

CRITICAL

**MARCH—
JUNE 2026**

ANTIQUITIES

WORKSHOP



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The seminars will be held online on Zoom or in a hybrid format. All are welcome. For more information on the Critical Antiquities Network please email fass.can@sydney.edu.au. To register, please **sign up** for the Critical Antiquities Network mailing list and you will receive CAN announcements and Zoom links.

March
3/4

From the womb of capital itself: Commodity Fetishism, Reproductive Fantasy, and the Use of Birth

Sara Brill
(Fairfield University)

Tues, March 3, 17:00–19:00 (New York)
Wed, March 4, 09:00–11:00 (Sydney)

Note on Location: On Zoom and in-person at the Vere Gordon Childe Centre Boardroom, University of Sydney

Near the end of the third volume of *Capital*, Marx deploys a telling image to describe the fantasy-world building of commodification, whereby productive powers and social relations are transferred from labor to capital, “and seem to issue from the womb of capital itself.” This trope, in which the womb is figured as both productive and destructive, both natal and mortal, both natural and unnatural, was available already to Aristotle, who used it to examine critically the nature of business expertise and the accrual of interest through the figure of the *tokos*, both ‘child’ and ‘interest.’ Their shared concern about the nature of money and the psycho-political effects of limitless acquisition and exchange invites a genealogical approach in assessing the possibilities of Marxist critique for a variety of contemporary critical theories. In this paper, I take up the invitation and explore the subterranean conceptual formations connecting an alienated approach to the material conditions of human birth with the dictates of neoliberal global capitalism.

March 31/
April 1

Broken Reversibilities: Echo and Merleau-Ponty

Kishore Saval
(Australian Catholic University)

Tues, March 31, 18:30–20:30 (New York)
Wed, April 1, 09:00–11:00 (Sydney)

Note on Location: On Zoom and in-person at the Vere Gordon Childe Centre Boardroom, University of Sydney

“I’m here!” “I’m here!” The philosophical promise of the ancient myth of “Echo and Narcissus” is inexhaustible, and critical philosophers of the last two centuries have explored some of its most fruitful implications. Perhaps the most famous of these voices is Jacques Derrida, whose early essay, *Voice and Phenomenon*, can be read as an extended meditation on the myth itself. However, Derrida is not the first philosopher to see a problem in the fact that, to myself, I am hearable from the place that I speak, visible from the place that I see, and touchable from the place that I touch. There is an echo of Derrida in Merleau-Ponty, who also perceptively explores the delay, hiatus, or spacing between these different vantage-points on necessarily connected experiences. Echo and Narcissus reveal that, perversely, I myself can never inhabit the double of my speaking and being heard, or my seeing and being seen, at one and the same moment, even though all the promise and risk of meaning and desire emerges from this incapacity to be absolutely present to myself. My talk explores the critical philosophical implications of the ancient Echo and Narcissus problem in its contemporary rethinking by Merleau-Ponty, whose work is animated by the reversibility of visibility and seeing, and tangibility and touching, no less than the dangerous capacity of his speech to be transformed by its own overhearing. I am particularly interested, however, in the way that these reversibilities always come to be broken and shattered, so that philosophy takes and loses new shape in the breakdown of such reversibility.

May
5/6

Blasting out of History: The Challenge of ‘Inca Communism’

James Martel
(San Francisco State University)

Tues, May 5, 18:30-20:30 (New York)
Wed, May 6, 09:00-11:00 (Sydney)

Note on location: On Zoom and in-person at Faculty
of Arts and Social Sciences Meeting Room N301,
University of Sydney

In his “On the Concept of History,” Walter Benjamin argues that engaging with the past had a radical effect on the present. This was because each time period had a specific material reality of its own and each could disrupt the certainties and oppressions of the other, those systems of power that Benjamin calls “mythic violence” and what I like to call archism. In this talk, I will engage with that framework to consider the claim by the Peruvian Marxist José Carlos Mariátegui that communism lies, not only in the future, but also in the distant past in the form of what he calls “Inca communism.” Inca communism was (and remains) a form of societal organization that defied the Incan empire itself—and actually preceded it. It has survived to the present day in the form of the *ayllu*, deeply organized kinship networks that helped the Indigenous communities of the Andean Highlands to survive the Spanish conquest, genocide, the rise of liberal nation states and now neoliberalism. In some sense the ongoing existence of the *ayllu* form could be seen as a concrete example of how different historical eras can coexist and disrupt each other. At the same time, the *ayllu* has not remained static since its inception. The *ayllu* is as contemporary as archism and it remains as a challenge and also a political and social model that Western leftists might look to to better understand how to resist and even overthrow archist power.

June
2/3

The Many Things Happening around Marx’s Dissertation

Peter Fenves
(Northwestern University)

Tues, June 2, 18:30-20:30 (New York)
Wed, June 3, 09:00–11:00 (Sydney)

Note on Location: On Zoom and in-person at the Kevin
Lee Room, University of Sydney

The aim of this talk is to identify and discuss the many things that are happening not only in the dissertation Marx submitted to the University of Jena but also in the extant notes he developed both in preparation for, and in reflection on, this project from around 1839 to 1841. The basic theme pursued in the dissertation is the distinction between the original form of Greek atomism, represented by Democritus, and its derivative—or, alternatively, completed—form, which is seen to take shape in Epicurus’ writings. Marx seems to have been drawn to this theme from two primary impulses: an interest in materialism, which would obviously represent a challenge to German idealism in general, and an interest in the predicament of those who are forced to live in the shadow of a totalizing philosopher—after Aristotle in the case of Epicurus, after Hegel in Marx’s own case. The dissertation and its surrounding notes are, moreover, concerned with many more things, some of which return in Marx’s work in surprising ways.