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Metaphors We Survive By

edited by

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Front cover image: Terracotta lekthyos, ca. 480-70 BCE, attrib. the Tithonos painter (Metropolitan Museum of Art, Fletcher Fund 1925)

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Introduction: Metaphors and Metamorphoses

Desmond Manderson[1]

In the Year of our Lockdown—*Anno Clausura* 2020 (not to be confused with AC 2021 or even AC 2022), the editors of this issue had a sense of the vital role of metaphor in how we think; vital in the twin senses of crucial and full of life. Faced with a global public health crisis unparalleled in our lifetimes, metaphors of disease, on the one hand, and of our digital age, on the other, were—to evoke a metaphor that binds these two key realms of twenty-first century life—going viral. We wanted to find out more from colleagues working in disciplines as diverse as history, cultural studies, critical theory, law, and philosophy. We wanted to think about the role of metaphors in how we confront difference; in how we make sense of the world; in the political, legal, and social challenges of the world we live in.

Of course, there is a rich tradition of writing about metaphors and society. Friedrich Nietzsche's epigram is well known:

> Truth is a mobile army of metaphors, metonyms, anthropomorphisms, in short, a sum of human relations which were poetically and rhetorically heightened, transferred, and adorned, and after long use seem solid, canonical, and binding to a nation. (1994: 46-47)

This short passage covers a great deal of ground. It suggests the force of metaphor to enlarge, through language and image, our response to the world, to intensify it, but also its power to obscure certain assumptions. Metaphors are loaded, in other words; strategically employed both

to illuminate particular ways of relating the world and to it, and to validate them. The image of a 'mobile army' of metaphors suggests (metaphorically, what else?) the implicit calculation and violence entailed in how imagistic language is used, by whom and in the service of what interests. No metaphor is innocent.

Etymologically, translatio is the Roman word for the Greek μετάφραση, a translation of a translation, or a metaphor of a metaphor. Both mean to carry or bring across. Metaphors build bridges between the natural world and the social world: they bring across an experience that is new or strange by reference to something we are familiar with. And in so doing they create temporal connections as well as spatial or conceptual ones: they are ways of ferrying between past and present, the known and the unknown, joining there and then with here and now. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, in *Metaphors We Live By* (1980), the *locus classicus* of the field, do not think of this as a kind of assault on reason, a fall from grace which, at least on one level, might be taken to be implied in the Nietzschean critique. Neither do they treat rhetoric as a form of deception or trickery or seduction, the reputation it has acquired over the past few centuries (this is probably one example among many of the influence of the Reformation's rather literal approach to scripture (Cummings 2012) on the evolution of modern thought and modern hermeneutics—another word whose origin lies in the idea of the transmission of messages across incommensurable realms). On the contrary, Lakoff and Johnson argue that metaphor is simply the way humans think, perhaps the only way that thought is possible.

> The mind is inherently embodied.
> Thought is mostly unconscious.
> Abstract concepts are largely metaphorical. (1999: 3)

But they too want to know exactly what is at stake in the metaphors we choose or that are chosen for us. In a famous passage, cited by more than one of the authors contributing to this volume, they ask what it means to speak of an argument in terms of war rather than, say, as a dance. How does the litany of military metaphors organize and constrain not just our understanding but the relations that we constitute with each

other when we argue? To double back for a moment, if Nietzsche had begun by writing that truth is a tango of metaphors rather than an army, how might his thought (and the history of twentieth century philosophy) have unfolded differently?

