

Periodizing the Present: The 2020s, the *Longue Durée*, & Contemporary Culture

Treasa De Loughry
University College Dublin

Brittany Murray
University of Tennessee, Knoxville

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Treasa DE LOUGHRY and Brittany MURRAY

Periodizing the Present: The 2020s, the *Longue Durée*, and Contemporary Culture

The overlapping crises of the present beg the question of causes; when and how did the problems begin? The question is particularly urgent in light of renewed calls for social justice, spurred by the transnational movement to combat racism and anti-Blackness, the uneven impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, a deep-seated and planetary inability to respond adequately to climate change, increasingly repressive border regimes, and the risk of authoritarianism and far-right populism. Adding to this sense of crisis is an overall diminishment of reproductive capacities, including the deepening of higher education debt, and reduced access to affordable housing, healthcare, and a sustainable environment for future generations. However, analyses that treat these crises in their immediacy often omit their preconditions in the capitalist world-system. What gets overlooked is the wider context of seemingly unending accumulation and its intensification of inequality, resource exhaustion, and ecological toxification.

This special issue is concerned with precisely this wider context, on which the 2020s provide a particular vantage point. To access this longer historical purview, the issue turns to culture—in its emerging, dominant, and residual forms (to borrow Raymond Williams' lexicon). A transnational and comparative approach testifies to renewed political energy at multiple sites of struggle. Rather than treat struggles in Africa, Asia, Europe, and the Americas as singular events, contributors historicize emerging tendencies as being bound up with earlier periodic moments of transition. Jeremy Glick, for example, traces contemporary critical and artistic responses to a longer history of transnational Black liberation struggles and anti-colonial wars in the Global South. To cite another example, Sasi Kiran R. Mallam Kiran and Vamshi Vemireddy demonstrate how recent political protest to neo-colonization and state subjugation draws upon the residual form of folk performance.

This drive to historicize is one grounded in the productive tension between periodic and periodizing frameworks. Recent research in materialist cultural studies deploy comparative and transnational approaches, paired with conceptual *longue durée* analyses, of how the problems of the present are bound up with intersecting economic and hegemonic crises (Warwick; Brouillette, Nilges and Sauri; Deckard and Shapiro). While it is important to capture emerging cultural forms, apparent novelty must be situated within older structural trends (Shapiro, this issue). This long *durée* requires attention to recurring crises of accumulation. Just as importantly, it demands a rigorous imagination beyond the present impasse defined by capitalism; the colonial and contemporary exhaustion of commodity frontiers; the critical reliance on unpaid care work; and the adaptation of coercive technologies of surveillance and labor reorganization. In this spirit, this special issue highlights Marxist cultural perspectives, feminist materialisms, social reproduction theory, eco-materialist and world-systemic approaches, with attention to left activism and resistance movements. It seeks to theorize the current moment via analyses of emergent and reactivated cultural forms.

To meet this imperative, contributors respond to diverse contemporary media and genres. The aesthetic modes in the issue include Afro-dystopian novels (Waller), left video-content or "Breadtube" (Sylvia IV and Moody), Hong Kong speculative-protest photography (Siu), cognitive mapping in post-recession novels (Gilroy), experimental Mexican eco-horror (Romero), West African visual waste works (De Loughry), Anglophone service economy novels (Montague), a Wuhan post-socialist realist diary (Yongbing and Penghan), Moroccan avant garde art (Brauer and Rafi), postcolonial disaster literature (Bhattacharya), and French pandemic-era film (Murray). In addition to exploring a wide variety of aesthetic forms, many contributions are dedicated to exploring marginal perspectives, from Chinese urban youth and their response to state-corporate "rising tide" (*houlang*) videos (Lili and Gullotta), to the impact of India's pandemic response on care and informal workers (Swatie and Mehra), to mapping recent Latin American and European popular insurrections (Barria-Asenjo, Scholten, Žižek, Pavón-Cuellar, Salas, Cabezas, Jesús Huanca-Arohuanca, Aguilar Alcalá). This eclectic range is designed to capture the breadth of global emergent cultural modes.

