

## HM2010 NYC Abstracts

### Session 1, Friday 15th Jan 10:15-12:30:

#### DESECRATION; REDEMPTION

**Jacob Blumenfeld** (New School for Social Research)

##### **All Things Are Nothing To Me: Stirner's Negation**

Max Stirner's 1844 critique of everything has yet to be surpassed. A return to his strange theories on the self, property, and consumption will help singe the crust off the stale politics of the present, and put the terrible back in materialism.

**Liam Sionnach** (Institute for Experimental Freedom)

##### **The Proletariat and Messianic-Time: Rupture and Redemptive-rhythm within the State of Exception**

Because the question of "movement" connotes a relationship to time, we are forced to rethink capitalist-time, the Marxian conceptions of time, and what a revolutionary time might entail. Whereas Marx began to conceptualize a revolutionary time, he ultimately fell back on a new linear time which happens as a progression of the same historical time capitalism inherited from Hegel's Spirit: the history of the state—the history of "man." However, only Walter Benjamin has really thought out this question in eloquent terms which correspond to our real history "The history of the oppressed teaches us that the state of exception is not the exception but the rule." Through Benjamin's reading of the analogy between the proletariat and the messiah, we can begin to conceptualize a time which occurs within chronological time, but which is itself a rupture with history: messianic time. The "time of the now" is the time that remains between this moment and the end of time. Insurrection is the straight gait that has been thrust open in history, through which the messiah enters.

**John-David Scott**

##### **Theses on the Realisation of History by Way of Its Desecration**

Through the intensified objectification of time into the eternal realm of commerce, man's ability to recall his own past appears as a practice of accumulation, manifested in both the abstract and concrete. The abolition of value will necessarily start from the destruction of things, and it is through the asserted simultaneity of past and present, united by an engagement against which lived experience has been banned from its own present, that the desecration of history takes flight.

#### CRITICAL FEMINISMS

**Hester Eisenstein** (Queens College and Graduate Center, CUNY)

##### **Feminism Seduced: How Global Elites Use Women's Labor and Ideas to Exploit the World**

I will present the argument of my recently published book, which looks at the ways in which national governments and international financial institutions have taken advantage of the success and wide dissemination of mainstream feminist ideas. I suggest that the centrality of the idea of work as key to women's emancipation has been useful to elites in

the US and in Third World countries, and suggest ways in which international feminist organizing can help move toward alternatives to neoliberal capitalism.

**Nina Power** (Roehampton University)

### **Feuerbach for the 21st Century; and "One-Dimensional Woman"**

Concepts of immaterial labour, generic humanity and questions of universalism vis-a-vis politics have come to the forefront of contemporary political discussions. This paper will suggest that many of today's concerns were already present in the work of Marx's precursor, Ludwig Feuerbach, in the 1830s and 40s. By understanding the debates of the Young and Left Hegelians, Feuerbach in particular, we get a much better sense of the stakes of today's problems.

**Valerie Francisco**

### **Filipina Countertopography: Empire Migration and Feminism**

## **ORIGINS OF THE CURRENT CRISIS**

**Andrew Kliman** (Pace University)

### **Roots of the Economic Crisis: The Persistent Fall in Profitability and Debt Financing**

Various leftists are trying to have working people march behind the banner of some statist version of capitalism, as a supposed solution to the economic crisis and/or a way of preventing a recurrence of crisis. Frequently the turn to statism is justified on the basis of the claim that the current crisis is a purely financial one, caused by free financial markets, unrelated to and distinct from profitability problems within capitalist production. This paper will show that the claim is incorrect. Properly measured and assessed, there has been a persistent fall in US corporations' rate of profit and declining GDP growth, the effects of which have been continually papered over with ever-growing mountains of debt. But the excessive indebtedness leads to bubbles and the bursting of the bubbles. The latest crisis is the the most severe yet. A further rise in debt is not a genuine solution to the crisis; only a new human society is. In the meantime, working people should fight for concessions without subsuming their self-activity under the agenda of some section of the ruling class.

**Fred Moseley** (Mount Holyoke College)

### **The Crisis is Far from Over**

The US economy has bounced back in recent months, largely due to very expansionary fiscal and monetary policies. However, this paper argues that this "recovery" is only temporary, and does not provide a lasting solution to the fundamental problem in the US economy, which is excessive debt, i.e. debt to income ratios that are much higher than ever before, and roughly twice as high as in 1929 for the economy as a whole. A lasting recovery requires that the debt to income ratio for all sectors of the economy (and especially for the financial sector and the household sector) must be significantly reduced. Recent government policies have not reduced these debt ratios, and have instead added trillions of dollars of government debt to the excessive private debt. This is no solution. Unfortunately, the main way that excessive debt can be reduced (and was reduced in over-indebtedness crises of the past, including the Great Depression) is through widespread bankruptcies, which would result in a much worse recession or depression. Government policies will probably continue to try to avoid this necessary

“solution”, but the result is likely to be a decade or more of stagnation, Japanese-style, with official rates of unemployment higher than 10%, and real rates of unemployment much higher than that.

**Simon Mohun** (QueenMary University of London)

### **What is the Present Crisis a Crisis of?**

Is the present crisis a crisis of profitability? The data do not support this for the crisis beginning in 2007. Examination of the historical record suggests that there are long swings in the macroeconomic rate of profit, and that serious crises are associated with turning points. Crises associated with falling profitability are typified by that in the period following the end of the ‘golden age’, from the mid-1970s to the early 1980s. Indeed, this is the only ‘falling rate of profit’ crisis of the twentieth century. The contemporary crisis is quite different, being associated with a long-term rise in the macroeconomic rate of profit. It is this feature, as well as its severity, which makes for meaningful comparison with the 1929-33 crisis. This suggests a periodisation of capitalism in which lack of regulation, the celebration of the free market, growth in inequality across many dimensions, weak labour movement institutions, and speculative excess are associated with periods of rising profitability. When the bubbles burst, a serious crisis ensues, and recovery requires Keynesian expansionism, national and international regulation, measures of egalitarianism, and industrial interventions by the state. The ensuing period of ‘social democracy’ is one of long run falling profitability, which culminates in a crisis that restores the free market and all of its works (thus 1979-82). Like 1929, the current crisis is a crisis at the top of a profitability swing, and like the Great Depression, capitalism requires some substantial form of social democratic renewal.

## **ENERGY AS CAPITAL**

**George Caffentzis** (Midnight Notes)

### **“Peak Oil” and “Resource Curses” from a Class Perspective**

The intention of this paper is simple: to strip the peak oil hypothesis of its apocalyptic pathos and examine it in the light of Marxist categories. Doing this is a modest but important step in fashioning an anti-capitalist energy politics.

The main claim of the peak oil hypothesis translated into Marxist language is that the costs of production (especially in terms of constant capital) of extracting oil are going to increase dramatically in the next few decades. Hence there will be an increase in the organic composition of capital (OCC) in the oil industry in general, an industry where the OCC is already high.

What also follows from the hypothesis is that there will be an increase in the rents paid to the owners of those fields where the costs of production are much lower than the fields where the costs of production is high (though not high enough to make them unprofitable).

Thus from the Marxist point of view the Peak Oil hypothesis implies that there will be an increase in both the transformation of surplus value into profit of the oil industry as well as the transformation of surplus value into oil rents. Surplus value being the unowned extra value produced in the capitalist system as a whole that is differentially appropriated by specific profit, rent and interest owners. Here lies the “freemasonry of capital,” as Marx ironically expresses it.

Put in this way, the Peak Oil hypothesis can have positive consequences for workers in the oil-producing areas on two counts, i.e., Peak Oil is not all gloom and doom for everyone. First, class struggles over wages in these areas can dramatically increase and, second, class disputes over the ownership of oil fields (especially claims for common ownership) are becoming pivotal and the source of a tremendous struggle.

These signs of an intensifying struggle in the oil-producing areas are the source of much capitalist anxiety (explaining much of the apocalyptic pathos I mentioned above) and create much of the attraction for the notion of the “resource curse.” For there is in the deployment of this notion a sort of “sour grapes” position claiming that the wealth transferred to profits and rents in the oil producing regions cannot be used by workers who are not in the advanced capitalist world already (e.g., Norway). So that the present and coming struggles of workers in the oil-producing world are already discounted as failures. I end the paper with a critique of this ideology.

### **Heather Rogers** **The Fuel of Forests**

Transportation fuels made from vegetable oils, known as biofuels, have raised criticisms around the world due to their knock-on social and ecological affects namely food crises and deforestation. Nevertheless, biofuel use is set only to rise as the world’s major economies, including the US, UK, EU, Brazil and parts of China, have enacted legal mandates and issued major subsidies as part of carbon reduction measures. To meet this demand—and despite the global economic crisis—output of biofuels continues to increase. Although we hear criticisms of corn-based ethanol grown on the vast monoculture that is the US Midwest, little has been written about biofuels’ impact globally.

This talk tells the story of massive ecosystem destruction to create cropland for biofuels based on on-the-ground reporting within the tropical rainforest on Indonesian Borneo. Here the world’s most biodiverse native forest is being felled and burned, and carbon rich peatlands drained, to make way for new plantations of oil palm to supply biodiesel refineries that sell to the West. Among those operating plantations are Cargill and a company partially owned by Archer Daniels Midland. The clear-cutting has led to Indonesia, an impoverished country that has yet to industrialize, becoming the world's third largest emitter of greenhouse gases, trailing only the US and China. Delicate ecological systems and Indigenous Dayak communities are being shattered by the expansion of oil palm as villages that have existed for centuries are plowed under along with the trees. But some communities are putting up valiant resistance despite the odds. This talk offers an up-close look at the ecological apocalypse that’s surreally unfolding in a time of unprecedented environmental awareness.

### **Victor Wallis (Socialism and Democracy)** **Beyond "Green Capitalism"**

This paper explores the basis for developing ecosocialism as a political force. It argues that the ecological crisis is a crisis of capitalism. It then summarizes the limitations of the various “alternative energy” technologies in order to make the point that there must be a reduction in total energy-use. The often assumed conflict between localist and Marxist approaches is then called into question. It is suggested that the strongest link between an anti-growth perspective and a mass constituency is to be found in the global

movement of indigenous peoples. The question then becomes how this movement can merge with class-based movements to comprise a powerful political force. In conclusion, a new framework is proposed for negotiating energy allowances in the international arena.

### **CRITIQUE IN CRISIS**

**Gopal Balakrishnan** (UC Santa Cruz)  
**The Politics of the Decline of Capital**

**Aaron Benanav** (UCLA)  
**The Brutal Facts: Too Few Jobs for Too Many People**

## **Session 2, Friday 15th Jan 1:30-3:30:**

### **MILITANCY AND COMMUNIZATION**

**Jasper Bernes** (UC Berkeley)

#### **Some Militant Topologies – Between Production and Reproduction**

Situated both within and outside the site of capital valorization, current struggles often demonstrate a curious, even paradoxical topology – occupations that are both the closure and the unbinding of space; urban conflicts that are both the interruption of capital circulation and the destruction of obstacles to movement; forms of withdrawal that are, in short, means of advance and attack. This paper will examine the limits and potentials of such tactics and the kinds of time and space in which they operate.

