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## Introduction

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Theory & Event, Volume 20, Number 2, April 2017, pp. 293-295 (Article)

Published by Johns Hopkins University Press



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# Introduction

James Martel and Kennan Ferguson

In 2017, common sense is up for grabs. In the political absence of a generally-agreed-upon commons, in the sociologically weighted notion of the sensorium, and in our aesthetically post-Kantian ideas of the *sensus communis*, the idea that a unifying notion of collective judgment can bring us together seems overtly idealistic and wrong.

Ella Myers' essay on "The Non-Scandal of American Oligarchy," the first in this issue, rethinks the notion of oligarchy as it relates to an imagined common sense. How can a society that descriptively decides that the rich rule (whether that is celebrated or criticized) react? Can the outrage to oppose such a system even be gathered and directed in the first place?

Leonard Feldman asks a similar question regarding the normalization of police violence in contemporary culture. By cultivating and reinforcing ambiguity along juridical lines, Feldman argues, political structures which have the ostensible ability to delimit and even halt these displays of naked power instead participate in its obscuration. Justifications along temporal and spatial layers allow grey zones of legal immunity emerge to rationalize and allow police violence, resulting in visible actions which would otherwise shock the commons which the police are sworn to protect.

Like Feldman, Elva F. Orozco Mendoza pays attention to the visibility of the commons in her essay "Femicide and the Funeralization of the City"; for her, the event of the protest brings into being a form of common sense opposed to the femicide widespread in Ciudad Juárez. What she terms the "funeralization of the city" is the bringing-into-being of a space of remembrance and continued political objection. Protest objects, she shows, enact a form of thing-power which sacralizes the locationality of murdered and disappeared women, bringing the state's failure to protect into collective space.

Collective affects provide the location of politics for Paul Earlie. From Derrida, Earlie investigates the dynamics of desire and anxiety, both libidinal connections to an outside commons. The technics and technology of the binding of self to non-self always result in affective overdetermination, where the promise of otherness always binds to the threat of the dissolution of those bonds. Derrida's turn to politics, and his engagement with friendship and autoimmunity, emerges as (in the post-9/11 world) the psychic commons is threatened.

In "Speed the Collapse? Using Marx to Rethink the Politics of Accelerationism," Michael Laurence takes issue with accelerationism, the idea that hastening a collapse of current economic and political practices will lead to a revolutionary outcome. For Laurence, this idea misses the distinction between the effects of economic disintegration and of critique, the latter of which is necessary for the emergence of a real alternative. In contrast to accelerationists like Mark Fisher, Alex Williams and Nick Srnicek, who develop it from Marx, Laurence returns to Marx to argue against them. He argues that their reading of Marx does not account for the way that capitalism is not just an economic system but a form of subjectivity, one that also must be overcome via critique in order to ensure that the collapse of capitalism doesn't lead to more of the same. Here, the common sense itself must be accounted for and produced as a part of larger forms of resistance.

In "The New Realism: Seeking Alternatives to Postmodern Pessimism," Todd Hoffman similarly argues against a move towards pessimism and despair in the resilience of capitalism. Rather than try to deny the idea of "capitalist realism," Hoffman seeks to complicate this idea with recourse to Deleuzian models of realism. Manuel DeLanda and Benjamin Lozano allow Hoffman to argue that, rather than trying to deny the "realism" of capitalism, one can approach this reality as a set of assemblages, an ontology that is not a destiny but an opportunity for radical change (and on its own terms). This novel approach to common sense shows that even when that sense seems to be self-defeating and pessimistic, it contains the grounds for its own self-transformation.

Megan Ruxton's essay looks at the phenomenon of "GamerGate," a concerted and ongoing attack on women through the internet and social media and, in particular, video games. She links the women who have been submitted to this treatment to Agamben's notion of *Homo Sacer*, the subject of the ban, who can be killed but not sacrificed. This essay rethinks the role of women beyond the boundaries of the nation state and into the realm of cyberspace where the *femina sacra* is the subject of great violence without having the same status or meaning as the men who dominate the videogaming world, the logical and unrealized gender extension of Agamben's work.

Willy Blomme's "Two Portraits of Land in the Climate Crisis," looks at two "land formations" – the "Ocean Flower," a floating resort in the Maldives, and Nowhereisland, an art project in the Norwegian arctic – to dramatize and illuminate the effects of climate change. In both cases, the destabilization of the land itself is matched by a destabilization in the way these places are physically and socially organized. Blomme argues that the very idea of common belonging, one of the most basic features of human self-organization, is put into question,

is what we need to rethink in a new world of rising oceans and disappearing lands.

Adam Kotsko argues that neoliberalism as a doctrine matches and reflects the political theology of the devil. “The devil” indicates a mode of freedom that is itself illustrative of the situation of the neoliberal subject. Both figures are free from the expected norms of collective expectation, but their freedom is not absolute. Like the devil in the face of God’s power, the neoliberal subject is free enough to be blamed for her failure, but not free enough to actually subvert and overthrow the economic order that entraps her. Here, common sense is revealed to be not a community of judgment but an order within which our choices are far more determined than we normally realize.

In our symposium “Brown v. Bored of Accumulation,” three theorists engage Wendy Brown’s recent book *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism’s Stealth Revolution*. Annie McClanahan, Patchen Markell, and Antonio Y. Vázquez-Arroyo critique and correct Brown’s analysis of neoliberal rationality as the enemy of *homo politicus*, the mode of human being concerned with the common good. Though each finds much to admire in Brown’s analytic, agreeing with its criticisms of accumulation, its unearthing of “human capital,” and its repoliticization of economic logic, these are critical engagements. Even as the authors themselves disagree about Brown’s form and goal (is this a manifesto? what is neoliberalism’s relationship to liberalism?), each sees hesitations, mistakes, and misapplied hope in her analysis and path forward. The interactions of these three authors enact the importance of this critical book from one of the vital thinkers of our time. *Theory & Event* thanks Dilip Gaonkar, who organized earlier versions of these engagements at Northwestern University through The Center for Global Culture and the Critical Theory Cluster.

Issue 20.2 concludes with four reviews: (1) Eugene Holland reviews Romand Coles’ *Visionary Pragmatism: Radical & Ecological Democracy in Neoliberal Times*; (2) Thomas Biebricher, Ira Allen and George Ciccariello-Maher review Anita Chari’s *A Political Economy of the Senses: Neoliberalism, Reification, Critique*; (3) Jimmy Casas Klausen (edited by James Martel) reviews Michael J. Shapiro’s *War Crimes, Atrocity, and Justice*; and, (4) Kevin Bruyneel reviews Iyko Day’s *Alien Capital: Asian Racialization and the Logic of Settler Colonial Capitalism*.