

Dialogues in Human Geography

<http://dhg.sagepub.com/>

'Critique is impossible without moves': An interview of Kojin Karatani by Joel Wainwright

Kojin Karatani and Joel Wainwright
Dialogues in Human Geography 2012 2: 30
DOI: 10.1177/2043820612436923

The online version of this article can be found at:
<http://dhg.sagepub.com/content/2/1/30>

Published by:



<http://www.sagepublications.com>

Additional services and information for *Dialogues in Human Geography* can be found at:

Email Alerts: <http://dhg.sagepub.com/cgi/alerts>

Subscriptions: <http://dhg.sagepub.com/subscriptions>

Reprints: <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsReprints.nav>

Permissions: <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav>

Citations: <http://dhg.sagepub.com/content/2/1/30.refs.html>

>> [Version of Record](#) - Mar 21, 2012

[What is This?](#)

'Critique is impossible without moves': An interview of Kojin Karatani by Joel Wainwright

Dialogues in Human Geography
2(1) 30–52
© The Author(s) 2012
Reprints and permission:
sagepub.co.uk/journalsPermissions.nav
DOI: 10.1177/2043820612436923
dhg.sagepub.com



Kojin Karatani

Independent scholar

Joel Wainwright

The Ohio State University, USA

Abstract

In this dialogue, geographer Joel Wainwright interviews the celebrated Marxist philosopher, Kojin Karatani. Their wide-ranging discussion examines key concepts by a series of philosophers – especially Kant, Marx, Hegel and Derrida – through an analysis of several core geographical concerns: the spatial organization of global capitalism, the formation of empires and territorial nation states, the current economic crisis, and more. The interview concludes with a discussion of the conditions of possibility of transcending the dominant social formation (i.e. capital-nation-state).

Keywords

capitalism, geographic thought, Japanese Marxism, Kant, Karatani, Marx, territory, value

Introduction

Kojin Karatani, born 1941, is widely regarded as one of Japan's greatest living intellectuals. He was awarded the Gunzo Literary Prize for an essay on Sōseki in 1969 and subsequently taught literature at several Japanese universities as well as Yale, Columbia, Cornell, and UCLA. A thinker of tremendous originality, Karatani has written over 20 books on a wide range of topics. Among Anglophone geographers, he is best known for his book *Transcritique: On Kant and Marx* (2003), which Slavoj Žižek (2004: 121) describes as 'one of the most original attempts to recast the philosophical and political bases of opposition to the empire of capital'. Since completing *Transcritique*, Karatani has written five subsequent books and numerous essays on matters

central to human geography: the history and spatiality of nation states, the organization of global capitalism, and the prospects for a more just world (2002, 2004a, 2004b, 2006, 2010). Unfortunately only one of these books, *History and Repetition* (2012), has been translated into English. It is comprised of essays written around 1989 on historical repetition and Japanese literature.¹ Several recent essays have been translated (2008c, 2009a, 2009b), and *Counterpunch* published Karatani's (2011) provocative response to the Tōhoku

Corresponding author:

Joel Wainwright, Department of Geography, The Ohio State University, Columbus, OH 43210, USA.

Email: wainwright.11@osu.edu

earthquake and tsunami. Yet the bulk of Karatani's writings, both pre- and post-*Transcritique*, remain inaccessible to English readers.

This is not the place for a critical review of Karatani's oeuvre (for recent commentaries in English, see Boutry-Stadelmann, 2009; Cassegard, 2007; Fuminobu, 2009; Lippit, 2012; Žižek, 2006). Given the breadth and originality of his work, it is impossible to briefly summarize its relevance to contemporary geographic thought. Geographers have drawn on Karatani's work to examine the political economy of oil (Huber, 2009; Labban, 2010), historical materialism (Mann, 2009), and nationalism (Wainwright and Kim, 2008), but this only scratches the surface of our potential dialogue with Karatani. His work yields profound insights into political economy, the philosophy of language, the interpretation of Kant and Marx, the geopolitics of capitalist nation states, the theory of social transformation, and more. While it may be vain to search for a unifying theme to these diverse contributions, Murakami Fuminobu (2009) suggests that one of the guiding threads throughout Karatani's diverse work since the late 1960s has been the analysis of problems of self-referential language, or of problems that cannot be adequately expressed in language. He notes that Karatani has cited the following passage from Kant numerous times:

Human reason has the peculiar fate in one species of its cognitions that it is burdened with questions which it cannot dismiss, since they are given to it as problems by the nature of reason itself, but which it also cannot answer, since they transcend every capacity of human reason. (Kant, 1998 [1791]: A vii–ix)

I believe that Fuminobu is right about this Kantian quality of Karatani's thought. The dominant theme of Karatani's writings since *Transcritique* has been the necessary-but-impossible articulation of an alternative to capital-nation-state, an alternative Karatani calls simply 'X'. Those who wish to conceptualize a world beyond capital, nation, and state must confront the aporetic challenge of grasping X. In this interview – Karatani's first with a geographer – we examine the geographical dimensions of his thought, and of X.

I first met Karatani in Massachusetts in 2006; we met again in Tokyo in 2010. Yet this text is not a transcription of our discussions. Karatani's native language is Japanese, which I cannot speak, and while he speaks English fluently, given the theoretical and technical character of our dialogue, we agreed that it would be best to conduct our exchange in writing. Thus I sent Karatani my questions a few weeks before we met in Tokyo, and after our discussion we wrote this text.

Joel Wainwright

Interview

Wainwright: I'd like to begin by clarifying your conception of Marx's retrospective presentation in *Capital* and his value form theory. In a 1980 essay, you wrote:

Marx's so-called 'dialectics' in *Capital* exists in its peculiar description that retrospectively reveals the inversion – fabrication of necessity out of contingency – entailed in Hegelian categorizations; it detects this mechanism, case by case, one by one, whenever a becoming of a category occurs, all the while following the line of Hegelian thought. In other words, the dynamic of *Capital* is that it constructs problematics in the mode of Hegel and at the same time deconstructs them, since there is indeed no other possibility of executing a 'critique' of Hegel. (cited in Karatani, 1997: xxi)

This passage suggests that already in 1980 you were skeptical that it was appropriate to characterize Marx's analysis in *Capital* as 'dialectical'. In fact, you described Marx's critique of Hegel as 'deconstruction'. By contrast, in *Transcritique* you attribute the retrospective quality of *Capital* not to a critique of Hegel as such, but rather to the deeply Kantian quality of Marx's analysis. Yet you do not claim that this change came about because Marx formally or explicitly returned to Kant. Rather, you attribute Marx's radical turn to his introduction of value form after 'his initiation to skepticism' via 'Bailey's critique of Ricardo's theory of value' (Karatani, 2003: 5). I agree with you on this. What remains slightly obscure to me, and what I would ask you to

clarify, is the relation between Marx's retrospection, Kant's triadic analysis, and value theory. More precisely, my confusion stems from the fact that your central illustration of Marx's Kantian quality in *Capital* is value form, since Bailey's skepticism and Kant's parallax are totally different.

Karatani: That's right. Bailey's only insight is to insist on the relationality of value.

Wainwright: Here is how I understand your argument. Marx's analysis of capitalism centers on his examination of value. His analysis changes over time in a way that becomes increasingly Kantian, but especially after the encounter with Bailey – not because Marx agrees with Bailey, but because he recognizes after Bailey that value requires a relational framework. Marx recognized that neither Ricardo nor Bailey could account adequately for capital's transformation into money and the inherent drive for accumulation of surplus value. As you explain: 'Marx's Copernican turn in *Capital* is [that,] between object (qua use-value) and value, Marx discovered the form of value which makes them what they are, from which they derive' (Karatani, 2003: 194). It is this relational system that defines the Kantian quality of Marx's value form theory:

While Ricardo maintained that every commodity contains value (qua labor time) within, Bailey insisted that the value of a commodity exists only in its relation with other commodities ... Marx's theory of value form was formed transcritically between these poles. (Karatani, 2003: 194)

In other words, to critique both Ricardo and Bailey, Marx needed value form theory, which led him to think in a way that was essentially Kantian.

Karatani: Your question reminds me of my thought from the 1970s to the 1980s. Let me speak a little about it. In the 1970s I wrote an essay called 'The genealogy of Marx'. As the title suggests, this was an attempt to bridge Marx's method and Nietzsche's 'genealogy'. I did so by re-examining Marx's reading of classical political economy.

Adam Smith thought that each commodity contains exchange value which is to be indicated by money. Marx criticizes such a view as mistaking a

result for a cause, by pointing out that the cause acts as a 'vanishing mediator':

What appears to happen is not that a particular commodity becomes money because all other commodities express their values in it, but, on the contrary, that all other commodities universally express their values in a particular commodity because it is money. The movement through which this process has been mediated vanishes in its own result, leaving no trace behind. (Marx, 1976 [1867]: 187)

In other words, the mediating process as cause is being effaced in the result. However, isn't this similar to what Nietzsche (2002 [1886]) called 'perspectival perversion of cause and effect'? The intent of Nietzsche's 'genealogy' is to trace back to the 'vanishing mediator', so to speak – to disclose that the cause and effect, as commonly perceived, are reversed. Kant and Marx often did the same. I used the term 'genealogy' to write about Marx to criticize those, such as Foucault, who praise Nietzsche while ignoring Kant and Marx.

Wainwright: In what sense can we say that Marx's analysis is genealogical?

Karatani: In *Capital* Marx points out numerous instances of such 'perspectival perversion'. So although *Capital* seems to be written based on Hegel's dialectical system, at the same time the text is continually disclosing the perspectival perversion in Hegelian dialectics. Then it is inappropriate and misleading to call *Capital* 'dialectical'. For this reason I appealed to Nietzsche's 'genealogy'. But later I came to read Kant closely and realized that this genealogical critique of the perspectival perversion started with Kant.

Kant wrote that he initially favored rationalism, or metaphysics, but was woken out of his 'dogmatic slumber' by Hume's skepticism. Dogmatism here means the rationalism of Descartes, Leibniz, and so on. Hume doubted all this. For instance, he doubted the law of physical causality, saying that such is only guesswork from observing the regular succession of events. People imagine that 'A caused B', when B-type events follow regularly after A-type events happen. As you know, Kant did not stop at that and criticized Hume, who presumes empirical certainty.

Kant's 'critique' was directed at rationalism and at the same time to Hume, or rather empiricist premises.

Rationalists disregard intuition, while empiricists start from sense-data. But according to Kant, this sense-data is the result constituted by the sensible form, that is, through active workings of the subject. But this 'movement of mediation' is concealed from consciousness. Empiricists take the sense-data which is the result for the cause. Kantian critique aims to disclose perspectival perversion.

Wainwright: And you contend that the same is true for Marx.

Karatani: Yes. Marx was stunned by his belated reading of Bailey's criticism of Ricardo. This parallels the shock Kant experienced by reading Hume. According to Ricardo, every commodity has intrinsic value, but Bailey insists that the value of a commodity is only relative – there is no absolute, intrinsic value of a commodity, only the relations of exchange-value between commodities. Bailey (1825: 8) writes, 'It is from this circumstance of constant reference to other commodities, or to money, ... that the notion of value, as something intrinsic and absolute, has arisen'. This particular passage should remind us of Hume's skeptical critique of the law of causality as the inference from the constant succession of events.

But Marx did not stop with Bailey's critique of Ricardo. He criticized Bailey as well. Marx recognized that a commodity has no intrinsic value, but such skepticism cannot explain why people hoard particular commodities, such as gold. He asked, what makes gold special? What explains money? Marx solved this riddle through his conception of the value-form, which consists of relative form of value and equivalent form of value. Gold becomes money not because of its intrinsic value, but because it is placed in the general equivalent form of value. Regardless of what the thing may be, in so far as it is placed in the equivalent form of value, it becomes money. People do not usually think this way; they think that because a thing is money, it indicates the value of other commodities. Thus economists fail to recognize the value form, which is the 'movement of mediation' in concealment.

Wainwright: So concealed that classical political economy failed to see it.

Karatani: That's right. Neither Smith nor Bailey could see the value form which makes a thing a commodity or money. They were not interested in money. But without explaining money, how could it be possible to understand the activity of capital? Why do people want money? Because money gives them the right to obtain other things. The activity of capital is in accumulation of money. This is not the same as accumulation of things. Rather, accumulation of money is accumulation of the right to obtain things any time, instead of consuming. For this reason Marx sees the hoarding of money in the origin of capital. Yet industrial capital no longer remembers this 'origin'. This is one respect in which capital is essentially a perverted activity, which we take to be natural.

As you remarked, to critique both Ricardo and Bailey, Marx needed value form theory, which led him to think in a way that was essentially Kantian. That is right, but let me add one thing here. To be essentially Kantian also implies a genealogical attempt to disclose the mediated process in concealment.

Wainwright: Do you see Marx's value form theory as an explicit reiteration of Kant's triadic structure of thing-in-itself, phenomena, and *Schein*? If so, could we say that thing-in-itself: use value:: phenomena: exchange value:: value form: *Schein*?

Karatani: Actually, no, I don't see it that way. It seems difficult to say so. I wrote in *Transcritique* that the Lacanian distinction between the real, the symbolic, and the imaginary could be traced back to Kant's distinction between thing-in-itself, phenomenon, and *Schein*. So, if I have to, I would say that commodities:: real, value-form:: symbolic, money:: imaginary.

Wainwright: In your recent work you have extended your claim that Marx thought in a Kantian fashion by reading the *Metaphysics of Morals* as the basis for a communist metaphysics. For instance, you argue that that Kant's maxim, 'every rational being exists as an ends in himself and not merely as a means to be arbitrarily used by this or that will' (Kant, 1990 [1785]: 45), should be taken as a critique of the social relations of capitalism, which are nothing except the reduction of all relations to the commodity, the market nexus, and ultimately, money. It

seems to me that Kant's conception of dignity could be helpful for clarifying the relationship between communist metaphysics and singular in universality. In the second section of the *Metaphysics of Morals* Kant draws the following distinction:

In the realm of ends everything has either a price or a dignity. Whatever has a price can be replaced by something else as its equivalent; on the other hand, whatever is above all price and therefore admits of no equivalent, has dignity. (Kant, 1990 [1785]: 51)

Could we say therefore that communism is a metaphysics of dignity? That each person, singular in universality, is above all price and has no equivalent?

Karatani: Yes, you put it beautifully. I regret that I did not quote this phrase in the book. It actually points to what I wished to say most accurately. To give another example, in *Transcritique* I differentiated between particularity and singularity (2003: section 3.3). Following Kant, particularity can be said to have a price and singularity can be said to have dignity. Each person's singularity has no exchange value. This does not come from any special quality or unique individuality of a person. Such qualities have a price and are exchangeable. Singularity, which any ordinary person has, is something un-exchangeable. That is dignity. In other words, dignity is freedom or voluntary subjectivity. Kant found the moral principle in treating others not just as means but also as ends. To treat others as ends is to treat others as voluntary subjects. Kant calls the society where people treat each other as an end the 'kingdom of ends' (*Reiche der Zwecke*).² Unlike today's ethicists who refer to Kant, Kant considered this matter from the economic level. For instance, capitalist society relies on treating labor as a commodity, so human beings are routinely treated as mere means. Thus, the kingdom of ends can only be realized by superseding capitalist economy. It was for this reason that Kant proposed cooperatives, which is totally ignored today. By contrast, Marx's communism is typically conceptualized only on the level of economics, and it is totally forgotten that his communism is nothing but Kant's 'kingdom of ends'. What is worth the name of communism has to be something that secures human dignity.

Wainwright: Your reply reminds me of a passage from your book *Architecture as Metaphor*, where you discuss the conditions of possibility for change in philosophy:

Changes in philosophy are not prompted only by changed historical circumstances; they also emerge as a result of changes in the very nature of philosophy itself – philosophy is a self-referential system where ultimate determination and closure is impossible. But if this is so, a critique of philosophy results in another dual opposition. The insistence on the superiority of either text or rhetoric over philosophy might become dominant. But is this any different from the previous state of affairs? Is it not, after all, a metaphysics of the text? Derrida addresses this issue as follows: 'Whoever alleges that philosophical discourse belongs to the closure of a language must still proceed within this language and with the oppositions it furnishes. According to a law that can be formalized, philosophy reappropriates for itself the discourse that delimits it'. (Karatani, 1997 [1983]: 103)

My impression is that, by the time you wrote *Transcritique* in the 1990s,³ your position had moved away from Derrida's. In one of the key passages in the Preface, you write: 'This, to state it outright, is a project to reconstruct the metaphysics called communism' (2003: xi). I find this project deeply compelling. Yet how do you conceptualize the task of 'reconstructing metaphysics'? And how would you characterize the relation between your project in *Transcritique* and Derrida's conception of 'closure of metaphysics'? Could we say that Derrida also shifted toward the metaphysics called communism in the 1990s, particularly in *Specters of Marx* (1994) where he calls for the New International?

Karatani: Let me explain my relationship with Derrida a bit. I read Derrida in the early 1970s. My interest was mostly in his relatively early works, such as his critique of Husserl's phenomenology from a different viewpoint from Heidegger. His works in the 1960s, such as *Writing and Difference* (Derrida, 1978 [1967]), remain masterpieces. But when I came to know him in the United States he was already quite different.

Wainwright: How did you come to know Derrida?

Karatani: I was introduced to him by Paul de Man while teaching at Yale in 1976. De Man was a professor of comparative literature at Yale and writing literary criticism. Derrida became well known in America almost exclusively in terms of literary criticism. The books he wrote in France too show his affinity to literature. He was trying to become a 'writer' (*ecrivain*), so to speak. I am different in this respect. I started off as a literary critic but wished to draw myself out of it. So I was not sympathetic to the Derridian literary style in general. I have never written in that style.

I should say a word here on my view of literature. Not only Derrida but in fact all those who were literature-oriented at that time were motivated by the failure of *Evenements de Mai*. They sought the possibility of revolution in literature, or *Ecriture* and poetic language. The thoughts generally known as poststructuralism should be seen as a type of conversion from politics to literature. The same could be said of Heidegger, who first proposed deconstruction of western metaphysics. For him, poetry was more fundamental than philosophy. This reflects his thinking after his involvement with the Nazis and subsequent disillusionment with it.

Wainwright: Thus Heidegger turned away from politics toward poetical thinking.

Karatani: This sort of thinking always comes from political failure. It seems revolutionary, but underneath it lies political impotency. Similarly, during the 1960s there was no possibility to go beyond the cold war. Then people tried to go beyond it by imagination, that is, literature. This was why philosophy or any other thing had to be literature.

