

In other words, what Mountz defines as the death of asylum is ultimately symptomatic of the political and legal architecture of the border regime which is proactively oriented to hinder migrants' access to international protection, rights and humanitarian support. In this sense, we can turn from an analysis of the death of asylum towards an inquiry into the what I call the dismantling of asylum and of the spaces of refuge. Mobile infrastructures of deterrence have been put in place to prevent migrants from reaching Europe, from building living spaces and from pursuing their desires. Migrants are injured and hampered through spatial confinement and temporal borders: the stolen life of migration that Shahram Khosravi has identified is one of the most harmful effects that migration laws and policies generate for people seeking asylum.

*The Death of Asylum* pushes us to reflect on which political spaces can be built and opened up in the face of such a politics of containment and of the destitution of refugees it creates. The book invites us not to stop the laborious work of critique by documenting the shrinking of the asylum system. Nor, I add, can we limit our analyt-

ical work to reporting that, despite everything, migrants resist and engage in acts of refusal. Which transformative political-epistemological approach to the politics of migration can we envision? And how can we tackle border violence, even in its most invisible forms, without reifying 'migration' as a self-standing field of analysis? Mountz's insights into migrants' carceral archipelago and the heterogenous modes of confinement can be a starting point for gesturing towards border abolitionism as a method. Ruth Gilmore's conception of an abolitionist geography 'as an antagonistic contradiction of carceral geographies' can be productively put to work as an analytical lens for rethinking a critique of migration governmentality. Border abolitionist as a method pays attention to the interlocking racialising mechanisms that sustain modes of differential confinement and exploitation. Unlike NoBorders perspectives that assume the image of borders as discrete sites and as the main targets of action, an abolitionist approach challenges the very distinction between deserving and undeserving refugees, dismantling the very logics of racialised confinement and captivity.

Martina Tazzioli

## Return of the conjuncture

Vittorio Morfino and Peter D. Thomas, eds, *The Government of Time: Theories of Multiple Temporality in the Marxist Tradition* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2017). 306pp., £91.00 hb., 978 9 00429 119 5

A sense of impending collapse is a fixture of the present. Signs abound of the limits of a worldview of infinite accumulation in a finite world. These contradictions are not only apparent in economic and epidemiological charts; they can be felt viscerally in quotidian life. In this illuminating volume, Vittorio Morfino and Peter D. Thomas bring together voices that explore temporality and the underappreciated prospect of its multiplicity. The chapters challenge the monolithic time of the neoliberal present, shedding light on fractures along its surface. *The Government of Time* deserves praise as a compendium of theories of multiple temporality, serving as a primer as well as a series of provocative interventions that could rejuvenate historical materialist theory and politics. These interventions substantiate the ontological contemporaneity

of times in the plural, precariously woven together in a *conjuncture*, over and against a taken-for-granted static temporal background.

Historical materialism embodies the effort to develop a methodology of persuasively scientific and grounded social analysis. Marx and historical materialists after him have therefore refined the theoretical armoury of critical political economy in line with this aim. This could be why, as Massimiliano Tomba observes, Marx did not draw up a 'passe-partout historical philosophical theory' at a level of abstraction, and devoted more attention to political economy. We can nevertheless observe intimations towards such a theory across Marx's invocations of the temporal rifts dotting the European social landscape. Following these reflections, we find a Marx that

did not neglect temporal multiplicity. His explorations are scattered across political writings such as those on the social 'backwardness' and philosophical 'forwardness' of Germany, reflections on the unfolding temporality of the collective subject in the French Revolution, along with his widely overlooked reflections on the Russian rural commune *mir*. Apart from these local observations, Stefano Bracaletti presents a latticework of temporalities moving through *Capital*, showing how Marx attended to interweaving processes and transpositions of cause and effect in this work.

Such divergent explorations indicate the potentials of problematised temporality and its incorporation into critical theory and social science. In addition, these chapters serve as reminders that Marx was not the founder of an ecumenical body of thought with inviolable laws. On the contrary, historical materialism is a constitutionally incomplete and expansive 'philosophy of praxis' and this openness allows it to reflexively revisit, refine and complement its categories (following Gramsci). Reading Marx with an underexplored notion such as temporality in mind helps bring to life a thinker that periodically rethought his concepts and combed through various themes simultaneously, with innovative outcomes at every turn.

Aside from accounts of Marx's multiple temporalities, the volume leaves ample space for other historical materialists, covering wide reaches of Western Marxist thought. Ernst Bloch, Antonio Gramsci and Louis Althusser are brought under particular scrutiny. These readings reveal, due partially to the multilingualism of the contributors, notions that have heretofore evaded sweeping accounts and translations of major works. Morfino invokes *multiversum*, Bloch's outline of a temporally and geographically diverse global history against a Eurocentric fundamental time, and an articulation of historical change that can avoid the twin threats of linear modernism and incredulous postmodernism. As Morfino recounts, Bloch reappropriates progress from its condescending and imperialist connotations, presenting a continual and multifocal unfolding captured in the metaphor of a 'chariot with many horses'. Non-European historical civilisations find respective places across a grand humanity without a particular *telos* or retroactive narrative of modernisation. Disposing of this delimited notion of progress allows for a deeper appreciation of the particular elements across

a tapestry of the myriad contours of human civilisations. Over a topography of cosmopolitan steps towards the (re)foundation of a classless society and points of darkness, this 'expansion' of the conceptual content of history is at once heartening and humbling.

