(MIS)READINGS OF MARX IN CONTINENTAL PHILOSOPHY

Edited by **Jernej Habjan** & **Jessica Whyte**

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Also by Jessica Whyte

CATASTROPHE AND REDEMPTION: The Political Thought of Giorgio Agamben (*2013*)

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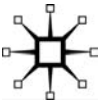

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Introduction

Jernej Habjan and Jessica Whyte

Whither Marxism? This question was elevated to the title of a conference that took place in April 1993 at UC Riverside and that soon became known for its proceedings published under the same title (Magnus and Cullenberg, 1995) but even more so for the book-length publication of the plenary address, titled *Specters of Marx*. Two decades later, Jacques Derrida's plenary address has not only been addressed by Fredric Jameson, Toni Negri, Terry Eagleton and other contributors to the 1999 volume *Ghostly Demarcations* (Sprinker, 1999) but has also given rise to a full-fledged cultural-studies commonplace of the spectre. More importantly still, two decades later a response to the question in the proceedings' title, *Whither Marxism?*, and even its subtitle, *Global Crises in International Perspective*, has begun to emerge as a set of lists. Derrida's (1994, pp. 81–4) 1993 list of the ten plagues of the 'new world order' (unemployment; statelessness; the economic war; the global market; accumulation by foreign debt; the arms trade; nuclear weapons; interethnic wars; mafias; international law) was not only preceded by Jameson's (1994, pp. 1–71) 1991 list of the four antinomies of post-modernity (constant change vs. absolute stasis; spatial heterogeneity vs. global homogeneity; a hostility to nature vs. a renewed sense of nature; utopia vs. anti-utopia) but has also more recently been met by such disparate lists as Slavoj Žižek's (2011, p. x) four riders of the coming apocalypse (the ecological crisis; economic imbalances; the biogenetic revolution; exploding social divisions), David Harvey's (2010, pp. 123–83) seven activity spheres of capitalism (technologies; social relations; institutional arrangements; production processes; relations to nature; the reproduction of the species; 'mental conceptions of the world'), Darko Suvin's (2010, pp. 269–320) three plagues of our time (mass murder; mass prostitution; mass drug use) or even, less recently and more benignly, Arjun Appadurai's (1996,

pp. 32–43) five scapes of the globalised world (ethnoscapes; mediascapes; technoscapes; financescapes; ideoscapes).

The list goes on. This list of lists does not end here. It goes beyond a list of lists, beyond yet another list of the vicissitudes of our time; instead of one more list, it suggests a structure, even a symptom. This list of lists proposes that these lists be approached as so many attempts to reconstruct a universalist cognitive mapping of the contemporary social reality, something akin to exactly that which *Whither Marxism?* (and especially *Specters of Marx*) mourned – Marxism. Most of these lists resemble attempts to supplement the symbolic network that was catastrophically decomposed in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union, not unlike the way a psychotic's paranoid network is both a symptom of the destruction of the symbolic order and an attempt to reconstruct that order. As if in the wake of the real-socialist disaster, with the Name-of-the-Father ('Marx') being foreclosed, theory lost, willingly or not, the very tools that enabled it to grasp the present and was thus forced to resort to constructing lists.

This is, of course, not to say anything about the symptomatology of these theories. Rather, it is a claim about the very social reality that these theories try to conceptualise in these ways: the fact that even the most elaborate of these lists can suggest no more than an abstract anticipation of a new form of socialist culture (Jameson, 1994, pp. 73–4), the New International (Derrida, 1994, pp. 84–6), a new communist politics (Žižek, 2011, p. 185) or zero growth economy (Harvey, 2010, pp. 215–60) reveals less about them and more about the social totality of which they are a part or maybe even a collection of symptoms. Likewise, the fact that Derrida's list is soon (Derrida, 1994, p. 142) followed by his critique of Marx's own lists and that Harvey's list is a comment on a list made by Marx – who, moreover, himself offered a lot more insight on the past bourgeois revolutions than on the coming proletarian ones – speaks less about Marx himself than about his time, its state of class consciousness, class struggle and, indeed, spirit.

The social totality of the time in which these returns to Marx are taking place is the ultimate horizon that this collective volume tries to sketch. For a generation of leading European philosophers in the late twentieth century, Marxism was no longer the 'untranscendable philosophy for our time' (as Jean-Paul Sartre [2004, p. 822] had proclaimed) but a philosophy in need of transcending. *(Mis)readings of Marx in Continental Philosophy* provides new readings of the ways in which these thinkers related to Marx's thought. It starts from the premise that the readings of Marx provided by philosophers in the late twentieth century

were overdetermined by the spectre of Stalinism and the reality of the Stalinised communist parties in Europe. Today, with the memory of the Soviet Bloc exerting less of a hold over intellectual life, it is possible to reconsider Marx's writings outside the context of the Cold War. In a context of renewed attempts to theorise a crisis-prone capitalist system, there is a need both for critical reflection on the way major continental philosophers positioned themselves in the Cold War conflict through attacks on or misreadings of Marx and for the identification of areas of common concern and new possibilities for combining Marx's insights with those of recent continental thought.

In speaking of '(mis)readings' our intention is not to initiate an exercise in 'correction' or, much less, what Bruno Bosteels, in his own chapter in this volume, refers to as a 'summary trial'. Indeed, this book would not be necessary if the readings of Marx offered by the leading European philosophers of the twentieth century were without value and could simply be discarded or even purged in the course of a retreat to a time before the twentieth and even the nineteenth centuries, back to Marx's own texts in their uncorrupted 'purity'. Rather, we are interested in the productivity of the readings and '(mis)readings' of Marx offered by these figures as they used Marx to think with – and to think against. In this spirit, this book brings together leading and upcoming theorists of Marxism, post-structuralism and continental philosophy to address the readings of Marx offered by the major European thinkers of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. It provides new accounts of the work of Theodor Adorno, Giorgio Agamben, Louis Althusser, Hannah Arendt, Alain Badiou, Walter Benjamin, Gilles Deleuze, Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Bruno Latour, Antonio Negri, Jacques Rancière and Slavoj Žižek. Not only are these thinkers major figures in the tradition of continental philosophy and important influences on contemporary philosophical and political thought, they are thinkers who have grappled with Marx's thought in the course of formulating their own philosophical and political positions – even if only in often frustrated attempts to break free of his legacy.

Today we are seeing a renewed attention to Marx which takes place in a context dramatically different to that in which mid- to late-twentieth century thinkers such as Derrida, Deleuze and Foucault wrote. 'Don't talk to me about Marx any more!' Michel Foucault (quoted in Eribon, 1991, p. 266) angrily exclaimed to a young militant in 1975. 'I never want to hear anything about that man again.' Like many philosophers writing in the wake of May 1968, Foucault's experience of Marx was overshadowed by the question of Stalinism and the hegemony exerted over the

left by Stalinised communist parties, such as the French Communist Party (PCF); hence Foucault's (quoted in Eribon, 1991, p. 66) reproach to his interlocutor, 'Ask the Marxist functionaries'. As Marx's legacy was mobilised to legitimise the Soviet states, there was a tendency to invert this picture and hold his thought responsible for everything from gulags to the Stasi, thus detracting from a careful examination of his texts and of the complex history of the socialist bloc itself, which included both the country leading the Warsaw Pact and the country introducing the Non-Aligned Movement. While Marx's thought continued to haunt continental philosophy from the 1970s onwards, the general political climate often led to distorted or one-sided accounts of it, if not to outright attempts at exorcism. And yet, as Hannah Arendt (2002, p. 275) remarked in the early 1950s, in a surprising defence of the thinker to whom she attributes the nineteenth century's only serious philosophical consideration of the emancipation of the working class, 'Marxism in this sense has done as much to hide and obliterate the actual teachings of Marx as it has to propagate them.'

This obliterating force of 'Marxism' becomes clear, for instance, when Foucault builds his theory of power in opposition to what he terms 'Marx, or what passes for Marxism today', referring to a view of power as a commodity to be possessed or traded. As Wendy Brown (1995, pp. 12–13) points out, this dramatically understates the subtlety of Marx's account of the commodity as a social relation rather than a 'thing to be possessed', and, in fact, what Foucault terms 'Marxism' bears little relation to Marx's writings. That Foucault (2007) devoted a 1976 lecture to outlining the extent to which Marx's *Capital* contains elements that can be used to construct a theory of power that is not repressive but positive, not unitary but regional, suggests the importance of not simply conflating Marx and Marxism if we are to adequately assess the legacy of Marx's thought.

This, of course, does not simply mean that it is Marxism that needs to be exorcised from the body of Marx's work. On the contrary, and building on the above-mentioned understanding of '(mis)readings', a truly Marxian operation would be to see a dialectical totality in Marx's work *plus* its Marxist appropriations, starting from Engels's grounding of his pre-theoretical notion of false consciousness in the base/superstructure metaphor (Engels, 2004, p. 164), which Althusser (2014, pp. 237–42) traces back to Marx's own merely descriptive theory of the state, and proceeding up to, say, the post-autonomist optimism about the communism inherent to global capitalism (see, e.g., Hardt and Negri, 2000, pp. 351–413), which Žižek (2008, pp. 350–62) reflects back

into Marx's notion of general intellect. In this way, Marx can be seen not as a teacher, as a leader or, in Foucault's words, as 'that man' but as what Foucault (1984, pp. 113–14) dubbed in 1969 a 'founder of discursivity': an author of a textual practice irreducible to anyone's body of work, even the author's.

However, as suggested already by the differences between Foucault's 1969, 1975 and 1976 statements about Marx, there have been multiple readings, rejections and misreadings of Marx and not only in philosophy sensu stricto. In theoretical and scientific practice, these misreadings have contributed to the revisionism of the third generations of three continental traditions: the Annales School since François Furet and Pierre Nora, the Frankfurt School since Jürgen Habermas and Axel Honneth, and Workerism since late Antonio Negri and Paolo Virno. Outside of these traditions, too, work based on Marxian theory was to a large extent evacuated to fields that seemed at a safe remove from anything like political economy or historiography, and even in those marginal fields, such figures of Marxist political science and cultural theory as Antonio Gramsci, György Lukács and, later, Fredric Jameson were appropriated as protodeconstructive thinkers of subalternity, the bygone novelistic hero and the deserted modernity, respectively.

As protestors return to remaining sections of the Berlin wall not to demolish them but to prevent them from being dismantled to make way for luxury apartments, it is possible to reconsider Marx's writings outside of the context of the Cold War. And with the memory of the Berlin Wall functioning as a Freudian screen memory covering up the traumatic proliferation of ever new walls – and even of what Brown (2010) calls 'walled states', and Étienne Balibar (2002, p. 82) 'world *apartheid*' – this reconsideration of Marx is becoming necessary.

In 2009, many of the world's most important philosophers gathered in London in front of an audience of over one thousand people to affirm that the idea of communism is one to which we should remain faithful. Speaking at the close of that conference, Slavoj Žižek appealed to all those who had exchanged youthful radical commitment for mature anticommunism: 'Do not be afraid, join us, come back! You've had your anti-communist fun, and you are pardoned for it – time to get serious once again!' (For the proceedings, see Douzinas and Žižek, 2010.) In a context marked by protracted global economic crisis, many have heeded this call to reconsider not only the idea of communism but also the thought of Karl Marx. As an article in *The Guardian* bemoaned, '[t]he only thing more troubling than the thought of predatory traders circulating around banks such as HBOS, profiting from rumours of their

destitution, is the thought of repentant liberals circulating around Marx, begging like cheating lovers to be taken back' (McGoey, 2008). The most prominent advocate of the revival of communism has been the French philosopher Alain Badiou, who has doggedly declared that the idea of communism is one to which we should remain faithful. For Marx and Engels, however, communism was not only an idea but a form of praxis: 'the *real* movement which abolishes the present state of things' (Marx and Engels, 1976, p. 49). Moreover, this praxis was for Marx unthinkable outside a communist *strategy*. While it may be possible to speak of communism once more, there is real disagreement about what this word signifies, much of which centres on the role of Marx's writings and the legacy of Marxism in a renewed communist thought and praxis.

By gathering together leading Marxian thinkers and continental theorists to address a number of key themes that emerge from the interaction between Marx and continental thought, this book provides an important intervention in this debate. It contains new accounts of Marx's theory of commodity fetishism; the questions of humanism, messianism, revolution and eschatology; structural causality; the critique of political economy; empire and imperialism; capitalism and networks; republicanism and the autonomy of the political; the generic; Hegelianism; totality and supplement; and the aesthetics and politics of appearance.

Against this background, this collection of essays asks the following questions: What new light do recent philosophical debates throw on Marx's writing, and how can his thought contribute to the rejuvenation of contemporary philosophy? Is class struggle still central to the project of communism's realisation? Is the economy still the terrain of a battle, a field marked by the conflict of labour and capital, or is it the realm of mere fact, the simple management of what is? Was Marx's theory of commodity fetishism 'foolishly abandoned' in the Marxist milieu of the seventies, as Giorgio Agamben (2000, p. 75) claims, or does it presuppose belief in a human essence, which must be dispensed with in the wake of the antihumanist insights of Althusser, Lacan and Foucault? Is the Marxist classless society a secularisation of messianic time, as numerous thinkers have claimed, and, if so, is this, as Walter Benjamin (2003, pp. 401–2) asserted, 'a good thing'? Are Badiou's and Žižek's ontological conceptualisations of communism in the midst of a global crisis of neoliberalism as paradigmatic as was Derrida's deconstruction of ontologising Marxism in a time of neoliberalism's global victory – and if so, do they call for a historical materialist reply equal to Postone's, Macherey's or Ahmad's critiques of Derrida's Marx? Can Marx's insights enable us to understand a contemporary form of capitalism that looks

dramatically different to the one he analysed and critiqued? Is it possible to be 'completely Marxist', as Deleuze (1995, p. 51) said of himself late in life, while 'writing on things that Marx knew nothing about'? And crucially, how can the new insights produced through a renewed philosophical engagement with Marx help to illuminate the present?

* * *

In this volume, the return to Marx begins with a return to romanticism but not so much the romanticism of the 'early' Marx as the romanticism of the philosopher who returns to him: Walter Benjamin. The romanticism of *Zivilisationskritik*, coupled with Jewish messianism, made Benjamin the first Marxist to break radically with the ideology of progress, says Michael Löwy in his chapter on Benjamin's Marxism, building on *Fire Alarm* (2005) and his many other canonical books on Benjamin. Due to this legacy Benjamin approaches Marxism through anarchism. By 1929, he tries to reconcile Marxism and anarchism by defining communism as the organisation of pessimism while praising surrealism for its revolutionary romanticism. Löwy calls this position of Benjamin, also of André Breton, 'gothic Marxism'. After a period of 'progressive parenthesis' in which he flirts with the 'Soviet productivism' of the Second Five-Year Plan, Benjamin returns to his project of integrating revolutionary romanticism with a Marxist critique of alienation. After 1936, this allows him to reject both Stalinism and social democracy for their shared cult of 'progress'. This, Löwy stresses, was not revisionism but an attempt to return to Marx himself by emphasising his romantic anti-bourgeois beginnings (and, accordingly, by rejecting the progressivism of Marx's own *Manifesto* and *The Civil War in France*). Finally, Benjamin's Marxism as developed in the *Arcades Project* and in his last writings is an original reinterpretation of historical materialism radically different from the orthodoxy of the Second and the Third International. His last pieces, the theses *On the Concept of History*, are perhaps the most important document in revolutionary theory since Marx's celebrated *Theses on Feuerbach*, concludes Löwy. The result is a reworking, a critical reformulation, of Marxism that integrates messianic, romantic, Blanquist, anarchist and Fourierist 'splinters' into the body of historical materialism. Or, rather, the result is a fabrication, using all these materials, of a new and heretical Marxism radically different from all the other – orthodox and dissident – variants of its time.

The collection continues with two thinkers who helped publish the works of their friend Walter Benjamin after his suicide upon apprehension in 1940: Theodor W. Adorno and Hannah Arendt. In his chapter

on Adorno, Massimiliano Tomba reflects on the idea of the crisis of the individual and the possibility of an anthropological transformation in Marx and Adorno. If not Benjamin then certainly Adorno could be viewed as the last representative of a declining critical tradition contemplating the decay of Western culture. This perspective changes, notes Tomba, if we regard Adorno not as a witness to but as a part of the horizon he was sketching out. Without any hypostasisation of human nature, Adorno poses the question of the crisis of the individual in terms of the individual's recent transformation within the capitalist relations of production. On the one hand, Tomba addresses the new phenotype that Marx sketched out in the *Grundrisse* in the 'Fragment on Machines', calling it 'social individual'. As Tomba recently demonstrated in *Marx's Temporalities* (2012, pp. 60–91), this crucial Marxian concept marks an anthropological break. It grasps individuals who have broken their bond with nature and are reconfiguring the relationship between the individual and the collective. On the other hand, Tomba considers the crisis of the modern individual as it was addressed by Adorno in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, *Minima Moralia* and his anthropological notes. Adorno takes the Marxian category of the organic composition of capital and translates it in an anthropological context by producing the concept of the organic composition of the human being. This seemingly marginal concept is particularly useful if we want to understand, beyond postmodern enthusiasm and romantic pessimism, the new possibilities that open anytime human skills are absorbed by capital and objectified in machines. Rereading Adorno's conception of the liquidation of the individual against the backdrop of Marx's idea of the new subject that arises within the capitalist form of production allows Tomba to ask himself whether the golden age of the individual ever really existed and what the causes and the results of that liquidation might be.

Many – perhaps most – of the great minds of the twentieth century had an ambiguous relationship with the work and the legacy of Karl Marx. But perhaps none was more ambiguous than that of Hannah Arendt, argues Charles Barbour, the author of *The Marx Machine* (Barbour, 2012), in his chapter on Arendt. On the one hand, as is well known, Arendt constructed her conception of political community and of the 'space of appearances' in which humans engage one another in words and deeds in direct opposition to Marx and to Marx's reduction, as she saw it, of human interaction to labour. On the other hand, at the same time, Arendt had great respect for the achievements of workers' movements and counted committed Marxists (Luxemburg and Benjamin, for example) among her most profound influences. The purpose of

Barbour's chapter is twofold. First, he sketches out, in a fairly exegetical fashion, the central elements of Arendt's reading, or rather readings, of Marx. While this kind of work has been done in the past, Barbour adds to the established interpretation by paying close attention to the texts to which she had access and the place of her readings in the long history of the editing and publishing of Marx's *Nachlass*, or literary remains. Second, Barbour suggests that Arendt's position on Marx remained ambiguous because, in many ways, what she discovered in his manuscripts and notebooks, especially from the early part of his life, were responses to the criticisms she was attempting to level. The contradiction that Barbour discovers is hence that Marx's early work consists in large measure of a response to the civic republicanism of left Hegelian scholars such as Bruno Bauer and Arnold Ruge. And the more Arendt engaged this material, the more she must have realised that, as she was reading Marx, he was reading her as well.

This volume then moves from the Frankfurt of the Weimar Republic to the Paris of the Fourth Republic and then from the Paris of the German refugees of the Nazi period to the Paris of French structuralists. Here, the radical humanism of the Frankfurt School is followed by the militant antihumanism of the school of structuralist Marxism, which Louis Althusser led alongside and, as the next two chapters show from their respective positions, in opposition to Michel Foucault's own alternative to Marxist humanism. A generation later, when *structuralisme* and *Autonomia* became *post-structuralism* and *post-autonomism*, ambitious books in response to those written by Marx and Engels were published by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, and Luc Boltanski and Ève Chiapello, while antihumanist Marxism was criticised by such former students of Althusser and Foucault as Jacques Rancière, Jacques Derrida and Étienne Balibar.

Rastko Močnik, an established commentator on Louis Althusser's philosophy ever since the influential collective volume *The Althusserian Legacy* (Močnik, 1993) was published, approaches Althusser here as the only philosopher who chose theory over philosophy in Marx. In fact, Marx's own 'mature' choice of the critique of political economy over his 'early' critique of Hegelianism is seen by Althusser as an epistemological break with ideology. By breaking with philosophy, Althusser's Marx then also breaks with pre-theoretical ideology. However, in Althusser, theory's break with ideology is much clearer than with philosophy, in which he sees both theory in crisis and intervention into that crisis. In both cases, though, philosophy declares theses, according to Althusser, while theory

produces problematics. Močnik accepts this notion of philosophy and treats it as a philosophical thesis that itself calls for theoretical elaboration. So in order to elaborate on Althusser's demonstration of Marx's epistemological break, he analyses Marx's intervention into David Ricardo's political economy. Močnik dismisses Michel Foucault's 'philosophical' subsumption of Marx's theoretical project under Ricardo's and instead follows the way Marx's philosophy and theory have been distinguished by Roger Establet, the only member of Althusser's school of structuralist Marxism who became a social theorist rather than a 'poststructuralist' philosopher. Močnik argues that, by missing the properly theoretical progress leading from Smith's homogeneous linear causality through Ricardo's heterogeneous linear causality to Marx's heterogeneous structural causality, Foucault misses what should be the real problem of any Foucauldian 'archaeology of knowledge': the class character of theory. On this basis, Močnik concludes that the archaeology of knowledge was realised precisely by Althusser, who always insisted on the class character of theory and worked toward an articulation between theoretical practice and the political practice of the class composition of the working class.

Michel Foucault's mentor, Louis Althusser, pushed Marxism to a limit by trying to purge it of Hegelian metaphysics while remaining resolutely within Marxism-Leninism. Mark G. E. Kelly, who has devoted a monograph to Foucault's political philosophy (Kelly, 2009), argues in his contribution to this collection that Foucault, following Althusser, pushed beyond this limit to break decisively with Marxism because he found that the only way to purge Marxism of Hegel is to repudiate Marxism itself. This is an odd picture to paint, Kelly admits, inasmuch as Foucault made a point neither of proclaiming allegiance to Althusser nor of attacking Hegel. While his sometime friend Deleuze derided Hegel in extremis, Foucault had written a youthful dissertation on the German master, and what little he said about the latter later in life was largely positive. It is indeed not Hegel per se or Hegelianism that Foucault desired to break with but rather key aspects of Hegelianism that haunt Marxism even in its Althusserian variant: a prophetic view of history, a metaphysics of the last instance, references to dialectic and totality. Kelly emphasises, however, against right-wing interpretations of Foucault, the fundamental continuity of Foucault's work with Marxism. Foucault's trajectory is here completely Marxian: to kick aside the vestiges of metaphysical philosophy in favour of a historical realism. Foucault's relation to Marxism is one of maximal proximity: he is effectively as close as one can be to being a Marxist without being a Marxist, Kelly argues.

Foucault retains class analysis (if not its centrality), a sympathy for revolution (though without any assurance as to its form) and the attempt to analyse the relations that structure society. For Kelly, Foucault thus gives us a useful kernel of Marxism without the constraining baggage, without a name or an agenda, a genuinely radical progressivism that is neither Marxist nor communist.

Unlike Foucault and most of his other French colleagues, Gilles Deleuze claimed as late as 1990 to have remained a Marxist. There are three main reasons for taking him at his word, Eugene W. Holland argues in his latest presentation of what he calls 'minor marxism' (Holland, 2011). First of all, Deleuze defines the vocation of political philosophy largely in relations to the struggles against the intolerable suffering inflicted on humanity by capitalism. Second, Deleuze considered capitalism to be one of the six great difference engines of the cosmos inasmuch as it pitted two of the great enemies of difference ('the qualitative order of resemblances and the quantitative order of equivalences') against one another in such a way that market decoding actually generates more difference than capitalist axiomatisation can capture or recode; understanding the dynamics of capitalism is thus of paramount importance, and no perspective is more essential to that understanding than Marx's. Finally, Deleuze's insistence on replacing subject-object dialectics (Hegelian and Marxist) with a Spinoza-inspired philosophy of immanence based on relations between the virtual and the actual aligned his reading of Marx with that of Althusser so that attention becomes focused less on the results of capital accumulation (susceptible to dialectical mapping) than on the structural preconditions for capitalism, otherwise known as 'primitive accumulation'. Because capitalism organises societies through the quantitative calculus of axiomatisation, social life is based on the virtual realm as never before (this is one way of understanding Deleuze and Guattari's adaptation of Marx's notion of 'universal history'); at the same time, however, the infinite debt owed to capital (one result of 'so-called primitive accumulation') redirects and restricts the actualisation of capitalist virtuality solely to the reproduction of capitalist social relations (through the permanent obligation to repay the debt). For Holland, Deleuze then reads Marx to provide analytic tools for targeting the neoliberal regime of personalised as well as sovereign debt and to suggest political strategies for confronting it.

Like Deleuze and Guattari, Antonio Negri has been one of the most important voices in revitalising Marxian critique in the last 20 years. His work has moved from an extremely marginalised position to one of the central reference points in attempts to understand Marx's legacy today.

In his chapter on Negri, Dave Eden, the author of *Autonomy: Capital, Class and Politics* (Eden, 2012), suggests that this might be due to the way that Negri's work is open to the novelties of the contemporary moment and also incorporates the poststructuralist work of Foucault and Deleuze and Guattari. Eden advances a critique of what is often overlooked but central to Negri's work: a critique of Marx's understanding of value and the subsequent argument that the law of value is either in crisis or inoperative in post-Fordism. Against Negri's argument, (also Deleuze and Guattari's) for a radical politics based on a flight or exodus from capital's axioms, Eden argues that such a position is a misreading of Marx and leads to a misunderstanding of capitalism today and to a limited form of communist practice. While it correctly highlights the extra-economic activity that is necessary for capital accumulation, it fails to understand the fetishised nature of commodity relations and thus the automatism of value's operations. As a form of anticapitalism, it downplays the depth of capital's reification of society, the effect of which can be seen in the institution-building politics of Hardt and Negri's *Empire* trilogy. According to Eden, an understanding of Marx that grasps value as a product of the commodity form points to a far more radical transformation.

In the Derrida community, our Great Recession coincides with the consensus on the thesis about radical atheism underlying Jacques Derrida's entire oeuvre. According to this thesis, Derrida's 1993 *Spectres de Marx* does not mark any ethical turn in late Derrida but remains faithful to early Derrida's deconstruction of presence. This implies that the only singularity of *Specters of Marx* within Derrida's oeuvre is that it actually is the Derrida book on Marx; the book is thus susceptible to all the criticism that the rest of Derrida's work has received. On the basis of these critiques, Jernej Habjan argues in his chapter on Derrida that by accusing Marx of trying to distinguish between spirit and spectre, the *Specters* projects onto Marx its own desire to differentiate between the spirit of Marx and the spectre of Marxism. Moreover, by doing what it says Marx is doing, *Specters* is inconsistent, rather than merely in line, with Marx: not only does *Specters* do what it charges Marx with doing, but also Marx does not do what *Specters* says he does. Habjan shows this by a further move, from *Specters* to its reading of Marx's *The Eighteenth Brumaire*. This text assumes the borderline not only between *Specters*' other two main objects, *German Ideology* and *Capital*, but also between the diamat that attracts Derrida in all three texts and the histomat that is, for Althusser, the product of Marx's epistemological break with his early diamat. Read from the standpoint of the theory of signifier from which

the general materialist critique of deconstruction has been produced, *Brumaire* forsakes the bourgeois repetition of the spirit and/or spectre of the revolution not for a non-repetitive spontaneous revolution but for repetition as reflexive self-criticism.

One of the readers of *Brumaire* critically discussed alongside Derrida is Jacques Rancière. More importantly, as Tim Fisken shows in his chapter, Rancière poses a number of questions to Marx and Marxism. The first of these derives from Rancière's work on politics. According to Rancière, politics is a rare and distinct thing that has been disavowed by the whole history of political philosophy, of which a focus on economics, inaugurated by Marxism and completed by neoliberalism, is the latest incarnation. Can Marxism understand politics, and if it is to do so, will this require rethinking certain Marxist assumptions about the economic? Rancière's second question to Marxism derives from his work on proletarian political organising, in which Rancière poses the specificity of his own work against what he sees as Marxism's abstract theoretical image of the proletariat. This challenges Marxists to ask about the value of abstraction in Marxist theory, as well as how the concrete detail we find, for instance, in *Capital* contributes to the theoretical development of that work. Rancière's third question to Marxism concerns the realm of aesthetics. For him, art is not merely contingently or instrumentally political but is already directly political in its ability to disrupt the 'distribution of the sensible', the order of exclusion that prevents the assertion of equality fundamental to politics. How compatible is this with Marxist aesthetics, which typically sees art as at least as capable of producing invisibility (ideology) as visibility? After focusing on these questions that Rancière asks of Marxism, Fisken concludes by considering the resources that we have in Marx's work for responding to them. In particular, Fisken considers a strand of Marxism that is attentive to aesthetics as the concrete materiality of appearances, on the basis of which it rethinks the concept of politics and so is capable of responding to Rancière on the terrain that Rancière's own work opens up.

In its final chapters, this collection spells out the ABZ: Agamben, Badiou, Žižek, the ABC of contemporary continental philosophy – plus its seeming theoretical and political opposite, Bruno Latour. Many of those rare leftist intellectuals of the late twentieth century who did not conform, like Latour, to the general trend of turning away from Marx have, at least in part, set their Marxism under the banner of anti-Hegelianism, which has permeated the entire era of post-Hegelian philosophy so much so that it could easily be deemed its symptom. Slavoj Žižek, however, followed the opposite path, claims Simon Hajdini in his chapter

on Žižek. If Marx is to be deemed problematic (and if 'deemed problematic' refers to a specific mode of fidelity to Marx), this, as far as Žižek is concerned, is not due to his disavowed Hegelianism, which supposedly contaminated his thought. For Žižek, Marx's neuralgic points are, on the contrary, the result of Marx's insufficient Hegelianism. However, the Hegel lacking in Marx is not the Hegel of anti-Hegelianism, Hegel as the emblematic figure of idealism, but precisely the materialist Hegel, the Hegel of Žižek's (Lacanian) 'materialist reversal' of the Hegel of post-Hegelian philosophy. It is exactly the materialism of this Hegel that functions as the agent of the 'materialist reversal' of Marx, a paradoxically redoubled materialist reversal of Marx's materialism itself. This reversal is best exemplified by Žižek's analysis of Marx's notions of commodity fetishism and revolutionary subjectivity, allowing Hajdini to delineate the exact range and focus of Žižek's materialism. On this basis, Hajdini reinterprets the classical psychoanalytical (as well as Marxian) formula of fetishism by producing the concepts of 'fetishism without the fetish' and 'commodity fetishism without the commodity'. In conclusion, Hajdini examines the precise status of negation in Žižek's fetishistic sequence, focusing particularly on a conceptualisation of 'the forth form of negation'. In this way, he demonstrates the key role of Žižek's use of Lacanian psychoanalysis both in determining the elements of the functioning of ideology today and in reinventing the theoretical tools for the critique of ideology.

In stark contrast to Žižek's retrieval of Hegel, Agamben (1993, p. 34) positions his own thought as a contribution to a 'Marxian exegesis that is truly freed from Hegelianism'. And yet, as Jessica Whyte, the author of *Catastrophe and Redemption: The Political Thought of Giorgio Agamben* (Whyte, 2013), notes in her chapter, the text of Marx that has preoccupied Agamben for several decades is the early (still-Hegelian) *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*. Beginning with his first book, *The Man without Content*, Agamben has repeatedly ignored Louis Althusser's suggestion that Marx's early works do not have to be taken into account and turned to the *Paris Manuscripts* in the course of formulating his own accounts of praxis and history. Although Agamben's most substantial engagements with Marx's manuscripts are found in his own earliest works – most prominently in *The Man without Content* and *Infancy and History* – the question of praxis has become ever more central to his project. Indeed, as Agamben has turned his attention from sovereignty to government, he has also focused on what he views as a decisive ontological transformation brought about by Christianity, which, he argues, has profoundly transformed our understanding of the relation between

praxis and being. Whyte examines Agamben's argument that Marx secularised a Christian account of the Being of creatures as divine praxis and highlights the extent to which this is bound up with a larger critique of the metaphysics of the will. This focus on the will as a central category of the economy, she argues, reveals the limitations of Agamben's account of secularisation for understanding what he terms the 'contemporary triumph of the economy'. The form of compulsion that typifies a *capitalist* economy differs significantly from that which characterised the 'despotic' relations between master and slave in the Aristotelian *oikos*. To grasp the 'silent compulsion of economic relations' under capitalism, Marx therefore had to leave the terrain of Feuerbach's secularised Christianity, on which the *Paris Manuscripts* unfold, and develop a critique of political economy.

As mentioned above, Bruno Latour is seemingly unusual among French intellectuals in being explicitly anti-Marxist, and his 'actor-network theory' is always wielded by him against Marxism. Extending his recent critique of Latour's 'low affirmationism' (Noys, 2010, pp. 80–105), Benjamin Noys argues that the anti-Marxism of this 'anthropologist' of networks is in fact emblematic of our present moment. Latour's chiding of Marxism for 'economic reductionism' and for an inattention to the complexity of the world is the signature gesture of a current moment disenchanted with critique. Analysing Latour's antihierarchical 'flat ontology', Noys suggests that his anticritical thought mistakes the form of capitalism. Dereifying capitalism into a series of local forms and arrangements occludes the systematic but non-intentional 'structuring' form of capital as a relation of value. The inflation of 'agency', tracked for humans and non-humans, is a result of this occlusion. In Latour's thought capitalism is presented as incomplete, but the agential forms he offers are deliberately limited and provide only piecemeal opportunities for change: a reticular reformism. It is the displacement of totalisation and reductionism from capitalism to its critics that completes the gesture of anticritique, claims Noys. In light of the current global financial crisis, which has forced into awareness 'global capitalism' as an object and form, he takes the opportunity to criticise the 'discreet charm' of this anticritical mode of thought, which radiates out beyond Latour. At the time of attempts to restart capitalism through recourse to further neoliberal measures, this sense of a finite and changeable capitalism, promoted by Latour, gains resonance as an ideological trope. Noys demonstrates that Latour's dereification is in fact a re-reification, which cannot grasp the accumulative forms of capital as social relation. The fact that this relation passes through 'things', through the form of

reification, leads to Latour's misunderstanding of the 'agency' of objects, concludes Noys.

Finally, Bruno Bosteels proposes one more time to revisit the complex relationship of Badiou and Marx. This time not via the experience of Maoism, as he studied it in *Badiou and Politics* (Bosteels, 2011), but via the notion of the generic. But first, he tackles the way Badiou's recent self-declaration as a Marxist has been condemned either on the basis of his supposed underestimation of the economic or on his earlier writings on the crisis of Marxism. For Bosteels, the problem with all such summary trials of Badiou's insufficiency as a Marxist is that they presume to know in advance the answer to the question What is Marxism? But not only may the answer be completely different from the one that the target of these criticisms might give; even the question is posed differently. For Badiou, this question is not theoretical but practical. Marxism always means political Marxism for Badiou. Hence, it is also as a militant political discourse that Marxism must be periodised, criticised, rectified and, if necessary, destroyed and recomposed. Thus, many of the objections raised against Badiou for being insufficiently Marxist depend on a prior definition of Marxism that is foreign to Badiou's own. On this basis, Bosteels outlines what Marx and Badiou have in common by treating both as thinkers of the generic. If for Marx it is the human being as species being that is generic, for Badiou it is truth that is generic, without having to refer the subject of this truth back to an underlying philosophical anthropology in the school of Feuerbach. This displacement of the category of the generic, however, should not obscure the presence of a continuous thread that articulates being and subject or substance and subject in ways reminiscent of the position that Marx took up starting in the mid-1840s in the context of the revision of the dialectic among Young Hegelians.

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1

A Historical Materialism with Romantic Splinters: Walter Benjamin and Karl Marx

Michael Löwy

Walter Benjamin first became interested in Marxism in 1923, when he read György Lukács's *History and Class Consciousness* and met the beautiful Latvian communist Asja Lacis. From that moment on, the basic concepts of historical materialism become central to his writings but only in association with his radical romantic *Zivilisationskritik* and his interest in Jewish messianism. As a consequence, Benjamin rejected the ideology of progress and, in his 1929 article on surrealism, identified communism with revolutionary pessimism. The struggle to emancipate historical materialism from the (bourgeois) idea of progress, as well as from positivism, is one of the main topics of his unfinished project on the Paris Arcades (*Das Passagen-Werk*) from the 1930s. While in the early 1930s Benjamin emphasised the Marxian concept of production, in his later writings class struggle and revolution appear as the key aspects of the Marxian heritage. In his last writing, an essay of 18 theses and two supplements called 'On the Concept of History' (1940), messianism and historical materialism are brought together in a unique revolutionary synthesis.

* * *

Walter Benjamin, who was born in Berlin in July 1892 to a Jewish/German middle-class family, occupies a unique place in the history of modern revolutionary thought: he is the first Marxist to break radically with the ideology of progress. His thinking has therefore a distinct critical quality that sets him apart from the dominant and 'official' forms of historical materialism and gives him a formidable political and intellectual superiority.

This peculiarity has to do with his ability to incorporate into the body of Marxist revolutionary theory insights from the romantic critique of civilisation and from the Jewish messianic tradition. Both these elements are present in his early, pre-Marxist writings, particularly in 'The Life of Students' (1915), in which he already rejected 'a view of history that puts its faith in the infinite extent of time and thus concerns itself only with the speed, or lack of it, with which people and epochs advance along the path of progress'. To this ideology, characterised by 'a certain absence of coherence and rigor in the demands it makes on the present', he opposed utopian images such as the messianic domain or the French Revolution (Benjamin, 1996b, p. 37; see also 1977b, p. 75).

Benjamin's first reference to communism appears in 1921 in his Sorelian essay 'Critique of Violence', in which he celebrates an 'annihilating and on the whole apt' critique of the parliament by the Bolsheviks and the anarcho-syndicalists (Benjamin, 1996a, p. 244; see also 1977d, p. 191). This link between communism and anarchism will be an important aspect of his political evolution; his Marxism will to a large extent take a libertarian colour.

But it is only after 1924, when he reads Lukács's *History and Class Consciousness* (1923) and discovers practical communism through the beautiful eyes of Asja Lacis – a Soviet artist and political activist he meets (and falls in love with) in Capri – that Marxism becomes a key component of his worldview. In 1929 Benjamin still refers to Lukács's text as one of the few books that remain alive:

> [T]he most achieved philosophical work of Marxist literature. Its uniqueness lies in the confidence with which it has recognised in the critical situation of philosophy the critical situation of class struggle, and in the coming concrete revolution the absolute presupposition and even the absolute implementation and the last word of theoretical knowledge. The polemic against it charged by the hierarchy of the Communist Party under Deborin's leadership confirms, in its way, the significance of the book. (Benjamin, 1980, p. 171)

This commentary illustrates the independence of Benjamin's mind in relation to the 'official' doctrine of Soviet Marxism – despite his sympathies for the USSR.

The first work in which the influence of Marxism is strongly felt is 'One-Way Street', an essay written between 1923 and 1925 and published in 1928. Here, Benjamin's former neoromantic criticism of progress is charged with a revolutionary Marxist tension: the section called 'Fire

Alarm' reads: '[I]f the abolition of the bourgeoisie is not completed by an almost calculable moment in economic and technical development (a moment signalled by inflation and poison-gas warfare), all is lost. Before the spark reaches the dynamite, the lighted fuse must be cut.' Will the proletariat be able to fulfil this historical task? Survival or destruction of 'three thousand years of cultural development' depends on the answer to this question (Benjamin, 1996c, p. 470).

In opposition to the vulgar evolutionist brand of Marxism, Benjamin conceives the proletarian revolution not as the 'natural' or 'inevitable' result of economic and technical progress but as the critical interruption of an evolution leading to catastrophe. This critical standpoint explains why his Marxism has a peculiarly pessimistic spirit – a revolutionary pessimism which has nothing to do with resigned fatalism. In his 1929 article on surrealism – in which he again tries to reconcile anarchism and Marxism – he defines communism as the organisation of pessimism, adding ironically that unlimited trust can be placed 'only in IG Farben and the peaceful perfecting of the air force [*Luftwaffe*]' (Benjamin, 1999a, p. 217; see also 1977c, p. 308). Both institutions were soon (after his death, however) to show, beyond his most pessimistic forecasts, the sinister use that could be made of modern technology.[1]

The 1929 article attests to Benjamin's interest in surrealism, which he sees as a modern manifestation of revolutionary romanticism. We might perhaps define the approach common to Walter Benjamin and André Breton as a kind of 'gothic Marxism', distinct from the dominant version of Marxism, which was metaphysically materialistic in tendency and contaminated by the evolutionary ideology of progress. The adjective 'gothic' has to be understood in its romantic sense: fascination with the marvellous and with the enchanted aspects of pre-modern societies and cultures. The English gothic novel of the eighteenth century and some German romantics of the nineteenth century constitute the 'gothic' references at the heart of the work of both thinkers. The gothic Marxism common to Benjamin and Breton might be said, then, to be a historical materialism sensitive to the magical dimension of past cultures, to the 'dark' moment of revolt, to the lightning flash that illuminates the sky of revolutionary action (see Cohen, 1993, pp. 1–2; Löwy, 2009).

