

# Editorial Note

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**Brent Hayes Edwards and Anna McCarthy**

This issue marks a threefold shift in the format and operations of *Social Text*. First, the journal has undergone a thorough interior and exterior redesign. Over the past year, the editorial collective has undertaken this process (in consultation with the able design team at Duke University Press) not simply as the latest ornamental sprucing of the journal's visage, but instead as an opportunity for a thorough consideration of *Social Text's* formal organization both from a historical standpoint and in relation to its future. Beyond the updating, arguably long overdue, of the journal's cover, display typography, and color palette, the collective has decided at once to extend the template of *Social Text* into another medium and to revive an element of the hardscrabble early years of the journal, when it was published independently and exhibited a readiness to experiment with its own format—perhaps precisely because its visual layout and critical norms had not yet congealed and become familiar; perhaps precisely because the awkward interdisciplinary straddling suggested by the journal's title had not yet settled into the common sense of U.S. cultural studies in its post-Birmingham afterlife.

A few years ago, the curator and art historian Susette Min joined the collective, and since then *Social Text* has made a more concerted effort to integrate its back-cover art with its contents. This issue, inaugurating the regular appearance of art on the front cover, officially marks our commitment to the sustained treatment of visual culture, not only as an object of analysis but also as a vehicle for critique itself. Look for more dossiers like the one Min has assembled for this issue in future volumes; although much of this material will be curated editorially, the collective welcomes submissions from artists and art historians in this vein.

A perusal of early issues of *Social Text* is a reminder that the journal

made space not only for some of the most exciting interdisciplinary scholarship in cultural studies, postcolonial theory, and feminist criticism, but also for a remarkable variety of forms—manifestos, debates, even poems. In other words, the journal was founded as a venue expressly hospitable to innovation, to modes of inquiry and critique that expand or even distend received disciplinary norms, whether through their topicality, their range of reference and evidence, their “subjectivism,” or their deliberate recourse to discrepant methodologies. As Adorno argued more than half a century ago, the most incisive scrutiny of the “estranged form” of contemporary life may well demand a writing itself “disconnected” and “non-binding,” a writing that finds the means of social critique in a steadfast attention to the ephemeral and the anachronistic—to everything in the social fabric that is “cross-gained, opaque, unassimilated.” *Social Text* will once again make space for this sort of critical experimentation, opening its pages to more fragmentary or aphoristic writings, to essays that “without ever pretending to be complete and definitive . . . are all intended to mark out points of attack or to furnish models for a future exertion of thought.”<sup>1</sup>

Our new commitment begins with this issue, which includes a selection of interwoven fragments in which Paul Stephens and Robert Hardwick Weston adopt and update the form of the *Denkbild* into a mode adequate to contemporary political commentary. In making room for pieces of writing that deviate in their rhetoric and structure from the standard academic essay, the journal enacts some of the possibilities of its own title. As new modes of polemic interweave with diverse cultural and philosophical material, providing dialogic counterpoint and contrast to the articles therein, each issue offers itself as a kind of *social text*, a material record of the multiple voices and codes historically layered in the print culture of the Left.

If digital texts are part of this culture today, then it is fitting that the *Social Text* Web site ([www.socialtextonline.org](http://www.socialtextonline.org)) is scheduled to launch as this issue goes to press. Although an Internet presence may well seem de rigueur in this day and age, for us the attraction is less a matter of promotion and visibility and more a matter of supplementation—another extension of the space of intervention available to the journal. The Web site will include content related to each issue of the print journal (additional source material, interviews, or follow-up commentary), an archive of past issues, and original content only available online, including galleries of visual material and a blog maintained by members of the editorial collective.

## Note

1. Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia* (1951), trans. E. F. N. Jephcott (London: Verso, 1978), 15, 18, 151.