

Editorial



Contemporary cultural production and questions about the nature of contemporaneity itself have become dominant in recent humanities scholarship but just what is 'the contemporary'? When did the contemporary begin? When will it end?

SO BEGAN THE CALL FOR PAPERS FOR THIS LATEST EDITION OF *DANDELION*, in a mail-out that, by chance, coincided with the United States presidential election. The next morning, we received our first response:

The Contemporary ended last night, November 8th 2016.

Kind regards

Donald Trump's crisis-ridden presidency has rumbled on for the duration of this issue's production and the escalating tumult of British politics has similarly fed into our discussions as to how to approach the theme of the contemporary in *times like these*. Should we apprehend the contemporary as a noun, offering definition and order to a discrete period in history; or is it rather as an adjective, traced with a particular structure of feeling, an apprehension to what is happening Now and an anxiety towards what comes next?

In response to these questions we have compiled a collection of texts that address how the social, political and aesthetic dilemmas that characterize our present are made manifest in the twenty-first century's cultural production. In 'The Becoming of Contemporaneity through Experimental Fiction', Carly Robinson tracks the emergence of a new form of feminist narrative which reactivates with difference the estrangement devices and techniques inherited

from literary modernism. After a commentary on literary prize culture, Robinson constructs a Deleuzo-Guattarian framework for cultural analysis, before deploying this schema in a reading of Eimear McBride's *A Girl Is A Half-Formed Thing*, clocking the novel's dislocation of reified forms of consciousness and its insistence on the subjective as a perpetual state of becoming.

Through a close reading of Dave Eggers 2013 novel *The Circle*, Philippa Hobbs explores how the novel, as an aesthetic form, can register the 'real subsumption' of society under neoliberal forms of economic rationality and governance. For Hobbs, the slow violence of *The Circle's* narrative shocks us into an awareness that we are already living in dire times, subject to invasive regimes of technological surveillance and mass consumerist conformity. Addressing the poetics of Maggie O'Sullivan and Susan Howe, two poets whose difficulty and critique lie in their refusal of conventional syntax, Dylan Williams reconstructs a genealogy that connects the enclosures of the 18th century with the contemporary neoliberal 'accumulation by dispossession'. Williams suggests that by recovering the suppressed histories of women and communities that are erased from ethno-nationalist fantasies of the nation, poetry can form a crucial node of resistance.

A leading question for this issue has been to ask if the contemporary is experienced similarly across the globe, or are its pressure points, modes and sites of dissent different depending on their location? By way of response, Tijen Tunali's article takes an overview of how, post-1989, the spread of neoliberal economics has galvanized an understanding of 'contemporary art' as synonymous with transnational capital and the technologization of the world. Crucially, however, Tunali argues that due to the uneven geographical development of neoliberalism, 'neither the processes of domination nor the strategies of resistance' performed by artists seeking to counter, or at least pause, the forces of globalisation are 'fixed and predictable'. This issue's Short Circuit, which sees Donatella Valente interview the contemporary Thai artist Sarawut Chutiwongpeti about some of his most recent video and installation work, can be read as a companion piece to Tunali's text. Chutiwongpeti, who travels constantly as part of his professional practice, responds to the precarious position of the conspicuously mobile 'neo-nomadic' artist.

Our Review section begins with Dan Barrow's reflections on John Akomfrah's 2015 video installation *Vertigo Sea*, a three-screen mediation on man's relationship with the sea and its role in the history of slavery, global migration, and geopolitical conflict, first seen at the 56th Venice Biennale. Barrow dissects the work's formal virtuosity to argue that 'the specificity of the history of (forced) migration that Akomfrah is attempting to address here is not articulated but merely accumulated'. Next, Karina R. Cicero examines how Mary, mother of Christ, is gifted a voice in Colm Tóibín's latest novella, *The Testament of Mary* (2012), in a feminist reading that convincingly demonstrates how Mary's account of her son's life, as told to two unnamed visitors following his death, bolsters her own identity in contravention of Catholic doctrine. Mara Arts reviews *Mutants: Selected Essays* (London: Seagull Books, 2016), Toby Litt's assorted collection of texts on topics relating to writers, writing and 'Literature with a capital L', including how to produce good writing in a digital age plagued by the 'Curse of the Cursor'. While Donatella Valente's rigorous survey of *Compact Cinematics: The Moving Image in the Age of Bit-Sized Media* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), edited by Pepita Hesselberth and Maria Poulaki, reveals how the contemporary short film can reinvigorate debates pertaining to the attention economy and media ecology.

Finally, to supplement this edition's investigation into the 'Contemporary', we have included a 'dossier' dedicated to a provisional scanning of contemporary methodologies in the humanities, which features the work of Hannah Barton, Jan Nawrocki, and Maria Patsou. Birkbeck researchers are strongly represented in this edition of *Dandelion* and we hope that the compilation of responses to the issue's theme offers a valuable insight into the exciting new scholarship supported by Birkbeck's research community. This is the first issue of *Dandelion* to be hosted by the Birkbeck Centre for Technology and Publishing and we would like to thank Professor Martin Paul Eve for his generous assistance in making the move possible. To new beginnings.

The Editorial Team

General Editors

Rebecca Sykes
Thomas Travers

Editors

Mara Arts
Cathrin Bengesser
Zainab Hemani
Raphael Kabo
Ghazal Mosadeq
Laurie Taylor
Donatella Valente

Cover Image

Sarawut Chutiwongpeti, *One to Another, Switzerland*, 2016. Image appears courtesy of the artist.