New and avant-garde media mediate intersecting issues; many concerns emerge in more than one article, including youth culture, the autonomy of art, and the importance of radical avenues for voicing complex longitudinal crises. Despite the dominant focus of this issue on self-historicizing emergent cultural forms, we have included sociological pieces to reflect the urgency of our current conjuncture. More specifically, these pieces address the Covid-19 pandemic, and growing popular insurrections (right and left), where there is very little time for cultural mediation in the face of fast moving and violent government interventions. Contributors also recognize the many unbearable professional and caring pressures scholars faced during the (ongoing) pandemic (see especially Swatie and Mehra). We also

encouraged submissions that broke with CLCWeb's emphasis on articles, and include here a review of Pallavi Rastogi's 2020 monograph *Postcolonial Disaster: Narrating Catastrophe in the Twenty-First Century* (Bhattacharya), an interview with avant garde and mixed media Moroccan artist Karim Rafi (Brauer and Rafi), and a roundtable mapping major recent insurrections in Latin America and Europe (Barria-Asenjo et al).

In doing so we take an approach that exceeds the literary focus of much comparative analyses. The point is not to flatten global cultural modes, or to accede to diagnoses of capitalism's production of cultural homogeneity. The point, rather, is to recognize the horizon of global capitalism. If, to cite the Warwick Research Collective, the "world-system exists unforgeably as the matrix within which all modern literature takes shape and comes into being" (20), then this logic should be extended to other global cultural forms, such as film, photography, and visual art. In doing so we hope to capture that world-culture is part of the "overarching study of social labor-power in its lived, inscribed, and performed modes in relation to the capitalist long spiral and governmental arrays" (Lazarus and Shapiro 17). Of interest is how cultural forms from diverse regions deploy transhistorical and structural imaginaries. This issue celebrates culture's imaginative capacity to limn more socially just, emancipatory, and utopian futures and alternatives to our capitalist present.

Periodicity and Periodizing

Our deployment of the term "*longue durée*," is in recognition of the turn in world-literary studies towards a radical transhistorical and transnational mode of comparative analysis, or a periodization based on capitalism's cyclical and repeating crises, to map the interaction between cultural and socio-economic ruptures across radically different regions and periods. To take a step back, the *longue durée* as a term was popularized by Fernand Braudel's macro-historical approach, to uncover the "continuity and transformation" (Wallerstein, "The Rise" 388) structuring the world-economic system, beyond "*l'histoire événementielle*" or the history of events and heroic individuals. This includes for Braudel, and later world-systems theorists like Immanuel Wallerstein and Giovanni Arrighi, a conceptualization of the development and repetition, since early-modern capitalism, of a division of labor based on the specialized financial, extractive, and value-bestowing nature of core, semi-peripheral and peripheral regions. Structuring the ebb and flow of the world-system are the nested temporalities of capital accumulation, or what Giovanni Arrighi describes as the "long century" of hegemonies; however, Wallerstein further emphasizes the role of Kondratieff cycles of capital "expansion and stagnation" (*World-Systems* 95). These cycles are based on socio-ecological revolutions, or capitalism's search for new frontiers of surplus value. The point is not that the world-system repetitively produces similar worlds, but that capitalist imperatives (the search for new avenues of accumulation) find varying expression depending on a range of local factors. Capitalism contains, as Wallerstein argues, both structural and evolving components, with different cycles mediated by specific social conditions.

