

## Editor's Letter

*Claudio Lomnitz*

**P**olitics takes surprising shapes, while history in preserving gives them a ghostly aura.

The Viet Cong's use of fallow peasant time as the resource for socialist education and military training, analyzed here by Duy Lap Nguyen, trumped the advanced capitalist war logic of the American army, which required measured, timely, and conclusive outcomes. At the same time, that confrontation twisted Vietnamese rural society and turned the North Vietnamese army into something very other than a traditional peasant organization: leisure and the excess of peasant festival became military and party discipline. It would seem that if the spirit of capitalism is no more than a chimera, the spirit of socialism travels in the guise of a deformed little imp. Such is Rafael Sánchez's account of Pentecostal urban squatters, who occupy buildings following God's direct instructions in the very heart of Venezuela's "socialism of the twenty-first century." To receive blessings from the Holy Spirit, Pentecostal squatters must occupy spaces. In and through the squatter's body, the paralegal space and the spirit (the Christian as well as the socialist) are fused and redeemed.

The temporalities of capitalism command the attention of many of the contributors to this volume. Gustav Peebles offers a study of how the consolidation of national currencies was a process in which national states came to stake the future of its citizens. The substitution of silver and gold with national currency turns inhabitants of that country into the creditors of the nation. Thus, the nation's future becomes the future of its residents.

This sort of logic is explored and exploded in Rosalind Morris's piece on rush and panic in a gold-mining region of South Africa, where the youth coolly contemplate collective extermination by AIDS and, in the backdrop, by unemployment. Morris provides an inspection of the politics of risk, profit, and rush

as they are managed both by insurance companies and by capitalist speculators, and she reads the way in which panic and rush have been worked into existential and practical orientations by the youth facing a sexualized commodity market that they cannot indulge in directly, the calculated risk of extermination by AIDS, and what appears as the inevitable strangulation of the working class by unemployment.

As we put together the essays for this volume, the calculated investments in life and death described by Morris affected my final reading of Shiloh Krupar's visual tour of Shanghai's future in maquette form. The massive, unfathomable construction that is going on in China presents—makes present—an incredible future, but as Krupar's title suggests, these buildings and constructions are also an imperious occupation that "hijacks" the future by occupying it with materialized plans that will have a social life of their own for years to come.

Partha Chatterjee's critique of popular culture questions distance and situation in cultural studies' denunciation of power in culture. "The task," he writes, following Antonio Gramsci, "is no longer to interrogate popular culture with the fully formed apparatus of a scientific worldview. Rather, it is to begin from the practices of popular culture, to immerse oneself in its forms, in order to develop its critique." By way of a critical engagement with visual culture in India, Chatterjee reminds us that our work circulates and forms part of the world that it describes, and he asks us to take this into consideration as we write and publish.

Danilyn Rutherford's account of the nationalist "decolonization" in Papua is framed and narrated to and for a third-person other, the U.N. observers, with Indonesians and other foreign neighbors within earshot. They, the people? Whose nationalism is a Papuan nationalism? Cultural diversity, in all its colors, is made to stand in for more compact, violent, explosive, and familiar expressions of nationalism as popular sovereignty, and plays a role analogous to it—from the viewpoint of a third-person outsider, the view from everywhere except Papua. This is, very recognizably, a national form, though it is now—more patently than ever—produced in, from, and for an international system.

This volume concludes with a haunting essay on the persecution of the Left in Greece, by Neni Panourgiá, who tells the little-known story of Greece's concentration camps and interrogates how a state of exception existed with no international outcry, and within a system that had a working parliament. The position of Greece as a nation in an international system seems to have trumped liberal governmental concerns about justice, rights, due process, and liberty and even to have confined repression itself to official oblivion and international neglect.

*Public Culture* is proud to present its readers with this remarkable collection of independently submitted essays. Its two initial opinion pieces, by Aric Mayer and Andrew Wachtel, on catastrophe aesthetics and winemaking, respectively, invite us discreetly to meditate on the limits of representation and commodification in our time.

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