

## Conjunctural Politics, Cultural Struggle, and Solidarity Economy: An interview with Kali Akuno

*Boone Shear*

In the first half of an expansive interview, Kali Akuno explores the current political-cultural conjuncture in the United States. Thinking through the responses to the pandemic and the Floyd Rebellion, Akuno analyzes the violence of and tensions between an escalating white supremacy, on the one hand, and an intractable (neo)liberalism that is attempting to capture and channel the energies and ideas of the Left, on the other. Akuno locates direction for the Left amid the flourishing of mutual-aid projects and the possibility of a politicized solidarity-economy movement that can fight for and build institutions beyond the limitations of the market, state, and what is deemed to be practical.

**Key Words:** COVID-19 Pandemic, Disposability, Radical Politics, Solidarity Economy, Struggle

### Abstract and Key Words

## The Right to Existence

*Antonio Callari*

The essay begins by interpreting current events as a moment in a long duré crisis of neoliberal capitalism and by reviewing the expansion of class struggle dynamics to citizenship realms in the biopolitics-mode of contemporary capitalism. It then asks whether Marxism's ana-

lytical tools are adequate for an effective intervention in the determination of the scope and direction (moving within or crossing beyond bourgeois parameters and perimeters) of the social-movement struggles characteristic of this crisis. The essay argues that, to be more theoretically perceptive and politically adequate, Marxism needs to reconfigure its value categories so as more properly to capture the operations of citizenship limitations and

exclusions through which the very identity of the commodity nature of wealth was historically and continues structurally to be instantiated. The essay ends suggesting the Lacanian theory of subjectification, structured around concepts of repression and foreclosure, as a fertile framework for such a reconceptualization.

**Key Words:** Crisis, Materialism, Marxist Politics, Socialism, Social Movements

## The Other Side of the Portal: COVID-19 and the Crisis of Social Reproduction

*Drucilla K. Barker*

The world is at a conjuncture: a fragile and globalized economy, a frayed or nonexistent social safety net for the vast majority of people, and a deadly pandemic. The crisis of production wrought by the pandemic is also a crisis of social reproduction. This is not a new phenomenon to capitalism, but the unique properties of COVID-19 pose a particularly difficult challenge. This essay argues that resolving the dual crisis will require us to valorize the voices, experiences, and work of those on the margins and to replace “I” thinking with “we” thinking in the social imaginary.

**Key Words:** Capitalism, Contradiction, COVID-19, Racism, Social Reproduction

## Pandemonium: The International Situation after COVID-19

*Ramón I. Centeno*

The Black Death is a natural benchmark for the COVID-19 pandemic and indicates that, after the present catastrophe, each place will undergo reconstruction on its own terms. However, a better reference is the pandemic that decimated the Americas in the aftermath of the arrival of Spanish conquistadores. This was the first time since the rise of capitalism that no Western power prevailed in an international crisis. In the current pandemic, the United States has lost to China. Liberal democracy has lost the seductive power it once enjoyed, as a posttotalitarian polity has

done better in “the battle of COVID-19.” Rather than sparking a new Renaissance, as happened after the Black Death, the current pandemic signals a different aftermath in which the powers that be feel the pressure of a rising outsider, as with the Conquista that changed forever the political landscape of the Americas.

**Key Words:** COVID-19 Pandemic, Geopolitics, Imperialism, U.S.-China Relations, World Hegemony

## COVID and Capitalism: A Conversation with Richard Wolff

*Vincent Lyon-Callo*

How do we make sense of the ways in which COVID-19 has developed and been responded to in the United States? How can nondeterminist class analysis help us to understand why the pandemic has impacted the United States so severely compared to other nations? What do these policies and experiences reveal about current capitalist economic and social relations within the United States today? Are there possibilities for interventions through a nonessentialist Marxist analysis and understanding? On a beautiful June afternoon, Rethinking Marxism coeditor Vin Lyon-Callo discussed these questions via zoom with his former professor, long-term RM board member, and host of the quite popular public intervention Democracy at Work, Richard Wolff, to discuss these questions.