**Sabu Kohso** (VOL Editorial Collective; Anti-Capitalist Forum (Japan))

#### **Lessons from the Lost Militancy in Japan's Oppositional Movement**

The Japanese oppositional movement has long been in stagnation. The protest against the G8 2008 could not bring much significant effect. Although it offered a meeting place for activists from the world over, which inspired the younger generations as a new experience, no action was successful enough to encourage the transformative impetus. Most of all, the defeat had already been announced prefiguratively by a spontaneous turn of events: the day-workers at Kamagasaki in Osaka rose up against a police brutality a week before the protest. The insurrection was quickly subdued, but as many understood, the uprising was significant. However, for many who had expectations in the coming G8 protest, it was also felt as if the main act had already been played out before the rise of the curtain.

The lag between the day-workers uprising and the anti-globalization protest epitomized in many senses the ineffectuality of the activism in order to face the new possibilities opened by the social and political unrest. Herein involved a number of issues such as class division, mismatching of spontaneity and organizing, division between everyday life and activism, domination of legalism, and so on.

I would consider this situation due to a lost militancy in a broad sense. I believe that one of the main causes for this is a haunt of the New Left, still looming around the broad

society of the left. After the heyday of 1968, some New Left Sects went into a long phase of concentrated violence: some to the ultra-militant line and others to severe intra-sectarian struggles. Now this phase has passed, but some of the sects are surviving and the dreadful memory of their sectarian violence is tacitly and deeply alive. I shall analyze the nature of the violence used in the intra-sectarian struggle, how it transformed their organizations themselves, and finally how it discouraged the development of a new anti-authoritarian militancy for the generations to follow. As a conclusion, I seek to define militancy in distinctive contexts of hierarchical and non-hierarchical organizations, by employing Deleuze/Guattari's concepts of molar and molecular movements.

**Evan Calder Williams** (UC Santa Cruz)

### **Communisation and its Discontents**

This talk situates itself at the intersection of three trajectories and lines of thinking. First, a history of capitalist crisis, the most recent incarnation of which indicates a durational catastrophe - one that lacks an abrupt moment of sudden collapse - and an uncertain terminus to an organization of capital and politics which had become broadly dominant since the '70s. Second, a collection of attempts, cultural and theoretical, to grasp the different modes of the "end of the world", moving between cyclical crises (expected and delayed expressions of known contradictions), catastrophes (an end which reveals nothing other than the absence of other possibilities), and apocalypse (the revelatory end that reveals what has been hidden in plain sight all along). Third, a discourse and envisioned practice of communisation, ranging from the writings of Dauvé, *Théorie Communiste*, Debord and the S.I., and, most recently, Tiqqun, which can be broadly understood as the insistence that we cannot wait for generalized proletariat revolution and must instead attack capital via the implementation of communist practices now, aiming to bring about the end of capital through what is supposed to only be possible after such an end. From this, a central question about where we stand now: does catastrophe produce militancy, or does militancy produce catastrophe? Does the hastening of the world order toward its further self-destruction produce the historical necessity - and supposed mass justification - for more radical tactics and extreme action, or is our task to accelerate the collapse in which such actions will retroactively become necessitated? Does the coming-apart of the contemporary order demand that we positively model new forms of the kind of world we want to come, or does the fact that it never comes apart as quickly or totally as it should mean that our action is fundamentally negative, a task of making apocalyptic what otherwise will be just a slow-motion disaster with no end in sight?

### **HOMEOWNERSHIP, HOUSEHOLD DEBT AND RACE IN THE POST-WAR US**

**Maya Gonzalez** (UC Santa Cruz)

#### **On the Housing Question...Not Again?!**

Today the US is witnessing the foreclosure of the American Dream – returned to the bank with a set of keys. The recent crash of the housing market leads us to reflect on a longer epoch, one that is now drawing to a close. Over the postwar period, capitalism found its support in widespread US home-ownership. This was the Keynesian solution to the housing question, which reinvigorated accumulation and saved the capitalist system from itself. Today, this is the same question we face once again, however, in its obverse form.

In my paper, I will argue that by turning the home into the commodity through which all others were sold capital was revived during the great American economic boom of the postwar period. Housing and the commodified existence accompanying it saved capitalism from its own contradictions while subsequently creating new ones. While focusing on housing and household debt, I will provide a history of the relationship between the reproduction of the proletariat and the reproduction of capital and demonstrate why, since the 70s, this problematic and unsustainable accord has come into crisis. Finally, I will suggest ways in which we might envision housing as the site of struggle in the present conjuncture.

**Justin Myers** (Graduate Center, CUNY)

**The Neoliberalization of Everyday Life: Finance Capital's Debt-Peonage, Debtor's Prisons, and the Potentiality of Anti-Debt Movements**

This paper contends that the key distinctive feature of Neoliberalism in the U.S. and its main strategy of reproduction since the 1990s is the imposition of debt-peonage on the general population. I explain that, when seen in relation to the "great refusal" (GR) of the 1960s and 1970s and its rejection of the Keynesian paradigm, Neoliberalism's move towards debt-peonage can be understood as a key mechanism for: (1) reintegrating living labor into the capital-relation; (2) intensifying and extensifying work via the commodity-form; (3) facilitating a new "regime" of accumulation; and (4) decomposing future-refusal via the conversion of home and university into debtor's prisons. Particular emphasis is placed on the connection between the attempted universalization of debt-peonage and the different dynamics - logics and tools - around which Neoliberalism (contra Keynesianism) operates. Of note, I maintain that the practice of debt-peonage, Neoliberal style, should be seen as Neoliberalism's inversion of the logic of the GR: debt-peonage is a toxic mimic of the GR's demands for increased access to social wealth decoupled from work. In conclusion, several ways to think about an anti-debt movement through the concepts of self-reduction in price, jubilee, and bankruptcy as class strategy are discussed.

**Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor** (Northwestern University)

**A Home of Their Own: The Politics of Housing in Urban America**

The pursuit of single family homeownership has been a central dimension of the American Dream since President Harry Truman declared "the realization of a decent home" as a goal for every American family in 1949. By the late 1960s this axiom was turned into social policy as the Nixon administration attempted to turn single family homeownership into social policy and as a social palliative to the crisis unraveling American cities. But the collusion between the private sector and public policy in an attempt to build and sell houses resulted in massive corruption and fraud eventually ending in the destruction of tens of thousands units of housing in Black neighborhoods across the country at the hands of the federal government.

**HERMENEUTICS OF VALUE**

**Neil Larsen** (UC, Davis)

**In the Shadow of 'Second Nature': Speculations on the Implied Presence of a Second Fetish-Form in Marx's Mature Critical Theory**

Via commentaries on selected passages in Capital vol. I and the Grundrisse, this paper, part of a longer work-in-progress, introduces, schematically, the following three

hypotheses:

1. That, read carefully on its own terms, Marx's classic theory of the commodity-fetish as (in Lukács' expression) a 'second nature'- an objective but unconscious form of social mediation-- implies not only the possibility of the conscious historical negation of said fetish but of the existence, within the relations of commodity production themselves, of an objective social form rendered invisible to the reified consciousness of 'second nature' itself: a negative, 'other' of the commodity-fetish, immanent to the same social relations that generate the latter.

2. That this 'other' is, in one sense, the 'real' or literal fetish-object, but that, contrary to traditional Marxist thought (and contrary to certain aspects of Marx's own thinking) its fetish quality per se—its imperviousness to 'rational' cognition—is not a hold-over from an antiquated or primitive, pre-capitalist past but is as much the modern product of the social relations of commodity production as is that of the commodity-form itself. Subsumed within this 'other' fetish-form are all those modern social contents—many of them, to be sure, pre-modern in origin—that cannot themselves be 'rationalized' or subsumed within the 'real abstraction' of the value-form. (Here I draw directly on the so-called 'Wert-Abspaltung' theory advanced by a number of contemporary German critical theorists associated with 'Wertkritik', among them the Marxist-feminist Roswitha Scholz.)

3. That among such social contents are objects and zones of experience traditionally identified as 'aesthetic'—something hinted at, albeit against the grain of Marx's own 'historical materialism' and without further theoretical ramifications, in Marx's celebrated remark on "Greek Art" at the conclusion to the Introduction to the Grundrisse.

**Alan Milchman** (Internationalist Perspective)

**The Value Form, Reification, & the Consciousness of the Collective Worker**

Marx's analysis of the value form, that deranged or perverted form, in which social relations between persons are inverted and appear as relations between things, has made it possible to grasp reification as a hallmark of modern capitalism. From Georg Lukács through the Frankfurt School theorists (Adorno and Marcuse) to those who had been their students (Hans-Jürgen Krahl, Hans-Georg Backhaus, Helmut Reichelt), the link between the value form, the trajectory of modern technology, and reification, has provided a theoretical basis for understanding both the crisis tendencies of capitalism and the obstacles to the development of the consciousness of the collective worker. The understanding that, as Backhaus has put it, "Value is 'material', objective, and yet also illusion, that is subjective...." points the way to a comprehension of the deep bases of capitalism's historic crises and to those facets of the life of the collective worker that indicate possibilities for human emancipation.

**Ken Kubota**

**The Dialectical Presentation of Capital: A Comparison of the Approaches of Backhaus/Reichelt and Uno/Sekine**

**CLASS STRUCTURE IN INDIA AND CHINA**

**Deepankar Basu** (University of Massachusetts, Amherst)

**Towards a Class Analysis of Indian Society**

This paper uses aggregate-level data, as well as case-studies, to trace the evolution of some key structural features of the Indian economy, relating both to the agricultural and the informal industrial sector in India. These aggregate trends are used to infer: (a) the dominant relations of production under which the vast majority of the Indian working people labour, and (b) the predominant ways in which the surplus labour of the direct producers is appropriated by the dominant classes. The analysis of the working class is complemented with a study of the emerging "middle" class and the bourgeoisie to arrive at a relatively comprehensive picture of the class structure of Indian society. This summary account of the class structure is meant to inform and link up with on-going attempts at radically restructuring Indian society.

**Richard Smith**

**China's Bureaucratic Collectivist Capitalism: Class Structure and Economic Development, Tendencies, Contradictions, and Implications**

In this paper I will argue that the key to understanding the sharply contradictory character of China's recent economic development is to be found in the analysis of China's unique bureaucratic collectivist/state capitalist property and surplus extraction system. China's hybrid "communist capitalist" economy is now more or less an established distinct mode of production with its own internal laws of motion, contradictions, and developmental tendencies. These contradictions and tendencies have powerful, even frightening, implications not only for China but for the whole world, especially with respect to class struggle and the global environment. I will sketch the main features of this hybrid system.

**SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY**

**Patricia Clough** (Queens College and Graduate Center, CUNY)

**Science and Historical Materialism**

The presentation takes up recent conceptualizations of matter, life and reality in the sciences, especially biology and physics and explores how these conceptualizations may affect our thinking about materialism, history, and doing politics

**William Lewis** (Skidmore College)

**Reading Henri Lefebvre's *Méthodologies des Sciences In and Out of Context***

Henri Lefebvre (1901-1991) is best known in the United States for his theories about space and material culture. Given this reputation and the relatively obscurity of many of his writings, it is not surprising that Lefebvre's contributions to philosophy of science in the Marxian tradition have been little examined. This is especially understandable given the fact that his major work in this area, *Méthodologie des Sciences* (Paris: Anthropos) remained unpublished for more than fifty years and only saw the light of day in 2003. It is in between the three extreme positions of Marxism-Leninism, historicist conventionalism, and logical empiricism that Lefebvre develops his own philosophy of science and it is here that his thought shows itself to be of more than historical interest.

**Massimiliano Tomba** (University of Padova)

**The Future Now: Interpretations of Marx's "Fragment on Machines"**

The "Fragment on Machines" of the Grundrisse was and is even today the focus of radical and brilliant interpretations of Marx. This "Fragment" is for many aspects futuristic due to its interpretation of automation of production. In my lecture I am going to review

the most important interpretations of this “Fragment” from Bordiga and Panzieri to workerism and post-workerism. Moreover my aim is to underline both its force and its weakness in the light of Capital.

### **NEOLIBERALISM IN CRISIS**

**Gérard Duménil** (Economist)

#### **Capital Income and Upper Wages in Neoliberalism: From Prosperity to Crisis**

**Hester Eisenstein** (Queens College & Graduate Center CUNY)

#### **Neoliberalism and the Political Economy of Gender**

In this presentation I will look at the ways in which neoliberal ideology and practices have made use of mainstream feminism. Specifically, I will discuss the creation of a low-wage economy and the abolition of welfare as we know it in the United States, and the promotion of export processing zones and of micro finance in the Third World. The material draws on my recently published book, *Feminism Seduced: How Global Elites Use Women's labor and Ideas to Exploit the World* (Paradigm, 2009).

**David Laibman** (Science & Society)

#### **Conflict, Social Evolution, Finance: Perspectives on the Current Crisis**

Marxist theory remains the ultimate foundation for understanding capitalist development, but the edifice arising on this foundation is a work in progress. A tension exists between abstract conceptions of cyclical and structural crisis as inherent in capitalist accumulation, on the one hand; and inconclusive rehearsal of the details of current events, on the other. To help resolve this tension, the stadial nature of capitalism, the role of the balance of class forces and its unfolding, and the position of intercapital and interclass financial relations must be addressed. Bringing these elements together contributes to a deeper understanding of the present moment, whether or not we are on the brink of a relapse or a recovery phase; and of the revolutionary implications of currently contemplated social reforms.

### **Session 3, Friday 15th Jan 4:00-6:00:**

#### **(PRE-) AND (POST-) OPERAISMO**

**Sara R. Farris** (Jan van Eyck Academy; Int'l Institute of Social History)

#### **Italian Heterodox Marxism: on Mario Tronti's Weberianism.**

In this paper I analyse the engagement of Mario Tronti – leader of the classical season of Italian Operaismo – with the thought of Max Weber. Weber constituted one of Tronti's most important *cattivi maestri*. By analysing his influence upon Tronti's development, I aim to show the ways in which this encounter affected the latter's Marxist approach and political theory more in general. Stemming from the notion of the autonomy of the political, as a critique of so-called “vulgar” Marxism's idea of the political as a reflection of the economic, Tronti increasingly adopted Weberian terminology and theoretical points of reference. Ultimately, I argue that Tronti's heretical method led him to incorporate and re-propose theoretical and political problematics that are characteristic of bourgeois political theory: namely, the dyad administration-charisma and a teleological and

anthropological approach to history. By focusing upon this heterodox encounter, thus, we will be able to unravel one of the trajectories of the transformation of Marxism that occurred during its recurrent *rendez-vous* with the 'Marx of the bourgeoisie'.

**Nina Power** (Roehampton University)

### **Feuerbach for the 21st Century; and "One-Dimensional Woman"**

Concepts of immaterial labour, generic humanity and questions of universalism vis-a-vis politics have come to the forefront of contemporary political discussions. This paper will suggest that many of today's concerns were already present in the work of Marx's precursor, Ludwig Feuerbach, in the 1830s and 40s. By understanding the debates of the Young and Left Hegelians, Feuerbach in particular, we get a much better sense of the stakes of today's problems.

**Ben Trott** (Freie Universitaet Berlin)

### **What Defines the (Post-)Operaist Approach?**

This paper draws on this heterogeneous tradition of (post-)Operaismo – from its emergence in the pages of the journals *Quaderni Rossi* and *Classe Operaia* and the tumultuous struggles of 1960s and '70s Italy, to the more recent theorisation of post-Fordist production and resistance in the works of Michael Hardt, Antonio Negri, Paolo Virno and others – in order to set out its defining characteristics. The objective is not an unconditional defence of the tradition, but a critical reading that teases out four constituent elements to be offered up as tools for an analysis of contemporary capitalism and its overcoming.

## **SEXUALITY AND MARRIAGE**

**Christopher Chitty - UC Santa Cruz**

### **Late Capitalism and the Antinomies of Sexual Discourse**

This paper will offer a preliminary critique of the antinomies of contemporary discourses on sex by periodizing the emphasis placed upon the body and sexuality as an ideological symptom of the central contradictions attending late capitalism. What is the historical reason for the political and cultural prominence of the body and sex, on the one hand, and marriage and family on the other in advanced capitalist countries? Following Marx's suggestive thesis in his critique of early socialist Utopian texts that it is possible to judge from the sexual relationship "the entire level of development of mankind" and "the infinite degradation in which man exists for himself," I will argue that the centrality of sex and the body in contemporary thought and culture is evidence of a deep and profound failure of our socio-political imagination to envision human relationships and a future outside the brutal realities of capitalism in decline (Marx, *Early Writings*, 347). If Marx could envision the capitalist work-relationship through the allegorical figure of "universal prostitution" what would be the figure corresponding to the increasing unavailability of this work-relationship? I will argue that our current mode of production which has increasingly generated a relative surplus population or a proliferation of bodies that cannot valorize capital, has created a pornographic sensorium and corresponding cultural forms -- images of disaster, the sexual relationship and global poverty -- a spectacular set of libidinal investments which dramatize the sterility and limits of capital.

**Dana Cloud - University of Texas, Austin; Int'l Socialist Organization**  
**Marriage Equality and the Academic Left**

This paper will explore the approaches on the part of the academic left toward the demand for marriage equality. Generally, their idealist and utopian stances are distant from the actual movement for equality while claiming to be more purely left-wing or radical than the grassroots organizers who built the October 11, 2008 National Equality March in Washington, DC. For example, materialist feminist Rosemary Hennessy, in her book *Profit and Pleasure: Sexual Identities in Late Capitalism*, argues that capitalism's imperative to privatize of social responsibility in the family makes any demand for marriage equality suspect; seeking equality with regard to marriage simply buys into the oppressive and exploitative system that relies on the private family. Hennessy urges GLBTQ persons to "disidentify" with the institution of marriage alongside other capitalist norms. (At the Historical Materialism conference in Toronto in 2007, she re-iterated this argument.)

Likewise, Judith Butler has argued in several interviews that the struggle for marriage equality is too bound up within the liberal imaginary, outside of which we are, presumably, to think. She also suggests that this struggle is a distraction from the allegedly more radical demands and tactics of AIDS activists. She does not seem to think marriage equality—which would include the benefits for many of health care, child custody and adoption, inheritance, and medical rights—could be part of what she has defined as "a liveable life." This notion is very far removed from the material needs and transformative aspirations of a movement demanding full equality under the law and national federal intervention to make it so.

In both cases, the assumption is that we can think or talk our way out of oppressive institutions and norms; another is that the struggle for reforms inside the present system (which they define as a structure of meanings rather than institutions, economic relationships, and so on) is not sufficiently revolutionary. However, as Sherry Wolf argues, rejecting marriage equality is akin to rejecting demands for integration on the basis that failure to revolutionize capitalism makes civil rights meaningless. The academic left positions itself well outside of the vibrant new civil rights movement. Its theoretical abstractions that are ideological holdovers from the more conservative times of the 1980s and 1990s, making its utopianism—in Engels' terms, the idea that one can "leap over" or think oneself out of oppression and exploitation—conservative and pessimistic in the guise of being more radical than practical movements.

### **Justin Gilmore - UC Santa Cruz**

#### **Communization and the Negation of Sexual Identification**

With the current crisis of overproduction also comes a moment of political rupture that essentially allows for a reactivation of past failures--namely the possibility of a political project that is premised on that which Badiou labels a passion for the real--as the aforementioned crisis represents a situation that could facilitate favorable conditions for the withering away of the relevance of the male/female gender construction, and the ushering in of a new, transitory phase of human development. This paper will inquire as to how such developments are indeed contingent of the avoidance of traditional programmatic approaches of liberation, as they tend towards the affirmation of subject positions that are clearly subjugating, such as female collectivization of domestic work--a project that both naturalizes the 'woman' and furthermore assumes that such people would want to continue work that their gender construction has consigned to them. As an alternative to the programmatic paradigm, this paper will probe the dual prospects of

communization and luxurious bodily artifice as plausible complementary modes through which gender identity could be surpassed. Thus, the negation of such identities, as well as institutions surrounding the said identifications, such as marriage, must be negated entirely if the current crisis is to be effectively expropriated for the achievement of any real material reorganization of society.

## **CRISIS THEORY**

**Duncan Foley** (New School for Social Research)

### **Notes on Crisis and Social Change**

Capitalist crisis is neither more nor less favorable than other periods of capital accumulation for the promotion of fundamental social change. Left-wing critics of capitalism owe their readers an account of what alternatives to capitalism they advocate. The twentieth-century alternatives of communists and socialists which envision a political bureaucracy running economic enterprises is no longer politically convincing. Alternatives can be analyzed in terms of the bottom-up, top-down language of complex systems theory. Alternatives will have to transcend the growth paradigm shared by left and right in the twentieth century.

**Max Gasner**

### **There is No Such Thing as an Economic Crisis**

There is no convincing theory of economic crisis under capitalist society; or, rather, there is a myriad of interesting, thoughtful, and incompatible toy models of crisis many of which must have something to do with the observed behavior of the system. None, however, evade the trap which thinking according to the model of crisis poses for any program for the critique of political economy. I will touch on some alternative insights both classical (Marx, Schumpeter, Knight, Keynes) and modern (from the economics of networks) to suggest the practical uselessness of crisis theory. Critical economics must be deliberately "through the cycle" and eschew both soothsaying and hyperreactive policy prescriptions or abandon entirely its claims to relevance.