These were the questions that animated our interest in metaphor in the crises of the early 2020s. What metaphors frame our thinking and to what ends? The papers in this volume came out of a series of symposia that responded to this call and that took place over several months—virtually, of course—in the second half of 2020. Many of the papers took aim at the emerging discourse of disease and emergency. For them, Susan Sontag's text, *Illness as Metaphor* (1978), was a key point of departure. Sontag again wants to show us that certain diseases become both metaphorical signifiers for an age. At the same, she argued that the imagery and symbolism that certain diseases become afflicted by, affects not just how we think about illness but how we treat the ill. In this respect, Sontag is by no means as sanguine about the power of metaphor as, say, Paul Ricoeur in *The Rule of Metaphor* (1995). Ricoeur sees it as the essential creative force in language, the means by which it can extend itself to its very limits, forever discovering new resonances within itself. 'I find myself only by losing myself,' he said. Metaphor, he thought, was a way of opening the imagination to immanent possibilities of otherness; a moment of loss that becomes a discovery. This was not Sontag's view. She seemed, at least at times, to think of the symbolic circuits of representation as a political danger, a philosophical distortion and—particularly in *AIDS and its Metaphors* (1989)—a violation of human rights and a threat to public health.

The essays in this collection gravitate to these tensions: metaphor as necessity, opportunity, and impurity; metaphor as natural, as strategic, as tactical; metaphor as a way of living, a way of seeing, and a way of obscuring; metaphor as keeping faith and metaphor as betrayal; metaphor as critique and the critique of metaphor. The initial impetus for our symposia was an inquiry into the role of metaphor in how we confront the dramatic changes brought on by the pandemic. But in the papers we heard, and then even more so in those we invited to

be developed in written form and that finally, after a long process of editing and refinement, you have now before you—something broader and more disturbing emerged. In the 2020s, it would seem, a pattern can be discerned amidst the metaphorical noise. Figures of violence and horror haunt this collection. Directly or indirectly, the metaphors and tropes that our authors thought emblematic of the world we live in, or the world we are becoming, or the world that is bearing down on us like the blazing lights of a runaway train, speak of death and loss. These themes fall naturally into three parts, all of which impinge on our lives on a daily basis: colonialism, monsters, and disease. Each of the chapters that follow focuses on one of these themes, but all convincingly draw out their interconnections and mutual implications. What is colonialism but a monstrous disease? What are these monsters but diseased colonists? What is disease but yet another colonising monstrosity?

And underlying these three images, there sits another ghost, that of capitalism, that might equally understood in terms of one, two, or all three of our master tropes. Each chapter in this collection is haunted by the shadow of modern capitalism. In one way or another it has helped to shape each of our authors' responses to the metaphors that, in this twenty-first century, we survive by—just about.

1 Colonialism

Lorenzo Veracini's rich discussion begins our collection by speaking to the debate within the field of postcolonial studies in which some have argued against the discursive turn. Decolonization, they argue, cannot be just a metaphor because it deals with the materiality of human lives. But for Veracini colonialism could hardly exist without the heavy diet of metaphor, translation, and synecdoche that made sense of it. How could it be otherwise, he argues, given that colonial relations are by definition constituted by foundational translations across space? The reification of colonial places, for example, and their reductive nominalization in terms of the resources to be exploited by the colonial power—the Spice Islands, Ivory Coast, Gold Coast, Argentina and the rest—was one of many processes by which figures of speech worked to

normalize unequal and unjust power relations. But Veracini does not think metaphorical speech acts like Roland Barthes thinks of myth: an essentially reactionary strategy 'making contingency appear eternal' and reducing human decisions to 'the simplicity of essences' (2000: 142, 155). What can be made figuratively can be remade figuratively. Indeed, he argues that metaphor is not simply a reduction of difference to sameness at all. Just as compellingly, 'metaphor undoes *without subsumption* the incommensurability that separates distinct experiences of subjection.' Like any good translation, the strangeness of difference is not effaced but preserved. Because metaphors so often seek meaning by appealing to our embodied, material, physical selves, they are not the opposite of 'the real world' but the very mode of an empathetic access to it. 'In other words, we need to know about the metaphors we survive by so that we can craft the metaphors we will respond with.'