For a brief 'experimental' period between 1933 and 1935, during the years of the Second Five-Year Plan, some of Benjamin's Marxist texts seem close to 'Soviet productivism' and to an uncritical adherence to the promises of technological progress. This holds mainly for 'Experience and Poverty' (1933), 'The Author as Producer' (1934) and, to a certain degree, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility'

(1935). However, even in these years Benjamin doesn't quite lose his interest in the romantic problematic, as his 1935 article on Bachofen attests. In fact, Benjamin's thinking in this period is quite contradictory: he sometimes shifts very quickly from one extreme to the other – even in a single text, as in the famous essay on the work of art. One finds in these writings both a permanent aspect of his Marxist thinking – the materialist preoccupation – and an 'experimental' tendency to push certain arguments to their ultimate consequences. He seems tempted by a Soviet variant of the ideology of progress, though he reinterprets it in his own way. Some Marxist readings of Benjamin's works foreground just these texts that seem closer to a 'classical', if not orthodox, historical materialism. After 1936, this kind of 'progressive parenthesis' closes, and Benjamin increasingly reintegrates the romantic moment into his sui generis Marxist critique of capitalist forms of alienation.

In his writings from the 1920s there are very few references to Marx (or Engels) himself. Benjamin doesn't seem to have a real knowledge of Marx's writings in that period, and his appropriation of historical materialism is mainly based on contemporary Marxist literature, not on the texts of the Founding Fathers. The effective study of these texts seems to take place only in the 1930s, during his years of exile in Paris (1933–40) as a refugee from Nazi Germany, in connection with his work on *The Arcades Project* (*Das Passagen-Werk*). The precise nature of this project remains undecided: was this to be a new form of book, composed as a montage, an enormous assembly of quotations, peppered with comments? Or was this collection of files just rough material to be used for writing a book that never came into being? In any case, it documents Benjamin's intensive study of Marx's and Engels's writings after 1934, as well as his highly selective and idiosyncratic approach.

The German editors of *Das Passagen-Werk* have provided a list of works by Marx and Engels quoted in the text. From Marx and Engels, they include the first volume (I-1) of *Marx-Engels Gesamtausgabe* (*MEGA*), published by David Riazanov in Moscow in 1927, covering their writings before 1844; the third volume of *Gesammelte Schriften*, published by Franz Mehring in Stuttgart, 1902, concerning the period from May 1848 to 1850; the first part of *The German Ideology* (*On Feuerbach*), published by Riazanov in 1928; and two volumes of correspondence: *Ausgewählte Briefe*, published by V. V. Adoratsky in Leningrad in 1934, and the first volume of *Briefwechsel* (1844–53), published in Moscow in 1935. From Marx, they include *Der historische Materialismus: Die Frühschriften*, including the 1844 *Economic-Philosophical Manuscripts*, published by Siegfried Landshut and J. P. Mayer in Leipzig in 1932; *The Eighteenth*

Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte, *The Class Struggles in France, 1848–1850* and *Critique of the Gotha Program*; various editions of *Das Kapital*, one of which was edited and introduced by Karl Korsch in Berlin in 1932; various articles, published posthumously in *Die Neue Zeit*, on eighteenth-century French materialism, the socialist Karl Grün and various French books on conspirators and spies; a collection of essays on *Karl Marx als Denker, Mensch und Revolutionär*, published by Riazanov in Vienna and Berlin in 1928. And from Friedrich Engels, the texts quoted in *The Arcades Project* include 'The Condition of the Working-Class in England', 'Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of the Classic German Philosophy', 'Anti-Dühring', 'The Development of Socialism from Utopia to Science' and some notes on a journey from Paris to Bern, published in *Neue Zeit* in 1898–99.[2]

This bibliographical list is quite interesting for its content but also for its lacunae; two essential writings by Marx and Engels are missing: *The Communist Manifesto* (1848) and *The Civil War in France* (1871)! Both were basic reading for Marxists and, particularly, communists, throughout the twentieth century. How to explain this surprising absence? Could it be that Benjamin neglected the *Manifesto* because of its insistence on the 'progressive' role of the bourgeoisie? In any case, one of Benjamin's rare references to it is his acknowledgement of a critical comment by Korsch: the *Manifesto* believed that the bourgeoisie had destroyed all religious and political illusions, leaving only 'unveiled exploitation'; in fact, insists Korsch, it only replaced those past forms with a hidden exploitation that is more sophisticated and more difficult to unmask (Benjamin, 1999b, p. 663; see also 1982b, pp. 814–15). As for *The Civil War in France*, surprisingly enough, Benjamin had a rather negative assessment of the Paris Commune, very different from the one developed by Marx in his famous account. In *The Arcades Project* Benjamin quotes several negative assessments, including that of Franz Mehring, who considered the commune a victim of the 'old revolutionary legend' of the eighteenth-century bourgeois revolutions (Benjamin, 1999b, p. 788; see also 1982b, p. 949).

The aim of *The Arcades Project* is defined by Benjamin as follows: 'It may be considered one of the methodological objectives of this work to demonstrate a historical materialism which has annihilated within itself the idea of progress. Just here, historical materialism has every reason to distinguish itself sharply from bourgeois habits of thought' (Benjamin, 1999b, p. 460; see also 1982a, p. 574). Such a program did not aim at some sort of 'revision' but rather at what Korsch tried to achieve in his own book: a return to Marx himself.

One of the aspects of this 'annihilation' is a new interpretation of Marx's intellectual sources, one emphasising his relation to the romantic critique of civilisation. Benjamin approvingly mentions Korsch in this respect:

> Korsch says very justly (and one might well think of de Maistre and Bonald in this connection): 'To a certain extent, that [...] "disenchantment" which, after the conclusion of the great French Revolution, was first proclaimed by the early French theorists of the counter-revolution and by the German Romantics [...] has in fact exerted a considerable influence upon Marx mainly through Hegel, and has thus directly entered into the [...] theory of the modern workers' movement.' (Benjamin, 1999b, p. 668; see also 1982b, p. 820)

It is doubtful that Joseph de Maistre – who is extensively quoted in the *Arcades Project* in the section on Baudelaire – was of any interest to Marx, who had probably never read him. But the general hypothesis that romantic antibourgeois currents were relevant to Marx is quite appropriate and of course corresponds to Benjamin's own attempt to reformulate historical materialism.

These romantic undercurrents are also mentioned in the following section of Korsch's book:

> [Marx and Engels] took from all sides. From the bourgeois historians of the French Restoration they took the historical importance of class and class struggle; from Ricardo, the conflicting economic interests of the social classes; from Proudhon, the description of the modern proletariat as the only revolutionary class; from the feudal and Christian assailants of the new political order [Wirtschaftsordnung] [...], the ruthless unmasking of the liberal ideas of the bourgeoisie, the piercing invective full of hatred. Their ingenuous dissection of the unsolvable antagonisms of the modern mode of production they took from the petty-bourgeoisie socialism of Sismondi; the accents of humanism perceptible even in their later materialistic writings from earlier companions among the left Hegelians, especially from Feuerbach; the relevance of politics to the struggle of the working class from the contemporary labour parties, French Social Democrats and English Chartists; the doctrine of the revolutionary dictatorship from the French Convention, and from Blanqui and his followers. Finally, they took from Saint-Simon, Fourier, and Owen the ultimate goal of all socialism and communism, the complete overthrow of

> existing capitalistic society, abolition of all classes and class oppositions, and transformation of the political State into a mere management of production. (Korsch, 1963, pp. 819–20)[3]

This long quotation illustrates Benjamin's main interests concerning Marx: *class struggle* and *revolution*. Romantic critics, from 'Christian socialists' to Sismondi, occupy a significant place in this genealogy of Marxist theory.

Another argument in Benjamin's attempt to emancipate Marxism from the illusions of progress is his critique of the idealisation of industrial labour. In the *Arcades Project* several quotes from Marx or Engels are used to support this critique – for instance when Engels compares, in *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, 'the miserable routine of endless drudgery and toil in which the same mechanical process is repeated over and over again' with the infernal labours of Sisyphus: 'The burden of labor, like the rock, always keeps falling back on the worn-out laborer' (Benjamin, 1999b, p. 106; see also 1982a, p. 162). Moreover, in the *Arcades Project* and in his 1936–38 writings on Baudelaire, Benjamin takes up again the typically romantic idea – addressed as early as his 1930 essay on E. T. A. Hoffmann – of the radical opposition between life and the automaton, employing it for his Marxist-inspired analysis of the transformation of the proletarian into an automaton. The repetitive, meaningless, mechanical gestures of the worker grappling with the machine – Benjamin refers here to certain passages from Marx's *Capital* – are similar to the automaton-like gestures of passers-by in the crowd, as described by Poe and Hoffmann. Both groups of people, as victims of urban, industrial civilisation, no longer know authentic experience (*Erfahrung*) – based on the memory of historical, cultural tradition – but only immediate life (*Erlebnis*), in particular the shock experience (*Chockerlebnis*) that triggers in them reactive behaviour akin to that of automatons and Bergson's fictitious characters 'who have completely liquidated their memories' (Benjamin, 2003a, p. 330).

Benjamin's Marxism, as developed in the *Arcades Project* and in his last writings, is a new and original reinterpretation of historical materialism radically different from the orthodoxy of the Second and the Third International. It should be considered an attempt to deepen and radicalise the opposition between Marxism and bourgeois ideology, to heighten Marxism's revolutionary potential and to sharpen its critical content.

Politically, in the late 1920s and throughout the 1930s, Benjamin was an idiosyncratic sympathiser of the communist movement. However,

he had strong sympathies for Leon Trotsky, and particularly after 1937 he increasingly distanced himself from Soviet (Stalinist) Marxism.[4] From this *linksradikal* (left-radical) commitment follows quite logically a very critical assessment of social democracy, whose blindness Benjamin confronts with the powerful insights of Marx and Engels. For instance, his 1937 article 'Edward Fuchs, Collector and Historian' launches a severe attack on the social democratic ideology and its combination of Marxism and positivism, Darwinist evolutionism and the cult of 'progress'. For Benjamin, the greatest mistake of this ideology is that it sees in the development of technology only the progress of natural sciences, remaining blind to the accompanying social regression. It never perceives the danger that the energies produced by technology could serve above all the technical perfection of war. To the shallow optimism of the social democratic pseudo-Marxists, Benjamin opposes his pessimistic-revolutionary perspective, referring to the 'vision of incipient barbarism, which flashed on the consciousness of an Engels in *Die Lage der Arbeitenden Klassen in England* [The Condition of the Working Class in England], of a Marx in his prognosis of capitalist development' (Benjamin, 2002, p. 274; see also 1977a, p. 488).

In 1939, as the war began, Benjamin was interned as an enemy alien by the French government. He managed to escape the internment camp, but after the German victory and occupation of France in 1940, he had to leave Paris for Marseille. In these dramatic circumstances, he wrote his last piece, the essay 'On the Concept of History', whose theses are perhaps the most important document in revolutionary theory since Marx's celebrated *Theses on Feuerbach* (1845). A few months later, in September 1940, after a failed attempt to escape through Spain, he chose to commit suicide.

In these few but extraordinarily dense pages Marx is often quoted, once more as the thinker of class struggle and revolution. Benjamin criticises the ideology of progress – including its persistence within the communist movement – in its philosophical foundations: the linear and empty time. To this end he introduces a messianic conception of time. The question of the relationship between Marxism and messianism in Benjamin's late writings is of course a highly controversial one; during the sharp polemics in 1960s Germany, some insisted on Benjamin's religious dimension, others on his Marxist materialism. Benjamin himself referred ironically in a letter to Scholem to his 'Janus face', but the critics used to look at only one of Janus's two faces while ignoring the other one. In order to overcome this kind of polemic, it is useful to recall that the Roman god had two faces but only *one head*: Benjamin's faces

are manifestations of one single thought, which had simultaneously a messianic and a Marxist expression.

Let us take as an example Thesis I and its famous allegory of the mechanical chess player:

> There was once, we know, an automaton constructed in such a way that it could respond to every move by a chess player with a countermove that would ensure the winning of the game. A puppet wearing Turkish attire and with a hookah in its mouth sat before a chessboard placed on a large table. A system of mirrors created the illusion that this table was transparent on all sides. Actually, a hunchbacked dwarf – a master at chess – sat inside and guided the puppet's hand by means of strings. One can imagine a philosophic counterpart to this apparatus. The puppet, called 'historical materialism,' is to win all the time. It can easily be a match for anyone if it enlists the services of theology, which today, as we know, is small and ugly and has to keep out of sight. (Benjamin, 2003b, p. 389)

Two topics are interwoven in this allegory: a critique of the sort of Marxism that sees in history a mechanical process leading automatically to the triumph of socialism; and the re-establishment of the explosive, 'theological' – that is, messianic – and revolutionary spirit of historical materialism, reduced to a miserable automaton by its epigones.

One must take seriously the idea that theology is 'at the service of' historical materialism – a formulation that reverses the traditional scholastic definition of philosophy as *ancilla theologiae*. Theology, as memory of victims and as hope of redemption, is for Benjamin not an aim in itself; rather, theology is at the service of the struggle of the oppressed. A few decades after Benjamin's death, the idea of a theology at the service of the poor in the struggle for their self-liberation, a theology intimately linked with Marxism, comes to life again but this time in a very different cultural and historical context: the liberationist Christianity of Latin America. There is a secret affinity between Walter Benjamin and liberation theology.

The radical opposition between Marx and (German) social democracy is a leitmotiv in Benjamin's 'Theses'. For instance, in relation to the idealisation of industrial labour, an issue already discussed in the *Arcades Project*, Thesis XI comments:

> Nothing has so corrupted the German working class as the notion that it was moving with the current. It regarded technological

> development as the driving force of the stream with which it thought it was moving. From there it was but a step to the illusion that the factory work ostensibly furthering technological progress constituted a political achievement. The old Protestant work ethic was resurrected among German workers in secularized form. The Gotha Program already bears traces of this confusion, defining labor as 'the source of all wealth and all culture.' Smelling a rat, Marx countered that 'the man who possesses no other property than his labour power' must of necessity become 'the slave of other men who have made themselves owners.' (Benjamin, 2003b, p. 393)

As an attentive reader of Max Weber, Benjamin believes that the Protestant work ethic had close connections – by elective affinity – to the spirit of capitalism. Benjamin draws on both Weber and Marx to criticise the conformist posture of social democracy in relation to industrial-capitalist production.

More surprisingly, Benjamin distinguishes, in Thesis XVIIa (which is absent from the final version of the text), between the Marxian and the social democratic secularisation of messianism:

> In the idea of classless society, Marx secularized the idea of messianic time. And that was a good thing. It was only when the Social Democrats elevated this idea to an 'ideal' that the trouble began. The ideal was defined in neo-Kantian doctrine as an 'infinite [*unendlich*] task.' And this doctrine was the school philosophy of the Social Democratic Party [...]. Once the classless society had been defined as an infinite task, the empty and homogeneous time was transformed into an anteroom, so to speak, in which one could wait for the emergence of the revolutionary situation with more or less equanimity. (Benjamin, 2003c, pp. 401–2)

For Benjamin, secularisation, as practiced by Marx, is both legitimate and necessary – on condition that the subversive energy of the messianic remains present, even if as an occult force (of, say, the theology in the materialist chess player). What is to be criticised, insists Benjamin, is not secularisation as such but a specific form, social democratic neo-Kantianism, which turned the messianic idea into an ideal, an infinite task. Those chiefly implicated in this were a group of philosophers from the University of Marburg to which Alfred Stadler and Paul Natorp – two of the authors mentioned in the thesis – belonged, together with Hermann Cohen. Benjamin reproaches neo-Kantian-inspired social democracy

above all for its *attentisme*, the Olympian calm with which it awaits, comfortably installed in empty and homogeneous time like a courtier in the anteroom, the inescapable advent of the 'revolutionary situation' – which, of course, will never come. The alternative he proposes is both historical and political, and it is both of these things inseparably. It starts out from the hypothesis that each moment has its revolutionary potentialities. And in it an open conception of history as human praxis, rich in unexpected possibilities and able to produce something new, stands opposed to any kind of teleological doctrine that trusts in the 'laws of history' or in the gradual accumulation of reforms on the safe and sure path of infinite progress.

* * *

Benjamin's theses 'On the Concept of History' stand explicitly on the ground of the Marxist tradition – 'historical materialism' – which Benjamin wishes to wrench from the bureaucratic conformism that threatens it at least as much as the enemy. As we have seen, his relation to the Marxian heritage is highly selective and involves the abandonment of – rather than the explicit critique of or a direct 'settling of accounts' with – all the moments in the works of Marx and Engels that have served as references for the positivistic/evolutionary readings of Marxism in terms of irresistible progress, 'the laws of history' and 'natural necessity'. Benjamin's reading stands in direct contradiction to this idea of inevitability, which from the *Communist Manifesto* onwards haunts certain texts by Marx and Engels, including the following idea: 'What the bourgeoisie [...] produces, above all, are its own grave-diggers. Its fall and the victory of the proletariat are equally inevitable' (Marx and Engels, 2012, p. 50). Nothing is further from Benjamin's approach than the belief, suggested by certain passages in *Capital*, in a historical necessity 'with the inexorability of a natural process [mit der Notwendigkeit eines Naturprozesses]' (Marx, 1976, p. 929; see also 1968, p. 791).

No doubt, running through the work of Marx and Engels are unresolved tensions between a certain fascination with the natural scientific model and a dialectical-critical approach, between faith in the organic and quasi-natural maturation of the social process and the strategic vision of revolutionary action that seizes an exceptional moment. These tensions explain the diversity of the Marxisms that were to dispute the Marxian heritage after the death of its founders (see Bensaïd, 2002). In the 'Theses' of 1940, Benjamin ignores ideas at the former end of the Marxian spectrum and takes his inspiration from the latter.

Why does Benjamin prefer to attack the social democratic epigones rather than contest the writings of Marx and Engels that made those interpretations possible in the first place? We may assume that there were several – not necessarily contradictory – reasons for this attitude: the conviction that the real Marx lies elsewhere and the positivist moments are secondary; the political option of setting Marx himself against his epigones, who have in any case diluted or traduced his message; and the desire, following the example of his masters Lukács and Korsch, to state his reading of historical materialism in a positive mode rather than critically review the writings of the founders.

There are hardly any direct criticisms of Marx and Engels in the 'Theses' themselves, but they do figure here and there in the associated notes. At one important point Benjamin adopts a critical distance in relation to the author of *Capital*: 'Marx says that revolutions are the locomotive of world history. But perhaps it is quite otherwise. Perhaps revolutions are an attempt by the passengers on this train – namely, the human race – to activate the emergency brake' (Benjamin, 2003c, p. 402; see also Löwy, 2005, pp. 66–7). Implicitly, the image suggests that if humanity allows the train to follow its course, which was already laid down by the steel structure of the rails, and nothing stops its vertiginous career, we shall be hurled into catastrophe, the crash or the abyss. This passage is one of the preparatory notes to the theses in 'On the Concept of History' and does not appear in the final version of the text. The passage from Marx to which Benjamin refers appears in *The Civil War in France* and reads as follows: 'Die Revolutionen sind die Lokomotiven der Geschichte' (the word 'world', used in Benjamin's preparatory note on 'world history', does not appear in Marx).

Another point of direct criticism concerns the issue of 'progress': 'Critique of the theory of progress in Marx. Progress is there defined as the development of productive forces. But the human being, or the proletariat, belongs to them. In this way the question of the criterion is only pushed back', writes Benjamin in his notes to 'On the Concept of History' (1974, p. 1239). This is actually a point of major significance, since this 'theory of progress', this uncritical view of the development of the productive forces, largely fuelled the economistic interpretations of the Second International and Stalinist productivism. But the question remains at the level of a programmatic proposal, and Benjamin does not develop it.

To conclude, the 'recasting' of historical materialism in the 'Theses' effectively involves a selective – and heterodox – reappropriation of those Marxian themes that seem to Benjamin essential to his undertaking: the state as class domination, class struggle, the social revolution,

the utopia of a classless society. Materialism itself, revised by theology, is incorporated into his theoretical system. The result is a reworking, a critical reformulation, of Marxism, integrating messianic, romantic, Blanquist, anarchist and Fourierist 'splinters' into the body of historical materialism.[5] Or, rather, the result is a fabrication, using all these materials, of a new and heretical Marxism, radically different from all the other – orthodox or dissident – variants of its time.

Notes

1. The chemical company I. G. Farben employed forced labour from concentration camps during World War II. It also produced the Zyklon B gas used to exterminate the inmates. The *Luftwaffe* was the German air force, which destroyed many towns in Europe after 1939.
2. For a detailed description of the books in their original German versions as used by Benjamin, see 'Quellenverzeichnis' in Benjamin, 1982b, pp. 1293, 1308–9.
3. I used the English translation as Korsch has published it (Korsch, 1963, pp. 133–4). In one passage, I corrected the English with the German original quoted by Benjamin.
4. On Benjamin and Trotsky, see the interesting comments by Esther Leslie (Leslie, 2000, pp. 228–34).
5. Benjamin uses the expression 'splinters of messianic time' in Thesis XVIIIA.

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2

Adorno's Account of the Anthropological Crisis and the New Type of Human

Massimiliano Tomba

The liquidation of the individual

'To think that the individual is being neck and crop liquidated is over-optimistic' (Adorno, 2005, §88; see also Schweppenhäuser, 1971). Theodor W. Adorno's assertive statement sounds not only overly pessimistic but also elitist. One could imagine Adorno as the last representative of a declining critical tradition contemplating the decay of Western culture. This perspective changes, however, if we consider Adorno not a witness to but a part of the horizon he was sketching out. Without any form of the hypostasisation of human nature, Adorno poses the question of the crisis of the individual in terms of the individual's recent transformation within the capitalist relations of production and reproduction. Adorno assumes the Marxian category of the organic composition of capital and translates it into an anthropological context by inventing the concept of the 'organic composition of man'. This seemingly marginal concept is particularly useful if we want to understand, beyond postmodern enthusiasm and romantic whining, the new possibilities that open anytime certain human skills seem to be absorbed by capital and reproduced in collective form and objectified in machines. Rereading Adorno's conception of the liquidation of the individual against the backdrop of Marx's idea of the new subject that arises within the capitalist form of production allows us to ask ourselves, on the one hand, whether the golden age of the individual ever really existed and, on the other, what the causes and the results of that liquidation might be.

These questions are just two sides of a prism whose centre is the 'human being' as a field of possible anthropological configurations. According to Adorno,

> the pat phrase about the 'mechanization' of human beings is deceptive because it thinks of them as something static which, through an 'influence' from outside, an adaptation to conditions of production external to them, suffers certain deformations. But there is no substratum beneath such 'deformations', no ontic interior on which social mechanisms merely act externally: the deformation is not a sickness in human beings but in the society which begets its children with the 'hereditary taint' that biologism projects on to nature. (Adorno, 2005, §147)

Adorno's statement allows us to distance ourselves from any romantic and conservative criticism of the crisis of the individual. Adorno does not presuppose any 'ontic interior' or metahistorical 'substratum' such as the one found in Martin Heidegger's philosophy and particularly his ontology of Dasein (see Adorno, 1977, pp. 123–4). The thesis that 'deformations' do not have any substratum and therefore are not signs of the sickness of the human being means that one has to consider them qualitative transformations of a specific phenotype, the individual, whose historical origin, prefigured in the poems of Petrarch, dates back to early modernity, the Renaissance and the rise of the state and of the capitalist form of production (see Adorno, 2003c, p. 445). If there is no substratum in opposition to which one could judge 'deformations' as sickness, inauthenticity or lack, one must consider *de*formations to be *trans*formations rather than comparing them to the supposed golden age of individuality.

In the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Max Horkheimer and Adorno sketched out the genealogical pathway of the Western civilisation in which the modern individual had emerged. Far from merely projecting the contours of the modern individual onto Homer's Odysseus, they problematised a specific pathway of Western civilisation. In the famous chapter on Odysseus, which was written by Adorno and cut by Horkheimer (see Adorno, 1998, pp. 37–88), Odysseus's resistance to Circe's magic becomes an image of a specific path of civilisation that corresponds to the 'history of renunciation' and 'suppression of instinct' (Horkheimer and Adorno, 2002, pp. 56, 43, 55). In this chapter, Adorno substantially relied on the arguments of the conservative philologist Rudolf Borchardt, whose name, however, appears only once in the published version and simply as one of 'the esoteric apologists of German heavy industry' (Horkheimer and Adorno, 2002, p. 37). However, in his manuscript, Adorno inverted the conservative orientation of Borchardt's analysis: while Borchardt's denunciation of Homer's enlightenment and of the mercantile character

of the epic tried to exalt the original power of the chthonic mythology, Adorno rejected idealisations of the origin as mere projections of the discontent with the present onto the past. Here, critical thinking and reactionary considerations find at once their maximum of proximity and of distance: both are dissatisfied with the present, but while the latter looks to history in order to restore the origin, the former indicates possibilities that are contained in the present and can open new histories. Inverting the romantic perspective, Adorno considers the concept of myth in its historical and dynamic dimension. He analyses a myth in the core of enlightenment that enlightenment tries to remove. The history of the suppression of instincts, which began with the myth, turns reason itself into myth, bringing in the end its complete self-destruction and overturning into barbarism. Hence, romanticism and technocracy are in effect allies of barbarism, not opponents. The dialectic of enlightenment can be investigated in Odysseus's myth because the myth reappears in the core of enlightenment. The liberation from the myth through the dominion of rationality over nature turned this rationality into myth: 'Myth is already enlightenment, and enlightenment reverts to mythology' (Horkheimer and Adorno, 2002, p. xviii).

One may argue, with Habermas, that modern reason is not yet disenchanted enough to be really consistent with its claim of emancipation (Habermas, 1987, pp. 106–30; see also 1997, pp. 38–55). This perspective, which enables the idea of the unfinished project of modernity, makes no sense if one brings the entire course of Western civilisation into question. The dialectic of enlightenment shows us that the history of Western civilisation is definitively compromised and that the so-called unfinished project of modernity is to be broken rather than carried on. Romantic criticisms and the idea of the unfinished project of modernity share the idea of a unilinear history. Against this idea, the task of critical thinking is to maintain that other histories and modernities were (and are) possible. The issue concerns not the scale of the achievement of the project of modernity but a certain pathway of modernity. This capitalist project, far from freeing individuals, puts them at the mercy of blind forces. The mythical moment that put the individual fate at the mercy of ancient gods survives in the laws of capitalist production for which individuals are reduced to 'roles' (Marx, 1976, p. 170) or, more precisely, 'character masks [Charaktermasken]'. Habermas's idea of a discursive rationality that guarantees symmetrical relations between participants in communication is de facto a form of academic self-deception that hides the moment of the unfreedom of individuals and thus remains enchanted in it.

Individuals are still subjected to supra-individual forces, and individualism is merely a phenomenon of compensation for the impossibility individuals face in attempting to govern their own destinies. We are living in individualistic societies composed of non-individuals who compensate for their insignificance with competitive behaviour that projects this insignificance onto presumably outstanding personalities, such as political leaders. The gigantic faces of these personalities that ornament our streets express the only way in which the increasingly diminishing individual can appear. One can understand the annoying personalisation of every field of our everyday life as the compensation for the process of depersonalisation that characterises the contemporary political and economic structure. Hans Jürgen Krahl, the leader of the 1968 student protest in Germany and perhaps one of the best students of Adorno, wrote that the incipit of the antiauthoritarian protest was a reaction against the death of the bourgeois individual; the students were crying for the death of the individual, the final defeat of the ideology of the liberal public sphere free from domination (see Krahl, 1971). This work of mourning is still continuing, and many contemporary political and cultural phenomena should be understood as reactions to a world that, as Freud wrote as early as 1915, 'has become poor and empty' (Freud, 1957, p. 246).

The criticism that mourns the loss of the individual and stigmatises the 'mechanisation' of human beings is in all respects reactionary. For Adorno,

> reactionary criticism often enough attains insight into the decay of individuality and the crisis of society, but places the ontological responsibility for this on the individual as such, as something discrete and internal: for this reason the accusation of shallowness, lack of faith and substance, is the last word it has to say, and return to the past its solace. (Adorno, 2005, §97)

Reactionary complaints echo the ontologisation of the concept of the individual by those who do not question the social *principium individuationis* and regard abstract individuality as the yardstick for judging the individual.

As long as the representatives of upper-class conservative thought were still able to consider modernity something other than ineluctable destiny, they were also able to catch the critical connection between the individual and the social *principium individuationis*. Jakob Burckhardt 'connected the drying-up of Hellenistic individuality not only with the

objective decline of the *polis*, but precisely with the cult of the individual' (Adorno, 2005, §97). Nietzsche's criticism of both modern culture and modern education was related to the transformation of the social relations of production: '[M]en are to be trained for the purposes of the age to lend a hand as soon as possible: they are to labour in the factory of common utility before they are ripe, or rather to prevent their ever becoming ripe – because that would be a luxury which would withdraw a lot of strength from "the labour market"' (Nietzsche, 1980, p. 41). This process is now completely realised through the colonisation of free time by the market, which turns individuals into eternal consumers living in an ahistorical present. The idea of a culture born with the 'individual' is entirely unable to tackle this phenomenon because it is subjected to the same forces that affect individuals. Instead of educating 'ripe and harmonious personalities', the social process produces individuals who are able to do only the 'common, maximally useful labour' (Nietzsche, 1980, p. 41). This criticism also targeted upper-class education and grasped the beginning of a massive transformation of knowledge as such. The youth, Nietzsche writes, are 'whipped through all millennia' of political, diplomatic and cultural history until they have had enough. Contra the old and new reactionaries, the youth are not apathetic; they are simply defending themselves from the flood of information by 'deliberately dulling their sensibility [nur mit einem vorsätzlichen Stumpfsinn]' (Nietzsche, 1980, p. 41). Educational institutions are collecting information in disposable packages like assembly instructions for cheap furniture. The rationalisation of the working process that allows everyone to do almost any kind of work has extended to cognitive and intellectual labour.

The organic composition of the human being

In order to grasp this field of anthropological transformations, Adorno investigated the 'organic composition of man' (Adorno, 2005, §147) or, more precisely, of the human being, bringing anthropology into Marx's analysis of the 'organic composition of capital' (Marx, 1976, p. 762). By the organic composition of capital, Marx meant the correlation between the technical composition of capital and value composition; that is, between constant capital as the mass of the means of production and variable capital as the mass of labour necessary for their employment. The organic composition of the human being marks the prolongation of the transformation of the technical composition of capital to the organic composition within individuals, who are 'encompassed, and indeed constituted, by the technological demands of the production process'

(Adorno, 2005, §147). For Adorno, the 'organic composition of man is growing. That which determines subjects as means of production and not as living purposes, increases with the proportion of machines to variable capital' (Adorno, 2005, §147). This anthropological transformation also caught the attention of the Italian communist Antonio Gramsci, who wrote in his *Prison Notebooks* that 'American rationalisation has determined the need to elaborate a new type of man' (Gramsci, 1971, p. 286; a more precise translation of 'nuovo tipo umano' would be 'a new type of human'). The issue was not unknown to Marx, who, in the pages of his notes on economic studies (*Grundrisse* 1857–58) that are now known as the 'Fragment on Machines', tried to trace the 'new subject' that arises from the increase of machines in proportion to human labour (Marx, 1986, pp. 80–92).[1] Even if Adorno's analysis starts from other presuppositions, reading them together allows us to characterise the meaning of a materialist approach to the crisis of the individual; that is, the field of possibilities of the current anthropological transformation to which it might then be possible to give a different political orientation.

Before his considerations on the capitalist orthopaedics of labourers' bodies in *Capital*, in the *Grundrisse* Marx tried to figure out the consequences of the dilation of the sphere of needs and human capacities. He was interested in depicting a new kind of human as the social product of production based on capital.

> Hence the exploration of the whole of nature in order to discover new useful properties of things; the universal exchange of the products coming from the most diverse climates and lands; new (artificial) modes of processing natural objects to give them new use values. The all-round exploration of the earth to discover both new useful objects and new uses for old objects, such as their use as raw materials, etc.; hence the development of the natural sciences to their highest point; the discovery, creation and satisfaction of new needs arising from society itself; cultivating all the qualities of social man [gesellschaftlicher Mensch] and producing him in a form as rich as possible in needs because rich in qualities and relations – producing man as the most total and universal social product possible (for in order to enjoy many different kinds of things he must be capable of enjoyment, that is he must be cultivated to a high degree) – all these are also conditions of production based on capital. (Marx, 1986, p. 336)

Marx is considering here the historical relationship between the human being and nature from the perspective of the unlimited production of

new needs: capital cuts the umbilical cord that used to link man and nature, and nature becomes 'nothing more than a matter of utility' (Marx, 1986, p. 337). The severing of the umbilical cord indicates that the capitalist mode of production has surpassed a human limit. This limitless production of new needs is not led consciously by humans but is driven by the blind process of valorisation. The difference between these two levels shows the distance between history and the prehistory in which, for Marx, we are still living.

Speaking of the 'social human being', 'social individual' and 'new subject' (Marx, 1986, p. 92), Marx denotes the new type of human, whose capabilities are socially forced beyond the limits of natural need (Marx, 1986, p. 251). These concepts mark the anthropological break that makes individuals different from what they were: having broken their bond with nature, society becomes their new nature. This is, however, not the Hegelian second nature that presupposes a 'system of needs' in which individuals relate to each another in order to exchange different use values and satisfy their needs (Hegel, 2001, §§189–98). In Marx's analysis of bourgeois society, capital produces not in order to satisfy human needs but in order to valorise value.

Individuals are nothing but functions of capital. They relate to each other as 'economic dramatis personae' (Marx, 1976, p. 249) who have the function of exchanging commodities as the commodities 'cannot themselves go to market and perform exchanges in their own right' (Marx, 1976, p. 178). Their social relations have become relations between things. This realm of abstractness shapes the *third nature* of individuals, who have needs without any limit because what they consume is not use value but simply abstract exchange value. The classic form of experience is wasted from within, and the unlimited development of the sphere of needs sets individuals in a schizoid state: on the one hand, they are compulsive consumers perpetually dissatisfied because what they consume is exchange value; on the other, they represent themselves as Promethean beings without any limit. The postmodern *Schwärmerei* finds its place in the strain between these two poles.

While modernity has produced the individual, the capitalist mode of production is creating a new 'human being' beyond the individual. For Marx, this new subject is socialised in two ways: through the propagation of social (abstract) relationships and through the socialisation of (objectified) abilities. The 'social individual' also has a 'social brain [gesellschaftliches Hirn]' (Marx, 1986, p. 84), in which knowledge, memory and skills are objectified as and absorbed in fixed capital. The 'social brain' expresses the potential of the knowledge of the species

beyond the individual within the capitalist framework. The 'individual' brain is no longer the privilege of any one individual. The romantic myth of the genius wanes, and the new individuation reconfigures the relationship between the collective and the individual. From the individual's perspective, this transformation coincides with the crisis of the individual. However, that which may appear as ignorance from the individual's viewpoint can be seen as an increase in knowledge from the point of view of the collective, which is able to manage a large portion of the knowledge that is now objectified in machines: 'The development of fixed capital shows the degree to which society's general science, *knowledge*, has become an immediate productive force, and hence the degree to which the conditions of the social life process itself have been brought under the control of the *general intellect* and remoulded according to it' (Marx, 1986, p. 92). While from a reactionary perspective, one would mourn the alienation of the individual, the materialist perspective concerns the remoulding of the machines and their collective knowledge according to the '*general intellect*'. This concept grasps not a society's existing general science and knowledge but the collective and conscious control of the objectification of knowledge. In fact, sciences that are incorporated in capital have a specific capitalist use value that determines a specific relationship between the instrument and the labourer: 'The means of labour makes the worker independent – posits him as a proprietor. Machinery – as fixed capital – posits him as dependent, as appropriated' (Marx, 1986, p. 88). This is the insight of a critical history of technology (see Marx, 1976, p. 493, and Bahr, 1970) that allows us to understand the inversion in which the worker is transformed from an independent user of the means of labour to a mere appendage to the capitalist machine. This inversion is not an episode of the destiny of *techne* but an expression of the capitalist use value of machinery. The machine atomises the worker, who 'relates himself to it as a wage labourer, and the active individual in general as a mere labourer' (Marx, 1986, p. 88). Marx shows that individuals, through the use of machines in production, get the 'free time' they can use for developing their dispositions and hence their productivity (Marx, 1986, p. 97).

Average individuals become more educated, and the development of their individuality 'reacts upon the productive power of labour' so that, from the standpoint of capitalist production, they can be considered fixed capital (Marx, 1986, p. 97). Thus, 'free time' is not free anymore but subsumed under capital, and the distinction between work and free time becomes uncertain. This intermixture of work and non-work time

has generated many theoretical confusions, including the belief that immaterial labour has become the predominant productive labour.

Modern technology creates a completely new kind of relationship between machines and labourers, whose cognitive processes are more and more incorporated in hardware and software. The knowledge objectified in machines becomes organised in packages of information. This new form of organisation retroacts on human cognitive processes themselves so that individuals are producing knowledge and institutions are producing education in the form of objectifiable information. An enormous mass of knowledge can now be objectified not because machines are more powerful but because knowledge is already produced as objectifiable packages of information. This process is changing both the epistemic code of knowledge and human nature itself.

Something similar happened during the so-called industrial revolution: the specific knowledge of artisans was stolen from their hands and objectified in machines. The trades, which throughout the eighteenth century were still called 'mysteries' because they were taught by corporations in a secretive manner, lost their aura, and a new type of unskilled worker was transformed into an appendage to machines. Taylor called this new phenotype the 'trained gorilla'. Today this process has been extended to knowledge itself. Just as the artisan knowledge objectified in machines changed its use value, so, too, the knowledge people can carry in their pockets in their smartphones changes the use value of knowledge. Not only is education not prepared for this change, but this change itself is part of a new anthropology in which the concept of individual 'is basically obsolete or at least worn' (Adorno, 2003b, p. 69). The capitalist mode of production has introduced a new kind of objectification of labour and knowledge. There is no longer a tool mediating between the working subject and the material. With the machine and the rationalised labour process, concrete and individual time is replaced by an abstract, linear-production time 'which has no more need of qualitative, acquired experience' (Breuer, 1985, pp. 19–20). According to Adorno, the 'subject, deprived of a qualitative relation to the objective sphere by the form of its labour, is thus necessarily drained' (Adorno, 1988, p. 48). *Ex parte subjecti*, within this process the experience of the temporal continuum disintegrates into discontinuous, shocklike moments, and the subjective consciousness is confined to the course of abstract time (Adorno, 1988, p. 47). *Ex parte objecti*, the capitalist objectification of labour and knowledge retroacts on those activities, giving rise to a new kind of labour and knowledge characterised by computability and measurability. This objectification of labour is, however, never neutral.

Objectifying labour means setting constant capital against living labour, making workers increasingly replaceable. At the same time, the new type of human emerging from this process is also capable of a new form of subjectification, of new forms of conflict and individuation. These two dimensions converge in the determination of the 'organic composition of the human being' (Adorno, 2005, §147).

The new type of human

By shifting the Marxian category of organic composition of capital onto the anthropological field and proposing the concept of the organic composition of human being, Adorno wanted to investigate the individual's transformation into Marx's 'different subject', whose mind is the repository of the accumulated knowledge of society and who, at the same time, shares its cognitive functions with machines. Modern consciousness tries to reflect on this interpermeation of humans and machines in novels and films in which individuals' brains are completely interfaced with powerful computers. The result is often a gloomy atmosphere that expresses the unconscious anxiety in the face of a non-conscious process. The popular film *The Matrix* expressed, in the vicissitudes of the hero, the need for a compensation for the reduction of human beings, or what remains of them, to battery people – that is, fixed capital, the form in which human beings appeared under the domination of the machines at the beginning of the series.