**Tony Smith** (Iowa State University)

### **Beyond 'the Keynes Solution'**

An ideology serving the interests of capital as well as the theory of efficient markets is not likely to disappear before the disappearance of capital itself. Nonetheless, the Great Recession of 2007-???? disconfirms this theory as unequivocally as any theory can be empirically disconfirmed. This has created a much greater space for Keynesian and Post Keynesian ideas than existed previously. We can expect these positions to become increasingly influential in social movements seeking a progressive alternative to a neoliberal global economy. They are also likely to play an increasingly central role in philosophical theories of global justice. In this paper I shall critically examine the proposed reforms of the international financial architecture proposed by Paul Davidson, a leading Post-Keynesian theorist, in his recent book /The Keynes Solution: The Path to Global Economic Prosperity/. Davidson echoes Keynes's call for a new form of world money, and for strict rules of adjustment to be imposed on both surplus and deficit economies. I shall argue that these proposals ultimately rest on an inadequate understanding of the role of money in the capitalist world market. Attaining the goals of Keynes and his followers will require more radical measures than those they proposed.

## **NEO-LIBERALISM IN PRACTICE**

**Ozgur Ozturk**

### **Global Crisis and the 'New' Imperialism: Turkish Finance Capital in the 21st Century**

There were discussions about 'the new imperialism' a few years ago, especially after the US invasion of Iraq. With the beginning of the global crisis in mid-2007, it seems that the momentum of the discussions shifted to the effects of the crisis, and the global restructuring of capital, with possible outcomes on the present inter-state balance of power. The classical concept of imperialism is still on the agenda, with some minor modifications. However, the development of capitalism in the 'third world' countries, especially in some of the 'emerging markets', and the results of this development has not been integrated in the main theory. Within this context, this paper investigates the formation of finance capital in a late capitalised country, and the connections between the development of finance capital and imperialism. In the case of Turkey, we are witnessing the birth of a new kind of 'imperialism', very different in some aspects, but also similar to the older one. The rapid internationalization of Turkish finance capital, together with (i) the imperial past of the country, (ii) the disintegration of USSR, and (iii) collaboration with the US capital, opened up a possible 'imperial' space for the Turkish bourgeoisie, which it seems to take advantage of, especially within the recent crisis conditions. This paper will try to present the dimensions of the internationalization of Turkish finance capital, the opportunities provided to it with the current global crisis, and will discuss the recent foreign politics of Turkey as an example of an imperial(ist) attempt.

**Melda Yaman Ozturk** (Ondokuz Mayıs University)

### **The Impact of the Global Crisis on the Accumulation Process in Turkey: Rethinking the Capitalist Crisis in the Context of Late Development**

Due to the rapid internationalization of capital in the last 20-30 years, and the high degree of capital accumulation in the 'developing' countries in the same period, the current crisis will effect the developing world in a different way than the global crisis of the 1970s. This can be observed in the changing international credit relations since then.

The case of Turkey provides a clear example and we can see both dynamics (development and internationalization) at work, especially since the year 1980. At this date, Turkey left the import substitution industrialization strategy of the previous period, preferred a different capitalist development path, 'opened' her economy, targeted a deeper integration with international capital and developed new financial institutions. In this process, Turkish capital groups ('holdings') strengthened their connections with international capital. On the one hand, Turkish investments in other countries increased from year to year; on the other hand, international capital investments and partnerships increased within Turkey. As a result, while current crisis causes high unemployment and poverty for working class in Turkey, Turkish capital groups which were facing the effects of the crisis passively in the 1970s, has now become active figures trying to take the advantage of it.

**Aylin Topal** (Middle East Technical University)

### **Neoliberal State Restructuring and Decentralization in Mexico and Turkey**

This article aims to investigate the dynamics that relate state decentralization to the rise of neoliberal policy schemes, especially in the countries of the periphery. It argues that state decentralization is part and parcel of the neoliberal state restructuring which would reform the representational ties between the classes and political parties. This institutional restructuring took different paths filtered through the inter- and intra-class relations of each country.

The article develops its arguments through a comparative analysis of the stories of decentralization in Mexico and Turkey, from the early 1980's onwards. There are certain interesting parallels between Mexico and Turkey. 1) These two countries have parallel history of highly centralized state structures and 'authoritarian' political regimes which faced a crisis in the late 1970s. 2) They have been ardent followers of the IMF policies and leading recipients of the WB structural adjustment programs since the debt crisis of the early 1980s from which both countries have suffered severely. 3) Integration of these peripheral economies into the world economy with differing ways has accelerated since the second half of the 1990s with NAFTA and Customs Union –as a part of the EU accession process- respectively. Despite the similarity of conditions conducive to the emergence of a neoliberal policy scheme, the path and timing of decentralization in these countries differed.

The comparison reveals that both in Turkey and Mexico state decentralization aimed to reconstitute neoliberal state policies with downscaling state functions and reform the corporatist representational ties between the classes and political parties. The differences in the decentralization paths lie in strategies of the factions of capital settled in different levels of politics with their varying strengths. Mexico witnessed an earlier decentralization process owing to the demands for decentralization that came from below, from the factions of bourgeoisie who had perceived to have much to gain from a deepening integration with the US economy, and thus decentralization indeed facilitated neoliberalization of the local economy in Mexico. In Turkey, on the other hand, the story was rather reversed. Transition to neoliberal policies preceded decentralization. The first round of decentralization worked against the interests of the major local industrial bourgeoisie in the country, who ironically later on contributed to the second round of state decentralization, from the mid-1990s onwards.

The article elaborates its arguments in three steps: The first section is dedicated to the problem formulation and elaboration of key concepts. The second section takes a closer look at the case countries, first, by comparing and contrasting the historical backgrounds. Then, the story of decentralization in Mexico and in Turkey is examined in detail. The last section will go back to theoretical analysis to re-think the original question.

## **OIL AND WATER**

**Matthew T. Huber** (Syracuse University)

### **Enforcing Scarcity: Oil, Violence, and the Making of the Market**

Because of its finite quantities and centrality to industrial life, oil has always been at the forefront of discussions of natural resource scarcity. Over the last decade of volatile and often rising oil prices, a vast "peak oil" literature has emerged citing the geological finitude of petroleum as a harbinger of an era of catastrophic scarcity. Many analysts

focused on the geopolitics of oil also start from a basic premise that the increasing natural scarcity of oil is the primary driver of global conflict and “resource wars.” In contrast, I follow many human geographers who approach resource scarcity as not a natural (or geological) fact, but a social relationship mediated by capitalist commodity relations. With any exchangeable commodity scarcity must be socially produced to create the conditions for the price mechanism to function and the possibility of profitable production. Moreover, oil is often referred to as a “strategic commodity”, which makes its scarcity, and thus its effective commodification, a necessity of capitalist social life. Although many processes contribute to the production of scarcity (e.g., competition, economic policy, inequality), I focus on the role of violence in producing the scarcity necessary for the oil market to function. While case studies of oil and violence abound, I examine the 1931 declaration of “martial law” in the oil-fields of East Texas and Oklahoma in a moment of lax depression-era demand, overproduction, glut, and collapsing oil prices. Most historians approach this event from the standpoint of nearly bankrupt oil producers. Based on archival research, I argue that violently imposing oil scarcity was not merely sectoral, but a broader project of stabilizing the chaotic oil market in accordance with the sociopolitical reorganization of capitalism during the 1930s. Such stabilization was critical for the emergence of an oil-powered Fordism in the postwar United States responsible for the intractable patterns of suburbanization and auto-centric transportation so vexing to energy policymakers today. I conclude by suggesting that in order to better understand contemporary debates on energy policy and the geopolitics of oil, we should consider not so much how scarcity generates violence, but rather how violence produces scarcity.

**Enrique Lanz Oca** (Graduate Center, CUNY)

### **The Ecological Industrial Complex: Federal-Corporatism and Hydro-Militarism behind the Elwha Dam River Restoration Project**

Recent macro-ecological restoration projects seem to be in direct conflict with the tendency within capitalism towards time-space compression. Although the construction of large dams has taken from several months to a few years, the removals of big dams or nuclear power plants take decades or even a century. The Elwha Project in Washington State, the largest dam removal and the second largest restoration project ever planned in the United States, is a 308 million dollar project. Based on interviews, primary and secondary sources, and direct observation, I argue that although this ecological project’s objective is to restore the river and thus create future benefits for the local community, this plan is being used by corporate and federal groups to extract revenues. Restoring the river will take decades. Corporatism, however, is a short-term process. I show how federal and corporate discourse surrounding this project is constructed to convince the public that the only requirement needed to restore the river is to implement the short-term project of tearing down the dams, camouflaging the necessity of an increased financial investment in long-term tasks such as the restoration of the habitat and salmon. By making dam removal synonymous with habitat restoration, federal and corporate interests more easily justify spending the majority of the budget on short-term processes that are, not coincidentally, controlled by them. What is being heralded as one of the largest and most progressive ecological projects of the century is actually a venue for the military industrial complex to make money.

**Gideon Fink Shapiro** (University of Pennsylvania)

## **Architecture or Revolution: Transformation and Continuity in the Landscape of the Tennessee Valley**

In transforming the hydrology of a multi-state region, the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) also attempted to assimilate a rural population to industrial production and centralized governance. Hydroelectric dams, managed forests, and electrified farms were components of a thoroughly redesigned landscape that reconfigured social relations. New farm and refrigeration cooperatives, trade unions, and political advisory councils emerged from a combination of TVA policy and existing social networks. Thus harnessed to a broad development program, the architecture of the TVA initially reflected competing socialist, technocratic, and liberal-democratic ideals. The agency's head architect was Roland A. Wank, a Hungarian-born socialist who envisioned the building of new communities and dams as part of a movement toward revolution. TVA directors remained committed to capitalism, but responded to the need for radical intervention to unify and mobilize a fractured populace. The new landscape embodied cooperative labor and scientific management—yet it also conveyed a sense of continuity with the past. Both as instruments of change and as mass-mediated images of change, design and planning functioned at the level of propaganda. In the context of the New Deal and the Second World War, TVA architecture embodied the tensions between democracy and bureaucracy, revolutionary transformation and entrenched power.