Shane Chalmers draws out similar themes in a potent and vivid historical register. He observes the constant anxiety of the Australian judiciary about the place of metaphorical reasoning in the creation of law. The High Court's positivism, which is at the heart of its self-understanding, might appear in jeopardy if leaps of linguistic imagination were made the basis of changing the law. The irony, as Chalmers points out, is that Australia's legal sovereignty is entirely based on a foundational claim to possession that is, as Justice Kirby observed in *Yarmirr v Northern Territory,* entirely metaphoric. The British Crown claimed to 'occupy' and 'possess' a continent on which it had hardly set foot and whose metes and bounds were entirely unknown to it. They did so by placing a flag—a moment of metonymic semiotic theatre—on an island which was not even contiguous with the land they claimed; for the very sensible reason that the actual and decidedly non-metaphoric local inhabitants prevented them from landing on the mainland and establishing any material occupation or possession there. The claim of sovereignty was purely metaphoric, *faute de mieux.* The violence of the slow transformation of that symbolic gesture into boots and hoofs on the ground was not lessened by its origin in a series of figures of speech. To think about metaphorical legality in settler colonial Australia is to be uncomfortably reminded of its violent and

hypocritical foundations.

In the second part of his essay, Chalmers explores the metaphoric basis of colonial sovereignty through a specific historical event: the public festivals and marches that celebrated the inauguration of the Colony of Victoria in 1850. Here, he argues, we can see the importance of Michael Walzer's argument, lately echoed by Chiara Bottici, (2014), that a state must be imagined into existence, that 'it must be personified before it can be seen, symbolized before it can be loved, imagined before it can be conceived' (1967: 194). Public displays of triumphant settler presence in Melbourne and Geelong did just that: like street parades or anti-vax protests to this day they featured the honking of horns and the waving of flags. But Aboriginal participation in the historical events studied by Chalmers is particularly significant. Their displays and performances were both a claim to corporeal membership within the newly constituted body politic but at the same time, implied a very different relationship to the land. Chalmers sees the visible Aboriginal presence in the birth rites of Victoria as a double game. They demanded recognition within the metaphorical body of the colonial state while at the same time maintaining their sovereign integrity outside of it. 'Quite simply,' Chalmers argues, 'while colonial sovereignty is metaphorical, First Nations' sovereignty is "ontological". Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples might have become constitutive parts of the Australian body politic, but they will *always also* be occupied and possessed by this country,' in ways that displays of settler colonialism cannot displace. Note the elegant inversion. Colonialism makes a metaphorical claim to occupy and possess the land. Indigenous peoples make an ontological claim to be occupied and possessed by it.

Yet colonialism, wherever it is to be found, seems to suffer from a dirty little secret. The metropole has the power, but at the same time, it is the metropole that is dependent on the colony, not the other way around. The metropole needs the colony for its status, wealth, resources, manpower. Why the colony needs the metropole is far less obvious. Colonial exploitation contains a secret vulnerability, a closet dependence which it is the purpose of metaphors, be they those of

civilization, paternity, or animality, to conceal. As Frantz Fanon showed us (if we didn't already know it), the colonized subject must be made to feel 'like' a savage, an animal, a child, a fraud (1963). These metaphors disguise the power relations that otherwise risk bringing the whole edifice tumbling down whether through an outburst of politics or—Fanon again—violence. Thus, modern society is built on relationships of dependence reconstituted, ideologically and metaphorically, as natural superiority.

This was one of Marx's essential insights. And he articulated them through the metaphor of slavery. Indeed, the metaphor of slavery connects the paradoxical power relations of colonialism to the similarly paradoxical power relations of capitalism. Edwin Bikundo's essay thus serves as the perfect bridge between the first set of essays on the former and the second set on the latter. He reminds us of the colourful and complex play of tropes that lie at the heart of Marx's analysis. Money after all is nothing but a metaphorical device, using pure symbolic forms to translate one form of labour or wealth into another. And this process of translation is deeply ambivalent. For capitalism, the finite and kinetic energy of past workers is converted into the pure potential energy of value, an animated monster which begins to 'work…as if its body were by love possessed' (1973: 704). But the same act is experienced by the worker not as a love but as slavery, as pure exploitation. Bikundo points out that this slavery was not, for Marx, so much a metaphor as a metonym: the translation of a real economic condition into something more abstract and therefore harder to see. So, capitalist love is the smothering embrace of a monster, nothing but a form of slavery.

