

Introduction

Andrés Bernal

In a widely-shared video published April 17, 2019, Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez outlined what the future might look like in the decade following the passage of a Green New Deal.¹ Over beautifully drawn images of robust public transit in motion; workers of diverse backgrounds involved in coastal recovery work; and young people enthusiastically engaged in the political process, Ocasio-Cortez narrates a future world defined by collective care, maintenance, and sustainability, rather than by austerity and deprivation. It is a vision of the future that cannot be understood by conventional modes of economic thought. Like much of the bold legislation proposed today, Ocasio-Cortez's more utopian vision finds its greatest potential when grounded in the thought-provoking approach to the economic and policy analysis known as Modern Monetary Theory, or MMT.² In my combined capacities as a doctoral student in Public and Urban Policy at the New School for Public Engagement in New York City, adjunct professor of Urban Studies at CUNY Queens College, political activist, and advisor to AOC, I understand MMT's framework as a fresh perspective and essential way forward for not only averting climate catastrophe, but also rediscovering our political and social imaginations for the purposes of building a world on more just and equitable foundations. Neither am I alone in recognizing

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¹ Naomi Klein, "A Message from the Future with Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez," *The Intercept*, April 17, 2019.

<https://theintercept.com/2019/04/17/green-new-deal-short-film-alexandria-ocasio-cortez/>.

² Eliza Relman, "Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez says the theory that deficit spending is good for the

economy should 'absolutely' be part of the conversation," *Business Insider*, January 7, 2019. <https://www.businessinsider.com/alexandria-ocasio-cortez-ommt-modern-monetary-theory-how-pay-for-policies-2019-1>.

the urgency and appeal of game-changing proposals like a Green New Deal and the possibilities inherent in the ideas of MMT — within 24 hours of its publication, Ocasio-Cortez’s “Message from the Future” had been viewed over one million times.

As enthusiastic as I and others are about MMT as a lens for understanding contemporary macroeconomics and policy analysis, I also recognize that the straightforward perspective often taken by professional economists and market practitioners captures only part of a much deeper reality. Here, the efforts of the Modern Money Network: Humanities Division (MMNHD), and their podcast *Money on the Left*, provide an essential critical, conceptual, and performative complement. By grounding their multimedia work on the insights of MMT—but also at every step leveraging the theoretical repertoire of the humanities to scrutinize and extrapolate on those foundations—the creators of *Money on the Left* expand the horizon of MMT’s theoretical mandate to include the arts, politics, and the performance of everyday life in a world defined by possibility rather than by de facto scarcity. In other words, *Money on the Left* deploys new discourses and affects with which to more powerfully describe, theorize, and perform a world of contested abundance.

One of the most striking aspects of the *Money on the Left* project is its tendency toward imaginative construction and critical optimism rather than left cynicism or melancholia. Indeed, while the interviews and conversations in the 16 published episodes of *Money on the Left* often turn on a baseline critique of the political economic status quo, they never veer too far or long from their primarily constructive course. Cohosts Scott Ferguson (University of South Florida), William Saas (Louisiana State University), and Maxximilian Seijo (University of California, Santa Barbara) are clearly concerned with developing the interdisciplinary project of critical theory, but often do so in novel and unexpected ways. As Ferguson, co-founder of MMNHD, put it in his opening remarks at the organization’s inaugural conference, “rather than waiting for an unspecified new system as people and environments continue to suffer, [we] want to expand the bounds of the possible right away with tools that are ready at hand.”³ This is one of the clearest ways that the project diverges from the tradition of critical theory. Where dispirited critical theorists may call for the abandonment of an all-encompassing and hopelessly repressive system, *Money on the Left* exhorts us to recall and reanimate the radical capacity of humans to collectively conspire to confront the difficulties of *care*. In other words, unlike many within the critical

³ Modern Money Network: Humanities Division, “Money on the Left: Welcome and Opening Remarks,” Youtube.com, May 16, 2018.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7Y5LC6pCi-g>.

theory orthodoxy, the *Money on the Left* project employs critical theory to the problem of care in the service of building public, collective power.

It is for these reasons that I am very pleased to introduce this special issue of *Liminalities*, which invites Saas, Seijo, and Ferguson to reflect and expand upon their work, both in producing the podcast and in developing the Modern Money Network: Humanities Division as a center for progressive and humanistic political economic epistemologies. Original essays by Saas, Seijo, and Ferguson — framed and punctuated by clips, transcriptions, and images from the *Money on the Left* podcast — outline the ambitions of the MMNHD project; articulate its unique historiographic perspective; and probe its aesthetic horizons, respectively. An original video essay by Seijo mobilizes the MMNHD perspective to critique what he calls “cinema’s fascist unconscious,” exemplified by a particularly striking scene in Quentin Tarantino’s *Inglorious Basterds* (2009). Taken together, the essays and artifacts included in this special issue stand not only as compelling examples of collaborative, transmedia scholarship. They also lend essential voice to a more affirming and hopeful vision of the political future.



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