

Editor's Introduction

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Both general and dedicated issues of *positions* signal problem orientations arriving on the horizon of scholarship. Larger frameworks have for decades become surfaced in *positions*' patterns of scholarly publication. Linh Khanh Nguyen's "Geometries of Fractals and Power: Transnational Marriages, Translocal Marriages, and Asia's Global Ruralities" kicks off a set of studies all focused on global labor migration. In the article, Nguyen lays out a relatively familiar spatial configuration—the urban and the rural—but starts her analysis by considering how historical subjects, rural women, propelled by their own desires, make their way to urban work or international marriage. But then the article initiates a new way of analyzing transnational marriage. In Nguyen's words, "Fractals refer to patterns formed by self-similar shapes that are repeatedly and unpredictably generated on endless scales," and which supplant the familiar relation that insists that the

singular is a piece of the universal, the case a piece of the rule, and so on. Accepting Nguyen's logic would change grids for social analysis because, she explains,

fractals acknowledge the randomness of reality, but their multiple scales allow us to examine the deep structure by looking for connections among patterns that prevail in different parts. Using fractal geometry, [Nguyen] demonstrate[s] that a seemingly resulting chaos of transnational marriages in one rural locality in Korea or Vietnam is a repetition of a global pattern sweeping across Asia. This worldwide pattern will confirm that the rural is being globally reconstituted with other ruralities, not just the omnipresent "urban."

Introjecting this novel logic into geographer Massey's pioneering theoretical work, Nguyen ably demonstrates that "fractal and power geometry allow us to study how global relationships among rural localities bypass urban connections and reshape contemporary rural landscapes."

Andrew Alan Johnson also raises questions about how social theory understands women's laboring bodies. "Foreign Bodies: Horror and Intimacy in Singapore's Migrant Labor Regimes" focuses on domestic workers living in Singaporean Chinese family homes. While Nguyen foregrounds particularly female, rural labor brides' desire, Johnson's article considers intimate care. According to some of their employers, the largely Indonesian and Muslim domestic workers carry out criminal violence and witchcraft in the employers' homes. As fractal logics disturb earlier ways of explaining female labor/marriage migration, focus on intimacy and physical contact leads into a scary world, revolting and fearful, where the maid hides her lovers under her bed while seducing the employer's children with delicious foreign food. This fieldwork shows that in fact "the violation of boundaries becomes magical warfare." Projections and microaggressions hover uncomfortably in the intimate relation that Singapore itself occupies in relation to Indonesia and Malaysia. "The uncanny return of the original inhabitants of the land as outsiders should be familiar to many in settler contexts," he argues. In this temporality, magic from a periphery that Singapore has alleged overcome returns, dirty and contaminated, to haunt the present. "The worker works her will upon the employer, not the other way around."

Migration theory's strength and sophistication is clear, as well, in Hyunshik Ju's "From Immigrants to Refugees: Relocating Strangers in Two Plays about North Korean Defectors." In this theoretical reworking, Ju "employs an analytical framework that weaves the terms of the immigrant and of the refugee and the sociology of the stranger together." As Johnson documents fear of the other and racial projections in the eyes of the Singaporean Chinese middle class, Ju directly takes on the problem that strangers among us raise for the theorist. The reason to pursue this analytical work is general in the sense that the article is a case study, but it also requires a particular emphasis on theatrical performance. In this, Ju avoids a scenario familiar in less sophisticated scholarship and meditates specifically on South Korean stage plays and their power to point out defector strangers. Performance allows analysis of the social reality presented in the political and cultural particularity of Korean theater and demonstrates that cultural praxis can provide a valuable way to grasp in group and out group hysteria as well as forge possible ways to diminish the border and soften the boundary of the citizen and the stranger while allowing an autocritique of the South. Political praxis in the cultural world opens ways to criticize South Korean capitalist cultures and what Ju terms "division hysteria penetrating South Korean society."