What does this mean for our special issue, and its reference to periodicity and periodization? This issue begins with the understanding that there is no one sequence to the development of literary form, but multiple ones, responsive to their location in the global system (Warwick 50-1). Recent models of literary comparativism challenge any mechanistic or pre-determined approach to literary history, particularly when it is combined with a nation-centered view of literary studies. These include Franco Moretti's call, inspired by the "one but uneven" world-system of dependency theorists, for a spatial morphology of literature, attentive to the cross-currents and varying temporalities of novelistic and generic emergence (149-151); or Pascale Casanova's world-literary model of competing centers of cultural capital. To this, the Warwick Research Collective argues for a reading of how literary forms mediate the ruptures of the world-system (51). Rather than a "long wave," however, such an approach demands a "long spiral," with Deckard and Shapiro positing that, because capitalist cycles of accumulation tend to create structural similarities between different times and places, literary forms might also re-appear across different moments and global sites. These give rise to "analogical similarities in chronologically contiguous moments within capitalism's long spiral" (29); in response, writers might reactivate older literary forms, first looking to the way their predecessors mediated similar economic processes and then refashioning these older models to provide new aesthetic forms for the present. Of course, each recurrence is no "mere" repetition; great insights can also be drawn from each work's particularity. The best analyses set in motion a dialectic between the recurring contradictions of capitalism's long spiral and the specificity of how these contradictions occur at each site. Rather than try to resolve or subsume the tension between periodization and periodicity, this issue uses this tension to sharpen its critical attunement.

While the goals of this special issue are more modest, the imperative remains the same: for our contributors to interrogate notions of cultural or social novelty within longer materialist frameworks and histories, and to avoid the ahistoricity to which so many diagnoses of the present subscribe. This is especially important given the convergence of multiple crises in the 2020s—epidemiological, political, racial, environmental, and inflationary—with tremendous destabilizing impact on the “social contract,” or capitalism’s promise to endow wealth, longevity, and worker satisfaction. Our contributors explore how and why a global range of texts deploy aesthetic innovations to interrogate inherited forms: whether to probe capitalism’s troubled decay in the present, or to cathect potentially liberatory futures.

Contemporary

Thus, this special issue takes the point made in recent work on the “contemporary” that seeks to disavow presentist, exceptionalizing, and ‘end of history’ style analyses. As Brouillette, Nilges, and Sauri argue in their introduction to *Literature and the Global Contemporary*, injunctions to “live in the moment” (xvii), empty the present of its frictions, especially those caused by the logic of uneven development. This logic produces the violent expropriations, of neo-colonization and extraction, that undergird life in global peripheries. At the same time, it produces the capital accumulation and wealth-hoarding that structure particular core regions and industries. The distended logic of this unequal system became especially vivid during the pandemic and the unequal Covid-19 vaccine roll-out. As Eli Jelly-Schapiro succinctly puts it, “the efficacy of capitalist ideology in the global North continues to be ensured in part by the enactment of crude state violence in the global South (or in spaces of exclusion within the North)” (31-2). Capitalist ideology translates this very structural division of expropriation into an asynchronous, and highly deceptive narrative about temporality, which treats certain groups and regions as “out of” or “behind” time (see Brouillette, Nilges, Sauri xviii). By contrast, this issue strives to capture, rather than exclude or homogenize, the very frictions that define our present.

To capture the complexity of the present, it is absolutely vital to think more broadly than the narrow frame of bourgeois experience in the capitalist core. Over-reliance on Anglophone academic criticism risks over-representing middle-class experience in metropolitan cores, focusing on the decline of Fordist economies and the rise of the entrepreneurial self, immaterial labor, and service work (Deckard and Shapiro 30). This overly narrow focus excludes vital information; namely, the way that modernity, which may very well appear “liquid” or “immaterial” in the capitalist core—nevertheless relies upon toxic extraction, despairing assembly line work, and “wageless” life in global peripheries. What is required is a synchronic approach. The capitalist world-system relies upon differentiations in the mode of production across space, and not only through time. Extending this point, Daniel Hartley critiques treatments of core sensibilities and professionalization as paradigmatic of neoliberal modernity, rather than the “uneven combination of exemplary subjects which, in varying rhythms and ratios, constitutes the objective fact of neoliberal social (de)composition and the diffuse material and geographical basis for the emergence of any future revolutionary subject” (138). Hartley’s point recalls Harry Harootunian’s argument for a “structure of comparability” (47) attentive to the multiple temporalities of capitalist modernity. Such a comparative approach should be grounded in Bloch’s notion of “non-contemporary synchronisms, where past and present are not necessarily successive but simultaneously produced, or coexist as uneven temporalities” (47). In light of capitalism’s multiple temporalities, the issue’s geographical breadth, and the diversity of viewpoints represented therein, allow us to better grasp the time of the present in all of its frictional complexity.

