



Letter from the Editor

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INTRODUCTION



ABSTRACT

For the 12.1 issue of SPECTRA, we opened our Call for Papers without a set theme, instead inviting scholars to reflect on their fields, speak across difference, and reconsider the categories that shape intellectual life. The resulting issue reflects this breadth and continues SPECTRA's interdisciplinary commitment to theory as a practice of critical interruption. Across essays, reviews, visual work, and an interview on Afro-Futurism and global politics, contributors renegotiate inherited paradigms to confront urgent sociopolitical questions. Together, these pieces demonstrate theory's power to unsettle "common sense" and to reimagine the worlds scholarship makes possible.

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We are proud to present here the 12th issue of *SPECTRA*. *SPECTRA* is, first and foremost, a journal of theory, and this year's articles strongly reflect *SPECTRA*'s commitment to the critical reevaluation of categories and paradigms which theory allows. A theory is a cut; an entry into an otherwise overly fast and confusing reality whose structure is too often taken for granted as "the way it is" or "common sense." The articles in this issue, like all good theory, slow down and make sense of this reality beyond its chaotic appearance.

We might describe this issue as a rethinking of the categories with which we typically describe the world. All of the articles, reviews, and interviews in this issue in some way wish to renegotiate the terms and definitions of intellectual traditions in order to better critique today's pressing sociopolitical conundrums. With some articles, this is done by challenging the assumed distinctions between past and present, medieval and modern—a distinction even critical and decolonial thinkers rely upon. For other pieces, it is the methods of thinking itself—writing, archiving, data collecting—that are under interrogation, demonstrating that, when it comes to theoretical work, the form of our approach is more revealing of our political stakes than the opinions we claim to defend. Still other articles push us to think of the limitations inherent in categorizing itself, suggesting that any theoretical intervention is always-already a moment which necessarily excludes as much as it reveals, particularly in discourses on gender and sexuality.

The featured interview of this issue, a conversation on Afro-Futurism and contemporary global politics with Dr. Thomas Stanley, directly addresses the power of reimagining and rethinking inherited categories and intellectual traditions. Indeed, Sun Ra's powerful invocation that "it's after the end of the world, don't you know that yet?" is nothing if not a demand to see the world one inherits as already lost, turning our attention to new and hitherto unconsidered priorities. The theory performed in these articles ends the worlds of past scholarship and tries to forge new ways to think the present. An issue of *SPECTRA* can ask no more than this.

Opening this issue is Aline de Souza's "Academia hanging by a thread," a visual meditation on the precarity shaping contemporary academic life. The piece foregrounds the affective and embodied insights that arts-based research makes possible amid ongoing institutional crises.

Our research section begins with Maria Siddiqui and Muhammed Shah Shajahan's "On Limits," which challenges how secularism studies deploy the categories of heterogeneity and homogeneity. Reframing "limit" as a practice of power, they show how traditions disclose themselves through authoritative forms of life rather than through analytic dichotomies. Following this is Rebekah Mui's "Decolonial Medievalism?" which unsettles modernity's founding fiction of historical rupture by placing decolonial theory in conversation with medievalist scholarship. Mui invites readers to consider how unexamined narratives about the Middle Ages help sustain colonial modernity's self-mythologizing.

Turning to our review section, Hannah Steinhauer's "Colonial Innovations or Collective Futures?" examines Jennifer Denbow's critique of tech-centered solutions to crises in reproductive and caring labor. Steinhauer highlights Denbow's argument that innovation discourse often obscures the erosion of social reproductive capacities. In "The Responsibility of Writing," Michael J. Shapiro and Brad Evans reflect on literary form, musicality, and the burdens of authorship in fractured political landscapes. Their dialogue meditates on failure, reception, and writing as a practice that invites readers into their own work of thinking.

To conclude, we finish the issue with our interview with Dr. Thomas Stanley, "After the End of the World: Killing Myths," inviting us all to reflect on the possibilities of the time after the end of the world.

After the publication of Issue 12.1, Elhom Gosink and Chris Thorne will officially conclude their term as co-editors of *SPECTRA*. We are delighted to welcome Maria Siddiqui and Erin Hammond as the new editors of the journal. We thank all the authors, peer reviewers, the *SPECTRA* advisory board, the newly appointed editorial board, ASPECT, the Virginia Tech Library, and VT Publishing for their invaluable contributions to this issue.

COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors have no competing interests to declare.

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