### **Enrique Lanz-Oca**

#### **The Ecological Industrial Complex: Federal-Corprotism and Hydro-Militarism behind the Elwha Dam River Resoration Project**

### **DIALECTICAL METHODS**

#### **Bertell Ollman (NYU)**

##### **Role of Marx's Dialectical Method and Theory of Alienation in His Economic Theories, or Why Do Marxist Economists Have So Much Difficulty Understanding Marx's Economics**

Marx's political economy is not about why things cost what they do, but why they cost anything at all, or what kind of society treats the productive activity of human beings in terms of the value of their products. The kind of labor involved here is alienated labor, and the link between this labor and the value form of its product (as distinct from its quantity) is not causal but dialectical as are the subsequent metamorphoses of value into commodity, capital, money, profit, interest, rent, and wages. Without an adequate grasp of Marx's dialectical method and his theory of alienation, most Marxist economists substitute a radical version of classical political economy for the domination of material conditions over the people who created them and the fetishism of the forms of value associated with them that lie at the heart of Marx's political economy.

#### **Antonio Y. Vázquez-Arroyo (University of Minnesota)**

##### **Wayward Dialectics: On Fredric Jameson**

This essay considers the critical import of Fredric Jameson's recent recasting of dialectical thinking. After the crucial year of 1968, intellectually the dialectic had collapsed, at least in the Euro-Atlantic world. It seemed that Theodor W. Adorno's *Negative Dialectics* (1966) has become its lapidary statement. Working within the dialectical legacy of western Marxism, only Gillian Rose's work has retrieved the dialectical import of critical theory but hers is a mostly neglected oeuvre. Yet also

working within this legacy, Jameson has arguably become one of the most successful exponents of the dialectic that, while working within the parameters of the dialectical legacy, reworks the Hegelian and Adornian formulations. This essay sets out to begin an exploration of the critical import of Jameson's recasting of dialectical thinking and the significance of these recent developments for contemporary critical theory.

## **Plenary 2, Friday 15<sup>th</sup> Jan 7:00-9:00**

### **CRISIS AND POLITICAL ORGANIZATION**

**Paul Blackledge** (Leeds Metropolitan University)

#### **Ethics and Anti-Capitalism**

Recently a number of prominent theorists including Slavoj Žižek, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, John Holloway and Simon Critchley have attempted various re-assessments of Marx's and Lenin's relevance to contemporary anti-capitalism. This paper draws out and criticises some common threads in these assessments. Taking as my point of departure Critchley's anarchist critique of what he calls classical Marxism's 'active nihilism', I argue, on the contrary, that there is an ethical core to Marxism which is rooted in the virtues of working-class solidarity and which provides a standpoint from which one might transcend the emotivist limitations of contemporary, including anti-capitalist, ethical theory. I argue that Lenin's contribution to Marxism, once properly disassociated from its caricature at the hands of the Stalinists, is best understood as the political corollary to this ethical socialism. Further, I suggest that because each of the contemporary theorists noted above have, in their own distinct but related ways, misunderstand the ethical component of (Lenin's) Marxism they have also misconstrued, in various politically debilitating ways, the nature and importance of his relevance to contemporary anti-capitalism.

**Peter Thomas** (Finnish Academy; Jan van Eyck Academy; Historical Materialism)  
**Confronting the Crisis: Gramsci and the Politics of Hegemony**

**Alberto Toscano** (Goldsmiths, University of London; Historical Materialism)

#### **Democracy and Catastrophe**

How does the widespread preoccupation of contemporary radical thought with emancipatory and subjective notions of discontinuity (dissensus, event, act, etc.) fare in the face of the salience and urgency of (economic) crisis and (ecological) catastrophe? How is our thinking of political organisation affected by attending to these menacingly asubjective and potentially depoliticising forms of discontinuity? This talk will explore the idea, forwarded by the likes of Jean-Pierre Dupuy and Isabelle Stengers, that we live in a 'time of catastrophes', in order to consider its cogency and its consequences for our understanding of political agency and systemic change. I hope to show that the ideological and strategic struggles within the Left over political form and organisation can be indexed to different conceptions of system-wide failure, to different ways of revealing totality in its dysfunctions. In particular, I will focus on the differing political semantics and temporal registers attaching to notions of crisis and catastrophe. With reference to recent arguments about political forms adequate to an anti-capitalist response to the crisis (commons, communes, new figures of the state), I will argue that the ways in which we

envisage collective political agency strongly depend on the temporal modalities that we project onto notions such as crisis and catastrophe, especially whether we treat these as primarily event-like (breakdowns), conjunctural (phases and opportunities) or structural ('catastrophe in permanence').

## **Plenary 2, Friday 15<sup>th</sup> Jan 7:00-9:00**

### **LINEAGES OF THE PRESENT CRISIS**

**Gérard Duménil** (Economist)

#### **Neoliberalism Adrift: A Historical Perspective**

The presentation will cover three main topics: (1) Neoliberalism and the contemporary crisis in the broader framework of structural crises and social orders since the late 19th century; (2) The present phase of the crisis; and (3) Perspectives for the coming decades.

**Yves Smith** (Naked Capitalism)

#### **ECONNED: How Unenlightened Self Interest Caused the Global Financial Crisis**

**Anwar Shaikh** (The New School for Social Research)

#### **The First Great Depression of the 21st Century: Causes and Implications**

## **Session 4, Saturday 16th Jan 10:15-12:15:**

### **THE COMMONS**

**Silvia Federici** (Hofstra University)

#### **Women, Computers and Potatoes: Feminist Reflections on the Discourse of the Common/s.**

Federici's presentation is a feminist critique of the discourse of the common/s as articulated by the Marxist left in the Europe and the US. It argues that (i) its inability to address the contradictions inherent in its view of the common/s prevent this principle from translating into a coherent political project; (ii) the path beyond these contradictions is engagement with the struggles women are making, especially in the global south, on the terrain of reproduction.

**Jason Read** (University of Southern Maine)

#### **Figures of the Common: Species Being, Transindividuality, Virtual Action**

The common has become a central term for political strategies contesting the existing order of neoliberal capitalism, central because it makes it possible to link together diverse struggles over the environment, culture, and knowledge. While the common is central to contemporary politics, developing the concept entails working through some of the more persistent dualisms western thought. The idea of the common demands moving beyond the sterile opposition of self and society that finds its expressions in various forms of individualism and holism in order to elaborate a concept of the social individual. Moreover, in that the common encompasses both a social relation and a property relation, the definition of the concept demands overcoming the dualism of

subject and object. This paper will explore a history of figures of the common, from Marx's species being to Simondon's concept of transindividuality, in order to produce a concept adequate to the political conjuncture.

**Jason E. Smith** (Art Center College of Design)

### **Communism, Common, Commune**

This paper will examine the importance of the theme of the "common" in recent attempts to affirm the possibility of communism. I want to focus on two opposed tendencies within this affirmation, represented by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's recent *Commonwealth* and a series of texts by the (now defunct) Paris-based collective *Tiqqun* written in 2001. What I want to draw out here is the manner in which Hardt and Negri conceive the current crisis of capital not simply as function of the objective disequilibria attending the breakneck financialization of capital, but as a strain on capital's control over the production process itself, increasingly autonomous and producing not measurable "wealth" as such, but the common as a new figure of collective existence. I want to contrast this tendency with the one proposed by *Tiqqun*, who locate the ontological figure of the common and the corresponding political form of the "commune" not as a possibility indexed to class composition, but as the discrete organization of affective and ethical intensities--a sphere of friendship and enmity, in rupture with the universal "hostility" of biopolitical imperial governance--at a remove from the dynamics of the production process. An important element of this discussion will concern the forms of conflict these different conceptions of the common and communism require or imply.

### **MONEY, FINANCE & FICTITIOUS CAPITAL**

**Riccardo Bellofiore** (University of Bergamo; University of Amsterdam)

### **From Marx to Minsky: The Universal Equivalent, Finance to Production and the Deepening of the Real Subsumption of Labour to Capital in Money Manager Capitalism**

In the present paper, I shall try to reconstruct the originality and difficulties of the Marxian labour theory of value in its dual role as criticism of non-monetary value theories and as proposition of a monetary labour theory of value. The crucial point, which is usually lost in most interpretations, is that Marx mounts a powerful attack against the theories which expel money from the definition itself of value: so it is incompatible both with those who build the theoretical edifice on just an use value foundation (as Neoclassicals or Neoricardians), and those who build it on a mere monetary foundation breaking with the labour theory of value (as most monetary heterodoxies). Marx is lost by 'substantialists' as well as by 'formalists'.

**Geoffrey McDonald** (Ruthless Criticism)

### **The Fetishism of "Fictitious Capital": On the Economic Might of Illusionary Wealth**

Marx' term "Fictitious Capital" has recently often been interpreted as saying that the wealth of securities is just a claim to the results of accumulation in the productive sector and is therefore in itself no wealth at all. In a financial crisis this wealth would reveal itself as being made up. But investors value securities in fact at least as much as factories and, far from anxious to collect the claims on real wealth, rather reinvest in new securities. Furthermore, the mass of finance capital exceeds the productive even in times of crises. Following remarks by Marx himself, this paper argues that securities have a value of their own. Though its last basis is the exploitation of labor, its immediate

source is nothing but the judgment of the buyer in the future prospects of the security to gain in value. Thus being "Fictitious" it is nevertheless "Capital", the valid form of wealth in capitalism. "Fictitious Capital" is then the highest form of fetishism: actions deriving from the belief of the financial community in the value of their papers make them valuable, a collective belief produces unconsciously an economic might independent of their control.

**Ted Winslow** (York University)

### **Marx on "Monetary Crises": The "Historical Materialist" Approach to Financial Crises**

Marx's "historical materialism" treats history as internally related "educational" "stages in the development of the human mind," stages whose "final goal" is the actualization of "self-conscious reason" in the "rich individuality" of "universally developed individuals" creating and living in "the true realm of freedom." His treatment of the "internal relations" that, both between and within stages, constitute this process of development, of *bildung*, critically appropriates Hegel's "higher dialectic of the conception," a "dialectic" that locates "reason" in each stage of the process as the "the rose in the cross of the present," as that which "produces out of this negative a positive content and result." He also critically appropriates Hegel's idea of this negative as "human self-estrangement" expressed in the labour process:

"Hegel conceives the self-creation of man as a process, conceives objectification as loss of the object, as alienation and as transcendence of this alienation; that he thus grasps the essence of labour and comprehends objective man--true, because real man--as the outcome of man's own labour."

Thus, within the "dialectic" that is the capitalist labour process, "the propertied class and the class of the proletariat present the same form of human self-estrangement." The "positive" in this "negative" is the "greatest impulse" it gives to "the development of the social productive forces and the integral development of every individual producer." The "growing domination of capital" is, therefore, "the estrangement which is growing and therefore hastening to its annulment. This is indeed the only way in which that which exists affirms its opposite."