Such an attention to capitalism’s unevenness need not preclude an aspiration to solidarity. Brouillette, Nilges and Sauri, for example, locate hope in the contemporary’s signification of “modern senses of collectivity and community” (xx) as articulated by the rise of early print media, and an early sense of “sociability”. This reading of the contemporary should not be taken up without attention to the role of the nation-state and print media in violent redefinitions of exclusion. Nevertheless, the notion of a shared now as cohering a wider community suggests that common experiences of the present, even in extreme circumstances, can provoke a generative sense of solidarity. To take a concrete example, many of the contributions in this special issue are concerned with theorizing the systemic conditions that led to the Covid-19 pandemic becoming a disaster for specific workers and communities. Among these preconditions are the biopolitics of nation-states, the un- and under-paid care work of social reproduction, and the unequal privatization and distribution of the vaccine.

Futurity

This map of the present would not be complete, however, without an account of futurity. Returning to Eric Cazdyn and Imre Szeman’s *After Globalization* (2011), the authors offer a salutary reminder that

part of capitalism's ideological force is that the "truth of the capitalist system itself" does not alone suffice to spur effective political action. *After Globalization* shrewdly confronts the "commonsensical" ideologies that underpin analyses of the contemporary moment, which act as a block to thinking beyond hegemonic capitalist globalization and the nation-state. Even liberal political imaginaries, which propose better futures—more equality, education, healthcare, and social mobility—exist "outside" reconsiderations of painful structural reforms (131). Rarely are liberal salvific promises delinked from the constraints of corporate-state-parliamentary systems. This has been especially true of the Anglophone world. It remains to be seen, however, whether this thesis should be refined as many core states withdraw from redistributive politics and possible utopian narratives. At the same time, theories of capitalist futurity must account for those core states that seem to be increasingly in thrall of the populism peddled by figures like Boris Johnson.

Though capitalist ideology often cloaks itself in the language of brass tacks realism, its futures are as fantastical as any—whether it peddles the utopian workplace where work is creative and fulfilling, the technology-mediated triumph of the individual, or the fictional possibility of a just capitalism where everyone lives like the middle-class (Cazdyn and Szeman 134). As the overlapping crises of the present have made plain, faith in that illusory better global capitalism might qualify as "cruel optimism," the kind of futurity that Lauren Berlant cautioned readers about, when certain fantasies of "the good life" actually impede thriving (*Cruel* 1-2). The fantasies proffered by hegemonic capitalist ideology, the one where the future, as Cazdyn and Szeman satirize it, is "expected to look much like the present – or even the past!" (133) represents precisely one of those cruel attachments, one that only enables the catastrophic effects of the present system and increasingly threatens the ability to safeguard any future at all.

How, then, does one break the spell of these bad futurities—which imaginatively extend the worst elements of the present indefinitely into the future—and what might take their place? The colliding ecological, medical, economic, social, and political crises of the present have felt, to many, like an impasse; and yet, an impasse, as Berlant argued, does not have to be simply a "time of dithering from which someone or some situation cannot move forward" (*Cruel* 4). Rather, an impasse might also be a time of heightened critical attentiveness, "a stretch of time in which one moves around with a sense that the world is at once intensely present and enigmatic, such that the activity of living demands both a wandering absorptive awareness and a hypervigilance that collects material that might help to clarify things, maintain one's sea legs" (4). Many of the contributions in this issue model just such a heightened awareness. This attention suffuses interpretations of contemporary culture, for example, visual art from Hong Kong (Siu) or Mexican eco-fiction (Romero Rivera). It also motivates authors to decipher social forms, for example India's pandemic response (Swatie and Rashee Mehra). In all of the contributions, readers can detect the effort to carefully calibrate critical attention to this rapidly shifting present.