Appropriately, in *The Human Use of Human Beings*, Norbert Wiener, one of the founders of cybernetics, referred to individuals as 'human atoms'. According to Wiener, when 'human atoms are knit into an organization in which they are used, not in their full right as responsible human beings, but as cogs and levers and rods, it matters little that their raw material is flesh and blood. What is used as an element in a machine, is in fact an element in the machine.' If we think in terms of organisation, it does not matter if 'we entrust our decisions to machines of metal, or to those machines of flesh and blood which are bureaus and vast laboratories and armies and corporations' (Wiener, 1989, pp. 185–6). In this process the increasing organic composition of the human being refers not only to the 'specialized technical faculties' of human beings but 'equally to their opposite, the moments of naturalness which once themselves sprung from the social dialectic and are now succumbing to it' (Adorno, 2005, §147). Psychological differentiation and even spontaneity, creativity and extraversion are now being incorporated into machines as a kind of lubrication. Thus, for Adorno, when individuals

do break out of their passivity, as with jazz enthusiasms, in the liberation of the body and in sexuality, 'they fall prey to a particularly vicious form of manipulation, one which has already anticipated their revolt and draws from it the power of a new, expanded reproduction' (Breuer, 1985, p. 30). The division of labour takes place within the individual, whose functions become relatively independent like units of a factory. Representatives of the new type of human are able to multitask, but at the same time, their experience becomes extremely fragmented and discrete as they get caught changing radio stations, zapping channels or surfing the Internet. As a result of the breaks in the continuity of experience, individuals become unable to have 'their own experiences' (Adorno, 2003b, p. 65). The new type of human has the experience of packages of experience that are already wrapped up by society. Thus, the transcendental synthesis is transferred from the individual subject to the society, and the individual subject becomes more passive and open to ideological manipulation. (Max Horkheimer addressed this topic in the *Dialectic*'s chapter on anti-Semitism; see Horkheimer and Adorno, 2002, pp. 137–72.)

For Adorno, the growth in the organic composition of the human being manifests itself in the 'transition from firm qualities to push-button behaviour-patterns' as the 'pre-condition of all totalitarian mass-movements' (Adorno, 2005, §147). Representatives of the new type of human are capable of quick reactions that 'do not restore spontaneity, but establish the person as a measuring instrument deployed and calibrated by a central authority' (Adorno, 2005, §147). We should reverse the perspective from which we look at totalitarianism: it is not totalitarianism that makes human beings superfluous and insignificant but rather the annulment of individuality and its reduction to a Pavlovian bundle of automatic reactions as the result of the growth in the organic composition of the human being that is a condition of the possibility of totalitarianism.[2] In a time when liberal democracies are governed in a constant state of exception, we should abandon the Cold War scheme that opposes totalitarianism and liberal democracies and ask whether totalitarianisms were instead political and social attempts, however despicable, to reorganise the political and social form in the midst of the disintegration of individuality and the recollectivisation of the human (see Neumann, 1995, p. 392). The problem is still relevant and cannot be solved by liberal democracies, as they have arisen through the production and reproduction of the 'individual' type that today has become obsolete. Perhaps this is why liberal democracies tend to be totalitarian in a new way. Adorno stressed the real problem of a new kind of education,

ethics and politics adequate to the new phenotype. He addressed the 'individuation' against which but also through which the social process imposes itself, the open process that should be understood as a *field of possibilities* in which the new type of human is emerging.

In his anthropological notes, Adorno claimed that representatives of the new type of human ban themselves from thinking in order not to hinder their adaptation to the existing order, which requires almost all their physical and intellectual energy. As in Nietzsche, who talked about the 'deliberate dullness' through which young people defend themselves from the mass of information, Adorno considered the new type of human a response to the need to adapt. But Adorno, educated as he was in the school of the dialectic, stressed that, at the same time, representatives of the new type of human have become 'wiser [gewitzigt]' in a new way (Adorno, 2003b, p. 63).[3] It is not easy to deceive them any more. For Adorno, these mutilated human beings (*verstümmelte Menschen*) have, by virtue of their mutilation, the possibility to end mutilation. This possibility would require a conscious education through which this 'being-wiser [Gewitzigt-Sein]' could be pushed to the point where it destroys its fixation on immediate action and turns into authentic thought (Adorno, 2003b, p. 63). This *Gewitzigt-Sein* is the result of a new kind of practical experience through which representatives of the new type of human are able to recognise in the unique the genus, because for them there is not auratic uniqueness at all (see Benjamin, 2002). Becoming 'wiser' in this new way is the result of the crisis of experience, a crisis in which the *hic et nunc* becomes fungible and in which even personal experience is no longer individual experience of the old kind.

After the death of the old education and the traditional culture, the task of a new critical pedagogy would be to overthrow the coldness of these representatives of the new type of human by the 'spirit of self-sacrifice for the truth', their improvisation by 'cunning in the fight against the huge organization', and their aphasia by 'promptness to make decisive actions' (Adorno, 2003b, p. 64). Now 'self-sacrifice', 'cunning in fighting' and 'promptness to make decisive actions' could easily be understood as qualities of fascist soldiers. In fact, fascism was incomparably more able to incorporate the new qualities of the new human being than liberals or even communists. In his book *Der Arbeiter* (The Worker), published just one year before Hitler's seizure of power, Ernst Jünger celebrated the death of the individual and the rise of a new 'active type' embodied in the 'nameless soldier' (Jünger, 1981, p. 75). The fascist Jünger was interested in the possible survival of the single (*Einzelne*) among the ruins of the individual through 'contact with new sources of energy' and its inclusion in

an utterly new 'hierarchical order [Rangordnung]' (Jünger, 1981, pp. 53, 70). Totalitarianisms did not cause the death of the individual but rather attempted to organise the individual's funeral. Hence the mournful character that oozes from every big parade. Fascism was an attempt to organise the emergence of a new type of human in a new hierarchical order after the destruction of the individual. The new anthropological quality resulting from the destruction of the individual was channelled into totalitarian systems. Jünger saw in the fascist *Rangordnung* a possible social and political organisation of the new type of human; Adorno tried to activate, also through a new pedagogy but in a different direction, the energy that representatives of the new type use to adapt themselves to the existing order even at the cost of total depersonalisation. The field of possibilities outlined by Adorno's 'self-sacrifice', 'cunning in fighting' and 'promptness to make decisive actions' is an alternative to the one tragically developed by totalitarianisms in their attempt to organise a new anthropology. Adorno's question addresses the obsolescence of both education systems and the institutional and political forms that were erected in the liberal age of the individual in order to produce and govern individuals. These forms are today no longer adequate for the 'representatives of the new type [who] are no longer individuals' (Adorno, 2003b, p. 66). But 'Adorno's aversion to the idea of a collective subject' (Buck-Morss, 1977, p. 82) led him to take part in the defence of the individual against the forces of collectivisation. Precisely at this point one can measure the divergence between Adorno and Benjamin. While Adorno criticised new forms of collective art, such as film, Benjamin affirmed their political potential to reorganise new forms of collective experience and 'to mobilize the masses' (Benjamin, 2002, p. 120). As Benjamin wrote to Adorno on 30 June 1936, their studies were 'like two spotlights which are directed at the same object from opposite sides' (quoted in Buck-Morss, 1977, pp. 148–9). On the one hand, (the crisis of) the individual opposes the impersonal forces of the market; on the other, a new configuration of a collective individual is anticipated.

Adorno's gesture seems aristocratic for the same reason Schönberg's music does. Their art and writing require the active engagement of the public against the passive culinary pleasure of the audience. Adorno's style forces the reader to work together with the author. Critical thinking does not allow the reader to be a passive spectator of a work that develops by itself according to the logic of the concept. Similarly, in the case of Schönberg's music, the listener is not taken by the hand like a child but participates in the work, passing through the hexachords of twelve-tone music, which 'requires the listener

spontaneously to compose its inner movement and demands of him not mere contemplation but praxis' (Adorno, 1981, pp. 148–9). The passage from contemplation to praxis is provoked by the polarisation of musical language into extremes: the gesture of shocks, on the one hand, and the 'brittle immobility of a person paralyzed by anxiety', on the other (Adorno, 2006, p. 37). The individual who is falsely reconciled with the world through compulsory adaptation should be separated from the world by shocks and anxiety, which are the modern equivalent of Plato's *thaumazein*. Much as 'musical "mediation" is destroyed by that polarization' (Adorno, 2006, p. 37) of shocks and anxiety, philosophical mediation is suspended before bad totality and aware that any attempt to harmonise the irreconcilable 'helps to perpetuate the bad totality' (Adorno, 2005, §117). But at the same time, the complete loss of every form of mediation leaves the individual naked in front of totality. Hence, the concept of mediation must be saved the very moment it becomes inadequate. Because of this dialectical contradiction, form and content exert tension upon each other. The task of critical thought is to develop this tension until the formal structure itself collapses through polarisations that one cannot mediate. This does not lead to the apparent liberty to follow the free associations of the mind, which have only the privilege not to be free at all. Jumping from one topic to another only repeats the authoritarian gesture through which the public must follow the rhapsodic media messages. The collection of aphorisms that *Minima Moralia* presents is not a random mass of thoughts, as it expresses the fact that all objects are equally distant to the centre; that is, to the principle that casts its spell over all of them (Adorno, 1991, pp. 3–23).[4] Freed of forms, the individual is no freer than before, only more vulnerable.

Adorno's *Minima Moralia* is an ethics for a new individuation in the crisis of the modern individual. This ethics is intertwined with politics as it deals with an individuation that, unless it finds a different outcome, will become the subject of a new totalitarian politics. Each aphorism regards the reader and the author himself. Thus, the form of each aphorism of *Minima Moralia* is not alogical even when its ideas are not developed in accordance with discursive logic. Rather, it pushes thought to free itself from the coercion of consequential thought. Adorno's aesthetics, like the new music, seeks, by way of conscious control, the liberation from reactions based on reflexes (Adorno, 2003a, pp. 189–92). This aesthetics breaks with such reactions and hence takes the risk of appearing aristocratic. It may appear aristocratic from the point of view of the barbarism that camouflages itself by democracy; however, it anticipates truly

just human relations by questioning the system that excludes a part of humanity from the so-called high culture. This exclusion is no less violent because it is coveted by the subjects themselves through disengaged entertainment functional to the reproduction of their physical and intellectual force of labour.

Minima Moralia is an intervention into the sphere of philosophy, which once was called 'the teaching of the good life' and is today a 'mournful science' that 'has lapsed into intellectual neglect, sententious whimsy and finally oblivion' (Adorno, 2005, p. 15). But the good life or, more precisely, right life is not possible if we do not bring together inside and outside, the reconfiguration of which is the task of the times of ethical and political crisis: there can be no transformation of the world that does not begin with a new individuation. Adorno's aesthetic writings work on the 'ideal ground of individuation' (Horkheimer and Adorno, 1956, p. 42), on Benjamin's field of the battle between the politicisation of art and the aestheticisation of politics. The aestheticisation of politics remains the totalitarian way to the collectivisation of the human, as it does not undermine the existing relations of production. The positive gesture of the politicisation of art has instead the task of voicing the truth of the new that is situated in the intentionless (Adorno, 2004, p. 34). Today the reconfiguration of the individual and the collective is all the more urgent because the forces that push the individual towards collectivisation are particularly insidious. The outcome of this implosion of the individual is not clear at all: the liquidation of the individual makes possible new forms of political action; but it also makes possible new forms of totalitarianism.

In his notes on anthropology, perhaps the pages of Adorno's work where the presence of Benjamin's gesture is the strongest, Adorno was considering the possibilities disclosed by the process of the atrophy of experience:

> One has reason to believe that, at the same time, the atrophy goes together with the release of certain skills which make these human beings able to bring about transformations that the old 'individuals' would have never been able to perform. The breaking through the monadic wall that in the liberal age imprisoned every individual in itself, is a source of the greatest hope. (Adorno, 2003b, p. 66)

In these pages, Adorno assumes the configuration of the new type not as a pretext for the romantic yearning for what has been lost but as the

starting point for thinking about social change. A change that the 'old individuals' cannot perform.

Notes

1. Neither Adorno nor Gramsci could know this book. Only a few copies of the first edition published in the USSR (1939–41) reached the West, and the second edition appeared only in 1953 in Dietz Verlag.
2. The perspective of Hannah Arendt's analysis of totalitarianism should be inverted and emancipated from its engagement in the Cold War.
3. The same term can be found in Adorno, 2005, §153: 'Taught [gewitzigt] wisdom by a thousand situations, he already knows all the advice he can be given, and only comes when wisdom has failed and action is needed.'
4. Gillian Rose (1978, p. 11) has correctly stressed that it 'is impossible to understand Adorno's ideas without understanding the ways in which he presents them, that is, his style, and without understanding the reasons for his preoccupation with style'.

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3

The Republican and the Communist: Arendt Reading Marx (Reading Arendt)

Charles Barbour

Introduction

Most – perhaps all – of the great minds of the twentieth century had an ambiguous relationship with the work and legacy of Karl Marx. But few – if any – were more ambiguous than that of Hannah Arendt. On the one hand, Arendt sought to retrieve politics, or the grandeur of public life, in the wake of Marxism, which – she thought – had reduced politics to 'the social question'. That is to say, for Arendt freedom relies on the construction of a 'space of appearances' – a stage on which various actors might emerge and engage in discussion and debate. Marx and his followers treated this space or stage as an empty ideological expression of something more fundamental – labour, material interests, class struggle, modes of production. They thus mistook the realm of freedom for that of necessity and, once in power, cancelled the first in the name of administering the second. On the other hand, the same Arendt often expressed great respect for the political achievements of the working class and counted committed Marxists (Rosa Luxemburg, Walter Benjamin) among her most significant influences. Indeed, when she risked imagining what form political life might take in the future, she almost always pointed to the example of the revolutionary council, or the organisational structure that seems to emerge almost spontaneously whenever working people engage directly in public life. It is as if Arendt pushed Marx away with one hand while drawing him closer with the other or separated from him and related to him in the same gesture.

The ambiguity of Arendt's treatment of Marx becomes all the more profound when we recognise just how crucial her reading of his work was for the development of her own. Arendt first emerged as a thinker of international significance with the publication of *The Origins of*

Totalitarianism in 1951 – a text that, given its topic, contains surprisingly few references to Marx. We know from her literary remains, however, that Arendt initially intended to follow *Origins* with a book on Marx and that she undertook an extensive study of his primary texts in preparation. Arendt's Marx book – the initial drafts of which were published posthumously in 2002 in the journal *Social Research* as 'Karl Marx and the Tradition of Western Political Thought' – would have been an attempt to protect Marx from both friends and enemies by treating him, less as the father of twentieth-century Marxism and more as the capstone of an intellectual tradition that extended back to Plato. But for the same reason, Arendt discovered that addressing Marx meant addressing the intellectual tradition as such. In other words, she discovered that she could make sense of Marx only insofar as she tried to make sense of nearly everything and everyone else. Thus the planned book on Marx transformed itself into what is widely recognised as Arendt's greatest intellectual achievement and the work that solidified her standing as one of the most important thinkers of her time – *The Human Condition*.

Some deal with this aspect of Arendt's work by pretending it does not exist or treating her as a vigilant Cold Warrior whose principle commitments – during the 1950s at least – were to American-style democracy and to the institutions that, to her mind and to that of many others at the time, managed to resist the totalitarian aberration. But this approach has to overlook an enormous amount of evidence to the contrary, including the sense in which Arendt saw in McCarthyism and the 'Second Red Scare' of the 1950s the potential for a new mode of totalitarianism – one that would emerge out of rather than apart from the structures of American society (see Arendt and Jaspers, 1993, pp. 214–18). Indeed, it was in the midst of McCarthyism that Arendt considered writing her book on Marx – an atmosphere in which any mention of Marx in anything other than a derogatory fashion was a dangerous exercise likely to place real limits on an academic career.

Another, more subtle approach is to address Arendt's reading of Marx in almost psychoanalytic terms, as a symptom of some deeper, unconscious element of her thought. Hanna Pitkin, for example, notes that Arendt's account of Marx 'leaves out about half of that admittedly inconsistent thinker' and that 'what is missing from her Marx remarkably resembles Arendt's own ideas in *The Human Condition*' (Pitkin, 1998, p. 115). In a similar vein, Phillip Hansen proposes that Arendt 'attribute[s] to Marx views against which he himself seems to argue' and queries her 'unwillingness to concede, in a manner consistent with her own argument, that labour can express the conscious intent or

pluralist character of work' (Hansen, 1993, p. 41). Finally, Christopher Holman challenges what Seyla Benhabib calls Arendt's 'phenomenological essentialism', or her tendency to impose rigid borders between private and public, social and political, or labour, work and action, and speculates that 'Arendt's project of categorization is at least partially a response to [...] the Marxian dialectic' and that 'Arendt is forced to adopt a project of partition to the extent that she understands the dialectical logic as being implicated in the rise of totalitarianism' (Holman, 2011, pp. 334, 349).

The argument I want to make here is involved, perhaps even a little fussy. But it bears a family resemblance to these more symptomatic interpretations. I want to suggest that Arendt struggles with Marx – that his work represents an impasse or conundrum for her – because, in a way that she could not have known, she not only reads Marx but Marx reads her as well. Arendt counters Marx's theory and especially his treatment of the social and the political from a republican perspective. But she does not see – indeed, given the material she had available to her at the time, she could not really have seen – that Marx himself had developed crucial elements of his theory in response to precisely the republican reading of Hegel that was dominant among the political thinkers of his generation, especially Bruno Bauer and Arnold Ruge, both of whom held positions that, in retrospect, have more than a few similarities to the one taken by Arendt. Thus Arendt unwittingly finds herself in the curious position of trying to attack a theory with weapons that that theory had been designed to attack. It is as if Marx is always one step ahead of her or slipping between her fingers each time she thinks she has gotten hold of him.

My argument unfolds, then, in two sections. In the first, I sketch the various aspects of Arendt's reading of Marx. I emphasise, without attempting to resolve, the ambiguities introduced above. And I try to show how these ambiguities mark all of Arendt's engagements with Marx. In the second section, I suggest that many of the components of Marx's thought that trouble Arendt the most were developed amidst his early criticisms of the Hegelian republicans just mentioned. This set of claims is undoubtedly more intricate than the first. For it involves rethinking not only the way we understand Arendt's reading of Marx but also the way we understand Marx independently of Arendt. More precisely, it requires that we de-emphasise the common notion that, in 1845, Marx 'breaks' definitively with Hegelian philosophy by breaking with Ludwig Feuerbach and focus our attention on Marx's related but not identical 'breaks' with Bauer and Ruge – figures who are not particularly

well known today but who in the 1840s were among the most important proponents of Hegelian republicanism.

Arendt's 'pain in the neck'

Anyone who wants to understand what a thinker such as Arendt says about Marx should make some assessment of the state of Marx scholarship at the time the claims were made. For – more than others – what we mean by Marx changes significantly over time, as do the authorised lines of interpretation. In the 1950s, when Arendt began her study, with the exception of the *Communist Manifesto* and the first volume of *Capital*, Marx's body of work was generally accessed by way of selected works put together by individuals and institutions with clear political agendas – almost always associated with the official Communist parties, and the Soviet Union in particular. The first publication of Marx's early manuscripts in the original German in 1932 – including *The Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* of 1844 and *The German Ideology* of 1845 – was still relatively recent, and none of these texts were available in their entirety in either English or French translation. For this reason, these texts were known primarily among experts. And the debates over the significance of 'the young Marx' (who some would represent as a more humanist, philosophical alternative to orthodox Marxism, and others – notably Louis Althusser, whose crucial intervention was still a decade away – would describe as ideological and unscientific) had hardly begun.

It is thus striking to realise how deeply Arendt engages with Marx's literary remains – not only the theoretical texts just mentioned but also the articles he wrote on censorship and historical law while editor of the *Rheinische Zeitung*, the collection of study notes on Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* that we now call his 'Critique of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*' and the second and third volumes of *Capital*. We can find evidence of this engagement in Arendt's correspondence, where she defends Marx against the attacks of her friends by invoking his early work, and also – more extensively – in the footnotes to the 'Labour' chapter of *The Human Condition*, where Arendt often refers to the *Marx-Engels-Gesamtausgabe,* or collected works, in German, and particularly to the *Jugendschriften*, or youthful writings (see e.g., Arendt, 1993b, pp. 86n12–89n22).

Certainly when compared with that of her contemporaries or other people working in the same milieu, this level of scholarship goes a long way towards explaining the complexity of Arendt's relationship with Marx. In the 1950s there were, of course, popular efforts to find

the seeds of totalitarianism in Marx or in a tradition to which Marx could be said to belong. Sidney Hook and Karl Popper are two examples among many. And it is important to note that while we might today be tempted to include Arendt in this school, in both the unpublished Marx manuscript and *The Human Condition*, Arendt does everything she can to distinguish herself from it (what she calls the 'fashionable' notion that one can trace 'an unbroken line between Marx, Lenin and Stalin, thereby accusing Marx of being the father of totalitarian domination' [Arendt, 2002, p. 277]) and to couch her criticisms of Marx in a rhetoric of considerable respect.

For example, the 'Labour' chapter of *The Human Condition* begins apologetically. 'In the following chapter', Arendt writes, 'Karl Marx will be criticized. This is unfortunate', she continues, 'at a time when so many writers who once made their living by explicit or tacit borrowing from the great wealth of Marxian ideas and insights have decided to become professional anti-Marxists'. She then quotes Benjamin Constant's preface to his criticisms of Rousseau:

> 'Certainly I shall avoid the company of detractors of great men. If I happen to agree with them on a single point I grow suspicious of myself; and in order to console myself for having seemed to be of their opinion [...] I feel I must disavow and keep these false friends away from me as much as I can'. (Constant, quoted in Arendt, 1993b, p. 79)

Arendt, then, is not a 'professional anti-Marxist'. She is not interested in reducing Marx to slogans or forcing him to appear before the tribunal of the history of ideas. She takes him very seriously.

But if – and perhaps because – Arendt read a great deal of Marx, she never quite managed to get a final grasp on his thought. As she put it in a letter to Karl Jaspers written while she was working on her book about Marx, he proved to be 'a terrible pain in the neck' (Arendt and Jaspers, 1993, p. 216). In fact, Marx seemed to elude each of the conceptual systems Arendt designed to capture him. Thus Arendt begins 'Karl Marx and the Tradition of Western Political Thought' by characterising Marx as the culmination of an intellectual tradition that extends back to Plato – a tradition that totalitarianism ends. But then she finds she cannot square this claim with the obvious fact that Marx remains the inspiration for the one lasting manifestation of totalitarianism – Stalinism. So Marx is somehow both inside and outside of the tradition at once. In fact, his work and influence belie the very notion of a tradition that had come to

an end – a notion that, of course, had been widespread among German intellectuals in the 1920s, when Arendt was a student, especially Martin Heidegger.

Something similar, if on a grander scale, happens in *The Human Condition*. That is to say, in *The Human Condition*, Arendt insists upon a number of conceptual distinctions – between the private and the public, the *vita contemplativa* and the *vita activa*, and labour, work and action. And this set of distinctions is designed to separate what modernity and particularly Marx mistakenly brought together. But at the same time and on Arendt's own account, Marx's work cuts across these boundaries. It resists being located and threatens the crystalline simplicity of the arrangement.

Here, by way of example, it is worth dwelling on Arendt's concepts of labour, work and action, which are also the titles of the main chapters of *The Human Condition*. On Arendt's account, labour refers to the day-to-day, repetitive tasks required to maintain the body and keep at bay the destructive forces of nature. Work involves not repetitive toil but the production of objects intended to last and thus to make up what Arendt calls 'the permanence of the world'. Action, however, is something else again. It is not repetitive toil, but it is also not production or an instrumental means to an end. Rather, it escapes the logic of means and ends and is free insofar as it exhausts itself in its expression or, more accurately, its performance. If labour sustains the body and work produces objects, action persists in the memory and stories of an audience.

For Arendt, while the ancients took something like this set of distinctions for granted, we moderns have confused the categories and inverted their order. For the ancients, it was obvious that labour was the basest activity and the realm of slaves, as labour bound humans to necessity and thus deprived them of the experience of freedom. Work was slightly better and could be pursued by a free person, but it also subordinated the individual to a goal. Only action – performing great deeds and speaking great words before an audience of one's peers – could be genuinely free. Modernity, on the other hand, inverts this hierarchy. It elevates labour and the biological life processes it is designed to sustain to the highest of values and denigrates action and politics to the realm of mendacity, falsehood and deceit. And while we can find traces of this approach in nearly all of the great minds of the modern world, no one is more committed to it than Marx. Indeed, on Arendt's account, Marx is *the* great thinker of the modern world – the one who takes to its most radical conclusion the modern valorisation of labour and life over action and politics.

The ostensible purpose of *The Human Condition* and of a great deal of Arendt's work is to reassert, contra this trend, the grandeur of public life, of appearance in general and of the freedom that the ancients associated with politics. Thus Arendt endeavours to purify politics of the non- or extrapolitical interests that, throughout modernity, have infiltrated it – especially those of labour and work. For once we follow Marx and treat politics as an expression of labour or work, Arendt maintains; we confuse the free life of political action with the irresistible necessity of biological life processes, on the one hand, or with an instrumental means to an end, on the other. We must find a way, therefore, of keeping labour and work where they belong or keeping not only these interests but interest in general out of the public sphere.

But as soon as Arendt announces these distinctions, they come apart at the seams. Thus at a crucial moment in the 'Labour' chapter of *The Human Condition*, Arendt addresses the division of labour. 'Division of labour', she writes, 'grows directly out of the labouring process and should not be mistaken for the apparently similar principle of specialization which prevails in working processes and with which it is usually equated.' That is to say, pace Marx, the division of labour is not a manifestation of alienation or oppression but integral to labour. Immediately after this claim, however, Arendt says what amounts to the opposite:

> Specialization of work and division of labour have in common only the general principle of organization, which itself has nothing to do with either work or labour but owes its origin to the strictly political sphere of life, to the fact of man's capacity to act and to act together and in concert. Only within the framework of political organization, where men not merely live, but act, together, can specialization of work and division of labour take place. (Arendt, 1993b, p. 123)

Thus not only is it the case that division of labour and specialisation of work cannot be kept separate the way Arendt has just suggested. It is also the case that they can be understood only within the framework of the political, or the sphere of action – the very framework that Arendt is trying to purify of, precisely, labour and work.

The matter becomes even more strained when, in the 'Action' chapter of *The Human Condition* and specifically in the section called 'The Labour Movement', Arendt considers the way that, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, labour became a political subject. Here again Arendt's aim is to purify politics and exclude non- or extrapolitical concerns. In particular, Arendt insists that politics is the realm of what she calls

human plurality, or the realm in which we are related to and separated from one another at the same time, as when we sit around a table and are thus held together by the same object that holds us apart. In this sense, Arendt maintains, labour is not only unpolitical, it is 'antipolitical'. It is, as she puts it, 'an activity in which man is neither together with the world nor with other people, but alone with his body, facing the naked necessity to keep himself alive'. And even though labour might take place 'in the presence of and together with others', she continues, 'this togetherness has none of the distinctive marks of true plurality' (Arendt, 1993b, p. 212). While the political actor is public, in other words, inhabiting a world with others, the labourer, even when – as in the case of industrial production – she or he belongs to a mass of labourers, is alone.

But even as she attempts to establish these oppositions, Arendt has a hard time defending them. Thus a few pages into the same section of the text, we find a peon to what Arendt calls 'the sudden and frequently extraordinarily productive role which the labour movements have played in modern politics'. 'From the revolutions of 1848 to the Hungarian revolution of 1956', Arendt writes, 'the European working class, by virtue of their being the only organized and hence the leading section of the people, has written one of the most glorious and probably most promising chapters in recent history' (Arendt, 1993b, p. 215). Arendt goes on to try to preserve her distinction between labour and action (to overcome what she calls the 'apparently flagrant discrepancy between historical fact – the political productivity of the working class – and the phenomenal data obtained from an analysis of the labouring activity': Arendt, 1993b, p. 217) by separating the economic demands of trade unions from the revolutionary organisation of workers' councils. But the argument is entirely unconvincing, and it is clear that Arendt sees that the example of the labour movement shows precisely that one cannot maintain a neat division between things like labour, work and action – that there is no politics that is not in some sense conditioned by what Arendt tries to exclude as non- or extrapolitical concerns.

The issue returns in what is arguably Arendt's most important contribution to political theory – *On Revolution*. That book is organised as a comparison of two revolutionary traditions – one extending back to the American Revolution and the other to the French. The first, Arendt maintains, was initially more promising if not exactly more successful because it endeavoured to constitute a new space of freedom or a new public realm. The second, on the other hand, despite the fact that it would become the model for nearly all subsequent revolutionary events,

was inherently flawed. For it sought not to constitute a space of freedom but to liberate humanity from necessity – and especially from the destitution of the poor. It consequently took on the character not of a sequence of free acts but of an effort to keep pace, as it were, with the forces of necessity, whether that entailed the irresistible movement of the masses or – as in Marx – the irresistible march of history.

The remedy that Arendt proposes in this situation is an absolute separation between 'the social' and 'the political', the first of which, like labour in *The Human Condition*, is associated with necessity, especially the necessity of biological life processes, while the second is closely associated with republican institutions. But here as before, Arendt seems to have difficulty maintaining the rigour of her own convictions. For the whole point of 'the political' is to provide a space for action or a space in which humans might experience freedom. But 'the political' as Arendt describes it is a set of established frameworks, and action or freedom is precisely that which begins something new – that which exceeds all frameworks and all normative bounds. So the question becomes, how does one create a political order that preserves the act of creation itself? The political order established in the American Revolution might have begun with this aspiration, but it quickly degenerated from a deliberative and participatory conception of democracy to a representative one, in which the experience of freedom – of performing great deeds or speaking great words – was, at best, the domain of a very select few.

Arendt's solution, then, is to turn once again to the model of the revolutionary workers' council and particularly to those councils that had taken shape during the Hungarian Revolution of 1956. Here, she maintains, we do not merely see 'a certain control of rulers by those who are ruled' but 'the power that arises out of joint action and deliberation' (Arendt, 1990, p. 296). But here, as in *The Human Condition*, Arendt has to take enormous liberties with the facts to arrive at the conclusion she wants. In particular, she has to pretend that it is entirely accidental that the workers' councils were, precisely, *workers'* councils, that they generally emerged in factories and offices and that they generally made demands relating to the working or simply material conditions of their members, and she has to maintain that they were really about the discretely political experience of freedom that their organisers, particularly their leaders, felt. Everything that gives purpose to the political engagement of those involved in the workers' councils is made to vanish beneath their feet, such that they seem to float in thin air, suspended by nothing more than an agonistic desire to appear, or be seen and judged by others.

Across a range of texts, then, Arendt's reading of Marx remains ambiguous. As I said above, she seems to push him away with one hand while drawing him closer with the other. In what follows I want to suggest that the reason has to do with an aspect of Marx's work that Arendt did not know much about – indeed, an aspect that, given the state of Marx scholarship in the 1950s, she could not have known. Specifically, I want to argue that from Arendt's perspective Marx is difficult to contain with republican principles because a great deal of his mature thought was designed in response to, precisely, republicanism, especially that of Bauer and Ruge. Here we have a strange situation in which Marx's influence on his followers has for a long time occluded rather than clarified his work. For, until recently, we have read Bauer and Ruge through the lens of Marx's criticisms of them. As a result, the stakes of the debate have been misunderstood. Now, however, thanks in particular to the work of Douglas Moggach, we have a better sense of what the theoretical battles in which the young Marx participated entailed (Moggach, 2006). And we can see how Marx established his position by disentangling himself from republicans who, as it turns out, advanced arguments very much in line with the one developed by Arendt.

The ends of the republic

A central motif in Arendt's work is the notion that in the middle part of the twentieth century, totalitarianism put a definitive end to our intellectual tradition. On Arendt's account, totalitarianism cut history itself in half and left us suspended, as she put it in the title of one of her books, 'between past and future'. This is unquestionably a very large claim. But whether or not we allow that this end of tradition occurred, it would be hard to deny that Arendt's response to it did not emerge out of a void but belongs to a chain of republican political thought that extends back at least as far as the seventeenth century and that is discernible today in the work of figures such as Quentin Skinner and Phillip Petit. And while it is often overlooked, one crucial link in this historical chain was forged in the 1840s, especially among the group of Hegelian philosophers with whom Marx was associated during the *Vormärz* – the period in German history 'before March'; that is, before the riots that spread throughout Germany in March 1848, signalling the beginning of the 1848 Revolution there.

As mentioned, our understanding of Marx on this score has suffered because of the influence of Marx himself. Thus for a long time all that most cared to know about the Hegelian philosophers of the *Vormärz* was

what Marx said about them in his polemics against them – polemics that include Marx's essay 'On the Jewish Question', which was essentially a review of Bauer's 1843 book *Der Judenfrage*, as well as two works that he co-authored with Engels, *The Holy Family* and *The German Ideology*. When scholars did examine the writings of the authors Marx attacked, they focused on Feuerbach, with whom Marx is said to have broken in 1845. The problem here is not that Marx did not break with Feuerbach. He did. But he also broke with other figures; and each one of these breaks can be shown to be as, if not more, significant than his break with Feuerbach.

The two I want to draw attention to in this context are Ruge and Bauer. While their positions are not identical, between Ruge and Bauer we can get a sense of what the radical republican readers of Hegel claimed and thus of the theoretical formation against which Marx established some of his most important concepts and terms.

A representative statement of the period – one that Marx unquestionably read – is Ruge's 1842 essay 'Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* and the Politics of Our Times'. Ruge's aim was to expose the radical potential of Hegel's apparently conservative book:

> Hegel read the Greeks with too much intelligence and lived through his times, the age of Revolution, with too clear a consciousness not to attain, beyond the familial state (of dynastic possession) and the state of bourgeois society (police state [Polizeistaat] and bureaucracy), the demand for the state in the form of a public, self-determining structure,

Ruge writes:

> Therefore the public [öffentliche] Spirit and the process of public thinking and achievement is the state; the state is the essence, and the self-conscious subject is its [existence]; yet the essence is not only the goal, but also the product of the activity of the self-conscious subject, and thus freedom is the self-producing and self-ruling thinking and willing, which exists immediately as mores, but mediately by self-conscious subjects. (Ruge, 1983, p. 216)

Cutting through the densely Hegelian language, this passage essentially means that no matter what Hegel says in *The Philosophy of Right* about things such as constitutional monarchical and bureaucracy, a genuinely Hegelian state would be one that is created and ceaselessly re-created

by the ongoing public deliberation of its citizens, or 'self-conscious subjects'. It would be, in other words, a recognizably republican state – a res publica in which political actors speak the words and commit the deeds that constitute the state anew.

A more elaborate, complex version of this Hegelian republicanism was developed by Bauer – a brilliant theologian who, just before being ousted from academic life for his views, helped pass Marx's doctoral dissertation. Bauer's republicanism was particularly complex, but it had two key elements. First, like Ruge, Bauer argued that the state is not a static form but the ongoing creation of its citizens. Second, in a manner that resonates with Arendt's distinctions between private and public, social and political, and labour, work and action, Bauer insisted that in order to enter public life, one must relinquish all particularistic identifications, or all – as a Marxist might say – material interests. This explains why, in *Der Judenfrage*, the book that Marx reviews in 'On the Jewish Question', Bauer so vehemently opposes the claims of German Jews. For on his account, republican politics is properly the realm in which each subject forfeits its particular concerns (especially religion) and orients itself towards the universal.

The same set of republican commitments puts Bauer in conflict not only with *Vormärz* 'identity politics' but also with the leading socialist thinker of his time – Feuerbach. The issue came to a head in an essay that Bauer wrote in 1844 called 'The Genus and the Crowd' ('Die Gattung und die Masse') – an essay that in a letter to Feuerbach, Marx refers to as a 'covert polemic against you' (Marx to Feuerbach, 11 August 1844). In particular, Bauer goes after Feuerbach's definition of the human essence as 'species-being' (*Gattungswesen*). In this model, Bauer argues, 'the human essence is for man a power which he may not and cannot submit to critique' and 'an infinity which he does not possess but which possesses him'. It therefore avers 'a society which neither has nor makes [its own] essence, but is purely and solely constituted by it'. Here '[t]he unity of society is troubled no more, since in it there will be but one dogma, and this dogma, as the expression of the entire truth – rules all brothers the same way' (Bauer, 1983, pp. 201, 203).

As with the claims concerning particularistic belonging and citizenship oriented towards the universal just discussed, it is possible to translate these statements into Arendtian language, or the language of Arendt's criticisms of Marx. By reducing the public sphere to the biological life process of 'species-being', Feuerbach denies the freedom, plurality and conscious deliberation that make up politics. By presupposing the 'unity of society' or treating it like a given, immutable substance, he destroys

the space between humans – the space that makes both private and public existence possible and that holds us together while holding us apart. He composes an image of the social that is not only unpolitical but antipolitical.

The debates among the *Vormärz* Hegelians were considerably more involved than this. But what is important for our purposes is the way Marx responded to these recognizably republican (and Arendtian) kinds of arguments. In this respect, two documents are particularly important: 'On the Jewish Question', in which Marx addresses the relationship between the particular and the universal as well as between the social and the political, and the letter to Feuerbach quoted above, in which he initiates a response to Bauer's critique of socialism and the socialist concept of essence that becomes integral to the theory of 'historical materialism' first set out a year later in *The German Ideology* and 'Theses on Feuerbach'.

In the first instance, the essay 'On the Jewish Question', Marx responds to Bauer's republican effort to separate the realm of politics or the state from all particularistic interests by asserting that in every practical manifestation, politics and the state do defend particular interests but that they disguise them as the universal interests of all. Marx's example is the notion of 'the Rights of Man', which, he claims, might have begun as an egalitarian revolutionary ideal but which, throughout the course of the French Revolution, transformed into the rights of property owners and eventually the right of a state that secures property against external threats and internal claims. Genuine acts of emancipation, Marx insists, do not involve individuals relinquishing particular, social interests in the name of a universal, political citizenship. They involve struggles over particular interests which may or may not take on political form. They involve, in other words, not an artificial separation of the social and the political or private and public but a reassessment of how the borders between such categories get defined and whose interests are advanced by the prevailing definitions. This is the germ of the principle that a couple of years later, in *The German Ideology*, Marx dubs 'hegemony'.

In the second text, Marx's letter to Feuerbach, Marx begins to see a way around another aspect of *Vormärz* republicanism and especially Bauer's republican challenge to the socialist concept of essence. Responding to Bauer's assertion that Feuerbach's *Gattungswesen* consists of a static substance or unity that precedes and cancels out differences between humans, Marx redefines *Gattungswesen* as '[t]he unity of man with man, which is based on real differences between men' (Marx to Feuerbach, 11 August 1844). It is a unity, in other words, that is inseparable from

differences or that not only constitutes relations between humans but is constituted by those relations. In the sixth of his 'Theses on Feuerbach', Marx expands on this notion by asserting – this time against rather than with Feuerbach – that the human essence is not an abstraction inherent in each individual but instead 'the ensemble of social relations' (Marx, 2000, p. 157). In other words, for Marx, neither the individual nor the collective, neither the particular nor the universal, is 'essential'. Rather, and enigmatically, the relation – or what Marx frequently calls exchange (*Verkehr*) – comes before that which it relates.

What we find in these works, then, are the beginnings of a dialectically mediated understanding of things such as the particular and the universal, the social and the political – one in which neither can be said to prevail and each is reciprocally constituted. To ascribe such an understanding to Marx is, of course, nothing new. In fact, today at least, it is among the least controversial things one could say about Marx. But to highlight how this understanding took shape, in part, in Marx's confrontations with the Hegelian republicans of the *Vormärz* is, I think, to help explain why Arendt has such trouble mounting and sustaining her republican criticisms of it. For such a highlighting allows us to see not only how Marx's argument had already taken many of those criticisms into account but also how his mature thought, as it is often called, was in part a product of efforts to avoid those criticisms. As I said at the outset, it allows us to see how, even as Arendt reads Marx, Marx reads her as well.

Conclusion

Arendt liked to accuse Marx of what, on more than one occasion, she called 'fundamental and flagrant contradictions' – between, for example, an activist conception of politics and a deterministic conception of history, an understanding of the human essence as being bound to labour and one of human freedom as a world without labour. But she also, typically in the same breath, liked to say that no 'great author' is without contradictions and that it is in these contradictions that we find, as she put it, 'the most important clue to a true understanding of their problems and new insights' (Arendt, 1993a, p. 25). Perhaps something similar is true not only of great authors but also of great readers of great authors or great thinkers reading great thinkers. Perhaps it is precisely where the reading comes apart or loses rather than acquires consistency that we find the most important problems and insights. In any case, something like this is certainly true of Arendt's reading of

Marx. For what seems more interesting about her reading of him is not those moments when she successfully comprehends his ideas or slots him into a neatly packaged 'tradition' but the ones when he slips out of her hands, exposing the limits of what she is trying to do with him.

