



Capitalism: Concept & Idea

150 Years of Marx's *Capital*: The philosophy and politics of capital today

London, 13 & 14 October 2017

Sessions, titles, abstracts and speakers' biographies

1. Capital and Capitalism: Value-form & Politics

1.1 Werner Bonefeld

On the Critique of Economic Categories: *Capital* as Social Theory

Marx's *Capital* is critique of the capitalistically organised social relations of reproduction. It recognises economic categories as perverted social categories and asks about how human social practice manifests itself in the form of independent economic categories and laws that unfold as if governed by invisible principles. He says, the capitalist relations are beyond human control and he argues that the individuals act under economic compulsion and are controlled by the products of their own labour. His critique says, in the capitalist social relations the individuals act as personification of economic categories. The immense wealth of capitalist society is abstract; it appears in the form of money as more money. In these wealth-relations, time is money, the satisfaction of human needs a mere sideshow. Yet, the economic categories are purely social forms. Critique of political economy is social critique of economic inversion; it is about the sheer unrest of life as the hidden misery of economic things. As social critique, the critique of political economy has its origin in 'suffering'.

Werner Bonefeld is is Professor of Politics at the University of York. His recent books include *Critical Theory and the Critique of Political Economy* (2014), *Notes From Tomorrow* (2015), and *The Strong State and the Free Economy* (2017). He is lead editor of the three-volume *Handbook on Frankfurt School Critical Theory* that is forthcoming from Sage in 2018. He has also published numerous articles about the critique of political economy, ordoliberalism and European Union.

1.2 Elena Louisa Lange

The Critical Function of 'Abstract Labour'

This paper seeks to clarify the critical function of abstract labour from its conceptual locus at the beginning of *Capital*. Against a common misunderstanding in many interpreters, namely that the introduction of abstract labour as the substance of value in the first chapter is 'unnecessary' or an 'unproven presupposition', I will argue to the contrary that it is the crucial key to the fetishisms and mystifications of political economy that Marx unravels in the three volumes. The critical function of abstract labour is therefore precisely its 'impurity', in that the whole system of bourgeois production is presupposed in it, while it simultaneously accounts for the fetishistic forms of value's various appearances ('profit', 'interest' etc.). I argue that attempts at ontologizing and 'purifying' the categories of value-form analysis are diametrically opposed to Marx's critical method and serve the ideological dogmatism of presuppositionlessness.

Elena Louisa Lange is Senior Research Associate and Senior Lecturer at the Institute for Asian and Oriental studies, University of Zurich, where she teaches classes on intellectual history, Japanese philosophy, Marxism and modernity. She is a co-editor books of *Begriff und Bild der modernen japanischen Philosophie* (2014) and *Concepts of Philosophy in Asia and the Islamic World* (forthcoming from Brill in 2017). She has also published articles on recent debates in Marxian value theory. She is currently working on a critical study of Japanese Marxist Uno Kōzō.

2. Capitalism and Freedom

2.1 Anselm Jappe

Is There an 'Esoteric' and an 'Exoteric' Marx? How Marx survived Marxism and Anti-Marxism

There are many people who believe Marx is outdated. Equally, there are those who think he should be taken at face value and others still who hold that his concepts need to be 'incorporated' into other fields of knowledge. The 'critique of value', however, takes a very different approach: Marx's critique of political economy – in particular, his critique of abstract labour, the commodity, value, money, fetishism and the 'automatic subject' – still describes the inner workings of capitalist society and is perhaps even more apt today than it was in his own time. This is the 'esoteric' Marx, who is often difficult to grasp. In contrast, the 'exoteric' Marx, who is much better known, describes the empirical forms of nineteenth-century capitalism, centred, as it was, on class struggle. Today, it is the 'esoteric' Marx who can help us understand capitalism and its crisis, which is the catastrophic consequence of the 'two-fold nature of labour', which he himself believed to be his most important discovery.

Anselm Jappe is the author of *Guy Debord* (1993, University of California Press 1999, PM Press 2017), *Les Aventures de la marchandise. Pour une nouvelle critique de la valeur* (Denoel 2003), *L'Avant-garde inacceptable. Réflexions sur Guy Debord* (Lignes, 2004), *Crédit à mort* (Lignes 2011, translated as *The Writing on the Wall*, Zero Books 2016), *Contro il denaro* (Mimesis, 2013). He contributed to the German reviews *Krisis* and *Exit!*, founded by Robert Kurz, which developed the "critique of value". He teaches at the Fine Art Schools of Sassari (Italy) and has been visiting professor in various European and Latin American universities.

