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Dominic Davies

From Communism to Postcapitalism: Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels' *The Communist Manifesto* (1848)

Abstract

History bears testament to the *Manifesto*'s planetary circulation, global readership and material impact. Interpretations of this short document have affected the lives of millions globally, particularly in the second half of the twentieth century. The text is somehow able to outline the complex theoretical foundations for the world's most enduring critique of capitalism in a comprehensible and persuasive language, and as such, readers of all classes, professions, nations and ethnicities have drawn on – and in many cases warped and manipulated – its valuable insights. Whilst arguing for the importance of the *Manifesto* as an anti-imperial book and exploring the reasons for its viral circulation, this chapter will also show that it is a self-reflexive text that predicts its own historic impact. It is the formal and generic – or, in fact, 'literary' – qualities of this astonishing document that have given it such primacy in the canon of anti-imperial and anti-capitalist writing.

Bio

Dominic Davies is a British Academy Postdoctoral Fellow at the English Faculty, University of Oxford, where he also completed his DPhil in March 2015. He has written and published widely, including articles in the *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* and the *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* and chapters in *South Africa and Post-Apartheid Literature (1994–2014)* (Études Littéraires Africaines, 2015) and *South Asian Fiction in English: Contemporary Transformations* (Palgrave, 2016). He is the co-editor of a forthcoming essay collection, *Planned Violence: Post/Colonial Urban Infrastructures, Literature and Culture* (Palgrave, 2017), and his first monograph, *Imperial Infrastructure and Spatial Resistance in Colonial Literature (1880–1930)* (Peter Lang) was published in 2017. He was the Facilitator of the Leverhulme-funded Network, 'Planned Violence: Post/colonial Urban Infrastructures and Literature' from 2014 to 2016, and from 2016 he has been the convener of a network based at The Oxford Research Centre in the Humanities (TORCH), University of Oxford, entitled 'Comics and Graphic Novels: The Politics of Form'.

A spectre is haunting Europe – the spectre of Communism.

The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles.

All that is solid melts into air.

[T]he free development of each is the condition for the free development of all.

*The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains [...] WORKING MEN OF ALL COUNTRIES, UNITE!*¹

That most readers will recognize at least one of these now (in)famous phrases is testament to the global impact of *The Communist Manifesto*. First drafted by Friedrich Engels in October 1847, in December 1847 and January 1848 Karl Marx added the rhetorical force that launched its words into the world's imagination. Perhaps of all the books included in this volume, *The Communist Manifesto*'s planetary influence is the least contested. The critics included in this chapter's bibliography – by no means a comprehensive list of the thinkers to have reflected on this short document – are generally in consensus: 'It is said that the Bible and the Quran are the only two books that have been printed in more editions and disseminated more widely than *The Communist Manifesto*', remarks postcolonial theorist Aijaz Ahmad; 'the Manifesto conquered the world', observes historian Eric Hobsbawm; '[m]illions of people all around the world – peasants, soldiers, intellectuals as well as professionals of all sorts, have over the years, been touched and inspired by it', comments geographer David Harvey; philosopher Martin Puchner argues that, '[t]he *Communist Manifesto* influenced the course of history more directly and lastingly than almost any other text'; and literary theorist Terry Eagleton claims that '[v]ery few [texts] have changed the course of actual history as decisively' as the *Manifesto*.²

Eagleton is not wrong. Interpretations of the *Manifesto* have affected the material lives of millions of the world's inhabitants. As Gareth Stedman Jones writes, the *Manifesto*'s importance is undeniable 'not because of its intrinsic merits, but because of the brute facts of world politics' – after the Second World War, 'millions in the Soviet Union, China, Cuba and Eastern Europe lived under communist rule', whilst millions more in Southern Africa, Latin America and South East Asia were caught up in anti-imperial movements and civil wars fuelled by the communist ideals Marx and Engels outlined one hundred years earlier.³ But separating the *Manifesto*'s 'intrinsic merits' from the 'brute facts of world politics' is a mistake: that the text outlines the theoretical foundations of the world's most

¹ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (London: Penguin Books, 2002), 218, 219, 223, 244, 258. Throughout I use the Penguin Edition, with an introduction and comprehensive notes by Gareth Stedman Jones's, and which includes the numerous prefaces and other paratexts that Marx and Engels wrote for the *Manifesto*'s various editions. The chapter addresses this complex history of the *Manifesto*'s multiple editions and translations below.