Bikundo asks us where this monstrous metaphor leads us. He notes—following Jessica Whyte—that Agamben and Marx *both* envisage a world in which the oppressive nature of work, as obligation, as necessity, as human condition, might someday be abolished, returning us to the idle joy of Eden from which our sin exiled us. Whyte explains:

> Just like the abolition of labour that Marx and Engels wrote of, Agamben's inoperativity is not simply an idleness but a human activity

> freed of instrumentality and a necessary relation to an end. What would such an activity look like? Perhaps, if we were to envisage it in a bucolic key, we would "hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticize after dinner" - all "without ever becoming hunter, fisherman, shepherd or critic." (2017: 263)

And it is here, says Bikundo, that the idea of capitalism as slavery can do its real work—affirming Ricoeur's assertion that the power of metaphor 'can extend itself to its very limits, forever discovering new resonances within itself'—only if we commit to it fully. We have evidence from the successful revolution in Haiti in the late eighteenth century, and from the Jamaican Quashees: real material exemplars that Agamben ignores entirely and that Marx mentions only in passing. What happens when slaves are freed? *They stop working*. They see clearly, as many of us do not, held as tightly as we are in the possessive embrace of the capitalist monster. They regard—and here Marx quotes from a panic-stricken article in *The Times,* ' "indulgence and idleness" as the real luxury good; how they leave to the devil the sugar and capital fixe invested in the plantations, but rather observe the planters' impending bankruptcy with an ironic grin of malicious pleasure' (cited in Kemple 1995: 42). So, the central trope in Marx and Agamben, the knotty image that brings together love, slavery, and possession, is not just the master trope of capitalism, learned at the feet of its colonialist originators and then extended to encompass the entire human race. It is also the clue, when taken seriously, when turned from mere figure of speech into something material and embodied, to the possibility of its resistance.

2 Monsters

Capitalism is a monster that turns flesh into machine and love into death. This *grand guignol* forms the background to the next trio of papers. As Penny Crofts points out, there is something monstrous at the legal heart of the corporation—an inhuman form which the law endows with all the attributes of a natural person. Like Frankenstein's monster, it is an inanimate assemblage, a compendium of synecdoches

which the electrical circuits of the legal system jump-starts into life. But Crofts is not content with this general observation. The essence of the monster lies in the element of the uncanny, that 'transgresses cherished categories and boundaries': alive/dead, soul/body, human/animal/alien. But exactly what form does this monster take? Drawing on representations of both corporations and monsters in popular culture, she offers the reader a veritable taxonomy of monstrosity. She argues that each of the familiar tropes—Frankenstein, zombie, vampire, alien—draw on a particular genre of horror, and at the same time, highlight certain features of the corporation while omitting or concealing others. These metaphorical resemblances are by no means coincidental. Both the vampire and Frankenstein's monster, for example, are well recognized as emerging precisely out of the anxieties and disturbances of the industrial revolution (as Marx's exuberant metaphoricity, to which Bikundo has already drawn our attention, show -- capitalism as vampire, as rat, as monster, or as machine-life).

On the one hand, then, Crofts brings these metaphors seductively up to date. The article shows us the ways that contemporary and classic horror has constructed for each of these figures a distinctive culture and lore, before drawing out how the implications of that lore have given the critics and critiques of modern capitalism a distinctive contour. On the other hand, however, Crofts is sensitive to the limits of metaphors as well as to their imaginative force. Monsters are fictional personifications. Treating capitalist entities as monsters only compounds the fallacy of personification. We might be better off if we stopped trafficking in the tropes of horror and paid more attention to the actual concerns these framings hint at. The problem is that to speak of something as a monster condemns it to an unalterable purpose and an inexorable teleology. Monsters just unchangeably *are*. Like that other mainstay of popular culture, the serial killer, they have a logic but no rationale, no psychology, no explanation—no choice. This determinism lets us off the hook of having to question them, understand them or change them. A corporation is a structure that has a range of profoundly troubling features, as Crofts shows us. But it is not destined to be trapped within this logic for all time. Those

working for example on ideas of corporate responsibility, particularly in the context of climate change, believe that just as the legal system has endowed them with life, it can endow them with new responsibilities, new purposes, and even new virtues. Perhaps we should heed the plea of Frankenstein's monster after all and demand of our corporations the agency of a soul after all.

