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Introduction

Marx at the Movies: Revisiting History, Theory and Practice

Ewa Mazierska and Lars Kristensen

The history of the 21st century cannot be told without reference to both cinema and communism. Whilst communism presented itself as the political system entrusted with implementing Marxist ideas and challenging the hegemony of capitalism, cinema became the main tool of social communication and a major cultural institution. However, by the end of the century both had lost their privileged positions. Cinema as an institution became supplanted by other forms of visual communication, such as television and the internet. Its privileged access to reality also became questioned as a result of technological developments, most importantly through a gradual replacement of analogue by digital technologies. Communism, almost everywhere it ruled, gave way to a neoliberal version of capitalism. But neither cinema nor Marxism disappeared from political and artistic debates. On the contrary, in the last decade we observe intensified discussions about their importance, although usually conducted separately. This book intends to bring them together, pointing both to their common fate and differences in relation to culture, social life and politics.

Post-communist Marxism, neoliberal communism

An important task of this book is to reconceptualise and develop Marxism as an analytical framework within the realm of film studies. In this regard, it is necessary to distinguish initially between Marxism as manifested in different spheres – most importantly, politics on the one hand, and philosophy and culture on the other hand, even if this means temporarily departing from the spirit of Marxism, which requires philosophy to be intimately linked to practice. According to

Jacques Bidet, two political systems could claim allegiance to Marxism: first, regimes in the communist sphere, where official doctrine claimed to be rooted in Marxism, and second, those in all developed capitalist countries, particularly in Europe, where the Marxist aspect manifested itself through a 'social state' or 'welfare state' (Bidet 2008: 4–5; see also Kouvelakis 2008: 30–38). Both of these systems collapsed, albeit at different speeds, with a welfare state lingering in some parts of Europe, such as Scandinavia. The question worth posing is this: How did their collapse affect the standing of communism as a political alternative to capitalism and Marxism as a world view? It is worth mentioning that the very fact that such a question is posed, suggesting that Marxism might be in crisis, demonstrates that Marxism is not like any other philosophy. As Stathis Kouvelakis points out, it is unlikely that Platonists will speak of 'a crisis of Platonism' or Kantians of a 'crisis of Kantianism' (Kouvelakis 2008: 23).

Regarding the actuality of communism and, by the same token, the validity of Marxism as a political project, there are several distinct positions. According to one, probably the most common, communism is finished and consequently history is finished, reaching its culmination with the victory of the system based on market economy and parliamentary democracy. Such a position is famously attributed to Francis Fukuyama and his term 'the end of history' (1992), but we can also find it among authors such as Fredric Jameson, who famously said that it is easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism (2003), and Slavoj Žižek, who gave his last book the title *Living in the End Times* (2011). However, the tone of these pronouncements is different. Fukuyama celebrated the end of history, claiming that there is no need to treat communism in different terms to historical ones. Jameson mourned the death of communism and explicitly challenged his readers to change the course of history. In the early 1990s, Fukuyama's capitalist future looked economically prosperous. However, as the decade faded away and the universal prosperity that had been promised through a free labour market and liberal democracy had not been delivered, leading to an increase in international terrorism, urban warfare, nationalism and religious fanaticism, his predictions started to look naive. Žižek's observation, that we live at a time when the global capitalist system is approaching an apocalyptic zero-point, has more currency. Its 'four riders of the apocalypse' comprise the ecological crisis, consequences of the biogenetic revolution, imbalances within the system itself (problems with intellectual property, forthcoming struggles over raw materials, food and water), and the explosive growth of social divisions and

exclusions' (Žižek 2011: x). These and other authors argue that even if communism in a certain form was defeated, this does not exclude its chance of resurrection (Groys 2009: 103–127).

The second position regarding the actuality of Marxism and communism pronounces that, although communism was officially abolished in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, it survived elsewhere and even colonised the world. Its incarnation is a system known as post-Fordism or neoliberalism, which supplanted a regime known as embedded liberalism in the Western world from the early 1980s and communism from the early 1990s. This opinion is most clearly presented by Paolo Virno in the widely quoted final thesis of his *A Grammar of the Multitude: 'Post-Fordism is the "communism of capital"'* (Virno 2004: 110). Virno comes to such a conclusion by comparing the 1980s and the 1990s in the West with the Western response to the October Revolution and the crisis of 1929. He claims that the first moment consisted of 'the gigantic socialisation (or better, nationalisation) of the means of production', which amounted to 'an abolition of the capitalist private industry on the basis of the capitalist system itself' (110). At that time, to survive, capitalism had to adapt some elements of the communist programme. Then he proceeds to argue that the changes in capitalism which occurred in the 1980s and 1990s, which include the extinction of the state as an industry of coercion and as a monopoly of political decision-making, and the great reduction in wage labour 'guarantee a calm version of realism for the potential communist' (110). In his brief discussion of the history of work in the 20th century, Virno suggests that communism is always a part or aspect of capitalism. Following this line of thought, it is interesting to look at China and Vietnam, because in these countries market capitalism is upheld by a communist party (Harvey 2005: 120–51). Moreover, rather than coercing the population to accept the economic and political *status quo* by appealing to its class consciousness, the ruling elites in these countries are justifying their one party system through calls for national unity (Zhang 2004: 53). In his claim that a neoliberal version of capitalism is 'minimalistic communism' or 'communism for realists', Virno echoes French sociologists Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello, who in their influential book *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, published for the first time in France in 1999, argued that neoliberalism is a response to the critique of capitalism, voiced in France and Europe at large in the years 1968–1975. This critique, which they describe as an 'artistic critique' as it was articulated largely by students participating in the events of May '68, consisted of a critique of alienation and decreasing chances for autonomous and creative work, as well as demands

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for more autonomy, flexibility and scope for creativity. Boltanski and Chiapello claimed that capitalist organisations addressed this critique by changing their structures and mode of operating, becoming open to creativity and flexibility (Boltanski and Chiapello 2005: 184). Creativity and flexibility became not just a privilege of working under neoliberalism, but a basic requirement, as reflected by the demand of workers to participate in continuous training, often at their own expense.

