

**The Screen Behind the Screen:
A Penultimate Response to a Polemical Companion**

David Castillo and William Egginton

More than four years ago, as we began exchanging notes and drafting sections of what would eventually become *Medialogies: Reading Reality in the Age of Inflationary Media*; it went largely unnoticed by either of us that our examples tended to return with perhaps disproportionate frequency to a single buffoonish reality TV star. Now, on the humbling occasion of being permitted to engage with so many who have given us the greatest gift, the gift of a *critical reading*, we note with some (guilty) pleasure that the horror of last November has lent our volume a slightly prophetic tint, one that our colleagues have been only too happy to pick up and run with.

Our co-axial brothers Julio Baena and Bradley J. Nelson have given us a second gift, a gift within a gift, of inviting us to write:

the *penultimate* word providing an occasion for [us] to see [our] own framing techniques from a distance, deterritorializing them [or is it still us?] in order to create even more points of convergence and lines of flight in what we [they] hope will result in a veritable toolbox for measuring, assessing, even throwing wrenches into the inflationary medialogies we inhabit and that inhabit us [stet]. (4)

We see our contribution as an opportunity to reflect on where we are at this point in time in terms of the arguments of the book, and to distill the book's central tenets in relation to our troubled political present. We think that the election of Donald Trump on the back of fake news and his alt-right, alt-facts presidency ought to make us even more aware of the fact that without

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reality literacy and some recourse to a notion of *truth* (situational as this notion might be), our democracy is in imminent danger.

As Santiago Zabala has recently written,

The wall on the Mexican border, the ban on Muslims, and Trump's hostility toward the facts of climate change are not meant to create a "state of emergency." They are meant to create a condition without emergencies — where nothing can emerge from the overwhelming order and difference, change, and predefined others must be avoided or overwhelmed lest they disrupt the safety that order is supposed to represent. If this order reveals itself every day as more authoritarian by reducing civil liberties, it does so because it holds itself to be in possession of the essence of reality, defining truth for all human beings.

In possession of the essence of reality—this more than any other aspect of Trump's character (in the theatrical sense of the word) powers his ability to manipulate the media as effectively as he has. This is the central issue we would like to explore in this penultimate response: Trump's alt-factual world is not the expression of too little reality, but a symptom of reality entitlement, which is actually a key promise of the market society: the right to our own portable, ineffable reality.

This is why we must rush to clarify: if we are claiming that Trump is a symptom of today's medialogy, it is also clear that today's medialogy is vast and long and Trump, despite his claims to the contrary, is small and short(-handed). The medialogy does not explain Trump; Trump illustrates the medialogy to the extent that he navigates it so well. Hence, at the beginning of our first chapter, we quoted a movie-obsessed teenager in Wes Craven's 1996 *Scream* who, in discussing a recent murder, explains to a friend (and us) that "it's the millennium; motives are incidental" (Castillo & Egginton 9). We also cite, on the same page, an aide to President George W. Bush who lectures journalist Ron Suskind on the workings of the new (political) reality. According to Suskind, the aide (later identified as Karl Rove) explained "that guys like me were in 'what we call the reality-based community,' which he defined as people who 'believe that solutions emerge from your judicious study of discernible reality'" (quoted in Castillo & Egginton 9).

While our citation in the book ended here, Suskind's quotation goes on: "That's not the way the world really works anymore," [Rove] continued. "We are an empire now and when we act we create our reality. And while you're studying that reality—judiciously, as you will—we'll act again, creating other new realities, which you can study too, and that's how things will sort out."

We're history's actors . . . and you, all of you, will be left to study what we do'" (Suskind). The question then is, how surprised should we really be when we see Trump creating reality, one tweet at a time, or Sean Spicer and Kellyanne Conway consistently doubling down on "alternative facts"?