The imputation to history of a Hegelian endpoint, as we can deduce from Bloch's rich philosophical vocabulary, is a crude materialist reproduction of a monolithic and self-contained notion of history. Any given present, from this perspective, is a self-referential culmination of a linear process, conceptually barring the non-contemporaneous from its substantial content. Hence, as Althusser states and Thomas underlines, it is not without reason that there has not been, nor can there be, a transformative politics in a Hegelian register; once an 'essential section' is taken as an immediate reflection of a historical essence, those elements that sit uneasily with its unifying temporal frame are glossed over. In other words, there is nothing that can escape the essential determinations of this totalising backdrop. Thomas' chapter counterposes an interweaving of times that profoundly blurs the 'present'. In this light, the term has analytic utility as a shorthand for an otherwise irreducibly complex real temporality. An etymologically informed return to the notion of *conjuncture*, once prominent in post-war French theory, is a requisite for a cogent elaboration of multiple temporality. Following Althusser and Gramsci, two thinkers often superficially and wrongly seen as lying at opposite poles, Thomas argues that the apparent unity of the present is retrospectively imposed as 'accomplished fact', and hegemonically sustained as a flat, inevitable moment.

Thomas goes further than other conceptualisations of the present (including mine) that subject it to temporally diverse inflections. This treatment disputes the ontological and theoretical autonomy of the present from the multiple times that constitute it. Heterodox approaches to historical time can be organised under 'archaeological' and 'cartographical' approaches. According to the former, the present houses longitudinally diverse layers of temporality, at least some of which continue to permeate its texture. And according to the latter, its spatial undulations and heterogeneity are emphasised. Both of these conceptions are more sophisticated than a facile localisation of the present as a point on a straight line. This would amount to an uncritical espousal of

*chronos*: time as a quantitative, uniform flow, over the rough and choppy temporality of *kairos*: the qualitatively distinct time in which, for Walter Benjamin, messianic and redemptive moments were manifested. In sum, the 'present' of the singular point on a line can be described as (x). Its archaeological and cartographical expansions facilitate a more robust appreciation of its depth and breadth, identified now as a set of coordinates (x, y, z). However, Thomas maintains that these perspectives still maintain the 'essential section' of a self-same present, no matter how uneven. The present as *kampfplatz*, a terrain of political contestation, falls short of illuminating a revolutionary political line; it reproduces a 'structural spatialisation' of a given object – the present – and competing contemplative subjects, a notion which would raise the ire of Althusser, who had always protested against his structuralist characterisation.

For Thomas, Althusser and Gramsci have composed the groundwork for an alternative to the autonomous present. Social reproduction takes place along relatively discrete levels with 'times' of their own, and the assumption of an 'objective' reference time is a figment of ideological misrecognition. In its place, it is apt to take up these times within the 'articulation, displacement and torsion' that harmonises them, at the *clinamen* where discrete elements conjoin for a precarious moment (which, in the historical scale, may last decades or ages). Such articulations may take on a formidable stability, as a juridico-politically imposed temporal order can establish itself for long stretches of time. However, their unity in a present is always tied together as a *fait accompli*, and their *givenness* is in itself an ideological ruse wherein the powerful conjure up a self-image of their inevitable permanence. Taking this correspondence between the empirical social formation and conceptual models presupposes a structure, or in Thomas' terms, a 'totalised hierarchy of elements whose relation is fixed prior to their relation with the totality itself'.

The continual unwinding implicated in processes of articulation finds expression in the *conjuncture*, a term that comes up in both Althusser and Gramsci's works in remarkably similar ways. Referring to the fleeting yet forceful synchronisations of various temporalities, the

conjuncture is the particular moment of the interweaving and conjoining of relational elements. As opposed to the objective *kampfplatz*, this relativisation of the present has significant political consequences. Political subjects with transitional goals are no longer only a side on the objective political chessboard. Temporal relationality also comes into focus. The task of transformative politics is not solely to promote an alternative 'present', but to radically engage in a defiant non-identitarianism with the dominant temporal order by relating to the conjuncture in ways that can unravel it while binding together novel articulations. In this way, revolutionary politics cuts through essential sections of all sorts, and tethers the struggles of the past to the becoming of future societies. This inquiry into the multiple temporalities of Althusser and Gramsci underlines their points of contact and possibilities of mutual translation in terms of strategy, as the political task described above can also be expressed in terms inspired by the conceptual repositories of both thinkers: multi-temporal hegemonic activity can bind together new lines of ruptural fusion.

Morfino explains how atemporal politics is far from a concern solely entertained by democratic thinkers: Nietzsche, in fact, had proposed that the 'masses' blindly lived in the present, and only the 'great individual' could experience, purvey and handle the untimely. This elitist perspective on the untimely, non-conformist attitude to the present is undoubtedly politically objectionable, but it could be observed today in the exaltation of neo-fascist figures and heads of government at the cost of the erosion of already battered liberal democratic norms. As neoliberalism has laid waste to our economic and cultural lives, and we continue to bear the burden of its decimation of social welfare systems, 'anti-establishment' sentiment is only likely to increase. Its appropriation by the right is neither acceptable nor inevitable, but requires a rejuvenated political imaginary. The fundamentals necessary for a radical non-identity with the status quo come through in the interventions across *The Government of Time*. As the temporal cohesion of the present has lately been shattered, what better place to chart ways to overcome it than a radical critique of the conjuncture?

Onur Acaroglu