Other thinkers claim that capitalism's positive response to the 'artistic critique' did not make the current system communist or Marxist. This is because neoliberalism destroyed the welfare state and with that deepened class inequalities and consolidated the capitalist class power, eroded social security, atomised the working class, strengthened external surveillance and self-surveillance and homogenised culture, rendering it deadly for the soul (Augé 1995; Harvey 2005, 2006, 2008, 2010a, 2010b; Lash and Urry 1987; Sennett 1998, 2006). In due course it also led to wars and misery, as exemplified by military conflicts in former Yugoslavia, Rwanda, Syria, Somalia, Afghanistan and Iraq. Such an idea is summarised by the French philosopher Jacques Rancière, who wrote that capitalism only produces capitalism. To counteract it, one has to attack it from a distinctly anti-capitalist, egalitarian and emancipatory position. The actuality of communism is thus the actuality of this critique, of rejecting the capitalist *status quo* in the name of egalitarian values. Rancière describes such a position as being 'intempestive', which means:

that one belongs and yet does not belong to the same time, just as *atopia* means that one belongs and yet does not belong to the same place. An *intempestive* or *atopian* communist thinks and acts so as to enact the unconditional equality of each and everyone in a world where communism has no actuality except for the network framed by communist thoughts and actions. This means that there is no 'objective' communism already at work in the forms of capitalist production, no communism anticipated by the logic of capitalism. Capitalism may produce more and more immateriality, yet this immateriality will never be more than the immateriality of capitalism. Capitalism only produces capitalism. If communism means something, it means something that is radically heterogeneous to the logic of capitalism, entirely heterogeneous to the materiality of the capitalist world. (Rancière 2010: 135)

For Rancière, Marxism and communism are thus alive as long as there are people willing and able to fight in their name, including in the

field of cultural production. These people might live in the capitalist world, but at the same time they belong to a different world. But such an attitude raises the question as to whether Rancière's definition of an 'intempestive' communist is not too wide, because if we accept it, then we can argue that almost everybody is a communist of some sort. Even ardent capitalists like Bill Gates dream, at least publicly, about a world without misery or injustice. Slavoj Žižek labels such individuals 'liberal communists' (Žižek 2009: 13–14).

In our view, even if the fall of the 'real' or 'state' socialism weakened the chance of creating a communist society, it helped rather than hindered the revival of Marxism as a worldview. This is because what Hannah Arendt regards as the most formidable charge ever raised against Marx, namely 'that one form of totalitarian domination uses, and apparently developed directly from, Marxism', concerns the past connection rather than the present (Arendt 2002: 276). The fall of the Berlin Wall freed Marx from, or at least weakened his connection with, Bolshevism in a similar way as the end of Nazism freed Nietzsche, Hegel, Luther or Plato from an accusation of being the ancestors of Nazism (276). Instead, the end of this system has allowed us to see with greater clarity that it was in fact a form of capitalism, rather than a dictatorship of the proletariat (Burawoy and Lukács 1992; Groys 2009). Equally its replacement by neoliberalism has demonstrated that capitalism has more in common with the way it was described in *Capital* than with the paradise dreamt of by an average person living behind the Iron Curtain. Thus, those from the East who before were 'instinctive Marxists', but were afraid to act on their views from the fear of being accused of supporting the disgraced authorities, are no longer at risk of such accusations and can find support for their ideas nationally as well as transnationally. It is thus not a surprise that the last decade or so has seen a Marxist revival in countries such as Poland and Ukraine. Neither is it unexpected that philosophers, historians and political activists in the countries of former Yugoslavia continue an interest in Marxist ideas, with Slavoj Žižek serving as a prime example (see, for example, Douzinas and Žižek 2010). Moreover, as a result of the fall of the Berlin Wall, communism is no longer tied to a geographical place or space. It is truly universal, even if only abstract or theoretical, as some authors argue. For authors such as Hardt and Negri, it is a question of transnational or even global phenomena, such as 'Empire' and 'multitude', which can be seen as reconfigured forces of capitalism on the one hand and socialism on the other (Hardt and Negri 2000, 2006).

Marxism, modernism and postmodernism

Even those who regard the 'positive' part of Marx's output as impossible to fulfil, both on practical and moral grounds, believe that it is useful as a superior theorisation and critique of capitalism; hence it can be productively utilised by the apologists of the capitalist system. In particular, Marx's writings on overaccumulation of capital, capitalist crises and internal and external colonisation as the means to overcome these crises (Marx 1965, 1966, 1967, 1973) can be seen as a recipe for avoiding the perennial problems of capitalism and ensure capitalist growth.

But there is more to Marx's actuality than being able to help capitalists avoid economic crises. Marx also had specific views on the future of the material world and human identity. From the first perspective, according to Hannah Arendt and Marshall Berman, he is a model modernist, because he saw the world in terms of dramatic change, of continuous destruction. As they notice, he was not the first to conceive the world in such a way, but followed in the footsteps of earlier German authors, such as Goethe and Hegel (Arendt 2002: 276; Berman 1988: 96). He also predicted that this continuous change will lead to diminishing the world's material dimension, most importantly in his 'fragment on the machines' from *Grundrisse* (Marx 1973: 693–95), which proved a major inspiration to the theorists of immaterial labour. This is captured by these words from *The Communist Manifesto*: 'All that is solid melts into air' (Marx and Engels 2008: 38), which is also a perfect slogan for the age of digital communication, genetic experimentation and obsessive protection of copyrights and patents, rather than material goods.

By the same token, Marx posed a question about the essence and destiny of humanity. If everything melts, does the world and 'man' remain unchanged; should we, perhaps, redefine them? In relation to this issue, there are two distinct answers. According to the prevailing one, Marx was a teleological thinker, who saw the end of the world as paradise on earth, ensured by socialist revolution. In this paradise man will finally reject his identity as labourer and appropriate a new one, that of 'amateur'. According to a second opinion, which is closer to that of the authors of this introduction, even if Marx was a teleological thinker, his work is rich enough to imagine different scenarios of human destiny, including that there is no ultimate destiny or human essence: the world will keep melting, people drift and mutate forever. Such an opinion chimes with Marx's refusal to say much about the shape of future communist society, as if he was assuming that 'man' of the future might be quite different from what we understand by that term today.