The two chapters that follow seize on the gothic tropes canvassed by Crofts and show with astounding particularity the ways in which they are fully enmeshed within the discourses of contemporary capitalism. No doubt, capitalism has long been understood as a horror show: the undead body sucking the life out of others and yet at the same time resurrecting death and exploitation into a new and active form. Specifically, Chris Reitz argues that the metaphor of the zombie plays a critical role in contemporary discourse. On the one hand, it is frequently adumbrated by critics of neoliberalism and of consumerism as suggesting an economic form that is already dead – but doesn't know it. Capitalism, for example, has turned us all into soulless consumers, wandering the malls on our mobile phones with lifeless eyes and outstretched arms. But in an ironic reversal, theorists and defenders of crisis capitalism themselves have, since the crash of 2008, seized on the trope of 'zombie economies'.

This appropriation, Reitz argues, repeats the history of the zombie trope itself. It originated on the Caribbean plantations—and specifically in Haiti—as a grotesque expression of the commodification and subjugation of the enslaved. Their bodies were denied agency, denied personhood, and yet continued to function like human automata—neither dead nor alive but undead. Yet after the Haitian revolution and the threat it posed to colonial power, the zombie trope becomes steadily repurposed to articulate rather a horror of primitivism, of an alien savagery which, since the only recourse of the civilized, the fully 'human', was to wipe it out, became in fact the very justification of colonial rule. The 'demonization and exoticization' of the zombie, and more generally of voodoo, is used to vilify subjugated peoples themselves, ignoring the processes by which they were subjugated.

The zombie is no longer a critique of colonialism but its justification: a mark of the unalterable inhumanity of the creature rather than the inhumanity of those who created it. Reitz writes, 'hereinafter, the zombie has been recoded again and again to serve as a metaphor of (cultural) Othering in the interest of imperial expansion and internal reaction.'

Likewise, in the wake of the debt crisis that began in 2008, the language of 'zombie banks', 'zombie states', and 'zombie companies' was routinely used to denigrate those, typically 'southern', non-Western, or peripheral countries, that continue to survive, relying on transfusions of cheap credit to prop up a moribund system. For them, the economic undead, the shock therapy of neoliberal austerity would be destructive but ultimately necessary. In an uncanny parallel with the imperial history of the metaphor, the violence and futility of late modern capitalism which the language of the zombie was meant to critique, has been transformed into a justification of it. The zombie is once again a sign by which other economies—whether Greek, Portuguese, Japanese, or African—can be vilified as 'fiscally irresponsible,' or in other words monstrous, and their economic collapse taken as a sign of good capitalist hygiene. The zombie trope is the metaphor by which capitalism transmutes its own propensity to crisis and the death-dealing violence it provokes, into something urgent, necessary, and desirable. In a remarkable turn of phrase, the economist Warren Montag writes (2005: 16), 'the market reduces and rations life; it not only allows death, it demands that death be allowed by the sovereign power.'

Metaphors are not just means of describing or materializing abstract forces, but of creating affective and therefore normative responses. As we have already noted, 'capitalist monsterology' is not only a way of giving to algorithms and systems an uncanny agency or motivation, but of positioning that agency as inevitable. 'There Is No Alternative', Thatcher's famous dictum, is both the hallmark of late capitalism and modern horror. In this context, figures, tropes, and genres do far more than tap into subterranean forces or anxieties: they weave the logic of capitalism, colonialism, and otherness 'into the very fabric of social

imagination.'

