

Introduction

Kennan Ferguson, James Martel

Theory & Event, Volume 21, Number 2, April 2018, pp. 333-335 (Article)



Published by Johns Hopkins University Press

DOI: https://doi.org/10.1353/tae.2018.0015

→ For additional information about this article

https://muse.jhu.edu/article/690522

Introduction

Kennan Ferguson and James Martel

The essays that begin Issue 21.2 all involve the logic of assemblage and juxtaposition, joining unlike to unlike in ways that both resist and affirm the power of globalized capitalism. Beginning with a reading of Trump through the lens of an earlier discussion of Ronald Reagan, we move to a juxtaposition of Nietzsche and the Haitian revolution, as well as some reflections on how drones and the sale of human body parts both scramble existing spatial orientations and create new affective (and supremely violent) spaces. We end with looking at the way that bodily maps are transposed into economic ones and the way that economics is itself restructured by algorithms. In these six essays, we see the ceaseless churn of various models of control and resistance; modalities change, but subjugation remains. Tracking the constant as well as the contingent, these essays help to orient us in an ever-strange, but still recognizably capitalist, world.

Alyson Cole and George Shulman's essay on Trump revisits the work of Michael Rogin, a critical thinker and theorist who became well known for his analysis of Ronald Reagan at the emergence of right wing revanchism and neoliberalism. Though Rogin's commentary on Reagan remains historically distant from Trump, both Presidents provoked widespread astonishment and consternation. The gap in explanatory language, Cole and Shulman argue, point to differences in causes and solutions. Rogin saw a grave threat posed by the far right in the United States from this country's inception to the present. He excoriated the accommodationist liberal response (e.g., the "end of history" where liberalism simply had to mop up its former opposition). Rogin's foresight about the continuities and future of the right, Cole and Shulman show, make him an unlikely but useful guide to the contemporary blinders of liberal blandishments about power and authority in the United States.

Andrés Henao-Castro addresses a different revolutionary sensibility, revisiting Susan Buck-Morss' Hegel and the Haitian revolution with a bold reading of that same revolution with the work of Nietzsche. Rather than argue (as Buck-Morss does concerning Hegel) that Nietzsche had Haiti in mind during his writing, Henao-Castro stages a kind of dramaturgical intervention, reading the Haitian revolution through the lens of Nietzsche's writings. In this way, events

such as the slave revolt, the question of debt, and the role of fate, destiny and tragedy, are revisited through the intersection between this historical event and Nietzsche's own historical imagination. Treating the revolution as a bit of dramaturgy does not reduce its value. Instead, it unleashes our reading of the revolution from certain predetermined and unwavering models of "what really happened," opening up the revolution (and from it subsequent works such as that of Fanon) to new ways of thinking about the connection between history, colonialism, postcolonialism, and radical post-enlightenment thought.

Sabeen Ahmed stages a kind of dramaturgy of her own, thinking about the way that spaces and human actors are determined by forms of affective spatial constructions, particularly through the case of drones. Ahmed describes the effect of a decade of drone warfare on the psychophysical mappings both of those areas (Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, etc.) that are being bombed, and those areas (particularly, the United States) which source those bombs. For Ahmed, ideas such as risk management promise a kind of perpetual safety for some by wantonly killing others, but the formation of space constituted by drones does not readily lend itself to such easy distinctions. Although it surely does create a kind of space of death in certain parts of the world, that death is not something that stops at any particular border. Instead, drones reorder the kind of physical mappings of the world so that former lines like national borders are threatened as much as they are asserted by these kinds of affective regimes.

What Sabeen Ahmed argues concerning national boundaries, Florentina C. Andreescu applies to questions of human bodies. Riffing off Deleuze and Guattari's idea of "bodies without organs," Andreescu discusses "organs without bodies" - body parts that have been commodified (sometimes stolen or bought from living people's bodies) and sold in the global market. Just as national and regional boundaries can be violated by acts of violence, so can the contents of the human body similarly escape its bounds and be placed into a larger context where personal boundaries disappear or are shown to have never really existed in the first place. The disembodied organ serves to undermine notions of personal autonomy while also suggesting a dangerous new affective dimension where we will move from a false unity of bodies (the unity of the liberal subject) to an equally bogus disunity of bodies (the disunity of the body as removable parts). Either way, global capital and its demands prove preeminent and the subjects of that power are utterly determined, whether whole or in parts.

Economics, too, comes from bodies. Christopher England notes that Karl Polanyi recognized the physiological anatomies which made up the genealogy of liberalism. Different economic processes became biologized, thematically integrated into one another through an imagined embodiment. Turning to Foucault and Weber as similar genealo-

gists, England argues that Polanyi recognized the importance of utopian and theodictic naturalism in thinkers as diverse as Aristotle and Joseph Townsend. England contrasts the organicism of Polanyi to the mechanistic approaches generally used to explain the emergence and spread of capitalism.

In "The Ideological Algorithmic Apparatus", Matthew Flisfeder shows how capitalism's mode of producing subjugation emerges from its unparalleled ability to develop and perfect desiring-machines through the algorithms upon which digital media depends. What Flisfeder calls "machinic enslavement" emerges from the transitions of interpellation and production (the usual topics of Marxist and Althusserian analytics) into their contemporary forms of meaning, forms developed by and reducible to data and computational likelihoods. If the old methods of domination could be resisted (e.g., through labor organization), Flisfeder holds that these newest forms may not be. A subjugation without possible exit, he notes, is slavery.

Our Symposium in this issue is inspired by recent work addressing beings and environments. In "Theory at the Frontiers: The Prism of the Biocultural," each author takes seriously the claim that the ways in which bodies literally matter - at the chemical, cellular, and biological levels - conjoins them with the world ostensibly outside them. Organized by Alex Melonas, the symposium materializes human (and other) beings as political organizations and engaged locations.

Issue 21.2 concludes with four book reviews: Jairus Grove reviews Robert P. Marzec's Militarizing the Environment: Climate Change and the Security State; Robert Geroux reviews Michael Lerma's Guided by the Mountains: Navajo Political Philosophy and Governance; Ivana Perica reviews Ingo Cornils' Writing the Revolution: The Construction of "1968" in Germany; and, Caroline Alphin reviews Adam Kotsko's The Prince of this World.