



UWL REPOSITORY
repository.uwl.ac.uk

And the ship sails on

Dowd, Garin ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6435-640X> (2014) And the ship sails on. *Radical Philosophy* (184). pp. 46-49. ISSN 0300-211x

This is the Published Version of the final output.

UWL repository link: <https://repository.uwl.ac.uk/id/eprint/1009/>

Alternative formats: If you require this document in an alternative format, please contact: open.research@uwl.ac.uk

Copyright: Creative Commons: Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 4.0

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the public portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

Take down policy: If you believe that this document breaches copyright, please contact us at open.research@uwl.ac.uk providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

Davidson suggests, rediscovering his orthodoxy, by a working class that is fully conscious of itself and its mission to make a society free of the exploitation that defined the others. The party-form, he weakly insists, is fundamental to its realization. Despite the obvious Hegelian source of such an idealist story, it appears ironically that in reconstructing it historically in considerable detail, Davidson may have momentarily forgotten the historical ‘cunning’ of capital so fundamental to his own concept.

How Revolutionary Were the Bourgeois Revolutions? is a rich and comprehensive work of history and theory. It is one of a set of important but more or less defensive works of Marxism recently published by Haymarket Books, which are marked by times of crisis. On the one hand, and most obviously, they are marked by the ongoing crisis of capitalism; on the other, less obviously, but equally actually, they are marked by a crisis within existing forms of opposition to it, including that of the party to which Davidson belongs (the Socialist Workers Party). Like *The Gramscian Moment: Philosophy, Hegemony and Marxism* (2009) by Peter D. Thomas and *History as Theory: Essays on Modes of Production and Exploitation* (2010) by Jairus Banaji, it is characterized not only by a shared critique of the work of Perry Anderson, but also by both a marshalling of existing resources and an attempt at critically generating new ideas out of new versions of old ones – without the conceptual adventure required of a genuine contemporaneity. Thomas convincingly renovates and reconfigures Gramsci’s idea of ‘hegemonic apparatus’ – a valuable task, in the manner of Christine Buci-Glucksmann’s *Gramsci and the State* (1975) – whilst, less convincingly, arguing for the contemporary political relevance of Gramsci’s philosophy of praxis.

Similarly, Banaji’s excellent collection of heterodox essays reconfigures the historical relations between capital, accumulation and exploitation in inventive and analytically important ways, but in the process also threatens so to extend the geographical and temporal limits of capitalism as a historical epoch into the past as to make it almost impossible to work with. (There the source of the book’s weakness is, paradoxically, its theoretical strength.) For his part, Davidson insists on presenting his account of ‘bourgeois revolution’, both as concept and reality, as an education in historical materialism, engaging over and over again with key debates from its history. This includes, like many before him, being nobbled by Marx’s discussion of the relative determining weight of the forces and relations of production in the 1959

‘Preface’. Such a methodology provides for both the book’s highs (the recovery of Lukács’s reflections on uneven development and revolution, for example) and lows (an overt Trotskyism which even threatens to consume Walter Benjamin, for example). In this respect, the size of the book – and if the page format were the same as the rest of the series, it would extend to over 1,000 pages – is a reflection of the breadth and depth of the crises (social, political, intellectual) that it internalizes in the very structure of its composition.

John Kraniauskas

And the ship sails on

Alain Badiou, *Cinema*, Polity, Cambridge, 2013.
320 pp., £55.00 hb., £17.99 pb., 978 0 74565 567 3 hb.,
978 0 74565 568 0 pb.

To call a book simply *Cinema* is to frame its contents as a contribution to the theorization of cinema, and thus, for a certain readership, to identify it as something other than film criticism. It is, in other words, to announce its apparent participation in, or proximity to, film theory. In an interview conducted by a former editor-in-chief of *Cahiers du cinéma*, Antoine de Baecque, for the original publication in French, Badiou himself seems however, by turns, relatively modest and occasionally self-congratulatory as regards any claim to make a major intervention in the field. His entertaining and informative account of his largely solitary *cinéphilie* of the 1950s and 1960s, as a ‘young provincial’ frequenting the Cinémathèque (a few doors away at that time from the École Normale Supérieure on the rue d’Ulm), through to his work as a ‘heathen’ infiltrating the Catholic journal *Vin nouveau*, and on to his engagement with cinema through politics, contains both moments of self-regarding comedy as well as statements which identify several of the key tropes that will recur throughout the volume. Hence, of Jean-Luc Godard’s *Film Socialisme*, in which Badiou plays himself in a scene aboard a cruise ship, he comments: ‘in just a few seconds, in the scene where I’m working at the desk, I’ve never before seen images where I am so much myself. So I’m pleased with the mode of presence attributed to me in that shot’. The observation has its more obviously serious counterpart in a comment made later on in the interview when Badiou states that Godard’s invitation to appear in the film touched him, ‘[b]ecause