Marxist actuality also lies in his approach to the role of an intellectual in social and cultural life. This approach is captured by Maurice Blanchot, who attributed to this thinker three types of speech: 'writer of thoughts', 'political speech' and 'scientific discourse' (Blanchot 2010: 103–5). A similar attitude to Marx is revealed by Eric Hobsbawm, who referring to a recent biography of Marx written by Jacques Attali, maintains that his work 'is not "interdisciplinary" in the conventional sense but integrates all disciplines. [...] Philosophers before him have thought of man in his totality, but he was the first to apprehend the world as a whole which is at once political, economic, scientific and philosophical' (Hobsbawm 2011: 12).

We argue that in his desire to capture man in his/her totality and respond to that totality, Marx is neither a modernist nor postmodernist thinker. He is not a modernist, because the modernist ambition was to divide science into separate compartments and defend specificity and irreducibility of each of the disciplines; an approach epitomised by the rigid division of disciplines in Western academia, archives and museums. Postmodernism, on the other hand, although rejecting such rigid divisions, equally rejects a desire to create an all-encompassing theory. This is conveyed most importantly in its interest in marginality, in local and subjective phenomena and 'small narratives'. Such an approach can be lauded for giving voice to those whose views were previously suppressed, such as women, people of colour, victims of colonial conquest, sexual minorities and children, but also for losing the larger picture, and with that a larger political project (Bertens 1995), and even for supporting the capitalist *status quo*. Such an opinion is expressed by Iain Hamilton-Grant, who describes this situation in such terms: 'Where the political will of a people, a nation or a culture used to be harnessed to long-term general goals, now fragmented groups engage in short-term struggles. The spread of identity politics over the last twenty years is testimony to this, with its emphasis on ethnicity, class, gender and sexuality replacing political credo' (Hamilton-Grant 2001: 30). He further observes that the consequence of engaging in identity and micro-politics is leaving macro-decisions to the enemy: 'By concentrating all the attention on "micro-political" issues, or on short-term single-issue politics, the very real large-scale political structures that govern our everyday lives are disregarded and left uncontested to the enemy, which simply translates into covert support for, or actual complicity with, the *status quo*' (31).

According to Alain Badiou, this shift from modernist to postmodernist politics was to a large extent the consequence of May '68 in France. This seemingly radical event ultimately led to the loss of hierarchy of political

agents and causes, and to the downgrading of the proletariat from its special position as the main agent of emancipation (Badiou 2010: 52–3). Hence, it is not an accident that the interest in Marxism both declined and changed its course after the 1970s, when post-structuralism and post-modernism triumphed,¹ with their focus on a decentred and subjective reading of reality. The post-structuralist readings of Marx, if they were at all sympathetic to this thinker,² usually attempted to merge him with ideas such as ‘minority politics’ and changing the world without taking power (Choat 2010; Thoburn 2003). Meaningfully, Slavoj Žižek begins his book on Krzysztof Kieslowski, published in 2001, with the words: ‘If this book had been published twenty-five years ago, in the heyday of “structuralist Marxism”, its subtitle, undoubtedly, would have been “On Class Struggle in Cinema”’ (Žižek 2001: 1). The obvious implication of such a statement is that in 2001 it was no longer the case – class struggle stopped mattering in cinema and elsewhere, giving way to other issues.

However, after dominating the humanities for 30 years or so, post-modernism understood as a period or theory of ‘small narratives’ is in decline too, as reflected by a widespread sense that it led to unproductive relativism and subjectivism. Mike Wayne, following Georg Lukács and Fredric Jameson, reminds us that ‘beneath the appearance of flux, fragmentation and unpredictability lies an ever more integrated and concentrated socioeconomic system’ (Wayne 2005: 15). Consequently, there is a search for getting beneath the shattering of narrative worlds of postmodernism, albeit without losing sight of the specific and the marginal, for assessing the state of humanity from an objective vantage point and a new revolutionary subject (Douzinas and Žižek 2010). Marx is an excellent starting point for such a search, because in his works we identify such ambitions. Marx can serve as a matrix for a method of critique and a dialogue about what a post-capitalist future would look like. Not surprisingly, the most discussed interventions in the humanities and social sciences (when humanities also include economy) of the last 20 years or so, continue Marxist thought in one way or another (on this see especially Hutnyk’s chapter in this volume). Together with many of the most cited cultural critics of today, the authors of this volume argue that art can play an important role in political and social transformation.

Marxism, art and cinema

It is a well-known fact that economy and politics, rather than art, were at the centre of Marx’s work. However, as Maynard Solomon writes in the introduction to his impressive collection (until now the most

extensive anthology of Marxist aesthetics), *Marxism and Art*, 'Perhaps it is the very absence of a definitive work by Marx on criticism or aesthetic theory which has opened the door to interpretation, prevented the reduction of Marxist aesthetics to a rigid set of accepted formulas, and made impossible descent into academicism' (Solomon 1979: 8); and elsewhere: 'the Marxist texts on aesthetics are aphorisms pregnant with an aesthetics – an unsystematised aesthetics open to endless analogical and metaphorical development' (9).

Indeed, the field of Marxist aesthetics is very wide and versatile, as demonstrated by the names mentioned in Solomon's anthology, which include William Morris, Franz Mehring, Karl Kautsky, Georgi Plekhanov, Rosa Luxemburg, Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, Leon Trotsky, Maxim Gorki, Mao Tse-Tung, Jean-Paul Sartre, Antonio Gramsci, Béla Balázs, Mikhail Bakhtin, Bertolt Brecht, Theodor Adorno, George Lukács, André Breton, Herbert Marcuse, Walter Benjamin, André Malraux and Ernst Bloch.³ If somebody were to update such an anthology, they would have to add many more names, such as Raymond Williams, Pierre Macherey, Terry Eagleton, Fredric Jameson, Jean-Luc Nancy, Alain Badiou, Jacques Rancière and Slavoj Žižek. These authors work in different fields, with some interested in literature, others in music and still others in film, and some dealing with general aesthetic questions, such as the relationship between class and taste, art and reality or the genesis and future of art. However, what transpires from studying them is that the vast majority, with the exception of a small group of authors, whom Solomon puts together under the label 'Zhdanovism', proclaim art as a relatively autonomous sphere of human production, whose influence on people's values and behaviour is somewhat mysterious. Art is both social and individual; it tends to convey dominant ideology, but also the idiosyncratic views of the author. It both expresses and represses, as put by the title of the famous essay of Pierre Macherey: 'The Text Says What It Does Not Say' (Macherey 1978). This also means that pre-socialist or even 'bourgeois' art, especially if it is art of high aesthetic value, might serve the purposes of socialist revolution as well as, if not better than, art created specifically for the purpose of subverting the capitalist *status quo*. This point was made by Marx himself, who praised Honoré de Balzac. He did so because Balzac, in spite of being conservative and royalist, was able to reveal the immorality of capitalism and potentially help to fight it (Praver 1976: 318). After Marx, this point was reiterated by Vladimir Lenin and Leon Trotsky, two of the main architects of the new, socialist art, and in contemporary times by Jacques Rancière. Lenin devoted much of his attention to Tolstoy, writing:

Tolstoy is dead, and the pre-revolutionary Russia whose weakness and impotence found their expression in philosophy and are depicted in the works of the great artist, has become a thing of the past. But the heritage which he has left includes that which has not become a thing of the past, but belongs to the future. [...] The Russian proletariat will explain to the masses of the toilers and the exploited the meaning of Tolstoy's criticism of the state, the church, private property in land [...]. The Russian proletariat will explain to the masses Tolstoy's criticism of capitalism, [...] to create a new society in which the people will not be doomed to poverty, in which there will be no exploitation of man by man (Lenin 1979: 176).

Trotsky argued: 'Works of art developed in a medieval Italian city can, we find, affect us too. What does this require? A small thing: it requires that these feelings and moods shall have received such broad, intense, powerful expression as to have raised them above the limitations of the life of those days' (Trotsky 1979: 197). Jacques Rancière builds on these insights, by drawing attention to the political significance of *Madame Bovary* by Gustave Flaubert. Despite Flaubert's aristocratic situation and political conformity (and, of course, using capitalist channels of communications with his readers, namely profit-oriented publishing houses), he regards *Madame Bovary* as a progressive work of art of great significance, helping in the emancipation of women (Rancière 2004: 12–19).

Marxist aestheticians also point to the fact that art which might help the revolution should inform and move – it should appeal to our brains, including the more hidden layers, and to our hearts. In popular understanding of Marxist aesthetics, however, the opinion prevails that realist styles are closer to Marxism than non-realist styles. Such opinion has some foundation in the fact that Friedrich Engels, who is attributed with a more developed aesthetic theory than Marx, was a proponent of realism, and Balzac, who was Marx's favourite writer, is also seen as a master of realist fiction. However, even if we agree with such an opinion, we have to qualify it by accepting that the criteria of realism change. The realism of Maxim Gorki is different to that of Vladimir Mayakovsky and different still to that of André Breton and other surrealists who also believed that they unearth reality, albeit that of a dream and the unconscious. Nothing is more foreign to the spirit of Marx than a demand to freeze art in one privileged style.⁴

Marxism always looked into the future; hence there is a natural rapport between Marxism and the avant-garde. On the other hand, Marxism was meant to appeal to the most economically and culturally impoverished sections of society. This fact was widely recognised

by Gramsci and Trotsky. The former argued: 'Marxism was confronted with two tasks: to combat modern ideologies in their most refined form in order to create its own core of independent intellectuals; and to educate the masses of the people whose level of culture was medi-aval' (Gramsci 1979: 268). Trotsky asked:

Does the proletariat of today offer such a cultural-ideological milieu, in which the new artist may obtain, without leaving it in his day-to-day existence, all the inspirations he needs while at the same time mastering the procedures of his craft? No, the working masses are culturally extremely backward; the illiteracy or low level of literacy of the majority of the workers presents in itself a very great obstacle to this. And above all, the proletariat, in so far as it remains a proletariat, is compelled to expand its best forces in political struggle, in restoring the economy, and in meeting elementary cultural needs, fighting against illiteracy, lousiness, syphilis, etc. (Trotsky 1979: 195).

Hence, the challenge for Marxist artists was to create popular masterpieces. Marx himself showed the way by creating in *The Communist Manifesto* a work which is both sophisticated and simple, saturated with metaphors, yet describing capitalist society in vivid images, while also looking into the communist future. In due course it was discovered that cinema can fulfil the above-mentioned requirements perfectly, as noted by Lenin, who pronounced it the most important of all arts (Christie and Taylor 1991: xv).⁵ This was because it was avant-garde, even in the most basic sense of being a new art, born out of photography, similar to theatre, music and painting, but irreducible to them. At the same time, it was popular because, at the beginning being silent, it could be understood by the illiterate and later, when it found its 'voice', talk to the people in a language they could understand. In addition, cinema has a dual ability to tell the truth and lie. The first property relies on cinema's mimetic qualities, its ability to show the world as we perceive it with our own eyes, or even better. These qualities are analysed by a long list of authors, from the pioneer Bolesław Matuszewski, through classics of realist film theory, such as Siegfried Kracauer and André Bazin, to Alain Badiou (2009), who proclaims cinema to be an 'ontological art' in an intimate relation with reality, and authors researching the specificity of digital cinema.

The opportunities offered by montage, of connecting distant places and times, and objects seen from different distances and perspectives, render film as a privileged means to link micro- with macro-economy, personal experience with politics, and work's history with its present day and future. Such opportunities were discussed not only by philosophers

and film historians, including Walter Benjamin and Theodor Adorno (Hansen 2004: 16), but also by filmmakers, such as Sergei Eisenstein, Alexander Kluge and Jean-Luc Godard. But other authors claim that by the same token cinema can be an arch-manipulator, persuading us into making wrong choices, even coercing us to self-harming actions while showing real things. The examples of cinema at its most ‘didactic’, Soviet cinema, fascist cinema and Hollywood cinema (although its didacticism comes across as the subtlest of the three), identified by Bazin as being politically manipulative (Bazin 1985), illustrate this tendency very well. Marx himself noticed the potential of realistic art both to reveal and challenge the *status quo* and to naturalise it. He claimed that the world projected for mass consumption by the ruling classes is the world ‘upside down’, as in a camera obscura (Marx and Engels 1947: 14). Hence the question of whether there is something in the aesthetic of film that makes it a perfect tool for the socialist revolution, yet also ‘vulnerable’ for totalitarian appropriation. Does it have something to do with the fact that cinema is ‘moving’, although in reality it is made up of still shots? Such questions will inform many chapters included in this collection.