**Key Words:** Capitalist Crisis, COVID-19 Pandemic, Class Analysis, Nondeterminist, Profit Motive

## Trouble with Donald J. Trump

*Alex Betancourt*

The COVID-19 pandemic context has moved from rising death tolls tracked by the CDC to the single languishing body of the murdered George Floyd, and liberalism cannot assuage America's guilty conscience. Only socialism and participatory democracy can. To that end, this essay attempts to explain the ideological character of Trump's presidency, his mishandling of the global pandemic, and the insurrection against racial injustice. Contra many progressives, in order to comprehend Trump, we have to take Marx at his word and discard the explanation of Trump as an evil man and also the liberal chastising of young socialist democrats for being socialists. But there are some lessons that socialists need to learn. First is not to dismiss religion and religious people's concerns. Second is not to expect victory from having the best political platform. The problem is how to sell it, about which socialists can learn more from Trump than from progressive liberals.

**Key Words:** Ideology, Liberalism, Racial Injustice, Pandemic, Socialism

## Case Study: COVID-19, Care, and Incarceration in Massachusetts

*Justin Helepololei*

With the COVID-19 pandemic as current context, this essay draws on experiences of local organizing toward "decarceration"—working to decrease the use of prisons and jails—and reflects on competing political economies of

care: one grounded in white supremacy and reform and one oriented toward collective liberation and prison abolition.

**Key Words:** Care, COVID-19, Decarceration, Jails, Prison-Industrial Complex

## The Condition of the Working Class in India

*Anjan Chakrabarti & Anup Dhar*

This essay looks at the condition of the working class in India in the context of India's economic transition as the "old order" premised on global capitalism and a development model based on rural-to-urban migration face a serious meltdown in the postpandemic period. The systemic instability amid an ongoing economic depression has invited a response from the Indian government, which aims to reshape capitalism in the context of a new geopolitical order and, within that ambit, to attempt a cruel recasting of the character and governance of India's working class. But this historically dysfunctional juncture also presents an opportunity and a hope beyond the generalized despair, to rethink Marxian politics beyond the rural-urban division in the world-of-the-third contexts; to rethink it beyond mere anticapitalist critique and toward possible postcapitalist socioeconomic reconstruction.

**Key Words:** Development, Global Capitalism, Migrant Workers, Reconstructive Politics, World of the Third

## The Multitude Divided: Biopolitical Production during the Coronavirus Pandemic

*Stijn De Cauwer & Tim Christiaens*

The past months during the COVID-19 pandemic, many authors have pointed out the relevance of Michel Foucault's theories of biopolitics for the present situation. Foucault's theories of biopolitics were further developed by Italian neo-Marxist thinkers to analyze post-Fordist labour conditions. The current pandemic has emphasized the observation made by Foucault that biopolitics is always a differential exposure to risk, as we have seen that some are allowed to stay in lockdown while others have to keep on working. The pandemic has also revealed how post-Fordist labour has always been dependent on deskilled and often outsourced forms of labour, as exemplified by the current rise in platform companies. The exploitative labour practices of the latter, however, will make resistance more difficult than the Italian neo-Marxists imagine.

**Key Words:** Biopolitics, COVID-19, Michel Foucault, Platform Economy, Post-Fordism

## The Ideology of Work and the Pandemic in Britain

*Samuel J. R. Mercer*

The celebration of “key workers” in Britain during the pandemic forms the basis of what Althusser described as an “ideology of work,” a largely humanistic ideological machinery

deployed in the service of maintaining and reproducing capitalist relations of production in the face of the present crisis. As opposed to a benign expression of national unity in response to a threat, this essay argues that the ideological celebration of key workers in Britain has been crucial to the protection of key accumulation strategies threatened by the crisis and to the neutralization of any potential resistance by those workers endangered by these strategies. This ideology of work has underpinned the implementation of numerous social policies in the service of protecting these relations of production: a fact which this essay argues must be adequately confronted prior to the imagination of alternative social policies and social futures after the pandemic.

