

## Introduction to Issue 15

### Affirmative Inquiries: Reimagining the Art of Critique

*“Self-denial, the denial of life and of all human needs, is its cardinal doctrine. The less you eat, drink and read books, the less you go to the theatre, the dance hall, the public house; the less you think, love, theorize, sing, paint, fence, etc., the more you save—the greater becomes your treasure which neither moths nor dust will devour—your capital.” - Karl Marx (1844)*

*“No one has yet fully realized the wealth of sympathy, kindness, and generosity hidden in the soul of the child. The effort of every true educator should be to unlock that treasure to stimulate the child’s impulses and call forth the best and noblest tendencies.”- Emma Goldman (1931)*

*“There is a crack in everything, that’s how the light gets in”-Leonard Cohen (1992)*

The current issue of *Problématique* is organized around the idea of “affirmative inquiries”. Affirmative inquiry can be defined as a political act that brings a focus on hope, love, passion, creativity, inspiration, transformation, future possibilities and/or the rejuvenation of the left to the study and practice of politics. Inspired by a plethora of recent opportunities for optimism – Arab revolutions, Occupy Movements in more than 900 cities, the recent victory of the Quebec student movement and the ongoing struggle(s) for similar successes across Canada, mobilization against anti-choice agendas in the U.S., Wal-Mart strikes, anti-corruption campaigns in India, anti-austerity movements in Europe and labour unrest in South Africa and China – *to name only a few*, this issue of *Problématique* seeks to put strategies of affirmation and critique at its centre. After our initial call, we received a small number of excellent research essays and book reviews; and, as such, we have decided have a [rolling deadline](#) for online publication in this issue, to allow for ongoing contributions and the development of a conversational dynamic. The issue kicks off with a manuscript by Frantz Gheller, a PhD candidate in York’s department of Political Science, entitled “From Protest Marches to City Squares and Parks: The Fight for Urban Commons in the Neoliberal Era”. In this essay, Gheller analyzes the widespread re-appropriation of urban public spaces as resistance to ‘dispossession of people from the commons’; that is the enclosures of our neoliberal times. Drawing connections between the de-democratization of regional, national and international governing bodies, the appropriation of alternative organizations by neoliberalism, and the criminalization of dissent, Gheller suggests that in recent movements around “streets and squares” we are seeing a necessary shift in the mode of action of resistance. Cautious of scholars who reduce this shift to the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) in protest, Gheller instead recognizes the organizational power of ICTs, but offers an analysis that goes beyond technological change. Gheller focuses on the physical re-appropriation of contemporary commons and opportunities for social change offered by this new mode of action.

Following this Xavier Lafrance reasserts the contemporary import of class analysis in his essay “From *Industrialism to Capitalism*: re-assessing the relevance of class analysis”. Drawing on the work of EP Thompson and Ellen Wood, Lafrance critiques the “class demise” thesis offered in Daniel Bell’s 1976 *The coming of post-industrial society: A venture in social*

*forecasting*, and later advanced by scholars such as Terry Nichols Clark and Seymour Martin Lipset. For Lafrance, a “conception of class as both process and relationship” (10) is of ongoing relevance for academic research, first of all because of the unique capacity of class to capture and speak to the exploitative basis of capitalist social relations. Second, because class is never merely a bi-product of the technological aspects of production but is a historical phenomenon involving conscious actors, class is something that “evolves over time and may manifest itself in different forms” (10). Future research on the subject, he asserts, must take these two theoretical premises to account. Lafrance recently completed his PhD in Political Science at York University. He is currently a post-doctoral fellow in the History of Social Consciousness Department at the University of California, Santa Cruz.

In the book reviews section PhD candidate Graeme Reniers gives an insightful review of David McNally’s Deutscher prize winning book *Monsters of the Market: Zombies, Vampires and Global Capitalism*. The review complements the original essays with a subtle contribution to ‘affirmative inquiry’ by extracting the ‘positive’ creativity from a book that at first glance may seem inherently cynical. Reniers does not hesitate to express his personal views on the book’s arguments, nor does he refrain from second-guessing how one can find optimism in “a world of zombie-labourers and vampire-capitalists”. Yet, using his own creative writing style, Reniers methodically delves into a brief synopsis of each main chapter, and is able to find such ‘affirmative inquiry’ through McNally’s unique epistemological intertwining of various sub-fields, and in the literary genre of ‘fantastic realism’. While Reniers highly endorses the book due to its interdisciplinary accessibility and serious theoretical critiques and contributions to the study of the ‘capitalist human condition’, he also provides succinct criticism throughout, and recommends more detailed analyses of certain cases that would strengthen the overall argument. For those interested in a unique combination of political Marxism, pop-culture fantasies, literary genre and serious scholarship, the book is a must-read!

We are also currently seeking reviewers for Elizabeth Dauphinee’s (2013) *The Politics of Exile*, as well as *Arab Revolutions and World Transformations* edited by Anna Agathangelou and Nevzat Soguk (2013).