2.2 Boris Buden

It's Getting Colder under the Sun of Freedom

In the age of classical capitalism the modern political state played the role of what the young Marx called 'the central sun of freedom', the historical womb of the abstract figure of a free and equal individual. The emancipation, however, was merely political. Revolving around the universal sunlight of freedom were the worlds of bourgeois civil society – particular, unequal and unfree. Neoliberalism has reversed this process, by installing the figure of a free and equal individual into the earthy ground of the bourgeois civil society. Once again, the universal sun of freedom seems to revolve around the re-feudalised space of contemporary capitalism. As then, the hoi polloi do not understand the emancipatory Latin. So freedom has no choice: either it must learn to speak out in the new vernaculars or it will freeze forever.

Boris Buden is a writer and cultural critic. He studied philosophy in Zagreb and cultural theory at the Humboldt University in Berlin. In the 1990s he actively participated in the publishing projects of the Croatian anti-war movement. His writings cover topics in philosophy, politics, cultural and art criticism. Buden teaches cultural theory at the Faculty of Art and Design, Bauhaus-Universität Weimar.

3. Capital, Feminism and Social Reproduction

3.1 Tithi Bhattacharya

Who Produces the Worker? A Centrality of Gender in *Capital*

Social Reproduction Theory, an analysis of how labour-power is 'produced' away from the point of production of commodities, has had a welcome revival in recent years. In its current form, the theory makes an important claim about the status of work under capitalism: that the majority of people combine paid employment with unpaid domestic labour to maintain themselves. This approach has sparked creative discussions about the gendered nature of work while reviving analytical attention to categories of productive and unproductive labour. Some earlier debates about labour and capital have also returned. Formulations about unpaid labour, for instance, in one of its current iterations, have been reworked as 'affective labour' and argued to be specifically relevant to workers in the service industry.

This paper explores the implications of labour-power being produced in a 'unique' way, unlike all other commodities under capitalism. We approach this issue with two questions in mind. One, does the uniqueness of labour-power, away from the point of production, give it any extra-capitalist vitalism? And relatedly, does the reproduction of labour-power, then, take place 'outside' of or external to capitalist social relations? These questions relate directly to the understanding class struggle under neoliberalism, and the ability of the global working class to be the agent of social change. The paper will argue for an understanding of capitalism as (i) a system that presupposes the wage labour-capital relation and (ii) a totality of social relations, rather than a 'thing.' Social Reproduction Theory is particularly useful in illuminating the relationality of capital and has the capacity to indicate vital strategies for confronting it in our times.

Tithi Bhattacharya is a professor of South Asian History and the Director of Global Studies at Purdue University. She is the author of *The Sentinels of Culture: Class, Education, and the Colonial Intellectual in Bengal* (Oxford University Press, 2005). Her edited volume, *Social Reproduction Theory: Remapping Class, Recentring Oppression* is forthcoming from Pluto Press. She was one of the national organizers for the International Women's Strike.

3.2 Sara Farris

Social Reproduction and Racialized Surplus Populations

In this paper I draw on my recent book *In the Name of Women's Rights: The Rise of Femonationalism* (Duke 2017) to discuss how a combined reading of theories of social reproduction and surplus populations can become a privileged site for analysing the intersection (and unity) of racial and gendered oppression with class exploitation. In particular, I want to suggest that a combined reading of these strands of literature is central to the comprehension of the contemporary role of female migrant labour in Western European societies as well as to questioning inherited assumptions about the Marxian category of the 'reserve army of labour'.

Sara R. Farris is a Senior Lecturer in the sociology department at Goldsmiths, University of London. She is the author of *Max Weber's Theory of Personality: Individuation, Politics and Orientalism in the Sociology of Religion* (Brill, 2013) and *In the Name of Women's Rights: The Rise of Femonationalism* (Duke 2017).

4. 'Capital's Destinerrance: Event and Task'

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak

'Destinerrance' dislodges all that which – by some telecommunication – claims to destine itself. Marx had already started the dislodging. How do we locate what is crucial for this dislodging today? How does this relate to the global enthusiasm for something called 'democracy'? Does it relate to the new gendering of the subject who votes? Is it important to remember Gramsci's insistence on the "gnoseological?" This talk will share these questions.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak is University Professor at Columbia University, New York. Her many books include: *Nationalism and the Imagination* (2015), *An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization* (2013), *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (1999) and *Outside in the Teaching Machine* (1993; 2008).

