

Introduction

A Conversation on Power Structures

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What is power? In the introduction to a journal issue on power structures, there is no broader, nor a more relevant question to begin with. The innumerable meanings of power range from the ability to achieve certain goals, to a narrower conceptualisation of power as the use of force and domination (Boulding 1989). The image on the cover of this issue can be regarded as both a visual legacy and a symbolic representation of power. This photograph, taken in the 1950s, captures a moment on a bus station on the streets of Beirut in Lebanon (Van de Poll 1950). It depicts an adult male in a Western suit looking down on a young shoeshine boy who is avidly polishing the man's shoe. As a piece of visual evidence, the photograph records a particular moment in time in the recent years after the decolonisation of Lebanon in 1943. Yet simultaneously, this image seems to do more than documenting this historical moment. The image connotes the successful integration of Western culture and markets in the Middle East. This image was taken at a time when Lebanon was implementing a new economic model that opened up the country to international trade and finances, with Lebanon being called the 'Paris of the Middle East', and the 'Switzerland of the Orient' (Westmoreland 2008, 70). The two 1950s Oldsmobiles in the photograph seem carefully positioned as staged props of the American automotive industry. The dominant position of the Western male vis-à-vis the young boy's submissive gaze serves as a symbol of dominance of the West over the East. However, this symbolic interpretation is but one example of the meaning of power.

Throughout Western history, starting with Plato's political philosophy, thinkers have concerned themselves with the spectrum of possibilities of power and with its political, social, cultural, and economic manifestations. Therefore, it should come as no surprise that in the study of social systems and structures of inequality, the concept of power is most important. From Locke's writing on power and free will to Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, from Sojourner Truth's famous speech 'Ain't I A Woman' to Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels' *Communist Manifesto*, power structures, oppression, and resistance have kept many minds occupied. Marxist economic and cultural theories such as Structural Marxism, the Frankfurt School, and Marxist Feminism, influenced by Marx's dialectical understanding of history as fundamentally proceeding through class struggle, held sway over much of the socially-engaged academic theory of the first half of the twentieth century. The influential oeuvre of French

philosopher Michel Foucault (1926-1984), spanning from 1954 to 1984 and including classics such as *Discipline and Punish* (1977 [1975]) and *The History of Sexuality 1-3* (1990 [1976], 84), marked a turning point in humanities research on power. In place of a dialectical approach to power, viewing it as a structure of class-based economic hegemony propagated through a dominant ideology, Foucault proposes a more nuanced perspective on power, developing an understanding of the micro-physics of power as opposed to Marxism's concern with broader power structures, in which power is relayed through diverse strategies, technologies and programs in excess of centralized political control. The subject, in this understanding of power, is simultaneously oppressed by and brought into being by power. As such, there is no 'outside' of power; power is pervasively present in our social relations and the fabric of everyday life.

The level and perspectives with which we comprehend the construction and presence of power is continually changing as scholars working in the fields of philosophy, sociology, and comparative literature continue to engage with social issues. For instance, feminist and postcolonial scholarship emerging from social movements in the 1960s and 1970s further complicated the notion of power. Scholars and activists, ranging from the famous French philosopher Simone de Beauvoir to contemporary political theorists Wendy Brown and Joan W. Scott, contributed to and troubled the understanding of power, first in the liberal feminist and Marxist feminist tradition, later also influenced by Foucauldian and psychoanalytical understandings of power, by drawing attention to the specificity of the female experience. The feminist rallying slogan 'the personal is political' anchored the connection between personal experience and social and political power structures. Postcolonial scholars and Black feminists pointed out that 'the female experience' is anything but universal, and revolutionized contemporary theory on power by introducing the notion of intersectionality to account for the multiplicity in lived experiences amongst axes of differentiation. The operationalization of these theories can be seen in some of the articles of this issue, which emphasize the intersection and interaction of social categories such as race, gender, sexuality, and class, in systemized oppression and privilege. In short, the modification of Foucauldian and Marxist paradigms enables us to understand the structures of embodied, engendered, and technologically-mediated power relations. Putting theory into practice, these views enable young scholars such as the ones published in this issue to reflect on our current and future positions in modern-day academia.

POWER AND KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION

What is a research career in the age of (technological) efficiency and key performance indicators? For research-focused graduate students in the humanities, who in many cases have come of age in a technologically mediated and economically bereft society, this question is essential to consider.