² Aijaz Ahmad, 'The *Communist Manifesto* in its Own Time, and in Ours', in Prakash Karat, ed., *A World to Win: Essays on The Communist Manifesto* (New Delhi: Leftword Books, 1999), 14; Eric Hobsbawm, ed., *The Communist Manifesto: A Modern Edition* (London and New York: Verso, 2012), 8; David Harvey, ed., *The Communist Manifesto* (London: Pluto Press, 2008), 1; Martin Puchner, *Poetry of the Revolution: Marx, Manifestos, and the Avant-Gardes* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 11; Terry Eagleton, *Why Marx Was Right* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2011), x.

³ Gareth Stedman Jones, 'Introduction', in Marx and Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, 3.

enduring critique of capitalism in remarkably accessible language has allowed readers of all classes, nations and ethnicities to draw on – and in many cases to manipulate – its valuable insights.

Whilst emphasising the importance of the *Manifesto* as a set of fighting words, this chapter will also demonstrate that the book self-reflexively predicted its own historic impact. It is the *Manifesto*'s formal and generic innovations that have given it such primacy in the canon of anti-imperial and anti-capitalist writing. Despite recent claims by neoliberal economists that we have reached 'the End of History', the *Manifesto*'s influence, and the history it has both described and created, is far from over.⁴ In 2005 the *Manifesto* was listed as the most 'harmful' book in recent history by the American Conservative Journal *Human Events*, while in the same year a BBC Radio Four poll voted Karl Marx the 'Greatest Philosopher of All Time'.⁵ After the global financial crisis in 2008, there was a surge in 'Marx-mania' – capitalism now appears to be on the brink of the collapse that the *Manifesto* predicted so long ago, and new kinds of information networks and collaborative production increasingly resemble the vision of communism first espoused by Marx and Engels.⁶

The *Manifesto* as World Literature

To begin, I want to consider *what* that text, '*The Communist Manifesto*', actually is. Such a question is not as simple as it seems. The text originally written and published by Marx and Engels in 1848 was in fact entitled *The Manifesto of the Communist League*, 'a nineteenth century political tract [...] written in two months for an unknown and uninfluential group of German émigrés in London'.⁷ It was not until the preface to the German Edition of 1872 that Marx and Engels proclaimed that 'the Manifesto has become a historical document which we have no longer any right to alter'.⁸ Its content may not have altered significantly in the intervening period, but this preface reshaped the way it was read. It proclaimed the *Manifesto*'s global significance, transforming it from an 'uninfluential' political tract into a 'historical document'. Given the importance of the *Manifesto*'s conception of 'History' (significantly with a capital 'H'), the dialogue within the text between old sections and new reignites the original's revolutionary rhetoric. In the Penguin edition used as the primary text for this

⁴ Francis Fukuyama, 'The End of History?', *The National Interest* (1989), <https://ps321.community.uaf.edu/files/2012/10/Fukuyama-End-of-history-article.pdf> accessed 5 June 2015.

⁵ Jeffrey C. Isaac, ed., *Rethinking the Western Tradition: The Communist Manifesto* (Yale University Press, 2012), 1.

⁶ Paul Mason, *PostCapitalism: A Guide to Our Future* (London: Allen Lane, 2015), 49.

