

Editors' Introduction: New Milestones, New Initiatives

by Robert F. Carley, SAJ, Eero Laine and Chris Alen Sula | Issue 11.1 (Spring 2022)

ABSTRACT As we begin this second decade of *Lateral*, we reflect on the origins of the journal and new initiatives underway. We also consider the precarious nature of scholarly publishing and editing in the pandemic and reaffirm our commitment to this care work. This issue features three articles—two of which emerged from our articles-in-progress workshop at last year's Cultural Studies Association annual meeting—as well as the 2021 Randy Martin Prize winning essay and a number of book reviews. We invite applications for our editorial team and proposals for new initiatives at the journal.

KEYWORDS cultural studies, publishing, scholarly communication, pandemic

This issue begins the second decade of publishing for *Lateral*, which emerged alongside the Cultural Studies Association < <https://www.culturalstudiesassociation.org> > (CSA) as a sustained, collaborative, and experimental space in electronic publishing. The initial effort consisted of four research threads: "Theory and Method," < <https://csalateral.org/archive/section/theory/> > curated by Patricia Clough; "Culture Industries," < <https://csalateral.org/archive/section/culture-industries/> > curated by Jaafar Aksikas; "Universities in Question," < <https://csalateral.org/archive/section/universities-in-question/> > curated by Bruce Burgett and Randy Martin; and "Mobilisations, Interventions, and Cultural Policy," < <https://csalateral.org/archive/section/mobilisations-interventions-and-cultural-policy/> > curated by Emma Dowling. These threads could develop over time and between the annual conferences, they reflected core ideas that could span issues and volumes, and, when they needed to, they could publish in a ready and responsive manner, such as the manifestos < <https://csalateral.org/issue/2/manifestos-introduction/> > published in Issue 2, which included the Occupy Wall Street declaration < <https://csalateral.org/issue/2/manifestos-occupy-wall-street/> > and solidarity statements from comrades in Cairo < <https://csalateral.org/issue/2/manifestos-solidarity-from-cairo/> > and the Humanities Action Committee from University of Puerto Rico, Río Piedras < <https://csalateral.org/issue/2/manifestos-ocuparte-humanities-manifesto/> > . In other

words, the concept of threads reflected both the careful development of scholarship and research and the advantages of publishing through a digital platform that was radically open access and beholden to no one other than the community of scholars, practitioners, and activists associated and allied with the CSA.

The inaugural energies that helped shape *Lateral* shifted and changed over time, and at the CSA meeting at Villanova University in 2015, *Lateral* was reviewed by an ad hoc committee drawn from the CSA's membership. Shortly thereafter, a new core group of editors began developing the iteration of *Lateral* we're familiar with today. The journal added a [book reviews section](http://csalateral.org/archive/reviews/) < <http://csalateral.org/archive/reviews/>> ; [Forums](http://csalateral.org/forums/) < <http://csalateral.org/forums/>> , which includes media-rich and accessibly-written pieces that are imagined as tools for conversation, education, and agitation; and the [Years in Cultural Studies timeline project](http://csalateral.org/years/) < <http://csalateral.org/years/>> , which offers essays focused on specific years in the history of cultural studies as pedagogical resource, a place for documentation and excavation, and an opportunity for more storytelling.

As we enter *Lateral's* second decade, we are looking to expand significantly: towards publishing short-form open access and print books, [adding new co-editors](https://csalateral.org/contribute/editors-and-new-initiatives/) < <https://csalateral.org/contribute/editors-and-new-initiatives/>> to contribute to regular issues and to assist in new initiatives, and also [seeking new initiatives](https://csalateral.org/contribute/editors-and-new-initiatives/) < <https://csalateral.org/contribute/editors-and-new-initiatives/>> from contributors who might organize and pilot their own projects through *Lateral's* publishing platform. We remain committed to creative and interactive uses of technology, and this issue is no exception, offering our first article accompanied by a playlist that provides audio-visual context for readers. At the core of *Lateral's* practice is a commitment to radical open access publishing.

