Editors’ Introduction

As a department, Critical Theory and Social Justice strives to provide students with the analytic and critical tools necessary to understand, deconstruct, and rupture these ideological mechanisms as they operate within our society, politics, and life. It is with this mission in mind that the Student Editorial Staff of Critical Theory and Social Justice: Journal of Undergraduate Research presents this, our sixth volume. We endeavored to produce this issue in the shadow of the 2016 Presidential Election. During this time, binaric discourse surrounding choice and relevancy dominated the political conversation.

Just as the political discourse of this year has apparently revolved around the necessity of a choice between poles, each of the articles and art pieces in this issue deals with notions of false ideological binaries and their relation to resistance and oppression in different sectors and modes of thought. In particular, each piece in this volume investigates the possibility of transcending binaries, not just by positing a third position, but by cross-contaminating possibilities and interventions. This selection of articles – which examines such distant topics as Reddit, Eco-Feminism, Fusion Cuisine, and Continental Theory – reveals the workings of binary ideologies and works to identify resistive techniques.

The first two articles identify points of contention in our political and cultural thought. “Being Japonaise: Understanding the Authentic Implications of Fusion Cuisine,” by Hannah Stewart, considers nationalism, authenticity, and the epistemology of group identification from the perspective of food as cultural artifact. In this paper, we find an alternative to the historic argument between the authentic “national” and inauthentic “global” as it operates both as a vector of colonial power, and as it destabilizes itself in its own making. In the second article, “The Great Refusal: Liberation From the Facts of Life,” Jordan Cassidy brings the work of New Left Marxist thinker Herbert Marcuse into conversation with the Occupy Wall Street Movement and other forms of modern day public political participation. This article strongly asserts that confrontations with false ideologies must not result in counter-ideologies, but rather, the very refusal of these falsehoods. It is a notion of surpassing and triumph critical to our understanding of participation in and strategies of resistance.

CTSJ has made a commitment to publish new, resistive, and subaltern art. A result of this commitment is the work of Savannah Bustillo: “Ecofeminism Reinterpreted: Covering the Pieces Sunk and Wasted.” Her print making explores the advantages and limits of the medium as a means to interpret the idea of Mother Earth outside of rhetoric of damage or wholeness. Utilizing the uniqueness of printmaking to experiment with the boundary between human and object, earth and product, and other epistemological borders, Bustillo examines the role that art can play in negotiating contradiction and dismemberment.

This volume concludes with a return to our theme: to what extent do binaric conceptions of choice inform our very thinking, even before we have chosen? In “Levinas, the Feminine, and Maternity,” Melissa Bradley conducts an extensive review of key contradictions in Levinas’ work on the feminine and maternity: neither term is sufficient within the restrictive concept of woman as other, and Levinas’ writings seem to exclude women from the activity of reading. Bradley outlines an interpretation of Levinas’ thought that is not limiting on the basis of gender identity; as with
many other pieces in this issue, the negotiation of difference and its alternatives becomes central to the text. In our last article, Occidental College Alumnus Ray Buckner (2016) critically examines the role of psychological training as it informs our understandings of gender and identity in, “Whose Bodies Count? How Experience Working with Transgender Patients Shapes Conceptualizations of Transgender Identity.” The new publication of the latest Diagnostic Statistical Manual by the American Psychological Association and its change in rhetoric surrounding gender identity informs the complex and intricate intervention into praxis that Buckner outlines. Interviews, research, and theoretical analysis lead this essay to conclude that concrete methods of training psychologists to better assess and understand patients of nonconforming gender identities would overcome the barriers of training and discourse identified as counter-productive to a nuanced psychological understanding of gender identity.

This volume of CTSJ: Journal of Undergraduate Research marks the departure of many Senior Editors: Timothy Lewis, Gabriela Rosenada, Spencer Thompson, Andrew Fan, Maggie Mather, Griffin Wynne, Anya Weis, and Brenna Reid. Your hard work and knowledge has happily shaped recent volumes. The Journal thanks Copy Editor Karen Devivo and Graphic Design and Layout Artist Katya Tepper for their careful work, as well as Betsy Dillon for her patient administrative assistance. As always, we are grateful to the Faculty of the Department of Critical Theory and Social Justice for their guidance.

It is with excitement that we look ahead to continuing our work of the seventh volume of CTSJ; this volume will be published in the Fall of 2017.

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