Timothy Ström takes us from there to the social imaginary of high-tech capitalism. Metaphors connect abstract to embodied self. This is particularly necessary faced with the confounding abstractions of contemporary technology: hidden code made material by the operation of unseen electrical impulses on microscopic surfaces. Unsurprisingly, the terrain is richly metaphoric from mouse to web to google, a matter not just of words but of a carefully orchestrated visual and even aural semiotics. But these reassuringly anodyne and nostalgic signifiers conceal abstract processes and functions which in fact operate very differently. Spiders and bots crawl all over the internet, sending back a stream of data and a universe of corporate possibilities to exploit, almost entirely unbeknownst to the rest of us. Data mining, including of our voice and our faces, amounts to a massive form of covert surveillance 'in order to better profile and manipulate people into engaging in more consumeristic and energy intensive patterns of practice.' We are constantly being dragooned into participating in political and economic experiments without our knowledge. Every time we undertake a google search, google searches *us*. As a consequence of all these processes, the most intimate aspects of our identity, conduct, culture, and practices are appropriated without our consent, without compensation, for profit, and at ruinous sociological and ecological cost.

James Boyle (2002) characterises these strategies as digital parallels to the land enclosure movement that laid the foundations of capitalist modernity. But, argues Ström, with this difference: the abstract and virtual nature of these manoeuvres, described by light-fingered metaphors if at all, secure our tacit compliance. Data mining, not data theft; facial recognition not racial profiling. Even the language of secure property rights for the corporate ownership of intellectual property, which is taken as gospel by international capitalism and the community of nations, takes a metaphor of property and reifies it, to the lasting detriment of all those who thereby lose control over their identity, their genetic material, their habitats, local plants and indigenous knowledge, as a result. As Nicole Graham argues in *Lawscape* (2011), the 'dephysicalisation' of the idea of

property by processes of abstraction, metaphorization, and virtualization, has accomplished an unprecedented and ongoing transfer of wealth from poor to rich.

Yet the metaphor of enclosure has its limits. Enclosure was a way of fencing people out—redefining the commons as private land. It turned crofters and tenants into landless peasants. But cybernetic capitalism—the profiteering of individual identity, as practiced by Facebook, data miners, and the rest—is even more a way of fencing people *in* to the economic process. In the twenty-first century, the privatization of our intellectual commons does not turn us into landless peasants; it turns us into crops. Thus, in both the ways that digital metaphors work and the ways they don't, Ström mounts a strong argument for a hermeneutics of suspicion. He sounds a warning about the relationship between abstraction and metaphor in an increasingly technologically complex and obscure world. Metaphors do not simply help us embody and therefore relate to abstractions. They are also strategies of indirection; Sontag would have agreed. Indeed, Ström's discussion of Google is a perfect illustration of Nietzche's 'mobile army of metaphors': troops mobilized not simply to describe human relations but to adorn, conceal, and normalize them.

3 Disease

In the final section of papers, we do not leave behind the discourses of slavery, monsters, colonialism, capitalism and death but rather incorporate into them another crucial metaphoric dimension, particularly now in the 2020's: that of disease. Sorentino argues that blackness has always been connected to disease in colonial societies, both metaphorically and institutionally, from slavery and immigration to AIDS. While there is nothing *wrong*, she argues, in 'depathologizing' blackness, such a strategy can only ever amount to a partial solution. It risks shirking the ways in which the category of race itself was inextricably conditioned by the conditions and metaphors of its emergence in slavery. Sorentino's point is that we should not separate out metaphorical operation from material experience. The association of enslaved peoples with 'disease, infection, virus, risk, and contamination'

was at once both rhetorical *and* material—on the one hand a symbolic justification of oppression, and on the other, a concrete justification of specific bio-political practices, including quarantine, screening, exclusion, medical intervention, and legal control. In Australia, to complement Sorentino's compelling argument with a couple of local examples, the exclusion of Chinese immigration for one hundred years was justified as an urgent matter of public health. 'Disease, defilement, depravity, misery and crime,' wrote *The Bulletin* in 1886, 'these are the indispensable adjuncts which make the Chinese camps and quarters loathsome to the senses and faculties of civilised nations' (cited in Manderson 1993: 19-20). Likewise in Western Australia, the so-called 'leprosy line' was a barrier to the free movement of only and all Aboriginal persons. Thus, as Sorentino observes, the slave ships permanently inscribed blackness with morbidity and mortality.

