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Follow the Money. Follow the Bodies. Follow the Design: An Afterword to Computing in/from the South

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Computing may want to surveil and monetize, but it also wants to connect, network, and switch. To discern what computing—as a field, a means of organizing knowledge, and a method for governing behaviors—creates today, the authors of this section give us three commands: follow the money, follow the bodies, and follow the design. These are their orientation points to understanding computing in and from the perspective of the South. These authors' papers reveal that our language for describing connectivity and hierarchy across the South is deeply inadequate. This language, and even the term *South* itself constantly slips away from us, even as it must be used. Hackers, through their outside status, become sigils of authority; consent for research becomes a formula for exhausted research subjects; socialist robots are outlawed even as their programmers are sucked up into the service of a Silicon Valley located globally. Nation-states—China, Brazil, India—that should signify particular histories of knowing, making, and networking, become watchwords for more or less friendly (to the United States, to businesses) computing environments. To work against these tokenizations requires that we put technological artifacts into conversation with the worlds from which they emerge, to which they aspire, and the worlds that are created as they move with and against each other. There are as many versions of the South as there are of what computing means and could mean for computing economies, the bodies who work in and are represented by computing regimes, and the visible forms computing cultures take as they appear to diverse publics.

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As Okune, Beltran, and Wu show, money follows a complicated plot. As much as we focus on the extractive capacities of Big Data and its surveillance of the consumer, we disregard the equally important circuit between communities, research knowledge, tech-fueled business interests, and philanthropy (Amrute, 2020). The money traces not only what kinds of projects get authorized because they appear to fall within the normal parameters of "computing," but also how differently located populations are asked to contribute to those projects—as experts, as students, as workers, as rarified research subjects, and as sources of knowledge about exoticized populations.

When we prioritize embodiment in our analysis, we enter realms of meaning-making and realms of labor. Simultaneously McElroy and Murillo remind us to wonder, who makes the circuits and what are the hidden histories of these bodies' production? This question not only contains a history of labor exploitation and alienation from the condition of work and work products. It also contains a radical seed. The lives of these bodies and the technologies these bodies productively incorporate may have little to do with the intentions of those who employ and deploy them. Following the bodies takes the reader on what Murillo calls a "moral circuit" that can reveal the lifecycle of data and hardware, even as it poses alternative, contradictory routes from the one we might be on.

Following how information and interactions are designed tells us about the material practices of computing that encode these paths. Gupta inaugurates this conversation through satire, an affective response to the codes laid down through the corporate techno-rituals of beer drinking, app creation, and innovation. Gupta's approach makes masterful use of mimicry to simultaneously index the global discourse of muscular corporate computing cultures, and gesture toward the ample space within those tropes for play, revivified imagination, and misdirection (Amrute, 2019 & 2020, Boyer 2013, Ferdandez and Huber 2001). While Gupta's manual might be read as a recapitulation of the colonial derivative discourse, it is much more than that. It is an analysis of local design practices that circulate among aspirants to global elite status. In a moment when so many of our knowledge-producing activities are mediated by user interfaces that promise full disclosure, interventions like Gupta's makes us stop, look, and hear over and again, because we are made aware that we are never getting "the whole thing." This is a version of what computing might want to become that is always partial, even as it invites us in to become part of the apparatus of computing itself by means of its partialities. Such work calls to mind Miyarrka Media's project Making

Worlds Otherwise, a remix of a remix of a remix that brings a deeply relational sensibility to the mobile phone from a Yolnu aesthetic (Miyarrka Media 2020). Myarrka Media's designs do not other. Instead, they alter—they do computing otherwise by reworking what is given. In doing so, they remain receptive to new modes of appropriation and remix. Roussel and Stolfi take this entangled approach to how things are used one step further by demonstrating how a project for building networks in rural Brazil can be a responsive way to create organizational tool for a community. They name these practices taking back the future through "rooting technology." *Rooting* means two things at once: it is both a reference to the roots of the Baobab tree and to the privileged access one might achieve through a technical system.

Reading the work of all the scholars who contributed to this volume suggests that this task of rooting computing in a refusal to reduce and to tokenize is a very personal one. We are not only writing about the containment of computing cultures within predictable tropes; we are also experiencing our own containment as raced and sexed bodied that fall outside these norms. Together, we command a polyglot of languages, spoken, written, and signed, that gesture toward our histories, the histories of our grandmothers, parents, grandfathers, friends, that charge us all to play, at times, the migrant, the man, the queer, the communists, the woman, the exotic, and the misfit. In bringing together these many voices and languages, we interrogate and celebrate the crooked paths that have brought us to computing, otherwise, and cause us to ask, what else could computing want?