We mentioned at the beginning that cinema has lost its privileged position as the most important art. However, this does not refer to film, or more specifically to the moving image. On the contrary, this has consolidated its grip on culture and the human mind. The moving image is everywhere; it is a dominant mode of communication in the 21st century, due to the development of digital technologies, which allow, for example, for making and watching films using mobile phones or viewers affecting the course of the watched material as in computer games. The new films often look much more realistic than before the ‘digital revolution’ and at the same time create worlds which filmmakers of the earlier generations could only imagine (Brown 2009; Manovich 2001; Willemsen 2004: 171–190). Moreover, new cinema has largely done away with the camera as a stable point of fixation, thus undermining or at least questioning the role of filmmaker in creating a cinematic world (Brown 2009: 66–85). However, while practically everybody can be a filmmaker these days, the road to a mass audience is more difficult than ever, with fewer, and mostly Hollywood, films occupying privileged sites of mass exhibition. We argue that these transformations in the production, distribution and exhibition of the moving image, and of the world at large, marked by the hegemonic position of neoliberal capitalism, call for a Marxist analysis.

The content and structure of the collection

This book offers a re-evaluation of cinema from the Marxist perspective, by looking at its theory and practice, and past and present examples. The uniqueness of this approach results largely from applying it to the films and phenomena which previously did not lend themselves to such tools and, conversely, paying less attention to the ‘usual suspects’, namely the films belonging to Russian formalism and socialist realism, seen as a ‘natural home’ or, less positively, a ‘ghetto’ of Marxist cinema. This means, in the spirit of Marx, who admired Balzac, Lenin, who was enchanted by Tolstoy and Rancière, who pondered on the progressiveness of Gustave Flaubert, to re-evaluate popular films produced in the capitalist world by large, profit-oriented studios, and even some having no obvious Left-wing message, such as horrors and comedies. There are several essays which deal with cinema produced in the Eastern bloc, but they argue that their relationship with Marxism was far from straightforward. Despite the pressure to produce ‘socialist films’, including through the use of censorship, socialist filmmakers revealed their enchantment with ‘bourgeois art’ and often a critical attitude toward ‘real socialism’. Indirectly, the chapters concerned with cinema produced in the Eastern bloc confirm our view that Marxist cinema cannot be confined to any period or geographical region.

Secondly, the old disputes about whether Marxist art should be realist or non-realist, style- or content-oriented, are reframed. In this respect the majority of the contributors to this volume, explicitly or implicitly follow in the footsteps of Jacques Rancière, who in his works recognises that there are different types of political art or types of pedagogy attributed to critical art, which he describes as representational mediation, ethical immediacy and aesthetic distance. However, rather than arguing in favour of any of them as the most efficient type of political art, Rancière proposes to define political art as art which disrupts the consensus (introducing dissensus) by ‘breaking with the sensory self-evidence of the “natural” order that destines specific individuals and groups to occupy positions of rule or of being ruled, assigning them to private or public lives, pinning them down to a certain time and space, to specific “bodies”, that is to specific ways of being, seeing and saying’ (Rancière 2013: 139). Authors who refer in this volume to ideas such as Dialectical Image, montage or the Not-Yet-Conscious argue that they are effective means of breaking with the given and introducing dissensus, hence producing political art.

Thirdly, many authors undertake a materialist analysis of films, by drawing attention to the fact that cinema is a collective endeavour and

trying to account for the input of artists other than directors, who until recently were privileged in Western film history. This means recognising the role of producers, scriptwriters, cinematographers, actors and composers.

Fourthly, in the spirit of contemporary Marxist thinkers, such as Badiou and Harvey, this collection is preoccupied with moments of hope, as opposed to merely criticising the *status quo*. Hence, it is no accident that two chapters apply to the chosen films the views of the author Ernst Bloch, whose main work has the word 'hope' in its title. In comparison, the authors included in the collection reveal a more critical attitude towards the better known German theorist of cinema and popular art at large, Theodor Adorno, famous for his sour outlook and rants against jazz and Hollywood cinema.

The 'principle of hope' is also expressed in a relatively large part of this collection devoted to the role of laughter in Marxist-oriented art. The authors engaging with this concept admit that laughter can be regressive and progressive. Regressive laughter is, predictably, emphasised by Adorno, who saw fun as a 'medicinal bath which the entertainment industry never ceases to prescribe' (Adorno 2002: 112). Such laughter approves and naturalises the *status quo*. Progressive laughter, by contrast, provokes a break in our perception and discloses some secret connection of things hidden behind the everyday reality' (Rancière, quoted by Ladegaard in the chapter in this collection). By emphasising the importance of laughter in Marxist work we take a cue from Mikhail Bakhtin, who draws attention to its liberating potential and its ability to create a parallel (utopian) universe, where the old hierarchies are overthrown and a more democratic order is introduced, as expressed in such a sentence: 'Laughter liberates not only from external censorship but first of all from the great interior censor; it liberates from the fear that developed in man during thousands of years: fear of the sacred, of prohibitions, of the past, of power. [...] Laughter opened men's eyes on that which is new, on the future' (Bakhtin 1979: 300). The authors engaging with the question 'Marx and laughter' are also picking up film theory where it ended in the early 1990s, as seen in Robert Stam's work *Subversive Pleasures: Bakhtin, Cultural Criticism, and Film* (1992), which used Bakhtin as a remedy for locating the blind spots in the Marxist film theory of Althusser and Lacan (Stam 1989: 53). Claiming superiority of Bakhtin over other Marxist approaches, Stam sees Bakhtin's work as foreshadowing postcolonialism and multiculturalism.

