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Coming Attractions

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Saba Mahmood on secularism and the politics of empire; Colin Jager on romanticism’s contribution to an analysis of secularism; Charles Taylor on the modernness of religion in an age of mobilization; Laura Junka with a visual essay on the politics of representation in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict; Luis Cárcamo-Huechante on Milton Friedman and the turn to market culture in Pinochet’s Chile; Katherine Gordy on consumerism and socialist ideology in Special Period Cuba; Dominic Boyer on Ostalgie and the politics of the future in unified Germany; and more . . .
Call for Contributions

**Miscellany:** A collection of various kinds, especially news clippings, literary extracts, postcards, and images. Includes media accounts of items relevant to public discourse and debate throughout the world. The section seeks to highlight not only the reported phenomena as such but also the mediated nature of media coverage. *Public Culture* especially seeks pieces that are witty or (unintentionally) ironic. Submissions should include all relevant facts of publication and should be no longer than three pages.

**Etymologies:** Investigates the contemporary uses and meanings of the terms *public, publicity,* and *public opinion.* Short essays (of approximately six to eight pages) that consider the semantics and pragmatics of one or more of these interrelated terms in the context of a particular language and a particular people are welcome. How do these terms compare across cultures and languages? Do their meanings “translate,” and what do their “mistranslations” bode for comparative social theory grounded in what may be hidden ontological statements about civil society?

**Arts in Circulation:** Reflections and reports on innovative critical cultural work and on the work of art in public. Includes pieces on new kinds of museums; alternative or oral history projects; the expansion of musical performance and recording into forgotten musical histories or the dissemination of a broader range of music; alternative publishing ventures or exhibition practices in film, theater, and dance; innovative cultural work with children; public art such as murals and graffiti; innovative uses of television, radio, or other mass media; and reports on past cultural work.

**Sites of Knowledge:** Reportage and deliberation on institutions that have made a signal mark on a world region. Research centers, journals, publishing ventures, or any other institution of knowledge production and dissemination can be selected for close attention and engagement through interviews with key participants, direct documentation, and critique. How do institutional sites define and engage their publics? How do they position themselves in global networks of knowledge production? What notable qualities and innovations are worth sharing? The aim of the section is to generate an archive of sites of knowledge through a set of informative and critical reflections.

**From the Field:** Briefly annotated single photographs for inclusion as a photo feature at the end of the issue. Submissions are not limited by style or content. Contact submissions@publicculture.org for art guidelines.

*Public Culture,* New School University, 80 Fifth Ave., Room 507, New York, NY 10011; phone: 212-229-5375; fax: 212-229-5929; e-mail: info@publicculture.org; Web: www.publicculture.org.
Like many of life’s good things, Public Culture was first put together on a kitchen table. Seventeen years ago now, Carol Breckenridge, Arjun Appadurai, and a group of their friends thought of the idea and worked on layouts, inserts, and commentaries from their home in Philadelphia (or so the story goes). Their creature, this journal, was an artifact that brought together a collection of writers and of readers.

Public Culture succeeded in convening this initial group of people because it boldly recognized that globalization had created a challenge for the study of culture, a set of obstacles and opportunities that could not be faced except by turning away from the “business as usual” inertia of the academic disciplines and of their flagship journals. Globalization, a historical process that has its roots in the fifteenth century, but that refers to a period of world history that begins roughly in the 1970s, had fractured the connection between culture, society, and the state and introduced fissures in nations as sites of meaningful societal integration.

The conceptual issues that this posed were highlighted in the very choice of Public Culture for the journal’s title. Up until that point, the idea of public culture seemed redundant and unnecessary. To the extent that culture was understood as a socially constructed and widely shared system of signs, it was always already in some way public. Yet, by the late 1980s, the “public-ness” of culture was in dire need of conceptualization, specification, and description: urban subcultures were being networked in ways that breached national and linguistic borders; public spheres were collapsing as effective sites democratic discussion, or else they were being reconfigured in ways that were not yet understood; communications media were teeming with innovation that spawned an array of new social organizational forms and modes of expression.

