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Introduction

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Introduction

Cristina Beltrán and Kennan Ferguson

The essays in the July issue share a broad interest in questions of being and becoming. In desirous orientations that are never empty but always dynamic, dangerous, plentiful, and shot through with innumerable imaginings of what has been and what might yet be. Such ontologies of abundance push back against discourses of emptiness, lack, and loss — logics often used in the service of violent and dehumanizing projects that fail to engage with the deep materiality and future potentialities that mark our encounters with the political.

Karen Barad's essay "After the End of the World" introduces these concerns by noting the materiality of the relationship between nuclear physics and indigenous lives. Drawing on quantum field theory — a mixture of quantum theory, relativity, and field physics — Barad describes a theory of nature's transience, the radical undoing of the separation between being and nothingness. Quantum field theory and the atom bomb are directly and profoundly entangled: they each enable and develop the other. At QFT's core is the "void:" a nothingness which is not empty, but rather an "apparatus of colonialism, a crafty insidious imaginary, a way of offering justification for claims of ownership in the 'discovery' of 'virgin' territory." The waste and leftovers of this imaginary remain, particularly on the lands and peoples of the South Pacific, where a concrete dome "contains" radioactive waste on Enewetak Atoll.

In "Black Maternal Aesthetics," Jennifer Nash argues that the spectacular performances of black maternity staged by Serena Williams and Beyoncé Knowles offer a vision of black motherhood that refuses the crisis rhetoric that constrains and conflates black motherhood with grief, anticipated death, and mourning. Exploring how both Williams and Knowles deploy celebrity to become "masters of self-fashioning," Nash shows the promise of refigurment. Expressions of abundance, visibility, and joy each create unexpected political and ethical work, offering reimagined conceptions of black motherhood through new aesthetic imaginaries.

In contrast to Nash's hopeful account of the political possibilities of aesthetics, commodification, and performance, Elizabeth Davis explores the contradictions made visible by the popularity and consumability of certain representations of black life within an economic

and cultural system still grounded in spectacularized violence aimed at black life. "Beside(s) Love and Hate: The Politics of Consuming Black Culture" draws on Sylvia Wynter's approach to aesthetics as a "deciphering practice" using Jordan Peele's *Get Out*, cannibalism in the Middle Passage, and blackface minstrelsy to offer an analytic of taste and consumption that exposes how "structures of feeling" exceed the limited logics which conflate love as "wokeness" and hate as racism.

The concept of the spectacular takes on a different meaning in Joanne Faulkner's essay, "'Suffer Little Children': The Representation of Aboriginal Disadvantage through Images of Suffering Children, and the Wages of Spectacular Humanitarianism." Faulkner draws on Debord's account of the spectacle and Lacanian theory to examine why contemporary Australia scandals concerning indigeneity end up focusing exclusively on Aboriginal children. This focus on children obscures, domesticates, and conceptually quarantines political and material discussions of "adult" issues related to self-determination, land-rights, and sovereignty for First Nations people. Faulkner examines how colonial subjectivity transposes humanitarian self-regard into a preoccupation with (national) identity. More troubling still, she argues, such spectacles of suffering serve as a site of unconscious enjoyment—a form of pleasure that verges into pain and loss. For Faulkner, a livable future requires reckoning with how colonial relations are informed by an unacknowledged sense of *jouissance*.

Sara-Maria Sorentino's "Natural Slavery, Real Abstraction, and the Virtuality of Anti-Blackness" considers the abstractions of race with a different interlocutor: Marx. Examining the history of slavery from the ancients to the moderns, Sorentino identifies the work that abstraction itself does, redrawing historical activities in its own image. For modern thought and critical theory, this has meant the backwards rendition of racialization into the foundations of slavery. She points to the ambiguous nature of Aristotle's category of the "natural slave," noting its permeability, its nonspecific geography, and its individual mutability. Placing Marx alongside Black feminist theory, she argues that the concatenation of blackness and slavery which emerges with the European conquest of the Americas delimits contemporary understandings of labor, reproduction, and society.

Linette Park continues the discussion of the afterlives of slavery through the notions of the uncanny and the rhetorics of lynching. How is it, Park asks, that the legal and police powers of the United States—long the enforcers and arbiters of racialized violence—can arrest and penalize Black activists for "self-lynching?" Noting that anti-lynching laws concerned the legitimation of state violence, she describes a century of police violence against certain kinds of bodies. Bringing Spillers, Wilderson, and Sexton into conversation with Freud, Salecl,

and Nancy, Park examines how the concept of lynching operates as psychic locale, where race can be disavowed while at the same time justifying the infinite reach of violence.

This issue also contains the symposium “William E. Connolly at Eighty.” Connolly’s political theories of pluralism, identity, cosmology, materiality, and entanglement have long stood as one lodestone for *Theory & Event*. Thomas L. Dumm, a founder and first co-editor of this journal, brings Bonnie Honig, Catherine Keller, Nidesh Lawtoo, Lars Tønder, and Connolly himself into conversation concerning his influence, implications, and potentialities.

Issue 22.3 concludes with four book reviews: James Martel reviews Sina Kramer’s *Excluded Within: The (Un)intelligibility of Radical Political Actors*. Patricia Moynagh reviews Lori Jo Marso’s *Politics with Beauvoir: Freedom in the Encounter* and Elaine Stavro’s *Emancipatory Thinking: Simone de Beauvoir and Contemporary Political Thought*. Michael Richardson reviews Rebecca A. Adelman’s *Figuring Violence: Affective Investments in Perpetual War*. And Vanessa Wills reviews Will Roberts’s *Marx’s Inferno: The Political Theory of Capital*.

Finally, the work of a journal fundamentally depends on the unpaid and (usually) unrecognized intellectual labor of our many manuscript reviewers. Though we operate under double-blind anonymity, we do wish to acknowledge this work. Thus, this issue concludes with a list of gratitude — *Theory & Event* could not exist without you.