Obviously, an enormous amount has been said over the years about Karl Marx – there having been the better part of a century when nearly a third of the world's population lived under a system of government that legitimated itself with reference to his name. Not as much but still a considerable amount has been said about Hannah Arendt. But what astonishes about such figures as Marx and Arendt is the sense in which each new interpretation – each new reading – leaves us with more and not less to say. No matter how much we know about them, no matter how deeply we bore into their texts or their bodies of work and literary remains, no matter how many secrets we reveal, there seems to be more to know – as if each act of revelation were also an act of concealment, each deciphering an encryption. And while I am focusing on acts of reading and writing, something like this is probably true of any encounter whatsoever. Every encounter, in other words, every relationship, is ambiguous. And on this point, Arendt and Marx, republicans and communists, might agree. We are held together by that which holds us apart. Our 'unity' is always bound up with our 'real differences'.

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4

Ricardo – Marx // Foucault – Althusser

Rastko Močnik

Louis Althusser is arguably the one philosopher who, qua philosopher, not only detected a fundamental rupture between philosophy and theory in Marx's work but emphatically took the side of theory (see Althusser, 2005, p. 14). Indeed, it was this rupture between Marx's 'early' humanist critique of Hegelianism and his 'mature' critique of political economy that led Althusser to grant Marx's project the dignity of theoretical discovery equal only to Thales's mathematics, Galileo's physics and Freud's psychoanalysis (see Althusser, 1991; 2005, p. 14). Moreover, as one of only four existing epistemological breaks, this rupture marked, for Althusser, a break not only with philosophy but also with ideology. However, the two breaks – the distancing from philosophy and the break with ideology – are not symmetrical: while theory is precisely a break with ideology, philosophy remains an ambiguous notion for Althusser, both an external, ideological haven for theory at moments of its internal impotence (see Althusser, 1990) and a punctual political intervention at those same moments (see Althusser, 1971; 1990).

This ambiguity can be solved by reducing the two ideas of philosophy to their shared technical ground: the punctual character of philosophical practice, the momentary nature of its intervention – while theory produces a *problématique*, a problem field, philosophy declares theses. In this chapter, I accept this idea of philosophy and, applying it to itself, treat it precisely as a punctual philosophical thesis that calls for theoretical elaboration. To this end, I try to subtilise Althusser's demonstration of Marx's epistemological break – the demonstration made by Althusser, as mentioned above, qua philosopher – by analysing Marx's intervention into David Ricardo's political economy. This leads me to reject Michel Foucault's emphatically 'philosophical' annexation of

Marx's theoretical project to Ricardo's and to follow instead the separation between philosophy and theory within Marx's theoretical project itself as it was outlined by Roger Establet (1996), the only member of Althusser's school of structuralist Marxism who went on to engage in social theory rather than in what is today called 'poststructuralist' philosophy. I conclude by arguing that by missing the properly theoretical progress leading from Smith's homogeneous linear causality through Ricardo's heterogeneous linear causality to Marx's heterogeneous structural causality, Foucault misses what should be the real problem of any Foucauldian 'archaeology of knowledge'; namely, the class character of theory. Finally, I propose that the archaeology of knowledge was realised precisely by Althusser, who never ceased to insist on the class character of theory and to work toward an articulation between theoretical practice and the political practice of the class composition of the working class. Hopefully, the final result concretises, not just repeats, such book-length presentations of the Althusserian relation to Marx as those of Gregory Elliott (2006), Robert Paul Resch (1992), Étienne Balibar (1991), Alex Callinicos (1976), Warren Montag (2002) and Luke Ferretter (2006).

Foucault philosophises Ricardo

Foucault presents Ricardo's theory by contrasting it to the *episteme* of the classical epoch. Ricardo adopts Adam Smith's labour theory of value, notes Foucault, but shifts its accent: commodities are exchanged proportionally to the labour spent in their production because labour *produces* value – and not because, as Smith contends, labour can be analysed into days of subsistence, offering a fixed standard of exchange. Placing production at the centre of economic reflection, Ricardo relegates the classical *episteme* to the abyss of pre-theoretical philosophising and generates a new mode of thought that in Foucault's view immediately follows from Ricardo's initial move. For Foucault, the centrality of production has three decisive consequences:

1. A new form of *causality*: the synoptic spatial table of exchanges that forms the background pattern of classical thought is now substituted by a series of successive productions exhibiting a specific causality of its own. In Foucault's own formulation (1994, p. 255), Ricardo makes emerge the 'great linear, homogeneous series, which is that of production'. In Ricardo's theory, however, the series of consecutive production cycles is neither linear nor homogeneous: it is not

linear because it is mediated by *circulation* of value and its *distribution*; it is not homogeneous because circulation and distribution are determined by *heterogeneous causes* that produce effects that differ according to the structural loci where the effects emerge.[1] Insisting on the perspective of 'representation',[2] Foucault views the classical 'table' as a table of exchanges and fails to conceive it as a table of *circulation*.[3] Hence, Foucault does not present the whole breadth of Ricardo's transformation. Far from simply performing an epistemic turn consisting in the replacement of the centrality of exchange with that of production, Ricardo produced a *new problematic*: he started to think the difference that separates – and the relation that binds together – production and circulation: in production, labour creates value, which makes it the measure of value in exchange; in circulation, however, labour is a commodity among other commodities and is exchanged according to its price, the wage; that is, against the sum of money sufficient to purchase the necessaries of subsistence. As an effect of this *problematisation* of the production/circulation pair, there emerged the problem of explaining how their articulation commands the distribution of value.

2. The centrality of production, continues Foucault, induces the substitution of the theme of scarcity as human destiny to the classical view that scarcity is a consequence of human representation of needs and that generosity of land makes it possible to overcome scarcity (if people adequately understand their needs). According to Foucault (1994, p. 257), Ricardo situates economics 'in that perilous region where life is confronted with death'. At this point, Foucault departs from the tight logic of Ricardo's economics and embarks on a philosophical interpretation that will help him to present Marx as Ricardo's acolyte. In order to compare Ricardo and Marx in such a reductive manner, he first translates each into a philosophical jargon (of a somewhat existentialist timber: Foucault, 1994, pp. 259–60) – and then compares these *translations*. This 'existentialist' interlude retroactively justifies the reductive treatment of the introduction of the sphere of production into the centre of economics; leads towards the openly philosophical account of Ricardo's notion of history; and deploys the field to situate an equally 'existentialist' and 'philosophical' Marx within Ricardo's epistemic horizon.
3. As history is generated by the finitude of the human being, it emerges only to encounter its end. In that inescapable final moment, 'historicity will have been superimposed exactly upon human essence' (Foucault, 1994, p. 262). Two interpretations of this closing moment

> are possible, continues Foucault: Ricardo's 'pessimistic' one, which envisages the advent of a void flow of calendar time in an infinite stagnation, and Marx's revolutionary one, which sees this moment as the moment of re-apprehension of the truth of human essence by the human being and hence as the moment of reversal or as the beginning of the true history of humanity. Symptomatically, in order to make his construction hold, Foucault has to amalgamate the 'young' Marx of Parisian manuscripts with the Marx of *Capital*. From this inverse symmetry of the Ricardo/Marx couple, Foucault (1994, p. 263), draws a general epistemological and philosophical conclusion: 'The great dream of an end to History is the utopia of causal systems of thought, just as the dream of the world's beginnings was the utopia of the classifying systems of thought.'

It is now clear why Foucault's 'great series of production' had to be 'linear and homogeneous':[4] this invention made it possible to engage in an account of Ricardo tainted in existentialist philosophical ether and, via this construction of a common denominator, to annex Marx to the field of political economy; moreover, it has also provided a cornerstone within a larger construction that unifies heterogeneous intellectual efforts under the same *episteme* and secures the grounds for a cosy symmetrical disposition of the two consecutive *epistemai* in the abject terms of the origin/end metaphysics.

Ricardo's treatment of the wage-profit-rent triad

Foucault correctly and with some verve resumes Ricardo's theory of differential rent and its final result, general stagnation. Yet he does not enter the *technique* of Ricardo's conceptual developments: he makes a commentary in the grand style and starts following the direction indicated by his own eloquence, not by the trite limpidity of the text he claims to be reading.

Ricardo presents wages and profits as inversely proportioned quantities (2004, p. 16) and rents as opposed both to profits and to wages (2004, 71–2). The logic of this triple relation is this: capital as the demand of labour confronts population as the offer of labour on the background *overdetermined* by the need to expand the zone of cultivated land.[5] The invisible hand of the offer-demand mechanism operates on a background overdetermined by the unequal quality of land.[6] Ricardo presents exchange as articulated to and determined by production (at least by a certain production: the production on land) – and makes

distribution depend on the mode of this articulation. As the invisible hand of the offer-demand mechanism is not the ultimate truth of economic processes, the analysis of production, as Foucault correctly states, precedes that of exchange. However, Foucault does not read on to see that exchange, for Ricardo, results in circulation, which in turn yields the distribution of value.

Ricardo not only affirms the dominance of production over 'exchange', he abandons the Smithean tacit 'barter' model and conceives exchange as circulation. In a way, he manages to articulate circulation to the sphere of production. Most importantly, he demonstrates the effects of the circulation/production articulation on the distribution of the produced value among the three main classes: landlords, capitalists and workers. However, the more he 'naturalises' production by subordinating it to the ultimately natural 'regularity' of the diminishing marginal returns in agriculture, the more he conceives his problem in the simple terms of the distribution of the already produced value.

For Ricardo, the only branch of production with a specific dynamics is the production on land: its dynamics is specific but not proper – because it is a natural dynamics. The natural dynamics of land-based production affects economy via the mediation of another extraeconomic determination, the private appropriation of land. The problem he inaugurated when he placed production into the centre of economics Ricardo now solves by displacing it; he articulates production to circulation-distribution by articulating the economic sphere to its two specific exteriors: the nature and the private property of land.

The movement of differential rent affects the whole of a country's economy by determining the price of the basic means of subsistence and thus the price of labour. Since the price of labour is a constant across the whole economy at a given moment, Ricardo remains within the sphere of exchange-circulation once he has passed through the dynamics of the production on land. The price of labour then oscillates around the price of the means of subsistence according to the mechanism of offer and demand. The more a capitalist spends on wages, the less he retains as profit: wages are inversely proportionate to profits.

Let us now consider, with Ricardo, that a new (and less fertile) plot of land has just been drawn into cultivation. On this plot, more labour is needed for the production of a unity of corn. Since the price of corn on the market is determined by the production price of corn produced on this particular plot of land, the price of corn will now increase. Individual production prices of corn produced on other plots of land are lower than the individual production price on the least fertile plot of land, which is

now the price of corn on the market. The difference between the market price and the individual production price goes to the rent. Although the last plot of land drawn into cultivation yields no rent, all the plots yield profit (determined according to the average profit rate). This point is what interests me here.

As the price of corn increases, wages have to increase as well – for workers to be able to acquire the same quantities of means of subsistence for higher prices. As the wages increase, profits decrease. Hence, the average rate of profit falls. Since the average rate of profit determines the component 'profit' in all the production prices, its fall also affects the production price of corn produced on the land that yields no rent. By its effect on the whole of the national economy, the price of corn from the land with no rent has finally affected itself.

As a very particular price, as the price that determines the market price of corn, the production price of corn produced on the least fertile land affects all the prices in the national economy. As one price among the others, however, it is affected, as any other price, by that very particular price – that is, by itself. To be precise, it affects itself in two ways: not only via the general profit rate but also through the wages that it pushes upwards itself. One can see the beginning of an infinite regress (that will, however, be infinitely decreasing in intensity): the change of the price of the zero-rent corn, affected by the decrease of profits and the increase of wages, will affect all the other prices according to the described mechanism and will finally affect itself: the vicious circle can start again. It is not probable that the increase in wages and the decrease in profits cancel each other out, since the decrease in profits is mediated by the formation of the general profit rate.

Ricardo assumed that the movement of wages is determined by the movement of the price of corn: as we have seen, this assumption leads to a vicious circle.

Marx: The theoretical *concept* of the wage

However, this is a vicious circle only as long as we remain confined to the horizon of circulation. Contrary to Ricardo, who is drawn towards circulation once he has punctually linked its domain to the particular production on the land, Marx points out that the movement of wages is primarily determined not by the movement of prices of corn but by the rate of surplus value; that is, by a relation situated in production, not in circulation. In *Capital*, volume 3, Marx (1981, p. 157) shows that what Ricardo presents as the general case is just a special case

generated by a larger set of variables, neither of which is profit or wage:

> This case, that of a constant percentage composition of capital, constant working day, constant intensity of labour, with changes in the rate of surplus-value brought about by changes in wages, is the only one that meets Ricardo's assumption: 'Profits would be high or low, *exactly in proportion* as wages would be low or high'.

In the case considered to be general by Ricardo and specific by Marx, the movement of wages may well be the effect of the movement of prices of corn or of the movement of the demand of labour or of both; that is, an effect emerging from the sphere of circulation. However, even if generated in the sphere of circulation, the movement of wages retroactively affects the sphere of production, where it translates itself into changes in the rate of surplus value. As the rate of surplus value (together with the organic composition of capital, termed 'percentage composition of capital' in the passage quoted above and posed as invariant in order to meet Ricardo's assumption)[7] determines the profit rate in any production, it co-determines the general profit rate, which enters into the formation of production prices of all the commodities in a national economy.

Wage is a *verwandelte Form*

We have seen that there is no circle and no tautology as soon as we break out of the sphere of circulation and conceive wages as the inscription, within the sphere of circulation, of the portion of capital that produces surplus value, as the *transformation* of the element that, within the sphere of production, is the variable capital. The movement of wages then depends on the movement of the rate of surplus value – that is, of the rate of exploitation. In this way, relations of exchange, processes of circulation, are anchored in the class antagonism between labour and capital – the basic relation of production, which itself is already structured by the domination of capital in the proportion between 'constant' and 'variable' capital.

My Althusserian reading of *Capital* shows that the two external articulations of the economic sphere conceptualised by Ricardo (the articulation to nature and the articulation to juridico-political arrangements) are overdetermined by the internal articulation of a particular domain within the economic sphere, the domain of production. In this way,

by following Althusser's groundbreaking application of Freud's concept of overdetermination to Marx's theory,[8] we rediscover and reformulate the thesis of Marx's *Grundrisse* that the production dominates over ('*greift über*') the other spheres of economy. However, the *Grundrisse* thesis was only a declaration of a materialist position, a properly philosophical *thesis*, in Althusserian sense,[9] without analytical, that is, *theoretical* capacity.[10] The problem of the articulation of particular economic spheres can theoretically be solved only within a concrete analysis of a historical mode of production, as in *Capital*, not within a general discussion of their relations a priori, as in the *Grundrisse*. The very project of *Capital* emerges from the practical experience of the limitations of *Grundrisse*'s purely philosophical approach, thus re-establishing the distinction between theory (historical materialism) and philosophy as intervention into the field of theory at the moment of its saturation and deadlock (as in Althusser's Lenin: see Althusser, 1971). Hence, Foucault's philosophical intervention into the relation between Ricardo and Marx seems all the more reductive, since it intervenes into a theory that Marx's subtilisation of Ricardo has just established as theory proper rather than saturated.

This 'internal articulation' of production, that is, class antagonism, commands the formation of specific relations between elements of production (value, surplus value, the value of labour power) and elements of circulation in the terms of *verwandelte Formen*, converted or transformed forms (price, profit, wage). In Marx, the 'converted form' is rather feebly thematised. It was isolated as a philosophical category and developed under the philosophical perspective of 'the necessity of irrational expressions' by Merab Mamardashvili (1970). A converted form articulates two 'spheres', one of which overdetermines the other. In Marx, the two spheres are production and circulation. Within the sphere of circulation, profit is a converted form and a supplement of what is surplus value in production; in the same way, wage is a converted form of the value of labour power; and price is the converted form of value. The value of a commodity is defined as the socially necessary quantity of abstract labour spent in its production, but this quantity is determined only when the commodity is 'realised' on the market, that is, within the sphere of circulation, and then only by the mediation of the general profit rate (which, as an element of circulation, is itself a *verwandelte Form*, dependent for its constitution on the very value it retroactively fixes).

Wages *appear* to the implied agents[11] as inversely proportionate to profits because profits are, for the *immediate* (ideological bourgeois) consciousness, that which remains when the total of the advanced capital

is subtracted from the final sum realised on the market, and wages form a part of the advanced capital. However, what appears in circulation as the sum of wages, as the part of capital specifically advanced to hire labour power, is conceptualised in *theoretical* analysis as the variable capital in production, that is, as that part of the advanced capital that 'varies', for it alone generates surplus value. The *rate* of profit is both inversely proportionate to variable capital (since it is determined by the rate of surplus value, where variable capital figures in the denominator) and directly proportionate to it (since it is equally determined by the organic composition of capital, where variable capital figures as numerator). The general profit rate (which determines production prices) allocates profits to individual capitals according to the rule saying 'equal profits to equal quantities of capitals advanced' – and thus transfers surplus value from production branches with a lower organic composition of capital towards the branches with a higher composition.

Capital's central theoretical problem: the articulation of heterogeneous structural logics

In this way, the logic of circulation is radically heterogeneous to the logic of production. In production, value is *produced* according to the rule saying 'equal quantities of the newly produced value to equal quantities of the (socially necessary) invested labour'; while in circulation, value is *distributed* according to the rule saying 'equal profits to equal quantities of capitals advanced'. Marx (1981, pp. 258, 300) comments that the average profit rate makes individual capitalists behave like members of a shareholders society and that it consolidates them into a freemason club facing the working class. One could add that the average profit rate is not only the material bond of the capitalist class solidarity but also a mechanism of class discipline: while it makes capitalists run after the extra profit, it is itself generated by this very race to run away from it.

The difference between the rate of surplus value, a theoretically conceptualised relation situated in the sphere of production, and its converted form, the rate of profit, is only a matter of a distinction: the distinction between the variable and the constant capital. This distinction is made in the case of the rate of surplus value, that is, in theory, while it is not made in the case of the rate of profit, that is, in the immediate ideological perception – which, for this reason, conceals exploitation.

To conceive the distinction, to assume the theoretical position, one has to situate oneself not within the sphere of production as opposed to circulation but on the position of the *difference* between production and

circulation, the position from where it is possible and necessary to pose the question of the articulation between the two – the question that was first posed by Ricardo and conceptualised only by Marx.

Theoretical practice is a moment in the practice of class struggle

For Marx, the articulation between production and circulation *in the capitalist mode of production* is established and reproduced by the mechanism of a specific blindness: the blindness that apprehends profit as the fruit of the whole of the capital advanced – and that conceives labour power only as a mode of existence, *Existenzweise*, of capital. This blindness determines the perspective of the capital. In this sense, the converted forms (wage, profit, rent) are the material existence of bourgeois ideology. It is only when wage, or profit, is opposed to the value of labour power, or to surplus value, that wage, or profit, ceases to be a spontaneous ideological 'appearance' and can eventually become a theoretical concept. However, to see the difference between the profit and the surplus value, one first has to have the concept of surplus value. To have the concept of the specifically capitalist surplus value, one has to have the concept of the specifically capitalist exploitation – that is, one has to adopt the proletarian class perspective. And since class perspective and class position are both but a result of class struggle, a theory of capitalism can be practiced only as a moment in the practice of proletarian class struggle.

In terms of the class character of theoretical practice I show why Ricardo, theorising in the bourgeois perspective, was unable to elaborate the theory of absolute rent while Marx, theorising in the proletarian perspective, produced it.

Ricardo maintains that the less fertile land under cultivation does not yield rent. He insists on this assumption even though he possesses all the elements needed for a theory of absolute rent (especially the mechanism of the formation of the general rate of profit; see Ricardo, 2004, pp. 64–76). An immediate cause of Ricardo's insistence may be that the recognition of an absolute rent would ruin the assumption that commodities are exchanged according to their value, that value is the natural price of commodities and that market price oscillates around the natural price. Had Ricardo recognised that commodities are not exchanged according to their value, he would be unable to retain his discussion on rent and profit within the confines of the distribution of already produced value. He would have to reformulate

the question of the articulation between production and circulation – and, hence, to reconsider his solution of the articulation of the economic sphere to its specific exteriors, especially to the juridico-political apparatuses. In other words, Ricardo would be induced to do Marx's work: to develop a theory of the articulation between 'spheres' of heterogeneous logics.

Absolute rent is the effect of an extraeconomic arrangement – the private property of land. One of its consequences is that an extraeconomic, juridical category directly intervenes into the formation of prices of commodities produced on land. This means that commodities are not exchanged according to their value, that prices radically belong to the sphere of circulation and that circulation does not induce merely secondary oscillations around the 'natural price'.

In his analysis of absolute rent, Marx insists that it is the effect of property qua property: property of land intervenes as an 'alien force' into the economy and raises a 'barrier' to the movement of capital. It prevents capital from *entering* agricultural production until the market price of corn rises *above* its production price on the plot of land to be drawn into cultivation, so as to provide for the additional price component besides the invested capital and profit, namely, the rent. Private property of land also withdraws a part of the surplus value from the formation of the general rate of profit, since it transforms a part of the surplus value into rent, channelling it towards consumption.

The appearance that the law of property here operates as an 'alien force' originates in the fact that in this case, the involved juridical persons are posited as unequal – unequal as to the access to the conditions of production (the land). The explicitly established inequality differs from the wage relation in that it is not mediated by any 'freedom of equals' within the sphere of exchange.

Rent regulates relations within distribution and explicitly exhibits its origin in the property monopoly over the conditions of production. It affirms its origin in the class structure of society and demonstrates that economic processes of distribution are but processes of the class reproduction of society.

The wage relation, on the other hand, is being commanded by Althusser's 'abstraction'. This abstraction of law consists in the fact that law regulates contractual exchange relations among free and equal (legal) persons *as if these relations were not* relations among the bearers, *Träger*, within the process of circulation, which is the sphere of converted forms of the relations in production. We should consider Althusser's (theoretical) concept of the law as a counterpart to Mamardashvili's

(philosophical) category of *verwandelte Form*. According to Althusser, bourgeois law abstracts from the sphere of production and seems to regulate the sphere of circulation – while it is by this very abstraction that the juridical apparatus 'directly assures the functioning of the capitalist relations of production'; in this way, the juridical ideological apparatus assumes the specific role of 'articulating superstructure upon and into infrastructure' (Althusser, 1995, pp. 200–2).

Marx most faithfully follows Ricardo at the point where he breaks with him. The problem of articulating production with circulation does not exist in Ricardo; Marx's formulation of this problem is a break with Ricardo and the economists. However, the way Marx proceeds to elaborate the problem is more Ricardian than Ricardo himself could have been. Ricardo introduced what one might call 'heterogeneous causality': the same cause may produce different effects in different social classes;[12] the development of a historical sequence may be propelled by a number of heterogeneous causes. While Smith, at decisive points of his elaboration, resorts to the explanation pattern of the demand-supply mechanism, Ricardo's demonstration as to why economic development may be self-defeating and is likely to end up in stagnation uses a variety of differing causal patterns: economic development → demand of labour => increase of wages (Smith) => increase of population (Malthus) → pressure on the production of the means of subsistence => decreasing marginal return (Turgot) → rents increase while profits decrease => investments slow down (Ricardo) → decrease in demand of labour => wages decrease (Smith) => population decreases (Malthus) → general stagnation. While Ricardo understood heterogeneous causality either as a punctual event (one cause, different effects) or as a linear sequence, Marx made it the principle of the structuration of economic processes in the two senses that Establet, following Althusser, makes us conceptualise together: as the specifically capitalist structuration of the economic 'spheres' (production, circulation, etc.) and as the specifically capitalist coordination of individual labour processes. Simply put, in Smith, we have homogeneous linear causality; in Ricardo, heterogeneous linear causality; and in Marx, heterogeneous structural causality.

By missing Marx's central problem, the articulation of several heterogeneous 'logics' into a complex structure, Foucault misses the class character of his theory. One certainly has to look from a proletarian perspective in order to elaborate, to use Establet's (1996, p. 615) Althusserian parlance, 'the theory of the capitalist mode of production as a specific labour process'. However, the theory of capitalist

appropriation of surplus value is completed only when it embraces the theory of the class composition of the capitalist class. Marx elaborates this theory as he examines the articulation linking the movement of individual capitals to the movement of *Gesamtkapital*, the social capital as a whole; that is, as he theorises 'the capitalist mode of production as the laws of co-existence of immediate labour processes', establishing 'the theory of the specific repartition of social labour' (Establet, 1996, pp. 615, 629). The formation of the general profit rate, the result of the individual capitals' chase for surplus profit, is the material existence of the class composition of the capitalist class. This proposition presupposes the problematics of 'heterogeneous logics' and a theory of their articulation. This is what basically distinguishes Marx from the bourgeois theorist Ricardo. This is also what Foucault misses. And with it, Foucault misses the real problem of any 'archaeology of knowledge', the class character of theory.

Which means that Foucauldian archaeology of knowledge was realised by Althusser as the theorist of the class character of theory. Because of the inevitable class character of theory Althusser's Marxism was not an obstacle to his theorisation of Marx's procedure but a condition for it: Althusser was able to develop his theory of the class character of theory only when, and as soon as, he accepted the viewpoint of Marx's class theory – because Marx produced his class theory as soon as, and only when, he adopted the perspective of a specific class, the class of the declassed. This is ultimately why Althusser could not be a Marx scholar without being a Marxist. And this is why my account of Althusser's Marx could only be Althusserian: in a time when *Capital* remains as institutionally marginal as it is being confirmed by global economy itself, the only way to present, not simply reject, Althusser's defence of *Capital* is to start with a defence of *Capital*, which today means to follow, first and foremost, Althusser.

Notes

1. Ricardo constructs his understanding of causality conscientiously; see his polemical remark to Buchanan: 'Because a high price of provisions is sometimes occasioned by a deficient supply, Mr. Buchanan assumes it as a certain indication of deficient supply. He attributes to one cause exclusively that which may arise from many' (Ricardo, 2004, p. 141).
2. Foucault's simplification of Ricardo's notion of causality corresponds to his general intention to demonstrate that the same *episteme* commands vaguely synchronous but heterogeneous fields of knowledge. To support his contention that there exists a classical *episteme*, Foucault is forced to reduce theories produced in heterogeneous fields (universal grammar, analysis of wealth,

natural history) to a sort of common denominator that, in the case of economics, takes the form of a frozen synoptic table where the objects that 'represent' human needs reciprocally determine each other by 'representing' one another's value.

3. Here is how a historian of economic thought describes Quesnay's 'table', classical thought's paradigmatic tableau: 'Quesnay offers an analysis in the terms of the *circuit* that presents what we now call national production, national revenue, national spending. He establishes a theory of production and *circulation* [...]. [...] Quesnay's theory of production and reproduction is accompanied by a theory of the *circulation* of wealth among social classes that is presented in the Economic Table.' (Valier, 2005, pp. 42, 47; italics mine)
4. In purely stylistic terms, the *linearity* of the production series is motivated by the anticipation of its being finally *broken*, and its *homogeneity* by the need that it be broken by a *heterogeneous* element – 'death'.
5. Adam Smith already conceived wages as the outcome of the interplay between the demand for labour and the price of subsistence; Smith also linked the demand of labour to the movement of population (Smith, 1999, p. 458). However, he did not establish the relation between the increase of demand of labour (as an incentive to the growth of population) and the falling marginal yield of land.
6. The market price of a commodity produced on land (the price of 'corn') equals the production price (production price of a commodity = total advanced capital needed for its production; that is, capital including wages + profit on this capital calculated on the basis of the general profit rate) of the commodity produced on the last plot of land drawn into cultivation (the 'last' plot of land being the less fertile and perhaps the most distant one). The difference between the market price and the individual production price of the products of all the other plots of land is being appropriated by landlords as rent. With the increase of production and general opulence, the demand of labour increases, and wages increase; the population prospers and proliferates. New and less fertile plots of land have to be cultivated in order to feed the growing population. As a consequence, prices of corn increase and so do rents. As prices of subsistence grow, wages necessarily increase. As wages increase, profits decrease: there is less and less capital available for accumulation. Accumulation decreases and demand of labour with it. Wages start falling, the population starts starving and dying away. ... According to Ricardo, economic progress is self-defeating.
7. The 'organic composition of capital' is the proportion of the capital advanced for wages with respect to the total of the capital advanced; since only living labour produces new value, only the part of capital advanced for wages creates new value and thus 'varies': accordingly, Marx calls it 'variable capital', as opposed to 'constant capital', as the rest of the capital advanced. The proportion of the surplus value produced with respect to the total capital advanced (at a given rate of surplus value) depends on the organic composition of capital: the higher the proportion of variable capital, the higher the proportion of surplus value. The rate of surplus value is the proportion of the quantity of surplus value with respect to the variable capital.

8. See the chapters 'Contradiction and Overdetermination' and 'On the Materialist Dialectic' in *For Marx* (Althusser, 2005, pp. 87–128, 161–218). See also the development in *Reading Capital*, where Althusser examines Marx's use of the term *articulation* (*Gliederung*) and re-elaborates it towards the concepts of '*overdetermination*' and of 'structure in dominance', finally to resume them in the concept of a 'new form of causality [...]: *the determination by a structure*' where '*the whole existence of the structure consists of its effects*' (see, respectively, Althusser, 2009, pp. 109, 118, 120, 203, 209).
9. More precisely, in the sense of Althusser's 'Philosophy and the Spontaneous Philosophy of the Scientists'.
10. On the relation between the *Grundrisse* and *Capital* with respect to the problem of articulation of economic 'spheres' (production, circulation, distribution, consumption), see Establet, 1996, pp. 583–5. One could say that expressions that operate as philosophical categories (production, structure, dominant) in the introduction to *Grundrisse* operate as theoretical concepts in *Capital*: '[I]n the theory of every mode of production, the theoretically determining element is the *concept of the structure of the production process*, not because in the structure of the overall process, as suggested in the 1857 "Introduction", the sphere of production is always the determining sphere [a position that is *philosophically* materialist, but *theoretically* empiricist], but *because the concept of the structure of the overall process can only be produced starting from the concept of the structure of the production process*.' (Establet, 1996, p. 629; commentary mine)
11. This is how Marx describes his project at the beginning of *Capital*, vol. 3: 'In the first volume we investigated the phenomena exhibited by the *process of capitalist production*, taken by itself, i.e. the immediate production process, in which connection all secondary influences external to this process were left out of account. But this immediate production process does not exhaust the life cycle of capital. In the world as it actually is, it is supplemented by the *process of circulation*, and this formed our object of investigation in the second volume. Here we found [...] that the capitalist production process, taken as a whole, is a unity of the production and circulation processes. [...] Our concern is [...] to discover and present the concrete forms which grow out of the *process of capital's movement considered as a whole*. In their actual movement, capitals confront one another in certain concrete forms, and, in relation to these, both the shape capital assumes in the immediate production process and its shape in the process of circulation appear merely as particular moments. The conformations of capital, as developed in this volume, thus approach step by step the form in which they appear on the surface of society, in the action of different capitals on one another, i.e. in competition, and in the everyday consciousness of the agents of production themselves.' (Marx, 1981, p. 117) Establet (1996, p. 632) denounces the implicit Hegelianism of the passage. It seems that the theme of 'illusion' can easily be disconnected from its eventual Hegelian background if we interpret it as 'a mere *illusion*, but a *necessary illusion*', as Marx puts it (1973, p. 509): the illusion of the competition is structurally necessary for the class composition of the capitalist class.
12. 'I now, however, see reason to be satisfied that the one fund, from which landlords and capitalists derive their revenue, may increase, while the other,

> that upon which the labouring class mainly depend, may diminish, and therefore it follows, if I am right, that the same cause which may increase the net revenue of the country may at the same time render the population redundant, and deteriorate the condition of the labourer.' (Ricardo, 2004, p. 264)

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5

Foucault against Marxism: Althusser beyond Althusser

Mark G. E. Kelly

This is an essay about two late-twentieth-century French philosophers, Michel Foucault and Louis Althusser, and Marxism. My thesis, simply stated, is that Foucault and Althusser pursued the same basic theoretical trajectory in relation to Marxism and that this trajectory is both rooted in and leads decisively away from Marx and Marxism. I argue that Althusser was stymied in this trajectory by his adherence to the French Communist Party, leaving Foucault to fulfil it.

This picture may surprise. Althusser's life's project was to purge Marxism of Hegelian metaphysics while remaining resolutely within Marxism-Leninism. Foucault, by contrast, though a Marxist and close to Althusser as a student, broke with Marxism early in his career. Since Foucault's opposition to Marxism is better known than his connection to Althusser, despite some good work to the contrary, the differences between the two thinkers are often exaggerated (see Montag, 1995). In particular, Althusser's own repudiation of his strict adherence to Marx in a late book-length essay he wrote in 1978, 'Marx in His Limits', is not well known, since it was published posthumously, appearing in 1994 in French and only in 2006 in English.

I argue that Althusser's Marxism amounted to a strategic decision to tailor his arguments to suit the context in which he found himself. I further argue that his reasons for this orientation were inadequate. Rather, I argue that Foucault, by breaking with Marxism early in his career, produced a philosophy more appropriate to the times in which he wrote and a fortiori to us today.

This is not to renounce Marxism entirely, however. If Althusser's strict fidelity to Marxism was somewhat artificial, Foucault's apparent anti-Marxism is mitigated by a continuity with Marx and Althusser's thought.

A tale of two philosophers

Althusser and Foucault met as students at the École Normale Supérieure in Paris in the late 1940s. Foucault was only two years behind Althusser at the school, but this belied an eight-year difference in age: Althusser had spent the war as a prisoner in Germany and hence began his higher education only at its end. The older man effectively became the younger's mentor, influencing him into joining the French Communist Party (PCF). Foucault also followed Althusser in writing an undergraduate dissertation on Hegel's thought (see Macey, 1993, p. 32). Both of these commonalities reflected a shared adherence to Marxism, the first explicitly, the second more subtly. In France, Hegel's thought came to prominence only after the Russian Revolution of 1917 had made Marxism popular in France. That is, in France, Hegel was read and appreciated largely through the historic prism of Marxism, and to study Hegel in France in the 1940s indicated at least a proximity to Marxism.

Foucault was never properly active in the PCF (see Macey, 1993, pp. 38–40) and left after just two or three years.[1] Before long, he stopped adhering theoretically to Marxism, too. This contrasts with Althusser's ongoing ultimate fidelity to both the party and the doctrine. However, Foucault's apostasy did not entail a personal breach with Althusser. Foucault's life partner Daniel Defert tells us that Althusser 'assented' to Foucault's leaving the party (see Foucault, 1994a, p. 20). Theoretically, Foucault's and Althusser's trajectories remained close, despite the former's rejection of Marxism. The two were part of the same broad intellectual movement that emerged in France in the 1960s, though Foucault did not follow Althusser in this: their relationship was relatively distant during the period. This movement is often called 'French structuralism', though both Althusser and Foucault refused this categorisation (see Althusser, 2009, p. 7; Foucault, 1970, p. xiv). To call it French *antihumanism* would be more accurate. This antihumanism entails a rejection of a philosophy that makes the sovereign human subject its centre and instead emphasises the constitution of the human by anonymous structures outside of the subject's control.

This perspective sat awkwardly with Althusser's Marxism, inasmuch as both the PCF and some of Marx's works endorsed a humanist perspective. Althusser, however, saw Marx's economics-based analysis of class society as antihumanist and developed a perspective by which he rejected as pre-Marxist Marx's earlier, more Hegelian output, with its emphasis on

the alienation of the human subject in capitalism. Thus, Althusser identified Hegel's legacy as his major critical philosophical target.

Foucault, for his part, hardly mentions Hegel at all in his published work, positively or negatively, but then there was no reason for him to do so since he was not trying to hermetically isolate Marx from Hegel. Foucault went rather further than this, rejecting Marx's economic theory itself as a relic of the nineteenth century. Foucault identified as the main point of difference between Althusser and himself that Althusser saw Marx as representing an 'epistemological break', while he himself saw Marx as a thinker of his time (Foucault, 1998b, p. 281). Indeed, the very idea of the epistemological break is itself a point of difference between Althusser and Foucault. This phrase was coined by a French philosopher of science, Gaston Bachelard, to refer to the dawn of the modern scientific perspective. Althusser identified the epistemological break with Marx, though he also identified many precursors. By contrast, Foucault did not use the term and believed that the history of thought was characterised by multiple, periodic ruptures. This allowed for no privileged historical viewpoint, rather only specific 'epistemes'. Foucault is, in short, a historicist, while Althusser repudiated historicism in favour of a Marxism that was confident in its own superior scientific status.

Unlike two of his close associates, Althusser and Gilles Deleuze, Foucault declares no overt hostility to Hegel. However, his historicism implies that to the extent he rejects Marx, he must a fortiori reject Hegel. Indeed, Foucault can be said to dismiss Hegel to a greater degree than he does Marx, inasmuch as he argues that economics was a more historically important discourse of the nineteenth century than philosophy (Foucault, 1970, p. 335). Still, all nineteenth-century thought, be it philosophy or economics, Hegel or Marx, is dismissed by Foucault as obsolete after Nietzsche. The simple reason for this for Foucault is that nineteenth-century thought understood history as having an end and as having its own logic. Both man and history appear in nineteenth-century thought as finite, limited. For Foucault, by contrast, the point is to acknowledge the open-endedness of history and humanity, their infinite possibilities. Foucault's and Althusser's antihumanism converge on this point. The primary divergence is, as Foucault noted, around the historical pedigree they trace for this position. For Foucault, Nietzsche looms large as the recent originator of antihumanism, while Althusser sees his own perspective as originating in an 'underground current' stretching, via Marx, back to Spinoza and even to antiquity.

It is important to emphasise, however, against right-wing interpretations of Foucault and against exaggerated interpretations of his historical

relativism, that there are fundamental continuities of his thought with certain aspects of Marxism. Foucault's break with Marxism is itself profoundly Marxian: like Marx, he aims to kick aside the vestiges of metaphysical philosophy in favour of objective historical analysis. Foucault's relation to Marxism is one of maximal proximity: he is effectively as close as one can be to being a Marxist without being a Marxist. He retains class analysis (while abandoning the philosophy of history that gives class a privileged role)[2] and a sympathy for revolution (while abandoning the insistence on the inevitability of revolution or any other historical event).[3] Foucault's overall project of critical analysis of thought and society resembles nothing so much as Marx's early declaration for a 'ruthless criticism of all that exists' (Marx, 1956, p. 344). Foucault extracts this critical kernel from Marxism, freeing it from its constraining nineteenth-century husk. Althusser's project was governed by a similar move, seeking to break free of the influence of nineteenth-century German idealist philosophy on Marx. However, as Althusser was ultimately brought to recognise, as an artefact of the nineteenth century, Marx's thought is inherently limited. Due to an attempt to retain a strict adherence to Marx, however, Althusser was restrained in what he could add and jettison. Althusser thus comes as close to Foucault as one could while remaining a Marxist.

Althusser

What is the difference between Foucault and Althusser such that one left the French Communist Party and one stayed, one was aloof and the other committed? From interrogating Althusser's loyalty to Marxism, I conclude, following Althusser's own remarks, that it was essentially a case of psychological insecurity trumping theoretical consistency via a mistaken strategic assessment of the political situation.

Althusser's central philosophical project was to reconstruct a scientific form of 'structural' Marxism centred on *Capital*, bracketing Marx's early works and their Hegelianism from consideration. The ultimate problem with this approach is that *Capital* is itself widely acknowledged to be profoundly influenced by Hegel. For Althusser, the central contradiction of Marx's thought lies in the co-presence of materialism and Hegelianism. His project was to do away with this contradiction by expunging the Hegelian influence in order to produce a purely materialist Marxism. His procedure for doing this – namely, to distinguish a 'Marxist' late Marx from a Hegelian young Marx – was flawed, however, inasmuch as this distinction was not so clear-cut as Althusser claimed. Late in his life, Althusser admitted as much, that is, that *Capital* was

substantially Hegelian, albeit in texts he did not have published at the time (see Althusser, 2006).

Althusser's long insistence on positing a non-Hegelian late Marx, in spite of evidence to the contrary, stems from political motivations, specifically, from his decision to adhere to the PCF. While his political orientation on the left can be thought of as determining his adherence to the PCF and not vice versa, his devotion to Marx and Lenin in particular is consequent on his devotion to the PCF. His ultimate aim was thereby to realise a political objective of reforming the party from within and reviving its revolutionary traditions. To this end, he sought to combat the party's humanist orthodoxy, but to do that he had to represent his antihumanism as the true Marxism. As Jacques Rancière (2011, p. 24) puts it, 'Althusser's theoretical and political project [...] is staked on the bet that it is possible to effect a *political* transformation inside the Communist Party through a theoretical investigation aimed at restoring Marx's thought'.

The immediate obstacle facing Althusser in these aims was the party's intolerance of dissent. A frontal attack on the tenets of Marxism-Leninism or on the hierarchy of the party would have resulted in Althusser's expulsion. Althusser thus adopted a strategy of attacking the party only at the level of philosophy and by reference to Marx or, less frequently, other canonical figures, such as Lenin. As long as Althusser couched his antihumanism in terms of Marx's thought, it was hard for a party that cast itself as the standard bearer of Marxism to silence him (see Althusser, 1993, p. 196). That said, the party did not disguise its hostility towards his enterprise, explicitly rejecting his formulations.

