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Introduction

Cristina Beltrán and Kennan Ferguson

As a journal dedicated to offering interpretive frameworks for theorizing the meaning of political events, this July issue appears during eventful times. Readers are experiencing the ongoing reality of a global pandemic and the attendant loss of life and economic dislocations that have followed. Erupting within this pandemic has also been the mass movement for racial justice following the murder by police of George Floyd. We find ourselves in a time of worldwide protest, new and ongoing forms of social distancing, and cautious re-openings. Today, questions of embodiment, freedom and mobility – of who lives and who dies, and how we might build a world where everyone can breathe with ease and live their lives in safety – are shaping our daily lives.

The authors in this issue of *Theory & Event* encourage consideration of the political and cultural moment in which we find ourselves. Inviting us to think politics anew, the essays in this issue engage with radical energies: receptivity, segregation and subjugation, connectivity, rituals and performances of resistance, religious faith, familial attachments, feminist aesthetics, and populist politics.

In “I Love to Love You Baby: Beyoncé, Disco Aesthetics, and Black Feminist Politics” Samantha Pinto merges the work of contemporary scholars of black feminist visual culture and theories of black surface to explore the possibilities of what she calls “disco aesthetics” – a feminist aesthetics whose politics is rooted not in reference to traditional or formal spheres of political life but in the fantastic and quotidian registers of black women’s embodied experiences, performances, and presences. Exploring how the 1960s and 70s shaped our understanding of proper enactments of black feminist political consciousness, Pinto turns to the early solo career of Beyoncé to complicate the visual and sonic protocols that often limit the possibilities for making sense of black women’s politics and performances.

Moving from the dance floor to a different terrain for movement, Michael Shapiro explores another type of spatial odyssey – that of the road – to explore its importance in both the history of the novel as well as its cinematic legacy. Exploring how the road is often related to events and encounters governed by chance, Shapiro moves from Paul’s epistles to Paolo Pasolino’s screenplay, considering the ways in which Pasolino’s script both celebrates and destabilizes Paul’s episto-

lary journey. Describing the older media genre of the letter, Shapiro urges a renewed consideration for how the letter is used by Paul to disseminate a different kind of zealotry, incubated on the road.

As subjects who are often considered fanatical in their own right, Archana Kaku's "Burning the Body: The Bodily Politics of Tibetan Self-Immolation" reconsiders self-immolation as a practice that reveals the body's perpetual capacity for resistance. Approaching self-immolation as a fraught and complicated practice, Kaku examines the 2009-2012 self-immolations in Tibet, showing how these burnt and destroyed bodies provoke contestation and commemoration, challenging the authority of the sovereign in ways that exceed the agents themselves: a future-oriented spectacular death.

Another kind of disobedient subject—the "hysteric rebel"—provides the undisciplined political power Claudia Leeb investigates. Freud, Lacan, and Foucault turn to this mode of subjectivity to analyze the power of the normative and the status of knowledge. A hysteric transforms institutional power, both rejecting its assumptions and reinforcing its necessity. Returning to Freud's complex description of his patient "Dora," Leeb argues that she escapes the limits of oppressive subjectivity, both physically and psychically; even in the asylum, where the psychiatrist's mastery allegedly rules supreme, the hysteric subverts authority.

The *Neapolitan Quartet*, four novels by the pseudonymous Elena Ferrante, suggest a different sort of psychoanalytic energy, though one equally formed by sexuality and patriarchy. In the protagonist's narrative, Mary Caputi finds a suggestive maternal power. Drawing on the work of Julia Kristeva, Caputi argues that the terrifying abyss of Immacolata, the (often missing) mother in the novels, both propels the narrator into the public world and keeps her tethered to the city of Naples to which Elena repeatedly returns. Pointing to recurring disappearances—dolls, family, the Virgin Mary—Caputi finds in motherhood the threatening and motivating force in Elena's life, a power into which one is literally born.

In "What's in the Apartheid Analogy?," Raef Zreik and Azar Dakwar look to explain the non-convergence of Palestinian strategies against Israeli occupation, particularly in comparison to the similar (seeming) racialized oppression of 20th Century South Africa. Why, they ask, does the language of apartheid fail to resonate politically? Tracing the histories of both systems, they note how the conceptualization of the "two-state solution"—the insistence by both the Israeli government and Palestinian activists that Palestine can stand as a nation-state alongside Israel—makes difficult or even impossible the understanding of a racialized system of oppression within the state. The separations practiced by the particularly Israeli form of settler

colonialism demand, they argue, a more expansive type of political imaginary.

Lauren Goldman turns to William James to analyse the “energetic receptivities” that underpin emergent politics. Linked both to the vitalism of Bergson, and to the increasing importance of electricity in the United States, James locates energy as allowing and encouraging agency itself. Most importantly, “receptivity” becomes the locus of the metaphor of energy: to be available to the experiences, ideas, and conflicts that make up the world, each individual must develop an ethos of connection and reaction. This ethos emerges from the relationship that allows energy. Jamesian ethics and the Jamesian self, Goldman argues, can only be appreciated through the interlinked openness to the complexities of other beings in the world.

This issue’s symposium critically analyses the nature of the event as it emerges within left politics. Oriented around the work of Ernesto Laclau, the participants interrogate his conception of populism: the idea that the people are an emergent force which has the power to transform nations. Lasse Thomason, the symposium editor, brings Anton Jäger and Arthur Borriello, Samuele Mazzolini, Margarita Palacios, and Leticia Sabsay together to discuss critical questions concerning populism, affect, the body, linguistic representation, the relationship between populism and nationalism, and the conceptual paradoxes and ideological tensions raised by the convergence of left politics and populism.

Issue 23.3 concludes with four book reviews, including one review roundtable: Elisabeth R. Anker reviews Lauren Berlant and Kathleen Stewart’s *The Hundreds*. Sonali Chakravarti reviews Jack Jackson’s *Law Without Future: Anti-Constitutional Politics and the American Right*; Mark Golub reviews Sonali Chakravarti’s *Radical Enfranchisement in the Jury Room and Public Life*; and Jack Jackson reviews Mark Golub’s *Is Racial Equality Unconstitutional?*