As Benjy Sarlin noted in yet another journalistic (Rove would think of it as anachronistic) "study of discernible reality": "The combination of a president with his own facts who also never backs down has created a feedback loop in which dubious statements raise new questions which then generate false responses which foster even more questions" (Sarlin). Those mainstream journalists who insist on inhabiting what Rove defined as the anachronistic "reality-based community" are still displaying their dismay and calling for the truth in defense of democracy. As Dan Rather put it in a March 4, 2017, Facebook post: "We cannot afford for our democratic institutions to be consumed by a bonfire of lies, innuendos, and conspiracy theories . . . We want the truth. We demand the truth. We can handle the truth" (Facebook).

For many of these journalists, searching for the truth would be a matter of finding information from "sources that can be trusted," as Chris Anderson wrote in his online piece "Combatting Misinformation in a World of Alternative Facts." But the "trusted sources" argument is not without potential pitfalls. This same argument was used by public officials in Imperial Spain, for example, to secure the truth of the world via recourse to the authority of the Church. Cervantes, of course, pokes fun of this kind of "authorized truth" with relentless frequency. He takes a different route in his fictional approach to the question of truth and reality, a route that could serve as an ethical guide in the midst of our own medialogy. We propose to work our way toward this Cervantine truth-horizon by acknowledging and responding to some of our interlocutors' critiques, who also place epistemological and ethical questions at the center of their commentary.

Childers examines the legendary figure of the Quixotic news-anchor in an informative and deeply perceptive essay, which traces the history of the reception of *Don Quixote* in the United States, from a wealth of countercultural adoptions in hard-hitting political satires to the toothless rehashing of the romantic version rehearsed in *Man of La Mancha* and "the empty, idealist Quixotism we find in the *Newsroom*" (101). Childers sees—as do we—a continuation of the caustic Cervantine legacy in the political satirists of our time: "Today, the satirists of our own time who practice the minor strategy continue the tradition of interrogating the journalistic construction of reality through humorous pseudo-documentary across many formats: Sasha Baron-Cohen, Jon Stewart, Stephen Colbert, John Oliver, Michael Moore, Key and Peele, and now, Alec Baldwin, Kate McKinnon, and Melissa McCarthy, among others I am forgetting or don't know about yet" (106). Thus, Childers offers a most concrete answer to our bumper sticker question WWCD: "What would

Cervantes do during the Trump presidency? The thing he did so very well, that gets so easily under the skin of the powerful: Mock on!” (106).

As a matter of fact, Stephen Colbert provided the perfect illustration of the possibilities of just this type of satirical pseudo-journalism when his right-wing pundit persona celebrated the reality-proof presidency of George W. Bush while charging against the mainstream media (with the stated exception of Fox News) for its stubborn attachment to “facts” and “reality” during his roasting of the president at the 2006 Press Corp Dinner:

I am appalled to be surrounded by the liberal media that is destroying America, with the exception of Fox News . . . Over the last five years you people were so good, over tax cuts, over WMD intelligence, the effect of global warming . . . We Americans didn't wanna know and you had the courtesy not to try to find out. Those were good times, as far as we knew. But, listen, let's review the rules. This is how it works: The president makes decisions; he is the decider. The press secretary announces those decisions, and you people of the press type those decisions down. . . . Put them through a spell check and go home. Get to know your family again. Make love to your wife. Write that novel you've got kicking around in your head; you know, the one about the intrepid Washington reporter with the courage to stand up to the administration; you know, fiction! (Colbert)

Here we come full circle; we are again before the Quixotic character of the heroic news-anchor that Childers talks about, but now we see things through a distinctively Cervantine lens that makes the frame visible (and laughable). In her engaging essay, Rachel Schmidt also focuses on the power of Cervantine irony as “a weapon of choice in a mediatized world” (145). She makes the connection between the Cervantes (authorial) character and the Colbert (comedic) character while making a point about *Don Quixote*'s world as the breeding ground of the modern novel, “an ironic, fictional world, defined as a space spun by the tensions between Law, liberty, desire and transgression” (145). Importantly, Schmidt suggests that the effectiveness of Cervantine irony as a weapon of ideological criticism, not just in his world but in ours as well, can be explained by the continuity of the predatory and exploitative language of masculinity. Accordingly, she encourages us to make use of Cervantes's irony to expose the “mediatized language of masculinity [that] maims and kills male and female bodies [and] allows for the proud and the powerful to prey, sexually and otherwise, on the vulnerable, and then boast of it” (119–120).