But turning to literature by political failure or impotency was nothing new. For instance, modern Japanese literature started with political failure. Knowing this, I was skeptical about turning to literature after a failure of revolution. My book *Origins of Modern Japanese Literature* (1998 [1980]) intended to make it clear that modern literature is a product of such inversion, or the internalization of political failure. I began criticizing 'literature' in this way in the 1970s. When the English translation of this book was published in 1993, I was already far removed from literature.

Wainwright: How would you characterize this kind of political failure-driven literary revolution?

Karatani: It is a revolution by words which relies on the power of ideas. To criticize German idealists and Left Hegelian ideologues, including himself, Marx (1845) wrote: 'The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it'. French poststructuralists have spread the idea that we can change the world by changing our interpretation of the world. This was why reading of texts became the initial importance. This generated what Richard Rorty called 'textual idealism'.

There is a close parallel between this situation and German idealism. Toward the end of the 18th century England had developed industrial capitalism and France had political Bourgeois revolution but Germany did not have anything. The Germans could only carry out revolution of ideas. As you know, this was by no means an achievement of ordinary kind. Actually, German idealism became the model of philosophical revolution. The thought that made a sensation after the 1970s represents a revival of this.

Wainwright: Yet clearly your position is not that of orthodox materialism.

Karatani: No, we cannot always praise materialism. But neither can we say that idealism is always wrong. It is the social context that determines what is critical. There is no stance which is constantly correct. For example, you cannot always make yourself right by using the method of deconstruction. It may become evasive, depending upon the actual situation. I shifted my stance after the 1990s, that is to say, the end of metaphysical binary opposition of the cold war. Critique is impossible without moves. Later I started to call these shifts accompanying criticism 'transcritique', coining this term by combining transcendental and transversal critique.

Wainwright: Is 'transcritique' a spatial practice? Could it happen just anywhere, or does it require a certain geographical translocation? I ask this question because of an ambiguity in *Transcritique*. You imply that Marx's own achievement of transcritique was the result of his dislocation from Germany, to Paris, and to London. This makes sense to me, because the experience of geographical dislocation is one that I associate with self-reflection and critique. Yet you also write that Kant – who famously

never left Königsberg – ‘assumed a kind of transposition’ through his *refusal* to move to Berlin. How is it possible that for Marx transcritique required geographical transposition, but not for Kant? Is it possible that this may have had something to do with the fact that Kant gave so many lectures on geography? Moreover, how do you explain your own achievement of transcritique? Would you say that you are more like Marx or Kant in this sense?

Karatani: Your points about Kant are absolutely right. What he taught at university was not philosophy, but geography and anthropology. This is worth noting. It will be useful to re-read Kant as a geographer.

As regards translocation, what is important is not physical translocation. As for myself, I started to read Marx’s words in terms of translocation when I traveled to Europe alone at the age of 30. I had never left Japan before then. However, traveling or translocation does not always bring realizations. I know many people who travel all over the world all the time but receive no particular realization from the experience and go on explaining things based on the same old principles. Levi-Straus wrote, ‘I hate explorers’. Explorers enjoy translocations but gain no realizations. In fact, I dislike traveling. I am not interested in sightseeing either. Wherever I visit, my favorite activity is to sit in a café, reading and writing.

Wainwright: Earlier you mentioned that Derrida’s work was influenced by the events of 1968. But you came to know him later.

Karatani: That’s right. I became critical of Derrida when we met again during the Gulf War in 1991. His attitude was vague. Of course his language was equivocal even before then. But it was something methodological, which questioned the self-evidence of any positive stance, whether affirmative or negative. Such a position was necessary for a critical thinking during the cold war regime. But during the Gulf War – which in itself was evidence of the collapse of the cold war structure – his language appeared to be self-mystifying escapism. I had already grown weary of Derridean language of self-mystifying undecidability. Although I believed that Derrida himself must be different from his followers, I was disappointed by his attitude at the Gulf War.

Later I learned that Derrida was writing about Marx at that time. I came to realize that Derrida was after all different from Derridians. He too shifted his stance. Despite his adherence to the old style, he was transcritical. One example is his connection of the phrase ‘A specter of communism is haunting Europe’ from the *Communist Manifesto* with the ghost in *Hamlet* (Derrida, 1994). This sort of approach provided comfort to literary theorists, indicating that they could still get away without reading *Capital*.

But I suppose I could turn the same criticism toward myself. In Japan people used to know me as a literary critic. Regardless of the contents of my writings or activities, I was connected with literary criticism. It was only when I launched the New Associationist Movement (NAM) that people became aware that what I was doing went beyond literary criticism. While those who liked my previous writings or image objected to my shift, some others took my move as a proof of seriousness and started to like me.

Wainwright: Before discussing your experiences with NAM, I’d like to ask about your reading of Hegel, capitalism, and civil society. In the foreword to the Turkish translation of *Transcritique*, you write:

[I]t was Hegel who first grasped the Trinitarian nature of capital-nation-state ... Because Hegel’s understanding was idealistic, Marx tried to turn it around materialistically. In so doing, Marx saw civil society (capitalist economy) as infrastructure and the state or nation as super-structure. This leads to the idea that once the capitalist economy is superseded, the latter will automatically be extinguished. Obviously, this is not true. This is why Marxists repeatedly stumbled when it came to matters of the state and nation. This is because Marx himself failed to see that the state or nation has a solid and real basis of existence [in exchange] ... If we are to seriously supersede capital, nation, and state, we need to first recognize what they are. To simply deny them leads us nowhere. (Karatani, 2008a)

This passage raises two questions. First: how do you conceptualize the relationship between civil society (in Marx) and capital-nation-state? By my reading, the concept ‘civil society’ is displaced by your analysis; unlike capital-nation-state, what we

call ‘civil society’ since Hegel lacks a real basis in exchange, but is rather an expression of the totality of capital-nation-state. It seems to me that your perspective is a fundamental critique of Hegel’s ‘civil society’, since you reject the individualism of liberalism that takes each subject as a free floating atom in a total social cosmos, as well as the capital-nation-state ensemble that give rise to civil society. Could you clarify your thoughts here?

Karatani: Marx used the term ‘civil society’ (*bürgerliche Gesellschaft*) in his early years, when dealing with Hegel’s *Philosophy of Right* (1996 [1821]). In this period, Marx’s ideas are critical of Hegel yet remain in a Hegelian mindset. According to Hegel civil society is ‘*verständig*’ and not the ‘*vernünftig*’ (rational) state. The latter is the nation state which rationally regulates the anarchic market economy and actualizes the communality of people. Rational state is a realization of the slogan in the French Revolution: ‘Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity’.

In *Philosophy of Right* Hegel’s analysis was arguably modeled on England, since the state of such kind did not exist in Prussia. The kind of state delineated in *Philosophy of Right* is a kind of welfare state, which then is still valid today as a theory to account for welfare state. This is the reason I start from critique of Hegel. As much as Hegel is idealistic, it seems to me that he captured the totality of the triadic capital-nation-state, without abstracting any of them.

Marx materialistically ‘inverted’ Hegel’s idealistic system. In other words he understood civil society as the infrastructure and the nation or the state as the superstructure, the former determining the latter. This follows his thinking that by superseding civil society, or capitalist economy, the superstructure, or nation and the state, automatically disappears. But this cannot happen. Marxists always stumble on the issues of nation or the state. This was apparent in the Revolutions of 1848. These revolutions generated the state system, which is at once state-capitalist and state-socialist, as Bonaparte of France and Bismarck of Prussia show. That is to say, capital-nation-state was formed as a result of the Revolutions of 1848. Classic revolutionary movements were no longer possible in Europe after this. Paris commune was only a last sparkle. Now that capital-nation-state

is established in developed capitalist countries, revolutionary movements which do not accompany this recognition are naturally meaningless. In 1979 Francis Fukuyama declared ‘the end of history’, basing his arguments on Hegel. This means that capital-nation-state is the final system. In a sense, he is right. Many rejected his thesis of the end of history and tried to change society – as the US president Obama advocates – but they actually remain a part of capital-nation-state.

Wainwright: So your aim was to re-do Marx’s critique of Hegel, so to speak.

Karatani: Yes. Let me emphasize that Hegel was the first to capture capital, nation, and the state as a mutually relating system, in *Philosophy of Right*. For a revision of Marx’s critique of Hegel, one must on the one hand follow Marx and materialistically invert Hegel’s idealistic comprehension of the modern social formation and the ‘world history’ preceding it, while on the other hand maintaining Hegel’s recognition of the trinitarian nature of capital-nation-state. But to this end, it is indispensable to look at world history from the perspective of mode of exchange.

Wainwright: In contrast to that of mode of production.

Karatani: Yes. Most people see Marx as a theorist of capitalism as a mode of production, with the emphasis on social relations of production. This is not entirely wrong, of course. Consider Marx’s summary of the conclusions of his research in his famous Preface to his *Critique of Political Economy*:

In the social production of their existence, men inevitably enter into definite relations, which are independent of their will, namely relations of production appropriate to a given stage in the development of their material forces of production. The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which arises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the general process of social, political and intellectual life. (Marx, 1977 [1859])

This statement and others like it gave rise to a school of Marxist thought that interprets capitalism

as a mode of production, the ‘base’ of all social relations in capitalist society. As I have argued, politically this position has been disastrous.

Wainwright: Because it suggested that revolution simply required the use of state power by a vanguard party to overthrow capitalism.

Karatani: Yes, which in fact only contributed more power to the state and nation. And while capitalist social relations were repressed, they were not overcome. Along with the political critique of the base-superstructure metaphor, I would emphasize that we have to consider Marx’s analysis in *Capital*, which does not strictly follow his outline from the earlier Preface. To be sure, Marx continues to discuss capitalism as a ‘mode of production’.

Wainwright: In the very first sentence of *Capital*, he writes of ‘those societies in which the capitalist mode of production prevails’.

Karatani: True, but the analysis that immediately follows in that chapter – the exposition of value form – is not at all limited to production, and in fact centers on capital in motion.

Wainwright: Marx shows that the essence of capitalism as a social relation lies in commodity exchange.

Karatani: Precisely. He saw that capitalism’s peculiarity as a way of organizing social life stems from the production and sale of commodities. Both aspects are crucial.

Wainwright: As well as the *salto mortale* or parallax gap between the production process and the moment of sale.

Karatani: Yes. Rereading Marx, I came to see that we could interpret his approach based on the analysis of forms of relational exchange. Let me give two illustrations. He often uses the term *Verkehr*, which means ‘intercourse’ or ‘traffic’, to describe exchange relations. In *The German Ideology* (Marx and Engels, 1970 [1845]) he uses *Verkehr* to describe communication, traffic, trade, and even military exchanges between communities – in other words, ‘exchange’ in an expansive sense. A second illustration follows from Marx’s important writings on the relations between humans and nature. He defines this relationship with the concept *Stoffwechsel*, or ‘metabolism’, the material exchange between human beings and the environment. This concept is central

B plunder-redistribution	A reciprocity (gift-return)
C commodity exchange	D X

Figure 1. Modes of exchange
Source: Karatani (2006, 2008c)

to his very conception of human nature and its natural history. So here too we can see that, for Marx, relations of exchange are fundamental.

After completing *Transcritique*, I wanted to elaborate these ideas on a broader historical canvas. In *World Republic* (Karatani, 2006) I did so based on my conception of four modes of exchange. I argue that all concrete historical social formations are variations and combinations of four fundamental forms of exchange which can be derived from two distinctions: (1) non-reciprocal and reciprocal; (2) unfree and free (Figure 1).

Form of exchange A, gift and reciprocity, is arguably the ‘oldest’ mode of exchange, rooted in the earlier human communities; it consists in nothing more than the generalized expectation of give-and-take. It is a means of reciprocal exchange, one that creates community, everywhere governed, of course, by traditional norms (religion, patriarchy, gerontocracy), boundaries around the recognizable community (belonging and exclusion, or friend and enemy), and so on.

Wainwright: So the gift is reciprocal but obligatory, therefore unfree.

Karatani: That’s right. This form of reciprocity should not be interpreted as goodwill, but as a means of subordinating others to one’s will. And the gift here can include the simple but fundamental act of recognizing that one is part of a community. But this always entails exclusion, which is unfree from the perspective of the other, the excluded. Turning to plunder (B), this mode of exchange is neither free nor reciprocal, at least for those who are plundered. It is

nonetheless a form of exchange insofar as it involves material exchange – the theft of slaves, land, or crops – and the subsequent redistribution of value. Market exchange (C) has existed for a long period of human history. Capitalism did not invent markets. But what is distinctive today is that under capitalism, market exchange is definitive. This is the lesson of *Capital*: capitalism is not unique in centering social relations on exchange – only in the form this takes, which is commodity exchange organized by value form. But note that this does not mean that the other forms of exchange have disappeared – they have not. They are intermixed with market exchange, so to speak. It is simply that today, in contrast to earlier social-historical formations, we live in a world where A and B are subordinate to C.

Wainwright: Quadrant D is the most difficult to grasp.

Karatani: Here we find a mode of exchange defined by free and reciprocal exchange – what Marx calls ‘communism’, or Noam Chomsky calls ‘libertarian socialism’. But because these words carry negative and unintended connotations for many people today, I prefer to use the sign ‘X’. X does not exist in reality. It exists only as an idea (*Idée*).

Wainwright: Your comments on mode of exchange X raise the question of the possibility of transcending capital-nation-state. I find the conclusion of *Transcritique* to be profoundly aporetical. On one hand, you offer a powerful analysis of the Borromean ring capital-nation-state and the need to transcend it through the creation of practices that support X, which is social life based upon free and reciprocal exchange relations. Yet then it seems like you argue that we cannot achieve X, that X is impossible. And you contend that associations of associations – Marx’s expression for communism – have not yet existed. Thus, could we say that the ultimate anti-nomy of *Transcritique* is: ‘X must exist; X cannot exist’? This complexity is further elaborated in your recent remarks at Middlesex:

Mode D is ... a recovery of mode A, or reciprocity in a higher dimension. Mode D does not exist in reality; if it does, it is only temporary ... The recovery of reciprocity is ‘the return of the repressed’, so as Freud remarked, it has something compulsive

that transcends human will. In short, morality and religiosity do not reside in the superstructure, but rather are deeply rooted in the economic base structure. When seen in this light, we can easily understand Marx’s remark that the conditions of communism result from premises now in existence. Modes of exchange A, B, and C remain persistently. In other words, community (nation), the state, and capital remain persistently. We cannot clear them out. But we need not be pessimistic, because as long as these modes persist, the mode of exchange D will also persist. It will keep coming back no matter how much it is repressed and concealed. Kant’s ‘regulative idea’ is such a thing. (Karatani, 2009b)

To this point, a friend of mine suggested that you propose no real strategy of resistance to capitalism. My reply was to say, ‘of course, Karatani would concede that his strategy is basically impossible; but I cannot see an alternative to the sort of moral-political critique that Karatani proposes; I think Karatani, like Marx – or Derrida for that matter – would be the first to concede that the grasp for associationism beyond the trinity of capital-state-nation is aporetical’. I wonder if this is a fair estimation of your position. Yet, even if my reply does not misrepresent your view, I wonder how we might explain to people *why* ‘we need not be pessimistic’, as you said in London. It seems to me that faced with such an aporia, most people – including many on the left, however defined – will retreat to religion or liberalism. So when we say ‘we need not be pessimistic’ because D will persist, do we not also need to add ‘so long as there is a drive, or will, to transcend capital-nation-state’?

Karatani: Yes, the point you make is very important. Examination of the trinity of capital-nation-state makes you realize how difficult it is to supersede it. Previously people, for instance, thought of overcoming capitalism by the state or nation. This is not so difficult. But those attempts resulted in enforcing the state and nation, which in turn revives capitalism. This was what happened in the 20th century. Such difficulties compel us to recognize the finality of capital-nation-state, leaving us with the idea that the only possible way left for us now is to change society little by little within these confines. This is what was meant by the ‘the end of history’ in 1989.

It was then I started to think about Kant when the postmodern mantra of the idea as a mere appearance was echoing all over. I noticed the difference between Kant's constitutive idea (*Idée*) and regulative idea. What people called the idea was the constitutive idea. Those who attempted to recreate society to match their ideas and were met with disastrous consequences rejected the idea altogether. For me communism is a regulative idea and not a constitutive idea. This regulative idea, which would never be realized, keeps compelling us to supersede capital-nation-state. This regulative idea is not derived from our wishes, discontent or idealization. It compels us rather against our own will. This will not cease until it is fully realized.

Why? Marx explained communism as a necessary recovery of primitive communism, or common ownership, on a higher dimension. But why should the common ownership need to 'return'? The conception of the 'dialectical negation of the negation' cannot explain this – it only sounds similar to the myth of regaining a lost paradise.

I think that we can explain this from the viewpoint of mode of exchange, not mode of production, in combination with Freud's concept 'return of the repressed': a once repressed drive returns in a different form and with compulsion.⁴ If mode of exchange A – the principle of reciprocity – is repressed, it should return compulsively, albeit by taking a different form at the stage where the modes B and C are dominant.

Wainwright: But when you speak of D as a 'recovery' of A, this is not a romantic return to a former community life.

Karatani: Not at all. While every romantic recovery ends in affirming the *status quo* and recovering the traditional order, this 'return of the repressed' calls for radically changing the *status quo*. As the return of the repressed D apparently comes from the future rather than the revival of the past. In this regard, Ernst Bloch (1986) was right in his attempt to reconstruct Marxism as 'philosophy of future'. To critique Freudian 'unconsciousness', he put forward the idea 'the not-yet-consciousness'. But this is actually no different from Freud's 'return of the repressed'. When the ancient world-empire appeared, universal religion emerged as the 'return of the

repressed', as a resistance movement against empire. It emerged not as human wishes but as imperative from God. Social movements ever since were almost always clothed with the form of universal religion. In the late 19th century when the mode of exchange became dominant, D lost its religious aspects and became 'scientific socialism'. But D is essentially a regulative idea. If this perspective is lost, 'scientific socialism' becomes a constructive idea, and will be eventually debased, as in the case of Stalinism. But the regulative idea will never disappear.

