

CFA: *On Extraction and Media*

Our goal is to explore the relations of extraction that underpin and shape global media cultures. In what follows, we sketch out an invitation to foster collective scholarship on these relations across space and time. One outcome will be a book, but others are yet to be decided. Our words are not a CFP in the traditional sense, but instead a Call for Allies to co-create histories, explorations, and interventions.

On Extraction and Media begins as a dialectical quest. One part must examine media's relationship to the deep legacies and processes of capitalist and industrial extraction. Our project builds on the histories of racialised capitalism as an environment-making force, formed by cycles of conquest, enslavement, extraction and the elemental separation of the "human" from "nature." It is a deep history, of a colonial nomos, enabled by genocidal conquests of the Americas transforming land, biota, and climate in the Fifteenth Century, accelerated by human enslavement, the deforestation of land, and the expansion of *plantations* by a globalising Europe in the Sixteenth century transforming the commons into property and ordering the world by fictions of race. As is now well-known, the conversion of thermal and then fossil energy into mechanical energy across the long nineteenth century powered a technological and economic revolution. In the late nineteenth century, the discovery and harnessing of electricity, alongside new developments in chemistry, produced a second-stage industrial revolution. It is in the wake of these developments that new forms of "mass" media emerged, built from minerals and chemicals, and powered by electricity. Cinema, radio, and television developed from complex amalgams of metals, plastics, wood pulp, oil, silver, phosphorous and other materials. Beginning from the 1940s, a "digital" electronic information industry emerged using common and rare earth elements, minerals, metals and metalloids, such as tin, nickel, silicon, coltan, and lithium. Over time new forms of computation and computer-networking produced a new media configuration that garnered commercial and political profit from the extraction of information about people. One common illustration of this is the "smartphone," a rapidly obsolescent technology increasingly central to "the information economy," built from rare-earth minerals on the backs of exploited labour in Africa and China, reliant on the generation of electricity ("the Cloud" is the fifth largest user of electricity on this planet), and productive of trails of *data* principally from "social media."

Our call is for collaborators across disciplines and research fields who are curious about the political histories of the *materiality* of media (of copper, camphor, silicon, lithium, oil, silver, coltan, tin, and so on); the *energy* sources that power media technologies; the extraction of *labour* necessary to produce this materiality; and the mining of *information* about people in the service of commercial and political interests bent on further degrading environments as property. One thread of our project, then, explores the extraction of resources and energy from land and labouring bodies to produce media objects and cultures. It situates media in relation to the deep history of capitalism, and its degradation of peoples and environments, in order to generate political and material histories of extraction and media.

The second part of this dialectical project seeks to explore the possibilities that exist outside a framework focused on capitalist extraction, which risks reinstalling the primacy of extractors – chiefly from the Global North – as the principal historical actors of consequence, rendering other people and regions into objects of extraction or end consumers of West-centric globalisation. Doing so rushes past the complex developmental histories and heterogenous temporalities of modernization and industrialization, particularly in recent or emerging energy societies such as China and India. Our histories must clearly be global in scope. Alongside the construction of a multi-sited history, we seek the possibilities that lie beyond instrumental thought and outside the epistemic construction of land and people as *resource*. Questions here include, what are the presumptive scope and limits of a foundationally humanistic enquiry? What strategies enable ways of thinking and being outside the anthropogenic framework of extractive industries and practices? And how might our collective knowledge enable struggles against the technological instrumentalization of (human and nonhuman) nature? Can we collectively discern modes, from the praxis of indigenous resistance to social and policy activism, that enable the fostering of a convivial-multi-species-liveable shared environment?

On Extraction and Media seeks to build on pioneering work in elemental media, histories of racialised capitalism, environmental humanities, and imperial studies. It is rooted in Film and Media Studies but we hope to foster collaborations with scholars beyond old disciplinary configurations, which are no longer fit for the task of understanding the technological instrumentalization of life in the face of climate breakdown. Is it possible, for example, that a reckoning with modernity's dependence on extractive industries can reformulate the disciplinary study of media objects? Our hope is to generate a collaborative project bringing together people across the globe who galvanise a historical analysis of capitalism and industrial modernity to reflect on the disparities, variable trajectories, unequal consequences, and seemingly irreconcilable aspirations of a range of nations, states and populations comprising our energy-dependent world today. Our call is for allies to explore and think together as part of an imperative to generate knowledge and practice resistance to the depredations of global capitalism and its destruction of our shared environments.

We hope to organize events together, virtually "in" Los Angeles, London and elsewhere, in the process of collaborating on an anthology. If you are interested, please write to us at the addresses below by 30th July 2021 with a brief description of your biography and research interests (200 words).

Who we are:

Lee Grieveson is Professor of Media History at University College London. Most recently he has been co-editor of *Empire and Film* (British Film Institute, 2011), *Film and the End of Empire* (BFI, 2011), and *Cinema's Military Industrial Complex* (University of California Press, 2019); and author of *Cinema and the Wealth of*

Nations: Media, Capital, and the Liberal World System (University of California Press, 2018).

l.grievesson@ucl.ac.uk

Priya Jaikumar is Professor of Cinema and Media Studies at the School of Cinematic Arts, University of Southern California, Los Angeles. She is author of *Cinema at the End of Empire* (Duke University Press, 2006) and *Where Histories Reside: India as Filmed Space* (Duke, 2019). pjaikumar@cinema.usc.edu