
Editor's Letter

Shamus Khan

Our issue opens somewhat unusually for *Public Culture*, with two Forum pieces that focus on the United States. Harel Shapira begins by bringing us up close with American gun culture. Drawing on his two-year ethnography of gun owners, Shapira introduces us to Calvin Mitchell. Calvin is a classic gun owner in many senses—he's conservative, he loves guns, he belongs to a range of gun organizations—but he also happens to be black. And through Calvin, Shapira shows us how gun politics isn't about the right to bear arms; it's about a political matrix that interweaves various kinds of political commitments, including a racial politics that generally excludes men like Calvin. When we seek to understand guns and gun violence we often look closer and closer at guns themselves. But Calvin's story suggests that this fetishization of the gun, at the expense of attention to the political matrix of gun culture, may well move us further away from understanding.

Andrea M. Voyer has been similarly immersed, ethnographically, studying schools, churches, and neighborhood organizations throughout New York City to better understand how inequality works, not just in terms of wages but in our everyday lives. In this intimate portrait, she shows us how “inequality operates through slights and exclusions, rests on misunderstandings and prejudicial interpretations, and remains omnipresent” even in places that strive for egalitarianism. Voyer provides us with a poignant reminder of how, even when democratic civility prevails, background inequalities on the basis of race, gender, social class, and immigration status are often reproduced in mundane everyday interaction.

Kaiama L. Glover's essay follows immediately from and builds nicely on Voyer's, outlining the everyday “benign denials” of race and poverty. Glover's site is Haiti, and she reveals how political and popular commentators curiously conflate it with Africa. The denials that catch her eye are everyday acts of dehumaniza-

tion, seemingly harmless but simultaneously violent. Drawing on her earlier work, Glover suggests that we think with the zombie—a racialized assemblage that has been unraced—and see this pitiable being, this victim, this part of a contagious, potentially devastating horde, this nearly human thing that is not quite human, as a vehicle to understand how we see people in Haiti.

Melissa Tandiwe Myambo expands our attention to racial dynamics by outlining what she calls frontier heritage migration, the movement of individuals raised in Western Europe and the United States “back” to the nations of their ancestry. Myambo suggests that this movement from the “developed” to the “developing” worlds is central to the fabric of modern capitalism. Heritage migrants are also bringing with them categories of race, identity, and ethnicity, remaking the places to which they are imagining a “return” and creating a kind of cultural globalization of race and ethnicity.

Graham Huggan brings us back to the theme of violence and appeals to earlier work published here, in the special issue on celebrity edited by Sharon Marcus in January 2015. Huggan’s focus on the changing status of famous orcas like Shamu provides critical insights into the performative nature of celebrity and shows how celebrity is often an “obscene object of desire.”

Our interview is with Margaret Lock, a towering figure in the social studies of medicine. Eugene Raikhel speaks with Lock about her career, traveling through her various projects and developments. And excitingly, Raikhel gets Lock to anticipate the future of her field, wherein she expresses both admiration and frustration with posthumanism and suggests that more researchers “engage head-on with biology and the massive, rapid changes the human body is currently undergoing in the era of the Anthropocene.”

Yasmin Moll’s essay explores the subtling of Islam at Egyptian television’s Iqraa station—the world’s first self-declared Islamic station. It recalls Robyn Creswell’s Forum essay in the September 2016 issue of *Public Culture*, in which he similarly explored the issues of Arabic translation. Yet Moll situates critique more centrally at the heart of the practice. Moll shows us how translators engage in a dual critique, both of outside views of Islam and of Muslims themselves.

Our final two essays are, in a way, critical responses to Habermasian understandings of discursive politics and the public sphere. Hannah Knox writes on the relationship between infrastructural intervention and political community. Using the case of Peru, she suggests how townspeople can use infrastructure projects to demand incorporation into the national economy. Knox suggests that we move our understanding of politics away from the discursive and look more concretely at material relations in order to grasp contemporary politics.

Finally, Virág Molnár similarly asks us to think about material space and its relationship to the public sphere. Molnár notes that just as public spaces are shrinking, interest in public art is growing. Her concern is with a kind of digital public, where digital media have created a “new ecology for the documentation, sharing, and global dissemination of ‘ephemeral’ street art that has fueled its popularity while complicating its commercialization, reception, and political impact.” Molnár shows how digital media reflect street art’s countercultural tendencies but also work against them through forms of commodification.

On a more personal note, Shane Brennan has moved on from his position as our assistant editor after a year of making my own life as editor easier than it deserves to be. My sincere thanks to Shane. We are happy to welcome Rory Solomon in his place. I likewise wish to thank the Department of Media, Culture, and Communication at New York University for continuing to support our work with this position. I hope that you’ll reach out to Rory, managing editor Stephen Twilley, or me if you have any thoughts to share about our journal.