Wainwright: Your discussion of exchange mode A and reciprocity brings us to the question of nationalism. As you know, there is a crucial passage in the *Manifesto* where Marx and Engels discuss nationalism:

The Communists are further reproached with desiring to abolish countries and nationality. The working men have no country. We cannot take from them what they have not got. Since the proletariat must first of all acquire political supremacy, must rise to be the leading class of the nation, must constitute itself the nation, it is so far, itself national, though not in the bourgeois sense of the word. (Marx, 1994 [1848]: 174)

In my interpretation, Marx and Engels thus pose communism contra nationalism, 'in the bourgeois sense of the word', as it existed in Europe in the mid-19th century, and they argue for overthrowing capitalism *and* nationalism. But curiously, to accomplish its historical purposes they contend that 'the proletariat must first of all acquire political supremacy', must become the hegemonic class, 'must constitute itself the nation'. How do you interpret this? By my reading, Marx and Engels claim that the proletariat must somehow transcend the boundaries of nations and reconstitute disparate groups into an encompassing ensemble (Wainwright and Kim, 2008). Thus they affirm a communist ethics of transnationalism or, more precisely, they affirm the struggle of subaltern groups to articulate transnational communism as a counter-power to nationalist capitalism.

Karatani: I agree. But let me elaborate about nation. Nation corresponds to 'fraternity' in the slogan of the French Revolution, 'liberty, equality, and

fraternity', while capital and the state correspond to liberty and equality. Nation then is something to imaginarily recover 'the community' or the exchange mode A, which in some ways conflicts with B or C. This is why nationalism resembles D in certain senses. Nationalism is troublesome in this regard.

Yet of course nationalism is different from D. For instance, nation has exclusive elements, as well as egalitarian elements. In this sense it is the same as a village community. Nation simply aims to return to A and the traditional order. While D is a recovery of A on the higher level, nation is a recovery of A on the lower level, so to speak. Although nation seems critical of B and C, the state and capitalism, it affirms them instead of superseding them. Consequently they form capital-nation-state. Nationalism or romanticism is a recovery of A but not on the higher level like D. It soon subordinates to B and C. Nationalism is troublesome since it resembles D. That is one reason why fascism, or national socialism, attracted people.

In the *Manifesto* (Marx and Engels, 1994 [1848]), Marx writes, '*Die Arbeiter haben kein Vaterland*'. However, this was written to argue against the criticism that communism deprives nation from the proletariats. The proletariats are not treated as citizens, who are equal to the Bourgeois. It means that the proletariats have no nation. Then Marx asks, how could we take away from them what they do not have? Marx was not positively suggesting the necessity of nation for the proletariat, or proletarian nationalism. In reality there is a deep-seated ideology that the proletariat, who are also citizens, have the duty to serve the country. Marx's words are an ironical objection to this kind of bourgeois ideology. That is to say, Marx said to the bourgeois ideologues – who always emphasize nationalism – that the proletarians are not treated like citizens and thus have no country. To treat the proletarians as citizens would be to supersede the class relationship of capital-wage laborer.

Wainwright: By your reading, then, Marx's conception of the proletariat 'constituting itself the nation' is synonymous to its superseding of capital and the state.

Karatani: Precisely. However, we have to consider the *Manifesto* in its time. After the revolutions

of 1848, there were movements to treat the proletariats like citizens. That was the case in England first, but was followed by Luis Bonaparte of France, and Bismarck of Prussia who adopted socialist policies. This was a sort of counter revolution to the revolutions of 1848. Thus capital-nation-state was established for the first time. And it continues today.

Thus, it would be wrong to apply Marx's words before 1848 to the situations after then. Marx and others formed the first International in this situation, at a time when social movements in Europe were divided by nationalism. Some, like the Italians, aimed to achieve national unity. The formation of 'nation' is indispensable to such developing capitalist countries. Thus the first International was marked by clashes caused by nationalism. Behind the chasm between Bakunists and Marxists was antagonism between Russia and Prussia. And the Second International was entirely dissolved with the outbreak of the First World War, when socialists from different countries supported the participation of their countries in the war.

Nationalism has always presented intricacies for Marxists. It is a problem because it resembles D. It *seems* very critical of capital and the state. Otherwise there would be no appeal to people. This was why fascism, or national socialism, triumphed in Germany, Italy, and Japan. It seemed to provide a means to transcend capital and the state by recovering the national community. National socialism as such is unlikely to come back in future. What is strong now is religious fundamentalism. This too is something to antagonize capital and the state, and therefore resembles D. But it can only lead to theocracy, never to D.

Wainwright: I'd like to return to Marx's analysis of nation in the *Manifesto* here. Marx makes a curious argument about the role of capitalism – what you call mode of exchange C – in reducing national antagonisms:

National differences and antagonism between peoples are daily more and more vanishing, owing to the development of the bourgeoisie, to freedom of commerce, to the world market, to uniformity in the mode of production and in the conditions of life corresponding thereto. (Marx and Engels, 1994 [1848])

Marx and Engels thus claim that some of the conditions for the moment when the proletariat may 'constitute itself the nation' are, perhaps ironically, facilitated by what we today call 'globalization', as 'the development of the bourgeoisie, ... freedom of commerce' and 'the world market' reduce the distance and antagonisms between peoples. Of course, this does not mean that capitalism has been motivated by some moral or rational principle. As you write in *Transcritique*: 'the movement of capital, the hoarding drive, that unwittingly has been forming the globalization of 'humanity' in the world, does not have a rational motivation' (2003: 211). Yet, it persists, and transnationalism in this sense of 'the globalization of humanity' has indeed advanced as a consequence of the long-term global extension of capitalist social relations. Is this not the essence of what you call 'world intercourse'?

Karatani: That's right. Thanks to genetic analysis, recent archeology developed dramatically, from which we learn the following: humanity was born in Africa about 200,000 years ago. Around 50,000–60,000 years ago, fewer than one thousand people left Africa and dispersed all over the world via Yemen and India. They formed in each place numerous races, languages, and cultures. What we are experiencing today is the process of these ramified peoples coming to reunite as humanity.

What has been prompting this process was capitalism, or the thorough infiltration of the mode of exchange C in every society. Under the system of world-economy since the 16th century, modern states and nations were formed beyond the tribal ethnic groups. It will not be long before national divisions become of less importance. But this will not happen automatically. The struggles among nations, races, religions, and so on will likely intensify under the modern world-system. Human unity will be possible by realizing the system of world-republic. This is the world-system based on the principle of exchange mode D.

Wainwright: I'd like to ask about the geography of this world-system, that is, the spatiality of capital-nation-state and its possible transcendence. In recent years many Marxist geographers, myself included, have examined the spatiality of the power of the capitalist nation state. This work typically

centers on the concept of territory, since the production of territory – or territorialization, the making of state-space – is fundamental to the organization of capital-nation-state. Yet in *Transcritique* I did not find a clear statement on the spatiality of capital-nation-state. This seems to be something that you have taken up in your more recent work. Could you clarify how the spatiality of capital-nation-state has evolved in your thought?

Karatani: I did not overlook the issue of spatiality in *Transcritique*. I examined several philosophers through the lens of spatial difference – not only Kant and Marx, but even Descartes. He traveled to different places and through the past by reading books. From the differences he found in his moves, the 'I doubt' or *cogito* arose. Unlike mere self-consciousness, this *cogito* is geographical and anthropological. The concept 'transcritique' implies being transcendental and transversal at the same time. It means crossing spatial differences and different exchanges.

But, as you say, I did not give enough thought to actual spaces. I came to think about this more after writing *Transcritique* and began thinking about the world-system. This shift is related to what happened around the world after September 2001. Until then I had the tendency of thinking about the state from within. But during this period I acutely felt the impossibility of understanding the state only from within.

Wainwright: How did you attempt to grasp the spatiality of the state?

Karatani: By analyzing modes of exchange. A social formation consists of three different modes of exchange. The historical stage of a social formation varies depending on which mode of exchange is dominant: from a society where the mode A is dominant, to a society where the mode B is dominant, and then to a society where the mode C is dominant. In the C dominant society, or capitalist social formation, communities and the state are transformed to constitute a whole which is capital-nation-state.

The assumption here is that social formations exist by themselves. But in reality no social formation exists in isolation. We then need to assume that social formations are placed in relationship with

B world-empire	A mini-system
C world-economy	D world-republic

Figure 2. World-systems Source: Karatani (2006, 2008c)

other social formations. This is to think from the ‘world-system’ (Figure 2). Wallerstein differentiated the world without the state, the world controlled by a single state, and the world where market economy prevails without state control. He called them, respectively, ‘mini-systems’, ‘world-empires’, and ‘world-economies’ (Wallerstein, 1976).

There were two kinds of criticism of Wallerstein. One came from Christopher Chase-Dunn (1991). According to him, what defines a given ‘world-system’ is not the matter of scale, and even a ‘mini-system’ is a kind of world-system. It is true that the tribal confederacy of Iroquois was huge in its scale. The other criticism came from Braudel, who argues that the world-economy did not originate in 16th-century Europe, but existed in Greece and Rome.

Without elaborating on these debates, I contend that we could think of three types of world-systems by differentiating according to the formative mode of exchange (Figure 3). A mini-system is reciprocal and based on gifting or marriage. World-empire is the mode of exchange B. World-economy is the world-system which is formed by the mode C or trade and markets.

With this recognition we could realize how the world-system X, which transcends other world-systems, is possible. This is formed when the mode of exchange A is recovered on the higher level. This can only be formed by the power of gifting, not by military power or money. In my view, what Kant called a ‘world-republic’ was the idea of this kind of world-system.

Wainwright: This still leaves open the question of the territorial expression of these world-systems. In my book *Decolonizing Development*, I wrote:

Kojin Karatani proposed a similar problematic with the central trinity of his transcritical Marxism: nation-state-capital (2005: 13–16). In my view the key trinity is (nation-state)–capital–territory. It is the spatial, especially territorial relations of power that makes particular nation-state-capital couplings possible. (Wainwright, 2008: 35)

My views on this have since evolved, in part by reflecting upon your more recent theorization of modes of exchange. I agree with you that a Marxist analysis should examine capital-nation-state as a triadic structure – a Borromean ring, to use your metaphor. Yet, this still raises the analytical question of the relation of the Borromean ring structure to the world. In other words, what do you feel is the appropriate geographical or spatial concept that links (or articulates) between the Borromean ring capital-nation-state and world? It seems to me that something like the concept of territory is needed here.

Taking your analysis of Borromean ring structure, could we define ‘territory’ as the spatial-ontological condition that binds capital-nation-state in the world? If we accept this, two points are clarified. First, it shows that an attack on capital-nation-state – our attempt at transcending the Borromean ring through transcritical counteractions – must also imply transcending territory, i.e. remaking a world without territory. This is because overcoming capital-nation-state implies, ipso facto, transforming the spatial form of this Borromean ring. Second, it allows us to raise the question of Eurocentrism anew. The historical event of capital-nation-state coupling did not happen just anywhere; it occurred in Europe, which used this ‘achievement’ to attempt to dominate the world. Today we are turning to Kant and Marx because they provide us with powerful ways to understand capital-nation-state, but this is not in order to ‘return to Europe’. On the contrary, it seems to me that transcritique is essentially a postcolonial critique of Eurocentrism: one that must (by its call to overcome capital-nation-state) attempt to make a world that is not spatially organized in the territorial

Social formation	Dominant mode of exchange	World-system
1. Clan	A reciprocity	Mini-system
2. Asiatic	B1 plunder-redistribution	World-empire
3. Classical antiquity	B2 plunder-redistribution	World-empire
4. Feudal	B3 plunder-redistribution	World-empire
5. Capitalist	C commodity exchange	World-economy

Figure 3. Historical social formations Source: Karatani (2006, 2008c)

form that has become dominant since the spread of European empire.

Karatani: I have re-examined those questions from the view of world-system. Wallerstein understood the space of world-economy as core, semi-periphery, and periphery. Following the dependence theory of Frank, Amin, and others, Wallerstein thought that there is a mechanism through which the core exploits the wealth from the periphery. But I think his explanation is insufficient. Allow me to explain my view.

Preceding the emergence of the world capitalist economy, world-empire too had the structure of core and periphery. This, however, is different from world-economy. World-empires extend only as far as their military power extends, as they are based on the mode of exchange B. This explains why world-empires existed in many distinct places. But world-economy, which is based on the mode of exchange C, expands infinitely. Therefore, among the history of distinct world-empires, the world-economy is singular.

Wainwright: Does world-empire have a definitive spatial structure?

Karatani: Karl Wittfogel (1957) can help us to answer this question with his theory of Asiatic despotic states and irrigation. His reputation is quite negative among Marxists – he has been almost completely ignored – but I think he contributed a lot to elucidating the geopolitical structure of the world-empire: core, periphery, and semi-periphery. The periphery is placed in a tribute-protection relationship with the core. But the relationship between core and periphery is not fixed. The periphery often

counterattacks the core and sometimes even replaces it. Core and periphery then come to resemble each other. Meanwhile, the ‘semi-periphery’ is typically more distant from the core than the periphery. There is little direct threat from core. The semi-periphery adopts the core’s civilization, but not in its totality, only selectively. For instance, Greece and Rome were semi-peripheral with respect to Egypt and Mesopotamia as core; likewise Japan was semi-peripheral to China as core. Numerous theorists, from Marx and Weber to Braudel, noticed that Japanese feudalism was similar to that of Europe, but Wittfogel alone explained this through his analysis of the semi-peripheral standing of Japan. I agree with him about this. Incidentally, in peripheral Korea, a Chinese-style bureaucracy – including the Imperial Examination and employment of eunuchs as civil servants – was well developed. By contrast, Japan rejected it altogether, despite Japan’s overall reception of Chinese civilization in other areas. Japan was marked fundamentally by warrior (samurai) culture.

Naturally, when the European world-economy came to envelop the world, the former structure of older world-empires, including its peripheries and semi-peripheries, could no longer persist. The older world-empires, along with their peripheries and semi-peripheries, were pushed to the new peripheries of the world-economy. But this did not happen uniformly. The geographical pattern was shaped by the former standing in the older world-empire. For instance, many tribal societies in the periphery of the former world-empires were colonized by European nations. However, former world-empires

were not easily colonized. Toward the 20th century the Ottoman Empire, for instance, was segmented into nation states. Meanwhile, Russia and China escaped from such segmentations by way of Marxist revolutions, which placed class over ethnicity. Consequently they formed a 'new world-empire' to break away from world-economy. And semi-peripheries such as Japan successfully industrialized to become part of the core. Likewise the two world-systems called world-empire and world-economy are related. Today there are movements to recover the former world-empires, as represented by the European Union. This is not a matter of religion, but of world capitalism.

Wainwright: How does such an analysis of the geographical structure of world history help to critically assess Eurocentrism?

Karatani: To answer, let me return to Marx. In the *Grundrisse* he presents several historical 'forms which precede capitalist production', including the Asiatic state, classical antiquity, and the German (Marx, 1973 [1857]). This conception came from Hegel and was Eurocentric in a sense. In my view, these forms did not arise in sequential order but existed simultaneously in one space, albeit with different geographical structures. When Marx speaks of 'Asiatic state', he tends to have in mind the state at a rudimentary stage. But Asiatic states in reality were advanced in terms of their standing army and bureaucracy. Asiatic states built world-empires. They were in no way archaic. Seen from the view of mode of exchange, the state is already in its complete form in Asiatic state. For example, it was in modern absolute monarchy that the standing army and bureaucracy were realized in Europe.

Then, why did Greece and Rome not become Asiatic states? It was not because they were more advanced, but because they were relatively backward and maintaining the principle of reciprocity of the tribal society. Marx pointed this out. But the same can be said about European or Japanese feudalism. Feudalism is characterized not by the lord-serf relationship, but by reciprocity among the rulers. This does not allow despotic centralization. Seen from the center of civilization, this is a primitive state. The same is true about the 'world-economy'.

The market developed in Greece or Germany, located in the semi-periphery, where there was no state control of economy.

Wainwright: You have described the current emerging state form under the rubric of 'regionalism'. Could you elaborate upon what you see as this regional state form today? Are you thinking of regional economic alliances, such as ASEAN or NAFTA? If so, it seems to me that these are merely new combinations of forms of imperial and welfare states that do not alter the underlying dynamic of capital-nation-state in any fundamental way. In any event, would you agree that the world's geography today is defined by multiple conflicting regionalisms – what you call 'multiple regionalities' in the NAM statement of principles – and not only conflicting regions?

Karatani: I agree. Nation states appeared as segmented figures on the ground of the preceding world-empires. Because of this there is antagonism among nation states, but when they are threatened by other areas they form a 'wide area' based on their common culture and religion which they inherited from the world-empire. However such 'regions' are not something that existed there to begin with. It was formed in the current world capitalism. One regionalism triggers others.

Seen from the viewpoint of capitalism, regionalism is the same as what was called 'block economy' before the Second World War. Both were formed by the expansion of imperialist states which enclosed other states. Hannah Arendt stated that when a nation state expands it does not become 'empire' but becomes 'imperialism' because it does not have the principle of empire. In this sense, contemporary regionalism is closer to 'empire' than 'imperialism': they share a common religious, cultural background. I take this as something positive, but unlike some European ideologues I do not think regionalism can transcend the modern system. It cannot go beyond capital-nation-state.

Wainwright: In the NAM principles and also in 'Beyond Capital-Nation-State', you offer a quadrant to describe the spatial form of the nation, state, capital, association (Figure 4). Perhaps I do not understand the purpose of this table, but I feel that this part of your analysis is too simplistic. For one thing, feudal states and cities are dependent upon and

B feudal state	A agrarian community
C city	D association

Figure 4. Spatial forms of modes of exchange
Source: Karatani (2006, 2008c)

interconnected with agrarian communities, and some cities have existed without capital (or market economy).

More importantly, this table raises questions about the geographical nature of our political strategy. As I read it, your argument is that we must transcend the forms of exchange that continually give rise to nation, state, and capital. Yet, we do not wish to eliminate agrarian communities and cities. Thus, in my reading, while there may be some geographical relationship between nation-state-capital and community-feudal state-city, it is not so firm. How then should we conceptualize the relationship between association and geographical justice? Perhaps your concept of ‘existing amidst world intercourse’ is an answer to this question?

Karatani: What I want to say is something like this. At any stage a social formation is a combination of multiple modes of exchange. A social formation is determined by the mode of exchange that is dominant. In clan society, reciprocity is dominant. In pre-capitalist state society – whether Asiatic, classical antiquity, or feudal – mode B is dominant. Needless to say mode C is developed there, too. Concretely speaking, large cities developed there. Mode A or autonomous agricultural communities are there as well. A pre-modern social formation is a combination of these. Please do not take cities and agricultural communities here too literally. Because, for instance, cities too have communities and reciprocal exchanges, while there is commodity exchange in agricultural villages. Still, in cities commodity exchange is clearly dominant.

In the transition from pre-capitalist social formations to capitalism, mode of exchange C becomes dominant for the first time. But how is it combined to other modes? They are combined to constitute capital-nation-state, in a Borromean ring-like structure. Here nation is an ‘imagined community’ (Anderson, 1983), or an imaginary recovery of the community based on reciprocity (A). Capital-nation-state is not a creation from nothing, but the transformation of city, agricultural community, and feudal state. For this reason we find both continuity and discontinuity between the former and the latter.

