

## **BOOK LAUNCH: AGAIN, DANGEROUS VISIONS**

### **Again, Dangerous Visions: Essays in Cultural Materialism**

**By Andrew Milner**

**Edited by J. R. Burgmann**

Part of the Historical Materialism Book Series

Haymarket, Chicago, 554 pp, 2019. ISBN: 9781642590395

<https://www.haymarketbooks.org/books/1334-again-dangerous-visions>

Again, Dangerous Visions: Essays in Cultural Materialism brings together twenty-six essays charting the development of Andrew Milner's distinctively Orwellian version of cultural materialism between 1981 and 2015. The essays address three substantive areas: the sociology of literature, cultural materialism and the cultural politics of the New Left, and utopian and science fiction studies. They are bookended by two conversations between Milner and his editor J.R. Burgmann, the first looking back retrospectively on the development of Milner's thought, the second looking forward prospectively towards the future of academia, the political left and science fiction. The launch will consist of readings from these conversations by Milner and Burgmann. Signed copies of the book will also be available.

Biographies: Andrew Milner is Professor Emeritus of English and Comparative Literature at Monash University. In 2013 he was Ludwig Hirschfeld Mack Visiting Professor in the Institute für Englische Philologie at the Freie Universität Berlin. His recent publications include *Tenses of Imagination: Raymond Williams on Utopia, Dystopia and Science Fiction* (2010), *Locating Science Fiction* (2012), *Again, Dangerous Visions: Essays in Cultural Materialism* (2018) and *Science Fiction and Climate Change* (in press with Liverpool UP).

J.R. Burgmann is a PhD student in Creative Writing at Monash University, where he is writing a climate novel. He recently co-authored *Science Fiction and Climate Change* (in press with Liverpool UP).

## **BORDERS AND PRISONS**

**Title: "Economic Asylum: The Moral case for broadening the definition of Refugees"**

**Presenter: Nathan Bell**

Abstract: In this paper I argue that the definition of refugees contained in the refugee convention should be broadened to include those people seeking asylum who are fleeing from desperate economic circumstances that are result from the violence of structural oppression caused by global capitalism. The definition of 'persecution' in the convention definition does not currently include such circumstances, yet economic injustice and its consequences can be every bit as immiserating or indeed lethal as active persecution. I draw upon Marxist scholarship, the work of refugee theorists and aspects of Continental Philosophy to make my argument.

**Title: "Hydraulics and flood: rhetorics and realities of fluidity in Australian cities"**

**Presenter: Lauren Piko**

Abstract: This paper considers the manufactured rhetoric of Australia as a "full" container vulnerable to human "floods" of migration, and its relationship to settler-capitalism's material and environmental effects. Rhetoric of finite capacity and "congestion" has long helped deflect attention from deliberately cultivated scarcities of public infrastructure and funding. In recent decades, however, this rhetoric has also sought to naturalise growing environmental precarity, by projecting scarcity and threat onto migrant and refugee bodies. This rhetorical relationship binds together neoliberalisation, bordering, and environmental denialism in Australian politics, and disrupting its causal claims is central to challenging its exclusions.

**Title: "Prison abolition, contradiction and the justice system"**

**Presenter: Ti Lamusse**

Abstract: Prison abolitionism is nearly as old as the prison itself. Yet, despite almost century-long efforts of prison abolitionists, imprisonment rates in the much of the West remain unfathomably high compared to 30 years ago. This paper examines the differing logics of prison abolitionism over the last 40 years and how, despite revolutionary rhetoric, many contemporary abolitionist movements and academics seem hostile to proposing of concrete alternatives. As the paper will demonstrate, this is partially due to an incoherent idealism that has infected abolitionism. As a counter-narrative, this paper will outline the necessity of a historical materialist framework of abolitionism that exploits contradictions within the capitalist justice system. It proposes alternatives, based on existing conditions and contradictions, which make prisons redundant.

## **CONTEMPORARY MARXIST PHILOSOPHY**

**Title: "The Theory of Justice in the Perspective of Historical Materialism"**

**Presenter: Yanhui Bai, Ph.D Candidate, Wuhan University.**

Abstract: Under the opportunity of dialogue of "global justice", it has become an inevitable trend to pay attention to Marx's justice. From the perspective of historical materialism, this paper intends to clarify the logic of Marx's justice thought, explore its historical materialism connotation, and grasp its multiple dimensions. At the same time, the research on the theory of justice also highlights the era value of historical materialism. This kind of interactive research is the theoretical basis for constructing Marxist justice system with Chinese characteristics, and it is also a necessary exploration to solve the current problem of social fairness and justice.

**Title: "Public Interest and Community: Interpretation of Historical Materialism"**

**Presenter: Ting Kong, Ph.D Candidate, Wuhan University.**

Abstract: With the deepening of modernization, the contradiction between public interest and private interest has become increasingly acute. In fact, the public interest needs a certain human community to achieve. From the perspective of historical materialism, Marx reveals the historical logic of the development of public interest and provides profound inspiration for dealing with public interest issues. The idea of "community of human destiny" is precisely to promote the

development of a new international political and economic order in a fair and reasonable direction, and to propose a Chinese plan for solving world problems.

**Title: "Capital Logic and the 'Community of Shared Future for Mankind'"**  
**Presenter: Danfei Liu, Ph.D Candidate, Wuhan University**

Abstract: On the basis of historical materialism, Marx points out that expansion of capital will facilitate the formation of world history, and in the meantime bring about a series of disastrous consequences of modernity. These consequences actually constitute the realistic situation of human beings in the contemporary world. In order to get out of this dilemma, the fundamental way is to abolish the rule of capital logic to establish a new form of human community. Building a "community of shared future for mankind" is the objective requirement of the development of world history to the present stage.