At the same time as we seek to expand and develop *Lateral* in new directions, we also recognize the impacts of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic on our contributors and on the scholarly community at large. Articles take longer to write and revise amid sickness, fatigue, and other pandemic effects; reviewers take longer to evaluate work, when they are able to do so at all. While research specifically about COVID-19 has been sped through publication, in part through preprints and accelerated peer review¹, other work, particularly work outside of the sciences and public health, has slowed to a crawl for many journals. As Natalie Oswin, managing editor of *Society and Space*, writes, "Now, we most often send out 10 to 15 reviewer invitations to yield even two reviewer commitments, and reports regularly come in months late with a hefty percentage never materializing at all. The system's breakdown has greatly accelerated, in tune with the pandemic's characteristic ability to widen pre-existing cracks into chasms."² Like Oswin, we have no easy solutions to offer here, and we also express our gratitude to the authors and reviewers who have

generously contributed their time and intellectual labor to the pieces published in this issue. If anything, this crisis returns us to the notion of scholarly publishing and editing as a form of care work, and we reaffirm our political commitment to and engagement with that work, including through such venues as our [articles-in-progress workshop](https://www.culturalstudiesassociation.org/conference-960395.html#:~:text=workshop) < <https://www.culturalstudiesassociation.org/conference-960395.html#:~:text=workshop>> at the annual CSA conference. Last year's workshop, in fact, yielded the first two pieces published in this issue.

Jeremy Chow and Sage Gerson's "[Wasted: Wastewater, Hygiene Theatrics, & Contaminated Imaginaries](https://csalateral.org/issue/11-1/wasted-wastewater-hygiene-theatrics-contaminated-imaginaries-chow-gerson/)" < <https://csalateral.org/issue/11-1/wasted-wastewater-hygiene-theatrics-contaminated-imaginaries-chow-gerson/>> opens this issue with an analysis of the ever-present but often-unseen streams of waste that flow across the United States and beyond. This collaboratively authored piece brings together two channels of thought: a first-hand tour of Santa Barbara's El Estero water treatment facility, and reflections on narratives of contagion surrounding COVID-19, particularly sewage testing, and the intersecting HIV/AIDS pandemic, both of which have heavily impacted queer and BIPOC communities. Chow and Gerson posit the notion "hygiene theatrics" to describe the performance of hygiene, cleanliness, and purity surrounding waste(water), in contrast to notions of dirtiness, contagion, and their raced and homophobic associations in environmental and health public discourses. In considering wastewater, Chow and Gerson note other failures of infrastructure, including the 2011 Fukushima reactor explosion, which will leak radioactive waste into the Pacific Ocean for the next forty years, including to California's Central Coast, the site where their essay begins. The two authors converge and diverge repeatedly throughout the course of their essay, weaving together personal experiences and reflections with theoretical frameworks and analysis. Chow finds that wastewater methodologies are irredeemably bound to binaries of "clean" bodies and "dirty" bodies (and the the possibility of contamination of the former by the latter), while Gerson draws some hope for remediation from her experience at El Estero, which, in the end, protects communities from waterborne illness. Above all, Chow and Gerson point us to wastewater as a potent site for interrogating power through its histories, narratives, and impacts on humans and nonhumans alike.

Lucy March's "[Satisfaction Guaranteed: Techno-Orientalism in Vaporwave](https://csalateral.org/issue/11-1/satisfaction-guaranteed-techno-orientalism-vaporwave-march/)" < <https://csalateral.org/issue/11-1/satisfaction-guaranteed-techno-orientalism-vaporwave-march/>> analyzes a genre of music whose singles, albums, performances, merchandise, scene, and subculture are almost entirely or "extremely" online. March is one of a handful of scholars to analyze vaporwave and its spin-off sub-genres. Although the "heyday" of vaporwave has passed, March notes that its aesthetics currently pervade contemporary culture from Ariana Grande's "5 Rings" video down to our meme-saturated social media feeds. By looking at the multi-accentual paratexts and the ways that they both inflect and

play with layers of images synthesized (by Vaporwave artists and enthusiasts) from out of the 1980s market extensivity of Japanese technology, entertainment, and design but, also, with a broad range of pop culture imaginaries (prevalent, more generally, during the 80s), March diagnoses vaporwave as a site of pleasure, anxiety, and orientalism. Her prognosis is that vaporwave is not only crucially dependent on gender-based stereotypes and online anonymity but, ultimately, that vaporwave reproduces its own lexicon of orientalist, sexist, and Western white-supremacist images dangerously cloaked in a hauntological mix of pleasure, nostalgia, and cool that never was (and only is online). Where other scholarship has focused on whether or not vaporwave is a critique or endorsement of neoliberal capital, techno-orientalist, or genre-bending (or shattering), March moves affirmatively through each of these arguments absorbing the fullness of the vaporwave genre through its scholarship, imagery, sounds, audience reception, "death," and afterlife. March's essay extends and complicates research on internet music and music scenes and contributes, more generally, to global research into new media and virtually mediated global communities.