Wainwright: How then do you conceptualize the existence of mode of exchange D in pre-capitalist social formations? And how does this relatively ancient phenomenon relate to the movement toward D today?

Karatani: In pre-capitalist social formations, the mode of exchange D appears in the form of universal religion. To put it differently, association takes the form of religion. In a capitalist social formation, D appears as associationism (socialism), which is devoid of religious quality. Still, it is related to the D of pre-capitalist stage.

Wainwright: I’d like to ask you about the current economic crisis and its geographical qualities. Recently you have discussed the current economic crisis by drawing on Kozo Uno’s analysis of the peculiarity of labor as a commodity:

Most Marxists suppose that crisis is caused by anarchic overproduction or the ‘contradiction between socialized production and capitalistic appropriation.’ Yet, this idea explains the possibility of crisis, but not the cause of its periodic occurrence. As far as I know, only Kozo Uno gave a convincing answer to this mystery.⁵ He explored the problem of crisis and the business cycle in terms of the population law of capitalism. Labor is a peculiar commodity; it is difficult to increase it immediately in a shortage and difficult to decrease it when it is overstocked. Workers dismissed in a recession comprise the ‘reserve army of labor.’ During periods of prosperity employment increases, wages rise, and the rate of profit drops, but since credit is still good, capital continues to produce according to the appearance of demand. Eventually, credit is ruined and a crisis takes place, suddenly revealing that

commodities were being overproduced. Every crisis, therefore, emerges as a credit crisis, but the cause of the periodic crisis in industrial capitalism lies in the peculiarity of the labor commodity. (Karatani, 2008b: 136; see also 2009a)

I can accept your argument here about the peculiarity of labor and the periodicity of crisis. Yet how would you relate this to the analysis of the uneven geographical quality of crises? Just as crises have a certain temporality and historical predictability, could we not also say that the geography of capital-nation-state is implicated in the current crisis? For instance, in *Adam Smith in Beijing* Giovanni Arrighi (2007) argues that the current crisis is partly the result of an enormous gap that has emerged since the 1970s between the global capacity to produce and the capacity to consume, and that this is fundamentally linked to the entry to Chinese workers into the global labor market. While for several decades, consumers in the core – especially the USA – were able to maintain increasing consumption (through expanding credit), the day of reckoning has come. Such an explanation seems to me consistent with your own argument, but it has the virtue of also bringing in the geographical dimension. Would you accept this type of analysis for explaining the crisis? Or do you feel that Uno's theory and its temporal dynamic is essentially all we need to theorize crisis?

Karatani: Concerning the theory of economic crisis, I was influenced by Kozo Uno long ago. Let me explain it a little. In the third volume of *Capital* Marx examines crisis extensively, yet his argument remains vague. One reason is that this volume was a compilation of Marx's notes by Engels. The causes of crisis which Marx pointed out can be roughly divided into the excess of commodity and the excess of capital. Simply put, the excess of commodity theory explains crisis by anarchic capitalist production. Orthodox Marxists took this view.

But there are two flaws here. First, the disorder or disequilibrium that is caused by the anarchy of capitalist production is always present, and therefore cannot analytically explain the specific causes of particular periodical or cyclical crises, such as the present one. The second problem is political. The kind of socialism that would emerge based on this

interpretation of capitalist crises is that of the state-run planned economy. State socialism of this kind has nothing to do with Marx.

To return to today's crisis: many say that this crisis was caused by deregulation of finance or neoliberalist globalization. They insist that the crisis could have been avoided by state regulation. But this is logically inverted. Capital and state carried out financial deregulation in order to get out of a chronic depression caused by the lowered rate of profit since the 1970s. It makes no sense to find the cause of crisis in deregulation without asking why the average rate of profit had been lowered since 1970.

Kozo Uno took up the theory of excess of capital, which is to say the lowering of the average profit rate. Uno attempted to explain periodical, cyclical crises by re-examining the peculiarity of labor as a special commodity. As a commodity, labor is unique. It is a commodity which capital cannot produce. It cannot be increased when it is in demand. Nor can it be decreased when it is in surplus. Uno maintained that this is the fundamental cause of crisis and business cycles. For instance, during an economic boom, labor power runs short and the wage rises, which causes the drop of the profit rate, but it remains unnoticed because of the overheated credit. The reality of things surfaces in crisis, where 'commodity overproduction' is revealed. Capitalist production falls into overproduction not because it is anarchic production, but because it is based upon 'excess capital', in turn caused by the peculiarity of labor commodity.

The idea of 'excess capital' is important because this undermines the view that state control is necessary to solve the crisis. It leads instead to the view that abolition of capitalism is only possible with the abolition of labor as a commodity. Marx never thought of nationalization of economy. For him, socialism is made possible with associated production, that is, cooperatives, in which there is no distinction between capital and wage-worker.

Wainwright: Hence the significance of Uno's theory of crisis.

Karatani: Yes. But here I would like to add two clarifications. The first concerns the peculiarity of labor as a commodity. What differentiates proletarians from slaves or serfs is not just the fact that they are based on free contract or the mode of exchange

C, but that those wage-workers, as a totality, buy back what they produce. By hiring proletariats to make them work and also by making them buy back what they produce, industrial capitalism became an autopoietic system. That is also why commodity economy or the mode of exchange C infiltrates into the foundation of the society at the stage of industrial capitalist economy. The point is that industrial capital can multiply itself through the increase of workers-consumers.

The second point is that capital cannot subsist without accumulation or self-multiplication. Capital signifies the total body of the process, M-C-M'. This formula comes from merchant capitalism – but in the case of industrial capitalism, labor commodity becomes important in the 'C' (commodity) part. The accumulation of industrial capital, which is based on labor commodity, is made possible in two principal ways. The first is to boost labor productivity, by way of technical innovation and consequently lowering the relative value of labor power. And the second is to inject cheaper labor power from elsewhere, which inherently introduces new consumers into capitalist society. Geographically, cheap laborers qua new consumers need to be supplied to urban areas from rural areas or the periphery. The capitalist economy requires the 'outside' in this sense; the 'outside' is found in the whole world. To put this otherwise, without constant innovation or creation of new worker-consumers, the accumulation of capital is impossible and would end.

Wainwright: How does your Uno-inspired analysis help us to interpret the current crisis?

Karatani: The current crisis of capitalism surfaced in the 1970s. During the cold war, advanced capitalist nations developed rapidly under the hegemony and protection of the USA which, however, was saturated in the 1970s. This brought about the soaring of wages, saturated consumption, the decline of average profit rate, and an excess of capital. Financial panic was avoided but there was perpetual stagnation. World capitalism sought the way out of this in globalization. For instance, the excess of capital brought about speculation and bubble economies throughout the world. But the stagnation of world capitalism was overcome only by introducing the new proletariat-consumers. Concretely speaking, this was to incorporate the developing area – previously

protected by the existence of the socialist bloc – into world capitalism. Creating cheaper labor commodity wage worker-consumers this way, world capitalism respired but along with dramatic expansion of market it is reaching its limit. This is at the foundation of today's 'crisis'.

To repeat, capitalism's limits are inscribed in the necessary conditions which make capital's accumulation possible. The first is the limitation of technological innovation. For instance, Adam Smith foresaw that his contemporary economic growth was a temporary phenomenon and capitalist economy would eventually be stationary. He did not think that technological innovation would continue. This expectation was not fulfilled. World capitalism kept expanding by perpetual technological innovation. As an example, it kept developing from cotton industry to heavy industry and then to durable goods. These phases divide historical stages of industrial capitalism. Today this has nearly reached its peak.

The second condition, namely gaining new worker-consumers, has also reached its limit. They no longer really exist due to worldwide deruralization. On top of this, the growth of industrial capitalism is premised on a third condition – namely, the inexhaustible nature that makes industrial production possible. Capital treats natural resources as inexhaustible and the natural world as capable of absorbing all the waste resulting from production. Industrial capitalist economy has kept growing until today because 'nature' in these senses – nature as human beings (labor power) and nature as environment – were effectively limitless; but at the current stage of industrial capitalism the limits are all too apparent.

Wainwright: How would you position yourself in relation to the history of Japanese Marxism? I do not know this history well, but it is my impression that one of the great strengths of the tradition is its persistent examination of Marx's critical method and philosophy of value. (I am thinking of such thinkers as Kozo Uno, Tsunao Inomata, Samezō Kuruma, Tadayuki Tsushima, and Hiroshi Uchida.) Although I recognize that your interpretation of Marx is unique (and that Kant and Marx are your main interlocutors), I wonder to what degree this tradition has shaped your problematic?

Karatani: In the mid-1990s at an Association for Asian Studies conference in the USA, I gave a talk entitled ‘Japan is interesting because Japan is not interesting’. I wrote this talk after a friend of mine called Masao Miyoshi – a professor of English literature at the University of California, San Diego, who died in 2009 – gave a talk entitled ‘Japan is not interesting’. It was not that I was opposed to Miyoshi’s view. The kind of Japanese traditions which people in the West praised until then were older ones such as tea ceremony, noh-drama, kabuki, and so on. But in the 1980s, with the background of the growing Japanese economy and bubbly prosperities, contemporary Japanese popular culture, such as anime, attracted people’s interest. As a result, people started to say ‘Japan is interesting’. But this kind of attraction withers with the bursting of the bubble. So Miyoshi said ‘Japan is no longer interesting’.

What I said was that this sort of ‘Japan’ is not interesting, but its collapse will reveal another Japanese tradition: the tradition of Marxism, as represented by Uno Kozo’s studies of *Capital*. Around that time, I was writing drafts of texts which later developed into *Transcritique*. I wanted to say that these works were a product of this tradition. But back then there were no English translations of my books and such a claim would have been meaningless. In this sense, I am grateful for your question.

I say ‘Marxist tradition’, but the Marxists whom I have in mind did not openly call themselves Marxists. I myself have never called myself a Marxist in Japan. This was because, until around 1960, orthodox Marxists (particularly Stalinists) were dominant in Japan. Those who opposed this group were not considered to be Marxists. For this reason they tended to refrain from calling themselves ‘Marxist’, despite their deep respect for Marx. Among them was Kozo Uno. I would also include Masao Maruyama or Takaaki Yoshimoto here. They were not known as Marxists in Japan. Maruyama is a scholar of politics, who considered Japanese fascism from a social psychological point of view, by resorting to Weber, Schmidt, and others. Yoshimoto is a literary critic who attempted to elucidate the superstructure with his theory of ‘Common Illusion’. They are renowned as political scientist and literary critic, but nobody sees their significant contributions

to Japanese Marxist ideas. In fact, their works are based on their regret that Japanese Marxist movements succumbed to ‘Emperor fascism’ in the 1930s. Oppression was not the cause. They turned to fascism because there were defects in their thinking. One example is that in Germany the philosophers of Frankfurt school began with examining the defeat of Marxist movements to Nazism. They adopted psychoanalysis to supplement this. What Masao Maruyama and Takaaki Yoshimoto did was similar to this. But unlike the Frankfurt school, they are not regarded as Marxists in Japan.

Wainwright: How would you characterize their position?

Karatani: Essentially, they tried to elucidate why the ancient myths of the ‘emperor system’ functioned in the system of highly developed industrial capitalism. And they questioned why Marxist movements stumble on the state and nation. Consequently, they came to emphasize what they characterized as the ‘relative autonomy of superstructure’. Of course, I am critical of their works. But my work is clearly in the line of people like them and based on Japanese historical experiences. By contrast, I owe almost nothing to Russian Marxism or Western Marxism. My interest is in understanding three things simultaneously: capitalist economy, the state, and nation. It is clear where this interest comes from. It comes from Japanese Marxism, or more precisely from the experience of its failure. This is the background to my theory of mode of exchange.

Wainwright: When I met you at the Rethinking Marxism conference, I asked you how you would reply to Slavoj Žižek’s (2006) critique of your analysis of money and LETS (local exchange trading systems) (in Karatani, 2001, 2003). If I remember correctly, you said that the political situation in Japan with NAM, and its endorsement of LETS, had changed dramatically, and therefore his criticism was already outdated. Could you clarify how the situation with NAM has changed? Is NAM still active, and if so, do you remain involved? It seems to me, too, that regardless of the particular experience of NAM, that it would not change your analysis of LETS.

Karatani: I disbanded NAM in 2002. Yet what disbanded was NAM as a proper noun, not the new associationist movement, just as the ‘communist

party' Marx describes in *Communist Manifesto* is not a proper name. After the disbandment many associations – which were closely or loosely connected to NAM – stayed active and matured. I am thinking of remobilizing them in the near future.

You asked me what I think of Žižek's critique of my ideas on LETS, which was part of his review of *Transcritique* in *New Left Review* (2004). I was not surprised by it, because there were many such criticisms in Japan. I am perfectly aware that we cannot simply counter capitalism by LETS. But later I came to learn that there was an episode behind Žižek's criticism. When I was invited to give a talk in Slovenia in 2006 – Žižek was outside the country at the time – the intellectuals who invited me told me that after reading *Transcritique* they immediately appealed to the government and started LETS. Yet they failed. Then I realized that Žižek's comment was not just a criticism for the sake of criticism. I felt happy that they actually carried out my ideas.

The designer of LETS, Michael Linton, is an anarchist who attempted to revive the concept behind Proudhon's Exchange Bank, or People's Bank. Marxists have the tendency of ignoring what Proudhon attempted to realize. In the case of Proudhon, countering capitalism is conducted mainly in the process of circulation. One of the reasons for this is that capitalist production was not yet fully developed then. Around the same time, trade unions became quite active in England. This led Marx to think that along with development of industrial capitalism, struggles in the process of production would be pivotal. This proved to be true – yet as industrial capitalism deepened, things changed. Workers' movements regarding the circulation process came to be foregrounded. This is typically called the 'consumers' movement', but it is conducted by workers themselves.

Wainwright: Hence the necessity of combined worker-consumer counter-movements.

Karatani: Yes. Looking at workers' movements in the production process alone, or through workers' movement alone, lacks an understanding about capitalist economy. Capital's accumulation process, M-C-M', is not completed in the process of production alone. It is completed in the process of circulation, when the workers as totality buy back what

they have produced. If so, countering capitalism should be carried out not only in the process of production but also in the process of circulation. Consumers are the proletariats placed in the process of circulation. Thus countering capitalism is made possible by movement of worker-consumers.

With the establishment of labor unions, workers become exclusively engaged with economic struggles. Some older Marxists, or wider circle of some new lefts, have thought that the proletariats do not stand up in the process of circulation because they are confined to their 'reified' consciousness, so they need to be awakened and revolutionalized. But in many cases, it stands to reason that workers share interests with capital in their production process, because if a company collapses the workers are in trouble as well.

As the struggles in the production process did not go well, the new left in developed capitalist nations turned to various civic movements of gender, minority, environment, and so on. And they end up as social democrats, who seek the way of reform by grasping state power by winning elections. This is not particularly threatening to capitalism. It is after all just a part of capital-nation-state. And we see no vision to go beyond this. This happened because Marxists have been dwelling almost exclusively on the idea of workers' struggle at the point of production.

Wainwright: So to counter capitalist accumulation we must transform the entire process of circulation.

Karatani: Not only this. We need to create production-exchange relations which are not connected to capital and wage-labor, such as cooperatives and a local currency/credit system. We should respect that Proudhon was the thinker who first recognized this. Needless to say, as Marx warned, it will not be possible to simply go beyond capitalism by these means. They are destined to lose if they compete with capitalist corporations.

The experiences of non-capitalist market economy systems, which reject labor as a commodity, are valuable no matter how small they might be in scale. I have said that capitalist accumulation will become impossible and the capitalist economy will come to a standstill. But this will not bring the end of human economy or human livelihood. If the capitalist

economy collapses, we will be able to survive with the current production force. For that purpose we need to create a non-capitalist system. But you cannot realize it all of a sudden. We need to make a preliminary rehearsal. For even when accumulation of capital becomes impossible, capitalism will not end naturally. The state and capital will resort to any means to survive. To counter this, we need the strength to counter the state and capital and we need to prepare a system where we need not rely on the state and capital.

Funding

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

Notes

1. The first chapter is an exception. Its brilliant reading of political representation and Marx's 'Eighteenth Brumaire' anticipates Karatani's critique of the state in *Transcritique*.
2. One of Kant's formulations of the categorical imperative in the *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals* reads, 'every rational being must act as if by his maxims he were ... a legislative member of the universal realm of ends [*Reiche der Zwecke*]' (1990 [1785]: 55).
3. *Transcritique* was published in Japanese in 2001 and in English in 2003. Yet in the Preface Karatani explains that the book is based on essays 'published in the Japanese literary monthly *Gunzo*, beginning in 1992. They were published alongside novels, which is to say that I did not write them in the enclosure of the academy' (2003: xiii).
4. Freud first used this well-known psychoanalytic concept in 1896. Karatani's recent use of it is closer to that found in Freud's late study *Moses and Monotheism* (1939).
5. Kozo Uno (1897–1977) was an important Marxist political economist who deeply influenced post-war Japanese Marxist thought (see, especially, Uno, 1980 [1964]).

References

- Anderson B (1983) *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. New York: Verso.
- Arrighi G (2007) *Adam Smith in Beijing: Lineages of the 21st century*. New York: Verso.
- Bailey S (1825) *A Critical Dissertation on the Nature, Measures, and Causes of Value; Chiefly in Reference to the Writings of Mr. Ricardo and His Followers*. London: St. Paul's Churchyard.
- Bloch E (1986) *The Principle of Hope*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.
- Boutry-Stadelmann B (2009) Karatani Kōjin's world republic: Possibilities and perspectives. *Frontiers of Japanese Philosophy* 6: 330–346.
- Cassegard C (2007) Exteriority and transcritique: Karatani Kōjin and the impact of the 1990s. *Japanese Studies* 27 (1): 1–18.
- Chase-Dunn C (1991) *Global Formation: Structures of the World Economy*. London: Blackwell.
- Derrida J (1978 [1967]) *Writing and Difference*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago.
- Derrida J (1994) *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, translated by P Kamuf. New York: Routledge.
- Freud S (1939) *Moses and Monotheism. Moses and Monotheism*, translated by K Jones. New York: Vintage Books.
- Fuminobu M (2009) *Postmodern, Feminist and Postcolonial Currents in Contemporary Japanese Culture: A Reading of Murakami Haruki, Yoshimoto Banana, Yoshimoto Takaaki and Karatani Kojin*. New York: Routledge.
- Hegel GWF (1996 [1821]) *Philosophy of Right*. Amherst, NY: Prometheus.
- Huber M (2009) The use of gasoline: Value, oil, and the 'American way of life'. *Antipode* 41(3): 465–486.
- Kant I (1990 [1785]) *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*, second edition, translated by LW Beck. New York: Macmillan.
- Kant I (1998 [1781]) *Critique of Pure Reason*, edited and translated by P Guyer and A Wood. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Karatani K (1997 [1983]) *Architecture as Metaphor: Language, Number, Money*, translated by S Kohso. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.
- Karatani K (1998 [1980]) *Origins of Modern Japanese Literature*, translated by B De Bary. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Karatani K (2001) The Principles of New Associationist Movement (NAM). Available at: http://web.princeton.edu/sites/sics/NAM_principles.pdf.