The collection begins with Mike Wayne's discussion of the trajectory of the dialectical image in German philosophy, from Kant through

Marx to the key German cultural philosophers of the 20th century: Adorno, Benjamin and Kracauer. The author observes that among philosophers the image has traditionally had a lower status than the word, largely because comprehending the word (which is symbolic) required education, while understanding the image was not beyond the scope of the masses and even the feeble-minded. The Image (with a capital I, as it refers to all forms of pictorial representation) thus threatened to transfer the property of the ruling class – its cognitive concepts and moral ideas – to the masses in a form *they* could master. This is, as Wayne argues, one reason why Benjamin welcomed the increasing mechanical reproduction of art in the 20th century. In the meantime, the Word (with a capital W, as it designates all forms of discursive communication) also became more democratic, but remained a privileged instrument of the ruling classes. In the course of his argument Wayne refers to the tradition associated with German philosophy that recognises cross-fertilisation between the Word and the Image: the tradition from which the Dialectical Image emerges. He uses the term 'dialectical' to account for the fact that the Dialectical Image overcomes the gap between the conceptual and the perceptual, the universal and the particular, the cognitive and the affective, the elite and the popular. Wayne discusses the input to this idea of Kant, Marx, Adorno and Benjamin (these last two thinkers drawing largely on the moving image). In relation to Adorno, Wayne notices that the Dialectical Image is associated with a non-linear free form, typical of the avant-garde rather than popular cinema, which organises its movements around stories. This fact renders Adorno hostile to popular cinema (as well as other popular forms). However, the concept of natural beauty, to which Adorno returned in the late part of his career, in Wayne's opinion makes it useful to analyse popular films such as horror, which take issue with humans' relationship to nature and to each other. Wayne illustrates this by discussing George Romero's horror, *Land of the Dead* (2005), focusing on the spectacle of fireworks shown in the film. Wayne sees this as an example of a Dialectical Image in all its richness, contradiction and beauty. By extension, he sees the duty of the Marxist film historian as that of somebody who collects and elucidates Dialectical Images in all sorts of films, including those which seem to be made purely for entertainment.

The second chapter, authored by Johan Siebers, is concerned with Ernst Bloch. Siebers argues that Bloch's work was future-oriented and that he largely occupied himself with the means that could be used to transform the unsatisfactory present into a utopian future. Hence, although Bloch was critical of the cinema, which was already by his

time becoming a commercial vehicle, especially in Hollywood, he was also aware of the revolutionary and utopian potential of film. For Bloch, film critique should consist of elucidating what he calls the Not-Yet-Conscious. Siebers attempts to identify this utopian core, as seen by Bloch, in one of the most famous creations of early cinema: the figure of the Tramp, created by Charles Chaplin, most famously in his *City Lights* (1931). For Bloch, this utopian potential of film, not unlike for Benjamin, has to do with the montage. Editing, which is seen as an exclusive domain of the moving image, allows films to connect that which exists (in this case extreme economic and social inequality) with that which does not yet exist (equality and its fruits, such as universal welfare and dignity). In this way, it allows us to dream, but not merely in an escapist way, as conveyed by the term Dream Factory, but to envisage and project a different world. Siebers also notes that of all art forms, music is for Bloch the most utopian. It comes closest to expressing the deepest yearnings and hopes, partly due to its pre-semantic nature and partly due to it being a temporal medium. Accordingly, he discusses the similarities between film, especially the silent film, and music and the instances when music expresses the utopian moment, even in commercial Hollywood films. His essay, in common with Mike Wayne's, calls both for rescuing the films, neglected by Marxist historians as 'bourgeois', for Marxist analysis and for creating cinema which would help us to imagine and realise the socialist utopia.

Ian Fraser also uses Bloch's theory, but to discuss a film which on first impression does not lend itself easily to Marxist analysis: Terence Davies' *Distant Voices, Still Lives* (1988). This film can be described as a chamber drama about a working-class family in Liverpool in the 1940s and 1950s, centred on a tyrannical father whose overbearing presence dominates the lives of his wife and three children, Eileen, Tony and Maisie, when he was alive and when he was dead. In a surprising decision, and probably opening himself to a critique from some feminists, Fraser decides to demonstrate that utopian moments, the hope for a better future, can be identified in the episodes where the father shows some goodness and the children reveal their closeness to him despite his usually tyrannical nature. The particular value of Fraser's analysis lies in his concern with those aspects of films which are normally neglected by Marxist historians and which Davies uses with great effect: the appreciation of film through pantomime and the component parts of the technical work of the camera, the gesture of characters, the 'micrological of the incidental', and the affinity of film to painting. He argues that all these aspects of film allow us a glimpse into a better future – of course, if we are able

to look. In his discussion he also points to the importance of the family and the local community as a place where one can learn the skill most important in emancipatory struggle – solidarity – yet also learn submissiveness and acceptance of the *status quo*, which make such a struggle difficult.

Shifting the focus from post-war Liverpool to pre-war Hollywood, Iris Luppia examines *You and Me* (1938) by Fritz Lang. Lang's third film made in Hollywood was both a commercial flop and regarded as a critical failure at the time of its release. As a result it was often ignored in Lang scholarship. Luppia seeks to demonstrate that close analysis of the film's narrational strategies, such as camera work, mise-en-scène, editing and performance reveals a complex perspective on the apparent clash between the film's Brechtian methods and its seemingly reactionary politics. Through focusing on three selected moments in the film, she illustrates the tension between style and content in Lang's film, which unsettles the viewing experience. Luppia also argues that the film's overt challenge to the audience's more traditional viewing habits through the use of a more experimental visual style than would have been the norm in classical Hollywood cinema is entirely intentional and that Lang shares with Brecht an interest in addressing the audience in unfamiliar ways. However, despite the film's engagement with epic theatre methods, which Brecht had so clearly intended to be in the service of *explaining* capitalism to people who came to see his plays, the chapter concludes by conceding that the film's Marxist dimension is restricted to subtly drawing the audience's attention to the ideological tensions that pervade the everyday life of a paid worker in capitalism.

