

Editorial Foreword

Thing theories, object-human recursion, and materiality already seem familiar and domesticated. All to the good, as it's often not until the fickle winds of theoretical fashion shift that the most serious work can begin. We are still just scratching the surface in discerning and understanding the agencies or other capacities of things, and their limits—whether theorizing them, understanding their implications from different disciplinary perspectives, or documenting their configurations in the world. Many of this issue's essays undertake the reckoning of things and the challenges they pose of value, risk, calculation, and commensurability. None of the essays are predictable, none follow well-worn paths. They address things as consumed and as a cultivated taste in schools, a deployment of political “soft power”; the architectural challenge of built-things designed to communicate absence; “natural” things extracted and circulated, yielding new wagers of security and secrecy around them; a political insurgency's things, like braids, barriers, posters, and cyanide capsules worn around the neck; and bodies-as-things, from slaves of the Caucasus to debtors' collateralized bodies in Switzerland.

MATERIALS OF ABSENCE AND PRESENCE **H. Glenn Penny's** essay considers the central role of the consumption and production of “German things” in the extension of German soft power to Argentina and Chile. The taste for German things was cultivated especially in schools, ensuring an enduring market for German books, scientific equipment, maps, beer halls, sports gear, houses, and even bathtubs and soap. Yet the influence of German things in Latin America was anything but fixed. The networks of sociality it helped produce seem to have remained resolutely local, and resistant to the Bismarck program of nationalism. Even nationalist monuments could be coopted into local, village versions of Germanness.

If things work on the extension of presence, certain things are designed and intended to convey absence. But how to leverage material presence in service of absence? How to make a new building to convey ruin? If most monuments are raised in service of continuity or the extension of power across time and space, **Michael Meng** examines the labor of two architects working a generation apart to design monuments to Jewish absence, in Warsaw and Berlin. Meng compares the challenges and the constraints faced by Lachert and Libeskind in their respective projects—one by the strictures of socialist political narratives, the other by a metaphysics of representation that proved impossible to escape.

INCORPORATING NATURE At one level, the rubric “incorporating nature” points to the analytical move to take account of the increasingly insistent impingement of “nature” on social, political, and economic life. At another level it points to corporate attempts to direct, extract, limit, and otherwise control “naturally” forming objects of intense human desire—like diamonds, oil, and (more recently) mangroves, among others.

In “The Company Oracle: Corporate Security and Diviner-Detectives in Angola’s Diamond Mines,” **Filipe Calvão** takes apart the culture of secrecy and control organized around diamond mining. Analogous to secrets, diamonds are both craved and scarce. Thus they are carefully circumscribed by security measures, only increasing their value, which always remains opaque, a hermeneutic puzzle. Theft is inevitable and common in the contest between Angolan miners and corporate security forces, who may nevertheless on occasion become allies in pilfering. Calvão explores how a society organized around the surveillance and control of objects of uncertain value generates surprising alignments between bureaucratic techniques of detective-work and those of African divination. The work opens out to the broader comparative issue of indigenous infiltrations of state authority and corporate control.

From diamonds at Diamang, we scale up to a wider purchase on “nature,” in the clotted form of oil and the transnational petro-economy of the Caribbean. **David Bond** details the ways in which “nature” has come to appear as an intelligible thing through the prism of hydrocarbon risk. Focusing on St. Croix as it was subjected to colonial and neocolonial regimes of extraction, from sugar to oil—and left soaked in a toxic series of oil spills and leaks—Bond shows how mangroves gained new life, meaning, and value. As late as the 1960s, mangroves were slotted for extinction, relentlessly rooted out to open new shipping lanes and docks. Beginning in the 1970s, mangroves were reimagined as key to the ecological protection of the Caribbean, and transfigured from a nuisance shrub into a central figure of postcolonial identity and poetics. Bond’s study illustrates how “nature” as such comes to appear, in part, through crises and the politics of risk, set against a horizon of potential dystopian futures.

SOVEREIGNTY AND THE MYTHIC Insurgencies serve as laboratories of sovereignty, argue **Bart Klem** and **Sidharthan Maunaguru**. Political insurgency forces sovereignty’s otherwise opaque formulae to be made visible—its trappings of modern procedural governance and bureaucratic order, combined with mythic dramas joining sublime violence and divine kingship. In their own laboratory, Klem and Maunaguru distill the elements that activated the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in Sri Lanka’s two-decade civil war until 2009. The Tigers’ capacities for mimicry, austere martial discipline, and ritual performance that transformed fleshly Prabhakaran into a transcendent sun god, enabled the insurgency to take control not only of territory but of entire segments of the public sphere.

