This combination, together with its intersubjective character, makes humor coconstitutive of "common sense." Humor and laughter are, consequently, prime conduits for both prejudice and anti-racism. The question that remains is "among whom?" If the audience is constituted as a network of individuals linked intersubjectively in their construction of racial discourses, is racial humor, therefore, necessarily segregated? Richards's performance before a racially mixed audience was a case in point: Was the laughter empathetic, or was it racist?

The question haunted me at the March 2023 opening of Black playwright Aurin Squire's *Defacing Michael Jackson* in Miami Beach. The play's opening night featured an all-Black cast performing before an all-white audience of elected officials and wealthy donors. As they laughed at Black character stereotypes from the 1980s and, for instance, their use of the N-word, could theirs be a racist laughter? It became obvious to me that the inherent ambiguity among person, character, and caricature was not necessarily resolved dialogically and intersubjectively in racially heterogeneous contexts, and much less in a white supremacist society. Perhaps laughter is always a return of the repressed, to invoke Freud. And so, as many Black comedians have shown after #BLM, "to be real" is a commitment to transform tears not only into laughter but also into anti-racist resistance. Black humor's challenge is to maintain this commitment to anti-racism while also bringing non-Black audiences into its fold.

To Be Real is a book to think with for anthropologists of contemporary culture, race, performance, and, especially for all those interested in ethnography as a genre. Both ethnography and humor are discourses constructed intersubjectively. Both need to balance authenticity (an expected recognition of what Blackness represents) with sincerity (the "I was there" of ethnographic writing), even if that sincerity challenges the stereotype. *To Be Real* is very recommendable for undergraduate and graduate seminars on ethnography, racialization, and contemporary US culture.

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The small matter of suing Chevron

By Suzana Sawyer. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2022. 416 pp.

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How did a major oil company manage to evade paying a $9 billion indemnification in Ecuador after its operations polluted the Amazon rain forest, impacting the lives and livelihoods of 30,000 indigenous people and *campesinos*? This question is at the center of Suzana Sawyer's *The Small Matter of Suing Chevron*. The long-running and high-profile legal proceedings spanned three decades and as many continents. Already well known for her work on political mobilization against neoliberalism and multinational oil companies in Ecuador, Sawyer examines how truth claims were fashioned by both sides in the lawsuit against Chevron and proposes a novel framework for interpreting these interactions, one inspired by analytical chemistry.

Consider the risks to persons exposed to crude oil, long recognized as a threat to human health and a probable carcinogen. Petroleum contains thousands of hydrocarbon compounds, only a small number of which have been studied to determine their potential toxicity. Any given sample of oil consists of only a tiny fraction of the total number of chemicals; moreover, its composition changes over time as some of the chemicals evaporate or dissolve in groundwater. Chevron's predecessor, Texaco, operated oil wells in Ecuador from 1972 to 1992, discharging a billion gallons of wastewater contaminated by petroleum, mineral salts, and heavy metals into nearly 900 unlined and open pits, some the size of swimming pools, which drained into local waterways. Yet expert witnesses for the defense argued that the samples they collected and analyzed did not pose a proven risk to public health. To explain how this was possible, Sawyer goes molecular, introducing her readers to the workings of ambiguity and indeterminacy at the atomic level.

For Sawyer, insights from chemistry provide not only a pathway to assess the oil spill, but also a new analytic through which one can examine the entirety of the legal proceedings. She credits this perspective for enabling her to shift "away from a passion to denounce" (p. 11) and "the urgency to give voice to the forgotten" (p. 11), while acknowledging the complicity between consumers and an industry they are quick to condemn. Sawyer argues that it is important to respect the *complexity* of both chemical interactions and the legal proceedings, including their inconsistencies and contradictions. Another key concept for Sawyer is *valence*, which she explains with reference to how the capacity to connect, in the sense of forming relations, is contingent on the surrounding milieu, which she applies to both the analysis of how chemicals combine to form new compounds and how truth claims are produced within tightly constrained legal contexts.