- Karatani K (2002) 日本精神分析 [*Psychoanalysis of Japan or Analysis of Japanese Spirit*]. Tokyo: Bungeishunju.
- Karatani K (2003) *Transcritique: On Kant and Marx*, translated by S Kohso. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.
- Karatani K (2004a) ネーションと美学 [*Nation and Aesthetics*]. Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten.
- Karatani K (2004b) 歴史と反復 [*History and Repetition*]. Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten.
- Karatani K (2006) 世界共和国——資本 = ネーション = 国家を超えて [*World Republic: Beyond the Trinity of Capital, Nation, and State*]. Tokyo: Iwanami Shinsho.
- Karatani K (2008a) Preface. In: *Transkritik: Kant ve Marx Üzerine [Transcritique: On Kant and Marx]*. İlk Basım: Haziran.
- Karatani K (2008b) Revolution and repetition. *UMBR(a): A Journal of the Unconscious* 2008: 133–149.
- Karatani K (2008c) Beyond capital-nation-state. *Rethinking Marxism* 20(4): 569–595.
- Karatani K (2009a) The end of capitalism? Revolution and repetition. Lecture at the Tate Museum, London, 8 December.
- Karatani K (2009b) Kant, Hegel, Marx. Lecture at Middlesex University, London, 10 December.
- Karatani K (2010) 世界史の構造 [*The Structure of World History*]. Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten.
- Karatani K (2011) How catastrophe heralds a new Japan. *Counterpunch*, 24 March. Available at: <http://www.counterpunch.org/2011/03/24/how-catastrophe-heralds-a-new-japan>.
- Karatani K (2012) *History and Repetition*, edited by S Lippit. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Labban M (2010) Oil in parallax: Scarcity, markets, and the financialization of accumulation. *Geoforum* 41(4): 541–552.
- Lippit S (2012) Editor's introduction: On repetition, singularity, and historicity. In: Karatani K (ed. S Lippit) *History and Repetition*. New York: Columbia University Press, xv–xxx.
- Mann G (2009) Should political ecology be Marxist? A case for Gramsci's historical materialism. *Geoforum* 40(3): 335–344.
- Marx K (1845) *Theses on Feuerbach*, translated by W Lough. Available at: <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/theses/theses.htm>.
- Marx K (1973 [1857]) *Grundrisse*, translated by M Nicolaus. New York: Vintage.
- Marx K (1976 [1867]) *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, fourth edition, Vol. 1, translated by B Fowkes. New York: Penguin Books.
- Marx K (1977 [1859]) Preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*. Moscow: Progress Publishers. Available at: <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1859/critique-pol-economy/preface.htm>.
- Marx K and Engels F (1970 [1845]) *The German Ideology*, edited by CJ Arthur. New York: International.
- Marx K and Engels F (1994 [1848]) Manifesto of the Communist party. In: Simon L (ed.) *Karl Marx: Selected Writings*. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 157–186. Available at: <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1848/communist-manifesto/index.htm>.
- Nietzsche F (2002 [1886]) *Beyond Good and Evil*, translated by J Norman. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Uno K (1980 [1964]) *Principles of Political Economy: Theory of a Purely Capitalist Society*, translated by T Sekine. Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press.
- Wainwright J (2008) *Decolonizing Development: Colonial Power and the Maya*. Malden, MA: Blackwell.
- Wainwright J and Kim S-J (2008) Battles in Seattle redux: Transnational resistance to a neoliberal trade agreement. *Antipode* 40(4): 513–534.
- Wallerstein I (1976) *The Modern World-System: Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European World-Economy in the Sixteenth Century*. New York: Academic Press.
- Wittfogel K (1957) *Oriental Despotism: A Comparative Study of Total Power*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Žižek S (2004) The parallax view. *New Left Review* 25: 121–134.
- Žižek S (2006) *The Parallax View*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

Dialogues in Human Geography

<http://dhg.sagepub.com/>

The footwork of critique

Kiran Asher

Dialogues in Human Geography 2012 2: 53

DOI: 10.1177/2043820612436931

The online version of this article can be found at:

<http://dhg.sagepub.com/content/2/1/53>

Published by:



<http://www.sagepublications.com>

Additional services and information for *Dialogues in Human Geography* can be found at:

Email Alerts: <http://dhg.sagepub.com/cgi/alerts>

Subscriptions: <http://dhg.sagepub.com/subscriptions>

Reprints: <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsReprints.nav>

Permissions: <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav>

Citations: <http://dhg.sagepub.com/content/2/1/53.refs.html>

>> [Version of Record](#) - Mar 21, 2012

[What is This?](#)

The footwork of critique

Kiran Asher

Clark University, USA

Dialogues in Human Geography

2(1) 53–59

© The Author(s) 2012

Reprints and permission:

sagepub.co.uk/journalsPermissions.nav

DOI: 10.1177/2043820612436931

dhg.sagepub.com



Abstract

In this commentary Kiran Asher reflects on the theoretical and ethical implications of the Karatani-Wainwright exchange in the context of development theory, including its postcolonial, postdevelopment, and feminist variants.

Keywords

development theory, Karatani, postcolonial theory, postdevelopment theory, transcritique

Like Joel Wainwright, I first heard Kojin Karatani at the ‘Rethinking Marxism’ conference at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, in 2006. To follow Karatani’s argument, that we need to think beyond the triad of capital-nation-state in order to imagine an alternative to capitalism, required agility and patience. And, as Wainwright notes in the introduction to his interview with Karatani (Karatani and Wainwright, 2012), to conceptualize this necessary-but-impossible-articulation of an alternative (X) is an aporetic challenge. That is, while one cannot quite imagine a world beyond capital, one cannot *not* desire it. Of course Marx’s *oeuvre* is central to engaging that challenge. But for Karatani:

To understand Marx’s intervention, one has to bracket the conventional categories of political economy, philosophy, and political philosophy. It is necessary to observe Marx’s footwork, regardless of the targeted object. And in so doing, there is one clear thing that stands out – Marx’s thought existed as nothing other than a critique of previous thought. (Karatani, 2003: 133)

Likewise for Karatani the moral and political economic domains are ‘thoroughly inseparable’,

and the task of analyzing capitalism to conceptualize a more just world is an ethico-economic one. To understand his contribution is to recognize that *critique* or *transcritique* – what he refers to as being transcendental and transversal simultaneously – is central to his method. This is especially true in *Transcritique* where he reads ‘Marx via Kant and Kant via Marx’ to scrutinize and reinterpret the world made by capital. In his exchanges with Wainwright, it is clear that his conceptualization of the alternative mode of exchange X emerges from the intertwined critiques of metaphysics and political economy. In their exchange, Wainwright examines the spatial or geographical dimensions of Karatani’s thoughts, and suggests ‘that transcritique is essentially a postcolonial critique of Eurocentrism’. In my commentary here, I examine this suggestion and its place in the debates regarding third world development and its alternatives.

Corresponding author:

Kiran Asher, Department of International Development, Community, and Environment, Clark University, Worcester, MA 01610, USA.

Email: kasher@clarku.edu

The dialogue between economic geographers on the relationship between their work and development economics in the first issue of *Dialogues in Human Geography* (March 2011) provides a useful entry point. Eric Sheppard (2011a) initiates that dialogue by remarking on geography's place in questioning [capitalist] development's teleology. In his response to his colleagues (about the overlaps and disjunctures between geography and economics), Sheppard acknowledges that geographers are not the only critics of development, and concludes by asking:¹

How resilient is capitalist globalization *tout court*? Under what conditions will a persistent failure to deliver the goods to the bulk of people and places (not to mention the more-than-human world) arouse and connect variegated contestations across the global South . . . to mobilize alternative imaginaries and practices in ways that make a difference? (Sheppard, 2011b: 101)

A clue to Karatani's response to these questions may be read in the Preface to *Transcritique* where he notes '[Marx's] *Capital* does not offer an easy exit from capitalism; rather only by its very exitlessness does it suggest a possibility of practical intervention' (Karatani, 2003: ix) Karatani's intervention is grounded in a non-teleological and transcritical engagement of Marx's critique of capitalism. Unlike scientific and revolutionary Marxists, he argues that Marx neither predicted the collapse of capitalism nor advocated communism as an alternative to it.² Rather he traces capitalism's dynamism and resilience through a retrospective focus on value theory in *Capital*.

To follow Karatani's transcritical logic is to trace the intricate footwork of his thoughts, a task that Wainwright facilitates through probing questions. Karatani revisits Marx's analysis of how value is produced under capitalism to flag its relative or relational nature. If the value of commodities is only determined relative to the value of other commodities, then not only the social relations of production but also the acts of exchange under capitalism deserve analytical and political scrutiny. Following this insight, Karatani argues that we might more productively see capitalism as a mode of exchange,

and not just as a mode of production, and one that is global from the onset. Subsequently, he traces how a world economy based on commodity exchange emerges in relation to other modes of exchange and is consolidated through its tight linkages to the nation state.

Karatani abstracts from the history and geography of various social formations and relations of exchange to think about the possibility of a world beyond nation-state-capital. The outlines of a different world-system, one where other forms of exchange (pre-capitalist, free and reciprocal gift exchange) might prevail, may be imagined in his discussion of the mode of exchange X (Figures 1, 2 and 4) and the new associationist movements. That is, Karatani's transcritical critique of the status quo is accompanied by a focus on alternatives, including a recovery of *communism* as a liberatory practice and thought. But this communism bears no relation to communism or state-socialism as they actually existed. Still less should his discussions of the associationist mode of exchange be confused with the popular and romantic proposals of *postdevelopment* and their promises of non-western utopias. In short, Karatani's alternatives are neither revolutionary nor romantic. Rather as Wainwright reminds us 'the grasp for associationism beyond the trinity of capital-state-nation is aporetical'. Facing this aporia opens the possibility of a practical intervention in the field of development through an ethico-economic critique.³ A brief sketch of the trajectory of development theory should clarify why such a critique is necessary.

The post-Second World War period is regularly and mistakenly taken as the beginning of development in the third world. Such is the ahistorical and uncritical view of 'modernization', the first formal 'theory' of third world development that emerged in the 1950s largely from US social sciences. Development and modernity's close linkages to colonial expansion, Enlightenment ideals of progress through reason, and capitalism disappear in this telling. Colin Leys (1996) explains that this early development theory ignores Marx and critical political economy because of its pragmatic and technocratic orientation, its ideological stakes in the cold war, and the centrality of the Bretton Woods institutions

in fostering national economic growth. In the narratives of modernization theory and its twin, development economics, capitalist expansion along strictly patrolled national borders was the path to economic growth. The benefits of this growth were supposed to 'trickle-down', and lead to development and democracy. When 'underdevelopment' and poverty continued to plague the third world, its causes were traced to such 'internal' roadblocks to national capitalist accumulations as corruption and pesky, persistent 'traditional values'. Needless to say, faith in rationality and capitalist modernity remained unshaken among modernization theorists. This faith in rationality also persists in their post-cold war successors and self-appointed world changers such as Jeffrey Sachs and Mohammed Yunus, whose millennium development goals and strategies to empower-through-microcredit are premised on a view of capitalist development as a solution, rather than a generator of inequalities.

In contrast, dependency and world-systems theorists such as Fernando Cardoso and Enzo Faletto, Andre Gunder Frank, Immanuel Wallerstein, and Samir Amin drew on their intellectual debt to Marx to argue that capitalist expansion depended on complex and unequal connections – between colonies, nations, and world markets. Furthermore, such capitalist development always expands unevenly, enriching some areas and impoverishing others, or forming 'cores' and 'peripheries'. These critiques were also anti-colonial in their premise that imperial expansion was necessary for capitalist accumulation, and grew out of the persistent crises of capitalism. Wallerstein (1976) argues that the capitalist economy was not an aggregate of national economies but a 'world-system' that depended on global markets from the onset. Scholars such as Cardoso and Faletto (1979) also mobilized non-orthodox readings of Marx to contest 'scientific' models of development and structural explanations of economic inequality. However, the radical insights of such critiques all but disappeared when institutionalized in official development policy (as economic nationalist solutions such as Import Substitution Industrialization), as well as in the socialism advocated by those with a more political persuasion.

Radical analyses of underdevelopment also emerged from feminists. For example, Maria Mies (1982) showed how capitalist accumulation (both colonial and national) necessarily depends on subsistence production and women's labor. But this gendered contribution is invisibilized in the narratives of commodity production. Feminist analyses of gender and gendered relations of power were, and are, similarly absent from broader development and critical theories.

Marx is no more than a ghostly presence in the poststructuralist inspired 'postdevelopmentalist' critiques of development that emerged in the 1990s.⁴ Arturo Escobar (1995), the author most often associated with postdevelopment positions, draws on the work of Foucault and Said to trace the discursive productions and representations of the third world and its peoples as 'underdeveloped' objects and subjects in need of intervention. He maps the operations and effects of 'third world development', and argues that what undergirds them is the Eurocentric, western rationality inherited from colonial moves. The core of his critique is that colonial practices and the national economic development measures that followed after the end of formal colonialism erased or marginalized other cultural and economic logics. His solution is to recover subaltern 'difference' and reject development in favor of alternatives that emerge from outside its hegemonic reach. While Escobar's postdevelopmentalism gestures at a postcolonial reading of third world development, he sidesteps Marx as being Eurocentric and thus does not engage in a serious critique of capital.

While necessary, this critique of Eurocentrism is inadequate for at least two reasons. First, it is logically inconsistent with postcolonial insights that the 'West' and the 'Rest' constitute each other.⁵ Second, notwithstanding its desires for alternatives to capitalism, it cannot explain why they are not immanent. The rampant and violent expansion of capitalism in the 21st century indicates that capitalism remains 'sticky'. Accounting for and critiquing the inequalities it engenders requires a serious engagement with the postcolonial insight that capitalist development emerges *in relation to*, and not just against, other logics.

Wainwright (2008) also remarks on these failures of postdevelopment and argues for a postcolonial Marxist critique of development, specifically ‘one that examines its power, its sway as an aporetical totality’ (p. 10).⁶ The aporetical totality of development is that ‘it was only development – not civilization, not modernity, not progress – that was universally taken up after the end of colonialism to define and organize the nation-state-capital triad everywhere’ (p. 12). The aporetical challenge of development is that ‘We cannot *not desire* development. Development remains an absolutely necessary concept *and* also absolutely inadequate to its task’ (p. 10). Wainwright proposes the concept of *capitalism qua development* to examine how capitalism comes to masquerade as development and why development solicits itself to address its failures. The questions of Europe and the nation state are critical to this examination: the former because of the linkages between European colonialism and capitalist expansion; and the latter because of its production as a seemingly natural and necessary unit of analysis of capitalism *qua* development.

As with Karatani’s transcritique and Wainwright’s other interlocutors (among whom he counts Marx, Gramsci, Derrida, Spivak, and Said), his critique of development is ethico-political. It is also explicitly postcolonial in at least two related senses. Wainwright does not take the subjects and objects of analysis as given or having an a priori existence. Instead he reads how they come into being in relation to other institutions and practices, and especially in relation to colonial discourses. It is in this register that one should read his question of ‘territory’. Territory here is neither simply a disciplinary geographer’s unit of analysis, nor yet the pre-existing space where capitalist development unfolds. Rather it is the spatial-ontological condition of possibility for the existence of capital-nation-state (Karatani and Wainwright, 2012; Wainwright, 2008). He contends that if such a proposition were true then imagining an alternative to capitalism would mean transcending territory. In their conversation, he invites Karatani to consider transcritique as a postcolonial critique of Eurocentrism in its attempt to make a world ‘that is not spatially organized in the

territorial form that has become dominant since the spread of the European empire’.

Karatani responds by way of Wallerstein’s world-system theory and Marx’s *Grundrisse* to note that the European world-economy became world capitalism in relation to other historical world-systems (such as world empires and systems of ‘tribal’ exchange). He highlights uneven geographies such as those of power and wealth prevalent in each of these world-systems, and the lack of uniformity in the way capitalism spread across the globe. This answer suggests that the postcolonial nature of Karatani’s critique of Eurocentrism is implicit. Also implicit, but no less relevant, a critique of Eurocentrism, may be read in Karatani’s attention to the importance of relations of exchange in Marx’s critique of capitalism. The focus on relationality means that neither a return to Europe (or in this case capitalist development) nor to a pre-capitalist non-West can emerge as a possible alternative to the capital-nation-state, and indeed Karatani does not suggest either. Attention to relations of exchange can contribute to a critique of Eurocentrism through an interrogation of the forms of knowledge and modes of exchange that were brought into being during the *longue durée* of colonial rule and which continue into the present. Reading Karatani via Spivak, and Spivak via Karatani, is key here.⁷ That transcritique is part of my homework.

Follow-up tasks also emerge from two illustrations of exchange that remain unelaborated. Karatani makes a tantalizing reference to Marx’s writing on the relations between humans and nature (Karatani and Wainwright, 2012) to note that relations of exchange are fundamental to Marx’s critique. This relationality is also evident in Raymond Williams’ (1980) contention that a world beyond capitalism needs different relationships between humans and the environment. Following Karatani, transcending current relationships between human nature and natural history to imagine different relationships necessarily involves wandering the labyrinth of questions about the theory of value, the value of nature, and how that value emerges relationally. It may be unnecessary to add that such alternative relationships cannot be found in ecofeminist ecotopias.

Karatani's implicit engagement with feminism is the second moment of exchange that I want to draw attention to. In *Transcritique*, Karatani flags how household labor became labeled 'unproductive' by industrial capitalism and the modern nation state, and quickly became gendered under commodity production and exchange. He also flags that male-centric revolutionary moments are limited in that they lack countermeasures to this gendered division of labor (Karatani, 2003: 294). Karatani's observations here echo those of a long line of unnamed social feminists, including Maria Mies, even though he does not share their analytical or political paths. For possible countermeasures to these gender, ethnic and environmental inequalities, Karatani's proposal is associational exchange. Perhaps his cautions against romantic dreams (pp. 282–283) of pre-capitalist or agrarian societies might serve as a reminder to him (as to us) that gendered relations of power and unequal divisions of labor can and do prevail in all modes of exchange. That is, women are just as likely to bear the unequal burdens of labor in gift and exchange economies (say those based on love or affect) as in commodity exchange, albeit in different ways. As with Karatani's postcolonialism, his understanding of power and violence in modes of exchange is mostly implicit.