Barbara Simerka is also among the early modern specialists who have

postulated lines of continuity between the works of the Spanish Golden Age, including those of Miguel de Cervantes, Lope de Vega, and Gracián, and the self-conscious products of our own culture industry, including films like Charlie Kaufman's *Being John Malkovich* and *Adaptation*, Woody Allen's *Purple Rose* and *Melinda and Melinda*, and Marc Forster's *Stranger than Fiction*, TV series *House of Cards* and *Orange Is the New Black*, and popular satirical programs like Saturday Night Live and now the John Oliver show. In her essay in this volume, Simerka perceptively notes that President Trump and his spokespeople "have refuted the need for evidence if a statement reflects 'a long held belief,'" while agreeing with us that in the face of Trumpism and in the context of our medialogy, it is "not enough to double down on truth as if the ills of today's medialogy were an effect of relativism" (Simerka 76). Instead, she proposes incorporating works of comedy and satire in our pedagogical practices to promote reality literacy: "In order to circulate the insights and methodologies in *Medialogies* to a wider audience, comparative studies of literary satire and contemporary television humor could provide a valid (and entertaining) vehicle for a new level of pan-historic reality literacy" (71).

In his rich contribution, Luis Avilés concedes that this kind of historical traversing "allows for highly productive parallels between the baroque and contemporary manifestations of the media," but he also argues that, in some instances, "this fluidity may generate problems" (25). As an example, he questions our pairing of Guy Debord's theory of spectatorship with José Antonio Maravall's conceptualization of the Baroque as a guided mass-culture while offering Jacques Rancière's notion of the "emancipated spectator" as a possible corrective, or at least an opportunity for further reflection in connection with our discussion of the baroque *minor strategy*:

For example, can the *comedia's* "massive" deployment be compared to the massive media infrastructure in post-capitalist society? Were audiences so passive as to be manipulated so easily by dramatic performances during the baroque period? Can we think of instances in which audiences reacted critically to the imposition of specific modes of being? . . . I believe that Castillo and Egginton are aware of some of these issues. They address this impression of a dominating cultural formation by expanding on the concept of "minor strategy" in the last section of the book (Part 4, chapter 18). This strategy is capable of revealing the "frames" that construct the strategies imposed by the elites, showing in the Baroque era that appearances only lead to other appearances without ever reaching the solidity of truth. They speak of warping, deflecting and distorting these frames by lingering within the illusions. But can we think of "minor strategies" as capable of generating distortions outside illusion and, in

fact, able to propose alternate distributions, as Rancière seems to be postulating? This could be a very fruitful question for further reflection. (26)

Palmar Álvarez-Blanco agrees that we have much to learn from the works of our early modern ancestors (Cervantes, Lope de Vega, Gracián, Velázquez, and the anonymous author of *Lazarillo*), but also that we should look back “to our pre-modern and ancient predecessors: to Heraclitus, Apuleius, and the Sufis” (52). She proposes supplementing our theorization, and generally speaking our horizon of commentary, with the findings of Spanish philosopher García Calvo. Thus, she sets up what we take to be a fruitful dialogue between *Medialogies* and García Calvo’s *Análisis de la sociedad del bienestar* (The Culture of Well-Being). In essence, while our book would allow for transhistorical insights into the workings of the early modern and postmodern medialogies along the lines of García Calvo’s own explorations, his theorization of *the social* might just provide some answers to what Álvarez-Blanco sees as crucial questions:

As the authors of this book remind us, what is revolutionary about this moment is not what is told but the *way* in which it is told . . . But is it just a question of changing the optics? Does the understanding of an order based on asymmetric relations change our position and the way we interact within this social contract? (50)