it seems to mean that I'm part of the present time, in a film that incidentally deals with the hubbub of the world'. At face value both comments seem innocuous enough, suggesting a philosopher flattered by a director he has long admired, and who is indeed of central importance to several of the texts collected here. Taken together, however, the two comments distil several core concerns of Badiou's *Cinema* as a whole. In particular, what apparently pleases Badiou most is that Godard makes him part of that 'contemporary' which precisely furnishes the material that it is the role of cinema to 'purify'.

In the thirty-one texts making up the book, of disparate length, significance and occasion (several are lectures or seminars transcribed), cinema is defined in many different ways. It is, inter alia, and in no particular order, an art of 'general assembly', an art of 'the end of metaphysics', an art of identification; it operates via 'subtraction' and 'purification'; it comprises 'great figures of humanity in action', and, in its effectuation of a 'movement from love to politics', is an art in which one can, Badiou implies, locate a potential forum within which several of his own philosophical concepts might find themselves reflected or refracted. Cinema is an art of general assembly in so far as it is, in Badiou's terms, a mass art; it is a democratic art as opposed to an aristocratic art such as painting or music (although Badiou will absolutely insist on excluding what is referred to as 'the moaning of pop music'). Cinema, he tells us repeatedly, is something one goes to on a Saturday night; not requiring the apprenticeship or connoisseurship associated with other arts, cinema can be engaged with and understood by everyone.

The problem with this normative account of film viewing is that it leads Badiou, on the one hand, to propose some pretty dogmatic and indeed somewhat clichéd formulations regarding cinema spectatorship (no popcorn is mentioned, nor could it be, this being Paris), and, on the other, to an insistence on the presence in such mainstream films as *Titanic* or *Brassed Off* of the sort of 'truth' Badiou believes to be disclosed far more consistently in the work of 'modernist' directors such as Godard, Straub and Huillet, and Antonioni. Even these latter, he asserts, make films filled with the trite and the banal. Thus, in what is one of only three references to any other writings on cinema (by anyone), Badiou can affirm aspects of Bazin's ontology of the cinematographic image: the trite and the banal are merely the imprint of the real (as opposed to the Lacanian Real, which itself makes a somewhat muted but nonetheless notable

appearance, à la Žižek, in Badiou's many references to pornography), and is a feature as much of *Titanic* as it is of *À bout de souffle*. (In order to shake off some of the banality of the imprinted world on their films, Badiou's amusing proposal is that all great film artists should try to make films without cars, or else, as in some of the films of Godard and Kiarostami, employ them in a different way.)

Linked to this (itself rather trite) claim that cinema is democratic because its banal *effets de réel* can be recognized (cinema is an art of identification) – though we will not find Badiou citing Barthes, or anyone else for that matter – is Badiou's assertion of the presence in film of a 'generic humanity' in another form. In the only early text reprinted here, a 1957 essay from *Vin nouveau*, he refers to how cinema achieves 'the presence of man'. The notion returns later, albeit shorn of its existentialist trappings, in the familiar guise of a humanity courageously persisting in the manner of a character from the world of Beckett. Badiou insists that this inherent aspect of cinema, played out on the screen in the shape of a 'central conflict' between characters and values, through which a 'hero' emerges, is very difficult to read as anything more than a snatch of some conversation one might participate in with any filmgoer whatsoever (on Badiou's fabled Saturday night perhaps). This is of course partly Badiou's point: the hero may fall or rise on the screen, but the viewer is by definition 'on the rise' (as he asserts in a text from 2005, originally published in the journal *Critique*, entitled 'On Cinema as a Democratic Emblem') by virtue of the very possibility of this mass democratic chatter itself.