⁷ Geoff Dow and George Lafferty, eds, *Everlasting Uncertainty: Interrogating The Communist Manifesto, 1848–1998* (Annandale: Pluto Press, 1998), 1. Indeed, 'nowhere is the actual body on whose behalf the *Manifesto* was written, the Communist League, mentioned in it' – from the outset, Marx and Engels emphasized the *Manifesto*'s universal and enduring reach. Hobsbawm, ed., *The Communist Manifesto*, 15.

⁸ Marx and Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, 194.

chapter, no fewer than seven prefaces precede the actual text of the *Manifesto* itself. Today, critics continue to write introductions that relight the explosive energy lying dormant in the *Manifesto*; as Harvey rhetorically concludes: ‘We communists are the persistent spectral presence [...] The struggle continues’.⁹

Though ‘[n]obody would have predicted a remarkable future for the *Manifesto* in the 1850s and early 1860s’, after nine new editions appeared in six languages between 1871 and 1872, the *Manifesto* ‘conquered the world’.¹⁰ However, the *Manifesto* is a product of the decade in which it was first written. Throughout the 1840s, social unrest across Europe was so pervasive that ‘the idea of revolution, of one kind or another, seemed [...] as natural as the prospect that the sun would set in the evening and rise in the morning’.¹¹ It was ‘the age of revolution’, a ‘twin upheaval’ of ‘political revolution’ in France and ‘industrial revolution’ in Britain, culminating in the revolutions of 1848 that swept across Europe just weeks after the *Manifesto*’s first publication.¹² Furthermore, its diagnosis of capitalism was rooted in Engels’s first-hand experience. His 1847 document, ‘Principles of Communism’, on which much of the book’s first section is based, was a political response to his experience of Manchester in the early 1840s, recorded in detail his *Condition of the Working Class in England* (1845). Suffering from the depression of 1841–2, the Lancashire cotton industry offered a ‘classic example of technological unemployment’ and the resulting exacerbation of class relations between an impoverished working class and a small bourgeois elite were conditions that would become symptomatic of industrial capitalism globally.¹³

Language similarly complicates the text of the *Manifesto*. As Marx and Engels admitted in 1872, their document was published first in German, then quickly in French in 1848 and English in 1850.¹⁴ The 544 editions of the *Manifesto* published prior to the Russian Revolution in 1917 spanned thirty-five different languages and though, as Ahmad observes, these were predominantly ‘European languages’, there were also ‘three editions in Japanese and one in Chinese’.¹⁵ In the following years, it furthered its geographical and linguistic reach as ‘the two Russian revolutions helped catapult the *Manifesto* to

⁹ Harvey, ed., *The Communist Manifesto*, 30.

¹⁰ Hobsbawm, ed., *The Communist Manifesto*, 6–7.

¹¹ Aijaz Ahmad, ‘The Communist Manifesto and “World Literature”’, *Social Scientist* 29/7–8 (2000), 3.

¹² Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Revolution* (New York: Vintage Books, 1996), 1–2.

¹³ George R. Boyer, ‘The Historical Background of The Communist Manifesto’, *The Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 12/4 (1998), 152–62.

¹⁴ Marx and Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, 193.

¹⁵ Ahmad, ‘*The Communist Manifesto* in its Own Time, and in Ours’, 14; Hobsbawm ed., *The Communist Manifesto*, 8.

the position of being the primary revolutionary text'.¹⁶ For example, it arrived in India in 1922 and was first published in Bengali in 1926; by 1933 it had also been translated into Urdu, Marathi, Tamil and Hindi.¹⁷ At no point did Marx and Engels feel that the reader of the translated text was distanced from the political content of the German original, nor did this concern the many twentieth-century revolutionary movements inspired by the *Manifesto*'s words. 'What emerges', writes Puchner, is 'the dream of a new world literature: all editions of the *Manifesto* in all languages are equivalent so that the conception of an original language no longer matters'.¹⁸