Althusser's strategy implied considerable compromises. He had to maintain not only a public silence as to the deficiencies of the party but a silence as to deficiencies in Marx's and Lenin's thought. As he himself points out, it is surprising that he chose to remain within the party at all, given not only his considerable differences with the organisation's ideological line and political behaviour but that during his earliest days as a member, the woman who was to become his wife was persecuted by the party for reasons he clearly saw as spurious. Indeed, Althusser was ordered to stop seeing her and refused. 'All this', he says, 'gave me an unusually realistic insight into the leadership and workings of the Party' (Althusser, 1993, p. 203). He gives us several reasons for nonetheless remaining despite this.

Throughout his life, he sees in the PCF the sole serious force on the French left. He thus argues that being in the party was the only possible way of affecting the 'course of history' (Althusser, 1993 p. 240).

Particularly prominent in his retrospective defence of his strategy is his claim that the PCF had the crucial weight that could have turned the events of May 1968 into a full-scale social revolution (Althusser, 1993, p. 230). This claim is of course an untestable counterfactual, but it is not entirely implausible. Althusser does not, however, consider the possibility that the PCF's size was directly proportional to its lack of revolutionary inclination. My insinuation is indeed that the PCF was already beyond redemption as a revolutionary organisation.

The key problem for Althusser's strategy was that there was no route to changing the party line. There is no indication that philosophical criticism could ever affect the party's ideology, let alone its political practice. The party's proletarian members cared little about philosophy, as Althusser notes, while its intelligentsia were comfortable toeing the party line and had scant interest in new interpretations (see Althusser, 1993, p. 179). Moreover, by his own assessment, he was the only person mounting such an internal opposition within the PCF. While he points to the level of concern the party leadership had about him as an indication of his significance, this does not imply they thought he might actually be able to change the party (see Althusser, 1993, p. 233). Rather, I think their concern was that Althusser would have precisely the effect he did have; namely, corrupt the youth and cause them to shun the party. From this point of view, their strategy of condemning Althusser while allowing him to remain within the party was eminently sensible; it was quite likely Althusser would do more damage to them from the outside, serving as an alternative pole of attraction for recruits.

Althusser's followers were in any case mostly outside the party (see Althusser, 1993, p. 228). There they constituted groups that proclaimed their Marxist orthodoxy vis-à-vis the PCF. This is ironic, given that Althusser's orthodoxy was primarily a tactic for doing business within the PCF. They believed wholeheartedly in a doctrine that he had formulated to deal with specific constraints, ideological and practical; yet it led them to shed those constraints in turn. As in Foucault's case, Althusser (1993, p. 233) accepted their shunning of the PCF as a reasonable course of action: 'The rule I adopted was that each person had to make his own decision.' But wasn't shunning the PCF something more than reasonable, that is, *the* logical outcome of Althusser's position? Speaking of the departure of his student Rancière from the party, Althusser (1993, p. 228) noted that Rancière's action seemed more in keeping with Althusser's theory than with Althusser's own behaviour.

Althusser's various attempts to justify remaining in the party are thus vacuous. I think we can explain his course only with reference to

psychological motives, which Althusser himself admits to. He tells us he was in the party because it allowed him simultaneously to satisfy his desires to resist and to be protected (Althusser, 1993, p. 204). Resisting the party's strictures within the party's disciplinary framework was this double game. Though it would surely be an error to reduce Althusser's thought to this, his couching of his thought in relation to Marx was at base occasioned by a need to play a game that was essentially unproductive. Althusser was attached to a status quo and lacked any real desire to change it.

Yet the party changed anyway. Althusser's fight 'for Marx' within the party I think terminated in his desperate attempt to stop the party abandoning its official commitment to a 'dictatorship of the proletariat' during its 1970s rightward drift into 'Eurocommunism'. The fact that Althusser could not prevent the party from abandoning its entrenched official adherence to core tenets of Marxism surely shows that an attempt to leverage those tenets to persuade the party to adopt radical new perspectives was a forlorn cause. With the PCF's abandonment of orthodoxy, the strategic logic of strict adherence to Marx evaporated. Thus, in 1976, Althusser suggested publicly for the first time that adherence to Marx has limits. One must note, however, that it was only Marx and not communism or Marxism or the PCF that Althusser distanced himself from at this time. He always retained a commitment to communism, defined as the abolition of market relations (see Althusser, 1993, p. 240), and Marxism. He did depart the PCF but tells us (1993, p. 241) that this was only because, after he notoriously killed his wife in 1980, he felt his continued membership would bring the party into disrepute.

This is not to say that Althusser fell into line with the PCF's break with Marx. His break with Marx was in a completely opposite direction. Much of 'Marx in His Limits' is devoted to upholding the Marxist-Leninist theory of the state, including the notion of the dictatorship of the proletariat. It is rather that Althusser widens the scope of his 'Marxist' critique of Marx to criticise elements of *Capital*. This constitutes a significant shift, but he still does not abandon the game of internal opposition.

Foucault beyond Althusser

Althusser and Foucault share an antihumanist perspective, and both reject any philosophy that sees history as unfolding according to a set pattern. Foucault can be said to follow this shared perspective further in rejecting key aspects of Marx's thought that might be said to harbour Hegelian or metaphysical tendencies. I am referring to a prophetic view

of history, the notions of dialectic and totality, and a metaphysics of the last instance. Althusser struggles to free himself from each of these but does not manage it completely. He goes furthest in renouncing the eschatological view of history by which communism is seen as the history's 'inevitable end' but retains a minimal image of communism as an aim; he redefines the dialectic, the totality and the last instance but feels bound to keep referring to all three.

To take the last example, Althusser finds himself forced to accept the orthodox Marxist position that the economic infrastructure 'determines' the ideological 'superstructure' 'in the last instance'. In his most widely quoted essay, 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses', he argues that ideology is essential to the reproduction of any economic system. He then ties himself in knots trying to square this claim with the notion that ideology is a superstructure. Due to the significance of ideology in his picture, as a materialist he is compelled to posit ideology as itself material (see Althusser, 2014, p. 258). He maintains the base-superstructure distinction, however, on the basis that the degree of materiality of superstructure is lesser than that of the material objects and that the superstructure is ontologically dependent on this materiality (Althusser, 2014, p. 259). While is seems to be necessary for a materialist to allow that all that exists depends on the existence of matter in the strict sense, this does not itself entail a priority of economics over ideology within the social form. In 'Marx in His Limits', Althusser goes on to allow that the superstructure can continue to exist even if the base is taken away and that ultimately 'anything can be determinant in the last instance' (Althusser, 2006, pp. 61, 263). This makes nonsense of the architectural metaphor, however, which clearly implies that the base is needed to hold the superstructure up and not vice versa. Althusser now interprets this dependency diachronically instead of synchronically; that is, the base is needed to raise the superstructure but not to sustain it after it has been raised. The appropriate metaphor for this, however, would be scaffolding, not a base. Althusser no longer insists on any priority between base and superstructure, only on the priority of the material element within each of them. This is indeed the sine qua non of materialism but in effect removes any reason for making one structure above and the other below.

Foucault, by contrast, is not concerned to make pronouncements about ontological priority. Doubtless one reason he does not find this necessary is that he is not doing philosophy in its strict sense. Where Althusser sought to provide a 'missing' philosophy for Marxism, Foucault eschewed both Marxism and philosophy sensu stricto. In this

respect, Foucault was actually more Marxian than Althusser. Like Marx, Foucault was a scholar with a philosophical background who turned himself to the study of disciplines outside philosophy. However, one can certainly find in Foucault an ontology, one that is broadly materialist and realist and that sees ideas as dependent on a nonideal material reality (see Kelly, 2009, pp. 10–30). We can see Althusser here as trying to swim his way up through Marxism's detritus to a surface that Foucault had already breached.

There is much in Marxism from which Althusser has no inclination to free himself, however. His account of ideology is explicitly an extension of the schema provided in Marx's later writings. The inadequacy of this grounding in the Marxist theory of the state can be seen in Althusser's strategy itself. For him, 'ideological state apparatuses' are a battleground in which Marxism may fight bourgeois ideology. This is consonant with his project to reform the Communist Party. The attempt to strategically insert himself into the reproductive circuits of society via the educational system and via the party and its place in the political system is precisely an example of this. We may contrast his perspective with Foucault's insight concerning what he called 'the tactical polyvalence of discourses' (Foucault, 1998a, p. 100). This principle is that apparently opposed discourses may support one another in strategies of power produced by the complex interplay of power relations. This insight can be applied both to understanding the PCF's position in French society and to understanding Althusser's position within the PCF. While the party explicitly advocated revolution, in practice it was a component of a relatively stable French social system and in fact never seriously threatened the status quo. Not dissimilarly, Althusser's oppositional discourse within the party might have raised hackles, but it never threatened its operation. Indeed, one might say that, in spite of the party leadership's chagrin at Althusser's contradiction of their line, this contradiction nonetheless served to create an impression of a party that was open to debate, giving it a veneer of intellectual credibility. Moreover, by playing the game of Marxist orthodoxy, Althusser quite explicitly supported the basic dogma of the party, strengthening Marxism's status as the horizon of left-wing thought.

This is not to say that Foucault's thought has been more effective at changing society than Althusser's. In point of fact, Althusser's uncompromising Marxism immunised his work from the kind of appropriation that has befallen Foucault, whose name is often invoked in contemporary academic discourse to support banal forms of self-reflection and, indeed, neoliberalism. The point is rather that there is no guarantee of

efficaciousness for any strategy, and as such there is no decent reason to compromise oneself in the way that Althusser did, since the political ramifications of philosophy are profoundly unpredictable. Althusser's late position, 'aleatory materialism', by which politics is a multidimensional field of aleatory encounters, is very close to Foucault's in this regard, implying similar conclusions.

Althusser compares himself to his great influence, Spinoza, a philosopher who was under extraordinary limitations in what he could say (Althusser, 2006, p. 255). However, by contrast to Spinoza, who had to work within the limits of an intolerant religious society in order to avoid the harshest punishments, Althusser's submission to the diktats of the party was quite voluntary. Foucault's break with Marxism was, by comparison with Althusser's subservience, relatively courageous: it meant disagreeing with many in his milieu, including Althusser. It must be distinguished from the easy anti-Marxism found in the English-speaking world, where there was no powerful Stalinist party and where intellectuals were always predominantly anticommunist. That said, Foucault's marginalisation within the party for his homosexuality might have made staying within the party a more difficult course for him than it was for Althusser (see Macey, 1993, p. 40).

Foucault and historical materialism

Foucault's opposition to Marxism was far from total, however. While he rejected Marx(ism)'s philosophy of history, there was much in Marx that he admired. After the anti-Marxist tone he set in *The Order of Things*, his next book, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, presents a rather more sympathetic view of Marx. It is worth noting perhaps that in this latter work, unlike the former, Foucault (1972, p. 5) references *For Marx*, Althusser's first book, which had appeared just before *The Order of Things*. One is tempted to conclude that Foucault was brought (back) to a sympathy with Marx by reading Althusser's work between writing *The Order of Things* and *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. However, Foucault's sympathy for Marx in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* is very similar to sympathetic comments he made about Marx in 'Nietzsche, Freud, Marx', a piece composed prior to *The Order of Things*. Prefiguring *The Order of Things*, he there sees the nineteenth-century episteme as concerned with concealed profundities and sees Nietzsche as breaking with this. Unlike in *The Order of Things*, however, he also casts Marx's *Capital* in this vein, indeed casts Marx as of a piece with Nietzsche (and Freud) in disrupting the Western worldview. He concludes, however, by contrasting Marx with Marxism

as a tendency that closed down Marx's critical opening in favour of 'a reign of terror' (Foucault, 1990, p. 67).

In *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Foucault echoes Althusser in speaking of the distortion of Marx (Foucault, 1972, p. 15). Foucault now views the humanist interpretation of Marx as an attempt to restore what Marx had decentred (Foucault, 1972, p. 14). He identifies Marx as a seminal figure at the beginning of an 'epistemological mutation of history' (Foucault, 1972, pp. 12–13). Foucault thus again interprets Marx as a partial break with nineteenth-century thought, taking on board Althusser's critique of humanist Marxism, though by no means embracing Althusserian Marxism. In response to a question about the applicability of his *Order of Things* critique of Marx to Althusserian Marxism in 1971, Foucault makes clear that the former does not apply to the latter (Foucault, 1994b, p. 170).

It is tempting to read Foucault as vacillating in his position towards Marx, but actually his pronouncements on Marx and Marxism (as on other things) are coherent: he lauds certain aspects of Marx while condemning others, even within the same text of Marx's; hence Foucault's dictum that Marx, qua coherent, unitary thought, 'does not exist' (Foucault, 1980, p. 76). Foucault sees Marx as a precursor and someone who substantially set us on the road to new ways of thinking. In this much Foucault's position resembles Althusser's late position on Marx. What he still does not see Marx as, however, is the decisive figure that Marxism, including Althusser, insists on making of him. Indeed, while Althusser's project was one of taking Marxism beyond Marx, Foucault's was one of rescuing Marx from Marxism.

Early in 1976, Foucault points out the inadequacy of the Marxist view of power – 'at least a certain contemporary conception that passes for the Marxist conception' (Foucault, 2003, p. 13). Later in 1976, he reads *Capital* as containing an embryonic version of his own pluralist conception of power, formulated that year in his own *Will to Knowledge* (Foucault, 2007, pp. 157–8). Once again, Marx is pitted against Marxism.

For Foucault, renouncing Marxism as such is in fact a route to recovering a useful kernel from Marx's thought without the constraining baggage, without a name or an agenda, within a genuinely radical political stance that is neither Marxist nor communist. If Althusser rids Marxism of Hegelianism, Foucault moves one step further to take historical materialism beyond Marxism itself.

Foucault saw himself as neither a historical materialist nor a Marxist, but there is some precedent for applying the former designation to him, mostly by Étienne Balibar.[4] This designation allows us to understand

Foucault's position within the same historical current as Marxism without disingenuously assimilating him to Marxism tout court. It is in keeping with Foucault's commitment both to an historical approach and to materialism without ignoring his pointed, repeated rejection of Marxism per se.

Foucault's position vis-à-vis Marx and Marxism was to use them much as he advocated his own thought be used: as a kind of conceptual 'toolbox' from which he could pick what he needed to suit his critical tasks. Foucault (2003, p. 6) indeed claims Marxism can provide tools only when its theoretical unity is ripped up. Such an attitude in itself implies the rejection of 'Marxism' qua doctrine.

This led Foucault largely to elide Marx's name itself to avoid sanctifying him. This tactic of Foucault's is seen most clearly in the game he plays of including unreferenced quotes from Marx in his books (see Foucault, 1980, p. 52), and it can also be seen in an outburst in which he refused to talk about Marx (see Eribon, 1991, p. 266). Naming Marx plays into Marxism – the point is simply to use his insights, not to name-check him. Foucault vacillates between refusing to speak about Marx, because the signifier has become so overinvested as the Lacanian phallus of Marxism, and trying to detach Marx from Marxism, a castration that Marxism could hardly allow.

There is an argument for retaining Marxist dogma: Marx's thought functions as a theoretical lodestone, a way of checking we are on the right course. Foucault points out, however, that Marxism has a terrible track record in terms of going where it is supposed to. Rather, the insistent reference to Marx's works by Marxists has functioned as a guarantee that their course, whatever it might be, is correct. It thus serves as an excuse not to pay attention to new realities or new theories.

This is not to say that Foucault's thought is a theoretical anarchy. Rather, it can be said that he relies on certain axioms, including profound historicism, a bias towards nominalism, a certain materialism and an absolute commitment to criticism. His thought is tendentious, based in an orientation towards real struggles, such as that around prisons, on the basis of which he engaged in critical, historical analysis of institutions and discourses. What marks Foucault out from Marxism, including Althusserian Marxism, but not from Marx to such a great extent is that he does not insist that others follow the same axiomatic methodology in their analyses. He leaves no dogma but rather offers his work as one possible view to whomever finds something useful in it. This has allowed many to utilise his name for purposes quite foreign to his intentions, but we must remember that Marx has suffered precisely the same fate,

as Lenin noted (Lenin, 1964, p. 385), despite any amount of attempted orthodoxy.

One might argue that it is more Marxian to repudiate Marxism than to cleave to Marx's works as a doctrine. One may refer here to Marx's dictum that he was not a Marxist. Althusser papers over this hole in the centre of Marxism, insisting that Marx was most certainly a Marxist (see Althusser, 2006, p. 15). His reasoning for this claim is that Marx was quite consciously embarking on an epistemological break, propounding a radically new form of science. We must insist against Althusser that nothing is more glaringly non-Marxian than the attempt to canonise a single man, to declare Marx himself to be the fountainhead of a profound and specific wisdom accessible only via knowledge of his writings. Here, we can say that Althusser has not strayed sufficiently far from his youthful Catholicism and indeed that Marxism itself remains within the horizons of a religious culture as a substitute for religion. It is surely enough of a testament to Marx to say that his ideas remain relevant a century and a half later. To say, as is commonly said by Marxists, including Althusser, if not entirely explicitly, that one finds a peculiar doctrine laid out in Marx's work that must continue to serve as our evangel ought to stretch the credulity of avowed atheists. Althusser in effect advocates a Marxism beyond Marx. But why call it 'Marxism'? Althusser's claim that Marx's thought peculiarly constitutes an epistemological break is not borne out by Althusser's perspective by this time. Rather, what he in his last work calls 'aleatory materialism' is a matter of an epistemological break effected again and again over thousands of years down to the present, of which Marx is but one historically significant exemplar.

We have to point out, moreover, the limitations of trying to undermine one source of authority (the PCF) by adhering strictly to another (Marx). A dead philosopher is doubtless a more flexible source of authority than a living party, but Marx's method itself is surely to challenge orthodoxies by reference to political reality, history, empirical facts and so on, not by reference to a canon. The very fact that the only way to challenge party orthodoxy was by reference not to reality but to Marx is indicative of the fact that it was a doctrinaire formation not receptive to new ideas. While one could say that Althusser's invocation of Marx undermined party orthodoxy and allowed him to refer to realities ignored by the party, playing this game could be said to reinforce the basic principle that there is a Marxist orthodoxy to be found in Marx, which in itself is a force for ossification and dogmatism.

Repudiating Marxism has a bad reputation among Marxists because it typically coincides with a move to the right. It should be remembered,

however, that maintaining a soi-disant Marxism is no bar to revisionism: just look at China. Moreover, not all who break with Marxism do so from the right. Foucault is one of these. He certainly has been adopted by many to the right of Marxism, by commentators who are liberals in practice if not always in name. His criticisms of Marxism made him useful to anti-Marxists within academe. He has been accused of courting such attention, specifically because of his closeness to the French 'New Philosophers', former young Maoists who had converted to anticommunism during the 1970s. While Foucault was close to some of them, I think it is unfair to conclude from this an endorsement of all their views. Rather, it should be seen as a matter of a friendly and encouraging relationship with young philosophers, which he had forged when they were Maoists though he has disagreed with much of their perspective then, and maintained after their dramatic shift to the right. Foucault was neither a Marxist nor a New Philosopher but rather engaged with both these positions as a scholar and an activist. In opposing the French prison system, in particular, a coalition with Maoists had been eminently sensible. When it came later to opposing martial law in Poland or exposing human rights abuses in the Soviet Union some of the same people, though they were now liberal conservatives, remained natural allies for him.

This is in itself a difference between his modus operandi and that of many Marxists, perhaps including Marx in this instance. For Foucault, there is no question of 'line' to be asked in the formation of coalitions. Rather, multiple discourses may be in play, but the question is one of the resistance to power relations these discourses animate, how this resistance operates strategically in relation to power. Thus, Marxism is in some situations a discourse of resistance but in others, though making the same formal statements, a crutch for power; the same can be said of Islam, for example, as Foucault encountered it through the phases of the Iranian Revolution. Foucault, by contrast, tried to provide nothing other than suggestions for use in resistance, thus trying to circumvent the founding of a doctrine that could become a state ideology. It is Marxism's demonstrated aptness for this task above all else that leads Foucault to eschew it.

Notes

1. Accounts differ here: Defert's chronology has him leaving in October 1952 (see Foucault, 1994a, p. 20), and Macey (1993, p. 40) has him leaving in 1963 after the Doctors' Plot.

2. On class, see Foucault's extensive use of class categories, such as 'bourgeoisie', during his 1970s output and his explicit positing of class domination as a general phenomenon at Foucault, 1997, pp. 292–3.
3. On Foucault's complex attitude towards revolution, see Kelly, 2013.
4. Balibar, 1992, p. 54. See also, following Balibar, Olssen, 2004. It is also perhaps worth noting Dominique Lecourt's (1975) accusations that Foucault was very close to being a historical materialist in his *Archaeology of Knowledge*. Intriguingly, in the discussion following his lecture 'The Meshes of Power' (see Foucault, 2007), Foucault is directly asked what he thinks about Lecourt's accusation but defers his answer due, ostensibly, to time constraints (see Foucault, 1994b, p. 196).

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6

Deleuze and Guattari and Minor Marxism

Eugene W. Holland

'Félix Guattari and I have remained Marxists, in our two different ways, perhaps, but both of us. You see, we think any political philosophy must turn on the analysis of capitalism and the ways it has developed', Gilles Deleuze said in 1990 in conversation with Toni Negri (Deleuze, 1995, p. 171). It is fairly clear in *Anti-Oedipus* what happens to Freud at the hands of Deleuze and Guattari: psychoanalysis gets transformed into a 'revolutionary materialist psychiatry' called schizoanalysis. It is not so clear, even taking the two volumes of *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* together, what happens to Marx – especially in light of the fact that a Marxist concept central to the first volume, the mode of production, gets demoted (though not eliminated) in the second volume: in *A Thousand Plateaus* they 'define social formations by machinic processes and not by modes of production'; it is modes of production, they go on to say, that 'on the contrary depend on the processes' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 435). And so '[i]t is not the State that presupposes a mode of production; quite the opposite, it is the State that makes productions a "mode"' (1987, p. 429). Marx nonetheless remains crucial to the political philosophy that develops across the two volumes of *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* and in their last collaboration, *What Is Philosophy?* – and, in effect, what happens is that orthodox or dialectical Marxism gets transformed into what I call a 'minor marxism' (see Holland, 2011). In what follows I explain how this transformation of major Marxism into minor marxism is carried out through a set of displacements affecting five categories or problematics: the ambivalent relation between capitalism and freedom; the dialectic of forces and relations of production; the base-superstructure model and linear history; the relation between production and reproduction; and the relation between finance and industrial capital.

At the dawn of the industrial age, Marx would understandably situate capitalism in a grand narrative relating the conquest of scarcity by productivity, the passage from the realm of Necessity to the realm of Freedom. Marx's stance towards capitalism is thus essentially ambivalent: as critical of capitalism as Marx ultimately is, he nonetheless recognises and explicitly acknowledges the importance of the fact that capitalism is 'constantly revolutionizing the instruments of production, and thereby the relations of production, and with them the whole relations of society' (Marx and Engels, 2012, p. 38). Deleuze and Guattari's stance towards capitalism is ambivalent, too, but for very different reasons. In a social formation aptly characterised by Foucault in terms of 'biopower', whose hyperdeveloped productive forces already threaten wholesale environmental collapse, increasing productivity can hardly be considered the beneficial side of capitalism any longer. What is the best way to follow a great philosopher (such as Marx), Deleuze and Guattari ask in *What Is Philosophy?* It is *not* to merely repeat what he said, they insist, but rather to do what he did: create new concepts for 'problems that necessarily change' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994, p. 28). So what they consider to be the beneficial side of capitalism cannot be the freedom from necessity that is achieved by the development of productive forces; it is rather the freedom from standardisation (or from norms, in the Foucauldian idiom) – a standardisation that is both *imposed* by capitalism due to the private appropriation of surplus value and also *subverted* by capitalism in its constant expansion of exchange value and the continuous reorganisation of social life by the cash nexus of markets.

In *Anti-Oedipus*, the subversive side of capitalism is explained in terms of decoding and the kind of 'schizophrenia' that results therefrom.[1] On the first page of his most important solo philosophical work, *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze had laid the groundwork for this analysis of capitalism. There are, he insisted, two principal enemies of difference: representation and exchange, 'the qualitative order of resemblances and the quantitative order of equivalences' (Deleuze, 1994, p. 1). Capitalism plays one against the other: the cash nexus of the market decodes representation and thereby frees desire from its capture and repression by codes (and norms). 'All that is solid melts into air,' as Marx and Engels (2012, p. 38) put it; for Deleuze and Guattari, all fixed, fast-frozen social standards are swept away by the free form of desire they (following Lacan) call schizophrenia. Although capital also *re*codes desire (through 'paranoia') so as to enforce the private appropriation of surplus value, the fundamental and beneficial moment of capitalist axiomatisation is

market decoding, which always generates more differences than capitalist paranoia can recapture in identities.

By the time they write *A Thousand Plateaus*, the problems have necessarily changed and so have the concepts created to address them. The ambivalent relation of capitalist axiomatisation to freedom from standardisation is no longer posed in terms of paranoia and schizophrenia but in terms of denumerable and non-denumerable sets.[2] Exchange value, technoscience and biopower quantify: they make populations, raw materials, technical procedures and social relations calculable. Capitalist axiomatisation operates on the basis of predictive calculations that the forced conjugation of specific denumerated sets of production factors will produce a positive differential (surplus value). But in doing so it generates all kinds of unforced connections, both material and social, which escape denumeration. '*At the same time as capitalism is effectuated in the denumerable sets serving as its models, it necessarily constitutes non-denumerable sets that cut across and disrupt those models*' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 472). Majority standards of all kinds are promulgated in the attempt to ensure the friction-free quantification and axiomatisation of everything and everyone as factors of production, yet the very processes of axiomatisation generate sets of minorities that remain non-denumerable. *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* will thus end up calling for the mobilisation of '*revolutionary connections* in opposition to the *conjugations of the axiomatic*', and defining 'revolutionary movement [...] [as] the composition of nondenumerable aggregates, the becoming-minoritarian of everybody/everything [devenir-minoritaire de tout le monde]' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 473). Or as Deleuze put it as early as *Difference and Repetition*, 'revolution is the social power of difference' (Deleuze, 1994, p. 208). Minor marxism, then, will focus on the differences that escape capitalist axiomatisation, even those that axiomatisation generated in the first place.

To the extent that axiomatisation generates more differences than it can recode and recapture in standard-model identities, capitalism functions as a 'difference engine'.[3] It thus stands alongside other difference engines, such as biological evolution and linguistic expression, all of which operate according to the fundamental processes of differentiation and consolidation (the diastole and systole of the cosmos, in Deleuze and Guattari's colourful turn of phrase). In the case of life, random mutation produces differences from which ecological selection then consolidates organs and species; in the case of language, infinite semiosis produces differential relations among both signifiers and signifieds from which expression consolidates signs. In the case of capitalism, the division of

labour generates an increasingly differentiated multiplicity of specialised jobs, which the market articulates at any given time in the service of a specific regime of capital accumulation. As Deleuze says as early as *Difference and Repetition*, Althusser and his collaborators were right to

> insist [that] the fundamental difference between Marx and Hegel [...] [is] that in *Capital* the category of differenciation (the differenciation at the heart of a social multiplicity: the division of labour) is substituted for the Hegelian concepts of opposition, contradiction and alienation, the latter forming only an apparent movement and standing only for abstract effects separated from the principle and from the real movement of their production. (Deleuze, 1994, p. 207)

The real motor of history for a minor marxism, then, is not the dialectic of class struggle nor even the dialectic of forces and relations of production but the differentiation and articulation (or the decomposition and recomposition) of labour at the heart of the social multiplicity – the diastole and systole of universal history, if you will.

But the concept of history itself does not remain unchanged. Already in *Anti-Oedipus*, Deleuze and Guattari emphasise the changes wrought by Marx himself on the Hegelian notion of universal history, which would henceforth have to be 'retrospective, [...] contingent, singular, ironic, and critical' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1980, p. 140). But even more than that: in *A Thousand Plateaus*, history becomes explicitly non-linear. Arguing against anthropological evolutionism with its causal explanations for the emergence of the state, Deleuze and Guattari complain that 'the human sciences, with their materialist, evolutionary, and even dialectical schemas, lag behind the richness and complexity of causal relations in physics, or even in biology' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 431). In contrast to the simple causality of linear history, they go on to say,

> [p]hysics and biology present us with reverse causalities that are *without finality* but testify nonetheless to an action of the future on the present, or of the present on the past, for example, the convergent wave and the anticipated potential, which imply an inversion of time. More than breaks or zigzags, it is these reverse causalities that shatter evolution. (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 431)

In this instance, it is two political forms – antistate ('primitive') and state societies – that coexist as virtual basins of attraction and repulsion,

each of which represents a self-sustaining degree of consistency once the threshold separating it from the other has been crossed. And 'this threshold of consistency', Deleuze and Guattari insist, 'is not evolutionary but rather coexists with what [that is, the other political form of society] has yet to cross it' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 432). But the same is as true of economic forms as it is of political forms: modes of production are conceived of as virtual structures that do not evolve from one to the next but rather represent basins of consistency that, once a critical threshold of emergence has been crossed, can become more or less self-sustaining. Althusser in fact adapts a term from Deleuze to characterise the emergent coherence or consistency of a mode of production: 'becoming-necessary' (Althusser, 2006, pp. 194, 261).[4] The so-called laws governing a mode of production aren't given as necessary *ab nihilo*; rather they *become*-necessary as the mode consolidates itself and attains sufficient consistency. This is the sense in which Deleuze and Guattari say that a mode of production depends on the (machinic) processes that constitute it rather than the other way around. Instead of conceiving the economic instance as the base or infrastructure and other instances as parts of the superstructure, Althusser and Deleuze consider the mode of production to be a virtual structure or problem to which all social instances are components of an actual solution. Indeed, this conception is already present in *Difference and Repetition*, where Deleuze approvingly quotes Althusser and his collaborators for being

> profoundly correct in showing the presence of a genuine structure in *Capital*, and in rejecting historicist interpretations of Marxism, since this structure never acts transitively, following the order of succession in time; rather, it acts by incarnating its varieties in diverse societies and by accounting for the simultaneity of all the relations and terms which, each time and in each case, constitute the present: that is why 'the economic' is never given properly speaking, but rather designates a differential virtuality to be interpreted, always covered over by its forms of actualization; a theme or 'problematic' always covered over by its cases of solution. (Deleuze, 1994, p. 186)

On this view, history is no longer to be understood in terms of linear or transitive causality but in terms of virtual structures or basins of attraction and the various ahistorical – that is, non-linear and emergent – becomings associated with them. And for minor marxism, this understanding of history focuses attention on the conditions of emergence, on the machinic processes of becoming-necessary, rather than

on the resultant mode as it appears to have become-necessary.[5] In other words, rather than focusing on the *results* of capital accumulation (which may well be amenable to dialectical mapping), minor marxism focuses special attention on the structural preconditions for capitalism – that is, on the issue of the 'so-called primitive accumulation', to which I will return below.

But the Deleuze-inspired Althusserian category of 'becoming-necessary' is of crucial importance not only for understanding the emergence of a mode of production to begin with but also for assessing its ability to endure over time to maintain or enforce the degree of consistency among its diverse component instances necessary for it to survive and evolve. The contingency of capitalism's emergence, in other words, is matched by the contingency of its ongoing reproduction. It is often and easily forgotten that Althusser's essay 'Ideological State Apparatuses', with its famous neo-Lacanian redefinition of ideology, was in the first instance a prolonged reflection on the problem of *reproduction*: the necessity – and even more, the difficulty – of continually reproducing the conditions required for capitalism (or any other social system) to persist over time (see Althusser, 2014). Assuring the requisite conditions for the reproduction of the capitalist mode of production is all the more difficult given that – as Marx originally showed, and as Rosa Luxembourg later and David Harvey more recently emphasised (see Luxemburg, 1968; Harvey, 2006) – capitalism's inherent crises of overproduction compel it to reproduce itself on an ever-expanding scale. Capitalism first emerges through the conjugation of liquid wealth (available for investment in means of production) and 'free' labourers (available for hire as wage slaves). Key to the 'free' status of these wage slaves was the side of the so-called primitive accumulation that Harvey calls 'destitution': workers' inability to access means of life other than via the market. As Michael Perelman has shown in his meticulous study of the 'secret history of primitive accumulation' (Perelman, 2000), abject dependence on the market was carefully enforced so that labour not only would have to work for wages but would also have to spend those wages on goods produced by capitalist enterprise so as to avert crises of realisation (when surplus value fails to accrue to capital because already-produced goods go unsold). For capitalism to 'take off' and begin becoming-necessary, in other words, both labour power and purchasing power had to be captured by capitalist markets and made dependent on them. Yet the processes of 'primitive' accumulation/destitution/dependency don't end there – in fact, they don't end at all: new populations must constantly be stripped of their previous means of life and assimilated into capitalist markets for their

buying power and their labour power, and existing populations must be prevented from gaining access to any means of life other than those provided by capitalist markets. Capitalism must continue to capture ever-larger portions of the globe and of social life in order to continue 'becoming-necessary', and it does so by means of a pincer-like machine whose analysis is crucial to minor marxism.

One half of the pincer involves debt – and key to assessing the world historical role of debt is understanding the origins of money.[6] One of the foundational myths of bourgeois political economy is the notion that money evolved from barter as a way of facilitating the exchange of goods of equal value – a myth that Marx's brilliant analysis of the commodity form in the early parts of the first volume of *Capital* unfortunately does little to debunk and may in effect reinforce. In fact, money arose as a means of establishing, measuring and paying debt between parties of unequal power. Only much later did it branch out into commercial exchange – without ever leaving its role in debt relations behind. Equally important, it was debt relations that produced the category of labour in the first place – by isolating productive activity and detaching it from the warp and woof of social activity in general for the express purpose of paying back an infinite debt owed to conquerors (in the figure of what Deleuze and Guattari call the Despot) for sparing the lives of the conquered (either through slavery or tribute payment).[7] Crucially, both money and labour arise from unequal power relations long before money is used to buy goods of equal value, not to mention labour power. This is why Deleuze and Guattari insist that, as already quoted, '[i]t is not the State that presupposes a mode of production; quite the opposite, it is the State that makes productions a "mode"'. Indeed, given the preponderant pre-capitalist function of money, it would make more sense to speak of a 'mode of reproduction' rather than a mode of production – inasmuch as money initially served to reproduce the unequal power relations of debt rather than facilitate the 'constant revolutionizing of production' as the money form of capital does under capitalism. Considering capitalism (following Althusser) from the perspective of modes of reproduction provides important insights into the issue of the so-called primitive accumulation: in this light, the emergence of capitalism entails the transfer of Despotic debt from the Despot to capital. The infinite debt once owed to the Despot for sparing the lives of the conquered is henceforth owed to capital for sparing the lives of the destitute by giving them jobs, so to speak.

But that's not all that changes. Surplus labour is henceforth extorted not through slavery or the appropriation of tribute but through *wage*

slavery and the appropriation of surplus *value*. The specifically bourgeois accounting fiction of 'necessary labour' is invented to rationalise – in both senses of the term – the extortion of surplus labour from labour power through the value form.[8] The fiction of 'necessary labour' in effect forms the lower half of the pincer of capital, of which the infinite debt forms the upper half. Many dialectical readings of *Capital* take necessary labour as a point of departure and treat surplus labour as a derivative of necessary labour. For minor marxism, this amounts to confusing Marx's order of presentation with the order of real relations: for surplus labour came first historically, and what's more, it retains its primacy – even or especially under capitalism. Marx defines productive labour under capitalism, after all, as whatever produces surplus value for the capitalist – he defines it, that is, in relation to *surplus* labour rather than necessary labour. The so-called necessary labour is thus an artifice or subterfuge, allowing the supposed value of necessary labour power to be set as low as is culturally and politically possible at any given time so as to enable the extraction and private appropriation of surplus value. In this light, the famous last part of the first volume of *Capital*, on the so-called primitive accumulation, would appear not as some kind of afterthought or historical coda (as some dialectical readings, e.g., Jameson's [2011, pp. 73–91], would have it) but as the book's very conclusion and the final lifting of the veil off the real workings of the so-called capitalist mode of production – which would then appear as one historical variant among other modes of extorting surplus labour for the sake of reproducing class power relations and might also for this reason be better called a 'mode of *re*production', perhaps, than a mode of production.

Yet it is not just necessary labour that is an accounting fiction: so in a sense is capital itself. Here again there is a possible misunderstanding fostered by dialectical presentations that treat surplus value as a derivative of value when in fact the reverse is the case. Whatever may have been true of pre-capitalist moneylending, under modern capitalism surplus value (or what is sometimes called 'fictitious capital') is created by central banks out of thin air – usually with the proviso that there be a 'reserve requirement' that limits fictitious capital to some finite multiple of the 'real' capital held in assets.[9] Such fictitious capital is then loaned out so as to trigger the circulation of value through cycles of wage-mediated production and consumption with the expectation that these cycles will return a surplus for private appropriation. The point is, against the grain of many dialectical accounts of capitalism, that finance capital has both historical and actual effective primacy over industrial capital and

that the power of finance capital derives less from its position of superiority vis-à-vis industrial capital than from its imbrication with the state, which has always played and continues to play an indispensible role in the creation and legitimation of infinite debt and the ensuing processes of capital accumulation, both 'primitive' and 'fictitious'.

As in other modes of re/production, the extortion of surplus under capitalism still reproduces the unequal power relations expressed and enforced by the infinite debt, but the force or source of the extortion appears to have become strangely impersonal: surplus in its value form presents itself as surreptitiously economic and anonymous rather than overtly political and personal or interpersonal. But do class relations really just serve the extraction of surplus value, or does the extraction of surplus value instead merely serve to reproduce the power relations of class? Although many debates within Marxism and between Marxism and anarchism hinge on this question, for minor marxism, the answer is not either/or but both. Formerly the transcendent engine for the glorious expenditure of proceeds from the infinite debt, as Deleuze and Guattari show, the state form has become immanent to capital – which does not, however, mean that it has simply become subordinate to capital.[10] For capital continues to depend on the state *both* (as Althusser's very term for 'ideological state apparatuses' reminds us) for the reproduction of the conditions required for capitalism to continue 'becoming-necessary' despite its constant revolutionising of the means of production and the products of consumption *and* also for serving as the official guarantor of the infinite debt.

In addition to its part in cementing the inextricable relationship between state and capital in modern capitalism, the primacy of 'fictitious' finance capital over 'real' industrial capital has one other important ramification for minor marxism: it underlies capitalism's world-historically unprecedented mobilisation of the virtual. Marx praised humankind's unique ability to generate virtual images of products in the mind before actually producing them, and long before capitalism, money represented a virtual form of value (exchange value) in comparison with the actual use value of the goods being exchanged. (This is one reason philosophy flourished in ancient Greece, when minted coins achieved widespread currency.)[11] With the primacy of finance capital in modern capitalism, most major decisions are based on virtual calculations that the introduction of new means of production and consumption will generate a surplus well before this production and consumption actually take place. If freedom from standardisation is one of the features Deleuze and Guattari appreciate about capitalism, the access it grants to

the domain of the virtual is another. It's not just that the capitalist difference engine is constantly deterritorialising everything, 'revolutionising the instruments of production' but that capital plots out its peculiar (and limited) kind of 'revolutionary' strategies in the virtual domain before realising (or failing to realise) them in actuality. This is one reason why the utopian vocation of philosophy depends today on the spread of the world market: philosophy's task is to map the vast potential of the virtual realm opened up by capitalism in order to plot out *different* ways of actualising that potential that would improve upon the version we currently inhabit and suffer from so greatly.[12] A key component of this cartography, of course, is diagnosing the forces of actual reterritorialisation that tie potential revolutions in production, consumption and social life back to *both* the reproduction of capitalist social relations through the permanent obligation to repay the infinite debt *and* the continued valorisation of already existing, privately owned capital in order to expropriate the surplus. The central challenge of minor-marxist anticapitalism, in this light, is to render reterritorialisation collective and progressive rather than private and conservative and thereby free surplus difference from capture by the capitalist value form. This is easier said than done no doubt, but the role of philosophy, according to Deleuze and Guattari, is precisely to provide the best possible theoretical formulation of 'problems that necessarily change' so as to enable experimentation with practical ways to reorient inevitable change for the better.[13]

Notes

1. For more on Deleuze and Guattari's use of the term 'schizophrenia', see Holland, 1999.
2. On denumerable and non-denumerable sets, see esp. ch. 13 in Deleuze and Guattari, 1987.
3. The term 'difference engine' derives from the title of the collection *Deleuze and Philosophy: The Difference Engineer* (Ansell-Pearson, 1997); it is developed in Holland, 2009, pp. 147–66.
4. It should be said, however, that Althusser uses the term at cross-purposes with Deleuze and Guattari: for him, it indicates a tendency *towards* consistency, whereas becomings for them are a movement away from consistency.
5. For more on this focus in minor marxism, see Holland, 2011, esp. the conclusion.
6. On the history of debt, see Graeber, 2011.
7. On the figure of the Despot (and the mode of libidinal production called barbarism or Despotism), see esp. ch. 3 in Deleuze and Guattari, 1980.
8. For a compatible view of value under capitalism, see Postone, 1993.