Christopher B. Patterson consolidates several themes already present in migration study but doubles down on theorizing as such. In his "Brown Theory: A Storied Manifest of Our World," he makes short shrift of the history, concept, or category *brown* in order to focus tightly on somatic experience and geopolitics of race. Consequently, the article resituates readers' focus from "north/south" to the broad east-to-west sweep of the "brown transpacific," which, additionally, "decenters the United States as the figurative space where brownness is most relevant to see other forms of brownness in relation to nonwhite (but often *lighter*-coded) majorities." Attention to where the brown actually live opens up highly variegated spaces, displacing older regional terms like *the Middle East* to East Asia, where *brown* emerges phenotypically only in relation to "yellow" or East Asian, to brownness that instantiates a "blackness untethered to the continent of Africa ('Negritos,' Melanesians, Sri Lankans, dark[er] Indians, the many Indigenous groups in Papua New Guinea)." Deftly Patterson shows the interwoven, positional

history, and political actions that have characterized the theoretic project “brown theory.” In precise language the article reminds readers that the point of a manifest is, in some sense, to craft provisos commemorating a century old colonial critique (Rizval to Kalākaua and Patterson himself), while digging into the experiential dangers and possible liberations of living life brown. In the concluding section of the article he demonstrates how his claims build on those of Arun Saldanha, Amit Rai, and Jasbir Puar to extricate brownness from older colonial histories. In “brown theory,” *brown* becomes *brown mass*, the logic of the non-brown clarifies the granular brown experience, and the brown mass breaks into shards with sharp powers to disrupt current, received, disciplined studies of race and history.

In “Deleuze and East Asia: Toward a Comparative Methodology of the Gap,” Jay Hetrick differentiates Orientalism and his arguments while noting their long partnership. His end point is that because Deleuze grasped enough Buddhist thought in relation to a critique of “Western” philosophy, he succeeds in inventing a “methodology of the gap based upon Deleuze’s paradoxical onto-logic.” That, Hetrick argues, is “what [Deleuze] understands the project of philosophy to be: not a description of the world through logical syllogisms—which are ‘essentially and necessarily’ reductive . . . but the continual creation of concepts that are adequate to real encounters in thought.” Why this is important lies in the old effort to construct a philosophy of pure difference beyond the repetitive line of Plato to Hegel. Hetrick’s argument holds that [without] a methodology that systematically includes the gap, thinking beyond comparativism cannot proceed. We, philosophers and scholars in general, trap ourselves in rigid and timeless logic. Making clear that his own “comparative methodology of the gap,” rooted in exegetics, is sound, Hetrick reinforces his method by reference to François Jullien, a sinologist. Like Deleuze, Jullien’s project aims philosophically to open to thought to a transcendental ground, “the unthought within thought, the unquestioned givens.” Jullien is thus like Deleuze in the common effort to ditch questions of Being and “to unground this ‘ontological logic which came to us from the Greeks’ with a divergent ‘non-logical logic.’”

It seems only right, then, to introduce Anna Iskra’s piece, “Crazy English: Nation Strengthening and the Changing Politics of Neoliberal Self-

hood in Reform-Era China.” This ethnography and political critique shows how a stream of statist values (patriotism, boosterism, individualization of profit) combined with habitual self-creating language and ethical pedagogy to sweep the nation. Working in a stream of research that imagines languages to be commodities, and having laid out the scholarly precedents for her analysis Iskra argues that while “English can be conceptualized as a neoliberal technology of the self that inculcates in learners the values of self-entrepreneurship and meritocracy,” it is at the same time an attempt “to reconcile the values of . . . patriotism/nationalism that continue to characterize the self-fashioning practices performed by Chinese state agents, edu-entrepreneurs, and citizen-learners.” Li Yang, who corporatized the marriage of entrepreneurialism and patriotism with his English-language-teaching company, Li Yang Crazy English, thrived in an emergent world that would come to include other edu-celebrities like Li Yang: Chen Anzhi, a founder of “Success Studies in China,” and “teacher Xiong,” who extended the franchise. Iskra points out how ideologically congruent projects—pyramid schemes, for instance—also promised cosmopolitanism and class mobility, but she eloquently describes the nationalism that is knit into Crazy English—style schemes. This is to say that nationalistically instrumentalizing English language acquisition means setting the ideological and emotional conditions for “Chinese should conquer English instead of being conquered by it.”