5. Capital and Ecology

Jason W. Moore (Binghamton University)

'We Have Mixed our Labour with the Earth': Work, Cheap Nature, and the Violence of Real Abstraction

The history of capitalism – and the roots of today's planetary crisis – is a history of putting natures to work. That of course includes human work, itself a 'manifestation of a force of nature.' This paper challenges the dominant concept of capitalism – across the political spectrum – as an economic or social system, abstracted from the *web of life*. The alternative is a view of capitalism and its web of interdependent processes – imperialism, industrialization, financialization – as a world-ecology of power, re/production and nature. That means, as Raymond Williams insisted, that capitalism is not only a producer, but also a product, of the web of life. Capitalism's history is co-produced in and through the relations of class, capital, and domination. All are centred in ways of valuing and mobilizing work, and none make sense as social relations superimposed on nature; rather, class, capital, and domination emerge *through* the web of life, acquiring new properties as a result. I will show how capitalism has developed historically as a system a Cheap Nature through a tripartite division of work: paid work, unpaid human work, and the unpaid work of nature as a whole.

The law of value as a law of Cheap Nature has implied a double violence. On the one hand, this the “economic” domain of exploiting labor-power and appropriating low-cost food, energy, labor, and raw materials. On the other hand, such cheapening is possible through the development of binary codes – of Nature/Society, Man/Woman, Black/White, Colonizer/Colonized – as central to the territorial, cultural, and colonial domination necessary to devaluing the work, often unpaid, of ‘women, nature, and colonies.’ Reconstructing the history of capitalism, the paper challenges both Marxist and poststructuralist approaches that flatten differences between humans and the rest of nature, and which embrace those real dualisms (e.g. Nature/Society) at the core of modernity’s long history of racialized, gendered, and colonial violence.

Jason W. Moore is a geographer and world historian at Binghamton University, where is he an associate professor of Sociology. He writes frequently on environmental history, political economy, and social theory, and is author or editor of seven books, including *Capitalism in the Web of Life* (Verso 2015) and, with Raj Patel, *A History of the World in Seven Cheap Things* (University of California Press, 2017). Moore chairs the Political Economy of the World-System section of the American Sociological Association, and coordinates the World-Ecology Research Network.

6. Subjectivation and War (Marx and Foucault)

6.1 Judith Revel

Effects of Subjectivation, Effects of Composition: Historicizing the Capital Relation

How can the relation of capital (that is to say, the way in which Marx always defines capital as a relation – mystified by the wage form – between fixed capital and variable capital) be newly understood? Can subjectivation, so necessary to the cooperative and social transformation of capital today, determine an asymmetry, a powerful response to the devices of the generalized extraction of value to which our lives are subjected?

Judith Revel is Professor of Contemporary Philosophy, University of Paris 10, Nanterre. She is a specialist in the work of Michel Foucault. Her books include: *Foucault avec Merleau-Ponty: Ontologie politique presnetisme et histoire* (2015), *Foucault, une pensée du discontinu* (2010), and *Qui a peur de la balieue?* (2008).

6.2 Éric Alliez (University of Paris 8/CRMEP, Kingston University) & Maurizio Lazzarato (Paris)

Wars and Capital

This paper will update the analysis of *Capital's* key phrase, ‘*Force is itself an economic power*’ (Vol. 1, Part VIII), in the light of neoliberalism and the reality of the wars inflicted on us and denied, through a permanent exchange between Marx and Foucault. Not once, but twice, then: not the ideal war of philosophers, but the *multiplicity of wars* raging within the mechanisms of power, wars that are the secret motor of the institutions of global political economy. For it is not only a question of reading the history of capital through war, but also of reading war through ‘the impossible revolution of 1968’, and the counter-revolution that responds to it, in the guise of the philosophy and politics of capital today.

Éric Alliez and **Maurizio Lazzarato** are the co-authors of *Guerres et Capital* (Éditions Amsterdam, 2016; English translation, *Wars and Capital*, Semiotext(e), autumn 2017).

Éric Alliez is Professor of Contemporary French Philosophy in the CRMEP and Professor of Professor of Philosophie et Créations Contemporaines en Art in the Department of Philosophy at University of Paris 8. His books include: *Défaire l'image. De l'art contemporain* (2013), *The Brain-Eye: New Histories of Modern Painting* (2007; trans. 2016), *La Pensée-Matisse* (with Jean-Claude Bonne, 2005), *De l'impossibilité de la phénoménologie* (1995) and *The Signature of the World, or What is Deleuze and Guattari's Philosophy?* (trans 2004)

Maurizio Lazzarato is a sociologist and philosopher. His books include: *Governing by Debt* (2015), *Signs and Machines: Capitalism and the Production of Subjectivity* (2014), *The Making of the Indebted Man: An Essay on the Neoliberal Condition* (2011; trans. 2012) and *Experimental Politics: Work, Welfare and Creativity in the Neoliberal Age* (2009; trans. forthcoming 2017). He is the author of the influential 1997 essay, 'Immaterial Labour'.

