Editors’ Introduction

Created as a result of student protests, the Department of Critical Theory and Social Justice is mission-driven to provide students with access to strategies of resistance that are linked to the international history of ideas; that which must be resisted are the forces of violence inherent in ableism, colonialism, heteronormativity and homophobia, misogyny, trans-shaming and trans-violence, and whiteness. This, the fifth volume of Critical Theory and Social Justice: Journal of Undergraduate Research, is produced in a time of strife at its home campus, Occidental College. In the middle weeks of November 2015, Occidental College saw a multitude of students participate in a weeklong occupation of the Arthur G. Coons Administrative Building; this occupation was the result of a long-standing complaint from students of color, queer students, and female-identifying students towards the current Administration for its (argued) lack of commitment to diversity, equity, and ‘inclusive excellence.’ What is pertinent in this event is the consideration for theoretical interventions in the discourses that have made this event possible: the forces that have made possible students articulating that they are on the precipice of extinction at this predominantly white institution; that have compelled students to participate in the encircling of the Alumni House after learning of a crisis-response meeting of upper-level administrators in the wake of the occupation; and that have brought many students of different positionalities together, chanting “Sixty-seven grand, meet our demands!” It is in the midst of this student protest, like those student protests that propelled the careers of those thinkers common to this Journal, that we mark the five-year anniversary of our publication history.

In the first piece in this volume, “‘Tête-a-tête avec Antonin Artaud:’ On the Communicability of the Void,” Occidental alumnus Elizabeth Caldart (2012) explores the politics of ability, performativity, and nonknowledge through a review-like lens of one of Antonin Artaud’s performances near the end of his life. Demanding a (re)experience of those forces present in Artaud’s work that beg analysis from the epistemes of Georges Bataille, Caldart forces readers to shift ever-so-close to the Hegelian line that marks the border of transgression and the void (nonknowledge and its variants). The second piece in this issue bounds directly out of the condition that Caldart leaves readers in; that is to say, Caldart offers the question of the (im)possibilities of subjectivity which Joseph Ferber of the University of Dayton directs towards the poetry of indigenous writer Sherman Alexie. In “The Deconstruction of Simplified Sovereignty in the Sonnets of Sherman Alexie’s What I’ve Stolen, What I’ve Earned,” Ferber argues that one of the hallmarks of colonialism is the articulation of an easy-to-understand sovereignty—a positioning of the Law in a way that is so relatable, it can be dematerialized in a way that ensures its materiality. This false erasure could be understood as an ontology that cannot be escaped.

However, the failure of old solutions to old problems necessitates a paradigm shift; as Alain Badiou said in his presentation at the Art Center in nearby Pasadena, California, ‘We need new problems.’ In that respect, then, Critical Theory and Social Justice: Journal of Undergraduate Research in this and all following volumes will be taking on a new, third
publication aspect: that of resistive, sub-altern art. The first artist in this series is the deceased/slain performance artist, Ana Mendieta. The Journal is in deep gratitude to the Estate of Ana Mendieta at Galerie Lelong in New York (particularly, Sarah Landry) for the Estate and the Galerie’s willingness to allow for the (re)production of two, original pieces of Ana Mendieta’s work (*Untitled (Ape Piece)*, 1975) in this volume of the Journal. Student Editor Gabriela Rosenada (2017) expands upon the logic of juxtapositioning subjects and objects in a dichotomy in her piece on the two images, “A Reflection of Binary Disruption in the Photographs of Ana Mendieta,” where she (de)links the re-dressing of the ‘human’ as animal to the death of the subject-sovereign-to among other instances of binaristic failure.

The middle of this volume moves towards music and the works of James Baldwin and Edward Soja; Ethan Blake of Brown University enters into the budding discourse on the racialization of space in, “The Socio-Spatial Dynamics and Roots of America’s Modern Black Creative Genius.” What is most unique about Blake’s work is that it refuses to participate in the discourse of racial essentialism that haunts this era of political activism and social justice; leaning towards a model of black excellence from the positioning of blackness as a politics of resistance, Blake opens new entryways for discussions of the politics of space. Lastly, Emily Long of Appalachian State University enters into the flurry that is the conversation surrounding the legitimacy of the works of Martin Heidegger. Considered to be one of the foremost intellectual heavyweights of twentieth-century Europe, Heidegger’s relationship with Nazism has forced a systemic re-evaluation of the communicability of his work at-large. What Long finds in her piece, “No Selfhood…No Freedom: Martin Heidegger’s Radical Definition of ‘Transcendence’ in 20th Century Europe,” is that the excommunication experienced by thinkers such as Paul de Man is necessarily inconsistent with work done on the concept of transcendence—particularly by Heidegger. Calling for a being with, instead of a being for, this volume of the Journal echoes Long’s reading of Heidegger against the capitalistic discourse of our time that separates ideas and individuals into a series of negativities, binding them together under headings that have no room for complexities.

As always, CTSJ: Journal of Undergraduate Research would not be possible without the support of a wide variety of individuals and resources. First and foremost, to the Faculty of the Department of Critical Theory and Social Justice at Occidental College, we, the Student Editorial Staff, thank you for your patience, vision, and guidance during these tumultuous moments. Secondly, the Journal would like to personally thank Professor Warren Montag of the Department of English for his review of the translations in Emily Long’s piece on Heidegger; additionally, the Journal would like to extend its most serious gratitude to Professor Simeon Pillich of the Department of Music for his ethnomusicological analysis of Ethan Blake’s piece on the politics of sovereignty as it relates to Jazz. This volume marks the departure of two Senior Editors: Ashley Ajayi and Michelle DiBattiste; we thank you for your service, leadership, and mentorship in this issue. Lastly, the Journal would like to thank the great talents of its long-time Copy Editor Karen Devivo and its Graphic Design and Layout Artist Katya Tepper: Without the efforts of these members of the Journal team, we would be unable to produce the quality content that has made CTSJ: Journal of Undergraduate Research the leader in its field. We hope
that you, the reader, are able to find moments of resistance and new sites of intervention in this volume of CTSJ; we look forward to continuing this work in our sixth volume, which will be published in the Fall of 2016.

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