There is much else that is implied in Karatani's critique of the capital-nation-state triad. For instance, Karatani argues that the world empires that preceded world capitalism expanded only as far as their military power allowed. In contrast, he notes that the capitalist world economy expands indefinitely. What he does not note is that the infinite expansion of world capitalism everywhere has been, and continues to be, accompanied by violence. That the violence of military power facilitates and seems necessary for such expansion is evident all over the world. Beyond the most obvious cases of Iraq and Afghanistan, one can cite several recent examples from Latin America, Africa, and Asia. But to be fair, Karatani acknowledges in the Preface to *Transcritique* that his analyses of state and nation, and those of underdevelopment and developing countries, are yet to be developed.

I read Wainwright's conversation with Karatani as an invitation to geographers, and by extension

those in the field of development, to read third world development transcritically. That task is not without challenges, not least because a transcritical reading of development is inseparable from critiques of metaphysics and ideology. Development studies could be said to share with metaphysics a concern with morals or the need to struggle towards a more just world. But the former is a field that remains bound to its practical orientation, where normative rationality remains unquestioned. Furthermore, as many of its critics have pointed out, it repeatedly proposes apolitical technical solutions to the political problems of social and economic inequalities – inequalities that are inherent to capitalist development. There is an explicit teleology, and a hidden ideology and hubris, to the logic that 'reason' (call it science, technology, subjectivity, agency) can lead to development, a good life, and a just world. This teleology and Eurocentric hubris are also evident in structural critics of development who seek in Marx a systematic repudiation of capitalism, and an alternative to it. We cannot not strive for a more just world. But as Gayatri Spivak repeatedly reminds us, to strive for development and justice is to move beyond 'benevolence toward others', and perhaps toward 'something that secures human dignity', which is how Karatani defines communism (Karatani and Wainwright, 2012). These are the impossibly difficult and necessary ethico-economic tasks that entail contending with the limits of human reason. That is, changing the world will require not only agility and patience, but also wisdom and love.

Notes

1. Indeed, there is a vast and burgeoning literature on development by its proponents and its critics. It is beyond the scope of this commentary to do it justice or to provide a comprehensive list of this literature. See Edelman and Haugerud (2005) and Roberts and Hite (2007) for two disciplinary anthologies of development debates. The bibliography related to the commentary in the March 2011 issue of *Dialogues in Human Geography* provides an excellent list of key sources for development geographers.
2. Karatani's point here may seem reminiscent of Meghnad Desai's in *Marx's Revenge* (2002). Like Karatani, Desai contends that Marx did not predict the collapse

of capitalism and the rise of socialism. But unlike Karatani, Desai distinguishes between Marx's early philosophical writings and his later political economic ones, reading the latter as Marx's 'scientific' analysis of capitalism as a dynamic, resilient system. Desai also differs from Karatani in that he reads Marx as a possible advocate of capitalism.

3. Such a reading of Marx is not entirely new in development studies, and Eric Wolf's (1982) work comes to mind when reading Karatani. For others it may invoke Karl Polanyi's contributions.
4. As with other development theories, this is not the place to discuss and assess the different positions of postdevelopmentalism. See Escobar (1995), Ferguson (1994), Gupta (1998), Mitchell (2002), and Saunders (2002), among others, for postdevelopmental critiques.
5. See Asher (2009), Gidwani (2002), and Wainwright (2008) for a review of the merits and limits of the post-colonialism of postdevelopmentalists.
6. Citing works such as Wainwright's 2008 monograph *Decolonizing Development*, Glassman (2011) notes that a generative discussion between Marxism and postcolonial theory is already underway in geography and development studies. One might also refer to Kevin Anderson's *Marx at the Margins* (2010) for another postcolonial reading of Marx.
7. Spivak's chapter 'Philosophy' in *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* (1999) and her essay 'Responsibility' (1994) came particularly to mind while re-reading *Transcritique* for this commentary. Both Spivak and Karatani critique the Enlightenment and explore the limits of human reason without rejecting their premises *tout court*.

References

- Anderson K (2010) *Marx at the Margins: On Nationalism, Ethnicity, and Non-Western Societies*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Asher K (2009) *Black and Green: Afro-Colombians, Development, and Nature in the Pacific Lowlands*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Cardoso HF and Faletto E (1979) *Dependency and Development in Latin America*, translated by MM Urquidi. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Desai M (2002) *Marx's Revenge: The Resurgence of Capitalism and the Death of Statist Socialism*. London: Verso.
- Edelman M and Haugerud A (eds) (2005) *The Anthropology of Development and Globalization: From Classical Political Economy to Contemporary Neoliberalism*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Escobar A (1995) *Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Ferguson J (1994) *The Anti-Politics Machine: 'Development', Depoliticization, and Bureaucratic Power in Lesotho*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Gidwani V (2002) The unbearable modernity of 'development'? Canal irrigation and development planning in Western India. *Progress in Planning* 58(1): 1–80.
- Glassman J (2011) Critical geography III: Critical development geography. *Progress in Human Geography* 35(5): 705–711.
- Gupta A (1998) *Postcolonial Developments: Agriculture in the Making of Modern India*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Karatani K (2003) *Transcritique: On Kant and Marx*, translated by S Kohso. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.
- Karatani K and Wainwright J (2012) 'Critique is impossible without moves': An interview of Kojin Karatani by Joel Wainwright. *Dialogues in Human Geography* 2(1). doi: 10.1177/2043820611436923.
- Leys C (1996) *The Rise and Fall of Development Theory*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.
- Mies M (1982) *The Lace Makers of Narsapur: Indian Housewives Produce for the World Market*. London: Zed Press.
- Mitchell T (2002) *Rule of Experts: Egypt, Techno-Politics, Modernity*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Roberts JT and Hite A (2007) *The Globalization and Development Reader: Perspectives on Development and Global Change*. Malden, MA: Blackwell.
- Saunders K (2002) Introduction: Towards a deconstructive post-development criticism. In: Saunders K (ed.) *Feminist Post-Development Thought: Rethinking Modernity, Post-Colonialism and Representation*. London: Zed Books, 1–38.
- Sheppard E (2011a) Geography, nature, and the question of development. *Dialogues in Human Geography* 1(1): 46–75.
- Sheppard E (2011b) Beyond geography and development: Response to my commentators. *Dialogues in Human Geography* 1(1): 98–102.

- Spivak GC (1994) Responsibility. *Boundary* 221(3): 19–64. Available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/303600>.
- Spivak GC (1999) *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Wainwright J (2008) *Decolonizing Development: Colonial Power and the Maya*. Malden, MA: Blackwell.
- Wallerstein I (1976) *The Modern World-System: Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European World-Economy in the Sixteenth Century*. New York: Academic Press.
- Williams R (1980) *Culture and Materialism: Selected Essays*. London: Verso.
- Wolf E (1982) *Europe and the People without History*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Dialogues in Human Geography

<http://dhg.sagepub.com/>

The challenge of X

Ian Graham Ronald Shaw

Dialogues in Human Geography 2012 2: 60

DOI: 10.1177/2043820612436937

The online version of this article can be found at:

<http://dhg.sagepub.com/content/2/1/60>

Published by:



<http://www.sagepublications.com>

Additional services and information for *Dialogues in Human Geography* can be found at:

Email Alerts: <http://dhg.sagepub.com/cgi/alerts>

Subscriptions: <http://dhg.sagepub.com/subscriptions>

Reprints: <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsReprints.nav>

Permissions: <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav>

Citations: <http://dhg.sagepub.com/content/2/1/60.refs.html>

>> [Version of Record](#) - Mar 21, 2012

[What is This?](#)

The challenge of X

Ian Graham Ronald Shaw

University of Glasgow, UK

Dialogues in Human Geography

2(1) 60–63

© The Author(s) 2012

Reprints and permission:

sagepub.co.uk/journalsPermissions.nav

DOI: 10.1177/2043820612436937

dhg.sagepub.com



Abstract

In this commentary Ian Shaw reflects on the alternative of X in Karatani's thought, linking it politically to the Leninist question of 'what is to be done?' and philosophically to Alain Badiou's theory of the 'event'.

Keywords

aporetical challenge, Badiou, event, Karatani, spatial ontology, X

When I read Kojin's Karatani's (2003) *Transcritique: On Kant and Marx*, I knew I had stumbled on something special. But it was difficult then (and now) to grasp the text in its entirety – Karatani's thought is so alive with a variety of themes, it is difficult to ever settle on a single idea. Perhaps that is the point of transcritique: it is mobile and restless, transforming viewpoints as it races along at the speed of 'X'. The Japanese philosopher should rightly be praised for his originality and accessibility, breathlessly conversing with Kant and Marx. Indeed, I cannot remember taking so many notes for a single work. The focus on consumers as active participants in capitalist circulation – and therefore vital to forging a more just society – was perhaps my most pronounced parallax. So too was seeing Kant, the godfather of Enlightenment thought, in a Marxist uniform.

Joel Wainwright's interview (Karatani and Wainwright, 2012) offers a successful and intriguing set of questions and responses, which both elaborate and extend the issues raised in Karatani's *Transcritique* and beyond. The interview will be interesting for many geographers, especially given Wainwright's repeated attempts to elicit the 'spatiality' of Karatani's thought. The loose focus of

my response is to engage Karatani's 'aporetical challenge'. Karatani's alternative to the unholy triad of capital-nation-state is called 'X'. This is the necessary but impossible alternative to the present order of things. The Kantian aporia smacks us in the face – there *is* an alternative, but through a noumenal sleight of hand, it is ungraspable. Addressing this point directly, Wainwright asks:

I find the conclusion of *Transcritique* to be profoundly aporetical. On one hand, you offer a powerful analysis of the Borromean ring capital-nation-state and the need to transcend it through the creation of practices that support X, which is social life based upon free and reciprocal exchange relations. Yet then it seems like you argue that we cannot achieve X, that X is impossible. And you contend that associations of associations – Marx's expression for communism – have not yet existed. Thus, could we say that the ultimate antinomy of *Transcritique* is: 'X must exist; X cannot exist'? (Karatani and Wainwright, 2012)

Corresponding author:

Ian Graham Ronald Shaw, School of Geographical and Earth Sciences, University of Glasgow, Glasgow G12 8QQ, UK.

Email: ian.shaw.2@glasgow.ac.uk

How do we respond to this antinomy? The initial response, I would argue, is frustration, and that is perhaps understandable. After a riveting and prolonged investigation into the intricacies and metaphysics of capitalism, Karatani's response feels inadequate. Perhaps Wainwright's friend, who suggested that Karatani proposes 'no real strategy of resistance to capitalism', is correct. But X is supposedly much *more* than a political alternative, 'TBA'. We should not simply view X negatively, as the leftover surplus of a ruthless form of economic organization. Rather, X is active. It is an *Idea* that interrupts the world, much like the specter Marx and Engels conjured in their famous *Communist Manifesto*. In Karatani's words:

For me communism is a regulative idea and not a constructive idea. This regulative idea, which would never be realized, keeps compelling us to supersede capital-nation-state. This regulative idea is not derived from our wishes, discontent or idealization. It compels us rather against our own will. This will not cease until it is fully realized. (Karatani and Wainwright, 2012)

There are tentative questions and comments I have in response. First, what is not immediately clear is why X, as a regulative idea, should be equal to communism. If X is an impossible transcendental, on what grounds can we properly call it communism – or indeed anything? Additionally, Karatani argues that:

Modes of exchange A, B, and C remain persistently . . . We cannot clear them out. But we need not be pessimistic, because as long as these modes persist, the mode of exchange D will also persist. It will keep coming back no matter how much it is repressed and concealed. (Karatani, 2009)

Does this therefore inevitably entail that X (D) only exists because of modes exchange A, B, and C, and not in spite of them? If so, would this give us a definition of X that was unavoidably negative – with X becoming an outside 'Other' unable to speak for itself? Finally, on what grounds can we be sure that X is an alternative that we would welcome?

These questions are not demands for specificity – I am not asking for 'constructive ideas' to follow. Instead, I am asking *on what grounds is X even possible* – a transcendental question. This would lead directly to the second question, the old Leninist question, of 'what is to be done?'

The French philosopher Alain Badiou is helpful here, and his resonance with Karatani is immediate. In an essay for the *New Left Review* titled 'The Communist hypothesis', Badiou writes that communism is also a Kantian 'idea':

'Communism' as such denotes only this very general set of intellectual representations. It is what Kant called an Idea, with a regulatory function, rather than a programme. It is foolish to call such communist principles utopian; in the sense that I have defined them here they are intellectual patterns, always actualized in a different fashion. As a pure Idea of equality, the communist hypothesis has no doubt existed since the beginnings of the state. As soon as mass action opposes state coercion in the name of egalitarian justice, rudiments or fragments of the hypothesis start to appear. Popular revolts – the slaves led by Spartacus, the peasants led by Müntzer – might be identified as practical examples of this 'communist invariant'. With the French Revolution, the communist hypothesis then inaugurates the epoch of political modernity. (Badiou, 2008)

Badiou gives a generic blueprint of what such an idea is:

What is the communist hypothesis? In its generic sense, given in its canonic Manifesto, 'communist' means, first, that the logic of class – the fundamental subordination of labour to a dominant class, the arrangement that has persisted since Antiquity – is not inevitable; it can be overcome. The communist hypothesis is that a different collective organization is practicable, one that will eliminate the inequality of wealth and even the division of labour. The private appropriation of massive fortunes and their transmission by inheritance will disappear. The existence of a coercive state, separate from civil society, will no longer appear a necessity: a long process of reorganization based on a

free association of producers will see it withering away. (Badiou, 2008)

The similarities between the two Marxists are perhaps unsurprising. Both passionately rally behind the communist idea. Yet they emerge from different philosophical corners. Karatani's transcritique shuttles between Marx and Kant. Badiou's materialist dialectic bounces between Plato and mathematics. The result is a philosophy founded on the disruptive relationship between 'being' and 'event' (Badiou, 2005), which he later calls a materialist dialectic (Badiou, 2009). More precisely, Badiou argues that every world is the finite manifestation of being, and these worlds are unable to express the infinite complexity they are drawn from. This leads to the constant threat of excess in a world. It is this excess, variously called an 'event', 'site', 'truth', or 'idea' that is the hallmark of political contingency in Badiou's writings. Indeed, Badiou's X is this event – the fleeting interruption of infinity.

To think of X not as an aberration, but as the ontological possibility of any world, helps frame my first question – 'on what grounds is X possible?' It also prevents X being read either negatively or theologically. The following question was 'what is to be done?' – a question tied to how subjectivity and subjects are deployed. For Badiou, X is a wager. A decision has to be made – is X worth fighting for? Indeed, Badiou thinks we are only alive when we live for ideas: 'We must therefore accept that for the materialist dialectic, "to live" and "to live for an Idea" are one and the same thing' (Badiou, 2009: 510). This militant struggle for ideas encapsulates Badiou's system of ethics.

I respect Badiou's stance, but feel it can exclude the everyday banality of being-with others. This is where I think Karatani's ethical comments shine. Karatani argues that we should treat each other as ends, rather than means. This leads Wainwright to ask 'Could we say therefore that communism is a metaphysics of dignity? That each person, singular in universality, is above all price and has no equivalent?', with which Karatani agrees, adding that Kant called such a society a 'kingdom of ends'. Of course, such a society is only possible with the free association of people, which is to say, communism. This would not happen overnight, however:

For even when accumulation of capital becomes impossible, capitalism will not end naturally. The state and capital will resort to any means to survive. To counter this, we need the strength to counter the state and capital and we need to prepare a system where we need not rely on the state and capital. (Karatani and Wainwright, 2012)

For Karatani then, X is not simply the impossibility of thought, but a challenge. It is a wager that another world is possible, and is only possible if we start treating each other as ends. As such, we do not need to grasp X. We need to act *as if* we have grasped X.

I want to now finish by pushing the spatiality of Karatani's thought. Wainwright's instinct here is correct – that *Transcritique* was 'missing' a spatial component. But I still find Karatani's response lacking: 'The concept 'transcritique' implies being transcendental and transversal at the same time. It means crossing spatial differences and different exchanges'. I am looking not for a theory about space, or even one coupled to space. I am looking for a spatial ontology. So too, it seems, is Wainwright, who writes:

I agree with you that a Marxist analysis should examine capital-nation-state as a triadic structure – a Borromean ring, to use your metaphor. Yet, this still raises the analytic question of the relation of the Borromean ring structure to the world ... It seems to me that something like the concept of territory is needed here ... Taking your analysis of Borromean ring structure, could we define 'territory' as the spatial-ontological condition that binds capital-nation-state in the world? (Karatani and Wainwright, 2012)

It is not that his discussion of world-economy fails logically – but rather it fails to secure an ontological definition of spatiality. In *Decolonizing Development*, Wainwright addresses this: 'In my view the key trinity is (nation-state)-capital-territory. It is the spatial, especially territorial relations of power that makes particular nation-state-capital couplings possible' (Wainwright, 2008: 35). I am in agreement with Wainwright here. I would only add it is (nation-state)-capital-territory that constitutes 'world', a term

undertheorized in geography today. We still have a lot to learn from the likes of Alain Badiou and Martin Heidegger when it comes to this important concept.

References

- Badiou A (2005) *Being and Event*. London: Continuum.
- Badiou A (2008) The Communist hypothesis. *New Left Review* 49: Article 2705. Available at: <http://newleftreview.org/?view=2705>.
- Badiou A (2009) *Logics of Worlds: Being and Event II*. London: Continuum.
- Karatani K (2003) *Transcritique: On Kant and Marx*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Karatani K (2009) Kant, Hegel, Marx. Lecture at Middlesex University, London, 10 December.
- Karatani K and Wainwright J (2012) 'Critique is impossible without moves': An interview of Kojin Karatani by Joel Wainwright. *Dialogues in Human Geography* 2(1). doi: 10.1177/2043820611436923.
- Wainwright J (2008) *Decolonizing Development: Colonial Power and the Maya*. Malden, MA: Blackwell.