## **CONTEMPORARY MOVEMENTS, LEFT AND RIGHT**

**Title: "Badiou and Rancière on the 'Gilets Jaunes'"**  
**Presenter: Robert Boncardo**

Abstract: The 'Gilets Jaunes' movement in France has surprised observers by its extraordinary longevity, unique organising techniques, and its far-from-irrelevant impact on the French state. Yet it has also troubled these same observers, and not the least of them: two French thinkers in particular, Alain Badiou and Jacques Rancière, known globally for their significance for contemporary French philosophy, have proffered extensive reflections on the 'Gilets Jaunes' in which they have expressed their ambivalence towards the movement. In this paper, I will try to unpack Badiou and Rancière's interventions, confront them with their critics, and draw on other researchers' and participants' work on the movement to assess their significance and relevance. As I will argue, the two philosophers' writings on the 'Gilets Jaunes' raise classical questions of reform and revolution, but they also substantially shift these questions, thus raising the risk that their interventions will be misunderstood. I will therefore try to show how Badiou and Rancière, despite their mixed feelings about the 'Gilets Jaunes', can help us evaluate today's most significant political movements.

**Title: "Fascists in and out of uniform: making sense of street fascism in the broader context of white supremacy"**  
**Presenter: Anastasia Kanjere**

Abstract: The emergence in recent years of increasing fascist political activity, with openly white nationalist, xenophobic and race supremacist aims, poses two singular challenges to anti-fascist and anti-racist work. Firstly, there is the concern of opposing and outnumbering fascism in their chosen arena of street-based organising. Secondly, however – and no less importantly – this fascist organising has to be understood, contextualised, and fought in its role as a specific arm of the broad, vast, and ascendant project of white supremacy. While there exists a tendency to approach these organisations as 'populist,' 'alt right,' or even neo-Nazi, with a vague liberal sense of alarm at the 'fracturing of the social order' that these organisations are proposed to represent, anti-fascists must strenuously resist an interpretation which would post fascism as anomalous to the broader white supremacist hegemony. To this end, this paper examines the rhetoric of vulnerability, threat and hurt which are engaged by white nationalist organisers. It draws on the penultimate chapter of my doctoral thesis, which, as a whole, considers the mobilisation of notions of innocence in the service of white supremacy. This paper examines white nationalist rhetoric and organising

in my hometown of Melbourne, drawing links and extrapolations between these and similar organisations in the United Kingdom and the United States. While fascists draw on a particular sense of wounded affiliation with the threatened nation, I argue, the logic of immanent white vulnerability is also present in more normative enactments of white supremacy: structuring settler colonialism, border militarisation, and punitive retribution against resistant voices. This reading offers a way to understand the white nationalist rhetoric of wounding and vulnerability as continuous with a broader white supremacist logic of weaponised innocence.

**Title: "Extinction Rebellion: A Moral Duty to Rebel / Ethics of Rebellion"**  
**Presenter: Desmonda Lawrence**

Abstract: In this paper I will present arguments for grounding a moral obligation to engage in actions of civil disobedience in the face of the inaction of governments and their failure (especially here in Australia) to adequately acknowledge, let alone address the imminent existential threat from the climate emergency. I will survey historical and philosophical aspects of the notion of rebellion and will outline the work of Extinction Rebellion – the organisation's mission, means of achieving it, and local activities.

## **DECOLONIAL THEORY AND PRACTICE**

**Title: "Māori Mārx: Some provisional materials"**  
**Presenter: Simon Barber**

Abstract: I begin by following Marx in his search for the proper starting place for a materialist dialectics. Marx's search ends up, at the close of his life, with the passionate study of indigenous modes of life. I sketch some of the possible lineaments of a Māori Marxism which takes 'whakapapa' as its central concept. Whakapapa describes the way in which the world has its being and becoming through the relational and intergenerational reproduction of all things. From this perspective follows an indigenous form of historical materialism wherein reproduction is foregrounded as against production. I close by suggesting that we must come to conceive of ourselves as part of the ensemble powers of Papatūānuku (Earth Mother) if we are to conserve the earth whilst overcoming capital.

**Title: "Global Palestine: The Cuban Connection"**  
**Presenter: Robert Henry Austin**

Abstract: Since the Left turn of the late 1990s, most Latin American and Caribbean nations have come to support the Palestinian struggle for statehood and the right of return, opposing Israel's and its allies' severe repression of them. This study explains the singular historic exception — Cuba's 70-year-long solidarity with Palestine — through the theoretical lenses of race, class and colonialism. It first reviews transformation of Cuba's constrained solidarity with Palestine in the pre-revolution postwar years to comprehensive internationalism from Socialist Cuba. Then, analysing Zionism and its Latin American advocates from partition in 1947, we assess Cuba's break with Israel in 1973, alongside US-based Israeli and Cuban expat hostilities.

## **FEMINISM AND SOCIAL REPRODUCTION THEORY**

**Title: "Housework and Value: Domestic Labour in Marxist analysis"**  
**Presenter: Alice Nilsson**

Abstract: Marxist analysis of the role of domestic labour under capital has largely fallen into two main camps: 1) Housework as a productive activity, stemming from Italian Autonomist literature, and 2) Social Reproduction Theory, most notably presented in Vogel's *Marxism and The Oppression of Women*. This paper seeks to be a critical encounter with both these theories positing that Social Reproduction Theory sits firmly in Marx's economic categories, while the Autonomist analysis sits outside of a Marxist critique of domestic labour due to its conclusion that housework is a value producing activity.

**Title: "Social Reproduction Theory and Abortion Rights in Australia Today"**  
**Presenter: Judith McVey**

Abstract: From illegal market to decriminalisation: have abortion rights been won in Australia? Access to abortion was limited for a century by an illegal market, cemented with graft. Social Reproduction Theory allows us to understand the source of women's oppression in social relations of the family creating labour power for the workplaces. Abortion became symbolic of a battle for control of more than reproduction processes. Restriction of abortion is recognised by the right and the left as a political Trump card. Women must do their bit for the nation, we are reminded by an Islamophobic movement, but racism doesn't help white women workers. NSW shows that the attacks don't stop. Is decriminalisation enough?