**Key Words:** Louis Althusser, COVID-19 Pandemic, Ideology, Social Policy, Work

## The Biopolitics of the Coronavirus Pandemic: Herd Immunity, Thanatopolitics, Acts of Heroism

*Ali Rıza Taşkale & Christina Banalopoulou*

The coronavirus pandemic offers a rare opportunity to critique the biopolitical argument and a chance to reveal the life-and-death nexus, which is often clandestine in its operation. In this context, death rather than life is “put to work” under a biopolitical mode of production. Herd immunity is a case in point, an embodiment of how biopolitics can turn into thanatopolitics as a specific means of contemporary accumulation and domination. Important here is to trace how, in the name of COVID-19, herd

immunity exemplifies a thanatopolitical economy that values life based on its sacrificability to capital. Concomitantly, the thanatopolitical aspects of present-day immunity strategies are (re)produced through performative acts of heroism. The performance of “political glorification” and the “collective cheering” of the sacrifice of workers designated as essential together justify and normalize the political sacrifice of life to capital, maintaining life at the expense of those rendered disposable by the thanatopolitical register of neoliberal economies.

**Key Words:** Biopolitics, COVID-19, Herd Immunity, Performance, Thanatopolitics

### Grounded! COVID-19 and Grounding Postcapitalist Possibility in Place

*Stephen Healy, Matthew Scobie, & Kelly Dombroski*

This essay’s point of departure is a short piece by Bruno Latour that argued for the necessity of connecting post-COVID-19 economic recovery to a larger sustained task of responding to climate change. For Latour, the COVID pause in the global economy represents an opportunity for “coming down to earth,” to effect a radical shift away from modernist aspirations. This essay places Latour’s concept of the terrestrial in critical conversation with ecofeminist Val Plumwood’s “mode of humanity” and Glen Sean Coulthard’s (Yellowknives Dene) concept of culture as a mode of life. These authors argue that the future is grounded in place. This essay explores what this might mean in the context of Aotearoa New Zealand, which is regarded as having an effective response to COVID-19 but is

also a place in which a down-to-earth politics has been underway for quite some time within Māori struggles for self-determination.

**Key Words:** Aotearoa New Zealand, Climate Change, COVID-19, Grounded Normativity, Indigenous

### Building Where We Are: The Solidarity- Economy Response to Crisis

*Lauren T. Hudson*

Collective and cooperative organizers are familiar with the argument that crises expose the contradictions and brutality capitalism requires. It highlights the urgency of such work: we need to build cooperative institutions not only to weather acute crises but to contradict capitalism itself. The pandemic has led to a rapid growth of new solidarity economy (SE) entities, such as mutual aid networks. However, when these responses thrive, they run the risk of co-optation or of legitimizing state failure and retrenchment. Narratives of their success also risk obscuring the ways that movements struggle in these moments. This essay reflects on the author’s experiences as an SE organizer in New York City, the early epicenter of the pandemic in the United States, and how the crisis reveals the contradictions of such organizing. COVID-19 has not only “exposed” capitalism, it has raised serious questions about formality, geography, and the function of solidarity itself for SE models.

**Key Words:** Community Organizing, COVID-19, Mutual Aid, Pandemic, Solidarity Economy

## COVID-19, the Vanishing Mediator, and Postcapitalist Possibilities

*Jason C. Mueller, John McCollum, and Steven Schmidt*

We are in the midst of a world-historical crisis. The Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) has killed hundreds of thousands worldwide, and the capitalist world economy is convulsing. The United States is the epicenter of both the COVID-19 pandemic and the crisis of capitalism. The country is wracked with widespread racial, environmental, gender, and economic-based injustices that are compounded by COVID-19's disproportionately negative impact on already exploited and marginalized communities. Against these grim circumstances, this crisis moment contains a possibility for envisioning and ushering in a radically new postcapitalist United States. Fredric Jameson's concept of a vanishing mediator, or a catalyst that brings about social change by bridging two disparate historical moments, clarifies this claim. This essay shows how the vanishing-mediator concept offers hope for radical change by helping us identify the foundations of a more equitable future that already exists in our present moment.

**Key Words:** COVID-19, Fredric Jameson, Postcapitalism, Utopian Thinking, Vanishing Mediator

## Welcome to the New Localism

*Iason Athanasiadis*

This photo essay shot in Athens during the COVID-19 quarantine examines how the virus—which has spread through the world's most globalized nodes—is now forcing us to accept a new way of living in a world that is simultaneously vaster, narrower, and more local than the future myths we told each other up until now. The quarantine found the photographer covering two very local stories on the Greek-Turkish border region of Evros and in the island of Samos opposite İzmir. In itself, it was a rather cinematic Great Pause, which plunged us into the kind of mass introspection, or hallucination, that people used to embark on pilgrimages to attain. Just as our new world is likely to see a reshaping of production cycles among regions, this pause will inject renewed meaning into our locales, our cultures, and our ways of living communally.