Again critically appropriating another key aspect of Hegel's elaboration of this "higher dialectic," Marx, specifying the nature of the capitalist's self-estrangement, treats the motives of the capitalist as "passions" in Hegel's sense of motives that, though irrational, "supply the impelling and actuating force for accomplishing deeds shared in by the community at large." He credits classical political economy with a reasonably realistic conception of these motives, the main defect in the conception being its ignoring of the role played in the motives by money. He claims that, in this respect, the treatment of motivation by the forms of political economy that arose at "the historical dawn of capitalist production," the "monetary system" and "mercantilism", was more realistic. These forms, by uncritically treating money and gold as the ultimate objects of desire and, hence, as the true forms of exchange value, pointed to an essential feature of capitalist motivation that continued, according to Marx, to be relevant after capitalism had matured and exchange-value had, in classical political economy, come to be identified with objectified labour. This continuing relevance is made evident in what Marx calls "monetary crises" where the love of money, which continues to constitute the "inner

man” of the capitalist, resurfaces and “money then suddenly appears not as the medium of circulation but once more as the only adequate form of exchange-value, as a unique form of wealth just as it is regarded by the hoarder.” The paper will elaborate this idea of “monetary crises” as the basis in “historical materialism” for a theory of financial crises including the most recent one.

## **VIOLENCE AND IMPERIALISM**

**Anna M. Agathangelou** (York University)

### **New International Liberalism, Neoconservatism and Legacies of the 'New' Imperium: Bodies of Desire, Terror, and the War in Eurasia**

With a long history of appropriating insights and epistemologies from different sites (e.g., the academy) to further their aims, the neoliberal world order’s leaders are now intensifying their interventions by further exclusion, alienation, and killing in the name of “ethics,” freedom, and security. In their attempt to reconsolidate their power and further their projects through ontologies of profit, the managers of neoliberal projects draw on war and death to consolidate their understanding of “freedom” and “security.” The resulting imperial violence pushes us to ask what kinds of “secure” worlds such “ethical” calls and interventions make possible and how to disrupt these dominant approaches and epistemologies. Drawing on Marx, Agamben, Mbembe, postcolonial feminist theorists, and theories of social relations such as the migration of reproductive labor and war, I argue that these technologies of empire restructure social relations through regimes of terror, generating (in)securities in world politics for the majority and securing rights and resources for the rest. I argue that the fear of “death” fixes us to a “global security” that is metaphysically imprisoning. This paper articulates how such thinking colludes in reproducing violent and death worlds instead of enabling us to articulate an alternative world where the majority is privy to a safe “life.”

**Hamid Dabashi – TBA**

**Gayatri Spivak – TBA**

## **THE POLITICS OF OIL**

**Deepa Kumar** (Rutgers University)

### **Saudi Arabia and 9/11: The History of a "Special" Relationship and its Contradictions**

For over six decades, the relationship between the US and Saudi Arabia has been largely harmonious. Beginning with the first oil concession in 1933, the US has relied on Saudi Arabia for oil while Saudi Arabia has been dependent on the US for its security needs. During the Cold War, the US turned to Saudi Arabia to act as an Islamic pole of attraction and a bulwark against secular nationalism and the left. Through the decades, both Republican and Democratic Presidents have lauded Saudi Arabia and appreciated the “special relationship” between the two countries which Zbigniew Brzezinski characterized as an “asymmetrical interdependence.” Despite its horrendous human rights record, its archaic political system, and its corrupt economic policies, this interdependence shielded Saudi Arabia from criticism in the US . That is, until the events of September 11, 2001.

When it became known that 15 of the 19 hijackers were Saudi nationals, it caused a furor in the United States that opened Saudi Arabia to the kind of scrutiny and criticism not seen before. Sections of the political elite advocated severing ties with Saudi Arabia and taking over its oil fields. Yet, this is not an option that the US can afford. This paper examines the debates post 9/11 among the ruling elite about Saudi Arabia and explains the basis of the "oil for security" arrangement.

**Michael Schwartz**  
**Oil in Iraq and War Without End**

## **Session 5, Saturday 16th Jan 1:15-3:15:**

### **THE HUMAN AND MATERIALISM**

**Joel Wainwright** (Ohio State University)

#### **Gramsci's 'Conception of the World'**

Antonio Gramsci is widely celebrated for his conceptualization of hegemony. This paper elucidates a related concept that appears frequently in Gramsci's prison notebooks yet has been surprisingly under-emphasized: 'conceptions of the world.' These conceptions of the world are inherently philosophical, political, and geographical. This paper situates this concept in Gramsci's thought and elaborates on its implications through a reading of Gramsci's prison notes—particularly "What is man?," a key text for appreciating Gramsci's originality.

**William Clare Roberts** (McGill University)

#### **Aristotle's Communism: Paolo Virno on the Political Animal**

During and immediately after the Cold War, Western scholars tended to conscript Aristotle in the forces of capitalism. His criticism of Plato's Republic in Book B of the Politics was commonly treated as a criticism of Soviet communism *avant le lettre*, and anticommunism was the common ground uniting respected scholars (Miller) and embarrassing autodidacts (Rand). The presupposition was that Platonism, being a radical rationalism and idealism, amounts to a utopian totalitarianism in practice, whereas Aristotle's realism and "empiricism" are supposed to translate into practical pluralism and meliorism. The recent work of Paolo Virno cuts against the grain by repeatedly invoking Aristotle as the original thinker of transindividuality, the necessary – that is, fundamental even when unacknowledged – communism of both bodily experience and politics. In contrast to the Platonist communism of the Cold War imagination, which focused readers' attentions on institutions of property and family, Virno's Aristotelian communism is concerned with the modalities in which human beings become and persist as human beings through being in common, and the ways in which logos both disrupts and repairs this being in common. This essay analyzes and assesses Virno's Aristotle, focusing in particular on a) how best to understand the naturalism of his position and b) the motivations for and consequences of his identification of politics with the use of language.

**Hasana Sharp** (McGill University)  
**Desire for Man? Spinoza's Antihumanism**

Althusser famously heralded the necessity of Marx's theoretical antihumanism precisely as a precondition for understanding "the human world." Similarly, I will argue that Spinoza's philosophy consists in a kind of philanthropic antihumanism. Loving and knowing ourselves, depends upon annihilating certain cherished images of "man." At the same time, even as Marx and Spinoza challenge any philosophical anthropology of the human essence, they avow that "man" has an indispensable ideological, or "practico-social" function. This paper will conclude with an exploration of the promises and dangers of a politics without "man."

## **GLOBALIZATION**

**Marko Ampuja** (University of Helsinki)

### **Globalization Theory, Media-Centrism and Neoliberalism: a Critique of Recent Intellectual Trends**

In the last couple of decades, a number of influential social theorists have been producing epochal diagnoses that posit the demise of what is called "simple modernity". They have written about the coming of a very different social form, so different that – as the argument goes – earlier models of social change, including the classical sociological tradition as a whole, no longer provide the means by which we can understand the economic, political, cultural and social logics of our time. Globalization is the most important keyword of this intellectual movement, together with such catchwords as flows, networks, hybrids, diasporas, cosmopolitanism, connectivity, speed, time-space compression, uncertainty and contingency. These concepts have become dominant in social (and cultural) theory, to the point of establishing a new theoretical orthodoxy that we can define as globalization theory.

In the presentation, I will review the rise of globalization theory critically. The concept of globalization has been used in such a wall-to-wall manner that it now carries a distinctive air of flatness. Yet the reason why it has gained such a commanding position in social and cultural sciences is due to the fact that it is not only used to describe changes, but that it has also been developed into a theory or explanation of their causes and consequences (as emphasized by Marxist political scientist Justin Rosenberg). As I will show, globalization theorists rely heavily on arguments about the media, and new media and communications technology in particular, in making their claims concerning major epochal change. With this, they have also shown wide disinterest in the intensification of capitalism and the contradictions and antagonisms that are inherent parts of its social relations. This disinterest is dubious in light of the rise of neoliberalism, which overlaps with the emergence of globalization theory. Together with analyzing the contours of globalization theory, I will address its political implications, i.e. the question of whether or to what extent neoliberalism has affected the focuses, rhetoric and ways of reasoning that are typical for globalization theory in general.

**Mi Park** (Dalhousie University)

### **Imagining Alternatives to Global Capitalism: How does Another World look like?**

This paper analyzes diverse visions of an alternative society advocated by individuals and groups associated with the World Social Forum (WSF), also known as the 'anti-capitalist' movement or the 'anti-neoliberal globalization' movement. First, it documents political profiles of major organizations and influential thinkers in the movement. Then, it surveys competing visions of

production and exchange in a future society as the dissenters of globalization attach diverse meanings to globalization. Some define it as a global expansion of capitalism or imperialism, while others see it as industrialism or neoliberalism. Some major approaches discussed in the paper include: localization, primitivist anarchist, social anarchist (ParEcon and Inclusive Democracy), nestled coordinated socialism, 'feasible socialism', and global governance approaches. Finally, it sketches out shortcomings of each approach perceived by its opponents in order to facilitate further debates on the areas of conversion (agreements) and diversion (disagreements) in the anti-globalization movement.

**Nicole Trujillo-Pagan** (Wayne State University)

### **Hazardous Constructions of Mexican Immigrant Masculinity**

Dominant approaches to occupational health and safety for Mexican immigrant construction workers obscures the nature of workplace discrimination. In delineating occupational risks facing the group, specialists emphasize workers' deficiencies. In contrast, workers in a post-Hurricane Katrina New Orleans emphasized workplace discrimination and their legal vulnerability. This case elucidates how risk is commodified in emerging and dynamic labor markets. The kinds of outreach provided by governmental agencies were undermined by basic conflicts of interests and limited resources. Market conditions amplified the disaster for many workers.

## **THEORIES OF EXPLOITATION**

**Nancy Holmstrom** (Rutgers-Newark)

### **Exploitation: Marxist and Other Theories**

In thinking about the meaning of exploitation and why it is wrong, there is no better place to start than Marx's theory of exploitation in capitalism. Marx's theory was not limited to capitalism, as some interpreters think, but it is limited to labor, and his specific theory of exploitation in capitalism is limited to labor that meets certain conditions. Whether used broadly or narrowly, exploitation in a Marxist sense is clearly morally wrong though Marxists have debated just how to interpret this assumption.

**Gary Mongiovi** (St John's University)

### **On the Concept of Exploitation in Marxian Economics**

The paper traces the history of the notion of exploitation in economic writings prior to Marx, and then examines the evolution of the concept in his own writings. The word originated in the morally neutral concept of explication, and came to mean (and in some contexts still does mean) making the most effective use of a resource or an opportunity. It came to have a morally unsound connotation in English only in the mid-nineteenth century, at about the time that Marx was beginning his economic studies, when social reformers made it apply to human beings (as opposed to just objects or situations). Marx defines the term in a technical way: it is measured by the amount of labor-time employers compel workers to perform in excess of the amount of labor-time embodied in the wage goods workers consume. For Marx the prior concept is surplus-labor, and nothing would change in his analysis—it would not be more sound, or less sound—if he jettisoned the word “exploitation” and just spoke of surplus-labor, the rate of surplus-value etc. The word “exploitation” mainly serves the ideological, as opposed to the scientific, aims of Marxian rhetoric.