**Title: "Reclaiming Virtual Social Spaces; A Study Indian Urban Working Women"**  
**Presenter: Anshita Sharma and Anurandha Banerjee**

Abstract: Considering scholars arguing virtual social spaces constituted via embodied unequal and patriarchal structure of real world. The present study explores the experiences of gender-based violence (verbal, sexual, graphic) women on virtual social spaces (i.e. Facebook, Twitter, What's app, Instagram, Dating App and Matrimonial Sites). The study further examine the methods opted by women to re-claim virtual social spaces. Using M. Foucault (1975) self-regulatory techniques framework, this study inquire the self-censored online behavior opted by women in order to avoid further experience of harassment. The study uses the primary survey based on structured questionnaire of 400 working women and men aged between 20-45 years in four metro cities of India. Furthermore, we re-contacted 20 women for in-depth interviews.

**Title: "Feminism via media: understanding the origin and trajectory"**  
**Presenter: Sazzad Parwez**

Abstract: This study tries feminism reflected by various forms of media to address the agenda of adversity faced by the women in India, especially in urban set up. The problem of sexual harassment is exposed by the ongoing 'MeToo' campaign, it also reflects on the impact of social media in mobilizing people for much needed social change. While 'MeToo' campaign is upper class and urban movement in India, but not the only one. The study tries to address various feminist movement from 'MeToo', Rape (Kathuwa, Unnao etc) to 'IWillGoOut' in recent times and their trajectory via media to dissect the roots and analyses the role various stakeholders on both online and offline platform. Social media has emerged as primary catalyst for the campaign in order to mobilise young women and men, civil society and activities and more to organize and coordinate protest in different cities and time. The communication language of the movement is highly upper class, urban and in English. Despite the increasing criticisms of social media platforms, they can still be important for generating social change.

## **FINANCIAL CRISIS AND POLITICAL ECONOMY**

**Title: "Building a comprehensive approach to the 2008 financial crisis and its aftermath by applying the concept of transitional crisis"**

**Presenter: Artemisa Montes Sylvan**

Abstract: The aim of this paper is to take a different approach to the study of the 2008 crisis as the culmination of a transitional crisis that started worldwide in the mid-1970s. By building the continuity line between the end of the twentieth century processes and the 2008 financial crises, I will argue that using Regulation theory could add to the issue of crisis analysis. The work investigates the concept of transitional crisis: its component processes, institutions and dynamics. The research does not follow a mono-causal explanation of crisis process, but a holistic approach, having a chain of explanations, which start with the linking of four analytic

**Title: "Overaccumulation and Financial Instability in Canada"**

**Presenter: Geoffrey McCormack**

Abstract: Canadian capitalism has become increasingly unstable over the last decade. While the organic composition of capital rose, the rate of surplus value fell, and unproductive activities grew. These processes precipitated a falling rate of profit alongside a stagnating net mass of surplus value. In the context of general over-accumulation, a debt-driven housing boom poses a significant risk to Canada's highly-leveraged financial sector, whose principal assets are mortgages to households. While the state has attempted to attenuate these financial imbalances by raising interest rates and tightening mortgage lending rules, the shock of a new world recession could trigger a deeper crisis of Canadian capitalism.

**Title: "Social Necessity"**

**Presenter: Bill Dunn**

Abstract: Value is a core Marxist concept. Understood as 'socially necessary labour time', the many controversies surrounding value have focussed on labour time with less attention paid to social necessity. This paper argues that the idea is both more important and more slippery than is usually acknowledged. It has vital significance, amongst other things, for how Marxists understand; 'the social', the constitution of value in a society which remains incompletely commodified, the distinction between productive and unproductive labour, the importance of economic demand, and the relations between value, non-commodity money, class and national inequality.

## **FREEDOM AND NATURE: HÄGGLUND, POSTONE, AND IMMANENT CRITIQUE**

**Title: "Marx's Naturalism: On Self-Conscious Species Knowledge"**

**Presenter: Mathew Abbott**

Abstract: What is it to take ourselves as natural? This paper clarifies this question by drawing on resources from Marx and from some contemporary naturalist and humanist philosophy. I argue that for Marx our task is to account for our being one animal among others, a primate about which there is nothing special, but without eliding our characteristic capacities qua self-conscious beings. In this he is rather close to Wilfrid Sellars, who understood our task to be to join the order of reason

and responsiveness in which we participate as rational agents with the image of the world drawn by the natural sciences. Unlike Sellars, however, Marx understands this to be a social and political project as well as a philosophical one. Marx's naturalism can thus be set against the liberal naturalism currently supported by 'left Sellarsian' analytic philosophers. His project is unlike those projects in that it has a critical and practical character, as he seeks to grasp and indeed transform the historical conditions that have produced the alienated scientism characteristic of mainstream analytic philosophy. Marx's is not a liberal but a critical or revolutionary naturalism, and if we are to call it Marxist, our account of self-consciousness in nature must ground a critique of what he calls "modern society" and its law of motion.