As editor, Carol Breckenridge recognized that the most promising way to face these challenges was to bring together writings from a range of sites of knowledge, and she took decisive steps to achieve this. From the beginning, the journal
brought together people from a variety of fields (anthropology, criticism, literary theory, communications, history, art, sociology, philosophy), people who felt the desire and need to speak to each other. In addition to this transdisciplinary bent, the journal cultivated long-term relations with intellectuals in a number of metropoles—Johannesburg, Bombay, Rio de Janeiro, Hong Kong, Melbourne, and Mexico City, among others—and provided a space for sustained interaction and engagement with writers from the United States and Europe. Finally, *Public Culture* nurtured and cultivated a variety of accents, a fact that was and is still reflected in many ways, ranging from a keen interest in images and visual representation to a less interventionist approach to copyediting. Relying on its distinctive, famously vocal, committed, and contentious editorial boards, *Public Culture* came to be known for its serious engagement with authors.

*Public Culture*’s attention to location and authorial voice helped establish the nature and qualities of the asymmetries between the center and the periphery and helped make original perspectives from the periphery audible and, indeed, pivotal. These efforts were levered from the experiences of the postcolony, and they involved a substantial collective effort that Dipesh Chakrabarty has called “provincializing Europe.”

As a result of these propensities, and thanks especially to the submissions and dedication of an outstanding group of authors, collaborators, and editors, *Public Culture*’s initial years were a resounding success. Today, the term public culture describes a recognized field: anthropology, communications, and cultural studies departments post job advertisements that list public culture as a legitimate area of academic specialization; doctoral dissertations and journal articles use public culture as a keyword in their abstracts. The journal, in short, gave shape, form, and verve to an entire field.

This achievement seems like it could be a good reason to close the journal down. But I would now be writing the journal’s obituary, rather than my first note as *Public Culture*’s incoming editor, if I thought so. Things, as Arjun Appadurai reminds us in his essay for this issue, have a social life of their own. And so does *Public Culture*. Elizabeth Povinelli, my immediate predecessor, was sensitive to this from the start of her tenure as editor. Beth and her editorial committee recognized the wisdom of the adage that says the less things change, the less they remain the same, and she had the courage to take the journal in new directions. Her five years as editor have produced volumes and special issues that have explored, defined, and refined cultures of circulation with spirit and rigor. As a result, the journal transcended its initial pretext and turned the energy and experi-
ence of its collective to new uses. I hope to be worthy of her example, and I am grateful for her mentorship.

My own initiation as the journal’s editor marks yet another departure. With me, Public Culture has moved from the University of Chicago to the New School for Social Research. This move is certainly not a break with the Chicago-based community, on whom I rely for practically every other breath. It does, however, signal a change of mood, and perhaps also of intent. Public Culture’s success as a field-defining journal has made a number of us conscious of the journal’s performative potential. In line with this realization, we concluded that the purpose of the journal is not just to understand public culture but also to help change it (to coin a watered-down version of Marx’s famous phrase, and so to tailor it to my own gradualist, perhaps “all-too-human” persona).

The rules and restrictions of academic publishing have led us to refine the art of the “untimely intervention” by cultivating a wider variety of registers and thematic developments. If Public Culture succeeded in bringing distinctive perspectives to the fore, we now feel an urgency to organize the key themes of collective concern and to recognize the contemporary order of things. One example can stand in for the grand IOU of our collective intentions.

In its early years, Public Culture tended to provide only limited engagement with voices from Europe and Latin America. This was, in some measure, an effect of the conceptual power that sprang, at the time, from colonial and postcolonial criticism. Latin America, in that context, was historically too distant from the postcolonial moment, and it seemed too closely attached to U.S. dominion. As a result, its voices tended not to travel well; they succeeded only rarely in unsettling readers abroad. European perspectives, in their turn, were still seen as hegemonic and so tended to get less attention in the pages of this journal. Today, the situation is much altered. Despite many efforts, Europe has been effectively “provincialized,” not only by postcolonial criticism, but also by American geopolitics. Latin America, in turn, has interrupted the lullaby of capitalist triumphalism in a set of turns to managed economies, socialism, and strident forms of neorepublicanism. These developments, and many others, call for sustained engagement.

The journal’s response to these other challenges is reflected in a range of new initiatives, many of which will be immediately apparent to our readers. Beginning with this issue, Public Culture’s executive editor, Dilip Gaonkar, is leading a new editorial section, called “Doxa at Large.” This editorial space disseminates the thoughts of a group of Public Culture’s closest collaborators on contemporary questions, in a format that allows them to share their orientation in a succinct and
pointed manner. In this issue, Charles Taylor presents his opinion on the selection of Benedict XVI as pope, while Nilüfer Göle discusses the French vote on the European constitution and its connection to French sentiments regarding the Turkish bid to join the European Union.

