

Interregnums: Between the National and the Post-National

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It is an inescapable, though not always explicitly acknowledged, premise in much contemporary scholarship and political experience that we inhabit a world where nations are waning. This appears to be a tectonic shift, predicated on a vastly changed world order, post 1945, and manifests in interconnected ways: economic theory's move to the Right and the processes of global regulation, the breakdown of state sovereignty; the changing demands placed upon the idea and practices of international law. Yet through this transformation, this epistemic turn to the global, local struggles and national identities appear to refuse easy re-categorisation, and also refuse to evaporate. Citizens of specific nations are often, in turn, resistant, reactive, or melancholic about what is left of their culture, memory, history and law. Political theorist Wendy Brown characterises this current moment as an 'interregnum.... where power still traverses both circuits', and argues that the 'most difficult thing ...to do now is to simultaneously work in a national and a post-national way.'¹

Interregnums are both events and tropes, which recur across literatures and across periods. They offer space to consider the unease, danger, renewal and violence that disrupts nations as events and ideas transform them, from inside and outside. The time between identifiable epistemes that interregnums represent however is notoriously difficult to characterise, and even more difficult to analyse. This is particularly the case when the process of attempting to engage with what fundamental change in relationships of power means occurs in a range of interrelated, but often separately debated, disciplinary and political sites with different imperatives. In our own time this is a particular challenge for the Left, who are caught in an

¹ Brown, W. (2006) 'Learning to Love Again: An Interview with Wendy Brown', in *Contretemps: An Online Journal of Philosophy*, 6 Jan: 25-42. <http://www.usyd.edu.au/contretemps/contents.html>
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epistemological interregnum, a space between the historical failures of Marxism, and regret and longing over the limits of liberalism and what is allowed and disavowed, and for whom.

Framing Questions and Themes

A key question for the symposium is: from the perspective of the Left can nation states offer space for political or revolutionary projects? In exploring this very broad question, others of course arise, for example:

- ❖ What can Left politics and scholarship offer beyond melancholia to the challenges of the present or past raised by the tension between the national and post national? Is this a culturally consistent experience?
- ❖ Is the very idea of an interregnum, as a space between inherent but reconfigured sovereignties, sustainable?
- ❖ What is the genealogy of the concept of the interregnum?
- ❖ What remains of national histories, laws or cultures as the nation state falls apart?
- ❖ Conversely, what does it then mean to work internationally or globally, and what is left behind?
- ❖ What do prior historical shifts in the figuring of nations relationships to each other reveal?
- ❖ Are the challenges posed by the sense of loss to a national identity an opportunity for renewed thinking and political space for post colonial and feminist practices?

How you explore these and other questions in your work, and from the perspective of your discipline, is the aim of the symposium. As such, there should be no simple answers, as the questions themselves construct the uncertainty, and also potential space, of the epistemic moment. What different disciplines have at stake in seeking to analyse, characterise and diagnose interregnums, both in our own time, and in the past, will therefore give definition to the conversation.

We look forward to see you in October!