

6/7/2020

§1

Reading Freud, Karatani writes that "It is as if clan society perpetually killed off in advance the ur- father that would inevitably appear if matters were left to their own devices" (56). I am not quite sure myself what this would entail but I wonder what a psychoanalytic reading of his concept of modes of exchange could develop and how it could possibly integrate desire and drives into what seems to be a more political-economic analysis.

§2

Thought I would send through a random thought on something I've found quite thought provoking in the introduction. Specifically, this rather fundamental idea of certain epochs being defined by what is the dominant mode of exchange, with other modes of exchange not disappearing entirely, but co-existing as residual elements of previous (and perhaps future) developments. My thought is maybe an obvious one for anyone familiar with Lacan's work but I wonder if this model might be transposed into the idea that certain epochs have a dominant mode of enjoyment, which is either determined by the method of exchange or works against it some kind of antagonistic (or perhaps symbiotic) way. I really like that Karatani places exchange as primary to power (to avoid the Foucaultian trap) but I wonder how one might think it in relation to enjoyment. The only thing I can think of at the moment is the relationship between enjoyment and moving beyond limits, which might be thought of alongside the moving beyond boundaries of communal units but a lot of this is thinking out loud. Keen to hear if you had any thoughts on this.

§3

(1) The first is really deferring to Gabriel's expertise and the extent to which he sees Moses Hess (who Karatani cites as the origin of his concept of 'intercourse') as truly central to Karatani's thought. Obviously Hess and the other German communists have a somewhat ambivalent relation to Marx, so I think it might be interesting to take a look at Hess's 'The Essence of Money' as well as Marx's critique of the 'true socialists' (there is also the fact that it is Hess who first converted Engels to Communism, as well as Hess's collaboration in writing The German Ideology - which Karatani has a tendency to use as his part-of-Marx's oeuvre-qua-rhetorical-bludgeon). My question though is really to Gabriel and whether he sees Karatani as truly drawing on Hess or if that is a bit of an intellectual-historical fake-out.

That question seems central to me in terms of drawing out Karatani's relation to Marx.

(2) The second has to do with Karatani's supposed Kantianism, which - as Daniel noted - I think would be an interesting debate to try to 'settle' by the end of the seminar (because I think in many ways that is the way Karatani seems himself, although probably viewed from a standpoint that might not be recognizable to lots of Kantians...). More specifically though, I guess I'm trying to work out more precisely the connection between 'Mode D' and a regulative 'regulative idea.'

(3) I was particularly interested in Gabriel's comment about Engels, Althusser, etc as - perhaps counterintuitively - actually the thinkers Karatani is attempting to emulate, despite

his negative assessments of them. Although he certainly offers the sort of caricature portrait of Engels by the various post-vulgar Marxists, I do think it is worth noting - to Gabriel's point - that when Engels first makes an appearance in Marx: Towards the Center of Possibility Karatani says quite explicitly that while it is true that it is "Engels who formulated Marxism as a system" (in the 'bad' dogmatic sense) Karatani clarifies describing how it would be "incorrect to suggest that Engels distorted the 'true Marx'. It is not excessive to say that, without Engels genius, Marxism would never have enjoyed such mythical, religious power" (5).

Viewing (2) from the standpoint of (3), I guess I'm curious about the relationship between the 'Kantian regulative idea,' Mode D, the 'mythic, religious power' of Marxism (elsewhere he categorizes Marxism as a 'world religion'), and the system Karatani attempts to construct in SWH vis a vis the Kantian modal categories of possibility & actuality.

§4

I'm curious about Karatani's decision to use this word parallax - it seems to have a long relationship with technology, specifically anything with a lens or sight. The use of the word resolution (low-res) makes sense here, and Karatani doesn't strike me as someone writing through vagaries, more a stick-and-move style. It reminds me a bit of Burkhardt's quick, acute lectures but with less mannerism or idiosyncrasy.

But understanding parallax in terms of secular difference provides the leeway between and around regimes. This seems to be the capacity-force of this type of systematic thought.