The two subsequent chapters assess the role of humour in Marxist analysis and Marxist cinema. Jakob Ladegaard begins the first of two chapters dealing with comedy with an observation that although Karl Marx is barely present in comedy studies, at least two different comic strategies are present in his writings. On the one hand, Marx chastised the revolution of 1848 as a 'farcical' repetition of 1789, thus implying an idea of farce as mass spectacle as opposed to the epic history of revolutionary struggle. On the other hand, Marx used satire to ridicule German idealists as starry-eyed philosophers estranged from everyday reality. By extension, Marxist comedy and Marxist approaches to comedy can take (at least) two directions: the denunciation of comedy as ideology, or comedy as a form of ideology critique that reconnects ideas to the material world through humour. The first idea is represented by Theodor Adorno, who denounced ridicule and laughter as central to the culture industry and consigned the vast majority of films produced by

the mainstream to the 'regressive comedy' bin. Although this verdict is too hasty, it does remind us, Ladegaard argues, of the inherent ambivalences of comedy. Examples of such ambivalence include the films of Woody Allen, which, while ridiculing the American culture industry, are themselves well integrated in it. Turning to the idea of comedy as ideology critique, Ladegaard discusses three major critical strategies that often work together (or against each other) in comic films, but which can be distinguished for analytical purposes: the celebration of the grotesque body; the use of incongruity and wit; and the comic character. The first is illustrated by the elements of Bakhtinian 'carnival' in Sergei Eisenstein's *The General Line* (1929), which have an uneasy relationship to the dominant ideology, while Dušan Makavejev's *Sweet Movie* (1974) displays a more open-ended and self-critical use of the grotesque. The second approach draws on early films by Jean-Luc Godard. Referring to Bertolt Brecht, Walter Benjamin and Jacques Rancière, the author argues that Godard develops a politics of wit based on the montage of incongruent elements. The last part draws on Slavoj Žižek and Alenka Zupančič, who argue for a link between comic characters and a critique of power. This is illustrated with examples from films like Ernst Lubitsch's *To Be or Not to Be* (1942). In conclusion, Ladegaard argues that comedies at their most progressive can be seen as social experiments that allow us to see the hidden face of ideology, but also imagine a different world.

Dennis Rothermel offers us a Marxist analysis of John Huston's *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre* (1948), which in its classical Hollywood mode tells the story of three gold diggers striking it rich in the Californian mountains and then losing it. The extraordinary thing about this loss of fortune is that these prospectors laugh at it, and it is a laughter that liberates them from their plight as labourers. According to Rothermel, the release of laughter signifies the realisation that there is no true value in the exchange value of the gold, thus coming to the same conclusion as Marx. The source of the story is located in the authorship of B. Traven, a reclusive writer whose identity was never fully revealed, but Rothermel traces Traven's involvement in this smooth Hollywood adaptation, noting how 'a simplistic application of the labour theory of value' turns into a Marxist glimmer of how it could be different. Such 'creative insights', grounded in the film theories of Gilles Deleuze, are found in abundance with workerist humour, where comedy moves beyond its play on stereotype. Rothermel's concept of workerist humour film is also linked to more contemporary film production such as Ken Loach's *The Navigators* (2001) and to a broader theoretical critique of

structural dialectics, which, in his opinion, stifle Marxist film analysis. The chapter highlights how watching moving images through Marx's prism of labour value can open passages for spectator liberation in mainstream cinema.

While most of the chapters deal with Western filmmakers, Peter Hames looks at the filmmakers in communist Czechoslovakia, tracing the motif of Marxist alienation in the Czechoslovak New Wave cinema of the 1960s. The key question that Hames seeks to answer is to what extent did the films of the 1960s reflect socialist beliefs? It is predominately held that the Czechoslovak New Wave was a critique of Stalinism and neo-Stalinism, but in what way was this critique Marxist? He focuses on the writings of two Marxist philosophers, Ivan Sviták and Karel Kosík, who both struggled with the issue of socialist humanism in art production. In *Dialectics of the Concrete* Karel Kosík viewed humanistic socialism as the negation of both capitalism and Stalinism, while Ivan Sviták saw the problems of alienation as existing within the context of two power blocs that were striving for world hegemony. Ivan Sviták, who was also a film critic, imbued cinema with a special responsibility towards social questions, which was echoed by Karel Kosík, who argued that the dialectics of art production rest on its ability to convey and create reality. The event that triggers this re-evaluation of communist ideology was, according to Hames, a conference on Franz Kafka held at Liblice in 1963, where many of the contributions focused on the subject of alienation. It is this actual communist alienation that Hames locates in the Czechoslovak New Wave films, highlighting films such as Evald Schorm's *Everyday Courage* (1964), Věra Chytilová's *Daisies* (1966), Jiri Menzel's *Closely Observed Trains* (1966), Vojtěch Jasný's *All My Good Countrymen* (1968) and Jaromil Jireš's *The Joke* (1968).

Silke Panse in the following chapter engages with Marx's and post-Marxist theories of labour, such as 'new' vital materialism and theories of immaterial labour, by seeking an acknowledgment of the contribution of documentary protagonists to their images taken by others. She observes that because the protagonists of documentary images are not supposed to act, they are not paid and cannot even claim that they are working immaterially. In Panse's reading, the artist or filmmaker as the owner of the images becomes the capitalist who appropriates the value the documentary protagonist generates. In order to underscore the dependence of the documentarians on the materiality of their protagonists, she refers to them as 'image-takers'. Because documentary protagonists often cannot claim any rights to the images others took of them, their position is similar to those of workers, as discussed by

Marx. Panse notices that the creative forces of the lives of the documentary protagonists do not result in image rights and recognition of their agency by bestowing authorship. Ultimately, she argues for developing the notion of the documentary protagonist as a worker.

William Brown, in his chapter 'Amateur Digital Filmmaking and Capitalism', suggests that amateur filmmaking may well constitute a form of Marxist progression towards socialism. Discussing amateurism, amateur filmmaking, digital Marxism, and film, Brown explores how it is a commonplace myth that the advent of digital technology involves a 'revolution' that will place all power in the hands of the people, such that the mainstream film industries will come crashing to the ground now that everyone has a camera in their hands and a website on which to distribute their work. This myth, however, seems far from being a reality. Instead, analysing the ways in which websites such as YouTube involve exploitation in the form of what Maurizio Lazzarato would term 'immaterial labour', Brown argues that the revolution is not happening – and that a spectacular revolution as such may not even be workable (since it would only be capitalised immediately). Indeed, this process can be seen in a film such as *¡Ataque de pánico!/Panic Attack!* (Fede Alvarez, 2009), which, far from suggesting that amateur cinema is subversive, in fact suggests that it reinforces the dominance of the mainstream, as witnessed by Alvarez's decision to accept an offer to remake *The Evil Dead* (2013) in Hollywood. However, rather than a revolution, Brown suggests perhaps more simply 'change' – towards socialism. All amateur films – even one like *Panic Attack!* – challenge Hollywood, but some reflect more openly on what it means to be an amateur filmmaker, including Brown's own film, *En Attendant Godard* (2009). Drawing in particular on Jacques Rancière's concept of dissensus, Brown suggests that if there is to be change, it must not be revolutionary in a spectacular sense, but slow. Amateur cinema must be content not to be popular (or not be concerned with popularity, thus being 'apopular'). And amateur cinema must involve an embrace of its own limitations, rather than a replication of the professional standards of mainstream cinema. In this way, progress towards socialism can and will be made.