Reactivating form and genre

In this moment of sharpened attunement, form and genre can help give shape to the collected material of the present. The novel provides one such mode for organizing and making sense of this transitional moment. Novels published during the past decades, as Mathias Nilges suggest, offer "an account not only of the causes of the crisis of futurity that purportedly defines our present but also of the ways we may historicize and ultimately move beyond the limits and impasses that commentators associate with our era of full contemporaneity" (9). Counteracting the stupor of *these unprecedented times*, as the cliché goes, aesthetic form points to helpful precedents, returning the present to the flow of history; as Nilges reminds readers, even the "crisis" of the present has an historical antecedent; "the novel emerged as an art form under conditions similar to those we face today: in the context of a historical crisis in the fiction of time and during the emergence of a new temporal regime (a new way of conceiving of temporality, contemporaneity, and "presence" (9-10). Through the inherited form of the novel, in Nilges' account, form opens a passage to the perspective of the *longue durée*, tracing the relationship of the present to previous "crises" of temporality. The novel, in other words, is an old form that is always solving a "new" problem of time.

These delicate relationships between new and old recall Raymond Williams' argument about the value of residual forms, which may have "an alternative or even oppositional relation to the dominant culture" (although not always, and not necessarily) (122). In addition to the novel, the contributions to this issue make compelling cases for how the residual and the emergent can be discerned in recent film, visual art, and digital cultural expression, whether that means thinking of a web-based, pandemic diary within a longer history of post-socialist realism (Jin Yongbing with Zhang Penghan) or connecting contemporary performance art to an older tradition of protest music (Sasi Kiran & Vamshi Vemireddy).

At the same time, the contributions in this issue register what Williams calls the emergent, or the pre-emergent, those forms or adaptations of form that are "active and pressing but not yet fully articulated" (Williams 126).

Genre can also serve as a powerful tool to bring the *longue durée* into view; the disorientation felt during a crisis, as Berlant suggested, can be described as a present without its proper expectations and explanations—in other words, a crisis of genre: when "predictable relations of cause and effect no longer obtain, the concept of event itself suddenly appears post-normative, which is to say that during crisis times the event emerges not as a thing that goes without saying but as a genre whose conventions are stunned, disorganized, and open for change" ("Austerity" 3). Many of the contributions in this issue appeal to genre in this manner, showing how genre not only gives form or expression to moments of crisis, but also how genre registers alternatives, opposition to hegemonic culture, and historical openings. Dystopia and utopia are among these genres (Waller, Montague, Gilroy), two poles held in productive tension as readers collectively decide which way the arc of history might bend.

Of all the compelling reasons to historicize the present, one would not want to neglect hope. It seems perilous to make predictions at this point, particularly when so much upheaval has rendered any orientation to the future, let alone a hopeful one, fragile. And yet, as José Esteban Muñoz maintained, himself re-activating the utopian thinking of Ernst Bloch, the stakes are too important not to risk the possibility, even probability, of being let down: "This fear of both hope and utopia, as affective structures and approaches to challenges within the social, has been prone to disappointment, making this critical approach difficult. As Bloch would insist, hope can be disappointed. But such disappointment needs to be risked if certain impasses are to be resisted" (65). Crucially, Muñoz and Bloch defend concrete utopias, not abstract ones. Unlike abstract utopias, "untethered from any historical consciousness," concrete utopias are "relational to historically situated struggles, a collectivity that is actualized or potential" (Muñoz 46). It is in the spirit of the concrete utopia, historical and in relation to the struggles that already animate our present, that the editors dared pursue the admittedly audacious principle of this special issue. The issue's characterizations of the 2020s, extrapolated from a limited vantage point only a few years into the decade, may later disappoint, but the editorial wager was that it would be riskier not to try.

Overview of Contributors and Submissions

This special issue includes fourteen articles, and a review, interview and roundtable. The issue is loosely organized into five sections: on systemic crises of capitalism, Covid-19 and cultural registrations, the reactivation of form and new digital futures, global protests and revolution; disaster, the postcolonial and environmental harm; with contributors making theoretical, sociological, and aesthetic interventions into ways of periodizing the present.