9. For Marx's treatment of the concept of fictitious capital, see esp. chs 29–32 of Marx, 1981.
10. On the state's becoming immanent to capital, see esp. ch. 3 in Deleuze and Guattari, 1980.
11. On the advantageous relation of philosophy first to ancient Greece and then to the world market, see the 'Geophilosophy' section in Deleuze and Guattari, 1994.
12. On the utopian vocation of political philosophy in Deleuze and Guattari, see esp. ch. 1 in Holland, 2011.
13. For more on the concept of the slow-motion general strike as a form of practical experimentation based on the theory of minor marxism, see the conclusion in Holland, 2011.

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7

The *Grundrisse* beyond *Capital*? Negri's Marx and the Problem of Value

Dave Eden

In this chapter I do something fairly simple, but I hope also fairly useful. I look at the work of Antonio Negri before he more obviously started using the concepts of Deleuze and Guattari and Foucault. I suggest that here we can already find a conceptualisation of capitalism that fits well with his later work, which does draw on these post-structuralist authors. This not only explains why Negri's Marxism can fit together so well with post-structuralism, hopefully it also draws to the surface some of the key elements of Negri's understanding of capitalism and his innovative use of Marx. This will help me to assess what this understanding can contribute to emancipatory communist activity and also what its weaknesses are. This is a continuation of a critique I previously made of Negri and elements of current post-workerism on the question of value (see Eden 2012b; 2012a).

Also in this chapter, I quickly sketch out Negri's current use of post-structuralism, present Negri's early theorisation of capital and then test how much either helps us grasp our condition. While I draw on a reading of Marx and argue that Negri makes some errors in his use of Marx, this is not the centre of my critique (after all, what is the point of laying charges of heterodoxy against the author of *Marx beyond Marx*?). Rather, I find Negri's description of capitalism limited. Against this I pose a different communist approach.

Negri, with Marx, washing in the Seine

> I can say that I have 'rinsed my washing' in the Seine – in other words I have created a hybrid between my workerist Marxism and the perspectives of French poststructuralism. (Negri, 2008b, p. 13)

While perhaps the hype around Negri's work has dissipated (such is the faddish nature of the university), it is hard to overestimate its important and groundbreaking nature. After the winter of the 'End of History' and at the historical moment when radical and emancipatory politics began to reassert themselves in a collective and popular way (often placed under the rubric of 'the alterglobalisation movement' or the 'movement of movements' – but on the ground far more complex and nuanced), Hardt and Negri's *Empire* (2000) seemed to provide a theory of global social reality and politics for these struggles.

Negri's work defied two of the rules that structured the possibilities for thought that accompanied that sad period of politics that arose after 1989. He insisted on the novelty of the new period of capitalism, but rather than discarding questions of class and struggle, he argued that these thematics were as important as ever, and thus communism remained an immediate possibility. Additionally, he used Marxist and post-structuralist intellectual influences in a way that invalidated the academic branding that often kept them contained and separate from one another. Not only was this a little scandalous – he did so from the position of being a prominent Marxist intellectual.

We can see a clear distinction in Negri between his writings in Italy and those after his entry into exile, with the prominent use of post-structuralist authors being a marking point, but it would be an error to suggest that before this there was no relationship between workerism (*operaismo* and *autonomia*) and the new forms of theory developing in France. For example, Deleuze argues that in Foucault's work we can find an 'echo of Mario Tronti's interpretation of Marxism' (2006, p. 120n128). Also in the context of struggle in Italy in the seventies, post-structuralist works 'ended up becoming reference points for the political discussions of the time' for at least some circles of militants (Berardi, Jacquement, and Vitali, 2009, p. 78).

We can see the work of Foucault and Deleuze and Guattari used in Negri's contemporary work in two ways. On the one hand, Negri makes frequent use of concepts such as 'biopower' and 'the society of control' to describe how capital organises and disciplines the multitude (and even revolutionises the notion of biopower in his conception of 'biopolitical production'). More profoundly, the model of capital that he creates is one of capital as a spectral force holding back the creative capacities of the multitude; this replicates the model advanced by Deleuze and Guattari in *Anti-Oedipus* of various creative flows held and restrained by the axioms of capital. But what I want to suggest here is that even before the more overt engagement with

post-structuralism, we can find a very similar model of capitalism in Negri's earlier work.

Marx beyond Marx?

Negri's understanding of capitalism hinges on his argument that the development of capitalism means that the law of value has become inoperative and thus value exists directly as an imposition of capitalist power – as command. This line of argument rests on two key elements: a privileging of the *Grundrisse* over *Capital* and a use of Marx's notion of 'tendency'.

In *Marx beyond Marx*, Negri sets up a clear distinction between the *Grundrisse* and *Capital*. In the former, Negri celebrates the building of a theory of capitalism around an understanding of money that is not derived from the concept of the commodity: 'the reality of mystification appears in a more tangible form than in other passages of Marx where the commodity form is the central protagonist' (Negri, 1991, p. 10). Here Negri thinks he has found an understanding of capitalism in which the commodity and everything it implies can be minimised if not rejected. Moreover, the status of *Capital* can be downgraded to 'one part, and a non-fundamental part at that, in the totality of the Marxian thematic' (Negri, 1991, p. 5). This rejection of the importance of the concept of commodity to anticapitalist analysis continues through Negri's work. To quote a recent passage:

> Fetishism represents the point of view of capitalism according to which it is impossible to harness value outside of domination. Yet this point of view cannot remain as is once subjected to criticism. If we pay attention to capitalist development and to the evolution of social struggles (and moreover if we consider the biopolitical fabric that lies at the base of the contradictions and crises of biopowers), we must necessarily recognise that use value is modified beyond, and more deeply than, so called 'commodity fetishism'. (Negri, 2008a, p. 83)

Value, the centre of Marx's critique of capitalism, is a devilish thing to describe. This is so because in a real capitalist society all the elements necessary for the accumulation of value are already in play. There is a vast accumulation of money as capital – capital as means of production, capital in the form of commodities – and of labour as wage labour. Not only do all these elements constitute a larger functioning totality,

but also this totality shapes each element in an interdependent manner, even as all these elements in their actual lived realities have numerous idiosyncrasies. Add to this the historical understanding of capitalism's development and the attempt to present how capitalism works requires two different approaches: logical and historical.

In *Capital*, Marx develops money out of his understanding of the commodity as capitalism's 'economic cell-form' (1976, p. 90). The value of a commodity is the socially necessary labour time that becomes objectified in it. This is apparent only in exchange: 'The value of commodity A is qualitatively expressed by the direct exchangeability of commodity B with commodity A' (Marx, 1976, p. 152). This is so because value is a historically specific phenomenon that reaches maturity in capitalist society and means that relationships between people take the 'fantastic form of a relationship between things' (Marx, 1976, p. 165). Now, in the opening pages of *Capital* Marx seems to be doing two things. First, he seems to be reproducing classical political economy's narrative of a state of barter that gives way to the development of money (Smith, 1981, p. 38). As we see below, this is something that can now be shown to be an ideological fantasy. Second and more important, Marx presents a logical analysis of an element of capitalist society, not a *historical* picture. Money obviously predates capitalism.

Capitalism as a reality and in its historical development demands the widespread existence of money that functions as a universal equivalent of value. Its function will allow value to be measured and also to circulate freed from the earthly constraints of use values. But Marx is clear that the role money plays arises *logically* and thus *necessarily* from the existence of wealth as commodities.

> It is not money that renders the commodities commensurable. Quite the contrary. Because all commodities, as values, are objectified human labour, and therefore in themselves commensurable, their values can be communally measured in one and the same specific commodity, and this commodity can be converted into the common measure of their values, that is into money. Money as a measure of value is the necessary form of appearance of the measure of value which is immanent in commodities, namely labour-time. (Marx, 1976, p. 188)

A correlate of this understanding is that value, the very thing that capitalism is and seeks to endlessly accumulate, exists because the products of humanity's metabolism with the wider world takes the form of things

to be bought and sold – something that is itself a product and reproducer of the separations of class and property that constitute capitalist social relations (Marx, 1976, p. 255).

Negri argues against this understanding of money as the logical (if not *historical*, as I show later) product of the generalisation of the commodity form. He does so on two levels. First, he argues that there is a different logic of value presented in the *Grundrisse* and that this second narrative better describes the capitalism of our times. He argues that in the *Grundrisse* we do not find money arising from the commodity form; rather money is a form of measure *imposed* by capital, and thus value exists as something *forced* on creativity:

> Money has the advantage of presenting me immediately the lurid face of the social relation of value; it shows me value right away as exchange, commanded and organised for exploitation. I do not need to plunge into Hegelianism in order to discover the double face of the commodity, of value: money has only one face, that of the boss. (Negri, 1991, p. 23)

Already we can begin to see two different understandings of capitalism. The Marx of *Capital* depicts a world of exploitation that exists within a world mediated by the circulation and processes of value – ultimately something within which capitalists themselves are also caught. What Negri wants to take from the *Grundrisse* is a conception of exploitation that takes place *directly* as an imposition of capitalist power or command:

> The difference between the *Grundrisse* and the later works of Marx resides in the fact that in the first, *the law of value is presented not only mediatedly, but also immediately as the law of exploitation*. There is no logical way which leads from the analysis of commodities to that of value, to that of surplus value: the middle term does not exist; it is – that, yes – a literary fiction, a mystification pure and simple which contains not an ounce of truth. To make money the representative of the form of value signifies recognizing that money is the exclusive form of the functioning of the law of value. (Negri, 1991, p. 24)

To be clear, money is an essential part of Marx's theory of value. Without money value simply could not take on a social consistency. But Negri is arguing here that value exists directly as a form of imposed exploitation. Measure is forced on the collective creative capacities of society. Money

is 'the route which *capitalist command* over society travels in order to overdetermine continually the oscillation of exploitation' (Negri, 1991, p. 24).

There are two other important elements to Negri's argument. Since money is an imposition of capital, this means it functions as a form of 'command' and thus is a constantly *political activity*. Consistent with Negri's continuation of workerism, this imposition of command *is contested*. Labour is an insurgent and subversive force. Thus, the imposition of value via money is always in crisis, a crisis of capitalist command and thus capital's ability to exploit labour. There is a historical narrative here: this crisis of command, this crisis of money, exacerbates as capitalism develops. Negri emphasises how capitalism continually brings together greater combinations of labour and thus increasingly socialises creativity. This exacerbates the tension between money as measure and the dense and complex interweaving of labour that it attempts to exploit:

> On the one hand, we have money as the specific determination and measure of the value of labour-power sold on the free market; on the other hand, we have the social character of production which capital has appropriated and turned into its own power [*potenza*] over social labour, over the totality of the independent social movement, as an autonomous power above the individual producers. (Negri, 2005, p. 2)

While I don't think it is a knockout blow to argue that Negri is misreading Marx, I think he is misreading Marx. There is plenty of evidence in the *Grundrisse* of value operating in ways very similar to the ways it does in *Capital*. The only difference is that the presentation of the argument in the former text is more contracted. In the *Grundrisse*, Marx developed his theory of money against the ideas of Alfred Louis Darimon, who functions as a representative for the dominant socialist ideas of the time, which were heavily influenced by Pierre-Joseph Proudhon. This socialist position looked towards transformations at the level of money as a solution to the problems and crises of capitalism. Marx's argument is that this approach is flawed, as money is not simply some free variable whose current existence is the cause of capitalism's problems but rather part of a more complex totality of social relations. And the commodity form is key to his reasoning. The following section from the *Grundrisse* mirrors Marx's later work in *Capital*, especially the section in 'The Fetishism of the Commodity and Its Secret' – the very section that attracts so much

of Negri's ire. Although this *Grundrisse* section does not use the word 'commodity', it is hard to not see the similarity in logic. Here, Marx is explaining why 'the individual carries his social power, as well as his bond with society, in his pocket':

> The social character of activity, as well as the social form of the product, and the share of individuals in production here appear as something alien and objective, confronting the individuals, not as their relation to one another, but as their subordination to relations which subsist independently of them and which arise out of collisions between mutually indifferent individuals. The general exchange of activities and products, which has become a vital condition for each individual – their mutual interconnection – here appears as something alien to them, autonomous, as a thing. In exchange value, the social connection between persons is transformed into a social relation between things; personal capacity into objective wealth. (Marx, 1973, p. 157)

In this section of the *Grundrisse*, Marx refers to 'exchange value' rather than the commodity. I don't think it would be anachronistic to think that Marx is here following the idea of classical political economy that exchange value is an aspect of the commodity (Smith, 1981, p. 44). Here, Marx presents the interactions of commodity and money as price:

> The price of a commodity constantly stands above or below the value of the commodity, and the value of the commodity itself exists only in this up-and-down movement of commodity prices. Supply and demand constantly determine the prices of commodities; never balance, or only coincidentally; but the cost of production, for its part, determines the oscillations of supply and demand. The gold or silver in which the price of a commodity, its market value, is expressed is itself a certain quantity of accumulated labour, a certain measure of materialized labour time. (Marx, 1973, pp. 137–8)

Here we see the interrelationship of commodities and money, which are both aspects of capitalist social relations, taking different (but interwoven) forms. We can also see this when Marx refers to money as 'the god among commodities' (Marx, 1973, p. 221). This is a picture of money as something that logically derives from the qualities of the commodity but then (as the pure expression of values) takes on a dominant form.

The other foundation of Negri's conception of capitalism is the concept of the *antagonistic tendency*. This is a composite of understanding capitalism as being constituted by antagonisms and simultaneously grasping the dynamic movement of capitalism in order to see the possible direction of capital in the present and act on this premonition. This is how Negri understands the instructions for the methodology of the critique of political economy laid down in the introduction to the *Grundrisse*. How are we to understand the totality of material production? Marx tells us that we can think only of a historically and site-specific notion of production; this is why, for Negri, the totality of material production is the conflicts and antagonisms of its different constitutive elements and the subjectivities of the classes that make it up: '*The category of production*, in the essential terms which distinguish it, and with the totality which characterizes it – a veritable social articulation of reality – *can only be constituted as a category of difference*, as a totality of subjects, of differences, of antagonism' (1991, p. 44). Negri reads the introduction in relation to such later chapters of the *Grundrisse* as those in which Marx attempts to grasp the development of capitalism in the United States, the link between '*the centralization of capital and the centralization of the state*' and the development of the world market. For Negri such a combination of logical and historical narratives shows that Marx argues more than just that there are fundamental antagonisms within capitalism (1991, p. 53). These antagonisms drive capitalism's development, and the more capitalism develops, the more the antagonisms intensify: '*antagonism is the motor of development of the system*, the foundation of a continuous resurgence of antagonism each time that the project, the history of capital, progresses' (1991, p. 54).

In this framework, capitalism is constituted by antagonisms that drive capital's reinvention. Each time capital reconstitutes itself, these antagonisms find a deeper and more intensified reconstitution. This leads Negri to say something about the relationship between the present and the future – about '*tendency*'. Tendency is the attempt to grasp capitalism in movement. Capitalism's categories have to be understood not as static realities but as moving and intensifying contradictions. Capitalism's elements are better understood the more developed capitalism becomes. Negri thus quotes the introduction to the *Grundrisse*: 'Human anatomy contains a key to the anatomy of the ape' (1991, p. 48).

Another step is needed. An attempt to grasp the tendency of capital's development is not a neutral procedure. For Negri, it is ultimately part of the militant intervention into society; an attempt to read which way capital is going, to grasp the explosive tensions and act:

> Marx's methodology is a *collective risk*. The tendency: it is not simply what permits a passive construction of the categories on the basis of a sum of historical acquisitions; it is above all what permits a reading of the present in light of the future, in order to make projects to illuminate the future. To take risks, to struggle. (Negri, 1991, p. 49)

On these pillars Negri then constructs his understanding of capitalism. There is a historical narrative here in which capitalism, driven by struggle, has reached a situation in which the crisis of the law of value, always implicit in money, has become social reality. This situation is one in which Keynesian attempts to reconstitute capitalism have broken apart as the antagonisms they hoped to harness reached new intensities. This is the 'Crisis of the Planner-State' (to quote the title of an essay written for the group *Potere Operaio*). Previously, Negri explained the genesis of the Planner-State in capital's reaction to the Russian Revolution. Capital faced the undeniable possibility of proletarian power. Capital faced 'a working class that had achieved political identity, and had become a historical protagonist in its own right' (Hardt and Negri, 2003, p. 25). Capital's reactions to this were the Fordist transformation of the labour processes and a transformation in the state and its relationship to capital accumulation and society. Of course the lived history of all this was wracked with struggle and violence:

> Paradoxically, capital turned to Marx, or at least learned to read *Das Kapital* [...]. Once the antagonism was recognized, the problem was to make it function in such a way as to prevent one pole of the antagonism from breaking free into independent destructive action. Working-class political revolution could only be avoided by recognizing and accepting the new relation of class forces, while making the working class function within an overall mechanism that would 'sublimate' its continuous struggle for power into a dynamic element within the system. The working class was to be controlled functionally within a series of mechanisms of equilibrium that would be dynamically readjusted from time to time by a regulated phasing of the 'incomes revolution.' The State was now prepared, as it were, to descend into civil society, to re-create continuously the source of its legitimacy in a process of permanent readjustment of the conditions of equilibrium. Soon this mechanism for reequilibrating incomes between the forces in play was articulated in the form of planning. The new material basis of the constitution became the State as planner, or better still, the State as the plan. (Hardt and Negri, 2003, pp. 28–9)

It is this state as plan that Negri believed was in crisis by the early seventies. The crisis that Negri argued existed within money, the tension between the imposition of measure and the capacities of social labour, was bursting open. For Negri, there are two interlocked elements of this new reality that express different sides of the same coin: proletarian refusal and the growth of social productivity. 'The Keynesian project was an attempt to regulate circulation, the cycle, the overall process of capital, by intervening to control the mediation of the contending elements, even to the point of continuously prefiguring it.' Money had to function in two ways, ways that exacerbated the internal tensions that existed within it: 'as a driving element for the further socialization of production' and also as the 'general equivalent, operating both as an instrument to measure labour and as a tool for controlling development. Once again, the contradictory nature of money was harnessed as a positive force for capital.' But, Negri continues, the potential crisis that was always in money and was being intensified in this period broke open 'due to the obdurate refusal of the working class to become the subject of this development and to the enduring emergence of a "wage labour that wishes to posit itself as independent" and acts that way' (Negri, 2005, pp. 6–7). Here we see that Negri is depicting money as primarily a political relationship, as something that exists because of the dictates of the state: 'Whenever we say "money," we could just as well say "Keynesian State" or "Planner-State"; in fact money no longer exists outside of these determinations' (Negri, 2005, p. 127).

What is the impact of this? How does capital survive in these conditions? Since Negri argues that value functions only through the imposition of money as measure, these conditions of proletarian refusal and increased social productivity mean that the money starts to crack apart as measure and that consequently value itself starts to falter:

> The labor of the single producer is posited from the outset as social labour. Hence the product of this overall social labour cannot be represented as exchange value, not even in the form of the proportional mediation of general labor and general control over it, nor in the form of capitalist planning. Work is already an immediate participation in the world of wealth. (Negri, 2005, p. 20)

It is on this terrain that capital and labour now face one another. Capital must then attempt to function as capital when the core of what capital actually is, 'self-valorising value', seems no longer to work.

Negri then argues that capital can continue to exist only by social and political imposition. Capital exists through power and the ability to command. The law of value is transformed from 'a law of political economy into a form of state command' (Negri, 2005, p. 232). And this command, this imposition of the logic of the factory, extends far out from the factory proper: 'The levelling of work to generic, abstract labor requires as its corollary the continued existence of the value form of labor, of capitalist command, of factory command extended over the entire society' (Negri, 2005, p. 25). And just in case the use of the term the 'continued existence of the value form' is confusing, later he will write of 'the state of un-value [disvalore], of enterprise command [commando d'impresa]' (Negri, 2005, p. 31). Thus '*money is the general equivalent* [...] *solely to the extent that it is immediately capital's organization and command*' (Negri, 2005, p. 129). This is a version of the 'incommensurability' thesis, which argues that as capitalism grows, it struggles to impose its modes of measuring the productivity of social labour (Caffentzis, 2008).

And thus we have a model of capitalism that already mirrors the model of Deleuze and Guattari. This is a capitalism of increased social productivity. This productivity is separate from capital, which faces it as an exterior power. Capital clamps down and restrains the emancipatory potentials contained in labour: 'The law of value, in the process of its extinction, is replaced by the rule of exploitation according to the will of capital' (Negri, 2005, p. 48). Here, just as in the later theorisation expressed in works such as *Empire*, the will of capital is enforced by violence – part of which is the violence of money itself. This is the effect that command has on peoples' lives. 'Everything is destroyed, selected and reconstructed according to this rhythm' (Negri, 2005, p. 131). But of course this violence also exists in the form of guns and batons such as those unleashed as part of the strategy of tension. (The strategy of tension refers to the Italian state's increased use of violence, including illegal activity carried out by fascists, to intensify the atmosphere of confrontation to facilitate the repression of the Italian movement. For Negri's personal experience of this repression, see *Diary of an Escape*. Balestrini's *The Unseen* is a deeply insightful and moving fictionalised account of the period.) As in *Empire*, so too here Negri understands the role of nuclear weapons as the ultimate threat of violence, the necessary blackmail that capital needs to impose its command. 'The pure indifference of command transforms itself into ferocity, organizes itself into the blackmail threat of nuclear destruction' (Negri, 2005, p. 281).

Political assessment

It is thus possible to see the continuity of Negri's work before and after his taking up of post-structuralist theory. In both these periods of his work, capitalism is sketched as a system that imposes its rule and its form of measure on a complex and rebellious form of creativity that is the very living potential of labour. At the heart of this is a particular reading of Marx, one that transforms value from the fetishised expression of social relationships in a commodity-producing society to a question of power. The next step is to argue that money, as the tool to impose power, is in crisis, and as such its imposition becomes even more destructive. In recent works, Negri argues that the contradictions of money have continued to unfold and that this is the secret of the expansion of finance capital: 'Financialisation is the current form of capitalist command' (Negri, 2010, p. 266). Thus, in works from both these periods, capitalism is described as being strangely empty and fragile, even dead, at the very moment it is seemingly everywhere. For example, in 'Domination and Sabotage' capitalism is no longer a 'machine for grinding out surplus-value, it has now become a net thrown down to block workers' sabotage'. But this net itself is 'frayed', so much so that Negri depicts the weakness of capitalism: 'the more the form of domination perfects itself, the emptier it becomes' (Negri, 2005, p. 285). Similarly, at the end of *Multitude*, Hardt and Negri (2004, p. 358) argue 'that today time is split between a present that is already dead and a future that is already living'.

And there is a similarity in the politics that arise from these understandings: in both periods of time, communist struggle is the struggle for labour to become autonomous from capital's command. The main difference is that in the seventies this manifested as the demand to *attack* capital, while now it has become for Negri a politics of *exodus*. Both are expressed with similarly theological imagery. In the seventies, Negri quoted Marx's account of struggle, according to which the 'Proletarians Storm Heaven' (Negri, 2005, p. 280). In contrast, in *Multitude*, Hardt and Negri draw on the biblical story of Exodus. Here violence is not posed at the front of struggle but behind it, aimed at the world the multitude is moving away from. Quoting Deleuze's essay 'Many Politics', they write: 'Every exodus requires an active resistance, a rearguard war against the pursuing powers of sovereignty. "Flee," as Gilles Deleuze says, "but while fleeing grab a weapon"' (Hardt and Negri, 2004, p. 342). Whether we attack or whether we flee, the point of our struggles is to push off capital's command and thus realise the possibilities of current reality.

What are we to make of all this? There are some clear positives to Negri's reading of Marx. He continues the challenge of *operaismo* right into the understanding of Marx's most fundamental categories. As Felton Shortall (1994) shows, Marx's critique of political economy often, especially in *Capital*, appears too 'objective'. By leaving out the power and importance of the 'subjective' struggle of labour, capitalism appears to be merely chugging along due to its own internal drives. The understanding of value without reference to the commodity form – but rather as the imposition of measure through money as a form of capital's command that contains an internal crisis that has now burst into the open – also has a number of virtues. While I disagree with its premise, it again stands as an important corrective to a possible reading of *Capital*. In *Capital*, Marx tries to present the operational logics of capitalism in a number of different ways, and while some chapters of *Capital* are highly historical, others present an ahistorical version of capitalism: a capitalism under laboratory conditions. Indeed, until we get to volume 3, we are not really seeing capitalism proper. Volume 1 gives us 'the *process of capitalist production*', volume 2 'the *process of circulation*', and only in volume 3 does Marx present 'the *process of capital's movement considered as a whole*' (Marx, 1981, p. 117). Moreover, the first chapters of volume 1 present, in a thought experiment, the basic 'cell-form' of capitalism, which is not really capitalism at all but a completely invented world of small commodity producers. Now, if we read the later chapter, 'So-Called Primitive Accumulation', I think it is clear that Marx knows he is not doing history but rather using and perhaps subverting a convention of classical political economy (Marx, 1976, p. 871). Thus at the start of volume 1 Marx presents money as *arising* out of simple commodity exchange which itself arose out of barter. Negri's corrective emphasises that in actual capitalist societies this did not (and does not) happen. Rather, the generalisation of money is always already a supremely political act, an imposition that necessitates the state as the form and conduit of capitalist power. Thus, we cannot have money without such assemblages of state power as courts, cops and jails, which work to ensure the imposition of measure. As for the origins of money, David Graeber (2011, p. 22) emphasises how anthropologists have long pointed out that the economists' narrative of barter leading to money is an 'imaginary world' lacking any evidence in actual human societies.

This shift in the understanding of money leads to a revitalisation of proletarian strategy – the struggle for more money, over the wage, becomes not just a demand for a higher material quality of life but rather a struggle against capitalist power and for proletarian power.

Negri's suggestions for politics most often included the demand for a guaranteed basic income. In the afterword to the volume *Crisis in the Global Economy*, he strangely calls it a 'rent wage' to locate it as a strategy against capitalism in which profit is becoming rent. The purpose of this demand is to both undermine command and compose the multitude by subverting the former and drawing together the latter.

> Hence struggles that lead to the construction of this subject will need to be conducted. Uniting precarious workers and those who are socially excluded, recomposing material and immaterial labor: the former inside the complexity of its factory and the metropolitan articulations, the latter on the same space and in the same complexity of its articulations [...]. This is the multitude that can compose a political subject that actively penetrates the territory of rent commanded by finance and can introduce (with the same force that the battle for wages had for the workers in the Fordist factories) a struggle for income. A 'rent wage' can and must be configured on this dimension. (Negri, 2010b, p. 268)

But here is the problem. Granted, it is important to remember that *Capital*, although engaged with history, is not primarily about producing a historical narrative of actual existing capitalism, and following Tronti's advice, it is essential to invert our understanding of capitalism to see and start from proletarian activity. But this does not discount the point that Marx is making. In a capitalist society, wealth takes the form of commodities and relationships between humans become fetishised ones. Class relationships are not lived as direct forms of domination, as they were, for example, under feudalism, but rather social relations 'take the form of a thing and give this thing a specific social character' (Marx, 1981, p. 953).

Value is a product and reproducer of the social relations of capitalist society. It is what is produced by and what reproduces a society in which non-commensurate forms of creativity, that is, different forms of concrete labour, are put to work producing the wealth that is taken to market and made commensurate with all other products at the level of society *via exchange*. This is how these non-commensurate forms of concrete labour become objectifications of *abstract labour*. John Milios, Dimitri Dimoulis and George Economakis (2002, p. 19) summarise Marx as follows:

> For the riddle of the equivalence of different kinds of labour to be solved, what must be comprehended is the *social character of labour*

> *under capitalism*: The capitalist organisation of production and the resultant social division of labour is underpinned by the direct (institutional) independence of each individual (capitalist) from all others. Nevertheless, all these individual productive procedures are linked indirectly between themselves through the mechanism of the market, since each of them produces not only for himself or for the 'community' but for exchange on the market, for the rest of society, whose economic encounter with him takes place only in the market-place. This procedure imposes an increasing social (capitalist) uniformity on all individual productive activities precisely through generalised commodity exchange and competition between individual commodity producers (capitalists).

Negri's argument that increasing combinations of labour are brought together to create wealth does not annul the fact that the products of the increasingly immaterial and scientific creativity still produce *commodities*. It doesn't change 'the social character of labour under capitalism'. (Claims about the apparently increasing immaterial and scientific nature of contemporary capitalism have also been subjected to serious critique; see Caffentzis, 2003.) Whatever the size, division or complexity of labour, the organic composition of capital or the geographies of production, all these processes of creativity are still organised on a capitalist basis – and thus relate to each through exchange on the market. Perhaps we need to emphasise that, to keep the relationships of capital functioning – to keep workers workers, commodities commodities and the property rights of capital safe – something like the society of control is needed: a complex mesh of capillary forms of power holding together the explosive tensions in capital. State violence, states of exception and the threat of nuclear war can also be understood as weapons of capital to ensure its own survival.

Now this is really what is at stake. In Negri, before and after Deleuze and Guattari and in Deleuze and Guattari's own work, capitalism is a society of open and boundless creativity, caught by some imposing force which channels and restrains this creativity. But in Marx's work human creativity under capitalism takes the form of reified relationships producing an upside-down world of human estrangement from our own creativity. For Negri, then, communism is the freeing of creativity as it already exists from the violence of capital's commands and from the deforming influence involved in its rule. Marx's work suggests a far more root and branch transformation that would necessitate melting away the totality of the social relations that give rise to this nightmare.

There are those, such as Open Marxism and its descendants, who try to place struggle at the heart of the categories of capital (Bonefeld, Gunn and Psychopedis, 1992; Holloway, 2010). The implication then would be that struggle is not one of labour's creativity against the command of capital but that ultimately labour struggles against being labour – that is, against the split between creators and the means of production, the split between producers that reduces us to wage labourers and renders humanity's creations as products to be exchanged to realise value.

The difference is that for Negri the *common* already exists and must be freed, while from Marx we could infer that a process of *communisation* is yet to come, even if the struggle for it already exists. (For an introduction to the debates around communisation, see Noys, 2012; my use of the term here is not to be taken as a sign of agreement with any of these positions.) Some of the political tasks that Negri puts forward may be part of the struggle for communism, but his depiction of capital underplays the depth that revolution must go to. Does this matter in and for actual struggles? Yes, but only in a limited way. Theory does not create the proletarian movement – living in capitalism does. However, the task of 'clearly understanding the line of march, the conditions, and the ultimate general results of the proletarian movement' and *then generalising these* insights remains a useful activity for communists (Marx and Engels, 2012, p. 51). Negri has provided us with a great many resources for this task, which we should pick up and use, but the limitations in his work need to be addressed with care.

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8

The Eighteenth Brumaire of Jacques Derrida

Jernej Habjan

Jacques Derrida never wrote on Karl Marx. Jacques Derrida held a few public talks on Karl Marx that were immediately published as books, despite the fact that in these talks he deliberately defended a certain spirit of Marx against the ruling ideology of anticommunism. As he admits himself, 'for reasons that remain to be analysed, and compared to most of my other books, this one [*Spectres de Marx*] was, let's put it this way, distributed, bought and translated a lot faster and more widely. I didn't say "read"' ('pour des raisons qui restent à analyser, et par comparaison avec la plupart de mes autres livres, celui-ci a été plus vite et plus largement, disons, diffusé, acheté et traduit. Je ne dis pas "lu"'; Derrida, 1997, 54). Apparently, the only ideology more effective than anticommunism in the academia of the 1990s was deconstructionism. So Derrida's speeches on Marx were always already writing – writing not only in the quasi-transcendental sense so dear to deconstructionists but also in the institutional sense, no less dear to certain Marxisms, of two books: *Spectres de Marx*, which almost immediately reappeared as *Specters of Marx*, and, a few years later, *Marx en jeu*, an edited volume that included Derrida's talks on *Spectres de Marx* and on Jean-Pierre Vincent's theatre piece based on that book. Thus, this writing was the only possible fulfilment of a 'desire' to do the 'impossible', to which Derrida (1993a, p. 201) admitted in 1989: '[T]oday, when in France any reference to Marx has become forbidden, impossible, immediately catalogued, I have a real desire to speak about Marx, to teach Marx – and I will if I can.'

Two decades later, at the end of what one may retroactively call the first five-year plan of the global north to save capital from the recession it has produced, Derrida scholars such as Sean Gaston, Geoffrey Bennington, Nicholas Royle, Alexander García Düttmann, J. Hillis Miller and Peggy Kamuf (the American translator of *Spectres de Marx*) are writing

books on their mourning of Derrida's death. (At the same time, a more inherently Marxian critique of Western Marxism that was published in the same year and by an equally prominent publisher as *Spectres de Marx*, Moishe Postone's *Time, Labor, and Social Domination*, is followed only by such pieces as his review article on *Specters of Marx* [Postone, 1998] – which I, however, follow significantly in this chapter.) The brutality of this phase of the declining US cycle of accumulation coincides, in the Derrida community, with the universality of the consensus on Martin Hägglund's thesis about the radical atheism underlying Derrida's entire oeuvre. According to this thesis, Derrida's 1993 *Spectres de Marx* does not mark any ethical turn in late Derrida but instead remains faithful to early Derrida's deconstruction of presence (Hägglund, 2008, pp. 77–8). For a study on Derrida's relevance for a materialist critique of our conjuncture this implies that there is no singularity of *Specters of Marx* within Derrida's oeuvre other than the fact that it actually is the Derrida book on Marx. Which in turn means that the book is potentially susceptible to all the criticism that the rest of Derrida's work has received. Indeed, Richard Beardsworth's recent charge of 'the irony of deconstruction' has been addressed exactly to the *Specters* as the book that, more than any other Derrida text, closes the world down in its very attempt to open it (Beardsworth, 2007, p. 214).

The commonsense leftist charge of deconstruction with ahistoricity was quickly refuted within Marxism as being itself ahistorical; here, it is enough to recall, say, Terry Eagleton's (1985) review of Perry Anderson's *In the Tracks of Historical Materialism*, which appeared only a year after deconstructionist Geoffrey Bennington (1984) had published a similar review of Michael Ryan's *Marxism and Deconstruction*. Leaving such charges of ahistoricity aside, the usual materialist critique of deconstruction, from Slavoj Žižek, Barbara Johnson and Gillian Rose all the way back to Paul de Man, is purely negative, ascribing to Derrida a certain absence of knowledge: Derrida doesn't know that the objects of his deconstructive reading always already know; he doesn't know that he merely reiterates its objects' knowledge.

Perhaps the best Derridean reply to this – a reply by arguably the best Derridean – is that Derrida's reiteration is nonetheless such that it could never be approved by his objects:

> [A] schema [...] quite common in reading Derrida [...] consists in saying that the authors whom he appears to reproach with a certain metaphysical blindness in fact escape from it, that they had already thought what Derrida appears to argue against them. [...] So Derrida

> will supposedly have helped us find Derrida all over Plato, Rousseau, Hegel and the others, without Zizek and the rest ever drawing the consequences of the fact that these authors would clearly never have subscribed to (countersigned) these things they may have said, but certainly never intended or declared. (Bennington, 2000, pp. 106–7)

This defence of Derrida is even more Derridean than Derrida's own defence, when he says, rather unconvincingly, that he has been using the label 'metaphysics' purely 'for pedagogical reasons' (Derrida, 1999, p. 229). But there is a retort to Geoffrey Bennington's Derridean defence of Derrida. There exists a more radical, positive version of the initial critique, one that adds to the absence of knowledge the presence of belief: by denying the object of its deconstructive reiteration the ability to countersign this reiteration, deconstruction implies that this object believes – which is precisely the form in which deconstruction itself believes. It believes by interpassively transferring belief onto its object, which should hence be viewed as its subject-supposed-to-believe. Robert Pfaller (2002) grasped such transference of activity onto a supposed Other as interpassivity; and as Žižek reports, Pfaller even gave deconstruction as an example of believing by presupposing that the object believes:

> As Robert Pfaller demonstrated [...], the direct belief in a truth which is subjectively fully assumed [...] is a modern phenomenon, in contrast to traditional beliefs-at-a-distance [...]. Pfaller is right to emphasize how, today, we believe more than ever: the most skeptical attitude, that of deconstruction, relies on the figure of an Other who 'really believes.' (Žižek, 2012, p. 953)

There indeed exist critiques of *Specters of Marx* that can support this general charge of deconstruction's interpassive belief (Postone, 1998; Žižek, 2002, pp. 65–70; Montag, 1999, pp. 73–7; Jameson, 2009, pp. 159–60; Macherey, 1999, pp. 23–4). On the basis of these critiques, one can say that by accusing Marx of trying to distinguish between spirit and spectre (Derrida, 1994, pp. 106–13, 122–4, 99; 1993b, pp. 173–85, 198–200, 162), the *Specters* projects onto Marx its own avowed desire to differentiate between Marxian critique and messianism, on the one hand, and Marxist dogmatism and teleology, on the other (1994, pp. 85–94, 13–14, 68, 63–4; 1993b, pp. 141–55, 35–6, 116–17, 109). So, the *Specters* is doing what it says Marx is doing: it is exorcising the spirit of its spectre by trying to free once and for all the critical and messianic Marx from

the dogmatic and teleological Marxism. As such, it is inconsistent rather than merely in line with Marx: it is not only that the *Specters* is doing what it charges Marx of doing – in this case the charge might still hold – but that Marx simply does not do what the *Specters* says he does; as I try to show, he is not in the business of freeing the revolutionary spirit from its spectre. Which means that he is indeed the *Specters*' subject-supposed-to-believe, not an actual believing subject.

This can perhaps best be shown by a further move, from the *Specters* to its reading of Marx's *The Eighteenth Brumaire*. This text seems closest to deconstruction – *The Class Struggles in France* for Derrideans, as it were – and embodies (together with *The Manifesto of the Communist Party*) the line between the *Specters*' other two main objects, *German Ideology* and *Capital*. Moreover, the *Brumaire* is also a text that stands at the border between dialectical and historical materialism. It is located between the diamat that attracts Derrida in all three Marx texts (with their 'paradoxy of the specter' [Derrida, 1994, p. 119], or, 'paradoxie du spectre' [1993b, p. 194] and their respect for and at once exorcism of the simulacrum [Derrida, 1994, pp. 169–70; 1993b, p. 269–70]) and the histomat that, for Louis Althusser, is the product of Marx's epistemological break with his early diamat (the break that Derrida [1994, p. 167; 1993b, p. 265] relativises rather abstractly). In the *Specters* (Derrida, 1994, pp. 107–8, 110–11, 112–14, 122–4; 1993b, pp. 175, 181, 183–5, 198–200), the politics of the *Brumaire* is labelled 'spectropolitics' ('spectro-politique') and criticised for trying to separate the spirit (*Geist*) of the revolution from the revolution's spectre (*Gespenst*). Indeed, Derrida himself admits that this critique is unjust. But instead of showing why his critique is unjust – why exactly *Brumaire*'s pair of spirit and spectre is more complex than his critique would have it – he tries to subtilise it with a critique of Marx's distinction between this complex spirit-as-spectre of the bourgeois revolutions and the supposedly ghost-free social revolutions (Derrida, 1994, pp. 113–16; 1993b, pp. 185–9). However, read from the standpoint of the theory of the signifier, from which the above-mentioned general materialist critique of deconstruction has been produced, the *Brumaire*, *pace* Derrida, forsakes the bourgeois repetition of the spirit and/or spectre of the revolution not in the name of a non-repetitive spontaneous revolution but on behalf of repetition as reflexive self-criticism.

