

FOREWORD

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By titling Issue 52 ‘New Politics’, it may look as if it were innovation and novelty in the political field that are invoked. We seem to experience yet another version of the discontents of civilisation, paralleled by the search for new political responses. The emergence in recent times of new forms of political claims and demands and the structural inequalities, both at local and global level – exacerbated by the biopolitical governmentality of the past two years and by digitisation – has reshaped the maps of the sayable and unsayable and forms of political expression and organisation. The traditional political apparatus and its vertical organisation are increasingly paralleled if not challenged by a proliferation of voices and their calls for recognition. Art, as the traditional sphere for progressive politics and for the exploration of the political by other means, offers a front seat to observe these dynamics and is in fact one of its main contemporary stages. In this regard, the ‘new’ in the title is perhaps misleading as it might recall, for some, old modernist cries for the search of novelty and progress and constant orientation towards futurity. By new, what the editorial team had in mind is perhaps closer to a certain contemporary structure of affect as a response to what are indeed new types of claims leading to new aesthetic positions and artistic sensibilities. And if all are not ‘new’, the plural geographies and the ‘minor’ archives they excavate and bring to the fore do shape an artistic landscape that articulates a different idea of the global, feels both contemporary and inactual and which, hopefully, contributes to shifting the positions within sensible configurations and to estranging prevalent modes of saying and doing.

This issue opens with two new essays on the work of Jonas Staal. Penned, by art critics and theorists Sven Lütticken and Kim West, these texts look at two essential tools of politics as explored by Staal, respectively the assembly form and propaganda. Looking at projects including *New World Summit* (2012–ongoing) and *Collectivize Facebook* (2020–ongoing), Lütticken looks at how Staal’s assemblies gather agents that are usually excluded from conventional political arenas, bringing into existence parliaments with and for stateless states, autonomist groups, and blacklisted political organisations. As for Kim West, Staal’s

practice is approached through the question of propaganda and of what a propagandist art could be. West draws a constellation between the propagandist strategies of Staal, Captain America and Willi Münzenberg. Probing each of these protagonists' relationship to media and propaganda – Staal's assemblies; the superhero and mainstream liberal centralised media; the anti-colonial, internationalist and anti-capitalist media empire of Münzenberg – West reassembles their potential to rethink criticality as a position within the art system. Rather than denouncing art's autonomy, West champions a 'socialist case for the autonomy of art', claiming that 'a truly progressive reform can only derive from it.'

Natalia de la Rosa looks at the Taller de Gráfica Popular ('Popular Graphics Workshop') founded in 1937 in Mexico City by the artists Leopoldo Méndez, Luis Arenal and Pablo O'Higgins. This in-depth essay considers anew the relationships between 'popular culture', the avant-gardes and politics. By looking at the workshop as a form of collective organisation and the way it rethought forms of labour, as well as at the distribution of print media (posters, loose sheets, flyers), the author examines how the actors of the Taller de Gráfica Popular negotiated the very notion of 'popular' visual culture with regards to the medium itself. Emerging from the search for a widespread medium able to combine propaganda, modern techniques and the production of new publics, print became a privileged terrain of political struggle and imagination.

In a conversation with *Afterall* editor Charles Stankieveh, writer Irenosen Okojie talks about her collection of writings *Nudibranch* (2019) – from which is excerpted the short experimental text *Logarithm* republished in this issue. She discusses questions of form and linguistic texture, the sensuality and bodily dimension of writing, the short story and fiction. In addition to these formal issues, Okojie addresses the expectations Black writers face, the 'pressure to tell certain narratives' and recounts her work to narrate 'stories about Blackness but in ways that feel hopefully interesting and expansive and really show that Blackness is not a monolith.'

Thomas (T.) Jean Lax's 'Searching for Iemanjá' is the curator's diaristic essay based on a research trip in Brazil in early 2020. There, they encounter Iemanjá, one of the seven *Orishas*, or deities, of the Yoruba people. During their trip, Iemanjá appear in various guises at different cultural events and spaces. And as Lax writes 'like the people who had cupped these objects in their hands or placed them on a table for safekeeping before me, I too held the idea of Iemanjá steady in my mind's eye as I crossed the city looking for her'. In his search for the deity, Lax recounts how the human and spiritual worlds are transcended through her presence and invocations, and weaves the narrative of his quest with those of a difficult history and present, but also the potential and creativity around

the work of Afro-Brazilian practitioners and spaces, the reclamation of their histories and the production of their own models.

