

Ex-position Feature Topic Call for Papers
Theoretical Figurations: Up Close and Updated

Publication Date: December 2023 (Issue No. 50)

Submission Deadline: March 31, 2023



In his textbook-style introduction to Actor-Network-Theory (ANT), *Reassembling the Social*, Bruno Latour emphatically articulates the importance of figuration for social thought—so much so that he actually writes the ant into his exposition of the theory, citing the insect’s myopia as a commendable exemplar of taking an earthbound, 2-D approach to the social and rejecting any overarching scope such as context or structure. For Latour, any sociological account, however abstract it may appear to be, is embedded in some sort of “flesh and features that make [it] have some form or shape.” Of the new key players he brings into ANT, *actor* is defined as “*any thing* that does modify a state of affairs by making a difference” whereas *actant* is something quite similar except that “it has no figuration yet.”

This feature topic proposes to broach theoretical figurations for humble reasons. It is hard to ignore that lately we have been bombarded by big-stroke discourses on the climate crisis: just as the scale of the predicament is said to be grand, narratives about it tend to generalize. What this feature topic is interested in, however, is minute attention to one particular figure at a time (with regard to the Anthropocene or not). By *theoretical figuration* we mean, echoing what is laid out by Latour, the very form or shape of a theoretical proposition—in his case, for instance, to think of the time and place we inhabit as a globe, a sphere, Nature, or Gaia marks distinct agendas because they are different figurations.

The stakes of discussing theoretical figures are much higher than, say, identifying keywords, not least because the very materiality of the figuration may change the components concerned. A theoretical figure may be a metaphor or analogy that fleshes out a concept: e.g., viscous hyperobjects (Timothy Morton), slow violence (Rob Nixon), and Chthulu (Donna Haraway), if we continue with the climate theme. Or theoretical figurations may simply define the material contours of a concept. In critical thought, we have come across an abundance of them: the primal scene, unconcealment, suture, economy (psychic economy, libidinal economy), regime (scopic, aesthetic, or climatic), *arche-* (arche-writing, arche-cinema), *hyper-* (hyperreality, hypermedia), *meta-* (metacommentary, metamodeling), hybridity, the incommensurable, the incomputable, and so on and so forth. We can also

include “the figural,” or a figure that has assumed a presence in literature and philosophy beyond the bounds of the original story: Peter, Bartleby, K., and Cthulhu (the Lovecraft version, not Haraway’s purposeful misnomer), just to name a few.

As long as we look a little bit more closely, we will find that these figures are everywhere. For this topic, we welcome shorter research articles (5,000 words minimum exclusive of the bibliography) that conduct close readings of theoretical or literary texts and update our understanding of some of the figurations which have served as the settings for important debates in critical thought.

***In addition to themed sections, each issue of Ex-position also includes a “General Topics” section, which welcomes submissions year-round.*

***For submission guidelines, visit the journal’s website:
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