In addition to the new editorial space, I want to call our readers’ attention to the two initiatives that have been added to “Call for Contributions.” The first of these, the “Arts in Circulation” section, is inaugurated in this issue with an essay by Arjun Appadurai on art and object. The “Arts in Circulation” initiative replaces the “Artworks” section of the journal by expanding it. “Arts in Circulation” now allows both for the short informative pieces that the journal collected in “Artworks” and for longer reflective essays, such as Arjun Appadurai’s contribution to this issue.

I wish, too, to call attention to a second novelty in the “Call for Contributions,” titled “Sites of Knowledge.” This section, which we plan to inaugurate in the next issue of the journal, will be cultivating reportage and analysis of cultural institutions that have had significant regional impact in different parts of the globe.

As of issue 18.2, our next issue, *Public Culture* will be introducing a new aperture to translation. The global ascendancy of English, and the journal’s policy to publish only original and previously unpublished submissions, in some cases has the unintended effect of closing its pages to global discussions that deserve to be flagged. Recognizing the asymmetries that result from this situation, “Public Culture Translations” will bring pieces from other languages that deserve our attention.

The final innovation that we are introducing is the use of thematic subdivisions in the organization of the journal’s contents. In this way, *Public Culture* highlights common themes, collective interventions, and expository genres, while avoiding excessive indulgence in thematic special issues. We are persuaded that this strategy will heighten the journal’s ability to signal new areas of concern and interest and that it will stimulate new voices to join in our efforts.

In this issue, we present the section “Sexualities, Ethics, Politics,” led by Candace Vogler’s incursion into ethical invention in the early years of the AIDS crisis, through a study of Derek Jarman’s film *The Angelic Conversation*. The piece is followed by Sue Ruddick’s careful tracking of an emerging trend in the treatment of children and the definition of child rights. Rounding out the section, Eric Fassin presents an essay that explores why sexual politics, a theme that the French once considered a characteristically American obsession, has surged in French political discussion, and why it has declined in the United States.
The middle section of this issue, “Anticapitalism, Xenophobia, Imperialism,” is devoted to short polemical interventions. Moishe Postone’s rigorous essay deals with the thorny issue of contemporary forms of political contestation and makes a strong argument regarding the ethical risks that are involved in current anti-capitalist alliances. Postone’s piece is followed by Peter van der Veer’s thoughtful essay on the Theo Van Gogh and Pim Fortuyn assassinations in Holland. Van der Veer turns the lens away from the “what’s wrong with the Muslims” question and hones in on recent transformations in Dutch society as an alternative explanation of the reactive formation against immigration. The final contribution, by Ann Laura Stoler, closes the section with a reflection on imperialism and sovereignty. Stoler’s polemical engagement gives analytical purchase to the way in which the genealogy of imperialism, as a pliable political strategy, provides a vantage point for a critical appraisal of contemporary U.S. geopolitics.

George Steinmetz and Julia Hell’s photo-essay on German imperialism in Namibia, which provided us with the marzipan man on our cover, reinforces and supplements Stoler’s historicization of imperialism and explores memory, oblivion, and the horizon of redemption through the material and visual remains of imperial encounters. The essay bridges the polemical section with the issue’s final section, “Present Re-Presented,” composed of two substantial ethnographic contributions to the Foucauldian project of developing a critical history of the present.

Thomas Blom Hansen’s essay is a contribution to the ethnography of urban movement and traffic as a form of public culture. Through an ethnographic account of public transport and “social velocity,” he explores the transgression and reconfiguration of social boundaries in South Africa. Finally, the issue closes with Jean and John Comaroff’s innovative piece, which offers a pointed and substantial account of a complex feature of contemporary public culture: the production of its obsession with crime. Taking their lead from science studies, Jean and John Comaroff provide a close ethnographic study of how crime statistics shape publics and social imaginaries in contemporary South Africa.

The depth, range, and originality of the engagements that are included in this issue amply confirm the vitality of the public that has constituted itself around this journal. I wish to acknowledge the support for Public Culture by these authors, and by all others who have taken the time and effort to submit their work to us.