

EDITORIAL STATEMENT

In our fourth issue of *Situations* (Volume II, no.2) we begin with three pieces on the contemporary political and economic situation. Michael Pelias and Iván Zatz engage some recent work in political economy that places into question the orthodox Marxist interpretations of neo-liberalism and late capitalism. They detect a paradigm shift for analyzing the “the age of financialization” and offer some alternative possibilities for building a new political culture. Stanley Aronowitz tackles the current political situation by attempting to explain the relative passivity of the Left. He describes four factors that have contributed to this passivity: the professionalization of the majority of the 1960s political opposition, the abandonment of the anti-capitalist perspective, the lack of consideration of a new political formation, and finally, the establishment of new repressive state apparatuses. Aronowitz invokes a new type, the political intellectual, to confront this malaise and malcontent of the Left. In a response to Aronowitz, Rick Wolff extends the analysis by pointing to a betrayal of the Left by New Deal policies, and calls for a new perspective on how to reorganize the surplus. In so doing, he reminds us of Marx’s great theoretical revolution concerning History and class struggle.

In our **Scholarship with a Purpose** section, Philip Castille gives us a fresh analysis of Erskine Caldwell’s fiction, particularly *God’s Little Acre*, and he demonstrates that the originality of this work lies in the fact that it possesses a fictional aesthetic which bestows beauty and dignity on proletarian life, far from the notion of drab and sordid conditions with which bourgeois mainstream fiction has prejudicially viewed these lives. The poignancy of Caldwell’s images of the mill workers’ lives and how they are released into productive social energies are accentuated by Castille’s analysis. In the second essay of this section, Stathis Kouvelakis gives a novel reading of Marx’s critique of the political, which he locates as early as the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* writings and the critique of Hegel’s *Philosophy of Right* (1843). He demonstrates that Marx’s theory of the Revolutions of 1848 is politically constituted, rather than being economist or evolutionary. Prospectively, Kouvelakis shows that, by the time of the Paris Commune, Marx has expanded his horizon of the political to recast a renewed experience with the French Revolution and with German political theory, and that this horizon has a self understanding that deepens the utopian objective of self-government.

In a radically imaginative connection between the cult film, *Plan 9 from Outer Space*, and Marx's notion of primitive accumulation, Stephen Shukaitis asks how we can work with a dynamic of social domination that is of the same stuff as constituent power and has the capacity to liberate, and how we can act otherwise within this paradox. For Shukaitis, we do not only create and embody new desires for liberation, but also work with the social energies all around us. He develops a new category called zombification, which confronts the old recasting of the 1848, 1871, 1917, and 1968 moments; this category, he hopes, will allow us to capture hitherto neglected or unseen liberatory moments.

Ian Parker critiques a new book on the Lacanian left, by Yannis Stavrakakis, problematizing its fantasmatic utopian speculation and its invocation of the Greek polis. He also takes issue with Stavrakakis' reading of identificatory joy (*jouissance*) as something attainable, and reminds us that Lacan himself warns against such immediate experiential bliss. However, Parker does see much that is favorable in the book, as well; specifically, an attempt made by the author to evaluate what role Lacanian theory has to play in transforming the world, and the way in which this work serves as an excellent introduction to the role that Lacan plays in shaping our contemporary political theory.

In a new section, **Leftist Travelogues**, Dennis Broe explores Italy in the summer of 2007. He analyses the post-Berlusconi era (satellite dish culture) with a Stendahlian romp through factory towns, the cinema, artworks, museums, and people's everyday lives. He shows the increasing commodification of all aspects of life, the endemic corruption in the south and in Sicily, and ends with a telling contrast between the artifice of postmodernist architecture and the "scarring" presence of a centuries-old building in a small town like Sorrento. Broe gives three ways in which the new status quo is resisted: young idealists become lawyers and cops to clean up corruption, the old Italian proclivity towards anarchism, and thirdly, a merger with the new internationalist movements coming together in Venice. In *Playing the Penny Slots*, Susan Willis broadens her childhood recollections of the Penny Arcade into her recent experience with Vegas penny slots. Looking at the configuration of space and time — the interior of the casinos with their architectural arrangement of barriers blocking a clear path to the exits, the assembly line of gambling machines, the slot's objective to extend the duration of the game into as much of a "free" continuation as possible — she points out the reinforcement of the ordinary reality of industrial labor in this seemingly extraordinary world of leisure. Yet, given the evident disappearance of cash in favor of electronic cards to credit winners, she also points out the shift from old industrial mindsets to the new culture of credit and finance. Reflecting on the fact that most of the "customers" at the time

of her visit were elderly, bent on a “pre-postmortem” fling to spend money that “you can’t take with you,” Willis connects the Vegas pretense of a sumptuary escape to its submerged economic purpose: to conform our lives to the cycle of spending in order to accumulate.

And we end this issue with an imagist poem, by Mark Zuss, on the return of the poet, Hart Crane, which in its timely juxtapositions forces us to rethink the relationships between nature, money and culture.

Finally on our website, www.radicalimagination.com, the situations collective now has a blog and we welcome our readers to visit.

Michael Pelias,
for the Editorial Collective

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The SITUATIONS Editorial Collective wishes to thank the following:

Melissa Antinori for her rigorous and diligent copyediting work

The Stonewall Foundation for their generous support

Doctoral Student Council of CUNY Graduate Center for their generous support