

Letter from the Editor

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At the end of his introduction that threads together articles in this special collection on the history and historiography of the Cold War, our special issue editor Kenneth Paul Tan writes, somewhat wistfully, “It is my hope that the articles in this special issue will contribute valuably to a long but necessary ritual to rid us of that debilitating Cold War specter.” In a world where division persists and where audiovisual storytelling thrives in a cold war simulacrum that assigns perpetrators and depicts winners and losers, this might prove to be wishful thinking. We nonetheless hope to move the needle, ever so slightly, at least for the scholarly community, to examine our own precepts and assumptions. Louis Menand, one of our contributors to this special issue and a keynote speaker at the Narrating Cold Wars: An International Interdisciplinary Conference in November 2021, noted in his talk how “the Cold War is given too much power as an explanatory variable,” which can be a liability that restricts our interpretative horizons and analytical possibilities.

In my remarks as chair of Menand’s keynote speech, I pointed out how reconstructing history is a tricky business, given the elusive nature of the past. How do we “bring a vanished world to life on the page?” to quote Menand’s words, given that “the more material you dredge up, the more elusive your subject becomes.” From time to time, we are confronted with not just the incompleteness but also the competing versions of the past. History is comprised of not merely facts but also a narrative that assembles and frames facts, a frequently fraught process of omission, elimination, embellishment and at times pure fabrication.

Menand puts it further that “history writing is an imaginative one”—or what our journal calls “storytelling.” When it comes to storytelling,

historians dredge up the past to make sense of how we get to where we are. The process of digging up the past is, more often than not, purposeful, being guided by our own moral conviction and ideological position as we apply rhetorical persuasion to drive toward closure of some sort, if not a final verdict. The exercise is akin to appraisal or evaluation. To use Stanley Fish's terms, "Evaluation is an act of persuasion rather than demonstration."¹ While cultural critics do their best to persuade, scholars and cultural historians demonstrate meticulously to make a point. To this end, our special issue aims to call attention to our own struggle with the notion of cold war and related scholarship. In the end, the real problem lies perhaps not with the Cold War as too broad a periodization tool in historical summation but "cold war" as a mentality that shapes the way we perceive the world and what divides us and our shared humanities.

The publication of this special issue marks the second anniversary of our journal.² As we toddle our way toward year three, we have two more special issues on the horizon. Issue 3.1 will focus on East Asian serial dramas in the era of global streaming services to address aspects of the interplay between local productions and global platforms, including Netflix and Disney+ in the United States and iQiyi in China. Issue 3.2 will zoom in on digital interventions in the public sphere in the broad Asia region, enacted through lighthearted, creative, and resistant communications in multimedia forms (from text and meme to short-video and livestreaming) across platforms and networks. After two years of global trotting, we choose to settle on a

1. Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980), 365–68.

2. Our issue 2.2 also includes a theme-based book review, "Tracking American Political Currents in White Identity Politics and Fox Populism: Branding Conservatism as Working Class" by David Gurney, which covers two books published in 2019 by Cambridge University Press, *White Identity Politics* by Ashley Jardina and *Fox Populism: Branding Conservatism as Working Class* by Reece Peck. The review was supposed to be included in our issue 2.1 but the timing did not work out. We are pleased to include the review in this issue.

particular region for a narrower yet more focused scholarly approach. Asia is naturally our first stop, given the physical base of this journal. It also allows us to leverage local and regional scholarly resources. The focus on digital media in our next two issues meets the demand for attention to storytelling and its ramifications in a fast-evolving digital arena.