John Hutnyk's chapter continues the focus on classics of Hollywood, but with an unconventional approach to the film adaptation of Marx's *Capital*. Highlighted as an experiment using the film *Citizen Kane* (1941) as an incitement to read Marx's *Capital* for today, paying attention to structure and characterisation, Hutnyk's argument is that Orson Welles and Karl Marx share traits that can assist our (mutual) comprehension of their work. Welles' 'Kane' is the personification of a class relation,

and Rosebud is, according to Hutnyk, not the only fetish object. If the interpretation of *Capital* is a question of scholarship today, then inspired by the work of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, this chapter suggests that a provocation from cinema might redirect attention back to critical but patient and insistent engagement. It is Hutnyk's claim that in an old, much discussed film from the 1940s there is something that can bring a book from the 1860s up to the present again. This is not a search for allegory or metaphor, and neither is it a question of cataloguing the monstrous accumulation of things that Kane collects, but, perhaps, the point is to change the way we see and read.

While John Hutnyk compares Marx to Welles and *Das Kapital* to *Citizen Kane*, Ewa Mazierska draws a different parallel – between Marx and Alexander Kluge and *Das Kapital* and Kluge's *News from Ideological Antiquity – Marx/Eisenstein/The Capital* (2008), paying attention both to the content and the formal qualities of both works. She notes that, in common with Marx, Kluge is a renaissance man, who in his life combined theory and political practice and in his films tried to use many languages and broach the divide between high and low culture. Mazierska argues that it is difficult to ascribe Marx's *Das Kapital* to any existing literary genre. Similarly, Kluge's opus magnum, *News from Ideological Antiquity*, bursts the boundaries of a film. Being an adaptation of Marx's work, Kluge's film deals with many themes developed by Marx, but is essentially about the birth and development of capitalist society. However, it also includes different motifs, such as the uses of history and the possibility of translation, most importantly translating complex philosophical ideas and theories, such as those presented in Marx's *Das Kapital*, on screen. Kluge argues that we live in the past if the images, descriptions and theories, created in the past, apply to our current situation. For this reason Marx's description is still valid or is even more pertinent to contemporary times than the period when Marx wrote his book, because the world under the neoliberal regime resembles more the model created by Marx than the one in which he lived himself. Kluge's film provides a strong argument in favour of the possibility and need to translate 'unadaptable' books. We need to translate to bring the masterpieces to the attention of the new generations of readers, and enrich the old works with new insights and even new languages. By and large, in order to save Marx from the fate of the socialist writers, discussed by Marx in *The Communist Manifesto*, whose work lost their political power due to bad translation, we have a duty to put him in the ever-changing context and keep translating his works. It is worth noting that Hutnyk and Mazierska's chapters, which both serve

as introductions of sorts to Marx's *Das Kapital*, reflect the heterogeneity of Marx's style. Hutnyk's piece emulates the poetical dimension of Marx's work; Mazierska's is written in a dry prose.

While the other chapters in this volume are rich in Marxist film analysis, historical Marxism and Marxist film theory, none of them deal with actual moving images of Marx himself. This is the object of analysis for Martin Brady and it closes our collection. In his chapter, Brady examines two East German films for children, *Moor and the Ravens of London* (1968), a Marx-biopic in which Marx is portrayed as a nice family man and friend to all children, and *Hans Röckle and the Devil* (1974), a fairy-tale with a strong analogy to Marx as a person. Brady situates these as 'straightforward Marxist pedagogy' aimed at children, but also with the concept of the *Gegenwartsfilm*, or the so-called 'contemporary film' depicting positive aspects of contemporary German Democratic Republic society. The chapter pays particular attention to issues concerning the production and reception of these two films, tracing their historical origin, context and distribution. Asserting the deep, uncompromisingly didactic combination of the films, Brady views them as a call for action of 'the socialist warrior, the sufferings and triumphs, defeats and victories in his historically inevitable, triumphant victory over the doomed forces of the old capitalist society'. Evoking Ernst Bloch, these portrayals of Karl Marx have a yet-to-be-like quality, like many other East German *Kinderfilme*, depicting the dream of an almost promised land.

To conclude, this collection argues that art and film in particular can play an important role in political and social transformation, but such art has to be at the same time popular and non-conformist, avoiding the traps of a sterile avant-garde and serving the god of capital – what Badiou describes as romantic formalism and *art pompier* (Badiou 2006: 138–39). The role of a Marxist film historian is to discover and rediscover such art, encourage filmmakers to create it and viewers to seek it.

Notes

1. 'Postmodernism' and 'post-structuralism' cover a similar area, but do not have identical meanings (on their comparison see Bertens 1995). For the purpose of our discussion we favour 'postmodernism', because it encompasses ideas conveyed by thinkers not identified with post-structuralism.
2. In relation to the attitude of post-structuralists to Marx, Althusser wrote that it became 'the fashion to sport Gulag buttons in one's lapel' (Althusser 2006: 10). Foucault illustrates this attitude very well, arguing that rather than seeing in Stalinism an error, an aberration of Marxism, one should search in Marx's

texts for an answer to the question: What made its horrors, which Foucault terms ‘the Gulag’, possible (Foucault 1980: 135)?

3. Solomon clearly privileges the study of literature over cinema. It is meaningful that his anthology does not contain the works of Sergei Eisenstein or Vsevolod Pudovkin.
4. We can derive this from a large number of references to literature in Marx’s writings and the versatility of styles used by this author.
5. Lenin’s quote about the importance of cinema in the Soviet Union does not come from his writings but is accounted for by Anatoli Lunacharsky, the first Soviet Minister of Education. In a meeting, Lenin should allegedly have told Lunacharsky that ‘among our people you [Lunacharsky] are reported to be a patron of art so you must remember that of all the arts for us the most important is cinema’ (Lunacharsky 1988: 57). Although the quote is second hand, it is well known and often used in both Western and Soviet film scholarship (for an example of the latter, see Groshev *et al.* 1968: 5).

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