

EDITORIAL

Jeremy Gilbert

This latest general issue of *New Formations* brings together a typically diverse range of contributions from around the world. The journal is well known for themed issues but has always been committed to inviting contributions on any relevant topic, and this is the latest collection of the very best of recent submissions. We are delighted to present such a fascinating and wide-ranging set of articles.

In their monumental essay, Iain Chambers and Marta Cariello seek to puncture prevalent European understandings of the Mediterranean. Insisting on what they call ‘a politics of registration and listening’ they interrogate the established legacy of representations of Western imaginings of the Mediterranean. Ultimately they ask us to consider how a more exposed, heterogeneous and turbulent conception of the Mediterranean might change how those in other parts of Europe think about the Balkans. Remaining in the Balkans, Neda Genova analyses the transformation of a specific high relief at the Monument to the Soviet Army in Sofia, which in the past decade has been subjected to a series of material and semiotic modifications. She proposes a rethinking of the operations of surfaces, using the concept of ‘recursion’ to explore surfaces as not only spatial, but also temporal objects engaged in the production of continuity and rupture through time.

Also preoccupied with the politics of the visual, Jane Lydon’s contribution examines how the competing positions and claims of Australian citizens, First Nations people and refugees are negotiated visually in the global public sphere. She argues persuasively that Australian perspectives on struggles over citizenship and semi-porous borders must be understood within a history of nation-building, regional relations and the ideology of Whiteness. How does visual culture constitute categories of inclusion and exclusion? In addressing these questions, she considers the extent to which these strategies shape debates around migration and refugees, and mediate between the historically powerful principles of Australian exclusion and the legitimate claims of refugees. Closely related themes are addressed in Stephanie Hemelryk Donald’s discussion of *Libidinal Circuits*, a significant art exhibition in Liverpool that raised important questions about the politics of migration. Donald situates this particular exhibition in the context of a body of critical artworks that address the manifold experiences of migration in thoughtful, committed and affecting ways. Donald goes on to consider the institutional forms in which ‘intellectual fields’ and ‘the public sphere’ are embodied at any given historical moment. Beyond that, she also addresses the ways in which such institutions make artworks possible, helping to define the

limits of what they can imagine and how they are received. As well as sharing themes, problems, and ways of seeing, she argues that the projects considered here have emerged from a field that has itself been brought into being, to a significant degree, by the type of dialogical collaboration between artists, academics, activists and curators in cultural institutions that was evident in *Libidinal Circuits*.

Our final two contributions address some key symptomatic phenomena of life in the age of advanced digital capitalism. Diane Negra and Suzanne Leonard's article tracks the emergence of sleep discourse in the past ten years in the USA, illustrating a democratisation of this rhetoric insofar as it has begun to interpellate populations beyond midlife women. The investigation then turns to the heightened attention paid to the experience of sleep during COVID-19, discusses how sleep discourse articulates to and with a sense of ambivalent dispossession from work regimes and, finally, argues that sleep crisis has been leveraged to intensify neoliberal brutalities. In a complementary vein, Emma Harrison's article builds upon research about the politics of work and the digital mundane. It does this via an ethnographic study that the author undertook at a North American 'digital detox' retreat. Harrison considers the pertinence of why a detox from the 'digital' and from 'work' were enveloped with one another and how the centrality that was accorded to 'work' at this retreat was tied in with a cultural framework of the digital mundane. She links themes repeated in 'digital detox' literature with epistemological concerns, highlighting how the signifier of the 'digital' allows for an obscuring of high-tech politics and agendas.

Each of these articles, in different ways, explores the edges and limits of some specific form of contemporary experience: the imagined originary location of 'western' culture, the supposedly-separate realms of work and leisure, the permeable borders of countries and nations, the limits and lineaments of public memories. Despite the unprecedented challenges now facing the critical humanities across the English-speaking world, *New Formations* is determined to continue providing an outlet for such challenging, rigorous and innovative work well into the twenty-first century.