§5

The word incommensurable came up a lot as well. This word calls up different associations, for me almost entirely in the Christian tradition, where incommensurability is the case after the fall, while it's opposite is Paradise, communion, and so on. So the gesture of making two regimes or two spheres commensurable could take on a communitarian shape. Secular time for example is considered to maintain this word with it's negative prefix. So I'm wondering how secularism can still welcome the difficult to ignore or admit thesis of : gods are everywhere.

§6

Not so much a question but I'm fascinated by this emerging critique of metabolism, exchange (Verkehr), and stockpiling. I've noticed these gastric tropes throughout much of my research - so I'm very curious to see how this builds throughout our reading.

§7

I have two short(-ish) questions, that I'd be interested to see picked up in the group discussion as we go forward. I'm behind with the reading, so both of these come out of Monday's video, and neither is specific to this week's reading, so I leave it to you to see how you want to meld them in, and if they don't resonate, please don't feel obliged to pursue them.

1. Scaling / Gabriel talked about the scale at which we choose to see things so that certain logics will appear. I am thinking that this is not just an analytical question, but also a question of where we want to intervene, and in what way we might imagine acting on the world. And

that this runs both ways: not only from analysis which can open up, or close down, new kinds of practice, but also that our history of practice would lead us to favour certain scales of analysis, and ignore others, in ways which may or may not be productive. (I suppose that this is because as I read Karatani, I am asking myself, not only what in his own history - his lived experience, not just his intellectual history - predisposes him to seeing / acting at certain scales, and not at others; but also, I am asking myself what actions does this make possible for me that were not previously imaginable? and conversely what possibilities for action does it close down, consciously or - more importantly perhaps - unconsciously?)

I guess this another way of asking: is the question of which scales we opt to use a free choice? Or is itself conditioned, both historically and personally? And if so, does that fold back into Karatani's approach in a mutually supportive way? Or does it create some sort of aporia or gap - a point which should be situated, but cannot be because it is, in some sense, too close for us to see it clearly?

So I would be interested in any reflections, as we go forward, that explicitly link the methodology of SWH to action - not just with respect to past activity, but also to what might be done (or not done) in the future - and which explore how thinking in terms of the scale of political action might confirm, or alternatively might change or shift, how we experience / think about the scale of analysis as a theoretical decision, as opposed to the lived, and partly unchosen, outcome of our experiences and the way they shape what modes of perception are and are not available to us.

2. Post-colonial / I am intrigued by the idea that Gabriel threw out that Karatani could help us reframe the question of post-coloniality, and in particular, by whether he could help us amplify, or shift, the sense of what a decolonial (or decolonised) left-wing politics would be like. I'd be very interested in any explorations of this that you guys might come up with, in particular in relation to the current moment (the upsurge in abolitionist praxis, along with renewed arguments, beyond any simple identity politics, for the foundational role of decolonial and anti-racist praxis within a revolutionary / Mode D-friendly politics).

§8

Karatani suggests that 'In the history of social formations, shifts in dominant mode of exchange are crucial; they produce radical change' in terms of the establishment of clan society, state society, and industrial capitalist society (p.32).

He also delineates how different modes of exchange relate to ways of holding in check the dynamics that may derive from the inequalities they create from the moment that fixed settlement is taken up. For example, in relation to clan society, Karatani notes that it 'always includes elements that will generate inequalities of wealth and power, but at the same time it always holds these in check through the obligations of the gift' (p.49). Similarly, in relation to the 'triplex system, the Capital- Nation- State trinity' that organizes our contemporary capitalist market economy, Karatani argues that the development of economic disparities and class conflict are countered by the 'intention toward communality and equality' embodied by the nation, and by forms of redistribution implemented by the state (p.2).

I was wondering whether Karatani sees social conflict originated by inequalities not successfully held in check, or its prospect, as having any role to play in the shift from one dominant mode of exchange to the other, or in their combination in a given social formation.