

# Introduction: Bodies in Disarray

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There is no such thing as a single-issue struggle  
because we do not lead single-issue lives.  
– Audre Lorde, ‘Learning from the 1960s’

The body breathes, breathes itself into words,  
and finds some provisional survival there.  
But once the breath is made into words,  
the body is given over to another,  
in the form of an appeal.  
– Judith Butler, *Frames of War*

Let us be brief. It would be difficult to understate the extent to which the events of the past year have reaffirmed the truth of Audre Lorde’s famous declaration. With COVID-19, we are not living through a single-issue crisis. The novel coronavirus has not just been the source of exclusively ‘novel’ problems—this pandemic has exposed and compounded pre-existing fault lines of inequality across the board. For instance, in the Netherlands it was reported in early October 2020 that intensive care units across the country saw among their patients an overrepresentation of those whom the Dutch so inelegantly term ‘people with a migration background.’<sup>1</sup> The first response of many was to speculate on the correlation between ethnicity and severe cases of the coronavirus. This invited a racist narrative of ‘foreign’ bodies overburdening ‘our’ healthcare system, propagated most loudly by Geert Wilders of the Party for Freedom (PVV).<sup>2</sup> Foregrounded less frequently was the alternative hypothesis that this was a case in which *class and race inform each other*. People of color and Eastern European migrant workers are disproportionately likely to hold low-wage jobs in sectors where anti-infection measures get swept aside in favor of stable turnover and profit margins (e.g. retail, construction, slaughterhouses), even when this puts their bodies directly in harm’s way. A higher infection rate within a particular socio-economic class leads to a higher absolute number of severe cases among people from that class, and so a tragic trend is born. The unequal distribution and concentration

of capital, the political salience of white supremacy, and soaring COVID-19 infection rates conspire to a devastating—and indeed, devastatingly racist—effect.

As devastating as the COVID-19 crisis has been, the past year has also seen a global surge in antiracist activism and protests. Alongside the pandemic, the Black Lives Matter movement was a key source of inspiration for this issue of *Junctions*. Some of the issue's central themes are bodily vulnerability and political resistance in times of crisis; what is the role of the body in the struggle for (racial) equality? In the passage cited above, Judith Butler claims that writing, specifically the writing of political activists, is a mode of communication in which the body 'breathes itself into words' and, in doing so, gives itself over to the Other 'in the form of an appeal.' But what if the political problem at hand is precisely the Other's refusal to recognize the legitimacy of such an appeal? Is it not so that, in cases of social injustice, the appeal can only consist of something *granted to* the oppressed *by* the oppressor, thus necessarily perpetuating the unequal relationship it seeks to level? If the conditions required for the appeal to be satisfactorily met were present, the need for it would not have arisen in the first place. The shared final words of black men like Eric Gartner, George Floyd, and too many others—'I can't breathe'—were an appeal, in this case to the compassion of white police officers who had none. But when activists and protestors wrote those words on cardboard signs, shopping center walls, and police cars around the world, the appeal was transformed into a mass *demand*. The movement is asking for far more than 'provisional survival'; it insists on an unconditional and immediate end to racist policing and the carceral state. Black Lives (will only come to) Matter when black bodies are no longer given over to the agents of capital and the forces of white supremacy, in any shape or form. Gartner and Floyd live on through a movement that speaks defiantly with their voices, refusing to surrender them a second time.

We do not claim that the following pages hold any sort of solution that ensures these demands will be met, nor do they contain any definitive statements about how the damage that still proliferates as a result of the ongoing pandemic should be managed. An academic journal may not be the place for that, but as scholars we should still strive towards active and responsible engagement with the communities and voices that are most directly afflicted by white supremacy, global capitalism, and the hierarchies and crises these systems create. Ultimately, we believe that the articles and book reviews in this issue offer insightful approaches to their respective topics that can help us think about what said engagement might look like.