**Title: "Praxis, History, and Immanent Critique in the Marxism of Merleau-Ponty and Hägglund"**

**Presenter: Conall Cash**

Abstract: Martin Hägglund's recent *This Life: Secular Faith and Spiritual Freedom* returns to a central concern of Hegelian and Marxist thought, namely the idea of immanent critique. Hägglund reconstructs Marx's critique of political economy in terms of an immanent critique of a liberal conception of rights. Hägglund shows that the liberal commitment to individual rights is incapable on its own terms of delivering its desired ends, and that at the intellectual root of this failing is an inability to think through the conditions that render all normative political commitments possible, which he identifies as the value of finite life and the intersubjectivity of freedom. In this, Hägglund takes up a question posed within a certain Marxist tradition often understood under the banner of the 'philosophy of praxis,' characterised by Maurice Merleau-Ponty as the effort to "recover an absolute in the relative." Rather than refusing the problem of relativism by asserting Marxism as an objective science, the philosophy of praxis – associated especially with the Lukács of *History and Class Consciousness* – declares that within the lived realm of relative and partial – in all senses – perspectives, a new order of truth arises which is not the discovery of an object but a process of self-knowing activity. In its classical iteration, the philosophy of praxis associates this process with the revolutionary activity of the proletariat. Merleau-Ponty, whose *Phenomenology of Perception* sought to respond to the problem of relativism and articulate a new conception of truth via a theory of embodied and intentional perception, identifies in his account of the development of Marxism, *Adventures of the Dialectic*, a self-undermining tendency of the philosophy of praxis, insofar as it wishes to render in the form of a state that which it nonetheless recognises as irreducibly processual. If to know oneself is to exist in mediated relation to oneself, the revolutionary praxis identified with proletarian activity cannot deliver a final state of being at home with oneself, a state which would rid freedom of any content. It is in recognition of this problem that Merleau-Ponty declares, "The failure of Marxism would be the failure of the philosophy of history." Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution and Sartre's account of the subjectivating function of the Party are then considered as expressions of this unresolved antinomy between self-consciousness and objectivity within Marxism. This paper will reconstruct Merleau-Ponty's immanent critique of the philosophy of praxis in the context of his larger philosophy's outline of an intersubjective conception of truth. It will then consider how Hägglund's reframing of Marxism in terms of a self-questioning necessarily hinged on (the recognition of) finitude may be considered as a way beyond the antinomy identified in Merleau-Ponty's immanent critique, while returning to Merleau-Ponty for a phenomenological account of the origin and the possibility of such an overcoming.

## **GREEN NEW DEAL AND ECOLOGY**

**Title: "The Climate Movement and a Green New Deal in Australia"**

**Presenter: Dino Varasso**

Abstract: A climate movement is taking shape globally and in Australia. The movement in Australia so far lacks political coherence or clarity. Social movement outcomes are shaped by the nature of their demands. The climate movement must adopt demands appropriate to the severity of the climate crisis. An ambitious program of massive, state led intervention into the economy must be articulated by activists from within the climate movement. It must be shown that this course of action is both necessary and realistic, and can be achieved through radical political organisation. This talk will set out to analyse the current state of the climate movement in Australia, and underline a political programme that transcends both a) dominant market approaches to the climate crisis; and b) a stance of intentional ambiguity that blurs political divisions to generate support.

**Title: "Class Power, Systemic Change, and the Green New Deal"**

**Presenter: Paul Raekstad**

Abstract: Over the last century, the socialist tradition has seen a great deal of debate and experimentation about the state's role in systemic change. Little of this has been brought to bear on thinking about one of the most important proposals for political change of our age: The Green New Deal. This paper begins to fill that gap by looking at the arguments for why the state tends to oppose systemic change and what will be needed to overcome these blocks to achieve a Green New Deal that can take us to a free and ecologically sustainable socialist society.

**Title: "Liquid Gold? The reconfiguration of social reproduction through Water Grabbing in Australia and Ireland."**

**Presenter: Madeline Moore**

Abstract: The commodification of water sources and privatisation of water services reconfigures the boundaries between social reproduction, the circuit of commodities, and nature. Water Grabbing includes the transfer of wealth, control, and risk, and can ultimately determine who has the right to survive under neoliberal capitalism. This paper explores the particular contradictions that such "water-based" accumulation strategies and the extension and intensification of the market into nature and social reproductive infrastructure such as water sharpen, as well as the particular collective political subjectivities that have developed on the terrain of social reproduction. It draws on extensive field research in both Australia and Ireland through an incorporative comparison.

## **GILLIAN ROSE: REASON AND DESPAIR**

Panel Abstract:

In her final years, Gillian Rose's philosophical refrain was 'Keep your mind in hell, and despair not'. Adapted from a strictly religious meaning, Rose's particular use of the phrase became a slogan for her salvo against what she saw as the post-structuralist retreat from reason. This panel reflects on the importance of reason in Rose's critical theory and its philosophical and political consequences. We aim to spotlight the sophistication of her engagement with Hegel, Marx and Adorno. This panel focuses on her attempt to furnish a critical theory that is resilient in its opposition to post-structuralism and radical in its critique of antinomical thinking - 'Marxist' or 'Hegelian'.

**Title: "The Contemporary Relevance of Gillian Rose's Concept of 'The Broken Middle'"**

**Presenter: Suzie Gibson (Charles Sturt University)**

Abstract: Philosopher Gillian Rose is considered to have operated at the very 'highest plane of abstraction', yet she was deeply critical of theoretical inscrutability. Significantly, she believed that post-structuralism's efforts to disrupt metaphysics had the obverse affect/effect of sustaining structural antinomies, turning dialectics into a nihilist enterprise. Her ideas are highly relevant in a political present where left and right are locked in an antinomic deadlock that blocks access to justice, reason and ethics. This paper argues that Rose's concept of the 'broken middle' provides a means by which to navigate untenable positions that stifle reasoning and the very possibility of ethics and justice.

**Title: "Gillian Rose and the 'Eternal Activity' of Philosophy"**

**Presenter: Jesse Lambourn**

Abstract: Gillian Rose's *Hegel Contra Sociology* argues that Hegelian phenomenology is the only way out of the antinomies of philosophy. However, she claims that we can only 'think the absolute' by acknowledging that the absolute cannot be thought. Significantly, Robert Pippin's influential 'post-Kantian' reading of Hegel draws upon Rose's work. Pippin challenges the dominant interpretation of Hegel's concept of 'absolute knowing' as the standpoint of a closed system of philosophy which suppresses the antinomies of reason. He claims that Hegel's system comprehends the necessity of its own incompleteness. This paper argues that recent post-Kantian interpretations of Hegel help to draw out the productive tension within Rose's reading.

