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INTRODUCTION

## Rethinking Politics

Archaeologies, genealogies, ethics

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*Over the last couple of decades, the emergence of neoliberalism as the dominant organizing imperative across social and public spaces and institutions, coupled with the exceptionalism of imperial and often violent, authoritarian forms of 'democracy,' has fostered a rethinking of politics across a wide range of contexts. Rethinking politics through critical intervention necessitates an engagement with conceptual forms, even epistemes, of an earlier theorisation of politics. The essays in this issue of Borderlands offer ways of rethinking not only politics but also ways of retheorising sites and subjects of the epistemological and the political—Guantanamo Bay, Disneyland, conservative female politicians, migration and multiculturalism, disciplines and the academy, and mass protest movements.*

Over the last couple of decades, the emergence of neoliberalism as the dominant organizing imperative across social and public spaces and institutions, coupled with the exceptionalism of imperial and often violent, authoritarian forms of 'democracy,' has fostered a rethinking of politics across a wide range of contexts. Rethinking politics through critical intervention necessitates an engagement with conceptual forms, even epistemes, of an earlier theorisation of politics. These engagements require thus not only a diagnosis of the operations and processes of present forms of power but a theorisation of how to diagnose, how to critique, and how to intervene.

In effect, the essays in this issue of *Borderlands* respond precisely to this problematic. If neoliberalism and its accompanying authoritarian forms of governance, productive of both neoliberalised subjects and subjects terrorised by its violence, can be 'interrupted by fracturing its

assumed coherence' through 'critical responses and interventions,' the following essays do just this (Grewal, 2005: 19). In the spirit and technique of a Foucauldian interruption, the essays disturb the naturalized or seamless forms of governmentality and discipline, spatial arrangements of violence and entertainment, the disciplining techniques of institutional procedures, moralizing judgements, and popular conservative assertions of subjectivity spawned by neoliberal authoritarianism. Though each of the authors examines sites which are geographically and historically specific, which may or may not be related to each other, it is this sense of grappling with a rethinking of politics through archaeologies, genealogies and ethics in the Foucauldian sense that provides a point of reference for all five essays. The essays, therefore, offer ways of rethinking not only politics but also ways of retheorising sites and subjects of the epistemological and the political—Guantanamo Bay, Disneyland, conservative female politicians, migration and multiculturalism, disciplines and the academy, and mass protest movements.

Reading the politico-artistic intervention of the internationally renowned guerilla artist Banksy as an apostrophic act, Joseph Pugliese stages a profound and complex genealogical reading of two seemingly incommensurable sites and subjects—detainees and inflatable dolls, Guantanamo Bay and Disneyland. Yet, mapping them within the teleological imperatives of the U.S. empire, Pugliese cogently demonstrates how the sites and practices of entertainment and leisure are constituted by imperial histories, and how organized spaces of leisure and pleasure disavow their connections to sites and practices of an imperial Orientalist violence embodied in the present at Guantanamo Bay.

There is a further juxtaposition in this essay which brings to light the differential ways in which children figure in the spatial arrangements of empire. The construction of 'childhood innocence' and discourses of clean entertainment which govern the conceptual ethos of a quintessential U.S. site of entertainment, Disneyland, are rendered hollow when juxtaposed with the detention and torture of children at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. Pugliese also offers a way of differentiating between 'camps' as well as between various figures of 'bare life': Agamben's reading of Auschwitz (2002) and the figure of the '*Muselman*' are not only different to Guantanamo Bay and the figures of the 'Arab' and the 'Muslim' but also reveal the racialised Orientalist hierarchies that operate between the terms 'Jew' and 'Muslim.' Pugliese's essay thus demands a rethinking of hierarchies which constitute spaces of exception.

Kathy Ferguson's 'Bush in Drag: Sarah Palin and Endless War' demands a similar rethinking in the U.S. context: the rise of conservative women in populist politics, and the implications of this phenomenon for a progressive feminist activism. The 'Palin-effect,' as Ferguson perceives it, has been to reconfigure the contestations around what can or cannot be termed feminist politics. In an ironical

turn, conservative male politicians and media commentators have become the present-day 'new' feminists (Ho, 2007). They defend conservative female politicians through a liberal humanist, individualist notion of feminism which justifies that rise to power. Not surprisingly, this new conservative female politician subject works actively against what has hitherto been considered feminist activism. The defense of conservative female politicians through a liberal feminist rhetoric of upward mobility, combined with a license to attack progressive feminist agendas, seems a deadly weapon.

Conducting an archaeological reading of the Palin-effect through Žižek's conceptualizations of the sublime, ideological dis-identification and jouissance, Ferguson demonstrates the appeal of the iconic and embodied folksy aura that Palin signifies within populist politics. As Ferguson argues, it is this reading that can shed light on the manner in which political gaffes and even ignorance are spun into triumphs through metonymic references to the ordinary American 'hockey mom' fed up with elitism and corruption in Washington. This analysis is all the more powerful for Ferguson's autobiographical account of her own location within a conservative Christian community. Ferguson's exploration of the Palin-effect is timely: as this issue goes to press, Paul Harris notes the rise of Michele Bachmann, 'a Republican Congresswomen' from Minnesota who is 'part of an increasingly visible "female brand" of conservatism that is rising in America in the wake of the election of Obama' (2009). Hence, the questions that Ferguson poses—and the political tasks that she outlines for progressive feminist intervention—are urgent.

