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## Introduction

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## Introduction

Cristina Beltrán and Kennan Ferguson

After years of unrelenting positivity, this issue of *Theory and Event* (Volume 22, Number 2) turns instead to antithesis: questions of nonsovereignty, nonsubjects, nonlife, and nondevelopment. Rather than trying to build a normative architecture founded on expansion, inclusion, and regulation, each of the essays herein addresses the questions which arise from the outside of the stories of such norms.

Is Russia part of (or against) “the West?” The question of a national identity formed the thought of the early 19th century theorist Pyotr Chaadaev, whose conception of Russia as both of and antipathetic toward Europe set up the debates which would continue to rage throughout the past two hundred years. Rather than attempting to answer such a question, in “Sovereign Nothingness” Kirill Chepurin and Alex Dubilet look instead to the politico-theological roots of the intellectual world which made such a question unanswerable. Sovereignty—usually seen as an internal problematic of the European interstate system—works (or does not work) differently when viewed from outside that system. Chaadaev, Chepurin and Dubilet argue, gives us political theology of “sovereignty, exception, and nothingness” far less grounded and positive than that of Carl Schmitt’s more famous counter-revolutionaries: a non-sovereignty immanent to nothingness itself.

Jayan Nayar asks “what do we (think we) speak about when we speak of Human Rights?” In “The Non-Perplexity of Human Rights,” he reveals how human rights were born out of and evolved through the exigencies of a continuing coloniality characterized by the categories of license, containment, and abandonment. Nayar argues for moving beyond a human rights discourse that only seeks to rationalize and regulate the global (b)ordering of differentiated subjects. Efforts to rescue The Human for the human-subject, he argues, merely reinforce the adaptive operations of global governmentality to normalize and resettle the World. Calling for a different reading of struggle that exceeds the human rights imaginary, Nayar turns to an anti-colonial philosophical orientation of desubjectification that engages in forms of “epistemic disobedience” that better enables opposition to the totalizing logic of global coloniality.

In “Necro-subjection: On Borders, Asylum, and Making Dead to Let Live,” Gilberto Rosas explores how the U.S.-Mexico border has become a zone of sacrifice, a relational practice that produces terror through relations of excess, illegality, and deportability. Asking “what does it mean to be the subject of death and its politics,” Rosas puts forward an account of necro-subjection that involves the material subjugation of certain lives that are situated socially, materially, discursively, and ideologically closer and closer to death. Providing readers with an self-ethnography of providing expert testimony for individuals seeking asylum, Rosas analyzes how legal proceedings serve to re-victimize migrants, mobilizing racist, gendered, and imperialist accounts of Mexicans in order to produce spaces of dwelling and survival within sovereignty-making violence.

The remainder of this issue consists of a symposium assembled by Sarah Brouillette, Joshua Clover, and Annie McClanahan addressing the idea of capitalism in stagnation; of an economic present defined less by spectacular crisis and more by the persistence of growthlessness and non-development. In “Cultures of Secular Stagnation” the authors describe our era as marked by slow violence—as “capitalism gone spongy, saturated with too much capacity and too many goods and too many unemployed; with no ability to move and nowhere to go.” Turning to the reemergent language of the term “secular stagnation” (a diagnosis coined by John Maynard Keynes’s student Alvin Hansen)—which predicts that the slowing of population growth would inevitably lead to a potentially irresolvable economic slow-down of “mature” economies—the authors in the symposium find that the concept itself fails to provide an adequate account of the current crisis of capitalism. At the same time, they argue, the term productively captures a cultural, political, and affective tendency to depict the present in terms of decline, de-development, stasis, stagnation, ill-health, and morbidity. Focusing on secular stagnation as an economic theory as well as a cultural phenomenon, these essays range from discussions of how mainstream economists are engaging secular stagnation, the gendered and raced implications of the concept—as well as how secular stagnation is reflected in a variety of cultural formations, including films, books, art, photography, video games, and TV shows.

Issue 22.2 concludes with two book reviews: Lisa Disch reviews Laura Ephraim’s *Who Speaks for Nature? On the Politics of Science* and Stefan Dolgert reviews Bonnie Honig’s *Public Things: Democracy in Disrepair*.