**Title: "Gillian Rose and the Politics of Absolute Ethical Life"**

**Presenter: Michael Lazarus**

Abstract: Hegel's philosophy of right demands the intriquer find 'delight' in reason, to embrace rational thought as the passion of life in the suffering of modernity. Gillian Rose's account of modernity centres on her concept of 'absolute ethical life', reconstructed from a radical interpretation of Hegel. She mobilises Hegel's critique of Kant's concept of morality, which she argues is confined to a paradigm defined by private property relations. Rose reads Hegel in the manner of Marx's *On the Jewish Question*, which characterises modern life as antinomial between the public and private realms. Rose's presentation challenges the dominant interpretation of Marx's early writings as his decisive departure from Hegel's conservative politics. Tracing the place of Marx and Hegel in her concept of 'absolute ethical life', this paper argues Rose presents a highly significant critique of modernity.

**Title: "Gillian Rose and the Reformation of Marxism"**

**Presenter: Daniel Lopez**

Abstract: At the end of her seminal work, *Hegel Contra Sociology*, Gillian Rose called for a reformation within Marxism, in the Christian sense of the term. She suggested that Marxism exists as a culture within modernity and that it depends on the notion of a possible future beyond capitalism to supply an ethical "ought". And yet, she noted that just this commitment forms an essential component of the ideology of capitalism. Consequently, Rose suggested the need for a type of philosophy that transcends the antinomies of Kantian theory, in order to "think the absolute by acknowledging the element of Sollen [ought] in such a thinking [and] by acknowledging the subjective element, the limits on our thinking the absolute."

This call remained relatively unexplored in Rose's work. This paper will therefore explore what a "reformation" within Marxism might entail, with a view to testing Rose's philosophically Hegelian critique of Marxian thought.

## **HEGEL AND PHILOSOPHY:**

**Title: "What Marx drew from Hegel"**

**Presenter: Peter Green**

Abstract: Marx, in the 1844 Manuscripts, about Hegel's Phenomenology, said that it contained "concealed and mystifying criticism", but that its "criticism is genuine and often well ahead of its time." He specified three sections that "contain ... critical elements – but still in estranged form". They were the 'unhappy consciousness,' the 'honest consciousness,' and the struggle of the 'noble and base consciousness'. Hegel regarded the noble consciousness, with its respect for and obedience to public authority, as identifying with both state power (which he called "the good") and wealth. Marx, Engels and Lenin saw state power as a force against the proletariat.

**Title: "Art and Alienation"**

**Presenter: Melanie Lazarow**

Abstract: Art is seen as one aspect of the interrelationship between human beings, and between human beings and nature mediated by human labour. In the 1844 Manuscripts Marx described the misery of selling oneself as a worker, as a maker of commodities, explaining workers do not fulfil themselves in work but deny themselves, feeling misery rather than well-being, do not develop freely their mental and physical energy. Though artists may suffer poverty and lack of recognition this paper argues that art is not alienated labour. What it is and whether it is resistance in various countries and eras is examined.

**Title: "What is the Significance of Contradiction? On Contemporary Dialectical Thought and its Theoretical Limitations"**

**Presenter: Daniel Badenhorst**

Abstract: This paper stages a dialogue between Hegel, Marx and Ciccariello-Maher. In his recent book Ciccariello-Maher attacks Hegelians and Marxists for what he sees as a conservative emphasis on unity and their resulting failure to foreground rupture. For Ciccariello-Maher, contradictions are things to be ruptured and thus indicate sites of revolutionary transformation. I problematise this vision through Marx and Hegel in order to demonstrate that this vision of contradiction valorises the non-dialectical assumption that contradictions are things to be necessarily expunged or removed. In so doing I conceptualise Marx's theory of change and its relation to the contradictions internal to capitalism.

## **MATERIALISM AND THE DIALECTIC**

**Title: "Totality is modern and it is material"**

**Presenter: David Blencowe**

Abstract: Modernity must necessarily be distinguished from pre-modernity and nowhere is the distinction stronger than in Marx's concept of totality. Pre-modern attempts to account for the sum of all things have lacked the idea of society as a structured and structuring force. However, Marxist totality should not be equated with society. Instead, it is a materialism that affirms the objective reality of the biological and ecological which, if forgotten, leads to many of the contradictions

and confluences that pervade contemporary politics, not least those on the Left.

**Title: “‘Marxism’ versus Engelsism”**

**Presenter: Lachlan Ross**

Abstract: There is an opposition between Marx’s materialist conception of history and ‘dialectical materialism’. For Marx, the world turns against us when it develops relative autonomy: the world as amassed value desires its own self-valorization, and living workers become a means to that end. For Marxists, beginning with Engels and Kautsky, the world is always already alien: i.e., what Marx sees as a problem to be solved (that the world stands apart from us and dominates us) is for Marxism qua Engelsism an eternal fact.

**Title: “Brother: We Are To Do Better Than That”**

**Presenter: Reto Oechslin**

Abstract: In Karl Marx’s discord with Lujo Brentano (1863) his mendacity echoes dialectically a coming-to-terms with the economical glitch, which plagues materialist history. Its speculative pattern is repeated in numerous trinities (knots), with alienation and economy remaining heterogeneous subject to the materialist agendas these associate with. From this viewpoint, the righteous quest for better doing musters the representations of functioning relationally, which in the causality theatre of materialism plays a particularly active role. Current remedial models hack into this symptomatic circularity, as Marx has predicted. Set back on track, their materialist efficiency strengthens considerably by acknowledging the crude basis of causal relations.

**MARXISM AND LITERATURE, PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE:**

**Title: Literature and/or Revolution: Leon Trotsky and Modernism**

**Presenter: Rory Dufficy**

Abstract: Amongst important politicians of the twentieth century, few have written so widely and with such verve as Leon Trotsky. As far as literary criticism from the same source goes, he stands atop a lonely and barren peak. Which makes it all the more surprising, then, that so little attention – outside circles of his followers – has been paid to his work. In this paper, I endeavor to rectify this by exploring the relationship between his major work of belles lettres, *Literature and Revolution*, and the wave of European modernism then cresting (the essays would make up the book began to be published in 1922, the year that saw the first full publications of *The Waste Land* and *Ulysses*). I will argue that Trotsky’s work is best considered as a defense of ‘modernism’ *avant la lettre* and suggest that the questions it raises about ‘revolutions’, in aesthetics and politics, remain pertinent today.