Dialogues in Human Geography

<http://dhg.sagepub.com/>

X marks the spot: Marxist intercourse and Kantian anarchism in Kojin Karatani

Kanishka Goonewardena and Reecia Orzeck

Dialogues in Human Geography 2012 2: 64

DOI: 10.1177/2043820612436935

The online version of this article can be found at:

<http://dhg.sagepub.com/content/2/1/64>

Published by:



<http://www.sagepublications.com>

Additional services and information for *Dialogues in Human Geography* can be found at:

Email Alerts: <http://dhg.sagepub.com/cgi/alerts>

Subscriptions: <http://dhg.sagepub.com/subscriptions>

Reprints: <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsReprints.nav>

Permissions: <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav>

Citations: <http://dhg.sagepub.com/content/2/1/64.refs.html>

>> [Version of Record](#) - Mar 21, 2012

[What is This?](#)

X marks the spot: Marxist intercourse and Kantian anarchism in Kojin Karatani

Dialogues in Human Geography

2(1) 64–70

© The Author(s) 2012

Reprints and permission:

sagepub.co.uk/journalsPermissions.nav

DOI: 10.1177/2043820612436935

dhg.sagepub.com



Kanishka Goonewardena

University of Toronto, Canada

Reecia Orzeck

University of Vermont, USA

Abstract

In this commentary Kanishka Goonewardena and Reecia Orzeck analyze the theoretical, political, and practical implications of Kojin Karatani's valorization of the mode of exchange relative to the mode of production.

Keywords

Karatani, Local Exchange Trading Systems, mode of exchange, *Verkehr*

Kojin Karatani is Japan's foremost radical intellectual and one of the world's leading non-Western Marxists. But he is certainly not a conventional reader of Marx – partly on account of being an independent Marxist who claims to have had no influence from either Soviet or Western Marxism. A telling index of Karatani's originality may be found in a recent essay in *Rethinking Marxism* entitled 'Beyond Capital-Nation-State', which he begins by questioning the very basis of historical materialism as it is summarily sketched in Marx's famous passage from the 1859 Preface to *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*:

In the social production of their life, men enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will, relations of production which correspond to a definite stage of

development of their material productive forces. The sum total of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which rises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the social, political and intellectual life processes in general. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but on the contrary their social being that determines their consciousness. (Marx, 1969 [1859]: 503)

Corresponding author:

Reecia Orzeck, Department of Geography, University of Vermont, Burlington, VT 05405, USA.

Email: rorzeck@uvm.edu

Engels is widely credited for proceeding from this formulation by Marx to popularize the base-superstructure model of the materialist conception of history, with suitable methodological qualifications and contextual considerations underlining its dialectical rather than mechanical account of causality, which has been examined since with sympathy by such critics as Raymond Williams (1977, 1980) and rejected most influentially in the Marxist tradition by Louis Althusser (1969 [1965]; Althusser and Balibar, 1970 [1968]). For his part, Karatani dismisses the Preface as neither original nor essential to Marx. Unlike structuralist or post-structuralist critics of post-Marxist stamp, however, he does not object to either the alleged determinism or teleology of the Preface. Moreover, his purpose in questioning the centrality of this particular passage to its author's thought is not to discard the latter by disavowing the former, but to return to a more authentic reading of Marx for the sake of a more open and powerful Marxism beyond Marxism.

What Karatani coolly deletes from Marxism is the most basic concept of historical materialism: the *mode of production*. By so doing he intends not so much to displace as to encompass the notion of *production* found at the heart of virtually every reading of Marx within the broader notion of *exchange*, so as to advance in the name and spirit of Marx a superior concept: the *mode of exchange*. The mode of exchange thus becomes for Karatani the key Marxist concept for understanding not only the past and the present, but also an *actually* possible future called X. He effectively claims that the whole world appears quite differently, and more usefully so, when viewed through the lens of the mode of exchange, which brings into its purview not only capital, but also state and nation. In contrast to Marx's periodization of the 'pre-history' of humanity in the Preface in terms of more or less successive modes of production – Tribal, Asiatic, Greco-Roman, Feudal, and Capitalist – Karatani discerns in human history four fundamental social formations defined in terms of their dominant mode of exchange (A, B, C, D). As explained in his interview with Joel Wainwright (Karatani and Wainwright, 2012), these begin with the social formation consisting essentially of relations of reciprocity (A), which

is followed by societies of plunder-redistribution (B) and commodity exchange (C); this last, the currently dominant form of the 'capital-nation-state' combination, anticipates the final possibility X (D), which he characterizes in Hegelian fashion as a sublation of the original form of reciprocity dominant in A on a higher plane. Karatani fleshes out his four-fold mode of exchange matrix with arresting historical-geographical-sociological nuance, wherein social formations are conceived conjuncturally as overdetermined articulations of more than one mode of exchange involving various mixes of capital, nation, and state at various stages of their development. Gesturing toward the deliberately elusive X, he finds terms such as communism, socialism, and anarchism generally agreeable as names for it but strategically inconvenient on account of their political-ideological baggage. The closest Karatani comes to naming X is with the word 'association', following anarchist as much as Marxist tradition, recalling Proudhon's conception of socialism and Marx's definition of communism as the generalized actualization of 'free association'.

What are we to make of such a radical reformatting of Marxism? Karatani's spirited project of anarchist Marxism, profoundly influenced by Kant's call for a World Republic of Perpetual Peace (another candidate for X), is unlikely to please everyone. Anarchists are the ones most likely to find Karatani's theoretical innovations intriguing; and, on close reading, they may very well regard this thinker a more reliable guide to an exit from the present state of the world than Michael Hardt and Tony Negri. Card-carrying Post-Marxists for their part might wonder why a man so genial as Karatani still wishes to remain a Marxist. The reaction of committed Marxists to Karatani's provocation is harder to predict, though a hostile one is not difficult to imagine. This would stem above all from a desire to retain the primacy of the concept of production, with appeals to Marx's mature works such as *Grundrisse* and *Capital*. Did not the achievement of Marx's *critique* of political economy, after all, lie precisely in taking us beyond the realm of exchange, where so much of classical political economy was detained, into the realm of production, wherein he laid before us the secret of accumulation – the making of

surplus value? How could we now decline Marx's memorable invitation:

in company with the owner of money and the owner of labour-power, [to] leave this noisy sphere [of circulation], where everything takes place on the surface and in full view of everyone, and follow them into the hidden abode of production, on whose threshold there hangs the notice 'No admittance except on business'. (Marx, 1976 [1867]: 279)

Was it not there that we saw 'the secret of profit making', that is, 'not only how capital produces, but how capital is itself produced'? (Marx, 1976 [1867]: 280).

If such objections may legitimately be raised at the first sight of Karatani's post-1989 work, they are only likely to become more strident upon encountering his contemporaneous practical-political activities, which Wainwright rightly questions him about. Karatani's New Associationist Movement (NAM) was founded in 2000 in Japan, and modeled on the Local Exchange Trading System (LETS) founded in 1983 by Michael Linton in British Columbia. Although J.K. Gibson-Graham may have endorsed this proposal to escape the commodity form, it sounds in essence very much like a postmodern version of Proudhon's celebrated effort to get rid of capitalism by getting rid of money – which did not succeed even in the much more propitious circumstances of Europe circa 1848 and was subjected by Marx to an especially ruthless critique in *Poverty of Philosophy*. Marx, who was sympathetic to Proudhon's anarchism in many respects and shared with him the key notion of free association as the basis of communism, simply could not go along with the man Karatani calls 'perhaps the first socialist' on this matter of the relationship between money and capital. The latter, for the author of *Capital*, is a social relation. Overcoming capital therefore requires overcoming those social relations specific to it, which cannot be accomplished merely by meddling with even their most universal means of mediation: money. Actually existing forms of LETS, needless to add, have only corroborated Marx's point whenever their *local* money has come up against the force of *real-world* money. So Karatani's emphatic political investment in

LETS comes as a let down to even those favorably disposed toward his mode of exchange matrix beckoning us towards X; for classical Marxists, it may seem fundamentally misguided. It may be understandable given Karatani's privileging of exchange over production, but it is no less politically ill-advised for being logical within Karatani's order of things.

Betting on LETS and valorizing exchange above production – how damaging is the Marxist critique of these moves and how does Karatani defend them? To address these, it is necessary to consider at least Karatani's major work available in English, *Transcritique: On Kant and Marx* (2003), which Fredric Jameson describes as an 'immensely ambitious theoretical edifice in which new relations between Kant and Marx are established, as well as a new kind of synthesis between Marxism and anarchism' (quoted on the back cover of *Transcritique*). This powerful work should lay to rest the suspicion of any theoretical naiveté or 'misunderstanding' of Marx on Karatani's part en route to LETS via the mode of exchange: Slavoj Žižek, for example, is a little too harsh in accusing him of ignoring surplus value in his activism in LETS and NAM, in an otherwise useful review of *Transcritique* in *New Left Review* (Žižek, 2004). Karatani understands surplus value as well as the difference between price and value and the nature of money, on the basis of which he sharply underlines the error of Proudhon in *Transcritique*, while insisting nonetheless on the value of this pioneering anarchist's conception of free association to a vision of society liberated from capital and state. And he readily acknowledges the concrete limitations of LETS and NAM and the modesty of his own political contributions by means of them, while noting more soberly than do some poststructuralisms à la Gibson-Graham the difficulties of negotiating the formidable forces of capital-nation-state on the way to X. What Karatani remains committed to in LETS and NAM nonetheless is the anarchist-Marxist principle of free association and the vision of the withering away of both capital and state – which was not actualized in actually existing socialism but is essential for X. LETS and NAM, much like the Marx informed by Proudhon on the eve of the failed European revolutions of 1848, thus

point to the direction away from the actuality of capital-nation-state, towards X.

If Marxists can be persuaded to soften their critiques of LETS and NAM, then what of their assessment of Karatani's displacement of mode of production by mode of exchange? Here too, on patient inspection this iconoclastic Japanese thinker would seem to plead a case less incredulous than first suspected – and on the authority of Marx. As Karatani points out in *Transcritique* and elsewhere, the conception of production operative in the first volume of *Capital* is not narrowly economic; it refers rather to the ensemble of social relations that defines capital as such, and extends well into the political and ideological realms concerned with the reproduction of the relations of production. The more technical second volume of *Capital* likewise begins with a thoroughgoing deconstruction of the categories of production, consumption and circulation, before its analytical emphasis falls heavily on the last of these. In *Grundrisse* too, even when Marx limits himself to a critique of classical political-economic concepts, he refrains from offering too narrow a categorical definition of production; here he links production inextricably to consumption, in order to examine the entire process of capitalist accumulation that both encompasses and exceeds what classical political economists called production and consumption. 'Production is ... immediately consumption', Marx wrote there at the outset, because 'the act of production is ... in all its moments also an act of consumption' (Marx, 1973 [1857–1858]: 90–91).

This characteristically dialectical formulation rests on the richness of Marx's conception of social relations, which includes production relations as well as relations of reproduction in their manifold mediations. For Karatani, it is the *totality* of these relations that consists of the proper object of Marx and Marxism, which cannot be reduced to production relations or any other subset of it. He finds the key term for this social totality in the pivotal manuscript written by Marx and Engels in 1845/6 and then abandoned without publication to the 'gnawing criticism of mice': *Verkehr*. This word, which occurs in some memorable passages of *The German Ideology*, harbors several meanings in the context of

Marx and Engels's usage: traffic (the predominant contemporary translation from everyday German), commerce, communication, interaction, communion and association. In most English translations of Marx, it is rendered as intercourse. This is what Karatani means by exchange in his *mode of exchange*. Yet his word choice in translation is poor: 'exchange' lends itself all too easily to strictly economic connotation and interpretation. He should have stuck to the more polysemous yet precise *Verkehr*, so as to alert the reader to the irreducible *sociality* of this concept mobilized by Marx and Engels. If an English translation of it were needed, it should have been *intercourse*. *Mode of intercourse (Verkehrsweise)* would likely have avoided many of the predictable objections summoned by Karatani's apparently hazardous proposal to replace mode of production with mode of exchange.

However poor his terminological choice, Karatani's case for the importance of *Verkehr* is persuasive:

Marx widely and diversely used the term *Verkehr* up until the *Communist Manifesto* of 1848. His abandonment of the concept thereafter seems to have been caused by the fact that he submerged himself in the study of economics, which eventually led him to write *Capital*. He finally limited himself to the study of the whole system of capitalist economy by way of commodity exchange, thus making observations on the state, community and nation secondary. Therefore, to deal with those matters comprehensively, we should return to the notion of *Verkehr*. (Karatani, 2008: 572)

If we quibble with Karatani's semantics, we do so with the intention of registering with greater clarity the genuine merit of his call for a return to the authentic Marxist concept of *Verkehr* – especially those aspects of the totality of human-human and human-nature relations that are related to but also relatively autonomous from the economic relations studied by Marx. In addition to the economic, Karatani argues, there exist two other fundamental dimensions of *Verkehrsweise* to be engaged head-on in the long march towards X: the political and the ideological. To these correspond, as the title of Karatani's essay 'Capital-Nation-State'

suggests, two persistent thorns in the side of socialism that must be sublated in order to achieve X – *state* and *nation*.

The value of Karatani's contention lies in the challenges posed by state and nation to communist politics. The lesson he draws from them is straightforward: instead of expecting state and nation to step respectfully aside to make way for communism *after* the revolution, we must struggle *simultaneously* on three fronts against capital, state and nation in order to defeat the totality of our own *Verkehrsweise* of 'capital-nation-state' if we are to attain X. Such a political standpoint requires that we re-evaluate state and nation as entities with *their own histories* – which interact with the history of commodity relations that originated in the 'margins' of pre-capitalist economic formations and became the essence of capitalism with the commodification of labor. Karatani's consideration of the state on the basis of his return to *Verkehr* stands out in the Marxist tradition for at least two related reasons. The first is his insistence on understanding the state as not only a condensation of contradictory social relations at the decisive political level of society, but also as a product of the fundamentally antagonistic relations between different states constituting a Hobbesian world-system of interstate relations. Karatani characterizes the latter in 'friend-enemy' terms, with express gratitude to Carl Schmitt for theorizing this autonomous *interstate* dimension of the political and an appeal to Kant's notion of the 'World Republic' as the only horizon that could transcend it – with the help of Marxist critique and anarchist politics. The second is his resourceful use of the much-maligned concept of the 'Asiatic mode of production'. Stalin had notoriously banned it from Soviet Marxism in order to forestall Marxist questions concerning the bureaucratization of the USSR. For quite different reasons, Perry Anderson recommended for this concept 'the decent burial that it deserves' on the penultimate page of *Lineages of the Absolutist State* (1974), as a precondition for undertaking in the non-European world 'a concrete and accurate typology of social formations and State systems in their own right' (pp. 548–549). Yet in Karatani's own typology, no doubt influenced by a generation of Japanese

Marxists researching the Asiatic mode of production, the same concept lends itself to a critique of Eurocentric tendencies found in mainstream as much as Marxist historical scholarship. Karatani writes in 'Beyond Capital-Nation-State':

Marx stressed that commodity exchange arose only between distinct communities. Likewise, it should be noted that the state, as well, can only emerge between distinct communities. The formation of the state cannot be seen as the outcome of the internal development of a community. Rather, it appears when a community rules other communities. This does not mean that all states were formed by conquest. If one state exists, other adjacent communities must become states in order to protect themselves from being subjected. It is in this sense that states exist essentially against other states ... The state is a community that imposes tribute and service on other communities that it dominates ... This is typical of the Asiatic social formation, which is usually considered an early and primitive stage in history ... These states facilitated the creation of technology necessary to control the environment, as in the case of large-scale irrigation, which greatly developed agricultural production. What is no less significant is that they also created technologies for controlling people, such as bureaucracy, letters, media, religion and so on. The Asiatic states are not elementary. (Karatani, 2008: 579–580)

In these reflections Karatani lays the basis for a suggestive comparative historical-sociological alternative to the mainstreams of Eurocentric teleology culminating – after the defeat of 'actually existing socialism' – in the 'end of history'. The central terms of his view of history are borrowed from a figure no less reviled than Schmitt by Marxists: Karl Wittfogel, the author of *Oriental Despotism* (1957), who proposed a theory of core, marginal, and submarginal space in the pre-capitalist world. Comparable conceptions have been advanced subsequently by scholars possessing more admirable Leftist political credentials: centre, semi-periphery, and periphery in Immanuel Wallerstein's 'world-system'; metropolis and satellite in Andre Gunder Frank's 'development of underdevelopment'; or centre and

periphery in Samir Amin's 'accumulation on a world scale'. Such perspectives on the world impress upon Karatani the need to study social formations in relation to other social formations in a hierarchically interconnected world. In general, he sees the margin as being unable to resist incorporation into the core; whereas the submargin is seen to exercise relative autonomy in appropriating selective features of the core and rejecting others while developing its own characteristics. Germanic societies as well as Japan find their place in this scheme 'on the [sub]margins of Asiatic empires and in direct relation to them' (Karatani, 2008: 581). It was thus possible for feudalism to evolve in these regions of the world rather than in countries that lay at the margin of Chinese and Indian Asiatic formations such as Korea, Vietnam, or Sri Lanka – thanks to their inheritance of relatively strong relations of reciprocity that proved catalytic in the development of private property. The decentralized structure of those feudal societies was more favorably disposed towards the subsequent consolidation of capitalism than Asiatic societies, wherein plunder-redistribution relations dominated under bureaucratic centralization. In advancing such hypotheses for historical-geographical research, Karatani undermines the commonplace mapping of the stylized political distinction between Asian despotism and European democracy on to the ideological-spatial division between Occident and Orient. He finds, in contrast, equivalents of Athenian 'democracy' in contemporaneous China, pointing in *both* cases to the emergence and imposition of the *state* as the decisive force against the politics of the polis. The case of China is familiar enough to Europeans from Wittfogel and other Sinologists. Yet few Occidental minds would follow Karatani in regarding Alexander the Great of Macedonia, whose imperial conquest of the Asian empires sounded the death knell of the ethos of Athens, as an Oriental Despot.