David Souto Alcalde cautions more sternly against interpretive models that downplay the fundamental differences between the products of the first and second medialogies. He identifies a central omission in our history: “the republican revolutions that materialized between the first and second medialogy, as well as the crisis of republic we seem unavoidably headed for once we were seized by the second medialogy” (76). As he goes on to argue,

The fundamental difference between these two medialogies falls by the wayside if we do not keep in mind an epistemological and ethical rupture of astronomical consequences. During the first medialogy, the medium and the artifice (inseparable elements), once they become known, are active instruments in the production of an immanence that establishes the subject as a radically new and autonomous entity. However, in the second medialogy the artifice transforms into artificial intelligence, becoming a platform of passivity and the production of virtual transcendence where

artifice as an instrument of action disappears. (76)

It is vital to point out here that we do not argue for a fundamental alignment of the medialogies of the first and second age, but rather for an inverted structure, in which the second frames the reality concept originally created by the first. In this way, we can see how something like republicanism is in fact explained rather than ignored by our schema.

In our formulation, the first medialogy is characterized by things (printed words, bodies on a stage) being treated as copies of absent things; in the second, those copies themselves are treated as things, ultimate bits of reality with no further referential value. Republicanism is not a revolution but an evolution from the first medialogy. Once the subject (*Untertan*) has been conceived as citizen, the stage is set for republicanism, but the citizen's body still represents an ideal, equal, though absent citizen. Fundamentalisms of the kinds we identify throughout the book are symptoms of the inversion of that medialogical framing. Bodies cease to refer to ideal/absent units of democratic exchange and instead solidify as non-referring substantial things, each supported entirely by its own private fundamentalism.

This is why Trumpism rears yet again its fearsome visage in the chapter on sex, money, and artificial intelligence. Trumpism, seen as a symptom of the second medialogy, acquires its power precisely as a reflection of how bodies no longer accrue value as indices of a universal and abstract citizenry, but only as instances of a particular ethnic, religious, and racial substance. Trump more than any other figure rose to power because he tapped into what the medialogy was implicitly saying about republicanism—that it is a sham. This is the point of Richard Rorty's now famous "something will crack" passage from his 1998 book *Achieving Our Country*, in which he wrote,

At that point, something will crack. The nonsuburban electorate will decide that the system has failed and start looking around for a strongman to vote for—someone willing to assure them that, once he is elected, the smug bureaucrats, tricky lawyers, overpaid bond salesmen, and postmodernist professors will no longer be calling the shots . . . One thing that is very likely to happen is that the gains made in the past 40 years by black and brown Americans, and by homosexuals, will be wiped out. Jocular contempt for women will come back into fashion . . . All the resentment which badly educated Americans feel about having their manners dictated to them by college graduates will find an outlet. (89–90)

The strongman in the second age calls the bluffs of the first: what counts is power; money is coterminous with the wealth it performs; woman is but the analogue of a powerful man's desire, requiring no autonomous desire of her own, just as artifice can be intelligent precisely because intelligence is a pure quantity without reference ("I have a very good brain"), rather than a point of ineluctable opacity.

Alberto Moreiras is particularly concerned with this question of the compacting of reality, which he calls a loss. As he notes in his perspicacious commentary:

The fundamental question for *Medialogies*, in my opinion, a question that *Medialogies* is by no means blind to, but may remain ultimately uncertain about, is whether such loss of reality—a loss of reality paradoxically understood as a total assumption of reality within the frame of the second medialogy—can be compensated or countervailed by the minor-baroque strategy of parergonal reading, by the strategy of interrogating the frame, or of reading those who have interrogated the frame. (127)

Indeed, several of our fellow attendees of this virtual symposium commented on our ethical call, its efficacy, or lack thereof. As we have seen, Avilés and Álvarez-Blanco echo in their own engaging essays, Moreiras's worry that "the minor baroque is a strategy for reading, not a proposal for a new creation" (124). As Avilés writes, "it may be that the efforts to reveal what is hidden and the humanistic work on media literacy may not be enough, politically speaking" (27). Moreiras further remarks that within the world of the neo-liberal university we, as university professors, "must now think of [our]selves as appropriately relegated to the woodwork" (126).