However, reading the *Manifesto* as a world literary text, S. S. Prawer identifies the proliferation of 'metaphors [and] images, from oral and written literature, from publishing, and from theatrical performance' present in the original German.¹⁹ For German readers, the *Manifesto* is a literary palimpsest: 'beneath the utterances of Marx and Engels they detect those of German poets', most notably that of Goethe, whose poem 'The Sorcerer's Apprentice' (made famous by Walt Disney's 1940 film, *Fantasia*) informs the *Manifesto*'s theory of class history.²⁰ In Goethe's poem, the apprentice 'calls up spirits he cannot, in the end, subdue'; for Marx and Engels, the bourgeoisie may have transformed a feudalist society into a capitalist one, but they cannot 'subdue' the proletariat they have created. Throughout, the *Manifesto* 'heightens or varies a well-known quotation', using 'the words of great writers to confirm and sanction [its] own'.²¹ If these references are lost on non-German readers, the *Manifesto*'s self-conscious reflections on translation still develop 'a new understanding of international literature that resonates in various ways with current discourses on literature and globalisation'.²² It actively predicts its own transcendence of linguistic, cultural and geographical barriers.

Somewhat contrarily, the *Manifesto*'s focus is not the blueprint for a communist utopia, but rather the celebration of bourgeois capitalism and the unified global culture it facilitates. Marx and Engels praise the bourgeoisie's 'infinite horizons, its revolutionary energy and audacity, its dynamic

¹⁶ Puchner, *Poetry of the Revolution*, 38.

¹⁷ Karat, ed., *The World to Win*, 131–2.

¹⁸ Puchner, *Poetry of the Revolution*, 52.

¹⁹ S. S. Prawer, *Karl Marx and World Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), 138.

²⁰ Prawer, *Karl Marx and World Literature*, 140. Critics have also pointed out the *Manifesto*'s allusion to Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, Dickens's 'A Christmas Carol' and Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. See respectively Jacques Derrida, *Spectres of Marx* (New York and London: Routledge, 2006); Coral Lansbury, 'Melodrama, Pantomime, and the Communist Manifesto', *Browning Institute Studies*, Vol.14, *The Victorian Threshold* (1985), 1–10 (2–6); Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air* (London: Penguin Books, 1988), 101.

²¹ Prawer, *Karl Marx and World Literature*, 158, 164.

²² Puchner, *Poetry of Revolution*, 3.

creativity, its adventurousness and romance’, so that ‘next to the *Communist Manifesto*, the whole body of capitalist apologetics, from Adam Ferguson to Milton Friedman, is remarkably pale and empty of life’.²³ If, as Puchner continues, it is ‘nowhere clearer how much Marx and Engels admire the bourgeoisie than in [their] remark about bourgeois world literature’, this is because the potential for communist revolution is rooted in the international solidarities built through a globalizing culture.²⁴ The *Manifesto* emphasizes that the global economy and culture created by bourgeois capitalism is a necessary predicate for the international communism that it advocates – it is the ‘WORKING MEN OF ALL COUNTRIES’, not of one region or nation, that must ‘UNITE!’ It then creates that global audience by overcoming the problem of its own translatability. The *Manifesto* anticipates ‘the world-wide dissemination and mingling of “national and local” literatures’ that defines contemporary global culture, as critics such as David Damrosch and Franco Moretti have subsequently explored.²⁵

The *Manifesto* and Anticolonialism

The *Manifesto*’s prediction of a global culture is exemplified by its own history of publication, translation and dissemination. Throughout the twentieth century, it not only informed the revolutions in Russia and China, but became ‘the most zealous advocate of the world’s anticolonialist movements’; after all, though Marx was European, it would be ‘in Asia that his ideas first took root, and in the so-called Third World that they flourished most vigorously’.²⁶ It influenced numerous anticolonial leaders and organizations, from Fidel Castro in Cuba to Frantz Fanon in Algeria, from Kwame Nkrumah in Ghana to Julius Nyerere in Tanzania, and from the Indian National Congress in India to the African National Congress in South Africa. Proliferating translations allowed the *Manifesto* to fuse ‘with local traditions and [create] new versions of world literature and new visions of internationalism’, a flexibility embedded within its formal structure and rhetorical techniques.²⁷ It offered a concise and lucid critique of capitalism before, almost immediately, predicting that system’s disintegration; the *Manifesto* spoke to political movements of the twentieth century because they were as much anti-capitalist as they were anti-imperial or anticolonial.