## CONTRIBUTIONS

Four original research articles grace the pages of this issue. In ‘Challenging the Overrepresentation of Man’, Megan Husain reads Bernadine Evaristo’s *Girl, Woman, Other* through the works of Sylvia Wynter and Adriana Cavarero, showing how the novel offers a literary model of relational ontology that challenges Eurocentric notions of ‘Man’. By using this lens to explore the ways in which the novel avoids traditional and archaic ontologies of the human and enacts an alternative literary imagining of the Black subject, Husain shows what the novel offers in light of contemporary Black Lives Matter discourse and the importance of understanding the human beyond the white bourgeois ethnoclass of ‘Man’.

In ‘The Body as Heterotopia’, Martijn Loos, Johanna Kaszti, and Rick van der Waarden posit that utopian theories have so far neglected the double role of the body as both a physical site and as a locus where cultural values are brought together and performed. To account for this double role and its implications for how we think utopia, the authors present the body as a Foucauldian *heterotopia* and analyze heterotopian themes in Octavia Butler’s *Paradigm of the Sower* and Ray Bradbury’s *The Illustrated Man*.

In ‘Shooting Total Strangers’, Andrew Moffitt examines two of Virginia Woolf’s pacifist short stories by bringing her work into conversation with that of Judith Butler and Slavoj Žižek. Aided by Butler’s theory of ‘grievability’ and Žižek’s method of ‘unmasking’, Moffitt argues that these stories offer a language to speak beyond nationalistic us-versus-them narratives, as well as a way to think about humanity’s shared vulnerability.

In ‘Pursued by Plague’, Anne de Hoop explores patterns of migration in the context of the Plague of Cyprian, which occurred in the Roman Empire during the third century AD. De Hoop argues that the broader consequences of the pandemic (for instance, famine and the social unrest that followed) allow us to understand the plague as an indirect motive of migration in the Roman world. Just as we can see an interweaving of socio-economic and cultural factors in our contemporary response to pandemic outbreaks, De Hoop shows that a similarly complex relationship can be found in the consequences of historic plagues.

In addition to these articles, we are happy to offer three fine book reviews of edited volumes that are all in various ways concerned with memory. Adam Dargiewicz and Karolina Miłkowska review *Museums, History and the Intimate Experience of the Great War: Love and Sorrow* (2020). According to them, the book makes an interdisciplinary contribution to both history and museology with its general attentiveness to the role of bodies and emotions in remembering past

events such as World War I. Dawid Aristotelis Fusiek reviews *Remembering Migration: Oral Histories and Heritage in Australia* (2019), finding it to be a broad collection of stories and approaches for studying and understanding migration in Australia and elsewhere. Finally, Stefano Lissi reviews *Mobilizing Cultural Identities in the First World War: History, Representations and Memory* (2020), a volume that highlights the cultural and identity-forming aspects of World War I. Lissi sees a crucial *leitmotif* emerge from the various contributions: an attention to relatively understudied actors, fronts, and narratives of that war.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

‘Bodies in Disarray’ is our second and last issue as managing editors. We wish our very capable successors the best of luck in the production of Volume 6 of *Junctions*. Of course, the current issue would not have been what it is now without the hard work and dedication of its entire editorial team. We are therefore immensely grateful to have had the following people working on it: Tamalone van den Eijnden (PhD editor-in-chief), Delaney Hart (student editor-in-chief), Dennis Jansen (managing editor), Mark Whittle (managing editor), Lotte Kremer (book review editor), Meike Robaard (book review editor and additional copy editing); Keerthi Sridharan (copy editor), Sanne Steen (copy editor); Madelynn Hart (proofreader), Helen Herbert (proofreader), and Tara Huisman (community manager and additional proofreading). Furthermore, we would like to thank the Utrecht University Graduate School of the Humanities for their continued financial support, Ubiquity Press for hosting and publishing the journal, and the members of our founding advisory board. We extend our thanks to the anonymous peer reviewers for their invaluable service, and finally to the authors for their excellent contributions to this issue.

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<sup>1</sup> This phrasing has recently replaced the more overtly racialised term *allochtonen* in official communications, but the latter is still commonly used in everyday speech.

<sup>2</sup> Internationally, Wilders is well known for his Islamophobic and nativist politics. In 2014, he was found guilty of *groepsbelediging* (perhaps best translated as ‘insult of a collective’ or ‘group libel’) for inciting a room full of his supporters to call for ‘less Moroccans’ and responding, ‘Then we’ll get that done’ in 2014.