In the Australian context, Jon Stratton demonstrates a discursive shift in the politics of migration and multiculturalism. Through a genealogy of Australian migration and multiculturalism, Stratton argues that the attention over the last decade to activism around refugees has obscured the neoliberal manoeuvres in Australian migration and multicultural policies. Paying attention to the 457 visa, which 'typifies the neoliberal understanding of the primacy of the market,' Stratton traces not only a privileging of the economic over the social, but of the ways in which migration programs become subject to a dominant neoliberal ethos (2009: 3). Linking the primacy of this form of migration with the commodification of higher education, and the ways in which international students have been attracted by a permanent residency points system since the 1990s, Stratton traces governmental attempts to manage migration through a class-based approach. He describes this process as one of making 'new Asian-Australians invisible through a process of assimilation, couched in terms of the acceptance of Australian values and the provisional attribution of honorary whiteness' (2009: 14).

Stratton's genealogy of this present formation demonstrates how asylum seekers 'have come to represent the lumpen, unskilled racial other,' when, in fact, the 'majority that come to Australia are educated middle-class people' (2009: 9). Furthermore, as Stratton argues, the

condition of 'honorary whiteness' even for non-white international students can be withdrawn or withheld (2009: 17). In 2009, the racial attacks against Indian students gained visibility and attest to the shaky status of honorary whiteness. While the attacks against Indian students became an issue in the Australian media due to the Indian media's tracking of the story, violent attacks, verbal abuse, and discrimination against non-white international students, in general, seem pervasive.[1] International student experiences appear to be linked to their emergence as an underclass of often exploited temporary workers—their living conditions characterised by the high fees they pay for often substandard education in the private educational sector without access to subsidised accommodation, and public transport. Their visibility as racialised international students makes them a target for violence (Baas, 2009). Simultaneously, the long stand-off in the latter half of 2009 between Sri-Lankan asylum seekers, the Australian Labour government, and the Indonesian government has depended on the earlier Liberal government's border security policies that are deployed against asylum seekers. Suvendrini Perera asks: 'To what lengths are Australians willing to be led by a historical anxiety over invasion and the "natural security of borders" to which our leaders lay claim? Is it time to face this fear for what it is—a form of aggression against the most vulnerable to shore up our own sense of power?' (2009). In asking these questions, Perera exposes the violence of the discourse of border security against refugees (2009). Stratton's mapping of the racialised and class-based ways in which asylum seekers and international students are placed in Australia's migration program is, therefore, a timely exposition of Australia's racial and class-based neoliberal approach to migration.

How does academia discipline the radical potential of politics? Undertaking a genealogy of the organization and teaching of an English Honours course in queer theory, Ian Barnard's cogent essay examines how institutions reproduce 'certain stylizations, epistemologies, and methodologies,' while concomitantly concealing or demonizing others (2009: 1). Teaching a course on queer theory, Barnard argues, is not necessarily radical when it is recuperated into the liberal academy's pluralistic desires. However, an anti-assimilationist and radical politics of queer—in terms of a style of pedagogy that poses a challenge to the 'familiar mode of the accretion of identities'—can be another matter (2009: 4). Barnard's enmeshment of a politics of pedagogy and a queer politics necessitates an examination of the ways in which the academy's desire for 'offering the Other for display' threatens to appropriate, and thus fundamentally *depoliticize*, a radical politics (2009: 8). What happens in the process of a refusal to display? Barnard's essay exposes the messy politics of such a refusal, and meticulously traces the simultaneous techniques of disciplining and undisciplining in the itinerary of the teaching of an English Honours course. This is an inspiring essay as it offers a plethora of questions for those interested in critical queer pedagogies and the (un)disciplining of forms and styles.

How do the theoretical frames of morality and ideology versus ethics make a difference in reading mass protests? After a decade of the iconic anti-globalisation protests at Seattle, Maria Hynes and Scott Sharpe rethink the evaluation of protest rallies anchored within the epistemological frameworks of morality and ideology. These evaluations often mark the protests in terms of disappointment—a disappointment at the demonisation of the protestors by the media which Noam Chomsky describes as ‘the scripting of a neoliberal geopolitical hegemony’ (qtd. in Hynes and Sharpe, 2009: 3). Yet rather than accepting this judgement, Hynes and Sharpe shift the theoretical lens. Staging a complex reading of Spinozan ethics and the body via Deleuze, Hynes and Sharpe reread the Seattle protests in relation to the concept of affect and the capacity to ‘act’ that affect entails. Such a reading of resistance movements, Hynes and Sharpe argue, unsettles the binaries between the mastery of consciousness of ideologies and bodily acts. This unsettling, they suggest, may provide fertile ground for a more ‘rigorous conception of pluralist politics’ (2009: 15). Such a focus on ethics in relation to anti-globalisation movements, Hynes and Sharpe show, ‘provides new criteria for evaluating its actions’ (2009: 16).

The above essays are rich in analysis and urgent in their critical interventions. We hope the readers of this issue are able to draw on the productive ways in which the essays offer modes of rethinking politics as a way of fracturing the apparent coherence and seamlessness of a neoliberal present.

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### **Notes**

1. Reports commissioned and supported by the City of Sydney and the City of Melbourne based on surveys of international students, for example, suggest that racism and discrimination are pervasive factors in public places, as well as in access to accommodation and employment.

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