²³ Berman, *All That Is Solid*, 98.

²⁴ Puchner, *Poetry of Revolution*, 49.

²⁵ Praver, *Karl Marx and World Literature*, 146; David Damrosch, *What is World Literature?* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003). Franco Moretti, ‘Conjectures on World Literature’, *New Left Review* (2000), 54-68.

²⁶ Eagleton, *Why Marx Was Right*, 215–25.

²⁷ Puchner, *Poetry of Revolution*, 63.

It was Lenin's reflections on the *Manifesto* that realized the *Manifesto*'s full anticolonial weight. Regardless of what Lenin 'effectively did' in Russia, argues Slavoj Žižek, 'the field of possibilities he opened up' have rightly made Leninist-Marxism the most dominant form of Marxism, both historically and today.²⁸ Lenin's two pamphlets, *What is to be Done?* (1902) and *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism* (1917), updated the *Manifesto*'s critique for 'the age of empire', a period that saw 'the triumph and transformation of capitalism in the historically specific forms of bourgeois society in its liberal vision'.²⁹ Lenin's bridging of theoretical analysis and the enactment of political change is a 'lesson' inscribed into, and 'learned' from, the *Manifesto*'s form, genre and rhetoric.³⁰ As Thomas Kemple argues in his close-reading of the *Manifesto*'s final line ('WORKING MEN OF ALL COUNTRIES, UNITE!'), the gap that separates these capitalized words from the rest of the written prose 'open[s] space for action' by calling 'a specific class' into existence: the *Manifesto* 'proposes not simply a *theory of history*', but also a '*thesis about the historicization of theory*'.³¹ Formally, it connects the written word to historical and material revolution, developing an intimate relationship between theory and action. The *Manifesto* is a book that not only shaped the postcolonial world, but actually theorized the processes of its own revolutionary shaping.

Despite its global uptake, the fall of the Berlin Wall and then the Soviet Union in the 1980s suggested that 'the communist hypothesis' had 'failed'.³² However, these societies and states departed from the *Manifesto*'s quite specific formulation of communism in fundamental ways, not least in the size of the state (virtually non-existent in the *Manifesto*'s account) and in the centrality of individualism (an ideology to which many of so-called 'communist' states were opposed, but that the *Manifesto*'s version harnesses for the greater social good). This is not to detach the kinds of political governance of the Soviet Union and Mao's China, say, from 'communism' as it is outlined in the *Manifesto*. Such an effort would risk repeating arguments that, in their attempts to defend Marx and Engels, begin to look like apologies for those murderous regimes – though Eagleton's point that capitalism has only 'brought untold prosperity to some sectors of the world [...] as did Stalin and Mao, at staggering human cost', is a convincing one.³³ Nevertheless, I want to conclude that, despite communism's apparent 'failure', the *Manifesto* is still relevant in the twenty-first century. Indeed, 'the horizon that

²⁸ Slavoj Žižek, 'Have Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri Rewritten the Communist Manifesto for the Twenty-first Century?' *Rethinking Marxism*, 13/3–4 (2001), Digital File.

²⁹ Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Empire* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 8–9.

³⁰ Puchner, *Poetry of Revolution*, 40.

³¹ Thomas Kemple, 'Post-Marx: Temporal Rhetoric and Textual Action in the Communist Manifesto', *Rethinking Marxism: A Journal of Economics, Culture & Society* 12/2 (2000), 57–8.

³² Alain Badiou, *The Communist Hypothesis*, trans. David Macey and Steve Corcoran (London and New York: Verso, 2010), 2.

