Introduction

Elisabeth Anker, Hagar Kotef

Theory & Event, Volume 27, Number 2, April 2024, pp. 139-140 (Article)

Published by Johns Hopkins University Press

DOI: https://doi.org/10.1353/tae.2024.a925040

For additional information about this article
https://muse.jhu.edu/article/925040
The April 2024 issue comes in a calendar year already rocked by various forms of political violence, carceral intensifications, financial depredations, and climate change disasters. Our essays in this spring issue reflect on the instabilities and brutalities of our moment by examining their underlying justifications, historical causes, and spiraling effects.

Paul Johnson surveys the right-wing scene in American conservatism to diagnose its investments in mocking and violating opponents, and in destroying their capacities for enjoyment altogether. The practice of “Owning The Libs,” for Johnson, involves work not merely to thwart opponents’ political projects but to brutally violate them and take pleasure in this violence. Focusing on right-wing attacks against climate action and racial justice, Johnson shows how “owning the libs” shores up right-wing personhood through the capacity to take pleasure in destruction.

Moving from right to left-wing politics, Alex Underwood excavates Deleuze and Guattari’s theory of revolution, arguing that they posit revolution as a moment of uniting disparate forms of political experimentation outside the institutional form. In “Deleuze and Guattari on the French Revolution: Problems, Universal Minority, and the Bourgeoisie,” Underwood examines their theory from the French revolution to the post-1968 era. Pressing them into dialogue with Marx, Underwood suggests that for Deleuze and Guattari, any notion of the “revolutionary” subject must be expansive yet without a universalizing and restrictive identity that eradicates the diversity and experimentation any revolution necessitates.

In “The Misbegotten Critique of the Model Minority Myth,” Claire Kim critiques the very critique of ‘model minority myth,’ which views Asian Americans as an exemplary case of minority success. Kim describes how the positionality of Asian-Americans and Asian-Americanists in a racially stratified America is oriented toward eliding structural problems and the project of racial justice. Kim queries: “Had the study of Asian American politics lost touch with the real world? … What did it mean that the Black politics panel was talking about police violence and the carceral state while we were talking about the perils
of being complimented too much?" As an alternative, Kim’s bold critique and important intervention seeks to resituate the positionality of Asian Americans in relation to structural anti-Blackness and the struggle against it.

Moving to engage directly with structural anti-Blackness, Juliet Hooker asks what should be done with racist symbols that saturate politics, specifically Confederate monuments. Hooker urges us to recognize that society speaks through monuments, and that those “shape citizens’ political imaginations.” “Statues Made of Sugar’: Martí, Monuments, and Hemispheric Ventriloquism” draws on José Martí, one of Latin America’s foremost anti-imperial thinkers, to show how it is possible to read the removal of racist monuments as an effort not to “correct” or “erase” the past, or engage in symbolic gestures over real change (as many critics argue); rather, as an effort to cultivate an anti-racist public memory that can correct “distorted and sanitized versions of the past that continue to shape the present.”

Kelly Happe asks us to distinguish utopian visions from revolutionary or radical action. In “Revisiting Utopia as Form: Failure, Time and the Political Subject of Anti-Capitalism,” Happe examines utopian expressions in Prison Abolition and Universal Basic Income movements. Happe places their utopian demands in dialogue with work of Frederic Jameson and Kathi Weeks to argues that utopia’s temporality is different from radicalism or revolution. Utopian form unearths possibilities for world-building that build on different relations to time. It is grounded in the present-possible but also radically open to the no-place of a utopian world as yet unimaginable to those who demand it.

Ingrid Diran interrogates the concept of “species,” asking “Why is it that at a moment when the ‘human’ elicits more suspicion than ever, ‘species’ continues to be taken at face value?” Diran calls “species” a limit-concept that doesn’t name a form of life so much as craft a grid of intelligibility for positing the truth of humanity, history, and evolution. In “Genealogy of Species as a Limit-Concept,” Diran traces the use of “species” in Alexandre Kojeve and Dipesh Chakrabarty to argue that its current manifestations work as political signifiers for universal humanity in the absence of historical humans. However, a decolonial vision of “species” as found in Frantz Fanon and Sylvia Wynter pushes against this limit-concept to articulate both an antithesis of “species” and an otherworldly category of being enmeshed in correlation.