Sorentino shows how the evolution and treatment of the 'black AIDS epidemic' over the past forty years traces these contours. The symbolic register, the medical response, and the physical suffering are mutually constitutive. The very different historical trajectories of AIDS as it has been experienced by gay white men in the developed north, for example, and by black people around the world, makes this abundantly clear. As Sorentino writes, 'the "end" meant the putative containment of AIDS by pharmaceuticals, on the one hand, and the criminalization of drug use and sex work, on the other, only engendering the redistribution of crises to an imagined elsewhere: the global slums, the Southern US, the continent of Africa.' The pathology of AIDS, its cause, aetiology, and stubborn survivance, can only be attributed to the *fusion*, at the very start, of race, sexuality, deviance, excess, and the distinction between reason and passion. Furthermore, as Gravlee (2009: 48) notes, 'social inequalities shape the biology of racialized groups, and embodied inequalities perpetuate a racialized view of human biology.' A discursive trap is constantly mediating between metaphorical signifiers on the one hand, and physical and social outcomes on the other: the insidious misattribution of effect to cause which is one of the defining features of metonymy. Sorentino's argument is as true and as confronting now as ever: 'epidemics are threatening but blackness contains that threat

most by rendering practices of containment enjoyable.'

The last two papers return us directly to the present moment and the metaphorical currency of the pandemic. Fiona Jenkins and Desmond Manderson each specifically address a disease that looms large in the contemporary imaginary, paying close attention to the implications of the metaphors that have been used to explain and to respond to COVID-19. Nevertheless, both suggest that what is at stake is not simply metaphor but metamorphosis. In this way, their two essays operate as conclusions to the collection as a whole. As Manderson explains,

> A metamorphosis is a sea change, a profound transformation that appears dramatic only if you have failed to notice the underlying compounds that, like a witch's brew, have been slowly bubbling away. A caterpillar turns into a butterfly. Daphne is transformed into a laurel tree. Sometimes the end result is rather more unpleasant: '*When Gregor Samsa awoke one morning from troubled dreams, he found himself changed into a monstrous cockroach.*'

Both would argue that the enormous disruptions of the past years have catalyzed—perhaps even weaponized—social forces already underway. Manderson claims that it is not just on an economic level that COVID has revealed hidden truths. Neoliberalism has always sought the fragmentation of public space and the atomization of private life—paving the way, as previous chapters in this collection have demonstrated, from the transformation of the human citizen into the zombie consumer of late capitalism. But the discourse of the pandemic has skilfully turned political danger into a public good.

> We should stay away from one another. We should retreat to the nuclear family and shelter in place… Avoid demonstrations. Avoid public meetings… Who needs a local theatre when you have Netflix? Who needs newspapers? Who needs schools? The world echoes to the sound of various last nails being hammered into assorted coffins.

So Manderson's essay is a diagnosis and a warning. He is concerned that the long-term effect of COVID-19 might just be to valorise and modalise the fragmented, insular, privatised world of neoliberalism,

and the authoritarian state that shields it from political scrutiny. 'COVID-19,' he argues, 'is not a metaphor for what happens next. It is metamorphosis or mutation: the denouement, the big reveal, the smoke from a gun that has already gone off.'

Little that has taken place over the past few years would run counter to this speculation. Certainly, each of the authors in the present collection seem to have seen through a glass darkly. They find the metaphors and other figures of speech that, like broken shards, catch the light of, and reflect back to us, the shadowy figures of modernity: monsters, disease, slavery, death; capitalism, colonialism, emergency. Their shared hope is that these analyses can allow us to see more clearly and to think more creatively. Manderson thinks that the illuminating power of our reflection on COVID-19 might yet bring home to us the responsibility we each bear for the fragility and inter-dependence of us all. The real bubble, he suggests, is the globe, on which, necessarily, we are all sheltering in place.