The first section, on systemic crises of capitalism, includes an article by Stephen Shapiro on "Conjunctures, Commodities, and Social State Marxism," in which he deploys his notion of Social State Marxism (in contrast to Value Form Marxism) to unpack how culture and ecology operate as "fixes" enabling the turnover of capitalism's commodity 'cloverleaf.' Key to Shapiro's article is a theorisation of the three periodicities of neoliberalism and the contemporary, within a shorter cyclical rhythm (4-60 years), a "Kress" cycle (of about 120 years), and a secular trend (of about 200 years). These multiple temporalities signal a reorganization of class post- the Great Recession, the end of the 'long century' of managerial oversight, and the long collapse of "centrist liberalism" and the gradualist and exclusionary expansion of suffrage under capitalist modernity.

Thomas Waller's article "Spectral Bodies, Dystopian Cities: Literature and Economy in Portuguese-speaking Southern Africa," deploys world-systemic and world-ecological theories to examine how post-1980s novels from Mozambique and Angola by Aldino Muiana, Aníbal Aleluia, Pepetela, and José Eduardo Agualusa use unreal, spectral and dystopian narrative modes to register the historical impact of colonial-capitalist extraction, and the environmental despoilations of post-independence neoliberalism. For Waller, these "spikes" in unreal fictions, while tentatively reflective of broader periodic revolutions in the world-economy, demand careful engagement with local economic ruptures, with Angolan writers using dystopia to register the multi-decadal violent and extractive neoliberalisation of southern Africa, and Mozambican texts figuring the violence of primitive accumulation pre-neoliberalism.

Marty Gilroy's submission, "Reading the Global City: Crisis, Cognitive Mapping and the 'Urban Sensorium' in Tom McCarthy's *Satin Island* and Ben Lerner's *10:04*," deploys an aesthetic and political interpretation of cognitive mapping, via Kanishka Goonewardena, to post-2008/11 fictions. Gilroy

unpacks a core inability to mediate totality or ideology in McCarthy's novel, while finding utopianism and a critical engagement with totality in Lerner's text.

Kate Montague's essay, "Kazuo Ishiguro and the Service Economy," argues that the novelist offers a poetics of work for the service economy. Observing a contradiction between deadly forms of exploitation, on one hand, and the euphemisms often deployed to describe reproductive labor and care work, on the other, Montague explains what the novelist's dystopian mode elucidates about the present crisis of care.

The second section, on Covid-19 and cultural registrations, includes an article by Brittany Murray, titled "Confinement, Care, and Commodification in Mati Diop's *In My Room*." Through a reading of the French and Senegalese director's short film, prepared during mandatory confinement due to Covid-19, Murray explores how *In My Room* represents issues such as grief, isolation, and care, particularly urgent during the pandemic and yet belonging to longstanding concerns about reproductive labor. Mediating between the present crisis and a longer history, the article demonstrates how the film's formal attributes make a claim to artistic autonomy, providing a lens, Murray argues, to understand future possibilities for art, reproductive labor and care work.

Swatie and Rashee Mehra's article, "Biopolitics in the Twenty-first Century: India and the Pandemic" elaborates upon this notion of care, complicating the intersection of care, neoliberal capitalism, and the biopolitical state. According to the authors, while the threat of the virus provoked initial displays of patriotism, subsequent waves of the virus exposed the limits of this early boosterism. The authors explain how racism, sensationalizing rhetoric about the threat of contagion, and neoliberal privatization of state care affect India's response to Covid-19.

Yongbing Jin and Penghan Zhang continue to explore the cultural effects of Covid-19, examining how the pandemic registered in literary form. In their article, "A Case of Pandemic Narrative and the End of Post-Cold War," Jin and Zhang offer a critical examination of the Wuhan Diary, a collection of online posts authored by the Chinese writer Fang Fang during the COVID-19 lockdown and later collected and translated for an international readership. Though the "becoming-diary," in the words of the article's authors, testifies to the specificity of life under lockdown, the article nevertheless situates Fang Fang's text within the longer generic of "post-socialist realism," an aesthetic adapted in dialogue with the political and economic shifts of the post-Cold War period.