## **THE PARTY, THE NATION AND "THIRD WORLD" MARXISM**

**Noaman Ali** (University of Toronto)

### **Africa and Marxism: Toward an intellectual history of the political thought of the Mozambique Revolution**

This paper seeks to examine the history, theory and practice of Marxism-Leninism in Mozambique. This paper is divided into two parts: The first part focuses on the context that led to the rise of Marxism-Leninism in Africa in the 1970s. I will examine the spread of Marxism in the Third World following the Bolshevik revolution, and the ideology of African socialism and its critiques. The second part focuses more closely on the historical development, practice and theory of Frelimo—perhaps one of the more significant African Marxist movements. In examining the historical development of Frelimo, it becomes evident that there was a rich dialectical relationship between its practice and its theory. While Marxism-Leninism as political practice was buried by Frelimo not long after the death of Samora Machel—leader of Frelimo and Mozambique until his assassination in 1986—the resurgent popularity of Machel in Mozambique suggests that there is something to be learned from the history, theory and practice of Marxism in Mozambique.

**Dhruv Jain** (York University)

### **Badiou and Mazumdar: On the Problem of Democracy and Organization**

Alain Badiou has, controversially, argued that the Leninist Party-form and the Communist goal of State-capture is a saturated experience as can be seen in China during the Cultural Revolution and the incapacity to stop the degeneration of the Chinese Communist project. I will examine this claim through an outlining of Badiou's critique of the Cultural Revolution and the Communist Party, and then juxtapose his critique to Indian Maoist ideologue, Charu Mazumdar's, own critique and reformulation of the Party-form in the concrete foundations of the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) in 1967. I argue that Badiou cannot appropriately deal with the problem that he correctly identifies in China i.e. the bureaucratization of the Party-State, by simply rejecting outright the Leninist Party-form or any involvement with the State. The problem of bureaucratization does not simply rest in either of those sites, but rather in the very structure of politics itself and thus must deal with the contradiction between democracy (politics) and discipline (organization). Thus, we must simultaneously focus on: 1) the problem of democratic-centralism within the Party; and 2) the site of politics itself. Mazumdar, in his Eight Historical Documents, argues that the Party must allow for a dialectical relationship within the Party that attempts to prevent the isolation of the Party leadership from the masses, and the Party itself from the masses (through the formation of the Party-State), that results in the stultification of the structures of the State that results in bureaucratization. Thus, there is a shift away from the Party being the site of politics to that of the 'situation'.

**Nagesh Rao** (The College of New Jersey)

### **Marxism, Nationalism, and Third Worldism**

In recent decades, the idea that the classical Marxist tradition has been unable to adequately theorize nationalism—an idea that is perhaps best captured in Benedict Anderson's suggestion that nationalism is an "anomaly" for Marxist thought—has become the sine qua non of academic discourse on nations and nationalisms. The

popularity of this argument has much to do with the failure of radical anti-colonial nationalisms, on the one hand, and of various “third-world” Marxisms on the other. This paper examines the politics of anti-colonial revolutionaries like Frantz Fanon and Amilcar Cabral through the lens of earlier debates on nationalism engaged by Marx, Lenin, Luxemburg and others. I argue that the Marxism that anti-colonial thinkers inherited, as well as their specific historical circumstances, drove them in a third-worldist direction. By clarifying the interactions between Marxism and radical nationalism, we might attribute the development, and subsequent demise, of radical third-worldism to a different “anomaly”: i.e., the gap between internationalist rhetoric and nationalist practice in the context of the Cold War. Furthermore, I argue that it is the historical failures of third-worldism—and, interestingly enough, its currency among post-colonial intellectuals—that sets the stage for post-colonial proclamations about Marxism’s inability to adequately address nationalism.

## **CAPITALISM, SLAVERY AND THE CIVIL WAR**

**Paul Heideman** (Rutgers-Newark)

### **Walter Johnson, Marxism, and the History of Slavery**

Walter Johnson's writings on slavery in the United States have become, over the last decade, one of the most influential accounts of the nature of the slave system. At the same time, his work constitutes a sustained critical engagement with Marxism in a field that, while once notable for the prominence of Marxist scholarship, has in recent years turned to other methodologies. This talk seeks to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of Johnson's critique of the Marxist tradition.

In several articles, Johnson argues that Marx himself repressed the question of slavery from his examination of the economic laws of motion of modern society. To the contrary, I argue that New World slavery was a central consideration of Marx's political and economic studies, and that Johnson's reading of *Capital* is based on misunderstanding of its purpose.

Johnson is also a strident critic of Eugene Genovese, the name today most closely identified with a Marxist account of American slavery. Johnson claims that Genovese downplays the importance of day-to-day resistance to the slave regime. I argue this involves a deep misreading of Genovese. Johnson also argues that Genovese exaggerates the extent to which slaves internalized the planters' ideology. While this complaint has some bite, Johnson's exclusive emphasis on force and coercion strikes me as a step backward from Genovese's complex, multicausal approach.

**August Nimitz** (University of Minnesota)

### **Marx and Douglass versus Progressive Skeptics of Lincoln & the Civil War**

Was the U.S. Civil War and its outcome a social revolution and, thus, should Lincoln be considered a revolutionary? Progressives, in general, regardless of national or racial origin, are skeptical on both accounts. Probably no text has contributed more to such skepticism as has Howard Zinn's popular, *A People's History of the United States*, published originally in 1980. A very recent essay of Henry Louis Gates, Jr. about Lincoln also questions his revolutionary credentials. For Marx and Engels, however, the overthrow of slavery in the U.S. was the most important overturn of the nineteenth century, the necessary step toward working class hegemony. Not only did they follow the

course of the War closely but they sought from afar to influence its outcome. Lincoln, for them, was the undisputed leader of the process. Another real time observer and participant in the upheaval and closer to the scene was Black abolitionist leader Fredrick Douglass. His views of the War and Lincoln corroborate the assessment of Marx and Engels.

**Charles Post** (BMCC-CUNY)

**Democracy Against Capitalism in the Post-Civil War United States**

For many on the Marxian left, the US Civil War and Reconstruction were a (albeit “incomplete”) “bourgeois democratic revolution”—a revolution that simultaneously establishes the conditions for the expanded reproduction of capitalist social property relations, and a democratic form of the capitalist state. My paper uses the framework developed in Ellen Meiksins Wood’s *Democracy Against Capitalism (Part II)*, to analyze the historical relationship of capitalism and democracy in the post-bellum US in order to critique the notion of a “bourgeois democratic revolution.”

**Session 6, Saturday 16th Jan 3:30-5:30**

**NEO-BARBARISMS**

**Robert Hullot-Kentor** (The School of Visual Arts)

**What Barbarism Is?**

Adorno's thinking revolves centrally around the question of barbarism, how it is that social progress in the control of nature leaves an ancient barbarism behind while producing a second barbarism. But, however important Adorno's thinking may now seem to us, the idea of barbarism does not strike a nerve here. To take a detail: Where European law, for instance, may charge an individual with 'acts of barbarism,' American law only refers to a lack of 'civility'. Or, more broadly, where Europeans think of their own history as struck through with a barbarian past in the collapse of Rome, the American sense of history stops short, currently in any case, at a tea party. Is it possible, however, in a moment when Eric Hobsbawm is hardly alone among European's in writing compellingly on the 'rebarbarization' of history that the idea of barbarism could be comprehended here, on these shores, for what it is, and at the same time better understand why it is that Adorno's work has currently become so urgent to us?

**Christopher Wright**

**Nightmare Without End? Notes from the Vanguard of Revanchism**

Capitalist society appears as a more complete totality than ever before in its relatively brief existence. There appears to be neither an outside nor any alternative. Social classes appear to be an anachronism in much of the world, as working class identity has been eclipsed as fewer and fewer workers, spread over more diffuse areas, produce more and more wealth. Unions and mass political working class parties seem a hangover from a now defunct mass industrialism. Money truly rules the world, but monetary relations have become universal at a moment where more and more of the world's population becomes redundant, that is, falls outside of the capital circuit that would allow them to exist legally as wage-laborers. The result has been wide-scale expansion of illegal means of securing money, especially in the forms of the drug trade,

the sex trade, and slavery, which is frequently intertwined with both. All of this is not the result of some inevitable process in capitalist society, but the outcome of the failed attempts to overcome the capital-labor relation. How do we comprehend this situation critically and what does it mean for the possibility of an emancipatory, communist politics?

**Alberto Toscano**  
**Fanaticism in and Against History**

### **THE AESTHETICS OF PRACTICE**

**Jeff Kinkle** (Goldsmiths College)

#### **Neoliberalism as Horror: Wolfen & the Political Unconscious of Real Estate**

'The South Bronx and Wall Street, what's the connection?' asks an expert on the psychology of terrorism in the horror film *Wolfen* (1981). When the nonpareil of New York's power elite is found brutally murdered together with his wife and bodyguard in Battery Park, most suspect a political assassination, the final spasm of the urban guerrillas of the 1970s: a trust-fund militant of the Weather Underground, American Indian Movement-affiliated construction workers, and a terrorist organization aptly named *Götterdämmerung* are all targeted by a sinister state-corporate investigation. Then bodies showing the marks of the same inhuman *modus operandi* are discovered in the rubble of a South Bronx effectively carpet-bombed by financial crisis, planned shrinkage and 'urban renewal'. The film's protagonists – a disheveled cop and an eccentric coroner – are left to make the connection between the city's most powerful forces and its most destitute terrains. Entangled in a plot symptomatically torn between political history, capitalist practice and mythologies of the land, *Wolfen* is a beguiling narrative about a critical moment in the collapse of radical politics and the emergence of a feral neoliberalism against a backdrop of urban dereliction and real estate speculation – resonating in many ways with the 'civil war' film inventoried by Fredric Jameson (*Assault on Precinct 13*, *Warriors*, *Fort Apache*, *The Bronx*, etc.). While the voracious 'werewolf hunger' of capital is obscured by the film's focus on Native American shapeshifters, this presentation will explore *Wolfen*'s visualizations of an eerily depopulated New York – from lycanthropic POV shots of the city at the lowest depths of its dilapidation to the inevitable skyline shots from the penthouses of real estate developers – as modes of mapping the economic shifts (Wall Street) and urban crisis (the South Bronx) of the early 1980s.

