

## Out of Suspicion

### Editorial

The current issue on Suspicion marks a new beginning of Diffractions. Following the six issues published by the previous editorial board, the current editors wish to continue the relevant work carried out by our predecessors for The Lisbon Consortium's doctoral program in Culture Studies.

To set the stage for the topic of Suspicion we chose poetry. Serendipity, and the spontaneous generosity of the Danish poet Ursula Andkjær Olsen made it possible to include two poems from the English translation of her book *Third Millennium Heart* (2017). Both poems show what suspicion and paranoia feel like in the body's mechanics, infrastructure, and flows. While the first addresses suspicion directly, the second poem suggests a certain degree of yielding of the always already suspicious subject. We want to express our thanks to Ursula Andkjær Olsen, the translator Katrine Øgaard Jensen, as well as to Broken Dimanche and Action Books for permission to use these poems.

Are we in danger of inaugurating this second series of Diffractions with a condemnation of critique? Though Bruno Latour's expression "gullible criticism" (2004: 230) might suggest as much, his ground-breaking 'critique of critique' is not a denunciation of critique, rather it calls for its renewed empowerment and for new

weapons adapted to new menaces. Gullible criticism or instant revisionism are among the new menaces we face in contemporary culture today, with suspicion being deployed by conspiracists and weaponized against scientific facts, thus postponing and avoiding the political action a closed argument would demand. This mode of suspicion shares similarities with critique, and Latour argues that we should “bring the sword of criticism to criticism itself and do a bit of soul searching here: what were we really after when we were so intent on showing the social construction of scientific facts?” (2004: 227).

Rita Felski, drawing on Latour, as well as on Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s ‘reparative reading’ (2003) recognizes similar symptoms, such as a “populist suspicion”, and a questioning of facts, amplified by social media (cf. p. 1 - 14 (15) of this issue). While Latour calls for a politics of matters of concern that could renew critique, Felski advocates an interpretation of literary texts that takes into account feelings and attachments emerging out of the experience of reading a text. This argument sets up the tone of the interview with Felski in the opening pages of the issue where we discuss the need for a ‘critique of critique’, or a grounding of critique not above the ordinary world but as part of it. In the face of a crisis of criticism, Felski calls for more positive approaches than just pervasive suspicion.

The first article could be seen as a response to Felski’s proposition. In *(Para)paranoia: Affect as Critical Inquiry*, Katrine Dirkinck-Holmfeld reinforces the question: “can we still afford suspicion as one of the main *modi operandi* within critical theory and cultural studies?” The author reads (para)paranoia against Sedgwick’s paranoid reading, suggesting a reparative practice of being paranoid that is also positive and reflexive. The article proposes to use this reparative practice as a tool to avoid the habitual suspicion, mutating its paranoid impulses into a creative act. Based on first-hand testimony of her personal experiences living in Beirut, Dirkinck-Holmfeld scripts her way through an original methodological toolbox for

reparative reading that affirms affect as a form of critical inquiry. This take on paranoia, demonstrates how Walter Mignolo's argument holds true: location does impact how we think and produce knowledge (Mignolo, 1999).

As the notion of truth is not far from the debate on suspicion, Nanna Rebekka Jensen contributes a text that links these two notions to the practice of documentary filmmaking, a field where she argues "the facticity of reality needs our attention and care more than our suspicion." (p. xx of this issue) In *Rehabilitating Observation: The Persistence of the Observational Documentary in the Age of Post-Truth Politics*, we are taken into the world of documentary film and new critical realism. Jensen's text invests in the polemics of postmodern notions of uncertainty and post-truth in order to critique the fashionable practice of the so-called 'reflexive documentary' and argues in favour of a return to the observational as a way to correct the obsessive appraisal of objectivity.

The notion of truth is discussed from a philosophical perspective in Alexandra Grieve-Johnson's *In Suspicious Minds: crisis in the subject between truth and truthiness*, where she expands her thoughts around current discussions on the crisis of truth and the climate emergency. In this free essay Grieve-Johnson claims that undermining facts with suspicion may have a direct impact on our relationship with our surroundings. She asserts that suspicion might entrap more than free us, leaving us forever in a place of uncertainty, unable to act, prisoners of a never-closed-argument without which no political action is taken (Latour, 2004).

What follows are three reviews, the first by Samuel Mountford is a subjective reading of the book *Unwanted Advances: Sexual Paranoia Comes to Campus* by Laura Kipnis. The book expresses concern with the state of feminism today, its influence in state politics, and the way it has been conducted within universities in the United

States. Mountford's generous account on the book lifts it to the state of current affairs. By cross-reading the book with the polemics of the #metoo movement and Sarah Schulman's *Conflict is not Abuse*, his contribution is more than a review, it is also a statement.

Another facet of the problematic use of suspicion is addressed in the form of moving images. The film *The Violence of a Civilization without Secrets*, directed by Adam Khalil, Zack Khalil, and Jackson Polys, and produced for inhabitants-tv.org, an online channel for exploratory video and documentary reporting. We wish to express our thanks to Inhabitants for letting us use the online link, through which our readers can access the film. Vera Herold's introduction expands on the subject of the film: the discovery of the remains of a prehistoric Paleoamerican that was used to challenge native Americans' status as first people and was consequently appropriated by white supremacists to claim European indigeneity. Through a reflection on indigenous sovereignty she leads us towards the controversy surrounding the limits to the quest for knowledge, and of archival desire, as well as the usefulness and the limits of suspicion that the discourse on indigeneity entails.

The review section closes with a comment on *A Necessary Realism*, an exhibition by José Pedro Cortes at the Museu Nacional de Arte Contemporânea do Chiado, in Lisbon. Ekaterina Smirnova proposes in this review that we read 'affective' as a substitute for 'necessary' in the title of the exhibition. Smirnova suggests that this change of terms charges the spectator with emotion and a sense of agency. She further argues that the photographs composing the exhibition are not a mere statement of how things are, but also that things are in a state of perpetual becoming; and for the consequential movement of becoming Ekaterina suggests suspicion as a positive, emancipatory, and active feeling in the spectator.

The issue on Suspicion is completed by our second interview. With it we invite you to join us in an important conversation on photography and truth with Margarida Medeiros, who is the author of several books on photography focusing on an alternative history of the medium. The interview teases out the author's ideas on the relationship between photography and suspicion. Here, Medeiros suggests that photography is not aligned with the discourse on suspicion, because photography is apodictic and thought of as a tool for knowledge. However, it is exactly because of its apodicticity that it can be successfully falsified. The interview ends with a reflection on our relationship with images: how they are part of our daily lives, in particular through social media; and whether we are becoming more suspicious or more gullible with regard to our belief in them.

The contributions to this issue ask whether, in order to engage with culture today, suspicion is in need of being reined in, or if there is a necessity for *new* modes of suspicion. Are we spectators, manipulated by the appeal of suspicion? Or is our suspicion untimely? These are some of the questions the editors wish to leave open for the reader to reflect on.

Sara Magno & Vera Herold

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