In the final essay in this collection, Fiona Jenkins also sees the pandemic as a moment in which metaphor and metamorphosis come together, but she argues that the metamorphosis it announces is a moment of *reckoning*—and therefore as necessary as it is laden with possibility. Jenkins looks at what lies beneath the soothing metaphor of 'the home' and our governments' ritual appeals to it, in the language of flexibility and resilience. As she points out, during the pandemic working from home came increasingly to look like living at work. Our employers requisitioned our homes and undermined our autonomy. She argues that it was the sympathetic resonance of 'home' and 'homeland', the security of the home and homeland security, that have been in play in these developments. Agamben argued that the pandemic was yet another step on the road to the normalization of the state of exception and the intensification of executive power. But Jenkins is not so sure. Drawing particularly on the work of Bonnie Honig (2009), she argues that our pandemic experience has opened up at least the possibility of new forms of sociality and new opportunities of democratic participation. The exception is never quite as exceptional as all that; it

is immanent in the communal, the public and the everyday.

It is not that there is nothing exceptional about the times we live in, but rather that it would be a grave mistake to think that it is only the state that is capable of seizing new opportunities and possibilities. That too neatly reduces the metaphor of home to homeland and responsiveness to obedience. The exception is on the one hand all around us all the time. On the other hand, it is that singularity in which the heavy veil of normality, including the normality of power and the normality of injustice, is finally 'rent in twain' (Matthew 27:51)—giving us a rare glimpse of the stage machinery that held the curtain in place, and untold vistas beyond. Bruno Latour's recent response to the pandemic, *After Lockdown: A Metamorphosis* (2021), is a broadside along these lines. Recent events, he argues, are the wake-up call our societies desperately need.

> You were forced to wake up out of a dream and ask yourselves: 'so where the hell did I live before?' Well, in the Economy, actually, meaning *somewhere other than at home*. (70)

Latour argues that it is well beyond time for our societies to wake up to the poverty of our language of individualism, ownership, property, and the sate, and to see clearly our absolute interdependence with the world we inhabit.

Jenkins demonstrates just how much these claims to a metamorphosis are based, both for their critique and for their possibilities, on an understanding of and deployment of metaphors of home.

> Latour's metaphorical exploration of "home" in terms of the "terrestrial" fundamentally reshapes our understanding of the "nomos of the earth" with seismic consequences; literally, it is like an *earthquake*. Humans, Latour suggests, have been rendered more or less extinct by the pandemic, not by virtue of succumbing to disease, but insofar as a relation to their 'home' has come to represent a fiction of exclusionary rights that has fully outlived its intelligibility, along with its capacity to sustain life.

Indeed, in a striking metaphorical move, as Jenkins points out, Latour

argues that Kafka's *Metamorphosis* has a happy ending. It is Gregor who finally comes to terms with the cataclysm that has befallen him, comes to accept and explore his creaturely life. It is his parents who are still stuck at home, clinging to the past, locked down by their needs for property, for proper conduct, and their *amour propre.* It is time, says Latour, to leave home and join at last, rather than to own or master, conquer or consume, the nomos of the earth.

Ultimately, this brings us back to the creative and destabilizing potential that nestles within any metaphor. Recalling Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952), Veracini wonders whether the ubiquitous mask-wearing brought on by the COVID-19 epidemic was not partly responsible for the growth and strength of the Black Lives Matter coalition. 'For the first time in human history,' writes Achille Mbembe, 'the term "Black" has been generalized' (2017: 6). Metaphors come from the past but contain within them an embryonic future. They carry things across time and across experience in unpredictable ways. The key word in the Nietzschean epigram might not be truth, or metaphor, or army—but 'mobile'. This insurgent mobility makes it hard to fight against… but good to fight with.

Endnote

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