The question of situating Covid-19 within a longer history of aesthetic forms, art-shaping institutions, and political transformation also informs Matthew Brauer's interview with the Moroccan multi-media artist, Karim Rafi. The constraints of the pandemic and mandatory periods of confinement shape Rafi's web-based performance, an experiment in juxtapositions between human, flora, and silicon-based technological tools. However, as Rafi and Brauer jointly explain, the performance's context is not only shaped by the pandemic, but also by the period of Moroccan independence, Amazigh activism, the Haraka movement, the Arab uprisings, and the decades at the end of the twentieth century known as the "years of lead." The interview explores how Rafi's art responds to these multiple histories as they converge upon the present.

A third section focuses on form, including reactivations of past forms and the emergence of new ones, including those suited to a digital future. In their article, "Tracing the residuality of a composite protest art form: The case of Telangana Dhoom Dham," Sasi Kiran & Vamshi Vemireddy reflect upon Dhoom Dham, a tradition combining folk song-and-dance routines with political speeches. The authors clarify how the form emerged alongside political protest during the Telangana statehood movement in southern India. Kiran and Vemireddy argue, borrowing the language of Raymond Williams, that Dhoom Dham includes characteristics of a residual form, and yet, as they demonstrate by drawing upon Walter Benjamin's politics of aestheticization, Dhoom Dham reworks existing forms for critical and subversive potential.

Emerging digital forms are the focus of JJ Sylvia IV and Kyle Moody's article, "BreadTube Rising: A Leftist Response to the Contemporary Algorithmic Arms Race." The authors demonstrate how the economic model of Youtube and other social media platforms shape user-generated digital content, leading to worrying tendencies such as greater radicalization and the proliferation of conspiracy thinking. Sylvia and Moody also document the rise of Breadtube, where creators can offer pro-socialist and anti-right-wing content via these same platforms.

Lin Lili and Diego Gullotta also analyze digital forms in their article, "Beyond 'Rising Tides' and 'Lying Flat': Emergent Cultural Practices Among Youth in Urban China." Beginning with a form sponsored by state-private partnerships, the authors offer a critique of rising tides (*houlang*) video, which the authors argue, reduces and homogenizes youth. They then explore opposition to this first form, the "lying flat"

phenomenon, which the authors argue, still falls into a for/against binary. Not content to remain within this limiting logic, Lili and Gullotta provide three cases of emergent youth cultural practices which offer dynamic and adaptive options beyond this impasse.

A fourth section features lucid analysis of global protest and revolution, situating the unresolved questions of the present within long histories of radical thought. To this end, Jeremy Glick, in his essay, "Fredric Jameson and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's *Periodizing the Black Internal Colony*," reads Black radical struggle alongside wars of decolonization, with the aim of protecting and stimulating twenty-first century revolutionary memory. Through a productive pairing of Fredric Jameson and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Glick frames a discussion about revolutionary politics and literary forms animated by thinkers and artists including Amiri Baraka, Charles Olson, Sun Ra, Toni Morrison, and Toni Cade Bambara.

Anthony Siu's article, "Necropolitics and Visuality: Figuring Aesthetics in Hong Kong after Rancière," also examines the intersection of art and political protest. Analyzing select images from *Defiance.Voices*, a two-volume collection of photography and art illustrations, Siu offers insight into the Hong Kong Protests. The collection's images, according to the author, function as "speculative fictions," a material ontology that historicizes modes of sovereign violence and deadly economics in the postcolony.

A roundtable, titled "Returning to the Past to Rethink Socio-Political Antagonisms: Mapping Today's Situation in regards to Popular Insurrections," approaches the question of global protest with an eye to comparative analysis and geographical breadth. Collectively, the authors (Nicol A. Barria-Asenjo, Hernán Scholten, Slavoj Žižek, David Pavón-Cuellar, Gonzalo Salas, Oscar Ariel Cabezas, Jesús William Huanca-Arohuanca, and Sergio J. Aguilar Alcalá) offer a synthetic account of mobilizations in many countries: Nicaragua, Mexico, Bolivia, Peru, Ecuador, Greece, Spain, Hong-Kong, Slovenia, Chile, Colombia and Tunisia. The roundtable identifies shared concerns and modalities of protest, creating a map of political mobilization in the present and perhaps intimations of the future.