Yet, we maintain a key continuity between reading and creation, and call for professors, along with artists, intellectuals, and activists to come, to the best of their ability, out of the (frame) woodwork. Hence our WWCD motto (What Would Cervantes Do?). Now more fully or officially ensconced in the world of Trump, we insist it is time to double down on this ethical call. A vital pivot for understanding how Cervantinism can be an answer to Trumpism, and yes, how professors can come out of the (frame) woodwork, and how reading (interpreting) is also creating, is that which appears between lies and fiction. So, let's lay down a track: to read-create requires not distinguishing lies from facts, or even facts from alternative facts, but distinguishing lies from fiction.¹

A lie is a false statement that the speaker knows is false, and with which he or she intends to deceive the receiver. Fiction, in contrast, is made of false statements that the receiver knows are false but listens to or reads anyway for

the sake of entertainment. But fiction is also much more than that. For us to be satisfied and moved by fiction, we expect it to engage our emotions in ways that feel real without being real. We need to believe in the characters we are encountering at the same time that we know what we are experiencing is not happening, at least not now, and at least not to us.

When a politician lies—for instance by repeatedly asserting that illegal immigrants are flooding across our southern border when net immigration from Mexico has been zero for some time, or that it would be beneficial, feasible, or constitutional to stop Muslims from entering the United States—he is empowering his lies with some of the belief that makes fiction so effective, but without nuancing them with the knowledge of their falsity that protects us from fiction’s allures.

Cervantes wrote fiction at a time when institutions like the Hapsburg monarchy and the Inquisition were propagating beliefs that helped buttress the crumbling foundations of their power. These institutions fed an over-taxed peasantry the belief that their “old Christian blood” made them superior to neighbors of Jewish descent. Neighbors with Muslim origins were eventually exiled en-masse in an act of almost apocalyptic scapegoating for Spain’s financial and political woes.

Weaned by personal disappointment from his own beliefs, Cervantes put these sorts of big, public lies into his books along with characters who believed in them, and then suffered the consequences. The result was an imaginary world populated by characters who feel more real to us because they share our blindness and perplexity. But that world also helped train a slowly growing reading public in the subtle art of believing something while knowing it not to be true. By making characters his readers could believe in, he created an art form that helps clarify not what they should believe but what they were being asked to believe and how their own desires were invested in the required show of belief.

Today’s political class benefits from a public that has unlearned that art. Their lies have all the appeal of fiction, all the thrall of religious belief, without the clarifying knowledge of their falsity. Citizens treat politicians like beloved characters from a novel: Donald Trump is “real” because “he says what everyone is thinking”; he’s “authentic.” In other words, Mr. Trump is a well-wrought fictional character that his public has forgotten is fictional. This is the most treacherous and effective kind of lie.

In *Medialogies*, we quote the philosopher and mathematician Gottfried Leibniz’s assertion that if someone “reads more imaginative novels and listens to more strange stories, then he can be said to have more knowledge than the other, even if there is not a word of truth in all that he has seen and heard . . . provided that he takes nothing in these stories and pictures to be true which really is not so” (355). Leibniz was writing from a vantage built on the les-

sons of Cervantes's fiction. Our point is that fiction, art, philosophy have the power to infect our beliefs with the self-knowledge that keeps us from being enthralled by them, and with the self-difference that deflates the power of a rhetoric predicated on collapsing artifice and thing.

Thus, what we could call a kind of "fictional awareness" lies at the heart of our approach to media and is key to understanding how deploying the minor strategy is essential for liberation politics. Let's take the problem of the so-called bubble filter and its effect on contemporary political discourse. Given that social media sites and search engines are built on algorithms that mathematically reproduce and reinforce well-documented selection biases and socio-demographic sorting, how do we ensure some modicum of objective knowledge about the world?