³³ Eagleton, *Why Marx Was Right*, 15. See also Badiou, *The Communist Hypothesis*, 3.

conditions our experience’, more than ever before, is communism as Marx and Engels originally conceived it.³⁴

The *Manifesto* and Postcapitalism

Marshall Berman emphasizes the ‘individualism’ that underpins the *Manifesto*’s ‘vision of communism’, pointing out that ‘Marx is closer to some of his bourgeois and liberal enemies than he is to traditional exponents of communism’.³⁵ The *Manifesto* celebrates the social and economic conditions brought about by bourgeois capitalism because they lay the material foundations for the next stage in ‘History’: communism. As the *Manifesto* famously puts it, ‘What the bourgeoisie, therefore, produces, above all, is its own grave-diggers’.³⁶ Bourgeois capitalism, or today’s neoliberalism, is a necessary prerequisite to communism as Marx and Engels envisage it. The enormous wealth generated by capitalist society, no matter how unevenly distributed, is essential: ‘Marx himself never imagined that socialism could be achieved in impoverished conditions’, such as those of revolutionary Russia or China.³⁷ To do so would, and did, require an authoritarian state to impose industrial revolution at huge human cost. Despite the historical association of communism with big government, the *Manifesto*’s vision of communism in fact promotes the eradication of the state entirely. It draws on liberal individualism, but transforms it, ever so slightly, to benefit not *capitalism* itself, but rather other individuals:

In bourgeois society, living labour is but a means to increase accumulated labour. In Communist society, accumulated labour is but a means to widen, to enrich, to promote the existence of the labourer. [...] By freedom is meant, under the present bourgeois conditions of production, free trade, free selling and buying. [...] In place of the old bourgeois society, with its classes and class antagonisms, we shall have an association, in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all.³⁸

As Hannah Arendt argues, ‘it was not Karl Marx but the liberal economists themselves who had to introduce “the communist fiction”’; but it *is* the *Manifesto* that is ‘courageous’ enough to ‘conclude

³⁴ Jodi Dean, *The Communist Horizon* (London and New York: Verso, 2012), 2.

³⁵ Berman, *All That Is Solid*, 98.

³⁶ Marx and Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, 233.

³⁷ Eagleton, *Why Marx Was Right*, 16.

³⁸ Marx and Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, 236–7, 244.

that the “socialization” of man would produce automatically a harmony of all interests’.³⁹ Paradoxically, in 1989 the neoliberal economist Francis Fukuyama drew directly on the *Manifesto* to proclaim that the world had reached ‘The End of History’. He claimed that the ‘two major challenges to liberalism, those of fascism and of communism’, had been defeated, and that the ‘class issue’ – the antagonism that for Marx and Engels had been ‘[t]he history of all hitherto existing society’ – had ‘actually been successfully resolved in the West’.⁴⁰ ‘History’, used in the ‘Hegelian-Marxist sense of the progressive evolution of human political and economic institutions’, had for Fukuyama ‘culminated not in socialism but in democracy and a market economy’.⁴¹

Peculiarly enough, as Li Xing points out, Fukuyama’s argument, along with other defences of neoliberalism, actually returns ‘to the most essential basis of the Marxian world-view – *the material foundations of society*, in other words, *the materialist conception of history*’.⁴² Fukuyama assumes that ‘the egalitarianism of modern America represents the essential achievement of the classless society envisioned by Marx’, blaming issues such as ‘black poverty’ not on ‘liberalism’ but rather on ‘the “legacy” of slavery and racism’; as though those two historical phenomena were somehow unrelated.⁴³ A quarter century later, during which time neoliberalism has tightened its grip, Fukuyama’s argument that ‘class’ is no longer an ongoing social and economic contradiction sounds absurd.⁴⁴ As Thomas Piketty’s recent study has shown, in the past decade capitalism has generated ‘arbitrary and unsustainable inequalities that radically undermine the meritocratic values on which democratic societies are based’.⁴⁵ Just as Marx and Engels predicted over 150 years ago, capitalism is ‘unsustainable’, sowing the seeds of its own destruction.