**Marina Vishmidt** (Queen Mary, University of London)

#### **'Imperative Degeneration of How': The Congealment of Labour and Art**

In order to determine what makes labour a question for contemporary art we would first of all have to revise the Adornian topology of autonomy and heteronomy. Under the sign of abstract labour, a managed and elite 'creativity' poses the current condition for both labour in general and what was once the opposite of abstract labour – the concrete, individual and unbound art work. Though it is a challenge to retain the ontological dimension of the critical split between autonomy and heteronomy as the condition of art after the 'conceptual' and 'institutional' turns, we can still pursue its political economic implications which identify the material and ideological conditions for the ultimate 'unconditioned', art, while appreciating the very equivocal resistance that the aesthetic category of the 'unconditioned' can offer to the value-form. The appearance of labour in

contemporary art can also be looked at in at least two ways: as mimesis, and as a prototype for the becoming-contingent, guaranteed and 'unconditional' of wage labour in general. From the historical cases that marked the porosity of the art/labour divide like APG and feminist artists like Ukeles, Rainer, Montana and Kelly, to the contemporary audience labour of 'participation' as spectacle, to the infernal post-factory kitsch of Mika Rottenberg or John Bock, labour has always been a symptomatic issue for art. More broadly, the phenomenon of artistic labour can be seen to reflect class and gender contradictions as well as the processing of art into 'culture' as a mode of symbolic and financial accumulation which would paper over those contradictions - what kind of labour is performed here by the category 'art'? Within art production, labour comes up as a kind of dangerously attractive 'anti-matter', an ongoing perversion and inversion of two forms of human activity that the social relations of capital must keep apart. With the 'totalising' effect' of global capitalist relations as discussed in the panel summary, we see a negative dialectics (negative because objects don't go into their concepts without a remainder, without struggle) of reciprocity between the becoming-art of labour and the becoming-labour of art. It is to the extent that art practices refer to or embody forms of temporality, knowledge and subjectivity which do not easily enter the concept of abstract labour while subsisting through it, that labour can be a critical approach to the economic and grammatical subject of contemporary art.

Starting from negative dialectics as a critical method adequate to the antagonistic totality of 'capitalist social relations' referred to in the panel summary the question of labour is a question of the loss of its specificity which can be compared to the loss of art's specificity it is precisely the 'totalising effect' of the value-form that at once erodes specificity in universal abstract labour, and elevates art as the rule-upholding exception. While we may follow Adorno this far in positioning art as simply this constant fluctuation between autonomy and heteronomy, the loss of specificity of contemporary art after the 'conceptual' turn means that the relative distinctness of modernist art required to mobilise this dialectic has been lost as an ontological category, only living a perpetual afterlife as a taxonomic or grammatical category. The oscillation between autonomy and heteronomy becomes much less constitutive for the practice of art when we can no longer make any but the most conventional and contextual assessments of what is an external determination or intrinsic property of art. The topology of autonomy and heteronomy, as Ranciere has noted in other words convention, especially as government policy mainlines 'creativity' as the economic placebo of the past decade.

## **CRISIS OF VALUE**

### **José A. Tapia Granados Economists, Recessions, and Profits**

Since the recession began in the fall of 2007, greed, interference of the US government in real-state markets, irresponsibility of banks in lending, income inequality, and deregulation of financial markets leading to real-estate and financial bubbles have been mentioned as causes of the recession. Most of the economic profession has been generally reluctant to discuss these causes. Deep divisions among conservative economists supporting a laissez faire policy, and Keynesians proposing Government interventions have emerged in 2009. The usual explanations of the recession assume that economic crises are events that can be avoided in free-enterprise economies like ours. The view supported in this paper is that recessions and expansions are intrinsic

components of the profit economy, i.e., of economic systems organized in multiple enterprises that compete in markets to maximize money profits. Since the late 19th century in the US economy corporate profits stagnated or dropped immediately before each downturn, and recent data show that profits also stagnated or dropped immediately before the recessions of 1990, 2001, and 2008, the three last recessions dated by the National Bureau of Economic Research. While the empirical evidence is quite consistent with the views of Karl Marx and Wesley Mitchell on the dynamics of the capitalist economy, most economists ignore Marx's views or cite Mitchell's studies on business cycles without knowing his underlying theory.

**Paul Mattick**

### **Does Marx's Theory Explain the Current Crisis?**

How are we to understand what has been going on in the global capitalist economy for the last two years? Almost all commentators, including many leftists and even Marxists, agree that it is at root a financial crisis which, while contained, has affected the so-called real economy. Given the difficulties with accepting this version of things, it is worth while investigating what light Marx's theory of capitalist crisis may shed on these events. This brings us sharply up against the wide gap between the high level of abstraction of Marxian theory and the complexity of economic reality. How, if at all, is this gap to be bridged? And what theoretical and practical benefits, if any, does application of the Marxian analysis offer?

**Sander** (Internationalist Perspective)

### **Crisis of Value**

The roots of the present economic crisis are to be found in the very foundation of capitalism, the value-form. In the commodity's dual nature, abstract exchange-value and concrete use-value. The accumulation of exchange-value needs to take the form of an expansion of use-values while use-values are only produced as a means to expand exchange-value. Use-value and exchange-value must therefore expand in tandem, as a unified process. But the harmony required between the two sides of the commodity is increasingly violated when capitalism, driven by the law of value, expands its real domination, a mode of production based on the use of past labor, to which as little as possible living labor is added. Use-value and exchange-value become unhinged. The first is set on a course of exponential growth, the second on one of relative decline. Both over-accumulation and a fall of the general rate of profit become inevitable. Devalorisation, through crisis and if that's not enough through war, become integral parts of capitalism's cycle. But capitalism did not grow in a lab. Its metabolism, with the non-capitalist world in which it was born, and later between areas thoroughly transformed by real domination and the lesser developed parts of the world, also shaped its history. The latter played an important part in counter-acting capitalism's contradictions. Different political and technological conditions determined to what degree that was possible. The 'globalisation' since the late 1980's was in that respect a boon for capitalism. While its end is not in sight, its beneficial impact is waning. This makes it hard to see how capitalism can avoid an accelerated devalorisation of capital, rendered fictitious because it is a claim on future value that cannot materialize, and eventually, to even more extreme forms of self-destruction.

## **FINANCIAL IMPERIALISM**

**Karl Beitel** (American Federation of Teachers)

### **The End of Neoliberalism? The Current Crisis in Historical Context**

This presentation discusses the current crisis in light of longer-term structural transformation of post-WWII dynamics of accumulation as expressed in the realm of finance. Longitudinal data on credit formation and the money supply over the period 1850-present provides evidence of a “structural break” in the organization of capitalism and the dominant forms of money in the period 1933-1945. Changing forms of monetary regulation are explained as the outcome of class struggles to transform capitalism along social democratic lines. Despite the three-decade neoliberal offensive, many features of the transformations wrought in the period 1933-1945 remain highly relevant features of crisis management – e.g. counter-cyclical deficit expenditure, unemployment and social security insurance, and aggressive use of powers of lender of last resort by the central bank. The result is a systemic “delinking” of credit money from its underlying substantive basis in socially necessary labor time, with money based a system of purely nominal unit of account wherein bank liabilities serve as socially valid representatives of the general equivalent. These transformations explain the forms assumed by crises due to falling rates of profit and under-investment – e.g. inflation and the hypertrophy (overproduction) of finance, as opposed to falling prices and wages. This has, over time, required the development of a highly sophisticated system of economic management. While allowing for the moderation of the violence of economic contractions, the result has been a permanent tendency to de-couple the growth of credit from the rate of growth of real output. I argue this dynamic of financial expansion, far from being due to insufficient regulation, is inherent in a system of nominal sign-money predicated upon the delinking of money as pure numerical abstract unit of account from its substantive basis in abstract labor time, resulting in the development of increasingly sophisticated mechanisms for engineering controlled debt deflation and asset write downs.

It is questionable, however, whether central banks will be able to use cheap credit to spur a durable recovery. This has potentially ominous implications, as it is transpiring in an environment of deepening stagnation and a long-term trend of rising prices. Barring a resurgent movement for social justice, the result will be the reinforcement of the most authoritarian, anti-democratic tendencies already well advanced within the upper reaches of the US, and global, ruling class.

I conclude by discussing how the left can build a sustained and concerted resistance in the present period.

**Geoff Mann** (Simon Fraser University)

### **Hobbes Redoubt: Money, Monetary Policy and the Reign of Value**

In contemporary capitalist states, the structure of modern monetary authority has a distinctively Hobbesian quality. Yet technocratic, class-privileged, autonomous governance of central material and ideological aspects of collective and individual life, i.e. money and monetary relations, is incommensurable with any acceptable definition of democracy. Conversations inside the central banking community consequently substitute 'credible', 'transparent', and 'accountable' for 'democratic', despite the fact that the first two bear absolutely no necessary relation to democracy, and the last in practice merely describes the central bank's relation with those who share its expertise. These problems are a function of the more general consolidation of the reign of value, the ongoing reconstitution of governmentality and state power qua and via money.

**Ramaa Vasudevan** (Colorado State University)

**Dollar Hegemony, Finance and Imperialism**

Marx's analysis of the emergence of "world money" offers interesting insights into the workings of the post-Bretton Woods floating dollar standard. In a curious inversion of the traditional formulations drawing on Lenin, imperial hegemony in today's context would seem to be associated with net capital imports (rather than exports) by the dominant country. In a context where the role of 'world money' rests on the monetary liabilities of a dominant state, in the form of credit money – "fictitious capital"- rather than bullion, there is an easing of the external constraint on the advanced countries in the core with the impact of the debt-deflationary spiral and financial fragility being borne disproportionately by the periphery. This analytical framework suggests that the theorization of imperialism needs to address the relation between the state and the financial system; the asymmetric manner in which countries outside the core were incorporated into the monetary system, and the role that financialization plays in preserving the hegemony of the dominant currency.

**MACHIAVELLI**

**Gopal Balakrishnan**

**The Problem of Historical Time in Machiavelli**

**Banu Bargu** (The New School for Social Research)

**The Problem of the Republic in Marx and Machiavelli**

**Robin Morasco**

**Passion and Revolt: Machiavelli and the Meaning of Politics**

**LEGACIES OF THE THIRD INTERNATIONAL**

**Paul Le Blanc**

**Radical Labor Sub-Culture And Revolutionary Organization**

Without the development of a labor-radical sub-culture, it will not be possible to develop the mass class-consciousness within the working class that would be necessary to sustain a coherent struggle that could result in a transition from capitalism to socialism. Such class-consciousness, dependent on such a sub-culture, is also necessary for creating and sustaining a genuine revolutionary party. This understanding -- grounded in anthropological study, Marxist theory (particularly Lenin, Trotsky, and Gramsci), and actual historical experience -- is an important tool for Marxist research and socialist activism in our time.

**John Riddell**

**The Communist Women's International, 1921-26**

The little-remembered women's movement sponsored by the Communist International sought to build on the achievements of socialist feminists in both the pre-1914 socialist movement and the 1917 Russian revolution. It can also be viewed as a bridge from the socialist feminism of Clara Zetkin, Inessa Armand, Alexandra Kollontai, and their comrades to that of the present period. On crucial issues their movement pointed the way forward for the Communist movement as a whole, prefiguring the leading role of women in today's social struggles.