Self-criticism, as opposed to spontaneous revolution, obviously demands institution. Which brings us to the second and final problem of the *Specters*: the fact that the *Specters* is doing what it charges Marx with doing, namely attempting to save the ghost from the spectre, is problematic not just because,as we have seen, Marx is simply not doing

it, but also because the *Specters*, as the book's author very well knows, should not be doing it either. Instead of distinguishing between the good critique and the bad realpolitik, Derrida should think them together. Had he thought the supposedly good spirit of Marxism together with its apparently bad institutions, he might not have called for something as anti-institutional and vague as his 'new International', which forced even such an avid reader of Derrida as Gayatri Spivak (1995, p. 69) to wonder: 'How, in other words, is the New International so new?' He might have realised that Marxist institutions are inevitably the material existence of the spirit of Marx or even that the anti-étatist 'new International' could easily be appropriated to serve as part of the material existence of the anti-étatism of neoliberal ideology. In this way, Derrida himself might have realised that, to quote Warren Montag's (1999, p. 80) early reply to the *Specters*,

> [l]ike the ghost of Hamlet's father, the spirit of Marxism, the idea of justice that it defines, the hopes and promises that it offers, all made their appearance in the world already armed: the strikes, disorders and riots of the working classes in Europe. The movements of struggle and the diverse organizations that take shape within them, far from killing the spirit of Marxism, are the sole form in which it can, in its irreducible diversity, live.

Derrida himself might have seen that, to quote Richard Beardsworth's (2007, pp. 226–7) more recent reply,

> what is particular to the socialist promise [...] is its acute awareness that *any* promise must entail organisation *if it is to contend with the historical forces that are already in place*. To separate the socialist promise from organisation and to speak of this promise as the condition of history radically short-circuits what Marx was trying to say. [...] In this sense, deconstruction's elision of the socialist promise in *Specters of Marx* ends up underestimating the promise of Marxian materialism and the *force* of human agency.

When Marx, in the *Brumaire*, speaks of the failed social revolution of 1848, the failure is first and foremost an institutional defeat; the proletarian revolution will have been precisely the jump from borrowing from the institutions of the past, themselves patchworks made up of even older institutions, to creating institutions of the future. Or when the current Left admits its own ineptitude in providing an answer to the

ongoing global recession, this can only be the ineptitude of its institutions in providing the framework for a formulation of answers. In one speculative sentence, the spirit is an institution. Only together do the spirit of Marx and the institutions of Marxism form a Marxian dialectical totality. So a procedure faithful to the spirit of Marx would be to insist that Marx's work can be grasped as a totality only if one adds to it the Marxist appropriations of it. And what is added should not only be openly ideological or even repressive appropriations of Marx but also purely theoretical ones, starting with Engels's grounding of his pre-theoretical notion of false consciousness in the base/superstructure metaphor, which Althusser (2014, pp. 237–42) traces back to Marx's own merely descriptive theory of the state, and proceeding up to, say, the post-autonomist optimism about the communism inherent to global capitalism, which Žižek (2008, pp. 350–62) reflects back into Marx's insufficient notion of the general intellect.

Granted, Derrida (1994, p. 91; 1993b, p. 150) does take this route insofar as he mentions that the 'totalitarian perversions' of Marxism 'are not pathological and accidental corruptions but the necessary deployment of an essential logic present at the birth, [...] the effect of an *ontological* treatment of the spectrality of the ghost' ('perversions totalitaires [...] ne sont pas [...] des détournements pathologiques et accidentels mais le déploiement nécessaire d'une logique essentielle et présente dès la naissance, [...] l'effet d'un traitement *ontologique* de la spectralité du fantôme'). But he mentions this in, as he admits, 'a too-elliptical fashion' ('de façon trop elliptique'), especially given his less elliptical discussion of 'Leninism and then Stalinist totalitarianism [...] as reactions to the fear of the ghost that communism inspired beginning in the last century' (Derrida, 1994, p. 105), or, 'le léninisme puis le totalitarisme stalinien [...] comme des réactions réciproques à la peur du fantôme que le communisme inspira dès le siècle dernier' (1993b, pp. 171, 172).

So Derrida ought to treat the bad realpolitik as that which should be added to the good critique in order to dialectically grasp the totality of the field. He could do that by simply staying within the field he has delineated, as it spans from the good critique to the bad realpolitik, and by treating the latter as what the former is supplemented with in the Derridean sense of the supplement as truth. As soon as our perspective is incompatible with either of these two, be it Marxian totality or Derridean supplement, we surrender to the ultimately anticommunist canonisation of Marx's oeuvre at the expense of all the Marxist politics that had supposedly misread and misapplied the oeuvre. We submit, in other words, to an academic procedure anticipated and rejected already

by the *Specters* (1994, pp. 31–2; 1993b, pp. 60–2). And vice versa, as long as we assume the viewpoint of either the Marxian totality or the Derridean supplement, we are able to assess the legacy of Marx on its own terms. In this way, we can finally achieve what the *Specters* sets out to do and read Marx and his legacy beyond the post-1989 conjurations of the 'anxious experts of anti-communism' (1994, p. 50), or, 'experts angoissés de l'anti-communisme' (1993b, p. 88). And in doing it by employing either the Marxian totality or the Derridean supplement, we ultimately valorise, practice even, the *Specters*' central idea of specific correspondence between deconstruction and Marxism.

In what follows, an analysis of the *Brumaire* will serve as a concretisation of the following general critique of Derrida's Marx.

* * *

Before the *Specters*, Jeffrey Mehlman offered a Derridean reading of Marx's lumpenproletariat as the figure of *différance*, which was later criticised by Nicholas Thoburn (2003, pp. 51–4) and Sandy Petrey (1988, pp. 460–4), among others. Five years after Mehlman's and ten before Derrida's, Jacques Rancière (2003, pp. 90–104) proposed a reading of the *Brumaire* that seems just as much informed by Derrida. In what has by now become his signature procedure of treating conceptual oppositions as attempts to evacuate universal processes into particular juxtaposed poles, Rancière breaks down Marx's proletariat/lumpenproletariat opposition by excavating traces of the lumpen tendency in every class. By doing this, Rancière in effect dismantles another opposition: the fundamental Marxian differentiation between the classes and the proletariat, which, as the class of the declassed, precisely embodies that universality in the name of which Rancière deconstructs Marx's opposition in the first place; the truly universal tendency is not simply the lumpen that Marx limits to the proletariat as a particular class but proletarianisation itself, the very tendency of any class to declass itself and thus join the proletariat as the class of the declassed. Perhaps this universalism of the proletariat is the reason why Marx's notion of revolution resurfaces in Rancière's recent work precisely at a major problematic point of Rancière's aesthetics: the relationship between metapolitics as the final of the three philosophical conceptions of politics, on the one hand, and metapolitics as the political dimension of the aesthetic, modern distribution of the sensible, on the other. In principle, metapolitics in the former sense is for Rancière the final of the three conceptions of politics, the vagaries of which are resolved by metapolitics in the latter sense; the philosophical (mainly Marxist) metapolitical practice

of reserving the status of politics only for the politics of the proletariat is challenged in Rancière by the aesthetic metapolitical practice of universalising the status of subjectivity across the established divisions. However, not only does Rancière use the same term, 'metapolitics', for both practices – the peak of philosophical concepts of politics, and the alternative to it – but in his recent *Aesthetics and Its Discontents* (2009, p. 38), Marx, Rancière's embodiment of the bad metapolitics, is himself associated with the good metapolitics. The name of Marx thus condenses the problem of distinguishing between Rancière's two notions of metapolitics, the most particularist and the most universalist one; as such, however, this name already points towards the solution, if only it starts naming the proletariat's universal potential, that is, the universality that the early Rancière lost by trying to find it through his deconstruction of the *Brumaire*.

If even the early Rancière's reading of the *Brumaire* has to do not only with the history of his own experience of Althusser, the PCF, the archives of class struggles in nineteenth-century France – or Derrida for that matter – but indeed also with the broader impact of deconstruction, then it is hardly surprising that when Derrida actually produced an interpretation of *Brumaire*, it influenced subsequent readings to the point of preventing them from recognising their own achievements. For example, four years after Derrida's *Specters*, Giosuè Ghisalberti (1997) traces in the *Brumaire* and painstakingly deconstructs the opposition between the repetitiveness of the bourgeois (counter-)revolution and the dialectics of the social revolution, ignoring Marx's own ascription of repetition to the social revolution – that is, Marx's insistence on repetition as the form of social revolution's self-critique – until the very last parentheses of his text. The tripartite phenomenology of repetition that I am proposing here could perhaps even serve as a starting point of such investigations of repetition as proposed by Kojin Karatani (2008, pp. 133–9) or Alenka Zupančič (2007, pp. 27–30), whose initial critiques of the *Brumaire* are stronger than Derrida's.

In the *Brumaire*, Marx describes the class struggles in France in the interval between the socialist revolution of February 1848 and Louis Bonaparte's coup d'état of 2 December 1851. Marx distinguishes three periods: first, the socialist prologue from February to June 1848, which is, second, betrayed by a year of the rise and fall of the republican bourgeoisie and then, third, parodied by the struggle between the parliamentary bourgeoisie (the Party of Order) and the president Louis Bonaparte, which ends with Bonaparte's coup d'état – more than 52 years after 18 Brumaire, Year VIII, when Napoleon overthrew the French Directory and

became dictator, and exactly a year before his nephew, Louis Bonaparte, will ascend the throne as Napoleon III.

The dialectical process leading from the revolution to the counter-revolution to the social revolution to come is condensed by Marx in aesthetic utterances and temporal knots. The 'high tragedy' of Napoleon's 'eighteenth Brumaire' is repeated as the 'low farce' of Louis Bonaparte's 'second imprint of the eighteenth Brumaire' (Marx, 2002, p. 19) and will have been sublated by the 'Hic Rhodus, hic salta!' of the social revolution (p. 23).

Marx's aesthetic and temporal metaphors – 'leitmotivs that hold the work together' (Prawer, 1978, p. 178), making it 'a contribution to the critique of *semiotic* economy' (Jessop, 2002, p. 182) – can be given the dignity of concepts when formalised by way of Lacan's theory of the four discourses. Read with Lacan's *Other Side of Psychoanalysis*, the bourgeois revolution, the counter-revolution and the social revolution appear as respective instances of the master's, the hysteric's and the analytic discourse. Far from being reductionist, such a synoptic reading of Marx's discursivisation of politics and Lacan's politicisation of discourse – that is, of their almost real-time analyses of the failed social revolutions of 1848 and 1968 – can prevent reductionist interpretations of such metaphoric dyads of the *Brumaire* as 'phrase'/'content', 'tragedy'/'farce', 'drape'/'parody' and 'new'/'native language' (Marx, 2002, pp. 22, 19, 20–1, 20). And vice versa, such a reading can render Lacan's matrix of discourses pertinent for Marxist analyses of contemporary capitalism and its commodification of the discursive *lien social* itself.

Marx's dialectics shows that Louis Bonaparte's hollowing out of the political is always already Bonaparte's politics. Napoleon's nephew participates in the bourgeois revolution as its enactment, its truth – as 'the real Bonaparte, the genuine article' (Marx, 2002, p. 63). A political alternative hence cannot return from Louis Bonaparte to the allegedly pure bourgeois revolution. Rather, it must break with both the revolution of the eighteenth century and its enactment in the nineteenth century. According to Marx, the bourgeois revolution suffers from an excess of phrase in relation to content; and the proletarian revolution, from an excess of content in relation to phrase. The former thus hurries from one victory to another to the final suspension of any possibility of escalating into a social revolution, and the latter stumbles from a defeat to another defeat to the point of no return.

The revolution of the capitalist class reproduces the structure of the master's discourse, the master being always already 'the castrated master' (Lacan, 2007, p. 87). For the enthusiastic subject is barred ($) by

the 'borrowed language' of 'the spirits of the past' (Marx, 2002, pp. 20, 19); that is, by the 'phrase', which is an empty, master signifier (S_1) that mistranslates the revolutionary enthusiasm into knowledge (S_2). This knowledge of the 'true interpreter and spokesman' Jean-Baptiste Say and 'the fat-head' Louis XVIII reduces the social revolution to the 'dreary realism' (Marx, 2002, p. 20) of the technological, capitalist revolution. 'Wholly absorbed in the production of wealth' (p. 20), this knowledge produces the excess of enjoyment (*a*), 'wealth, the property of the wealthy' (Lacan, 2007, pp. 79, 82).

agent: S_1: the 'borrowed language'	other: S_2: the 'dreary realism'
truth: \$: the enthusiastic subject	production: *a*: wealth

The social revolution as the revolution of the class of the declassed is structured as the analytic discourse, 'the other side' (Lacan, 2007, pp. 54, 136, 78) of the master's discourse. The agent of this discourse is the party as the vanguard of what the theorists of *operaismo* grasped as the political composition of the working class. This political composition of the working class emerges from the analysis of the means of production that shape the technical composition of the labour force that in turn shapes the political composition of the working class itself. As such, this political composition pertains to the unsymbolisable domain of the Real (*a*). For, to follow Rastko Močnik's (2008, p. 87) formalisation, from the temporal viewpoint, the party as the vanguard of the political class composition is merely a reaction to the way the means of production limit it by limiting the technical class composition; yet from the logical point of view, the party's action is a political act to which the owners of the means of production are forced to react in the first place by trying to limit it. In other words, the political class composition emerges as a reaction to the already existing political class composition, which belongs to the technical composition that is in turn shaped by the existing means of production. So this new political class composition is a reaction to the existing one and hence to the existing means of production – but a reaction that is structurally ahead of these means of production because it analyses them in order to criticise the political class composition they have shaped. As such, the new political class composition repeats the old one in the way Marx's social revolution repeats its past struggles. So as an analysis of its own material conditions, the political class composition is immanently self-critical. In fact, this convergence of theoretical analysis and political self-criticism is the only material support, the

truth, of the party. Knowledge (S_2) is hence positioned in the place of the truth and not of the other, of the discourse's agent, and as such obtains the dignity of theory. Due to the theoretical status of its knowledge, the party, the agent of the analytic discourse, is able to condense its own enthusiasm (\$) into '*Hic Rhodus, hic salta!*' Thus, enthusiasm produces its own phrase (S_1); it bars itself, subjectivating the class consciousness of the proletariat, which is irreducible to the imaginary working class and its insufficient 'level of [...] education' (Marx, 2002, p. 25).

a: the act of political class composition	\$: the enthusiastic subject
S_2: self-criticism and analysis	S_1: '*Hic Rhodus, hic salta!*'

Therefore, the truth of the bourgeois, class revolutions lies in the enthusiasm signified by the borrowed phrases that are the agent of the discourse; these phrases are mistranslated into knowledge that produces the wealth of nations and its surplus enjoyment. On the other hand, the truth of the social, proletarian revolutions is the theory practiced by the vanguard of the political class composition; through theory, this agent relates to its other, the enthusiasm of the working class, which will have produced proletariat as its own subjectivation.

To this formalisation of the bourgeois and the proletarian revolution should be added a formalisation of the very relation between them. According to Marx, this is a relation of antinomy, and for Lacan, the master's discourse is 'the other side' of the analytic discourse. The intermediary discourse in Lacan's matrix is of course the hysteric's. So too, Marx depicts the transition from the realised bourgeois revolution to the counter-revolution in terms uncannily close to Lacan's account of the hysterisation of the master. It is a transition from tragedy to farce, from drape to parody and 'caricature' (Marx, 2002, p. 21), from the spirit of the dead to the spectre of the undead – let us call it a transition from *mimēsis* to *mimēsis mimēseōs*, simulacrum.

The bourgeois revolutionaries are tragic insofar as they must surrender the place of the agent of the master's discourse to the empty signifiers, phrases, of past revolutions. The tragedy of this discourse lies in its constitutive 'impossibility' (Lacan, 2007, p. 174) of faithfully translating the empty signifier into a chain of knowledge (S_2). This is what Marx (2002, p. 21) calls the impossibility of 'glorifying' the bourgeois revolution by the spirit of the dead. It is the impossibility of giving the 'provisional' February government of 1848 a 'social republic', this republic being 'the general content of modern revolution', which 'stood in the

most bizarre contradiction to everything that could be put into practice there and then' (pp. 24–5).

On the other hand, there is the farce of Louis Bonaparte's 'impotence' characteristic of the hysteric's discourse (Lacan, 2007, p. 176). Napoleon's nephew, the agent of the hysteric's discourse ($), can produce only a chain of ordinary signifiers (S_2), history as the lowest comedy and masquerade (Marx, 2002, p. 63). This chain cannot form the smallholding peasants into a class: 'the most numerous class in French society' paradoxically 'do[es] not form a class' (pp. 100–1); it remains a formless mass (*a*), which must be represented by a 'master' (p. 101), Bonaparte, rather than by a master signifier. The bourgeois master's discourse replaced revolutionary enthusiasm with parliamentarism (S_2), producing an unrepresented mass (*a*) out of the subjectivated classes ($) represented by the revolutionary phrases (S_1); Bonaparte ($) in turn defeats the very revolutionary legacy, the old phrases (S_1), of the bourgeoisie by producing out of the unrepresented mass (*a*) nothing but 'uniformly levelled people and relationships' (S_2) (Marx, 2002, pp. 102–4). Therein lies the constitutive 'impotence' of the hysteric's discourse to symbolise its truth with its production. Bonaparte's 'official turns of phrase' about 'public order, religion, the family, and property' are irreconcilable with the 'disorder, prostitution and pilfering well out of sight', which was the domain of the Society of 10 December, the lumpenproletarian group that executed Louis Bonaparte's coup; this 'private army' of Bonaparte is '*his* work, his very own idea', 'his own history', yet 'well out of sight' (p. 64).

$: Napoleon's nephew	S_1: the 'borrowed language'
a: 'disorder, prostitution and pilfering'	S_2: 'order, religion, the family and property'

Bonaparte is unable to replace the statue of the uncle-soldier in the Place Vendôme with anything other than the reactionary statue of the uncle-emperor (Marx, 2002, p. 109). He can adapt the uncle's image solely to the taste of the mid-nineteenth century (p. 21). And his '"Napoleonic ideals"' (pp. 103–6) – more precisely, his Napoleonic ideas ('idées napoléoniennes': Marx, 1960, pp. 200–3) – are words and spirits transformed into phrases and spectres ('Worte, die in Phrasen, Geister, die in Gespenster verwandelt': p. 203). The farce then dwells in Bonaparte's inability to make yet another quarter turn of the master's discourse after turning it into the hysteric's discourse. 'Driven by the contradictory

demands of his circumstances, and having to keep in the public eye as a substitute for Napoleon' (Marx, 2002, p. 109), Louis Bonaparte resorts to *acting out* for the 'improvise[d] crowd' (p. 64); that is, to 'contradictory', 'confused poking about' (p. 107). He is unable to replace the uncle's statue with empty space and allow for a new master signifier to take the place of production in the analytic discourse. This is achieved only by the Paris Commune, which turns Louis Bonaparte's hysterical impotence into the 'impossibility' that Lacan (2007, p. 176) finds in the analytic discourse: the analyst's impossibility of traversing the fantasy on behalf of the subject. To give a telling detail, in his introduction to Marx's *The Class Struggles in France*, Engels mentions that Bismarck, who overthrew Bonaparte in 1871, was but Bonaparte's impersonator. To this 'irony of history' (Engels, 1990, p. 513) one can add here only that the one defeated by his imitator was himself an impersonator of Napoleon; the irony is therefore in the hysterical subject's self-inflicted defeat.

The tragic revolutions hence repeat 'the great events and characters of world history' (Marx, 2002, p. 19) by way of direct stylisation, and the farcical counter-revolutions, by way of indirect parody. The former stylise 'the antediluvian colossi, and along with them the resurrected Romans' (p. 20) or, say, 'Old Testament language, passions and delusions' (p. 21) in order to compensate for their own constrained, bourgeois content. The latter parody these tragic stylisations themselves in order to neutralise the content of the stylised 'events and characters of world history'. And Louis Bonaparte manages to 'parody' not only the bourgeois revolution but even 'an imperial restoration' (pp. 95, 106) when he realises his 'Napoleonic idée fixe' (p. 38) of a coup d'état.

The farce of 1848–51 is a time of 'shadows that have lost their bodies' (Marx, 2002, p. 40), of *mimēsis mimēseōs*, a bricolage of partial objects without the master signifier. What unfolds in this period is a chain of signifiers (S_2) produced via Bonaparte's hysterical attacks ($) on the master in the place of the other (S_1). The agent of this discourse 'in fact identifies the cause of order with his person whilst seeming to identify his person with the cause of order' (Marx, 2002, p. 50). He hysterically parodies the master signifier while relying on it. For example, the motto '*liberté, égalité, fraternité*', the agent of the bourgeois revolution, is militarised by Louis Bonaparte as 'infantry, cavalry, artillery' (p. 52). Bonaparte's coup d'état of 2 December 1851 is a fake event that succeeds 'in spite of his indiscretion and with the foreknowledge of the Assembly, a necessary, inevitable result of previous developments' (p. 90). All he can enact is the farcical truth of the Party of Order, as he returns, to use Lacan's definition of communication, the party's own messages to the

party in their inverted, true (Bonapartist) form: 'He quoted their own catchphrases back to them' (Marx, 2002, p. 37). The Party of Order is a coalition of royalist parties of the Bourbon and Orleans dynasties, which in reality represent the interests of the bourgeoisie. Hence, as shown by Žižek (1999, p. 217), in 1848, the party's royalist fantasies merely supplement and legitimate the party's republican practice. As we have seen, in 1851, these fantasies return to the party in the caricaturesque form of Bonaparte's coup d'état. The party and Napoleon's nephew are the same hysterical subject.

Just as the Party of Order had been attacking the Constituent Assembly in 1849, Bonaparte attacked the party, which had hitherto worked for him, on 2 December 1851. For on 29 January 1849 the Party of Order had blocked the republican law on the president's accountability – and with the coup d'état, President Bonaparte prevented the party's own implementation of such a law. Their desire to 'denounce' the parliamentary regime returns in the form of 'banishing' that regime, the true form, which they can only 'protest' against (p. 38). Here is one of Marx's many prosopopoeias: '"Above all France clamours for peace." The Party of Order had proclaimed this to the revolution since February [1848], and now [on 12 November 1850] Bonaparte's communiqué proclaimed it to the Party of Order' (p. 67). By June 1848 the Party of Order 'had made the catchphrases of the old society, "property, family, religion, order" into military passwords' – and with the coup d'état, the party's laws were finally 'torn to shreds in the name of religion, property, family, order' (p. 27).

The party yielded to Bonaparte without a fight, without taking command of the army (Marx, 2002, pp. 72–3, 91), because it hysterically yielded to itself, revealing 'its doubts about its own power' (p. 91). This is why Marx (p. 74) can say that Bonaparte's restorationist sympathies merely supplemented the party's own desires. Louis Bonaparte merely saturated the politics of the National Assembly. His coup d'état delivered the Assembly from its entrapment between the two deaths: the real death without burial (p. 90) and the symbolic death by coup d'état. As the latter was continuously '"*postponed*"' (p. 90), it was expected by this undead bourgeoisie with ambivalent jouissance.

Let me return to my opening claim that a reading of the *Brumaire* with *The Other Side of Psychoanalysis* proves productive for both texts. We have seen that Marx's critique of the February-revolution-turned-counter-revolution, written approximately one year after the events and in the span of one year, is irreducible to a simple dualist, deconstructible notion of repetition. And conversely, it is precisely through a Marxist analysis of the neoliberal appropriation of the 1968 student revolt that

we can account for Lacan's critique of May '68, written, again, roughly one year after the events and in the span of one year. Today Lacan's (2007, p. 207) comment on the hysterical structure of that revolt is being eerily validated by the commodification of the factory, the school and the family, which is returning, as Močnik (2008, p. 90) claims, to that revolt its own message in its inverted form. The revolt and the university itself have been appropriated by the final of Lacan's four discourses: capitalism's own university discourse.

This is why Derrida's reading falls short. For him, the politics of the *Brumaire* is a 'spectropolitics' trying to separate the spirit (*Geist*) of the revolution from the spectre (*Gespenst*) of the revolution. As mentioned above, Derrida does himself admit that his critique is unjust, but instead of showing why it is unjust, he corroborates it with a critique of Marx's distinction between this complex spirit-as-spectre of the bourgeois revolutions and the presumably ghost-free social revolutions. However, this new, ghost-free element that Marx is said to count on is but Derrida's own projection onto the *Brumaire* (and in general onto everything from *The German Ideology* to *Capital* [Derrida, 1994, pp. 169–70; 1993b, pp. 269–70]). Ultimately, it is Derrida himself who believes in the opposition between the ghost-free social revolution and its supplement, the spirit-as-spectre of the bourgeois revolutions; he believes in it by supposing that the *Brumaire* believes in it. For in the *Brumaire*, a social revolution does not simply try to escape, in a kind of Lacanian *acting out*, discursive repetition and its ghost calling; on the contrary, it is a *passage à l'acte*, a passage from the hysteric's to the analytic discourse. The bourgeois repetition of the spirit and/or spectre of the revolution is forsaken here not for a non-repetitive spontaneous revolution but for repetition as reflexive self-criticism. While the Roman spirit is repeated by the 1789–95 revolution and this revolution's spectre by the 1848–51 counter-revolution, the proletarian revolutions critically repeat solely their own failures until they finally reach the point of no repetition and cry '*Hic Rhodus, hic salta!*'

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9

The Visibility of Politics: Jacques Rancière's Challenge to Marxism

Tim Fisken

It would not be completely implausible to view Jacques Rancière's entire career as a series of – mostly veiled – critiques of Karl Marx; at any rate, we can notice Marx circulating in the background of much of Rancière's work as the figure who connects a number of otherwise disparate critiques of post-'68 French intellectual culture.[1] This is perhaps explicable in part by the importance of Marx to many of Rancière's contemporaries; but beyond this contingency there is, as we shall see, a deeper coherence to Rancière's targeting of Marx, because Marx is implicated in and Marxism unites the two forms of 'mastery' that Rancière opposes: pedagogy and sociology. Marxism, in Rancière's handling, is accused of a covert attachment to hierarchy in which an elite, gifted with special (philosophical or sociological) knowledge, directs and educates the masses. It is against this interpretation that Rancière develops an understanding of politics based around an axiomatic equality and a particular logic of visibility. This represents a challenge to Marxism, but it also, as I attempt to show, depends on a particular and partial construal of Marxism; Marxism in fact contains a strong critique of the form of equality championed by Rancière and an interesting if perhaps underdeveloped strand of thought around questions of visibility and the aesthetics of politics. Because of this, it may turn out that Rancière's challenge to Marxism provides an occasion to reactivate certain elements of the Marxist tradition.

Rancière's attack on mastery begins with one of his earliest works, *Althusser's Lesson* (2011), and in this 1974 book Rancière develops many of the concepts that inform his later work; it is also in his encounter with Louis Althusser that Rancière forms the conception of Marxism that will be operative in his later works. Because of the importance of the lesson Rancière drew from Althusser, it makes sense to begin by discussing Althusserian Marxism and Rancière's reaction to it.

Rancière against Marxism

Rancière's objection to Althusser concerns epistemology or, rather, the politics of Althusser's epistemology. The epistemology Althusser develops and employs in *Reading Capital* threads together a number of distinctions (between ideology and science, between the theoretical object and the material or historical object, between the political and economic 'levels'). The best way into the aspects of Althusser's work that Rancière criticises, however, is through the concept of symptomatic reading. Althusser describes both Marx's method in *Capital* and the method adopted in *Reading Capital* as 'symptomatic' (Althusser, 2009, p. 29), by which he means attempting to understand an author by considering the significance of what does *not* appear in his or her work. What does appear in a text will suggest certain conclusions which are, to us, clear or even obvious but which the author does not include in the text. Althusser's epistemological principle is that this absence is due to the specific way the author organises his or her questions and concerns (his or her 'problematic') and, furthermore, that by paying careful attention to these absences, we can discover a new problematic which encompasses the questions posed by the old problematic along with the questions avoided by it (Althusser, 2009, pp. 25–6). Althusser describes Marx as deploying this symptomatic method in his reading of Smith and the other classical economists and so developing the science of dialectical materialism out of the lapses and silences in the classical economists (Althusser, 2009, p. 29). Althusser proposes to apply the same method to Marx in order to find, in Marx's own lapses, the new problematic of scientific Marxism, a Marxism fully purged of Hegelian idealism (Althusser, 2009, pp. 30–1).

Rancière pursues this approach in a particularly pure form in his own contribution to *Reading Capital*.[2] He describes symptomatic reading as involving the comparison of '*two texts*', one being the text under discussion and the '*second text*' being the one implied by the absences in the first one (Althusser, 2009, p. 29). Rancière is helped in applying this method by the fact that the 'second text' in the case he is studying exists as a fully formed separate text; that is to say, Rancière takes *Capital* to be the text implied by the absences within Marx's *1844 Manuscripts*. He undertakes a symptomatic reading by comparing the two texts and (by showing how the concept of fetishism in *Capital* arises out of the lacunae in the *1844 Manuscripts*) is or believes himself to be able to understand the set of questions that shape *Capital* better than Marx himself was. Rancière, in his early work, follows Althusser in seeing a radical

discontinuity between Marx's early and late work, a discontinuity that can be identified by *us*, studying Marx's work from the outside with a rigor that Marx not only *did* not display but which Marx himself *could not* achieve. As Rancière puts it: 'We can *determine* in Marx's theoretical practice the break that Marx only *affirmed*, we can formulate the radical difference between the two problematics, but Marx himself never really grasped and conceptualized this difference' (Rancière, 1989a, p. 167).

Central to symptomatic reading and to Althusser's epistemology is the idea that observers can, because of their external vantage point, understand someone's thought better than he or she can him- or herself. In *Reading Capital*, this is applied specifically to Marx's thought, but Rancière soon comes to see as central to Althusser's thought the idea that the philosopher always understands the thought of others better than they do themselves. Rancière's rejection of this privileged position of the philosopher or theorist is central to all of his later work. Rancière lays out this criticism in *Althusser's Lesson* in the form of an ironic symptomatic reading of Althusser himself (2011, p. xxiii). A symptomatic reading proceeds by exposing, in the silences of a text, the premises of that text which the author was unable to know. Rancière applies this method to symptomatic reading itself, asking what premises of his method Althusser might not be able to know or, rather (because Rancière does not believe in the symptomatic method), what premises of his method Althusser prefers not to know or to reveal. Rancière's use of the symptomatic method is ironic because it is intended to expose the pretence that upholds the method. Althusser erected an intimidating philosophical and institutional edifice to disguise a simple premise: that there is a fundamental difference between those who know and those who do not know (Rancière, 2011, pp. 15–16). Having assumed this premise, Althusser's method then goes on to 'verify' it in practice: Althusser excludes the masses from participating in theory through the same theoretical edifice that purports to explain why the masses are unable to participate in theory.

Althusser, that is, exhibits the particular type of mastery that Rancière calls 'pedagogy'. Rancière expounds on the problem with pedagogy in *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* (1991). The problem with traditional pedagogy, Rancière argues, is that it invests the master with a particular kind of knowledge about knowledge. It is not just that the master knows something the student doesn't know; the master also knows *that* the student doesn't know and how the student's ignorance can be rectified, while the student, precisely because he or she is ignorant, does not really understand what this ignorance entails (1991, p. 7). That

is, traditional pedagogy presumes that the master knows the student better than the student knows him- or herself. This, Rancière argues, installs a fundamental inequality in the pedagogical situation: even if the student acquires the knowledge the master is teaching, the master retains the privilege of knowing whether or not the student knows. Indeed, Rancière argues that this is the purpose of pedagogy: it assumes a fundamental inequality in order to continuously verify this inequality in practice (1991, p. 6). Rancière is attracted to the educational practice of Jacotot, the original 'ignorant schoolmaster', because Jacotot does not argue for, still less attempt to produce, equality; instead, Jacotot's position is that we must assert, as a starting point or axiom, that all people are intellectually equal (1991, p. 50).

Rancière's interest in situations that depend on the positing of inequality is due to his conviction that the oppressive logic of pedagogy is widespread. Althusser's lesson is not primarily the lesson that Althusser delivered as a university professor but rather the lesson he and the French Communist Party delivered to the revolutionary students and workers in France in 1968. According to Rancière, Althusser insists on an intellectual division of labour in which intellectuals formulate a plan and the masses carry it out; Rancière considers this a pedagogical situation because it begins with the assertion that the masses lack knowledge and that this deficit must be made up with knowledge provided by the intellectuals (2011, p. 10). This mode of exclusion of the masses is supported by another form of mastery, that of the sociologist, in which the masses are excluded from knowledge because they are conceptualised as the *objects* of knowledge. In *Althusser's Lesson*, sociology is, like pedagogy, first explicated in an educational situation, which turns out to be a microcosm of society. Progressive educational sociology purports to identify the objective obstacles preventing educational achievement, particularly among the working-class and other sociologically identifiable groups. However, by positing this as an external knowledge that the sociologist is able to know better than the working-class students being studied, the sociologist is assuming a prior intellectual inequality between the sociologist and his or her object of study, an inequality that the 'discovery' of objective inequalities serves merely to reinforce (Rancière, 2011, p. 36). Bourdieu is the main target of these criticisms,[3] but Rancière's criticism of sociology gains additional significance for our purposes from the fact that when Rancière turns to consider Marx, it is Marx as the founder of sociology.

Marx is, for Rancière, the founder of sociology because he rejects or at least purports to reject philosophy while providing an alternative

justification for the types of mastery that Rancière has identified as the central gesture of philosophy going back to Plato. Sociology develops this antiphilosophical form of mastery culminating, according to Rancière, in Pierre Bourdieu's 'Parmenidean Marxism' (Rancière, 2003, p. 179). The starting point of this sociological mastery is Marx's theory of ideology, which Rancière glosses as follows:

> People 'make' history but they 'do not know' they do so. The formula can be developed ad infinitum. The world is populated by people who 'do,' who only express what they are in what they do and what they do in what they are, but who cannot 'do' without fabricating for themselves a knowledge that is always besides what they are. It is impossible to do without misrecognizing that one does. (Rancière, 2003, pp. 132–3)

The necessity of sociology, that is, comes from the fact that taking part in an activity systematically produces a misunderstanding of that activity. Or as Rancière puts it later, the conclusions of sociology may seem obvious, but it is precisely because of this that sociology is necessary, because the sociological enterprise starts from the assumption that immersion in practice produces a lack of understanding of that practice; sociology thus discovers what all know but don't know that they know (Rancière, 2003, p. 170).

The corollary of this, according to Rancière, is that sociology explains what it also presupposes; that is, that those who act cannot understand the context within which they act, that those who act cannot also think. In asserting that the oppressed cannot understand the situation that oppresses them, Rancière argues, sociology explains oppression in a way that also precludes any possibility that the oppressed could change this situation. It is this erasure of transformative possibilities that leads Rancière to call sociology Parmenidean Marxism; like the philosophy of Parmenides, sociology argues that any apparent change must be illusory. Sociology, for Rancière, describes the distribution of social roles, of individuals into their socially assigned places, in such a way as to render impossible any reorganisation of these places. In this way, according to Rancière, sociology is the culmination of Marxism: it completes the philosophers' project, descending from Plato, of assigning an immutable place to everyone in society, and it completes this through a supposedly objective, scientific replacement of philosophy (2003, p. 203).

Marx considered materialism to be the completion of philosophy, which, for Rancière, means the completion of the project, announced

by Plato at the beginning of the *Republic*, of deriving a political organisation from the social division of labour involved in satisfying our material needs (i.e., the social in Hannah Arendt's sense). This is why Rancière views as central to Marx's materialism the deflationary aspect which tries to show the priority of material needs over idealised principles. Referring to Marx's argument that history begins when humans 'begin to produce their means of subsistence', Rancière interprets this as an argument for the temporal priority of material needs: '"living individuals" [...] "before they make history" must *first* eat, drink, get clothing and housing, reproduce, and do a few other things of which one never sees the end' (Rancière, 2003, pp. 100–1). Marx's ruse, which Rancière claims to have identified, lies in the unending character of these material tasks. Although it might seem that Marx gives workers the central role in making revolution, this role is always postponed because there are always more menial tasks for the workers to perform first: 'The revolutionary dialectic of production and destruction is corrupted by the materialist history of preservation and reproduction' (Rancière, 2003, p. 101). That is, while Plato's philosopher told workers they could not leave the place of production assigned to them, Marxist sociologists end up saying that workers cannot leave that place *yet*, and, for Rancière, that amounts to the same thing.

From equality to politics

This is where the poor imagined by the philosophers and sociologists run up against the actual poor, who refuse the place assigned to them in intellectual schemes. This is why Rancière accuses Marx of a certain suspicion of or even hostility to the artisans he was involved with in the League of the Just prior to 1848 (Rancière, 2003, p. 85). These artisans were not the fully dehumanised proletarians of Marx's theory, those who 'have nothing to lose but their chains' and so who, completely subsumed by capital, were also the absolute negation *of* capital. On the contrary, these artisans had an existence separate from their work that, Rancière claims, Marx considered irrelevant to or a distraction from their political tasks but on which Rancière focuses as exactly what made these acts political (in contrast to the covering over of politics of which he will accuse Marx). This exploration is pursued at greater length – and not, at least not directly, as a criticism of Marx – in Rancière's *Nights of Labor* (1989b). Rancière here discusses the way in which radical artisans in nineteenth-century France disrupted the place of work not so much by actions in the workplace but by insisting

on their right to occupy other places to do things other than work. These activities – Rancière concentrates on the writing published in workers' journals – which take place during the workers' off-hours, their 'nights', amount to an assertion that the identity of workers is not a sociological life sentence and that they refuse to be limited to the 'place' assigned to them.

Rancière reads this as fundamentally an assertion of equality. Worker-poets assume they are equally capable of writing and of thinking as the bourgeois literati, an assumption that is uncomfortable, especially for the more liberal-minded literati who find themselves in the position of praising the workers' poetry while maintaining the distance that insists that worker-poets, unlike poets, must continue to work (Rancière, 1989b, p. 13). This scene is fundamental to Rancière's understanding of politics: the assumption of equality, particularly the equal ability to think, is the starting point of politics for Rancière (hence the importance of his study of the educational philosophy of Jacotot, who elaborated the consequences of taking intellectual equality to be axiomatic), while the processes that attempt to cover over this equality (from intellectual awkwardness to police batons) make up the other of politics, which Rancière calls 'the police' (1999, p. 29).

That this assumption of equality appears as equal ability to think, made visible through literary work, is not merely fortuitous because, for Rancière, political equality has a particular linguistic origin. Rancière sees the origin of politics in the logos of the community, where 'logos' means both 'reason' and 'speech'. Rancière argues that there is a fundamental paradox in the reasoning behind hierarchy, a paradox that rests on the capacity for speech:

> There is order in society because some people command and others obey, but in order to obey an order at least two things are required: you must understand the order and you must understand that you must obey it. And to do that, you must already be the equal of the person who is ordering you. It is this equality that gnaws away at any natural order. (Rancière, 1999, p. 16)

Politics is the assertion of this paradox in the face of a social order that attempts to deny it.

Rancière views politics as fundamentally about practices of expression (1999, p. 3), with linguistic expression and speech in particular taken as the paradigmatic form of expression. The political acts of expression are conditioned or occasioned by attempts to silence them, that is, by

the attempt at maintaining the hierarchical social order that Rancière calls 'the police': 'for politics to occur, there must be a meeting point between police logic and egalitarian logic' (1999, p. 34). This meeting point is what Rancière calls a 'wrong', a fundamental disorder within the community that demonstrates (or, rather, makes it possible for political subjects to make manifest) the contingency and hence illegitimacy of any social order. This fundamental wrong is what underpins specific disagreements within society (workers' struggles, e.g.) and makes it possible to raise these disagreements to the level of politics (Rancière, 1999, p. 35). This wrong is the ontology – or, one might say, anti-ontology (Deranty, 2003) – of politics: the lack of foundation in general of a social order, which makes possible the contestations within the community that make up politics.

This ontological context is given a specific subjectivity in Rancière's account, although not in the sense of a concrete historical location but rather in the sense of a structural position. The order of society, which politics disrupts, is an ordering of society into parts, or a 'count' of parts that is always, according to Rancière, also a miscount (1999, p. 6). The reason for this is that, alongside every particular quality used to divide the community into parts, there must also be some quality common to all members of the community. Furthermore, there will also be some members who have *none* of the specific qualities used to delineate the community into parts; their only quality is the quality shared by all, and so this common quality becomes, paradoxically, the defining feature of both the whole community and of a part within it (Rancière, 1999, p. 8). Rancière names this group the 'part of no part' (examples include the Athenian *demos* and the European proletariat), because it is a subsection of society that has no place within the classificatory system that orders society. The part of no part is the site of politics, according to Rancière, because in asserting its membership in the community despite the lack of any particular qualifications, it asserts its identity with the community as a whole and thereby demonstrates the contingency of the social order, undermining its claim to be a logos, a secure and necessary order.