**Title: “Sally Rooney, or a Marxist literature for our time”**

**Presenter: Jesse Clifton**

Abstract: The rise of socialism’s popularity in the anglophone world has found an expression in the literary establishment. Authors like Sally Rooney, a self-described Marxist, have become best-sellers. Yet accompanying this development has been an insensitivity to the political nature and significance of the ideas Rooney raises, including recognition, social relationships under capitalism, and the role of literature within the culture industry. My contention is both literary and sociological. First, I provide an exposition of Rooney’s works, including reclaiming them against the publishing elite and second, I assess the social implications of such a Marxist literature in the context of widespread dissemination.

**Title: "Utopian Futures in Recent Climate Fiction: MaddAddam, MAEVA! and New York 2140"**

**Presenter: Andrew Milner**

Abstract: This paper will explore the utopias represented in Margaret Atwood's MaddAddam trilogy (2003-2013), Dirk C. Fleck's MAEVA! trilogy (2008-2015) and Kim Stanley Robinson's New York 2140 (2017). These climate fictions achieve their utopian outcomes either by non-human intervention or by a sudden rush of revolutionary enthusiasm on the part of existing institutions. None attempt what William Morris achieved in News from Nowhere, the imagination and representation of new institutions challenging the old, in a situation of what Lenin called 'dual power'. It will argue that Morris was right about what happens in real revolutions and in plausible fictional revolutions.

**MARXISM AND POLITICAL STRATEGY**

**Title: "Poulantzas and Authoritarian Neoliberalism"**

**Presenter: Daniel McLoughlin**

Abstract: In 1978, Nicos Poulantzas' State Power and Socialism argued that a new state form had emerged in advanced capitalist countries that extended state control over economic life, curtailed civil liberties, and hollowed out the institutions of political democracy. Poulantzas' analysis of 'authoritarian statism' has recently been revived by a number of scholars to think through neoliberal authoritarianism. However, these analyses tend to focus on Poulantzas' arguments about law and democracy while marginalising the economic analysis that provides its foundation. This paper does the preliminary theoretical work needed for a Poulantzas-style analysis of neo-liberal authoritarianism that does encompass this economic dimension.

**Title: "The Workers' Government & the Strategic Legacy of the Comintern"**

**Presenter: Simon Aplin**

Abstract: It is common to underestimate the adjustments in revolutionary strategy made between 1917 and 1923 by the Communist International. Propelled by the developments of the German Revolution, the strategic concepts of the united front, transitional demands, and the workers' government would emerge out of Comintern debates to propose a path to revolution in the 'West'. This paper argues that returning to these debates allows us to appreciate a Leninism more complex than caricatures would often suggest, especially puts into question any absolute cleavage between workers' councils and the use of parliament in revolutionary strategy in the Leninist tradition.

**Title: "When the going got tough the left ... just left."**

**Presenter: William Briggs**

Abstract: Capitalism is in crisis and the 'left' seems unable to respond. Why? It all starts with Stalinism and repeated attempts to rescue Marxism. The result was a weakened theory and a weakened practice. What do we see? Inequality, despair, alienation and capitalism unchallenged. This cannot be the future. This paper, coming from a classical Marxist perspective, argues for something better. It argues for Marxism but not the Marxism that sprang from the Frankfurt School and ended in the morass of post-Marxism. No, it argues for a Marxism that will change the world. The paper engages with those 'rescuers of Marxism who have led it away from its core values and promises. It calls for a return to Marxism and its purpose;

to change the world.

In mid-2019 *Classical Marxism in an Age of Capitalist Crisis: the past is prologue*, was published, by Routledge. A second book, *Removing the Stalin Stain: Marxism and the working class in the 21st century*, to be published by John Hunt Publishers, is due for release in mid-2020. The paper draws briefly on my research and is a contribution to on-going debates and polemics on the future of Marxism and the revolutionary potential of the working class in an age of capitalist crisis.

## **MARXISM AND POLITICAL THEOLOGY/THEORY**

**Title: "Franz Neumann, Monopoly Capitalism and Dictatorship, Today"**

**Presenter: Matthew Sharpe**

Abstract: Franz Neumann, socialist lawyer, legal and political theorist, Leftist student and critic of Carl Schmitt, remains one of the least known of the Frankfurt School critical theorists. Yet his is arguably the most politically sophisticated work that issued from this group. And today, his work on how monopoly capitalism undermines the progressive promises of liberal democracy (rule of law, civil liberties, formal equality, fraternity) and generates the alienation, apathy, and anxiety upon which forms of dictatorship, Caesarism, and fascism feed are again uncannily prescient. In this paper I will analyse Neumann's account of later capitalism, the deformatisation of law, and the rise of national socialism as a way of understanding some of the dynamics that are unfolding around the world as liberalism fails, and forms of Rightwing 'populism' based on friend-enemy, conspiratorial thinking (what Neumann calls "false concreteness") and false promises of re-enchantment prosper. We are not experiencing here a 'dialectic of enlightenment', Neumann would suggest, but the destruction of the normative promises of the enlightenment, and the regression to forms of neofascist irrationalism.

**Title: "Metabolic Monstrosities: Gothic Marxism and Vampire Capital in the Anthropocene"**

**Presenter: Gregory Marks**

Abstract: Marx's characterisation of capital as "dead labour" which feeds "vampire-like" upon the living has been much remarked upon, and in the age of ecological disaster his metabolic metaphor has taken on a life of its own. As the earth itself is drained of life, ecosocialists such as John Bellamy Foster and Kohei Saito have adopted metabolism as the watchword of an ecologically-conscious Marxism. With reference to the "Gothic Marxism" which Margaret Cohen has identified in the works of Walter Benjamin, this paper argues for a Gothic eco-Marxism able to grapple with looming extinction at the hands of capital's vampiric thirst.

