

he often does, inadvertently, the words uttered by Samuel Fuller (playing himself) in Godard's *Pierrot le fou*: 'The film is like a battleground: love, hate, action, violence, death.' Above all, and to judge from the introductory interview, Badiou appears simply to be pleased with the fact that the compiler of these diverse texts, Antoine de Baecque, has made him so much more visibly present, as Godard did in *Film Socialisme*, in contemporary discourse in and about cinema.

Garin Dowd

## Hunger games

George Henderson, *Value in Marx: The Persistence of Value in a More-than-Capitalist World*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis and London, 2013. xxv + 171 pp., £50.50 hb., £17.00 pb., 978 0 81668 095 5 hb., 978 0 81668 096 2 pb.

Henderson's intention in this book is 'to explore what can be thought of as the lives of value in Marx's work, lives that are caught up in the capitalist moment but also take up residence beyond it'. To this end, the book focuses on the irreducibility of the concept of value to capital in Marx. It is therefore not an attempt to establish the definition of value as a specific determination internal to the concept of capital – distinguished, for instance, from 'exchange value', 'surplus value' or 'self-valorizing value' – but rather to establish a concept of value external to capital. As such, he takes issue with a powerful tradition of commentators who maintain that Marx's concept of value only applies to capital, and would not apply beyond it. In fact, Henderson does not oppose this tradition except in so far as it claims that there is only one theory of value in Marx. Marx's texts on value display ruptures and incoherencies, according to Henderson, and should therefore be read as the scenes of a tension between more than one theory of value.

However, the textual evidence for Henderson's reading is scant. Repeatedly he projects the concept of value onto passages where there is no mention of the word. Presumably it is in order to render all these absences as clues that we have to wait until the last chapter of the book before the primal scene of the investigation is disclosed in Marx's Letter to Ludwig Kugelmann of 11 July 1868. Here, irritated by his critics' demands that he prove the law of value, Marx

describes it as an elementary and transhistorical or 'natural' law that 'the amounts of products corresponding to the differing amounts of needs [in a society] demand differing and quantitatively determined amounts of society's aggregate labour'. Curiously, Henderson's quotation breaks off at the pivotal moment where Marx writes:

Natural laws cannot be abolished at all. The only thing that can change, under historically differing conditions, is the *form* in which those laws assert themselves. And the form in which this proportional distribution of labour asserts itself in a state of society in which the interconnection of social labour expresses itself as the *private exchange* of the individual products of labour, is precisely the *exchange value* of these products. Where science comes in is to show *how* the law of value asserts itself.

In other words, Marx attempts to show how, not whether, the law of value asserts itself.

This claim appears to contradict his treatment of the law of value elsewhere, especially in *Capital*, where it is ostensibly subsumed by the analysis of forms specific to capital, particularly exchange value and its bearers, such as commodities and money. But the Letter to Kugelmann suggests that Marx's definition of the law of value in *Capital* as the magnitude of socially necessary labour-time is not specific to capital, but rather a transhistorical law, which assumes the historical form of exchange value in capitalist societies. Communist societies would therefore also be subject to a calculation of socially necessary labour time, in so far as the cooperative production for social needs would still require a quantitative allocation of the total social labour to produce for different needs. This could no more be abandoned than could the production for needs in general. What could be abandoned is the organization of this total social labour according to exchange value or private property. Hence, communism is conceived as the social organization of the relation of a society's productive abilities to its needs. This is consistent with Marx's critique of various forms of 'crude communism' that maintain the presuppositions of political economy – for instance, his critique of 'the fair distribution of the proceeds of labour' proclaimed by the 'Gotha Programme', in so far as it ostensibly condemns those who cannot work to poverty, thereby revealing that it still treats labour as a form of private property.

Hence we have a coherent theory of the law of value in Marx's Letter to Kugelmann, as a trans-historical

law that takes historical forms. However, this coherence is not what Henderson sees. Rather, he sees an incoherence: 'Marx does not have a theory of value. ... It is disrupted by a fault line and for this reason will never be bound to fully satisfy.' Henderson judges that 'Marx does not master the lives of value', but it is Henderson who does not master the theory of value in Marx. He reveals a fault line by concealing a relationship, the relationship between transhistorical laws and their historical forms.

Henderson tracks this supposed fault line – following Vinay Gidwani's *Capital, Interrupted* (2008) – through Marx's texts in which he appeals to communism or associated production in order to demonstrate how the problems of value within capital would be resolved by communism. As Henderson puts it: 'it is *sort of true* that value exists only in associated production, but is its *also sort of true* that value exists in capitalism.' This is the second key point Henderson derives from Marx's Letter to Kugelmann. (Again, it helps if we start the quotation a sentence earlier than Henderson.)

The vulgar economist has not the slightest idea that the actual, everyday exchange relations and the value magnitudes *cannot be directly identical*. The point of bourgeois society is precisely that, *a priori*, no conscious social regulation of production takes place. What is reasonable and necessary by nature asserts itself only as a blindly operating average.

In other words, the law of value applies to capital but is concealed, for instance, by fluctuations of price. This is endemic to the form of exchange value, in so far as private property does not enable the social regulation of production. Such a regulation – communism – would thereby disclose the law of value in so far as it discloses the relation of total social production to social need. Now, if we collapse the law of value into its form as exchange value, then it is possible to arrive at the contradiction Henderson wants to see, namely that communism realizes the law of value of capitalism. But if we do not, then it is not, since communism does not realize the law of value in the form of exchange value.