Our answer lies in the importance that we grant to certain artistic and literary practices, specifically, in the ability of artists and writers (and perhaps philosophers, historians, in other words, humanists) to inculcate fictional awareness. Fictional awareness, a reading skill honed by engaging in representations that reframe and problematize how the media frame and position reality, primes us to be critical receptors of media in general, and to be attuned to how our own identities and desires are implicated in mediatic representations. The research indicates that, while enthrallment to highly biased information sources is a trans-political phenomenon, its incidence is notably higher on the right wing of the spectrum. While there is no doubt that left-fundamentalism is real, our thesis would be that it is mitigated by a closer alignment between left-politics and the inculcation of the fictional awareness we are describing.

To put it more clearly, irony is somewhat more abundant across the left spectrum, even in commercially popular and available forms. Let's take the example of SNL, clearly both an openly anti-Trump platform and a commercially successful, mainstream media presence. In its first episode after the election, following the famous cold open in which Kate McKinnon in her character as Hillary Clinton sat at a piano and sang the recently deceased Leonard Cohen's ballad "Hallelujah," the team presented a sketch skewering Brooklyn's liberal bubble. "The bubble is a planned community of like-minded free thinkers . . . and no one else," as one liberal says in the skit. "We don't see color here, but we celebrate it," another happily spouts, as his black counterpart looks on skeptically (SNL Season 42, 2016). We don't claim it is easy to burst the bubble, but maintaining a balancing and relativizing awareness of how one's own take on the world is actively influenced by the media's framing function has considerable liberating potential.

One way of summarizing our argument on this point is that in today's inflationary age, the main danger is how our desires can be ensnared by discourses of authenticity, with the caveat that the craving for authenticity was itself already a dominant feature of our culture since Romanticism. The dif-

ference we see between Romantic authenticity and our version in the second age of inflationary media is best captured by the contrast between two literary images. The hero of Goethe's 1774 international bestseller, *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, is credited with being one of the key inspirational texts of the German Romantic movement that started to surge in the decades after its appearance. The suicide of the title character when faced with the impossibility of fulfilling his desire was seen as the acme of an authentic commitment to one's self, which paradoxically led to a rash of copycat suicides and the book's subsequent banishing in several European states.

We can contrast Goethe's young character with that of Pedro Almodóvar's brilliant transvestite La Agrado in his sublime *Todo sobre mi madre*, who claims, in an impromptu monologue on stage, that a woman is more authentic the more she resembles what she has dreamt for herself. By putting these words in the mouth of a flamboyant transvestite, Almodóvar is in essence redefining authenticity for the second inflationary age. Rather than a copy's deep connection to its core but ineffable self, the copy—the performance, the stage persona—has taken on the status of an ultimate thing, with no further reference required.

To illustrate this point, let's turn back to the argument of one of our last chapters, "Empire of Solitude." There we used Mark Granovetter's thesis in pointing out that network relationships established in the virtual sphere may lower thresholds when it comes to committing violent acts. Paradoxically, however, our argument is not that digital relationships themselves lower the threshold to committing violent acts, but that living online has contributed to a kind of wide-spread digital isolation, an empire of solitude, out of which islands of fundamentalist doctrine more easily emerge. Fundamentalism has the effect of lowering the threshold to violence, because once you experience yourself as having access to a singular, unmitigated truth that the majority of those around you deny you are less likely to hold their lives as having the same value as your beliefs.

In the current medialogy, as in the prior one, the media can function both in a regulatory way, helping organize society hierarchically, and in a deterritorializing way, undermining hierarchical structures by allowing for horizontal connectivity and resistance. What is important to note, however, is that horizontal connectivity isn't necessarily or automatically beneficial or liberating. What counts in the new medialogy is the *strategy*. Fundamentalist islands of identity, like fake news sites and their support of the new alt-fact presidency, all depend on the major strategy. They posit the ultimate, unshakeable reality of their worldview. The minor strategy is always self-reflexive and self-ironizing, and is hence both a defense against top-down or "vertical" deployments of media as well as against the kind of internecine violence that is sustained and encouraged by digital isolation.