## **NEOLIBERALISM, WORK, AND RESISTANCE**

**Title: "Beyond failure in the face of fatalism and fetishism"**

**Presenter: Nathalie Jacque**

Abstract: Drawing on experiments in logistical disruption as a case study, this paper contests the notion that the old order is not safe anywhere by way of identifying two theoretical tendencies in the left's response to failure more broadly. The first is a fatalism practised in submission to capital's revitalising structures of exploitation and domination. In logistical disruption, this features as a response to capital's architecture of resilience and flexibility, emboldened by a securitised

state. The second is a form of fetishism which seeks to find revolution in the most minimal ripples of resistance. Here, failure is eradicated by misrecognising the impact of symbolic acts against capital, covering over the deepening material violence of capital on people and places.

**Title: "From the Bildungsroman to Privilege Checking: Historicizing Human Capital"**

**Presenter: Paddy Gordon**

Abstract: In a neoliberal capitalist mode of production, human capital is a dominant way of conceiving subjectivity. Subjects have always invested in themselves, however, and the tension between individuation and the subject's inherent 'species-being' underpins an array of cultural forms: from early bourgeois fiction to contemporary woke practices of privilege checking. This paper traces the historical development of the neoliberal subject, and positions vanguard processes of human capital accumulation in a dialectical relationship with subjectivity. Arguing that critical resources bequeathed by the Marxist tradition remain invaluable for contesting neoliberalisation, this paper counterposes a materialist understanding of subjectivity to the socially disembodied neoliberal homo economicus.

**Title: "Automation beyond Taylorism"**

**Presenter: Tsvetlina Hristova**

Abstract: What does the critique of automation look like if we construct a different history of automation? Focusing on the history of the workflow as a central concept and practice of labour automation, I look at the principles adopted by the early pioneers of scientific management – Frank and Lillian Gilbreth – that put a stress on collaboration and the management of affect in the workplace and analyse the effect of these early principles on the hierarchies established on outsourcing chains for teleradiology outsourcing.

## **PARTIES AND SOCIAL MOVEMENTS**

**Title: "Doing Without a Boss in the Twenty-First Century"**

**Presenter: Verity Burgmann**

Abstract: Workers' control experiments during the post-war boom audaciously refused work under bosses' control. In the current circumstances of global crisis, workers' control episodes reclaim and recuperate production as freely and equally associating humans, working collectively without fear and insecurity. Presenting case-studies of the FaSinPat porcelain plant in Argentina and the BioMe mining industry parts factory in Thessaloniki in Greece, this paper argues that twenty-first century workers' control experiments constitute a more determined rejection of capitalism and gesture more seriously towards a post-capitalist future than earlier episodes of doing without a boss.

**Title: "'Is your school revolting?': high school radicalism in the Vietnam War era"**

**Presenter: Tim Briedis**

Abstract: One of the most powerful social movements to emerge in recent years has been the School Climate Strike, attracting tens of thousands of participants in Australia alone. Yet school radicalism has a long history, and was an important - albeit often neglected and forgotten - part of the activist ferment of the Sixties and Seventies. My paper hones in on this period, charting key aspects of the array of dissent - from skipping school to go to the Moratoriums, to strikes around dress,

hair and corporal punishment, to the formation and distribution of underground newspapers. I tease out the potentialities and pitfalls of these movements, and draw out lessons for activist practice today.

**Title: “Was the Russian revolution a carrier pigeon revolution?: Digital technology, communication and organisation in the Victorian Socialists electoral campaign”**

**Presenter: Ian Anderson**

**Abstract:** In light of declining participation in ‘traditional’ democratic institutions, recent decades have seen excitement about digital media potentially enabling new forms of participation, including the rise of ‘digital parties’ such as the Pirate Party and an increasing academic interest in the democratic potential of digital counterpublics. Yet this utopian impulse has been tempered with an increasing awareness of surveillance, corporate centralisation, the (narrowing?) digital divide, wariness of overstated techno-utopianism, and more recent concerns about ‘Fake News.’ Drawing on an ethnographic case study of Melbourne Australia’s Victorian Socialists electoral project, this paper will discuss activists’ approach to both digital technology and other forms of communication in forming a socialist counterpublic. Activists expressed a skepticism regarding the hype about ‘Twitter revolutions’, arguing the remaining importance of face-to-face forms of communication. Yet the Victorian Socialists strongly used digital media for public promotion and mobilisation – though not, notably, for participatory democratic processes. The paper also demonstrates how the Victorian Socialists’ use of digital media complements other forms of public communication and organisation (such as doorknocking, street demonstrations, democratic conferences), and argues that recent ‘digital counterpublics’ research has not sufficiently examined the relationship between digital media and other organisational forms.

## **TABULA RASA AND TERRA NULLIUS**

Panel Abstract:

Through presentations and dialogues the panel discussion will explore the concepts of property and identity. Thought together these concepts serve as foundations for settler- colonial societies and shape settler-Indigenous relations. Through historical analysis we will outline how the discourse of private property and identity have been constructed following the same theoretical frameworks. If the construction of Terra Nullius as an empty land is the mechanism that allows land to be turned into property, then arguably the idea of Tabula Rasa is the mechanism that allows thought and consciousness to be constructed as identity. The aim of the panel is to interrogate these concepts and how they limit the possibilities for transformative settler-Indigenous relations and resistance.

Panel Participants:

The panel will feature all or most of these scholars and activists from both settler and Indigenous backgrounds.