Together, we write these collected essays in the extended moment of a global pandemic, the COVID-19 crisis. And we write in from the fire of a renewed movement for Black lives. We write, once again, from the midst of unfolding ecological change unprecedented in the history of the human-inhabited world. The connections between COVID-19 and racism are now widely apparent: in the United States, Black and Latinx people are three times as likely to become infected with COVID-19 and twice as likely to die as white Americans (Center for Disease Control and Prevention 2020). The further connection between COVID-19, race, and computing will come when we begin to understand the unequal provisioning of goods during this crisis, and the role of predictive algorithms in this process, along with the unintended consequences of contact tracing accomplished through data-centric projects, to name two emerging scenarios. As crises often do, COVID-19 has shown us what was there all along—a deeply flawed and unequal infrastructure that distributes risk unevenly and unfairly. Yet here too there are stories we can read if we learn to look across the lay of the land. In

particular, the history of international socialism may hold some lessons for this pandemic, as Cuba, Vietnam, and Kerala, along with Ghana and Ethiopia emerge as models of tracing outbreaks, providing adequate care for its populations, and containing disease (McCarthy, 2020).

The relationship between computing and Black liberation takes at least three forms. First, the calls to divest from the police are also calls for tech companies to divest from facial recognition and predictive policing technologies that make the US justice system biased and broken. Second, there is a movement to produce better data that answers questions important to Black communities, promoted, for instance, by the group Data4BlackLives. In the future, other such groups will certainly become more prominent in how computing and race come together. Third, the Black Lives Matter movement comes with the demand to further diversify tech companies, computing education, and the recognition of Black scholarship as legitimate in the field. These calls, which ongoing for some time now, will gain in prominence.

The third orientation point, in addition to the COVID-19 epidemic and the movement for Black Lives, is the unfolding ecological crisis, which is a feeder of the other two. As poor communities bear the brunt of climate change, long-term chronic health conditions make them more vulnerable to virus, even while the evidence of that slow burn, that slow death is invisible—until someone else names it (Gravlee, 2009; Cox 2015). Here too, there are histories of living otherwise that connect across colonial geographies that have yet to be written. These stories muddy lines between urban and rural spaces, and consider materials, practices, and bodies in terms of what they do in a particular context, rather than in terms of what they are, as defined externally (Young, 2019). These histories expand what we understand as technologies, braiding together Indigenous knowledge systems with archival practices, for instance, or local rainwater filtration practices with mapping projects that track coastline degradation.

What can a story of computing and the South tell us about such projects? We think *in* the South and *from* the South, but have we reached a computing that is *of* the South? While we can follow computing's ongoing development across territories traditionally marked Southern, and while we can even grasp the flavor, on its own terms, of the contests and contradictions over computing and its infrastructures that unfold across these terrains, we do not know what a computing that divested itself from the structures of patriarchy, white supremacy, and capitalism would look like. We do not know this because computing is not

isolated. It is not a source of unsullied opposition. Its oppositional practices are themselves fraught locations for the working out of knowledge, power, and materiality.

The South marks a poetic relationality, but it is not a simple one. It would be insufficient to club all oppositional movements together. Decolonial computing is not the same as a movement to divest from the police through reducing police access to facial recognition technologies, though they may ally temporarily. The Black Lives Matter movement includes movements for better data around COVID-19 risk for Black people, if that call is accompanied by demands for better healthcare and better environmental conditions for communities of color. There are goals that come under a banner of solidarity across communities of color, but there are also plenty of actors who would hold aloft the banner of solidarity, Black Lives Matter, and refuse to look at their own patterns of caste-based, gendered, minoritarian discrimination. Participating in global movements located elsewhere can provide a cardboard fig leaf for continued oppression by showing allegiance to a movement in the United States without connecting that fight for justice with continued colorism and racisms that move across Asia and South America, to take two examples from the long history of colonial and postcolonial race politics of the South. When elites in the Global South proclaim their allegiance to the Black Lives Matter cause, it might be the flip side of white Western philanthropy—establishing elite status through symbolic gestures that do not challenge relations of power at home.

It can be, but it does not have to be. Rather than taking as a focus these symbolic gestures of current public culture, there is a longer and continually revived history of movements that connect Black and Brown lives across these power-laded geographies. The South African movement #RhodesMustFall, for example, serves as a fulcrum connecting movements for Black Lives in the United States with decolonizing movements that similarly focused on toppling statutes of violent and vicious white oppressors. The story of these movements, which build one on the other, has yet to be told for the movements and their digital, archival afterlives. For computing culture writ large, these stories, and the stories of the economic geographies, embodied workforces, and design choices of data collection and scaffolding will make up the necessary backbone of a computing done otherwise, not only for and in, but from within the terms of a continually transformed South.

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