If ‘History’ is not over, where might the beginnings of the communist society that Marx and Engels predicted would succeed capitalism be found today? Badiou, who recently proclaimed ‘the rebirth of history’, argues that the 2011 riots in London and the recent revolutions in the Arab world resemble ‘the first working-class insurrections of the nineteenth century’.⁴⁶ But it is also manifesting in other,

³⁹ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 43–4.

⁴⁰ Marx and Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, 219, and Fukuyama, ‘The End of History?’, Digital File.

⁴¹ Francis Fukuyama, ‘Second Thoughts: The End of History 10 Years Later’, *New Perspectives Quarterly*, 16/4 (1999), 40.

⁴² Li Xing, ‘Capitalism and Globalisation in the Light of the Communist Manifesto’, *Economic and Political Weekly* 33/33–34 (1998), 2227.

⁴³ Fukuyama, ‘The End of History?’, Digital File.

⁴⁴ David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 2.

⁴⁵ Thomas Piketty, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (London: Harvard University Press, 2014), 1.

⁴⁶ Alain Badiou, *The Rebirth of History: Times of Riots and Uprisings*, trans. by Gregory Elliott (London and New York: Verso, 2012), 5.

less obvious ways. Paul Mason, echoing the *Manifesto*, argues that ‘capitalism, a complex, adaptive system [...] has reached the limits of its capacity to adapt’.⁴⁷ In its place, he identifies the ‘rise of collaborative production’: collective organizations such as Wikipedia that provide the ‘biggest information product in the world’ for free, creating ‘[n]ew forms of ownership, new forms of lending [and] new legal contracts’.⁴⁸ Whilst Mason does not specifically use the word ‘communist’, other commentators argue that ‘Wikipedia’s mode of production [...] bears strong resemblance with what Marx and Engels described as communism’, and that ‘the classic demands of the left – for less work, for an end to scarcity, for economic democracy, for the production of socially useful goods, and for the liberation of humanity – are materially more achievable than at any other point in history’.⁴⁹

This is not the communism of Stalin and Mao, but rather the kind of ‘participatory democracy’ that the *Manifesto* first propagated in the 1840s. Just as the ‘steam and machinery’ that had ‘revolutionized industrial production’ was a crucial technological development that would make communism possible for Marx and Engels, new technologies such as the internet are making ‘communist production practices’ realizable today.⁵⁰ Though these microcosms of communist production are still ‘antagonistically entangled into capitalist class relations’, they might yet ‘be developed, extended, and intensified’ into other spheres of society.⁵¹ As Srinicek and Williams argue, the ‘utopian potentials inherent in twenty-first-century technology cannot remain bound to a parochial capitalist imagination; they must be liberated by an ambitious left alternative’.⁵² The world literary and social commons that *The Communist Manifesto* drew on and created, in both content and form, and which informed many of the twentieth century’s anti-imperial movements, may also be fundamental to the realization of a postcapitalist society in the twenty-first.

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⁴⁷ Paul Mason, *PostCapitalism*, xiii.

⁴⁸ Mason, *PostCapitalism*, xv.

⁴⁹ Sylvain Firer-Blaess and Christian Fuchs, ‘Wikipedia: An Info-Communist Manifesto’, *Television & New Media*, 15/2 (2014), 88; Nick Srinicek and Alex Williams, *Inventing the Future: Postcapitalism and a World Without Work* (London and New York: Verso, 2015), 1–3.

⁵⁰ Marx and Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, 220; Firer-Blaess and Fuchs, ‘Wikipedia’, 90.

⁵¹ Firer-Blaess and Fuchs, ‘Wikipedia’, 90, 99.

⁵² Srinicek and Williams, *Inventing the Future*, 1–3.

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