Sawyer's use of chemical insights as a method works particularly well in assessing competing accounts of the oil spill presented by experts, although it may have led Sawyer to see greater equivalence in the data assembled by the two parties than is warranted, rather than recognizing one side's efforts to make evidence of the oil spill disappear while the other sought to keep it in view (Kirsch, 2020). Sawyer also introduces her own experience of exposure to crude oil, including how its pungent fumes cause one's muscles to contract, eyes to water, and breath to shorten. When the scientific presentation of results proved inconclusive, Sawyer argues, exposure to crude oil played an important evidentiary role in the case after several months of field inspections conducted by competing teams

of lawyers, scientific experts, and officers of the court. Sawyer supplements her personal experiences with compelling excerpts from depositions about firsthand exposure to crude oil and the resulting consequences for human health. While this strategy helps the reader understand the embodied experience of exposure and its long-term impacts, I wondered how these narratives may have been shaped by the Latin American genre of *testimonio* or other ways that survivors of traumatic experiences learn to narrate their experiences to various publics—something the author does not address.

The foray into chemistry seems less critical to other components of Sawyer's analysis, including her brilliant rereading of the infamous cross-examination of Ecuadoran judge Nicolás Zambrano in the US courts as part of a proceeding under the Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations (RICO) Act that targeted the lawyers for the plaintiffs and concluded that the judgment against Chevron had been fraudulently obtained and was therefore unenforceable. Lawyers for Chevron challenged Zambrano to identify claims he had made on specific pages of his sprawling, single-spaced, 188-page decision, which was written as a single paragraph. When he was unable to define a crucial acronym or recall a key finding, lawyers for Chevron seized on this failure to argue that he could not have written the judgment and that the ruling was therefore fraudulent. But Sawyer explains how Zambrano's responses to the questions he was asked in court were more than adequate, demonstrating both his knowledge of the case and competence to write the judgment. She also shows how Zambrano's decision transcended the ordinary constraints of the law in finding that Chevron remained liable for its environmental impacts in contrast to the company's argument that it had already discharged its obligations during a state-supervised clean-up shortly after the original case was filed. The company's position, however, was later endorsed by the international arbitrators appointed to decide whether the judgment violated a bilateral investment treaty between the US and Ecuador, which blocked the country's ability to enforce the $9 billion verdict against Chevron's assets held outside Ecuador.

In mobilizing chemistry as an analytical method, Sawyer positions herself as an observer of complexity rather than a partisan respondent to a controversial environmental tort. After reading this powerfully written and thought-provoking account of one of late industrialism's iconic legal contests, I have only one reservation: that the author's focus on chemistry is less helpful for imagining alternative outcomes in other efforts to hold multinational corporations accountable for their social and environmental impacts. Nonetheless, this book is a valuable addition to work at the critical intersection of law and environmental studies, and essential reading for scholars concerned with energy politics in Latin America. It is best suited for upper-level undergraduate courses and graduate seminars.

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Activist affordances: How disabled people improvise more accessible worlds

By Arseli Dokumacı. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2023. 336 pp.

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In *Activist Affordances: How Disabled People Improvise More Accessible Worlds*, Arseli Dokumacı places disability at the center of affordance theory, along with chronic illness, pain, and disease. The concept of affordances, originally developed by ecological psychologist James Gibson, refers to "possibilities of action whose actualization depends upon the complementarity between the organism and its environment" (p. 35). Affordances are neither "out there" in the world nor located in the "eye of the beholder"; they emerge through interrelations. Dokumacı builds this fiercely interdisciplinary text around a critical limitation of affordance theory: it takes for granted the ease with which affordances get actualized. *Activist* affordances recognize and affirm "the micro, ephemeral, and performative acts/arts of world-making with which disabled people must literally *make up*, and at the same time, *make up for*, whatever affordances fail to readily materialize in their environments and their remoteness to perception" (p. 104). Dokumacı's concept of *shrinkage* is key here. Shrinkage captures how disability diminishes affordances over time and in ways specific to potentially dissimilar conditions of impairment. Critically, however, shrinkage also sparks the creativity and improvisation that define activist affordances as such. Each instance of shrinkage "may require its own politics" (p. 69), an argument with theoretical and practical implications.

Taking readers on an autoethnographically grounded, multisited journey through Turkey (Denizli, Istanbul), the US (Florida), Canada (Montreal), Denmark (Copenhagen), and the UK (London, North Wales), Dokumacı concentrates on the activist affordances forged by people living with rheumatoid arthritis. This focus emerges from their own lived experience and because people with rheumatoid arthritis are "nonparadigmatic people with disability" (p. 12). In popular imagination, in disability studies, and in activist circles, rheumatoid arthritis is not typically linked to disability, and some of Dokumacı's interlocutors either decline to claim disability as an identity