In 1979, Jean-François Lyotard wrote *The Postmodern Condition* as a report for the *Institut Polytechnique de Philosophie* of the *Université de Paris VIII* and reflected on the status of knowledge in so-called First World societies. The system on which modern society has relied - rules of consensus between two rational minds regarding the truth-value of a statement - could no longer rely on a grand narrative to legitimize consensus. Instead, institutions were left with smaller 'clouds of narrative language elements' where each mini-narrative creates their own rules and parameters of legitimation (Lyotard 1979). The rules of engagement for the production of knowledge have changed, as the current system is based on performance and efficiency. The ultimate goal of this new system, according to Lyotard, is perfect information, or optimal performance, where knowledge is measured according to its productivity. Flash-forward to over thirty-five years later and the pressures of performance are readily observable in the fibres of modern-day academia.

In his *Report to the Academy* (2001), Gregg Lambert responds to Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition* from the perspective of twenty-first century academia. Lambert argues that the ideal (Kantian) subject, who has full authority to 'position' the idea of the university, as well as critique its architectonic or institutional arrangements, no longer exists. A new subject, a class of university administrators is introduced, who speak *for* the university. In other words, the university professor, who simultaneously influences the course of the university and critiques its arrangements, no longer exists. We can see this in the increase of management and administrative positions in the university, and in the increasingly precarious position of teaching faculties. For instance, the uneven distribution of labor between scholars constitutes a burden that weighs heavily on lecturers with temporary contracts. Moreover, in the rapidly neoliberalizing university, a constant increase of productivity is demanded of all faculty members, and 'under-performing' has become a moral sin (Ball 2012). It is through these auto-ethnographic observations in the classroom that students aspiring to a research career witness first-hand the importance of understanding academic power structures and developing skills that will help them thrive in and challenge the contemporary business-like environment of the modern academic institution. The inaugural theme of power structures, then, has a double aim: to invite aspiring scholars to think about the power structures they encounter in their research, and to support authors, reviewers, and editors – all of whom are students – to develop skills that will help them later on in their careers.

POWERFUL PERSPECTIVES

To return to the question, what is power? We cannot answer this question conclusively, but the articles in this issue can offer us a broad range of insights and perspectives into the many facets of power, and the vastness of political theories behind them. As can be seen in the variety of articles

in this issue, power is a transdisciplinary matter of concern, branching out into questions of inequality, hierarchies, and contemporary politics. A transdisciplinary advancement, as opposed to multi- or interdisciplinary, transcends and transgress disciplinary boundaries (Klein 2010). This is visible in the way in which the articles move beyond their disciplinary boundaries in network of connections made in-between the lines. The five articles presented in this issue are organized in an order that oscillates between foundational philosophical questions on power to more concrete examples of its emergence in different research areas.

First, with her article “Being-in-Common: the ‘Human’, the ‘Propertied’, and the ‘Common’ - An Enquiry into the ‘Common/s’ as a Strategy to Rearticulate Humanness”, Aurora Perego questions the construction of ‘humanness’ in relation to property. Situating the signification of ‘humanness’ in capitalist and colonial modernity, Perego sets out to explore how ‘the commons’ can blur the boundaries between categories of ‘human and ‘non-human’. Using the case study of the Zapatista movement of Mexico, and their efforts to reappropriate lands and dedicate them to the community, Perego explores to what extent ‘the commons’ can be used to rethink the notion of humanness.

Then, Jasper Bongers delves into the politics of humanness through the idea of citizenship with his article “Informal World Citizenship: The Debate Between Statist Republicans and Cosmopolitans.” Bongers introduces us to a debate on the nature of citizenship, in which statist republicans argue that citizenship exists only at the national level, and cosmopolitans counter that it is precisely the existence of nations that causes global inequality. Bongers weaves his analysis of the debate between cosmopolitans and statist republicans together with three cases of what he calls ‘informal world citizenship’: the *sans papiers* movement in France, the international Occupy-movement, and the anti-nuclear weapon protests of the 70s and 80s, thus showing that performances of citizenship are not limited to national boundaries, and a form of informal world citizenship is, in fact, already in practice.

