

Editorial

In 2008, I witnessed Barack Obama's election victory from the vantage point of Chicago's Grant Park. In the immediate aftermath, I penned an article in these pages, headed 'A bogie man is Haunting America', which outlined how the US right-wing commentariat had conjured the spectre of Marx in an attempt to smear Barack Obama as a radical commie. The background was the post-2007 worldwide banking crash and the subsequent economic meltdown: the intervening eight years has proven Obama to be far from the Red Menace which the right invoked.

In Poppy Kohner's report from a NATO summit meeting in Chicago, she focuses on the fifty military veterans who led a march through the city to protest against US militarism. For all that Obama has successfully cultivated a chic faux-radical persona, his ongoing drone killing programme and the continued presence of Guantanamo Bay are signifiers of a continuity with, not a radical rupture from, a conservative twentieth century foreign policy. However, eight years on from Obama's election - and who would have foreseen this? - a self-described socialist is centre-stage in US politics railing against economic inequality and demanding a political revolution. Even if Bernie Sanders's socialism

is more social democracy than full-fat communism, it signifies that class is back. Class was always there if you were looking for it, of course; however, since the eighties, in mainstream academic and political discourse, increasing numbers of commentators have appeared disinclined to seek it out. It is now increasingly difficult to dodge.

Class is certainly centre-stage in the cinematic adaptation of J. G. Ballard's novel, *High Rise*, the fifth feature length film directed by Ben Wheatly, which is set in some kind of anachronistic 1970s socially stratified tower block. Chelsea Birks looks beyond the films' superficial Hobbesian (perhaps extreme nihilist) worldview to explore how it expresses contemporary anxieties about ecological concerns. Capitalism has become the most efficient system designed by humanity for devouring the world's resources, and if the film refuses to proffer solutions, for Birks, its value is perhaps to be found in the film's capacity to represent humanity's exhaustion as it recognises the limits of its own excess.

In 'Why all the radicals?', Michael Higgins offers something of a critical discourse analysis of the term radical, highlighting 'some of the strands and networks of meaning that have attended notions of the radical over the centuries. Covering the realms of science and the humanities, Higgins both uncovers and interrogates what he describes as 'a cocktail of meanings' associated with a term appropriated by a diverse field and encourages future radicals to revisit and enhance some of its first principles.

Economic determinism gets a hard time these days. In fact, it always has done – how vulgar it seems – and yet the collapse in the centre of US and European politics and the push to the radical left and the radical right, has strong roots in the post 2007 economic crisis. In the 'Radical as Figure', Carl Lavery notes that the word radical derives from the Latin *radix* or root, and suggests that the radical unearthing, or digging up, of the root, in an act of social or political liberation, inevitably brings it into contact with the air in some kind of double movement. For Lavery, this allows the radical to float free of the earth from which the root hails, and he celebrates the poets and thinkers inspired by what he sees as the aerie potential of the Paris Commune, and its own collective striving for a radical future.

This edition of The Drouth coincides with Glasgow hosting the 2016 Radical Film Network Festival and Unconference. The city welcomes many academics, activists and filmmakers from Scotland and beyond to explore radical ideas in relation to cinema, culture and politics. We offer up the essays in this edition as a contribution to the debate.

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