

Explanation as Composition, or *Brainwashed* is the Most Important Film Ever Made
By Kenneth Reveiz

Brainwashed is the most important film ever made: the greatest. See how easy it is? To give women credit, to show women filmmakers love? – while also making money? while also being right? To surrender control; to share power. To allow oneself to be surprised; to call ‘em like you see ‘em, with an intuitive eye. Those may be the most humble economic, political, and spiritual gestures, interventions we can make for the benefit of our communities. Which only honorable people and courageous artists seem to have the integrity and the conviction to achieve. Slash how, in the streaming age, can we bankroll more unbankrupt entertainment? It’s so cringe to be numbed and rewarded for our complicity in normativity’s narrativities in this day and age; it’s so appropriate to scream in parody in my kitchen overhearing the woman screaming in the movie my roommate is not really watching. Of course we can also be nourished by the loving challenge of the clear and abrupt truth. Isn’t that the most important opportunity any individual has, to help our life come more alive for others? Which is what Menkes with great risk with *Brainwashed* has done. And why it’s the most great film ever made: the most important.

But don’t take it from me: I’m not an academic. Don’t take it from me: I’m not a celebrity. Don’t take it from me: my ethnicity, my identity disqualify me from impact, from profit. *See how easy it is to use their own logic against me?* See how brainwashed we are against being pro-*Brainwashed*?

There’s a Michael Warner joke, and a Martin Short tome – actually it’s the other way around. Martin Short wrote, presumably, before he said on television, regarding his frequent collaborator Steve Martin, “It’s safe to say that Steve’s a genius. Not particularly true, but safe.” – which to me is the most important joke of this essay, so far.

In my Yale senior thesis on queer aesthetics I wrote “white queer theorist Michael Warner” knowing, since he was the Second Reader for my thesis, that he’d read that formulation. It felt important to say because it was true, but not safe. Because it’s safe to say he’s one of the intellectuals I’ve found most important to my present thinking. And to name his thinking as racialized felt important to say because of its influence: my own influence might help make an impact farther down the timeline: making more public my perspective as a kind of intellectual Hail Mary, which is its own epic-romantic methodology.

In *Publics and Counterpublics* Warner mentions how one of the major interventions of feminism was to render the private public. As in, to expose private abuses and exploitations in the home: to name childcare and housework as invisible and essential; labor; terror; to articulate coercion, rape, sexual abuse in marriages and in relations; to make public private economic exploitations and abuses, gendered employment discrimination ... those and more all being important punctures in the normativity veil, disseminated courageously into the public

consciousness through un-private articulation. All these now-public private oppressions and accreted microaggressions. The impetus historical repair; new futures, new presents.

Returning to what isn't safe to say, it's safe to say Nina Menkes is a genius, and true. Because implicit to genius is risk tolerance, and being able to articulate the present more articulately than one's peers. *A continuous present and using everything and beginning again.* It all makes perfect sense just as much as it makes no sense, like the perfect joke.

So is *Brainwashed* a joke? In the "you've got to be kidding" sense of the word. In the high-concept "it's a hundred-seasons-plus -long procedural docu-drama about gruesome violence intended for a wide audience" sense of the word. In the "you need to hear this" sense of the word. And so you tell it, but it isn't quite right, so you have to listen to the teller tell it, again and again, and again and again, until it's no longer private, or white, or systemic, but historical, and they get it, and we get it right.

I want to go "bwack bwak." Like a chicken. With my arms at my sides folded in triangles flapping in an imitation of wings. What are you afraid of? Who are you when different? "Bwack bwak?" "Bwack bwak!"

Kenneth Reveiz is a poet and screenwriter, author of MOPES: A Book of Poems in Three Acts. At Yale University they wrote on queer aesthetics. At CalArts they wrote on narrativity and ethnic studies. Their work is in service of racial and economic justice.