

CULTURES OF COMPENSATION

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Our latest general issue was, as usual, not planned with any theme, but brings together the best of the unsolicited work to have been recently submitted to the journal. As almost always happens, however, certain themes resonate between a number of our contributions.

The context and effects of a highly-advanced form of capitalism – turbocharged by the cybernetic revolution, engaging in all imaginable forms of creative destruction – provides the backdrop to a number of our contributions, more than one of which is also concerned with the question of how capitalist cultures and its agents retain legitimacy in an era of extreme commercialisation and insecurity.

In their article ‘On Capital’s Watch’ Josh Bowsher and Theo Reeves-Evison examine the politics of ecological credit schemes, that allow businesses to destroy a discrete ecosystem in return for the restoration of an ecological site elsewhere. Drawing on discussions of financialisation in the social sciences, they show how biodiversity credits rearticulate ecosystems as units of ‘derivative ecology’, which makes the future of these ecosystems actionable in the present, at the same time as it restricts their capacity to adapt to anthropogenic climate change. They argue that market-based instruments such as biodiversity credits are constitutively unable to embrace the futurity of ecology on its own terms, because they have their own temporal logic that cannot help but petrify their bearers of value.

In her study of ‘Dispossessed Prosumption’ Nancy Ettliger situates the emergence of for-profit crowdsourcing as a key contemporary mode of value-extraction in the longer history of ‘prosumption’, as originally theorised by figures such as Foucault and Toffler. She argues that for-profit *crowdsourcing* is the salient corporate strategy in the digital era regarding capital-labour relations, encompassing both digital consumers and producers, showing how dispossessed prosumption uniquely configures for digital producers with reference to the requirement for self-capitalisation in a context of deepened precarity, while producers’ aspirations for a stable career and consumer lifestyle sustain the process.

Michael Symons and Marion Maddox offer a fascinating study of the mechanisms by which the *explicitly* commercial and profit-oriented nature of a range of social activities within advanced capitalist societies, come to be understood as guarantees of the legitimacy and authenticity of those activities themselves. Incessant marketing generates a concomitant reassurance: nothing is asked but purchasing. This ‘*consolation of profit*’ helps explain a wide range of otherwise surprising preferences – for commercially bottled over tap water, for example. In another fascinating case study, they consider the

extraordinary growth of so-called megachurches, as other forms of organised Christianity decline, arguing that this phenomenon attests the power of even supposedly sacred institutions engaging in a deliberate appropriation of marketing culture.

Ella Harris' paper charts emerging scholarship on 'compensatory cultures'; cultures that are compensatory responses to crisis, but are presented and received as desirable, even preferable ways of organising life. Since the 2008 crash, precarity has become a new normal and a dominant structure-of-feeling in the global north. In this context, the work explored by Harris' paper explored reveals compensatory cultures as central in remaking places, structuring social relations and producing meaning in crisis times.

On a somewhat different topic, but one no less relevant to the exigencies of our present moment, or less central to the core concerns of *New Formations* – Dhanveer Singh Brar and Ashwani Sharma's 'What is this 'Black' in Black Studies?' maps out a new presence in race discourse in the UK arts and higher education, under the heading of 'US Black Critical Thought'. At the same time, they seek to situate 'US Black Critical Thought' and its growing impact upon intellectual and aesthetic discourses on race in the UK, through the lens of the longer-term project of 'Black British Cultural Studies'.

Finally, and touching upon themes that would be relevant to every contribution to this volume, we are immensely proud and grateful to include in this issue a substantial interview with the great Hungarian philosopher Agnes Heller. Heller, who died in 2019 after an extraordinary life devoted to radical thought and practice, was interviewed in 2010 by David Bennett, Carolyn D'Cruz, Glenn D'Cruz and Julia Vassilieva, mainly on the topic of biopolitics. The interview has never previously been published, and we are honoured to carry it here.