Working from “within” and “without,” Klem and Maunaguru make the point that political insurgencies are not best viewed as failed governments but rather as experiments, the outcomes of which may come to inform and alter the repertoires of sovereignty deployed by even established states. The oscillation between disciplined order and sudden caprice turns out to be less a failure of rule than part and parcel of the character of sovereignty itself.

Alev Çinar and **Hakki Taş** attend to another genre and dimension of political myth: narratives of national origins, and temporal emplotment. Conventional national histories of Turkey locate its origins with the founding of the Republic in 1923, but that beginning is embattled on at least two fronts. One, activated of late by Erdogan, sends the nation’s origin hurtling back through time to Ottoman Islamic civilization, even to the 1453 conquest of Constantinople. If this narrative move seems almost predictable, the second front is not. Çinar and Taş analyze a new version of secular nationalism emergent since 2002—Ulusalçı nationalism—circulated in narratives, above all in a specific, widely read book entitled *Those Crazy Turks*. Resolutely anti-Western, it moves the founding moment from 1923 and the establishment of the Republic—an approximation to Europe—to 1919 and the War of Independence fought *against* European powers. Sometimes it even locates the nation’s origins in a pre-Islamic primordial secularity.

Different narratives of national origin, Çinar and Taş demonstrate, generate variant forms of sovereignty, each premised on different foundations, whether republican civilian reforms oriented toward Europe; or patriotic fervor, secularity, and an essential distinction from Europe; or the political-religious idealization of Ottoman Islamic civilization.

PERSONS, THINGS, PERSON-THINGS Maintaining a clear ontological demarcation between persons and things is arduous work, as Latour and others remind us. It requires classification work, purification work, boundary work, language work, social work, and more. Even so, certain historical contexts and situations have rendered the clear line fuzzy, and persons and things remained thoroughly entangled. Two such contexts are explored here: slavery in the Ottoman Empire, and the collateralization of debt in Switzerland, both in the second half of the nineteenth century, some 1,200 miles apart. Both could entail the reckoning of bodies as property.

Ceyda Karamursel’s work explores how slaves served to link notions of person, thing, and property, and to bridge gaps generated by “transplanted legalities” when Caucasus slave-holders were exiled to the Ottoman state in the 1870s. Despite the ban on African slaves in the Ottoman Empire since 1857, frictions between clashing legal systems—sharia law, Ottoman civil law, and Caucasus customary law—saw what Karamursel calls an “overabundance” of jurisprudence that sometimes led to legal silence rather than cacophony, often benefitting slaveholders. Yet the same period witnessed the

registering of complex freedom suits brought by enslaved refugees, who built their claims across the legal divides and the regionally contested notions of family, inheritance, whiteness, and possibilities of self-purchase, each of which factored into a given suit's success. Through the cases of Caucasian exiles and their slaves in the post-abolition Ottoman Empire, Karamursel shows how legal systems are vernacularized, especially in contexts of competing legal fictions and the attempt to regulate bodies displaced, but still inhabited by multiple jurisdictions.

"Debt and Its Attachments: Collateral as an Object of Knowledge in Nineteenth-Century Liberalism," the essay by **Mischa Suter**, inquires after social relations of obligation as these become objectified in things. Certain collateralized objects come to stand in as guarantees of a relationship, while other things become legally "unattachable." This uneven mapping of things and persons produces systems of commensuration and ever-shifting profiles of "credit-worthy persons." Suter argues that late nineteenth-century Switzerland serves as a revealing laboratory of liberalism and its limits. In rare cases, even persons were collateralized, bodily imprisoned as a guarantee for the repayment of debt. Intriguingly, that practice of the monetization of the human body—a "barbarism within liberalism"—was legally barred during the same period that slavery was ended in the last of its Atlantic as well as Ottoman instantiations.

REVIEW ESSAY **Matt Tomlinson** intervenes in conversations on the Anthropology of Christianity in his review of four recent publications in the field. Tomlinson points to the recent move toward a critical rapprochement between anthropologists and theology. Christianities are always and inevitably shot through—in the books reviewed here, with issues of health, masculinity, music, authenticity, and commerce. Across the comparisons of Christianity's complex and varied cultural entailments and matrices, Tomlinson discerns the recurring issue of "difference." "Difference" has familiarly been cast as the ways Christianity introduces rupture and change into a given society undergoing Christianization. Tomlinson complicates the question of difference, first by interrogating the notion of "grounding context" against which difference can be claimed and measured, and second, by raising the question of what kinds of Christianities the insistence on difference hails and promotes. In other words, what difference does the trumpeting of "difference" make for Christian practice itself?