Henderson's problems with Marx's theory of value derive from the peculiarity of communism's historical existence, namely the extent to which it has a qualitatively distinct relation to human history from other modes of production. Thus, whereas Marx suggests in his Letter to Kugelmann that the transhistorical or natural law of value exists only in specific historical forms, constituting the historical modes of production, his allusion to what is 'reasonable and necessary

by nature' suggests that communism would be a return to nature, to a transhistorical state in which the law of value would have no form, or perhaps only a form that is identical or transparent to its law. As such, communism would appear to stand outside of history, as a transcendental state, perhaps even a theoretical or meta-theoretical framework, which would offer a certain explanation of its utilization in *Capital* and elsewhere to analyse other modes of production. However, Marx did not conceive of communism as either just another historical mode of production, or as a transcendental logic, or even a regulative idea, but rather as a qualitatively new historical epoch, indeed the end of human 'pre-history', in which the nature of human society would not be alienated from itself. This does not demand that the law of value in communism would take no form. It would take the form of associated production, as opposed to the form of private exchange or exchange value. Hence, contra Henderson's contradiction: communism realizes the law of value in the form of



associated production; it does not realize the law of value in the form of exchange value, or even the law of value as such. Associated production does not conceal the social constitution of value in the way that private property does, and to that extent it does not produce the alienation or fetishism of value characteristic of capital.

Henderson wants to read Marx's texts without this conception of communism. This underpins the final arguments of the book that attempt to construct a 'political imaginary of value', or, more specifically, 'the possibility that value, *in explicitly involving a limit point*, would be desirable because it could be pleasurable'. Henderson's proposition is that the quality of value within capitalism – that it is unrealized, a 'limit point' that stands on the horizon of society – should be sustained as the basis for a political imaginary

of post-capitalism or communism. This is opposed to Marx's claim that communism would overcome alienation. For Henderson, alienation and fetishism should be revalued as forms of value's unrealizability, providing the possibility of a communist desire and pleasure.

Surprisingly, it is Marx's discussion of Greek art in the *Grundrisse* that provides the privileged scene for this argument, since, or so Henderson wants to argue, Greek art and value display an equivalence: '[Marx] assigns this art ... to the childhood of humanity but also posits it as a historically continuing norm – and so it verges on being a sort of exchange value, a measure across time, if you will.' Henderson here announces his collapse of value as a 'historically continuing norm' into 'exchange value', directly contradicting Marx's Letter to Kugelmann. This is entrenched by Henderson's attempt to then equate Greek art with commodities and money. These equivalences are crude at best, if not simply erroneous, forced through hastily by the desire to

establish a precedent in Marx for an unrealizable value that should persist after capitalism:

Any future worth having would have its own Greek art and its own capacity to be charmed by it. As a quality differentiated from the ordinary metabolism of social and individual becoming ... it is like a meal that cannot or dare not be eaten, an offering made by people to themselves, learning to hunger for hunger itself, or like an organ without a body.

For Henderson, a communism worth having is a communism of desire, of a hunger for hunger itself. But what Henderson calls value is what Marx calls exchange value; what Henderson calls communism, Marx calls capitalism; what Marx calls the fulfilment of need, Henderson calls desireless. Capitalism already has a political imaginary of value that takes pleasure in desire. Moreover, it already has an artistic culture that inculcates the displacement of satisfaction by desire.

**Stewart Martin**

## Choose zoe

Rosi Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2013. 229 pp., £50.00 hb., £14.99 pb., 978 0 74564 157 9 hb., 978 0 74564 158 4 pb.

The central task of *The Posthuman* is to craft a politics that is capable of confronting ecological, economic and academic crises alike. On the macro-scale Braidotti asks what form of politics is needed when humans affect all life on the planet, with potentially devastating consequences. This overarching problem then leads to more specific analyses of shifts in the capitalist logic that has triggered these threats, such as the intensification of processes through which human and nonhuman forms of life are reduced to sources of surplus value. Punctuating all such discussions, however, are questions about the place of theory in addressing these problems when the humanities have been colonized by this very logic of economic productivity and when critique is increasingly marginalized. In response to these issues Braidotti aims to develop ethical frameworks that are not reliant on humanist conceptions of political subjectivity. This is in line with her assertion that responsibility for these crises can – at least in part – be attributed to anthropocentric humanism, which has historically framed all life as a potential resource to be exploited

for the benefit of humanity (or at least for privileged groups of humans). Though the text does, therefore, provide an overview of debates in posthumanist theory – and the ramifications of this theory for the subject, the species and the academy – its loftier aim is to develop new modes of non-anthropocentric ethics, to ground the posthumanist political praxis that Braidotti contends is so urgently needed.

To develop this form of praxis, however, Braidotti is forced to confront persistent arguments that the notion of a 'posthuman politics' is an oxymoron, due to its dissolution of liberal-humanist ethical concepts (such as 'rights' or 'freedom') that have conventionally acted as a foundation for political subjectivities. As she points out, these tensions replay debates surrounding the rise of post-structuralism and 'anti-humanism' in the 1980s when humanism was being challenged as a foundation for ethics by feminist and postcolonial theory (due to its narrow conception of who 'counted' as a political subject). Her argument is that the resultant anxiety over what could replace humanism created the theoretical extremes of high