Chris J. Young's "[Scene Tracing: The Replication and Transformation of Global Industry, Movements, and Genres in Local Game Production](https://csalateral.org/issue/11-1/scene-tracing-replication-transformation-global-industry-movements-genres-local-game-production-young/)" < <https://csalateral.org/issue/11-1/scene-tracing-replication-transformation-global-industry-movements-genres-local-game-production-young/>> examines localized production through an explication and troubling of the notion of "scenes" as both temporal and geographically-particular communities. Young's focus on video game design and development opens the analysis to move beyond physical space toward virtual and remote community building. Employing an ethnographic approach with repeat and in-depth interviews with a number of gamemakers, Young explores the connections and webs and networks of creators and content that spans from the Toronto game scene toward planetary connections and exchanges. In doing so, Young offers both an exciting analysis of the interplays between local and globalizing scenes and an important model for marking and mapping the complicated and overlapping groups that inform and take part in cultural production.

Lateral is pleased to publish Larissa A. Irizarry's "[Alter Egoing: The Shifting Affects of Janelle Monáe](https://csalateral.org/issue/11-1/alter-egoing-shifting-affects-janelle-monae-irizarry/)," < <https://csalateral.org/issue/11-1/alter-egoing-shifting-affects-janelle-monae-irizarry/>> winner of the 2021 Randy Martin Prize from CSA. Irizarry offers a close reading of the 2018 album *Dirty Computer* and Monáe's performative use of alter egos, specifically the androids Cindy Mayweather, who switches on her Black skin to fulfill her role as a racialized entertainer and employs dandyism in her dress both as queer and as a tool of respectability, and Jane57821, whose "dirty" memories, which include a relationship with a man and a woman, are analyzed and ultimately wiped by two white men at the behest of a totalitarian government. Monáe's use of these alter egos thus effects critiques of Blackness, womanhood, and heteronormativity in the United States and, according to

Irizarry, responds to the shifting electoral politics between Barack Obama's historic election in 2008 and its subsequent backlash, culminating in the 2016 election of Donald Trump. Both political campaigns employed the rhetoric of optimism—"audacious hopefulness" in the case of Obama, and the white male nostalgia of Trump's "Make America Great Again"—an affect that Irizarry sees Monáe critically adopting in her 2018 album. Informed by and diverging from an earlier, Afropessimist response to Obama's audacious hope, *Dirty Computer* lifts up "Black girl magic" and enjoins, "let the vagina have a monologue" (an unfortunate conflation of womanhood with biology, as Irizarry notes). Irizarry describes Monáe's critical optimism as a reflexive process in which the marginalized subject is aware of the material realities that negate their personhood and yet still defies the futures and outcomes that have been relegated to them. By charting shifts in the performer's alter egoing over time, Irizarry explores how Monáe makes space for queer Black women in a racist, heteropatriarchal society.

We end this introduction with an invitation to continue working together laterally—as authors, editors, readers, reviewers. We're all working this out and none of us is truly doing it alone. We hope we have the opportunity to work with you in the future. Please be in touch and we'll do the same as we request your expertise for article reviews and continue to invite work for the journal.

Notes

1. Ludo Waltman, Stephen Pinfield, Narmin Rzayeva, Susana Oliveira Henriques, Zhichao Fang, Johanna Brumberg, Sarah Greaves, Phil Hurst, Andy Collings, Arianne Heinrichs, Nick Lindsay, Catriona J. MacCallum, Daniel Morgan, Susanna-Assunta Sansone, and Sowmya Swaminathan, "Scholarly Communication in Times of Crisis: The Response of the Scholarly Communication System to the COVID-19 Pandemic," Research on Research Institute (December 2021), <https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.17125394.v1> < <https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.17125394.v1> > . ↩
 2. Natalie Oswin, "The View from Here," *Society and Space* (2022). <https://doi.org/10.1177/02637758221103197> < <https://doi.org/10.1177/02637758221103197> > . ↩
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