

## FROM THE EDITOR

While he was a student of philosophy Karl Marx wrote in a letter to his father about his intention to publish and edit a journal of dramatic criticism. His father didn't think it would earn him a decent enough living. In any case, the young Marx soon turned his attention to more important things. The idea that I should propose and then edit a special issue of this journal on the subject of theatre and Marxism may have come from a persistent anxiety that the study of theatre might be a distraction from the more urgent tasks of developing a critique of political economy or mobilizing in support of a socialist or communist politics. As though the conjunction offered in this special issue of *Theatre Survey* might somehow make amends for a dereliction of duty elsewhere.

There was a time, and it was not even all that long ago, when you might have been surprised to hear the word "capitalism" spoken. It was not part of everyday vocabulary in the English-speaking territories of advanced capitalism itself. Rather like air, this component of everyday lives seemed not to attract any attention to itself. We moved in it, drew life from it (so we thought, or would have done, had we been thinking about it) but we didn't pay it any mind. Since about 2008, when the contours of the present "crisis" started to come into focus, it has become a part of everyday political vocabulary again, as the contradictions inherent in capitalism forced themselves upon public attention.

As commentators sought to grasp and communicate the scale of the crisis there were repeated attempts in mainstream media purporting to explain the renewed relevance of Marx and Marxism to an understanding of our present situation. As the historian Mark Mazower wrote recently, in a newspaper review of Gareth Stedman Jones's new biography of Marx, the value of Marx's work "today" is that it "remains an outstanding model of how to stand outside capitalism and subject it to critique on the basis of something larger—the ability of a reigning economic system to serve human needs."<sup>1</sup> Or, as a senior economic adviser to UBS wrote, in the same newspaper—the *Financial Times*—in August 2011, "the reason for Marx's relevance today is precisely because we are in a once-in-a-generation crisis of capitalism."<sup>2</sup> Perhaps more significant, however, than these flickers of recognition in one of the financial industry's leading publications has been the renewed engagement with Marx and with Marxist terms of analysis by radical social movements in both Europe and North America (often taking up, in their turn, ideas and commitments earlier articulated in the Global South, of course).

In the academic humanities, many efforts to understand the present situation, to make sense of its culture and to frame responses to its deprivations have turned to an analysis of neoliberalism. "Neoliberalism" is a term with many virtues. It names a political and ideological project and identifies it with its philosophical antecedents. It offers a way of thinking about the relationship between economic

policy and deep processes of subjectification. It articulates connections between political struggles in multiple locations, drawing particular attention, for example, to the significance of the relationship between state violence and economic “liberalization” in Pinochet’s Chile, as a precursor to later developments in the Northern Hemisphere. But it has also worn a little threadbare through overuse, and sometimes comes across as little more than a routine gesture indicating a generalized dissatisfaction with the way things are around here right now, and sometimes expressing an understandable feeling of resentful helplessness in the face of it all. One of the feelings that motivated the proposal of this special issue was a dim sense that our understanding of the present situation might be improved by thinking again in the terms offered by the Marxist tradition, broadly construed. Or, to put it more personally, I wanted to see what my colleagues could do, with Marx and Marxism, to help me work through and perhaps even beyond my own bad feelings about the times we have taken to calling neoliberal.

In the essays that follow our five contributors have definitely made me feel a little better. I shall now let them speak for themselves, without any ventriloquism from me, in the hope and expectation that this issue will offer you, the reader, some new intellectual resources for whatever struggles currently trouble and engage you.

Solidarity.

## ENDNOTES

1. Mark Mazower, “The Value of Karl Marx’s 19th Century Thinking in Today’s World,” *Financial Times*, 5 August 2016, [www.ft.com/content/04afaf98-57d3-11e6-9f70-badea1b336d4](http://www.ft.com/content/04afaf98-57d3-11e6-9f70-badea1b336d4), accessed 20 October 2016. See also, Gareth Stedman Jones, *Karl Marx: Greatness and Illusion* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016).

2. George Magnus, “Capitalism Is Having a Very Marxist Crisis,” *Financial Times*, 30 August 2011, [www.ft.com/content/a1cd5b74-cfd7-11e0-a1de-00144feabdc0](http://www.ft.com/content/a1cd5b74-cfd7-11e0-a1de-00144feabdc0), accessed 20 October 2016.