By putting pressure on the frame, puncturing the bubble, or even “shattering the box,” as Baena and Nelson remind us in a reference to Castillo’s reading of “El Coloquio” in *Baroque Horrors*, the minor strategy teaches us to reflect on the conditions of visibility and invisibility we buy into, invest in, and live by. Thus, while we understand Mowitt’s objections about our privileging of sight over hearing (we could add other senses here), and while we would certainly welcome the types of correctives he seems to prescribe, we would also note with the editors of the present volume that the medialogies we examine in our book are notoriously ocular-centric. If we can make use of the illustration that Mowitt himself provides, while there’s no question that the presence of the musician playing “air rabel” on the Cervantine *Stage of Wonders* provides an important point of pressure (and we say us much), we can hardly overstate the centrality of the visual in a meta-theatrical artifice that exposes the social contract as a matter of acting out “our belief” (the belief we are required to hold) in the very conditions of visibility we live by: “no one can see the wonders that are shown in it if they belong to a tainted race” (Castillo & Egginton 31).

We would make the point (with Cervantes) that if we want to fight the biases that feed into the ocular-centrism of our medialogy, we could do worse than to expose the arbitrary nature of the visual frames that define our reality. In a sense, this is what Foster does in his astute study of photography in violent, repressive, totalitarian contexts. By insisting on the impossibility of the “money shot,” Foster erodes our confidence in the promise of photography to capture reality. Instead he focuses the lens on the vanishing act of mediation. As Baena and Nelson put it, “the apparent promise of photography to deliver a more immediate view or experience of reality is undone by all the modes—technological, social, political, legal, aesthetic, etc.—that mediate the production, accumulation, circulation, and interpretation of photographs” (6).

Today, digital technologies raise the stakes when they promise us our own personal alt-reality: the world the way we want it. We can take total editing control of our reality by erasing objects from our field of vision (diminished reality) or by adding desired elements (augmented reality). The self-identified “world-wide first real-time Diminished Reality system” ends their promotional video with the words “your imagination is the limit; change the world the way you want now, in real-time” (Herling). In the book, we cite Morozov’s March 2, 2013, article, “The Perils of Perfection,” published in the Sunday Review section of the *New York Times*. If we can add a bit more text to our quote here:

Last year the futurist Ayesha Khanna even described smart contact lenses that could make homeless people disappear from view, ‘enhancing our basic sense’ and, undoubtedly, making our lives so much more enjoyable. In a way, this does solve the problem of homelessness—unless, of course, you happen

to be a homeless person. In that case, Silicon Valley would hand you a pair of overpriced glasses that would make the streets feel like home. To quote an ad for Samsung's fancy TV sets, "Reality. What a letdown." (Morozov)

We subsequently argue that the contact lenses that could make the homeless disappear would be redundant, strictly speaking, insofar as homeless people are already invisible in our media-framed reality, as are so many other "unpleasant" or "inconvenient" realities. As for examples of augmented reality, we could cite Spicer's presidential inauguration crowds or Conway's alternative facts, but as long as we are on the subject of photography, how about the selfie of the Syrian refugee that has been repeatedly presented in Facebook as the face of the perpetrator of multiple terrorist attacks? The Syrian refugee in question—his name is Anas Modamani—has literally become an alternative fact (DW News).

So where would Cervantes go today in search for truth in our age of inflationary media and reality-entitlement? If his *Retablo de las maravillas* is any indication, he would surely tell us that the truth is to be found among the victims of our own stages of wonders: among the pieces of the world that are routinely removed from view by those diminished versions of reality that shield us from what we don't want to see, say, the homeless; and also, among the victims of our augmented reality, say, the Syrian refugee who has become an alternative fact whose sole purpose is to justify our own fears and to allow us to double down on our chosen reality.

Notes

1. The next few pages draw from an Op-Ed one of us published almost a year prior to Trump's election. See Egginton.

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