Badiou's fidelity to such exchanges both between screen and viewer, and within the conversing masses, is connected, seemingly paradoxically, to the privileged status he accords to Godard – decidedly not a typical staple of the multiplex. There are many references to Godard as exemplar – like cinema itself, Godard is many things – and three texts devoted exclusively to his work. A consideration of the latter affords a way to think more generally about politics and cinema in Badiou's thinking as these are mutually articulated throughout this collection. The most recent of the texts on Godard is about a film already almost forty years old by the time Badiou came to write about it in 2005: *Tout va bien*, made in collaboration with Jean-Pierre Gorin in 1972. In Badiou's retrospective account of how 1972 marked the beginning of the ebbing of revolt, the film becomes an allegory of *gauchisme* on the wane, and includes the observation that its ironic title is in fact a version

of Mao's 'unrest is an excellent thing'. An earlier text, this time written closer to the historical juncture in question, finds much of interest in Godard's 1982 film *Passion*, which in a similar way to the film from a decade before, evokes with incisive precision, according to Badiou, both the coming to power of the Left in France and the 'Polish way' offered by Solidarność. By contrast, in a text from 1998 on Godard's *Histoire(s) du cinéma*, cinema is itself, Badiou writes, 'summoned before the court of its historical responsibility and artistic destiny', leading him to ask: 'Is this really fair to it?' Godard's film, he suggests, acts as a counterweight to that 'revisionist malady' of European cinema, which he castigates on several occasions, including, notably, *Lacombe Lucien* by Louis Malle and *The Night Porter* by Liliana Cavani (Badiou does not cite Foucault, who discussed both of these films in a 1974 interview with *Cahiers du cinéma*, translated as 'Film and Popular Memory' in *RP II*, Summer 1975). Yet it is, consequently, more than a little harsh, Badiou argues, in judging what he insists is still a mass art. Why? The reason lies in Badiou's insistence that in post-1972 cinema one finds 'a collection of precious victories', offering hope for the orphans of the revolution, for those who became weary, disenchanted or disengaged from the revolutionary path, or who (in this decidedly francocentric narrative) quickly realized that the coming to power of Mitterrand would not for long be the source of much hope.

In a collection of such diversity it is tempting to find unifying threads. One such is offered when the opening interview refers explicitly to the Badiouian concept of 'inaesthetics', and to the notion of cinema as the 'seventh art'. A central text, the longest in the book, serves to outline in what ways cinema might be construed as a distinctive form of 'philosophical experimentation'. The text was not written for publication but is transcribed from a seminar in Buenos Aires in 2005. It offers an account of all of the major concerns articulated elsewhere in the collection, and among its notable features is a clear (and largely uncontroversial) account of Deleuze's books on cinema. What Badiou describes, however, as five ways of 'thinking cinema' take as their own founding presupposition the (always unquestioned) claim that cinema is a mass art. In what is a rather comical slippage, Badiou makes no differentiation between what he thus proposes are five ways in which cinema has been thought (implicitly in the work of others, such as Bazin and Deleuze, as well as a great unnamed cast of film theorists) and the five ways in

which *he* thinks cinema. Thus we return to cinema as semblance of the real (Bazin), cinema as making time visible (Deleuze), but then also cinema as the democratization of the other arts, cinema as on the border between art and non-art, and finally cinema as affording what Badiou calls 'ethical genres, genres that are addressed to humanity so as to offer it a moral mythology'. What follows in the text is, finally, Badiou's own alternative to Deleuze's cinematic image, an array of provocations which, frustratingly, are not subsequently reconsidered in the light of Deleuze's concepts of movement- and time-images.

Badiou ranges far and wide, both explicitly in film history and implicitly (without acknowledgment) in some of the terrain upon which traditional film theory treads. In his discussion of how genre works as a democratizing force, for example, Orson Welles is of central importance. As Deleuze does in another context, Badiou gravitates towards Welles's *The Lady from Shanghai* and argues that montage is the 'destruction of metaphysics' whereas the still image is 'metaphysical'. Welles, he argues, is able to employ both. It is certainly true that Welles combines montage and a realism of the type affirmed by Bazin (the famed exploitation of depth of field, long takes, etc.). But, considered from the point of view of subsequent film history, he is hardly unique in this respect. More to the point: is metaphysics really what is at stake in *The Lady from Shanghai*? By Badiou's own account, is it not rather a matter of the worker-hero battling it out against the capitalist boss and the bored wife (played by Rita Hayworth)? It might, in this context, be suggested that Badiou's interpretation only rather arbitrarily focuses on the theoretical construction imposed upon the film. And even if this is perhaps not intended to be taken entirely seriously, the decision draws attention to the often rather thin nature of the material collected here when considered across the book as a whole.

That so much of it is made up of interviews, transcriptions of unpublished work, some unpublished short pieces on individual films, and quite a considerable amount of repetition, does not of course necessarily diminish this book's worth. In particular, those interested in gaining an appreciation of how cinema is located within Badiouian inaesthetics (and part of the book of that title is republished here), as well as of the notion of cinema as an 'impure' art, will doubtless find much to appreciate. Film scholars, however, may have to resign themselves to the fact that Badiou probably does not care too much about their objections. Instead, he is content to echo, as

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