions of carceral surround, yelling in a bullhorn in June can lead to arrest in August based on an Instagram image that had been circulating perhaps for years for friends and family. What is the time frame? What kind of logical relation between action and reaction exists here? And what, exactly, is policing in this context, when an innocuous headshot can morph into a damning mugshot because of the infrastructural intercession of ubiquitous recording media and high-powered software processing (French & Monahan, 2020)?

Brian Jefferson (2020), in his indispensable new book, *Digitize and Punish,* demonstrates that the remedial work of digital policing technologies is to redistribute the state sanctioned or extralegal group-differentiated exposure to vulnerability and premature death. Rather than a "new" mode of doing police work, he demonstrates that the recourse to medial police work is an intensification of the dynamics that are already seeded throughout geographically organized social space, and that works to transform said violence into surface-innocuous technical and technocratic accounting of potential harm (Jefferson, 2020). That the impact of the "digital harm reduction" dovetails with the historical contours of racial capitalist policing gives the lie to the technical sleight of hand and shows that the state and its interlocutors are only ever running the same racial violence play over and over.

But there is yet another difference here, because in spite of the growth of "e-carceration" ("James Kilgore," n.d.) and the amplified capacity to leverage digital media to distribute the logics of the prison

throughout nominally civilian space (ankle monitors, etc.), the media war of the carceral surround works at an even more minute level. It functions by introjecting the violent dynamics of carceral "care" into the interstices of the bodily, the imaginary, the possible. If taking a flattering picture of oneself meant to be shared with friends and acquaintances can — in combination with skateboarding down a public street or being loud at a public demonstration — catalyze at some unknowable date and time one's abduction into a Warrant Squad van or being under literal siege, then how is one to imagine an outside to the carceral? That is the point of the media war — to instantiate the open-ended possibilities of the carceral surround in the forefront of the consciousness of any potential public.

Conclusion

As I hope the case of New York City has shown in particular, and scholars like Chris Gilliard have been chronicling in detail on twitter and elsewhere, the logic of pandemic management and policing have completely dissolved into one another. Or, perhaps to put it more accurately, the logic of policing has always been a logic of pandemic management in that the premise of policing under racial capitalism is to treat negatively racialized and poor people as unravellers of the social order, as an always-emergent threat that must be vigorously suppressed for the health of the body politic (French & Monahan, 2020). That was the logic of "broken windows" under Giuliani, of "stop and frisk" under Bloomberg, and of "precision policing" under de Blasio. The *actual* pandemic has heightened these dynamics to the point that in Los Angeles, the city has contracted with *Citizen*, a racist vigilante app, to run its contact tracing program (Ongweso, 2020). The dynamics of the carceral surround continue to sink deeper into the everyday logics of urban life, content not just for the state to see like the police, but for life itself to become deputized in the violence work of state maintenance.

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