Continuing the discussion on state politics, Tjalling Valdés Olmos takes on the dictatorial past of Chile through a twofold analysis of Patricio Guzman’s documentary film *Nostalgia de la Luz*. Arguing that Guzman not only tackles various forms of state violence in his documentary, thus refusing to forget the violent dictatorial past, Valdés Olmos argues that Guzman critiques the memory politics of post-dictatorial Chile. Moreover, using a phenomenological analysis, Valdés Olmos illustrates how Guzman troubles the linear time of colonial and neoliberal projects of the state through his use of memory in his documentary, thus posing questions on embodied experience with non-linear, cyclical time, and in extension, to broader questions of dis/orientating starting positions to power structures.

On a more fundamental level of criticism, Noortje Delissen troubles the ruptured timeline scholars have used for Michel Foucault's work in "On Foucault's Work: Continuity rather than Rupture." Rather than cutting Foucault's oeuvre up in an early and a late period – corresponding with his archaeological and his genealogical method – Delissen argues that Foucault's work should be understood as a continuation. Analyzing his use of the notions of 'the subject' and of 'resistance', Delissen shows that Foucault's oeuvre should be understood as always already combining both methods, thus interweaving with and building on itself. Bringing two extremes together, Delissen emphasizes the co-dependency of Foucault's methods, and extends this co-dependency further to counteract our tendency to understand power as something which can only have one meaning.

Lastly, Rosa Wevers' article "'Kodak Shirley is the Norm': On Racism and Photography" questions how power structures influence who is deemed human (enough) by investigating the relation between the seemingly objective technology of color photography and the normativity of whiteness. Wevers takes on the case study of 'Kodak Shirley' cards, which were used as a standard for color development in photography as a representation of the universal human to whom people with all skin colors had to compare. Moreover, Wevers delves into the South African Apartheid regime's use of the 'boost button', a button on the Polaroid ID-3 camera that created extra flash, so black people would be visible in the photographs taken for their Pass Books. Elegantly weaving together the entanglements of technology and power structures in color photography, Wevers shows how precisely the design of photo cameras and color balancing technology shows the non-innocence, the subjective influence of cultural ideologies on the seemingly objective medium of photography.

Alongside the five published articles, we have published three book reviews, each discussing a different aspect of power relations. Timo Houtekamer reviews Indigenous Studies scholar Aileen Moreton-Robinson's book *The White Possessive*, which resonates with Perego's argument in this issue that whiteness – as a shorthand for humanness – depends on possession; the possession of Indigenous lands, specifically. Hans Rodenburg's review on the book *State Phobia and Civil Society: The Political Legacy of Michel Foucault* by Mitchell Dean and Kaspar Villadsen provides a bridge between Delissen's article on Foucault and Bongers' article on political science, by exploring how Dean and Villadsen understand Foucault's legacy in political sciences. In Francesca Hooft's review on Latin America scholar Francesca Lessa's most recent book *Memory and Transitional Justice in Argentina and Uruguay: Against impunity* which discusses investigates two case studies of transitional justice and connects these to memory politics, we can find resonances with Valdés Olmos' article on post-dictatorial memory practices in Chile in this issue. The book reviews thus offer enrichment on the issues of power structures that are tackled in the various articles.

NARRATING OUR HISTORY

Originating in a close collaboration with the Second Humanities Student Conference *Re: Interpretation – A Conversation on Power Structures*, held in January 2016, the Call for Papers for *Junctions*' inaugural issue aims to extend the rewarding experience of the Conference's conversations on power structures. These conversations have remained central to the production of this issue: the double-blind review process between editors, anonymous peer-reviewers and authors resulted in the selection of articles and reviews that are published here today. Nonetheless we want to emphasize that the production of this journal – a form of knowledge production - is not innocent, or free of the influences of power structures (Haraway 1988). The societal, cultural, economic, political, and institutional power dynamics that became explicit in the production of this issue have made us aware of questions such as, who has access to our Call for Papers? Who has the academic capital, the time, the energy, to submit an article, and then potentially go through revising and resubmitting it in a very short time? We are furthermore made aware of the voluntary intellectual and emotional labor the members of the editorial board, the reviewers, as well as the supporting faculty engaged in. And lastly, we could never have launched this journal without the financial support and backing of the Graduate School of Humanities. Clearly, there are many voices in a conversation on power structures. After employing the soft power tactics of argumentative persuasion, we hope you will find yourself drawn to the sound of these millennial scholars.

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ILLUSTRATION

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