There is clearly more to Karatani than this. As a philosopher, his signal contribution has been a novel juxtaposition of Kant and Marx in *Transcritique*, offering a Kantian reading of Marx and a Marxist reading of Kant without reducing one to the other, so as to inject an ethical dimension to the critique of political economy while advancing a political-economic critique of ethics. Methodologically, this

work revolves around the theorization of an irreducible gap between antinomic perspectives – such as the one Marx encountered between David Ricardo's and Samuel Bailey's irreconcilable conceptions of value that led, according to Karatani in *Transcritique* (2003: 193), to his most radical 'epistemological break' between *Grundrisse* and *Capital*, in the discovery of money and commodity form. It is evident that the philosophical grounding of this thinker who began his career as a literary critic before engaging political economy lies at the heart of his historical-geographical-sociological-anthropological sensibilities as much as anarchist-Marxist political orientation. Given the impossibility of accessing such a wide-ranging and original *oeuvre* from any academic-disciplinary perspective, it may be apt to attempt a balance sheet of Karatani's contribution by comparing him to a few other Marxists who have proposed their own 'triads'. Two suggest themselves for the purpose: Henri Lefebvre and Giovanni Arrighi. Both offered alternatives to the base-superstructure model by proposing different conceptions of social totality: the levels of global, urban, and everyday life in Lefebvre (most succinctly formulated in *The Urban Revolution*, 2003 [1970]); and, in Arrighi's case, the grand theorization of the levels of material life, market exchange and global geo-political-economy borrowed from Fernand Braudel. Both registered as well the role of the state in an original way within the terms of their totalities. Key to Arrighi's *The Long Twentieth Century* (1994) has been the distinction made between capitalism and the market economy and the identification of capitalism with the state by Braudel in *Afterthoughts on Material Civilization and Capitalism*:

[T]he modern state, which did not create capitalism but only inherited it, sometimes acts in its favor and at other times against it; it sometimes allows capitalism to expand and at other times destroys its mainspring. Capitalism only triumphs when it becomes identified with the state, when it is the state. (Braudel, 1977: 64)

In his 'global level' – the union of 'neo-dirigisme' and 'neo-liberalism' – Lefebvre likewise links the

state to capital, and accords considerable autonomy to it in *De l'État* (1976–1978) by means of the concept of the ‘state mode of production’ (*mode de production étatique*). In so doing he makes a case for *autogestion* (self-management), reminding communists of Marx’s vision of the ‘withering away of the state’. Karatani, then, is by no means the only heterodox thinker ‘deeply in awe of Marx’ (*Transcritique*: x) to theorize the state in an original way; to suggest a rapprochement between anarchism and Marxism; or to urge us to broaden political engagement beyond the laws of motion of capital for the sake of communist politics. Yet by the same token he belongs with Lefebvre, Althusser, and a handful of others who have read Marx in a radical and original way. There need be no assurance that anyone will fully agree with Karatani’s reading of *Capital* or his idiosyncratic rejection of historical materialism *tout court*; but it is safe to say that radical readers of his *Transcritique* and related texts could only sharpen the quality of their own Marxisms and become better qualified to answer the question: ‘what is to be done?’

References

- Althusser L (1969 [1965]) Contradiction and overdetermination. In: L Althusser *For Marx*, translated by B Brewster. London: Verso.
- Althusser L and Balibar E (1970 [1968]) *Reading 'Capital'*, translated by B Brewster. London: New Left Books.
- Anderson P (1974) *Lineages of the Absolutist State*. London: Verso.
- Arrighi G (1994) *The Long Twentieth Century*. London: Verso.
- Braudel F (1977) *Afterthoughts on Material Civilization and Capitalism*, translated by PM Ranum. Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Karatani K (2003) *Transcritique: On Kant and Marx*, translated by S Kohso. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.
- Karatani K (2008) Beyond capital-nation-state. *Rethinking Marxism* 20(4): 569–595.
- Karatani K and Wainwright J (2012) ‘Critique is impossible without moves’: An interview of Kojin Karatani by Joel Wainwright. *Dialogues in Human Geography* 2(1). doi: 10.1177/2043820611436923.
- Lefebvre H (1976–1978) *De l'État*, four volumes. Paris: UGE.
- Lefebvre H (2003 [1970]) *The Urban Revolution*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Marx K (1969 [1859]) Preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*. In: Marx K and Engels F *Selected Works*, Volume 1. Moscow: Progress Publishers, 502–506.
- Marx K (1973 [1857–1858]) *Grundrisse*, translated by M Nicolaus. London: Penguin and *New Left Review*.
- Marx K (1976 [1867]) *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, fourth edition, Vol. 1, translated by B Fowkes. New York: Penguin Books.
- Williams R (1977) Base and superstructure. In: R Williams *Marxism and Literature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 75–82.
- Williams R (1980) Base and superstructure in Marxist cultural theory. In: R Williams *Problems in Materialism and Culture*. London: Verso, 31–49.
- Wittfogel K (1957) *Oriental Despotism: A Comparative Study of Total Power*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Žižek S (2004) The parallax view. *New Left Review* 25: 121–134.

Dialogues in Human Geography

<http://dhg.sagepub.com/>

Comments in reply

Joel Wainwright

Dialogues in Human Geography 2012 2: 71

DOI: 10.1177/2043820612436939

The online version of this article can be found at:

<http://dhg.sagepub.com/content/2/1/71>

Published by:



<http://www.sagepublications.com>

Additional services and information for *Dialogues in Human Geography* can be found at:

Email Alerts: <http://dhg.sagepub.com/cgi/alerts>

Subscriptions: <http://dhg.sagepub.com/subscriptions>

Reprints: <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsReprints.nav>

Permissions: <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav>

Citations: <http://dhg.sagepub.com/content/2/1/71.refs.html>

>> [Version of Record](#) - Mar 21, 2012

[What is This?](#)

Comments in reply

Joel Wainwright

The Ohio State University, USA

Dialogues in Human Geography
2(1) 71–75
© The Author(s) 2012
Reprints and permission:
sagepub.co.uk/journalsPermissions.nav
DOI: 10.1177/2043820612436939
dhg.sagepub.com



Abstract

In his response Joel Wainwright deploys some passages from Kant to draw out some of the theoretical and political differences between Kojin Karatani and Michel Foucault.

Keywords

Aufklärung, Foucault, Kant, Karatani, X

I thank these commentators for their insightful remarks. It is not for me to reply to their criticisms of Karatani's thought. Instead, I would like to extend this dialogue with some remarks on the implications of reading Karatani, following upon themes from the three responses.

Each of the respondents places Karatani in conversation with a particular social theorist or body of theory. For Ian Shaw, Karatani provides us with a fruitful counterpoint to Alain Badiou, since both philosophers offer us with an original Marxist conception of the world. Kanishka Goonewardena and Reecia Orzeck place Karatani in conversation with Fernand Braudel and Giovanni Arrighi, with whom he shares a world-historical purview, then conclude that Karatani belongs on the bookshelf alongside Marxist luminaries Henri Lefebvre and Louis Althusser. Lastly, Kiran Asher finds that Karatani's work provides a powerful means to deepen the postcolonial critique of development and postdevelopment. Let me offer a few remarks on these suggestions, all of which seem valid.

The first point to note is that these names do not overlap (indeed I doubt Badiou, Althusser, and Escobar have ever been linked together). Such a diversity of views on the place of Karatani's

contributions plainly reflects the breadth and novelty of his thought. Why else would readers of Karatani, including these reviewers, imagine him contributing to multiple distinct literatures and place him in company with such luminary philosophers? The impulse to compare Karatani with Western Marxists in particular reflects the degree to which that tradition (only one substream of Marxist philosophy and practice) largely shapes the interpretation of Marx in geography.¹ This is not to suggest that Karatani's thought should be seen as opposed to Western Marxism; rather, it is to claim that a profound thinker like Karatani should challenge our reference points. To say this otherwise, I agree with Kiran Asher that Karatani could be read – like Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, with whom Karatani shares many interesting parallels – as a postcolonial Marxist working both within and outside of 'western'

Corresponding author:

Joel Wainwright, Department of Geography, The Ohio State University, Columbus, OH 43210, USA.

Email: wainwright.11@osu.edu

philosophy. The same could be said of Kant and Marx.

Rather than judge the merits of the commentators' specific suggestions, let me offer another potential interlocutor whom geographers might wish to read alongside Karatani: Michel Foucault. Since its critical turn, the discipline's human geographers have drawn most readily from two theorists above all others: Marx and Foucault. Year in and out, it seems that they are the most-discussed, most-assigned, most-cited social theorists in human geography. In this light, where might Karatani open debates in human geography? Obviously he does not displace Marx (though he could influence how we read him). But Karatani's work does challenge our discipline's reverence for Foucault. This claim is clearly one that cannot be elaborated in the space of this short reply.² But let me offer an illustration to suggest how reading Karatani might change our reception of Foucault.

On 5 January 1983, Foucault initiated his second-to-last lecture course with a pair of lectures comprised of commentaries on Kant's 1784 essay 'What is Enlightenment?'.³ The first hour of Foucault's lecture reads Kant's essay to situate it within modern philosophy – Foucault claims that Kant 'founded the two great traditions which have divided modern philosophy' (Foucault, 2010 [1983]: 20) – and to foreshadow the fundamental questions that Foucault will pursue in his lectures. He begins the second hour of his lectures with a 'rather more precise analysis' (p. 25) of certain points in Kant's text, beginning with its famous opening paragraph where Kant defines Enlightenment as 'man's emergence from his self-incurred immaturity' (Kant, 2004 [1784]: 54) and posits that the motto of Enlightenment is '*Sapere aude!* Have courage to use your *own* understanding!' (p. 54). Foucault patiently unpacks Kant's key terms and begins to unravel the text's paradoxes. Foucault gives one of these terms, 'tutelage', special emphasis (Foucault, 2010 [1983]: 28–33), as he examines how Kant argues that Enlightenment – conceptualized as a way out of tutelage – may come about. (To say the least, this is a question that is related to the question of social transformation.) Foucault observes that Kant's conception of tutelage here is clearly not simply an effect of 'political-judicial' repression, that tutelage is not simply the result of a seizure of power (p. 29). Rather

Foucault argues that tutelage exists, according to Kant, because 'men are unable or do not wish to conduct themselves, and others have obligingly come forward to conduct them' (p. 29). Now before going any further let me say that I am in general agreement with Foucault to this point, but that we should be careful not to agree too quickly with Foucault's reading of the evidence for this point, or its implications. Let me elaborate.

Foucault extends several points of evidence for his reading, but places special emphasis on the lines which follow where Kant uses three examples to illustrate the condition of tutelage. To quote Kant:

If I have a book to have understanding in place of me, a spiritual adviser to have a conscience for me, a doctor to judge my diet for me, and so on, I need not make any efforts at all. (Kant, 2004 [1784]: 54)⁴

Foucault offers a remarkable reading of this sentence in which he posits that these three examples anticipate Kant's three critiques (Foucault, 2010 [1983]: 30–32). This subsection of his lecture concludes with the observation that Kant's purpose in examining tutelage (and with the three examples) is not to suggest that we who remain under tutelage – i.e. without Enlightenment – are neither suffering some moral lack nor mere repression. Summarizing, Foucault explains:

I don't think that Kant is setting his sights on moral faults here, but actually on a sort of deficit in the relationship of autonomy with ourselves which enables us to make use of our reason and our morality. Consequently, what *Aufklärung* [Enlightenment] has to do, and is in the process of doing, is precisely to redistribute the relationships between government of self and government of others. (Foucault, 2010 [1983]: 33)⁵

The question then arises: how does Kant's essay allow us to conceptualize the barriers we face in rearranging what Foucault calls 'the relationship of autonomy with ourselves'?

At this juncture there is a remarkable gap in Foucault's patient walk through the first two

paragraphs of Kant's text. Immediately after the just-cited sentence where Kant offers his three examples of tutelage – 'If I have . . . understanding in place of me . . . and so on, I need not make any efforts at all' – Kant offers a lapidary explanation of the *form* of his lacking-courage for *Aufklärung*, writing: 'I need not think, *so long as I can pay*; others will soon enough take the tiresome job over for me' (Kant, 2004 [1784]: 54, my italics). How can we read this sentence except as a critique of the ethical consequences of our collective dependence upon the sale and purchase of labor power? Kant, we might remember, wrote these lines on the eve of the French Revolution, the event which would consecrate the unification of the capital-nation-state trinity. Anticipating Marx's critique of capitalism, Kant suggests that our release from tutelage will require us to confront the essence of our social formation. For what binds us in tutelage, what saps our courage to think, is the very freedom we associate with having money – especially as it represents potential command of another's labor power. The 'deficit in the relationship of autonomy to oneself' that Foucault identifies at the heart of Kant's critique centers upon the consequences of value form for our relationships with ourselves – and for the very possibility of *Aufklärung*.

Such a reading of Kant is indebted, of course, to Karatani, whose project since the collapse of state communism has been to try to reconstitute Marx's critique of capitalism in practical moral terms. Karatani and Foucault agree that our political-philosophical struggles today play out upon a terrain shaped decisively by Kant. The question is how, and to what end? In the Preface to *Transcritique*, Karatani explains his intentions in these terms: 'This, to state it outright, is a project to reconstruct the metaphysics called communism.' Nothing would be more foreign to Foucault than such a project. Yet nothing, I think, is more urgent today.

Consider state power. The tensions between Foucault and Karatani's readings of Kant can be further clarified by noting that both critics are concerned with the task of explaining the state. In their approach both thinkers stand at odds with the Hegelian tradition (including Engels, Lenin, and Gramsci). As we discussed in the interview, underlying Karatani's contention regarding the necessity of overcoming

nation, state, and capital simultaneously is an argument that nation and state exist prior to capital – and for autonomous reasons. Karatani argues that 'the state, like capital, is driven by its own certain *autonomous* power – which won't be dissolved by the globalization of capitalism' (Karatani, 2008: 579–580). The 'autonomy' of state power stems from its roots in a particular form of exchange, i.e. plunder, which is neither free nor reciprocal, and whereby one group threatens to seize control of another's resources.

Leninists have long underestimated Marx's own contempt for the state and overestimated the likelihood that the state would wither away after a communist revolution. Today these estimations are no small matter, because in the face of the global dual crisis of capitalism – economic and ecological – we find everywhere countermovements that seek a theory of the possible transcendence of capital-nation-state. And, as Karatani explains:

When individual national economies are threatened by the global market, they demand the protection (redistribution) of the state and/or bloc economy, at the same time as appealing to national cultural identity [as indeed has occurred throughout the world since the onset of the current crisis – JW]. So it is that any counteraction to capital must be one targeted against the state and nation (community). (Karatani, 2008: 583)

Karatani therefore calls for global revolution in the name of 'associationism', that is, for a society based upon free and reciprocal exchange, organized via the association of associations. Practically speaking, this means the creation of a movement of consumers qua workers everywhere, organized through coordinated 'immanent and ex-scendent' struggles (see Karatani, 2003: section 7). As Karatani elaborates:

[C]ountermovements against the state and capitalism in each nation are cause sine qua non. Concretely, this requires the creation of a noncapitalist alternative economy based upon reciprocal exchange at the level of transnational networks – that is, without state dependence. But if these movements were to reach a certain level of development, they would certainly face disruption by the state and capital; transnational networks would be

blocked and divided. Therefore, countermovements from ‘outside’ or ‘above’ are just as necessary. (Karatani, 2008: 591)

Karatani’s reading of Kant and Marx aims to discern the challenges facing these countermovements as well as to clarify the means to realize alternatives. Drawing on a distinction from Kant’s practical ethics, Karatani concludes that we should not treat X – the task of transcending capital-nation-state – as a constitutive idea, but as a regulative idea. This implies living so as to reorganize society around a form of exchange which is at once free and reciprocal. Such a form of exchange would exist outside the circuit of M-C-M’ and would not treat labor-power as a commodity. The model here is that of associations of combined consumers/producers cooperatives, or better, a society organized as an ensemble of association of free and equal producers (to repeat one of Marx’s expressions for communism). Clearly, building such relations requires transcending value form and money. Thus in order to facilitate the growth of an association of free and equal producers, Karatani reasons, we must ‘establish a financial system (or a system of payment/settlement) based on a currency that does not turn to capital, namely, that does not involve interest’ (Karatani, 2003: 297). That is, we must be able to conduct exchanges with a means other than money as we know it (see Mann, 2008). All this is unlikely to occur soon on the global scale, yet again this is the point of X: to articulate a conception of practical ethics so that we may live *as if* it were possible to transcend capital-nation-state, knowing that such transcendence is effectively impossible. This is part of what it means to treat X as a regulative idea.

The need for such an idea is not new, but today it is especially urgent. Writing in the aftermath of the 11 March 2011 Tōhoku earthquake and tsunami – an event which raises fundamental questions of the coming social-ecological form of the world – Karatani writes:

[G]lobal capitalism will no doubt become unsustainable in 20 or 30 years. The end of capitalism, however, is not the end of human life. Even without capitalist economic development or competition, people are able to live. Or rather, it is only then that

people will, for the first time, truly be able to live. Of course, the capitalist economy will not simply come to an end. Resisting such an outcome, the great powers will no doubt continue to fight over natural resources and markets. Yet I believe that the Japanese should never again choose such a path. Without the recent earthquake, Japan would no doubt have continued its hollow struggle for great power status, but such a dream is now unthinkable and should be abandoned. It is not Japan’s demise that the earthquake has produced, but rather the possibility of its rebirth. It may be that only amid the ruins can people gain the courage to stride down a new path. (Karatani, 2011)

It will take more than courage to ‘stride down a new path’, in Japan or elsewhere. We would also need a lucid, critical conception of the world. It is in this sense that the potential inherent in an encounter with Professor Karatani’s thought may be realized.

Notes

1. I include myself in this disciplinary self-critique.
2. Žižek has (I suspect) a similar claim in mind when he writes that *Transcritique* is ‘a must for everyone who wants to break the deadlock of “cultural” resistance to capitalism, and reassert the actuality of Marx’s critique of political economy’ (Žižek, 2004: 134).
3. These lectures are published in English as *The Government of Self and Others* (Foucault, 2010 [1983]). Foucault died 25 June 1984.
4. Foucault cites the same lines (in German and French) in his lecture (2010 [1983]: 30–31).
5. These relationships – between government of self and others – form the object of Foucault’s 1983 course (hence the book’s title). More generally, the task of grasping them ethically dominates Foucault’s late writings.

References

- Foucault M (2010 [1983]) *The Government of Self and Others: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1982–1983*, translated by G Burchell. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Kant I (2004 [1784]) What is enlightenment? In: Kant I *Political Writings*, edited by H Reiss, translated by H Nisbet. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 54–60.

- Karatani K (2003) *Transcritique: On Kant and Marx*, translated by S Kohso. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.
- Karatani K (2008) Beyond capital-nation-state. *Rethinking Marxism* 20(4): 569–595.
- Karatani K (2011) How catastrophe heralds a new Japan. *Counterpunch*, 24 March. Available at: <http://www.counterpunch.org/2011/03/24/how-catastrophe-heralds-a-new-japan>.
- Mann G (2008) Time, space and money in capitalism and communism. *Human Geography* 1(2): 4–12.
- Žižek S (2004) The parallax view. *New Left Review* 25: 121–134.