Related themes now consuming scholarship, of which neoliberalism is just one, emerge in Brett Hack’s “Working Worlds in Neoliberal Japan: Precarity, Imagination, and the ‘Other-World’ Trope.” In this study the focus is *isekai*, which Hack uses to pry open the mediated process of social imagination. A truly useful move, Hack’s “focus on fiction as a collective imaginative process aims for a multifaceted account of mediated sociality.” Productivity of emotional abilities to pierce ideological one-dimensionality become in this study experiential and symbolic, simultaneously affective and discursive. Fantasy itself has a social role in the world. The “potential for popular rejection of neoliberal reason,” he argues, twisting the autonomist Marxist position to suit his analytic positions, “lies in moments when social imagination can utilize affectively charged images of work to give form to a virtual social without reproducing alienating conditions. . . . In such

efforts, flights of fancy can often outpace critical realism.” This argument, perhaps the reverse of Iskra’s, exploits the category “problematic youth—*hikikomori*, freeters [part-time workers], and NEETs (non–job seekers)—and their perceived rejection of adulthood” to extract liberation, as for instance in the space fantasy *ARIA*, which presents a character, Akari, who owns her own labor. In the context of cruel optimism and precarity Akari’s decommodification of her own labor power is remarkable. That both examples of decommodification involve female workers—Tanada Yuki’s *One-Million Yen Girl* (*Hyakuman-en to nigamushi onna*, 2008) is the second—cannot be a coincidence. Drawing an important distinction generically between critical realism and this *isekai* potential for productive fantasy invention, Hack closes his article with the following observations. First, context does count, and Japanese media are not the proof case for theories about neoliberalism in other parts of the world. Second, “precarity necessitates fundamental reformulations of the concept of the social itself.” And he ends with the now familiar political question: What is to be done?

Michael Berman’s “Hope without a Future: Conflicts between Time and Place in Japan after 3/11” analyzes a widely studied village, Kamaishi, in the wake of the 2011 earthquake and tsunami. As in all of the articles published in this issue, Berman dexterously fuses actual conditions, political conditions, affective lives, and both official and minor temporalities. The fieldwork convinces Berman that into severely eroded social space, Kamaishi lost its future when youth migrated out, and that when “time stopped” in the disaster orientations toward a future defined by deindustrialization, elderly villagers turned hopeful. Berman thus measures intangibles such as “social imbalance in the burden of producing hopes”; this frees him from the shackles of repeating the obvious—the degraded lives wrought by neoliberalization, Koizumi deregulation, the aging society, and so on—to focus on resilient fantasies in which elders reiterate their hopes as a means of rehoming themselves. The article points to a meaningful contradiction, that people far away from it hold up the experience of communitarianism that the survivors and their helpers have recreated while people closer to the suffering sought to keep time static, place based, familiar, and deathless. Those in Kamaishi focused on place-based hope, whereas people at a distance transformed the struggle to create those places into a vision of the future, which sometimes

made it difficult for survivors' hope to endure. So in Kamaishi there was both a simultaneous performance of fresh suffering and movement toward a developed future without suffering.

The final article in this issue, "Paris in Korean Cinema: Fraudulence and the Female Form in Hong Sang-soo's *Night and Day* and Kim Ki-duk's *Wild Animals*" by Youngmin Choe, addresses the politics of grotesquery and misogyny, discussing "a compulsion to make vulgar spectacle out of the sexualization in public discourse of empowered women accused of being fraudulent or deceptive." Choe seeks to explain "how and why fraudulence and deception get coded as feminine in Korean politics and popular culture." Reinventing the classic European nude genre into all women's political fraudulence helps grasp the general terms. Or, as she writes, "The female subject's engagement with art becomes conflated with and assessed by questions of morality instead of aesthetics and is divorced from the more relevant contexts." The strongly argued article begins with Kim So-young's 2004 *new woman: her first song* and continues with two further cinema experiments in female subjectivity, Hong Sang-soo's *Night and Day* (2007) and Kim Ki-duk's *Wild Animals* (1997). The article closes with a consideration of what happens if the subject of women is detached from national genre or becomes unfathomably cosmopolitan. The final meditation asks how it came to be that in Korean cinema, Paris has been seen as both a site of authentic European culture and simultaneously a site of experimentation.