Discussing Kapwani Kiwanga's practice, art historian Elvan Zabunyan looks at the relationships between research processes and aesthetic in works including *AFROGALACTICA* (2011–ongoing), *Flowers for Africa* (2013–ongoing), *Glow* (2019) and *Repository* (2020). Drawing from Black histories, Afro-Atlantic cultures, Afrofuturism and operating between anthropological inquiry and the tension between the archive and the possibility of fictionalising history, Kiwanga's multi-disciplinary work articulates new grounds for the encounter between aesthetics and politics. In her essay, Zabunyan unfolds close readings of some of her works and shows how the artist articulates 'exit strategies' from the complex historical grounds she starts from and which she injects with a sense of futurity.

This issue also pays homage to expanded arts pioneer Aldo Tambellini (1930–2020). Working first with painting, which he pursued throughout his career, Tambellini's interest lied in blackness. Black as a question of media ontology – as creating a reversal of value in relation to light with which photography, film and video are traditionally associated; black as social, cultural and political issue expressed through his engagement with Afro-American artists and communities; finally, black as cosmological, that is, for Tambellini, as relating to an energy flowing through the universe. In her essay, art historian Hanna B. Hölling looks at the relationships between blackness, mediality and intermediality, as well as at materiality and physicality and claims that the work 'teleport[s] us into a realm in which black wanders between media, and perform an *aesthetic of change*'. Film scholar Matthew Barrington examines the artist's engagement with Afro-American culture, including the Umbra poets and the Black Arts Movement, in relation to his approach to abstraction, the non-pictorial and the anti-representational. For the author, Tambellini's exploration of black both as a formal question and as a racial and political issue positions the artist 'as an intriguing reference point for contemporary debates around the relationship between Blackness and experimental media arts, despite him being an Italian-American artist.'

Founded in 1997 and active until 2018, Ip Gim was the first collective to use the word 'feminist' to describe itself in South Korea. In her essay, art historian Hyeonjoo Kim retraces the group's trajectory, from its founding years to the recent renewed interest in its practice. As Kim eloquently demonstrates, Ip Gim occupies a unique place in Korean contemporary art history. Rejecting *Dansaekhwa*'s phallogentrism, concealed under the supposed universalism of its abstract aesthetics, Ip Gim expressed as well as shaped various moments of the relationship between art practice and feminist activism. Discussing several of the

collective's project including the seminal *Abanggung: Occupy Jongmyo Project* (2000) which nurtured 'feminist activist art' allowing 'a path to reopen for activist art practices that had been receding since the 1990s', Kim reconstructs the many layers on which Ip Gim operated, from the articulation of a feminist art oriented towards structural changes, through its contribution to feminism at large, to its championing of non-object-based, processual, collaborative forms of art practice.

In the last essay of the issue, sociologist Pascal Gielen examines the thorny issue of so-called 'cancel culture'. Taking a step back and addressing the way polemics emerge – which Gielen sees as a phenomenon specific to the online sphere – this essay discusses the bipolarisation of opinions on social media. Taking as examples the controversies around Erik Kessel's *Destroy My Face* (2020) and the Dutch translation of Amanda Gorman's poem 'The Hill We Climb', Gielen criticises the virality of online debates and their binary and peremptory style, contrasting them to live discussions. As Gielen writes, 'The body itself, the timbre of the voice, smell, facial features, the direction of the gaze, uncontrollable gestures, speaking hesitantly or perspiring all put judgment in perspective'.

This issue also includes a specially commissioned insert by Nikita Kadan. Entitled *SovMod Skull*, this series of drawings and collages is inspired by the movement Save Kyiv Modernism (or Save Ukrainian/Soviet Modernism) that recently emerged in Ukraine. Questioning the ambivalences of its claims and politics, Kadan has pictured modernist skulls by Picasso as protecting SovMod fetishised buildings that still remain untouched in Kyiv, Dnipro, Odessa or in the war zone of Donetsk.