**Key Words:** COVID-19, Greece, Economic Crisis, Localism, Pandemic

## Theorizing Entrepreneurial Price Gouging: Interdependency, Injustice, and Hand Sanitizer

*Jennifer Cohen*

The same entrepreneurialism that is apparently laudable under usual conditions is shameful under unusual conditions, generating dissonance for the public and for price gouging entrepreneurs, who struggle to reconcile themselves-as-people and themselves-as-entrepreneurs. Price gougers are singled out as “bad apples” but they are emblematic of the basic principle of capitalism: profit seeking. It is only because the pandemic makes apparent, first, interdependency in public health and, second, the injustice of extracting value, that their entrepreneurial activity attracts attention and anger. Injustice is extended beyond the hidden abode of production, where exploitation is mystified, into the sphere of circulation, where it takes on a very visible form. Consequently, price gougers’ profits appear unjust in the social imaginary while exploitation in production as the source of profits remains mystified. Price gouging highlights both the banality of exploitation in production and a kind of non-banal injustice in circulation.

**Key Words:** Capitalism, COVID-19, Entrepreneurialism, Exploitation, Price Gouging

## Counting the Cost: COVID-19 and the Crisis of Utilitarianism

*Neil Vallelly*

This essay examines why utilitarian calculations have come to dominate neoliberal governance—especially through the widespread use of cost-benefit analysis—and how the COVID-19 pandemic has ruthlessly exposed the limitations of utilitarianism as a model for policy making. Dedication to the utilitarian doctrine of cost-benefit analysis hampered many initial governmental responses to the pandemic, most notably with the “herd immunity” theory pushed by the Conservative government in the UK. Drawing on examples from the UK, United States, and New Zealand, this essay illustrates that those pushing utilitarian responses to the pandemic—for example, prioritizing the economy over number of deaths—do so to protect a neoliberal hegemony that depends on the financialization of costs and benefits. In this respect, a crisis of utilitarianism is simultaneously a crisis of neoliberal capitalism and, as such, generates the conditions for an anticapitalist politics to reimagine the relationship between costs and benefits.

**Key Words:** Cost-Benefit Analysis, COVID-19, Herd immunity, Neoliberalism, Utilitarianism

## DISEASE / CONTROL

*Andy Broadey, Félix de Rosen,  
& Richard Hudson-Miles*

This visual essay appropriates the aesthetic of Marxist art historian John Berger's *Ways of Seeing*, which constructs an image-driven argument which is radically open and reader centered. Our visual essay brings the current COVID-19 "lockdown" into alignment with similar historical "lockdowns" in a dialectical image of disciplinary society and disciplinary techniques. Foucault recognized in the plague village a vision of a perfectly ordered society where each individual is monitored, isolated, self-regulating, and fixed in their proper place. Following Foucault, Deleuze argued that these disciplinary societies had mutated into anarchic and decentered "societies of control." Yuk Hui has recently demonstrated the hyper-acceleration of this process following the introduction of new media technologies and new forms of disciplinary "modulation." This visual essay seeks to map these mutations visually and textually, bringing the authors above into dialogue with found images from the digital commons.

**Key Words:** COVID-19 Pandemic, Michel Foucault, Lockdown, Pandemic Response, Societies of Control

## Critique of Political Economy—Pandemic Edition: An Interview with David Ruccio

*Yahya M. Madra*

In this interview that restages a selection of posts from his blog ([anticap.wordpress.com](http://anticap.wordpress.com)), David Ruccio discusses the status of mainstream economics and the public discourse around policy responses to the economic consequences of the pandemic, the role of metaphors in economic discourse, the importance of uncertainty in modern life, the promise and limitations of Modern Monetary Theory, the problems with the calculation of the unemployment rate, and the socio-economic conditions underlining the demands for racial justice articulated by the insurrection.

**Key Words:** COVID-19 Pandemic, Modern Monetary Theory, Social Justice, Uncertainty, Unemployment