7. Poetics of *Capital*/Capital

7.1 Leigh Claire La Berge

From Postmodernism to Donald Trump: Finance as Form at the End of the Long 20th C.

Through a reading of realist and postmodern fiction, film, and financiers' own autobiographies, this paper tracks the materialization of finance capital as a literary form in the late twentieth-century United States. Beginning with the 1980s structural changes to the American economy known as financialization, the paper argues that as descriptions and representations of finance circulated through print and visual culture, finance and the spaces of its representation were transformed. Through the representation of finance, the paper claims, realism was rendered more postmodern; postmodernism became more canonical; and finance appeared more clearly as a distinct economic process.

Leigh Claire La Berge is the author of *Scandals and Abstraction: Financial Fiction of the Long 1980s* (Oxford, 2014) and co-editor of *Reading Capitalist Realism* (Iowa, 2014). She is currently finishing a book entitled *Wages Against Artwork: The Social Practice of Decommodification* on socially engaged art and unrecompensed labour. She teaches English at the City University of New York.

7.2 John Kraniauskas

Breaking Bad, Outlaw Accumulation

Contemporary critiques of political economy have become centered upon the logics of 'financialization', on the one hand, and those reproductive logics of capital associated with the notion of biopolitics (or 'life'), on the other. The recent TV series *Breaking Bad* dramatizes both of these logics as 'crisis' (in almost all of its meanings: both economic and medical) as it tracks the adventures of a chemistry teacher become virtuoso drugs manufacturer and mythical narco-lord. I will argue here that *Breaking Bad* narrates the drama of the autonomization of finance capital, via the 'laundering' of money, from a transitional form between epochal cycles of accumulation (as theorized by Arrighi) to subordinate accumulation as such, within a cycle of its own. In *Breaking Bad* this story is represented as a 'ruination'.

John Kraniauskas is Professor of Latin American Studies at Birkbeck, University of London. His most recent book is *Capitalism and its Discontents: Power and Accumulation in Latin American Culture* (University of Wales Press, 2017). He writes regularly on Latin American literature and film, cultural theory and political philosophy, and has been a regular contributor to the journal *Radical Philosophy*.

7. 3 Keston Sutherland

For a Marxist Poetics

Poetry in English is today more diversely invigorated by the work of Karl Marx and the tradition of critical theory than at any point since the 1930s. For several decades, and in particular since the financial crash of 2008, many poets in North America, the UK and beyond have tried to figure out what might be the relation of poetry to the 'critique of political economy'. Wild theoretical investigations by poets into the potential of poetry as explosive critique – not knowledge about the world, simply, but an attack on it – long ago exceeded the descriptive competence of traditional 'Marxist literary criticism'. This paper will ask whether *Capital* might itself be made to yield, through close reading and philological reinterpretation, a 'poetics' adequate to the task of analysing and evaluating the most radical poetry of the contemporary moment.

Keston Sutherland is the author of *Whither Russia*, *The Odes to TL61P*, *The Stats on Infinity*, *Stress Position*, *Hot White Andy* and many other books of poetry, much of it recently collected in *Poetical Works 1999-2015*, and of *Stupefaction*, a book about Marx and poetry. Together with Andrea Brady he edits Barque Press. In 2013 he was the Holloway Poetry Fellow at UC Berkeley and in 2015 the Bain-Swiggett Professor of Poetry at Princeton. He is currently Professor of Poetics at the University of Sussex.

8. Marxian Ontology, Today

Antonio Negri

Two questions. First, what ontological fabric of the class struggle can we describe as actual? Second, was the Marxian ontology, in the historical writings, in the *Grundrisse*, and in *Capital*, predisposed to such developments? To conclude: what does the Gramscian call to the 'Revolution against *Capital*' mean today?

Antonio Negri is an Italian philosopher and political activist. His many books include: *Marx and Foucault: Essays, Volume 1* (2017), *Time for Revolution* (2003), *Insurgencies: Constituent Power and the Modern State* (1993; trans. 1999) *Marx Beyond Marx: Lessons on the Grundrisse* (1991) *The Politics of Subversion: A Manifesto for the Twenty-First Century* (1989; 2005), *The Savage Anomaly: The Power of Spinoza's Metaphysics and Politics* (1981; trans. 1991) and – with Michael Hardt – the trilogy, *Empire* (2001), *Multitude* (2005) and *Commonwealth* (2011), and its recent successor, *Assembly* (2017).

Organized with the support of the Department of Philosophy, University of Paris 8, Saint-Denis