Dr Yoni Molad – independent scholar

Mercedes Zanker – student and activist

Roxley Foley – Fire Keeper at the Aboriginal Tent Embassy, Canberra

Dr George Vassilacopoulos – Senior Lecturer in Philosophy at a Trobe University, author of *Indigenous Sovereignty and the Being of the Occupier*

Dr Tyson Yunkaporta – Senior Lecturer of Indigenous Knowledges at Deakin University, author of *Sand Talk: How Indigenous Thinking Can Save the World*

Distinguished Professor Aileen Moreton-Robinson – Professor of Indigenous Research at QUT, Director of National Indigenous Research and Knowledges Network

## **TECHNOLOGY AND THE FUTURE**

**Title: “Innovation, Science and Capital”**

**Presenter: Shannon Walsh**

Abstract: In the late twentieth century most OECD countries replaced science policy with innovation policy. Far from an innocent semantic slip, this replacement signals a major transformation in the relationship between knowledge production and capitalism. This paper makes sense of the contemporary relation between science and capital by considering real subsumption in terms of the epistemic shifts witnessed in conceptions of knowledge production. The particular thinking about scientific production and technological change this represents – a thinking that has little validity in terms of actual scientific practice – has become entrenched through a regime of ‘statistical internationalism’ that presupposes and expands capitalist relations of production.

**Title: “The Future in Marx’s Grundrisse”**

**Presenter: Vanessa Arapko**

Abstract: This paper will trace the futuristic moments in Marx’s Grundrisse. Rather than situating this discussion solely within the confines of the famous chapter, ‘Fragment on Machines’, I wish to broaden the approach by locating these moments in the entirety of the Grundrisse. Such a task is imperative at a time when postcapitalist thinkers, such as Paul Mason and Aaron Bastani, theorise the future using only a part of Marx’s blueprint. This paper will thus propose a revision to postcapitalist thought and an impetus to strengthen the theorisation of postcapitalist futures.

## **TRANSNATIONAL TERRORISM: THE RIVAS AFFAIR**

Panel Abstract:

Adriana Rivas, confessed torturer from the National Intelligence Directorate (DINA)—Pinochet’s Gestapo—was arrested in Sydney this year after 40 years of impunity, pursuant to a 2014 extradition request by the Chilean Supreme Court. Shortly after the US-backed fascist coup of 11 September 1973, supported by neighbouring dictatorships and Washington, the DINA had instigated Operation Condor, a transnational campaign of state terrorism against anti-fascists which cost c. 80,000 lives and aided the imposition of the world’s first neoliberal state in Chile, at the point of a gun. This panel of 2.5 Chileans considers the Rivas affair from three perspectives: firstly, its international historical context; secondly, collaboration between Australian, Chilean and allied intelligence services to protect Chilean war criminals; and finally, the ongoing campaign to bring the fugitive to justice. Our enquiry considers the history of the antifascist Chilean Resistance, both in situ and in Australia. What role has it played in furthering our understanding of how state agencies shelter those involved in crimes against humanity? What political differences exist within and between the exile and solidarity communities, and how have they played out? Where do global class alliances and international solidarity fit in? What are the implications of the Rivas case for the antifascist cause nationally and internationally?

## Participant Bios:

María Teresa Mardones is currently undertaking studies in the Undergraduate Diploma of Counselling and Communication Skills (Torrens University). She migrated to Australia in 1979 and began her political activism in the mid-eighties in the campaign against HEC fees, whilst studying at Monash University. She has been actively involved in Direct Action components of the campaign to Extradite Adriana Rivas since 2013. Mónica López joined the Chilean Resistance against the Pinochet dictatorship in 1982, aged 15. She was part of the local Left Revolutionary Movement (MIR) organization in the working-class Santiago suburb of Pudahuel, which played a key role in the fall of the dictatorship. She co-organised a comprehensive local strike in Pudahuel which was among the first expressions of anti-fascist people power under the dictatorship. She was then arrested, tortured and interrogated by the Chilean secret police and imprisoned for 6 months. The MIR lost c. 80% of its militants in the 17-year struggle, which effectively exterminated it. Mónica has remained active on the Left since migrating to Australia in 1989, save for a 10-year period in Spain with an Anarquist group. She is currently an Anthropology student at La Trobe University. Robert Austin holds a Ph.D in History & Latin American Studies (La Trobe). He has worked in Chile since 1978, when permitted; see <https://sydney.academia.edu/RobertAustin> for full CV and publications. Unable to return under dictatorship, he was refused entry in 1997 for alleged involvement in the high-security helicopter jailbreak of antifascist prisoners immortalised in the book *El Gran Rescate* (The Great Escape). This, he regrets, is untrue.

## Abstracts:

### Robert Austin Henry

On 4 September 2020 the Latin American Left and beyond will remember the 50 th anniversary of socialist Dr Salvador Allende's election to the Chilean presidency. A fascist coup ended the 1,000 days of his Popular Unity government on 11 September 1973; one month later the Whitlam government recognised its instigators, the Pinochet dictatorship. This historical overview will consider the articulation of two phenomena: firstly, Australian corporations' role in the Pinochet dictatorship's neoliberal economic model; and secondly, the collaboration between Australian, Chilean and allied intelligence services in the systematic protection of Chilean war criminals, exquisitely captured in the current case of Adriana Rivas.

### Mónica López

Theoretical thinking on the Left must come from the reality of the world working class, including the many difficulties that currently confront the Left. These include the blockages that the capitalist system imposes on popular movements, and the tactical differences among groups in milestone cases. This paper will examine the Rivas case from the perspective of grassroots work, a fundamental and unavoidable aspect of class struggle in the international scenario.

### María Teresa Mardones

Despite Prime Minister Whitlam's directive to ASIS to cease all intelligence-gathering operations in support of the Pinochet dictatorship (1973-1990), it is well documented that the continuation of those activities played a significant role in CIA-backed sedition prior to and after the military coup. While Australia's role in protecting war criminals from World War II is well known, contemporary cases of crimes against humanity in Chile are not. Adriana Rivas is a Chilean national facing extradition for crimes against humanity committed on behalf of the Pinochet

dictatorship. She entered Australia on an asylum seeker/political refugee visa and has lived unencumbered in this country since 1978. At the same time, despite increasing community interest in the extradition process, divisions within the Chilean Left have highlighted differences between dogma and praxis. These will be examined as key to understanding the machinations that led to her becoming a resident in Australia, and the ongoing campaign to expose and deport her.