A fifth and final section, focuses upon disaster, the postcolonial, and environmental harm. Marcela Romero Rivera's article, "Signs of the Inhuman: Hauntings and Lost Futures in Verónica Gerber Bicecci's *La Compañía*" combines material analysis with eco-critical perspectives. The article complicates the existing critical lens through which eco-fiction is read, which may posit too simple a model for how literary genre might contribute to remedying the current planetary crisis, via content analysis and consciousness-raising. Advocating instead for rigorous material analysis, Romero Rivera suggests attention to class antagonism in eco-fiction, considering the fictional work's process of production and its proximity to power before evaluating how it may contribute to, or impede, the struggle for more just environments. Modeling such analysis, the article examines *La compañía* (2019), by the Mexican author, Verónica Gerber Bicecci. Through material analysis of form, the article explores the book's strategy of appropriating existing materials, its periodization of Mexican history, and its representation of the *inhuman*. This latter figure, the article suggests, merits further theorization in criticism of eco-fiction.

Trea De Loughry's article "Incendiary Devices: Imagining E-Waste Frontiers and Africa's Digital Futures" focuses on different visual responses to e-waste in West Africa, from eco-documentary film and photography responses to the infamous Agbogbloshie e-waste yard in Ghana; to techno-utopian visions of e-waste bricoleurs, and e-waste as a signifier and artefact of the neocolonial nature of the capitalist world-ecology in Africa. De Loughry argues that cultural analyses of high-tech waste require consideration not just of its "techno-fossil" materiality, but how it signifies the neoliberal intensification of precarious labor, the expansion of specialized peripheral mega-dumps, and the recursive nature of waste's value in an era of ecological scarcity.

Sourit Bhattacharya's review essay enhances this discussion of form, catastrophe, and postcolonial ecologies. Offering insight into literary criticism and 'postcolonial disasters,' the essay introduces readers to critical frameworks developed in the past few decades to account for literary representations of postcolonial catastrophe. Bhattacharya surveys a field of literary criticism that combines cultural-geographical and anthropological approaches to attentive analysis of form. Particularly notable for the author is Pallavi Rastogi's 2020 monograph, *Postcolonial Disasters: Narrating Catastrophe in the Twenty-First Century*. The essay praises Rastogi's theory of the "Disaster Unconscious" in fiction from South Asia and Southern Africa, celebrating the book's nuanced and comparative readings of postcolonial literatures of disaster.

Together, the contributions to this issue bring together a variety of disciplinary perspectives, geographical vantage points, and theoretical approaches to offer perspectives on the overlapping crises and historical possibilities that traverse the present. Many re-activate old forms, critically responding to

those past disappointments and triumphs that might inform the present. With this complex, fragile—even fallible—understanding of past and present, the editors hope that the issue as a whole might also honor culture's capacity to intimate more just and liberatory futures.

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Authors profiles:

Treasa De Loughry is an Ad Astra Fellow and Assistant Professor in World Literature in the School of English, Drama, and Film at University College Dublin, Ireland. Her research and teaching interests include examining global mediations of waste, disassembly, pollution, and climate change in contemporary fiction. Recent publications include the monograph *The Global Novel and Capitalism in Crisis – Contemporary Literary Narratives* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), and various chapters and articles on narrative and visual representations of plastic pollution, petro-modernity, and/ or world-economic and ecological crises. Email: treasa.deloughry@ucd.ie

Brittany Murray is Assistant Professor at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville and where she teaches French and Francophone studies and cinema. Murray's scholarly interests include gender, migration, work, and twentieth and twenty-first century culture. Recent publications have appeared or will appear in *French Cultural Studies*, *Short Film Studies*, and *The Comparatist*. She is co-editor of the volume, *Migration, Displacement, and Higher Education: Now What?* (Palgrave 2022) and is currently preparing a periodizing study of 1970s France with the assistance of a UT Humanities Center fellowship. Email: bmurra13@utk.edu