'Demonstrates' here is intended to carry all the etymological weight connecting it to showing, making visible as a form of expression: the 'logic of *demonstration* is indissolubly an aesthetic of *expression*' (Rancière, 1999, p. 57). Rancière captures this centrality of visibility to his account of politics in his concept of the 'distribution of the sensible' (1999, p. 57). He defines this as 'the system of self-evident facts of sense perception that simultaneously disclose the existence of

something in common and the delimitations that define the respective parts and positions within it' (2004, p. 12). That is, the distribution of the sensible is the police function that orders society by dividing it into parts and determining which parts can be seen and how they are seen. The distribution of the sensible is what establishes the part of no part as having no part: the distribution of the sensible divides the community in such a way as to render a part of it invisible. Thus, politics for Rancière is about creating a new distribution of the sensible, about creating visibility where it previously was lacking. In this, his account of politics emphasises the aesthetic, understood specifically as visibility, to the extent even of emphasising the *spectator*, which political action reduced to 'what can be *seen* of mass mobilization' (Hallward, 2009, p. 185); Rancière uses much the same language himself when he writes that politics is fundamentally about 'what can be seen and what can be said about it' (1999, p. 238).

It is to this account of politics as visibility that Rancière is led by his rejection of Althusser's Marxism and by his subsequent exploration of the axiomatics of intellectual equality that he saw as the alternative to Althusserian and Marxist mastery. In laying out Rancière's position, I have been looking at Marxism from the point of view of Rancière; that is, Marx and Marxist themes have been developed to the extent and in the form that they appear in Rancière's construction of his own political philosophy. It is useful, however, to turn our gaze in the other direction and consider Rancière from the point of view of Marx: what resources does the Marxist tradition have to grapple with such key concerns of Rancière as equality, exclusion and visibility? It turns out that this tradition has significant resources for addressing these concepts going back to Marx's own writings. Furthermore, the analysis contained in these writings does much to render the particular constructions Rancière gives to them rather questionable.

Marx's challenge to Rancière

Many of the concepts that are important to Marxism and to a Marxist response to Rancière are developed in the texts of Marx that Rancière reads – or, I argue, misreads. These are Marx's early texts (after his break with Althusser, Rancière almost never discusses any of Marx's work later than the 1852 *Eighteenth Brumaire*) concerned with the critique of the Young Hegelians and the critique of politics. Rancière considers the critique of politics in Marx to be 'the canonical formulation' of metapolitics, which Rancière considers the most recently developed

method by which philosophy attempts to deny the existence of politics. Metapolitics functions by seeing politics as a falsehood that obscures some more fundamental truth and that can be interpreted in order to discover this truth. Metapolitics interprets politics according to 'a symptomology that detects a sign of untruth within every political distinction' (Rancière, 1999, p. 82). According to Rancière, the truth that metapolitics insists on finding behind politics is 'the social, social issues, social classes, the real movement of society' (1999, p. 82). This is the argument Rancière finds in *On the Jewish Question*; he interprets Marx as criticising politics as unreal in contrast to a civil society that is held to be real: 'politics is the lie about a reality that is called society' (Rancière, 1999, p. 83).

Rancière is certainly not alone in interpreting *On the Jewish Question* in this way. Avineri's influential *The Social and Political Thought of Karl Marx* (1968, p. 14) treats the text in much the same way, as an example of a 'Feuerbachian' critique of Hegel in which, in the same way Feuerbach unmasked God as an unreal reflection of man, Marx is held to have unmasked politics as an unreal reflection of the economy. However, this is a significant oversimplification of Marx's early position, as shown by Kouvelakis's comparison between Marx and his Young Hegelian contemporaries, including Engels, who advanced a position Kouvelakis calls 'social-ist' because it 'seeks in "the social" a new, radically anti-political principle of cohesion and harmony' (2003, p. 271). It is this 'social-ist' position, which Rancière attributes to Marx, that *On the Jewish Question* sets out to criticise.[4] What Marx actually criticises in *On the Jewish Question* is the *separation* of politics and economics, and he criticises this not just as a falsehood but as something more complicated: a practical illusion. This criticism, of course, strikes directly at Rancière's insistence on the distinctiveness of politics.

We can see how this works by comparing Rancière's discussion of the Rights of Man to Marx's. Rancière writes that Marx's metapolitics interprets the assertion of equality in the Rights of Man as a 'formal' equality that is deceptive or hypocritical, that rights are '"form" belied by their contents or "appearances" made to conceal reality' (Rancière, 1999, p. 87). In contrast to what he takes to be Marx's position, Rancière argues that formal rights are one of the ways in which equality becomes visible, and thus the political task is to provide a content of equality to match this form, 'not to contradict appearances but, on the contrary, to confirm them' (1999, p. 88). But this misses Marx's criticism. Marx does not treat the Rights of Man as false or hypocritical; on the contrary, he

takes them seriously and reads them quite literally (1975, pp. 228–31). On this basis, Marx concludes that the equality embodied is genuine equality, 'namely that each man is equally considered to be a self-sufficient monad' (1975, p. 230). The Rights of Man, then, are with no pretence, the rights of what Marx calls 'egoistic man', the Rights of Man as an isolated individual 'withdrawn into himself, his private interest and his private desires and separated from the community' (1975, p. 230). One could hardly contend that such a description of modern society is hypocritical or misleading; on the contrary, it is this separation that produced capitalist society and that capitalist society is so insistent on reproducing. This is a materialised appearance, or what Marx (1975, p. 107) calls a 'practical illusion'.

It is this dimension of the practical effect, or material instantiation, of appearance that is missing in Rancière. Rancière's conception of politics is strictly formal, in that politics is understood purely in terms of its own internal logical structure: 'Politics is the practice whereby the logic of the characteristic of equality takes the form of the processing of a wrong, in which politics becomes the argument of a basic wrong that ties in with some established dispute in the distribution of jobs, roles, and places.' (1999, p. 35)[5] That is, politics has a particular formal structure (the logic of equality and the structural location of the 'part of no part'), which is the same in ancient Greece as it is today. Rancière's theory is ahistorical in a way that belies his extensive historical research: the rich empirical detail of these cases in the end only makes them instances of the transhistorical schema of 'politics' (see Rockhill, 2009, p. 61).

One example of this formalism is Rancière's discussion of Blanqui's self-description as a 'proletarian':

> Asked by the magistrate to give his profession, Blanqui simply replies: 'proletarian'. The magistrate immediately objects to this response: 'That is not a profession', thereby setting himself up for copping the accused's immediate response: 'It is the profession of thirty million Frenchmen who live off their labor and who are deprived of political rights.' (Rancière, 1999, p. 37)

Rancière's discussion of this event does not touch at all on the social and economic changes of the nineteenth century that created the conditions in which these 30 million proletarians worked and acted. Instead, he focuses on 'the double acceptance of a single word, "profession"' (Rancière, 1999, p. 37), a supposed piece of wordplay by which Blanqui

converts the term 'proletarian' into 'a profession of faith, a declaration of membership in a collective' (Rancière, 1999, p. 38). For Rancière, a redistribution of the sensible takes place immediately in this moment of linguistic expression, and so the expression is itself political; indeed, expression is the only thing that is properly political. Because the political effectivity of linguistic expression is built into Rancière's definition of politics, he brackets any questions of other effects that linguistic expression might have or, more importantly, might not have. Does Blanqui's 'profession of faith' change the material circumstances which constrain the actions of these 30 million proletarians? Rancière doesn't tell us because such considerations fall out of the purview of politics as he understands it.

A more consequential instance of Rancière's purely linguistic-expressive conception of politics is his discussion of two classical assertions of equality, the revolt of the Scythian slaves and the secession of the Roman plebeians. The Scythian slaves 'decided that, until proven wrong, they were the equal of the warriors. They consequently surrounded the territory with a great big trench and armed themselves, ready to hold their ground when the conquerors should return' (Rancière, 1999, p. 12). The warriors, however, responded by treating the armed slaves simply as slaves, approaching them with the instrument traditionally used to cow slaves, the whip, and 'struck by the spectacle, the slaves took to their heels without a fight' (Rancière, 1999, p. 12). According to Rancière, the failure of the slave revolt is quite predictable because opposing the masters by force of arms 'does not create a divided community' containing both slaves and masters in which 'politics as the deployment of a wrong' could be practiced (1999, p. 13). This is contrasted with the secession of the plebeians. The Roman plebeians, as Rancière, drawing on Ballanche, tells the story, set up their own political community in which they 'execute a series of speech acts that mimic those of the patricians' (Rancière, 1999, p. 24). In doing so, they disrupt the order of Rome by acting as if they were speaking beings to whom the patricians would have to speak if they wanted to continue to share a city with them. The demonstration of the plebeians is successful, and the patricians decide that 'since the plebs have become creatures of speech, there is nothing left to do but talk to them' (Rancière, 1999, pp. 25–6). The comparison between these two attempted revolts, one a failure and the other a success, shows us the kernel of Rancière's political theory: the Scythian slaves attempted to liberate themselves through action and so necessarily failed; the plebeians were successful because they simply talked about liberation.[6]

In other words, as Michael Dillon (2003) puts it, 'beyond the scholastic rendition and organization of litigation, argumentation and demonstration favoured by Rancière as the order proper to politics' there is also 'a more performative theatre of violence, power and cruelty'. It is in understanding the relationship of politics to these affective and material dimensions that Marxism can be a useful supplement to Rancière, correcting the limits of what Marx in 1844 called 'political understanding', which 'is just political understanding because its thought does not transcend the limits of politics' (1975, p. 413). Because of this limitation, political understanding fails to see the world in which political activity takes place:

> The more one-sided, i.e. the more perfect, *political* understanding is, the more completely it puts its faith in the *omnipotence* of the will; the blinder it is towards the *natural* and spiritual *limitations* of the will, the more incapable it becomes of discovering the real source of the ills of society. (Marx, 1975, p. 413)

So it is with Rancière, who, by abstracting politics from any (social, economic) conditions and equating it purely with free (that is, undetermined and unruly) speech, rules out any materialist understanding of politics. (As Peter Hallward, [2009, p. 156] rhetorically asks, 'Does political action no longer need to be informed by a detailed understanding of how the contemporary world works, how exploitation operates, how transnational corporations go about their business?')[7] The young Marx argues for an analysis that sees politics as inseparably connected to the non-political; the traditional name for such an analysis within the Marxist tradition is *the critique of political economy*, and it is in his mature work that Marx demonstrates what such an analysis would look like.

In *Capital*, Marx develops the theory of 'practical illusion' that he first introduces in his critique of Hegel and that I suggested provides an alternative to Rancière's conception of politics as a matter of expressive visibility. Rancière's reduction of Marx's early work to a 'sociology', figured as reactionary, leads him to neglect the development of a theory of appearance in Marx's later work that challenges Rancière's own account of the relationship between aesthetics and politics. This Marxist theory of appearance is the theory of the commodity developed in the early chapters of *Capital*, in which, through the dialectic of use value and exchange value, the commodity form comes to liberate itself from the material objects that are supposed to embody it (Marx, 1976, p. 158).

That is, Marx's theory is not at all a 'sociology' in Rancière's sense that seeks to explode appearances to get to the truth behind them but rather questions the obviousness of appearances themselves and attempts to provide a materialist theory of how these appearances arise. The paradox underlying *Capital* is that it requires intense theoretical effort to understanding what might seem to be most obvious: that, in capitalism, things 'appear as what they are' (Marx, 1976, p. 166).[8] The later parts of *Capital* follow this liberated appearance as it travels increasingly widely through the capitalism of nineteenth-century Britain – through its materialisation in factories and machinery to workers' housing and workers' struggles until the multiplication of appearances threatens to overflow both Marx's page and the capitalist order he is chronicling.[9]

The theory of the relationship between politics and appearance we find in the later Marx, then, is very different from Rancière's. For Rancière, appearance is something that can be consciously deployed: the part of no part makes itself visible and thereby effects a change in the distribution of the sensible. For Marx, on the other side, appearance is a material process in which we may be implicated but which certainly extends far beyond us. Hence, when Marx writes of politics, especially after 1848, he does so in terms of the precarious navigation of this space of appearance.[10]

Marxism after Rancière

Rancière is a critic of Marxism with an unusually extensive background in the study of Marx. This background certainly influenced the development of his subsequent thought: the rejection of Althusser's pedagogy can be seen in all of Rancière's central concepts. However, the specificity of the Marxist background against which Rancière was reacting colours his work in ways that may not be particularly helpful. Rancière's diagnosis of the philosophy implicit in the Marxism that he argues reduces politics to sociology may help us avoid the pathologies of objectivism, but, as Toscano (2011, p. 230) points out, is this really a particularly live theoretical danger in the current conjuncture? However, Rancière's deployment, in the name of an uncompromising radicality, of central liberal categories, such as equality, may provide an opportunity to sharpen the (perhaps rather rusty) weapons of the Marxist critique of liberalism, as well as encourage us to consider what is enduringly revolutionary and what may not be in Marx's attack on nineteenth-century liberalism now that liberalism is being (or has been) reconfigured into neoliberalism. In addition, Rancière's revival of the connection between

politics and appearance (a trope with a history stretching at least back to Niccolò Machiavelli and encompassing Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Hannah Arendt) might encourage us to look at Marx's neglected contribution to this debate and thereby find new resources for thinking about politics within the Marxist corpus.

Notes

1. For a detailed discussion of the development of Rancière's relationship to Marxism, see Renault, 2012.
2. Rancière's chapter does not appear in the 2nd edition of *Lire le Capital* and so does not appear in the English translation, which is based on this edition. The complete translation was subsequently published in *Ideology, Method, and Marx: Essays from Economy and Society* (Rancière, 1989a).
3. Bourdieu is mentioned only infrequently in *Althusser's Lesson* but is identified as the central figure of sociology in later works, which I discuss directly.
4. I am reminded here of Nealon's acerbic remark that Rancière exemplifies a tendency to attribute to Marxism what it actually rejects, in which 'it is Marxist theory, not capitalism, which oppresses' (Nealon, 2011, p. 169n4).
5. This is just one of many instances in which Rancière gives a formal definition of politics, of which Bosteels, 2011, pp. 143–5, compiles an extensive 'litany'.
6. May, 2010, pp. 37–8, makes a more contemporary use of the same argumentative structure in distinguishing the first intifada – analogous to the plebeian secession – from the second intifada, which, like the Scythian slave revolt, involves armed struggle. May draws a connection between the use of arms and a supposed abandonment of equality in the second intifada purely in order to criticise the Palestinians by the scheme of Rancièrian politics without considering how changes in material and political circumstances may have changed the forms of struggle available to Palestinians.
7. Brown puts the same point rather more forcefully: 'Nor will any effort to situate our struggles be aided by what Rancière has to offer: an abdication of structural analysis and a theory of politics as the unaccountable interruption of "a freedom that crops up and makes real the ultimate equality on which any social order rests," of politics as what unaccountably "occurs whenever a community with the capacity to argue and to make metaphors is likely, at any time and through anyone's intervention, to crop up." This is a theory of the relation between politics and "the police," as a game of whack-a-mole' (Brown, 2011, p. 23).
8. For a fuller explanation of this paradox, see Heinrich, 2012, pp. 73–4.
9. Marx's discussion of the overflowing population of London overflows the page of *Capital*, spilling into a two-page-long footnote that begins with a discussion of Malthus before meandering through parsons, celibacy, the breeding of churchmen, Hume and unproductive labour (1976, pp. 766–8).
10. While this concern marks all of Marx's texts after 1848, including the discussion of workers' struggle in *Capital*, the most extensive treatment is in the *Eighteenth Brumaire*, on which see Carver, 2002.

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10

'I, Ideology, Speak.' Elements of Žižek's Ideological Prosopopoeia

Simon Hajdini

Let me begin with an anecdote. Not just with any anecdote but with what is perhaps the ultimate philosophical anecdote, the anecdote of philosophy itself, of its own anecdotic beginning. One night, Thales, the first philosopher, left his house to go for a walk. And as he was going about his usual philosophical business, fixing his gaze on the stars, he failed to notice a ditch and fell right into it. As he lay in the ditch, cursing his bad fortune, an old Thracian woman appeared and addressed him laughingly: 'Do you, O Thales, who cannot see what is under your feet, think that you shall understand what is in heaven?'

This pinch of an anecdote, as conveyed by Diogenes Laërtius, is usually read as a mockery of philosophy and its radical detachment from what one could naively call reality. But for my present purpose, it could also be read as a parable of ideology and its critique. In this respect, the anecdote evokes two obvious Marxist references. On the one hand, it seems to stage Marx's eleventh thesis on Feuerbach, delimiting philosophy as a futile speculative endeavour from real socio-economic struggles, which alone are capable of triggering change. On the other hand, the anecdote evokes the notion of ideology as false consciousness, which we usually attribute to Marx and Engels's *The German Ideology*. Here ideology is conceived as perverted, false consciousness operating behind the backs of its subjects and coming into contradiction with the reality of the life process. The anecdotal opposition between the celestial domain of speculation and the worldly realm of reality, between the sky of reflection and the earthly gutter, corresponds perfectly to the conceptual opposition between false consciousness, on the one hand, and real being of the life process, on the other. With her remark, the Thracian woman is revealed as a devoted reader of *The German Ideology*. She places illusion on the side of consciousness, Thales's chimeric speculation, and opposes

to it the ditch of truth, the material immediacy of the domain of being. Hence, she practices the critique of ideology in the traditional sense: her laughter is like the 'melody' that the critique of ideology sings to the false consciousness in order to place it on the firm ground of reality.

'I, ideology, speak.'

At this point, we encounter the first key conceptual anchoring point of Žižek's reinvention of the notion of ideology. The first step of the critique concerns the simplistic opposition between being and consciousness, which places the deception, the chimeric illusion, on the side of consciousness as opposed to the reality of the life process. Countering such an understanding, Žižek's 'illusion' is neither 'internal' nor 'external', neither on the side of consciousness, the realm of 'pure' knowledge, nor on the side of reality; rather, it is on the side of a paradoxical materiality of belief persisting as a spectral exteriority of the interiority itself. Belief is extimate, to use Lacan's term, it is excluded into the interiority, and in this sense its status is stricto sensu objective. It is along these lines that one should read the famous formulation from Marx's *Capital*: 'Sie wissen es nicht, aber sie tun es' (Marx, 1968, p. 88); that is, 'They do this without being aware of it' (Marx, 1976, pp. 166–7), more precisely, 'They don't know it, but they are doing it.' The fallacy is not on the side of knowledge but on the side of Being itself: 'So now we have made a decisive step forward', Žižek writes, 'we have established a new way to read the Marxian formula "they do not know it, but they are doing it": the illusion is not on the side of knowledge, it is already on the side of reality itself, of what the people are doing' (Žižek, 1989, p. 32).[1]

Before I continue examining the presuppositions of Žižek's critique of ideology, let me pause for a moment to consider the specific conditions of Žižek's reinvention. Žižek is one of the few thinkers who insist not only on the use of the notion of ideology but also on practicing the critique of ideology in times considered to be post-ideological. At this point, Žižek follows the break 'represented by Althusser, by his insistence on the fact that a certain cleft, a certain fissure, misrecognition, characterizes the human condition as such: by the thesis that the idea of possible end of ideology is an ideological idea *par excellence*' (Žižek, 1989, p. 2; see also Althusser, 2005). If we accept the twofold thesis on the effectiveness of ideology in supposedly post-ideological times and on the inoperativeness of traditional methods of ideology critique, we must outline the functioning of ideology today by detecting the causes

of the inoperativeness of traditional ideology critique. In short, we must engage in the critique of the (traditional) critique of ideology. At this crucial point of the diagnosis of our current situation, Žižek relies on the now classical *Critique of Cynical Reason*, in which Peter Sloterdijk conceptualises the shift from the traditional or naive mode of the functioning of ideology to the cynical or reflected mode. The traditional critique was able to count on the naive ignorance of the ideological subject whose unconscious ideological belief had only to be made conscious for the illusion to magically dissolve itself. Today's enlightened cynical subject is, however, by definition immune to such a procedure. But if the time of the traditional critique is over, if this critique is helpless in face of the new ideological reality, we nonetheless cannot overlook the essential fact that its helplessness and inoperativeness is a paradoxical and perverted sign of its utmost success, of its *prevalent efficacy*. The traditional critique of ideology has become part of the prevalent ideological matrix; ideology has appropriated the elements of its former critique. That is why Sloterdijk (1987, p. 5) speaks of an 'enlightened false consciousness', a false consciousness that is false while being fully conscious of its own falsity. Today ideological deception appears in the form of its opposite as a sign of heroic enlightenment.

But what exactly enables this appropriation of the critique of ideology by ideology itself? The traditional critique was founded on an inherent classification; its opposition between real knowledge and blind belief was distributed in accordance with a silent supposition of the radical otherness of the naive subject, and the ideological mystification was structurally placed on the side of the Other whose fate it was to be classified by those who themselves escaped classification. Such a matrix accounts for a 'spontaneous ideology' of the traditional ideology critique. In his text on the ideological state apparatuses, Louis Althusser (2014, p. 265) introduces the concept of 'the practical *denegation* of the ideological character of ideology by ideology' to show that ideology implies not only ignorance of reality but also ignorance of this ignorance itself, which means that the functioning of ideology ultimately relies on a mechanism of the classificatory function.[2] This specific denegation of ideology forms also the disavowed presupposition of the procedure of ideology critique, leaving the classifier unclassified. If from here we turn to the cynical reformulation of ideology, the reflected false consciousness becomes but the reflection onto itself of this external split, a junction of the naive and the critical consciousness in the single figure of cynical Reason. And if in the traditional mode the statement 'I am ideology' was positively impossible insofar as ideology is always already a disavowal of itself

as ideology, this doesn't pertain to its cynical mode, which seemingly escapes ideology by constantly proclaiming one's own involvement in it. The prosopopoeia of ideology, the once impossible statement 'I, ideology, speak', thus forms the rhetorical model of contemporary ideological practices. The ideology of the naive consciousness excluded the possibility of self-distance towards one's embeddedness in ideology; it functioned precisely insofar as the subject was unable to lend it his or her voice. The cynical subject, however, is constantly lending his or her voice to ideology, which through him or her is constantly 'unmasking' (and 'abolishing') itself. The prosopopoeia of ideology as the key conceptual result of the critique of the critique of ideology forms a matrix that enables us to grasp the key elements of Žižek's notion of ideology.

Fetishism without the fetish

Žižek's cynical reformulation of Marx's formula of naive consciousness ('They don't know it, but they are doing it.') runs as follows: 'They know it, but they are still doing it.' In the first step, Žižek reads this matrix in terms of Octave Mannoni's formula of fetishism: 'I know well, but all the same …' (Mannoni, 2003). For Žižek, the reflected false consciousness points to the material power of ideology due to which ideology persists even when its mechanisms are unmasked and fully acknowledged by the subject. The cynical subject of knowledge uses the rhetorical figure of prosopopoeia, lending his or her voice to ideology in order to subvert it – but this self-distancing from belief doesn't do away with ideology; on the contrary, it sustains it. Cynical distance doesn't abolish belief and is irreducible to disbelief; rather, it makes visible a certain mode of belief that insists despite better knowledge. However, such an understanding of the relation between knowledge and belief entails a certain deadlock, a certain trap to be avoided. Let us take the classical psychoanalytical example of fetishist disavowal: 'I know well women don't have a penis, but all the same I believe they do.' The subject knows and is fully aware of the fact that women don't possess a penis, but 'unconsciously', through symptomatic behaviour, he still believes the opposite. My thesis is that such a reading of the formula of fetishism is already an interpretation and that it undermines the formula's radical status by adding to it a specific secondary *element of 'external' negation*, or a negation at the level of the statement. Is fetishism merely another name for the split between an affirmation and a negation of a predicate? And by asserting this, do we not slip back into the traditional matrix of ideology? Is the formula of fetishism really reducible to 'I know well x, but all the same I believe

non-*x*'? Is this negation of the predicate a structural feature of fetishist disavowal and thus the degree zero of contemporary functioning of ideology? It seems that Žižek is fully aware of this deadlock even though he doesn't formulate it explicitly. In fetishism we're not dealing with a simple split between knowledge and belief; in it, knowledge appears twice. It appears as knowledge opposed by belief and at once also as knowledge of this belief itself: 'I know well I believe, but all the same I believe' – such is the formula of reflected false consciousness. In it, belief doesn't contest knowledge but rather functions as its ratification.

The best example of the operativeness of fetishist disavowal beyond 'external' negation is provided by Lacan's remark on the jealous husband: even if the reasons for his jealousy prove absolutely justified, his jealousy is no less pathological, no less subject to mystification. Let me formulate Lacan's remark in terms of the formula of fetishism: '*I know she's cheating* on me, but all the same *I believe she's cheating* on me (and hence my jealousy remains pathological).' It is easy to notice that the formula bears all the features of fetishist disavowal without requiring 'external' negation. This absence of negation immediately shows that belief functions not as a barrier to knowledge but as its support, not as a support external to knowledge but as *an element of the belief of knowledge itself, belief as ratification of knowledge*. Such a reading of the formula of fetishism condenses all the essential theoretical points of Žižek's theory of ideology, combining the Marxist problematic with the conceptual foundations of Hegelian dialectics and Lacanian psychoanalysis.

If we formulate the example of jealousy in terms of the common reading of the formula of fetishism, we get the following statement: 'I know my wife's *not cheating* on me, but all the same I believe she *is cheating* on me.' Here, the pathological character of jealousy amounts to the opposition between knowledge and belief: the husband's suspicion is pathological because it opposes his knowledge, and as soon as it proves to be founded, as soon as this external opposition between knowledge and belief is dismissed (in favour of knowledge), the pathological dimension of his jealousy vanishes, too. Lacan's formula is founded on a more radical concept of the pathological, on a radical notion of mystification as an inherent characteristic of jealousy, which as such remains pathological despite better knowledge. The formula given above entails two key operations. The twofold operation consists of the 'repression' of the belief and the formation of a substitute; that is, rationalisation (Žižek, 1991, p. 242), assuming, say, the following (chauvinistic) form: 'I know she's not cheating on me, but a statistical fact remains that women are cheaters not to be trusted.' Let us oppose to this example the formula

that doesn't require 'external' negation: '*I know she is* cheating on me, but all the same *I believe she is* cheating on me.' In the first case the belief ('that she's cheating on me') is 'repressed' because it pragmatically contradicts better knowledge ('that she's *not* cheating on me'); that is, because it negates the very *content of knowledge*. In the second case, this ground for 'repression' falls away, since belief in this case neither contradicts knowledge nor negates its content. But the 'repression' nonetheless remains in place and so does jealousy's pathological character. The gist of this pathological nature of jealousy can be formulated as follows: 'You know you are being cheated on, *so why are you still jealous?* Why do you still *believe* she's cheating on you when in fact you *know well* she's cheating on you? Why are you rationalising?'

Imagine a husband who suspects that his wife is unfaithful and hires a detective who confirms his suspicion. Yet the husband doesn't want to act upon his knowledge; he refuses to draw the consequences and decides to keep on living the old way. It would be too simple to claim that he doesn't want to know and that he would much rather sacrifice his knowledge (of her unfaithfulness) in favour of his belief (in her faithfulness), sticking to the lie and 'repressing' the truth. Such a reading misses the fact that he believed in her unfaithfulness, not faithfulness, and that his decision to stay with her is not a decision to believe in her faithfulness despite better knowledge. The situation is more complex: *despite his knowledge of her unfaithfulness, he keeps on believing in her unfaithfulness*. His knowledge is not disavowed by a naive illusion of her faithfulness; he disavows it in an 'enlightened' way by continuing to believe in her unfaithfulness, which enables him to stick to his (mere) suspicion. The fetishist disavowal thus negates without negating the predicate – knowledge is disavowed not by way of *not* believing, by *not wanting* to believe, but, more radically, *by believing in it*, *by wanting* to believe. The husband is deceiving himself by way of the truth. He knows he is being cheated on, but he continues to act as if he *believed* he is being cheated on (by, say, performing the usual rituals of suspicion and yielding to excessive outbursts of jealousy). This surplus of belief at work in the materiality of his actions, this 'too-muchness' of knowledge, forms the element that engages his enjoyment and effectively makes his jealousy pathological.

The key element of my formula of 'fetishism without the fetish' thus concerns a *contradiction* reduced, in this reading, to its degree zero. The subtraction of the 'external' negation between my knowledge that *x* and my simultaneous belief that non-*x* doesn't subtract from the contradiction as such but, on the contrary, presents it in its minimal and purely formal state, as a pure gap, a formal surplus of knowledge, which has no

content but stands for a pure self-distance of knowledge, for its inherently inconsistent character.

Guilty of nothing

However, the extraction of 'external' negation as a secondary feature of the formula of fetishism doesn't imply a simple overlapping of belief and knowledge, a 'sublime victory' of the enlightened knowledge over pathological belief. The contradictory nature of the formula of jealousy and the universal status of illusion as insistence of the 'external' within the 'internal' cannot be grasped without recourse to Hegelian dialectics, which at this key point enters Žižek's theory of ideology. In the first step, illusion had to be extracted, separated or subtracted from the field of real knowledge and situated in the context of symbolic belief, embodied in the material practice or (fetishist) object. But this displacement won't do; there has to be another, Hegelian turn of the screw: illusion is neither on the side of the Concept nor on the side of Reality. If we free illusion from the grasp of the Concept and hastily place it within the field of (external) Reality, we are led to a misleading conclusion that illusion can be abolished by means of the Concept; that is, that the false reality of ideological mystification can be blown away by better knowledge. Such a conclusion is based on a vulgar understanding of Hegelian 'reconciliation' (*Versöhnung*) as sublation of (false) Reality in the Concept. Žižek insists that the crucial point of Hegel's notion of 'reconciliation' is much more radical: it represents the moment when the 'external' deadlock of Reality proves to be an 'internal' deadlock of the Concept itself, an element of its own inconsistency.[3] The pathological character of belief thus signifies the internal otherness of knowledge, a split that is internal and at once radically heterogeneous. My thesis is that the introduction of 'external' negation into the formula of fetishism deprives us of this precise Hegelian insight: by placing knowledge in an external opposition to belief, it implicitly formulates the problem of ideological illusion in terms of the naive problem of surpassing belief by means of the certainty pertaining to knowledge. By trying to protect knowledge from belief, such a position deprives itself of the knowledge of the heterogeneous surplus of belief at work within knowledge itself.[4]

The example of jealousy confronts us with the degree zero of negativity, the 'minimal difference' necessarily missed by the standard reading of the formula of fetishism. What remains hidden in the standard reading is the negativity of belief that is not simply external to knowledge but forms its internal otherness, knowledge in its Hegelian 'oppositional

determination'. The standard reading misses the point that belief in its minimal determination is but a gap in knowledge, a gap that is literally nothing other than the nothing separating knowledge *from itself*. The standard reading thus proves to be secondary, and the negativity of 'external' negation introduced by this reading is essentially a negation of the negativity that is the self-splitting of knowledge. The pathological jealousy in its standard form of 'I *know* she's *not* cheating on me, but all the same I *believe* that she *is*' amounts to a reaction formation, a rationalisation I cling to in order to be able to escape the Real of knowledge itself, the Real that remains displaced, inaccessible and insisting on the unconscious, Other Scene.[5]

One of Žižek's favourite examples of ideology as 'false consciousness' is Carpenter's *They Live* (1988), in which the protagonist, John Nada, discovers critico-ideological glasses, which enable him to see the ideological manipulation that remains hidden to others. Looking at a dollar bill, he sees written on it 'This is your God', which represents the hidden lever of the behaviour of individuals in the actual exchange process. The glasses represent the key moment of the passage from the Imaginary to the Symbolic: as soon as I put them on, I perceive beneath the glitter of coloured ads a symbolic message in black and white, a series of signifiers as the lever of manipulation. We could say that Carpenter's classic, insofar as it stages the procedure of the critique of ideology, is somewhat insufficient and fails to capture the specific aspects of contemporary functioning of ideology. The subjects in the film are still caught in the traditional *dispositif*: they don't know that they believe that money is god, as opposed to the cynical subjects who know that they believe that money is god. Today, the ideological message is no longer hidden but openly proclaimed, and it is precisely this immediacy, this lack of 'practical denegation of ideology', that seemingly subtracts from it its ideological character. To penetrate the ideological mask and see the real face, we seemingly no longer need any critico-ideological glasses; manipulation is at hand. In Žižek's terms, today we simply know that we believe that money is god, but all the same we keep on believing it.

One can easily add an alternative critico-ideological twist to Carpenter's film, one that would take into account the shift within the rhetoric of contemporary ideological practices. When John Nada puts on his glasses, he not only sees ideological manipulation but also discovers its source in the figure of monstrous aliens walking among 'ordinary' people. If we proceed from the horizon of the film's narrative and from the thesis that in times of prosopopoeia as the prevalent rhetorical mode of ideological practices, we no longer need critico-ideological glasses, then we

nonetheless have to resist the conclusion that today we are all John Nada and that we have unmasked ideological manipulation. The shift rather implies that today we are all monstrous aliens, automatons aware of the manipulation, knowing that we believe that money is god but all the same believing it, which renders our knowledge as such inconsistent, monstrous. Along the same lines we can also imagine an alternative to the famous fight scene between the hero and his friend, who cannot be convinced to put on the glasses and realise the truth. In our 'enlightened' times, such a scene is impossible since there is no sucker to be convinced. The critico-ideological fist should therefore be raised against the cynically enlightened subject, who might – like Edward Norton in *Fight Club* (1999) – beat himself up after putting on the critico-ideological glasses and seeing in the mirror his own monstrous face, the blind automatism as the truth of his 'enlightened' position.

Any ideological mystification based on fetishist disavowal and entailing 'external' negation hence relies on the Real kernel of the self-difference of knowledge; it relies on a gap, an inherent and inherently heterogeneous relation to the surplus of knowledge, the surplus of its own negativity. This surplus is but a pure gap of self-difference – that is, a difference of an element in relation to itself, in relation to the core of its own absence. Let us take Žižek's example of anti-Semitism:

> Instead of the direct split 'I know that the Jews are guilty of nothing, but nevertheless ... (I believe that they are guilty)' comes the statement of the type 'I know that the Jews are guilty of nothing; however, the fact is that in the development of capitalism, the Jews, as the representatives of financial and business capital, have usually profited from the productive labour of others'; instead of the direct split 'I know that there is no God, but nevertheless ... (I believe that there is)' appears a statement of the type 'I know that there is no God, but I respect religious ritual and take part in it because this ritual supports ethical values and encourages brotherhood and love among people.' Such statements are good examples of what might be called 'lying by way of the truth': the second part of the statement, the claim which follows the syntagm 'but nevertheless ... ', can on a factual level be largely accurate but nevertheless operates as a lie because in the concrete symbolic context in which it appears it operates as a ratification of the unconscious belief that the Jews are nevertheless guilty, that God nevertheless exists, and so on – without taking into account these 'investments' of the unconscious belief, the functioning of such statements remains totally incomprehensible. (Žižek, 1991, p. 242)

This passage contains all of the key elements discussed so far. The first example of anti-Semitic mystification corresponds to the example of jealousy, if only one reads it correctly; that is, by the letter. Beyond secondary rationalisation, which tries to account for the anti-Semitic position by relying on contingent historical circumstances and pseudoscientific argumentation, we find the precise structure of disavowal: 'I know the Jews are guilty of nothing, but all the same I believe they are guilty of nothing.' The second part of the statement functions as a quilting point that retroactively lays out the truth of the first part, which literally accuses the Jews of being *guilty of nothing*. And this nothing, this pure self-difference of knowledge, counts; it functions as the mark of an unconscious racist investment. What is that disturbing element, that stain which anti-Semitism inscribes into the Jewish Being, if not an unsymbolisable surplus that is but an embodiment of a void, a mark of the anti-Semite's unconscious desire? This of course does not mean that it is 'subjective'. The anti-Semite's desire is the desire of the Other, it forms an Other, decentred scene of *social reality itself*. The same point can be made about the belief in God. Having subtracted from the secondary alloys of rationalisation, we stumble on a leftover of a libidinal investment in God, which the atheist cannot get rid of and which forces him into the process of substitute formation. Just think of how Richard Dawkins, one of the most infamous atheists speaking out against religious delusions, reproduces the logic of zero-degree fetishism. His position is irreducible to a simple denial of God; to this denial, Dawkins adds an obscene praise of the miraculousness of nature: 'I know there is no God, but isn't it wonderful how the interaction of neuronal, chemical and etc. processes can produce this surplus known as the human being capable not only of a scientific understanding of the surrounding world but also of an aesthetic etc. experience?' This slip of a proclaimed atheist into obscene 'pagan' spiritualism relies precisely on the Žižekian dispositif: 'I know there is no God, but all the same I believe there is no God.' If we don't detect that the surplus of belief marks a split inherent to knowledge and delineates the space of the subject of the unconscious, such statements remain completely incomprehensible. As Žižek emphasises in the passage quoted above, such supplements can contain a factual truth while nonetheless betraying a pathological investment:

> Let us suppose, for example, that an objective look would confirm – why not? – that Jews really do financially exploit the rest of the population, that they do sometimes seduce our young daughters,

> that some of them do not wash regularly. Is it not clear that this has nothing to do with the real roots of our anti-Semitism? Here, we have only to remember the Lacanian proposition concerning the pathologically jealous husband: even if all the facts he quotes in support of his jealousy are true, even if his wife really is sleeping around with other men, this does not change one bit the fact that his jealousy is a pathological, paranoid construction. (Žižek, 1989, p. 48)[6]

Such examples illustrate why the traditional procedure of symptomatic reading remains impotent when faced with today's ideological condition. But they also clearly show the point of encounter between Marxism and psychoanalysis, their necessary encounter, in which Lacanian psychoanalysis doesn't play the role of an ideological 'comrade in arms' of the critique of ideology, the role of its faithful 'little helper', but, on the contrary, is the key lever of the reinvention of the critique of ideology in our supposedly post-ideological era. The symptomatic reading was facing naive subjects who didn't know that they believed; the contemporary critique of ideology, however, has to reconceptualise the levers of ideological mystification and develop tools that can grasp the 'enlightened naive consciousness'. To drop the idea of 'external' negation determining the relation between knowledge and belief means to drop the notion of belief as the mask of better knowledge, to drop the idea of the levers that are catapulting the critique of ideology right back into its traditional frame. The reduction of the cynical formula to its elementary form shows how the relation between belief and knowledge cannot be understood in terms of a mask and a true face beneath it. The reduction of 'external' negation is precisely the reduction of the surface of knowledge and the surface of belief to one single surface, the Mobius strip, where knowledge automatically passes into belief without having to cross the edge that supposedly separates it from belief. However, such a reduction to a single surface doesn't imply pure self-transparency of knowledge; on the contrary, it shows the Real kernel of enjoyment, which structures the phantasmatic frame as the support of reality. As Žižek maintains, the cynical position in fact thwarts the distinction between the mask and the true face beneath it, and yet 'cynical reason, with all its ironic detachment, leaves untouched the fundamental level of ideological fantasy, the level on which ideology structures the social reality itself' (Žižek, 1989, p. 30). The Lacanian concept of fantasy as a pathological investment enables us to make sense of apparently paradoxical examples of the operativeness of ideology in times of its decline, in times of cynical unmasking. The masks are no longer hiding anything; they are abolished as such, but the

reality 'behind' them paradoxically persists. In Žižek's words, despite the sober abolishment of the ideological dream, despite our awakening into reality as it 'truly is', 'we remain throughout "the consciousness of our ideological dream"' (Žižek, 1989, p. 48). The masks have fallen; yet the phantasmatic reality 'behind' them remains operative.

The fourth negation

Let us examine the structure of negation at work in Žižek's 'fetishistic sequence'. Alain Badiou (2008) has distinguished between three types of negation: the classical, obeying the principles of contradiction and of the excluded middle; the intuitionistic, obeying the principle of contradiction while not obeying the principle of the excluded middle; and the paraconsistent, obeying the principle of the excluded middle while not obeying the principle of contradiction. Let us leave aside for a moment the fourth type of negation, the one obeying neither of the two principles, which for Badiou (2008, p. 1879) coincides with the disappearance of negation as such.

I will start with anti-Semitic rationalisation; that is, with the 'developed' formula of fetishism relying on 'external negation': 'I know that the Jews are guilty of nothing; however, the fact is that in the development of capitalism, the Jews, as the representatives of financial and business capital, have usually profited from the productive labour of others.' The statement is not contradictory. In the choice between guilt (x) and innocence (non-x), it opts for guilt; however, it does not say the Jews are *absolutely* guilty – it says only that they are guilty *more or less*. The addition that among the Jews we also find those who 'exploit the rest of the population' relativises the guilt and opens up a whole spectrum of third options, which means that the statement obeys the principle of contradiction while not obeying the principle of the excluded middle. The anti-Semitic rationalisation thus follows the logic of intuitionistic negation, 'the dim space opened between complete innocence and evident guilt' (Badiou, 2008, p. 1881). However, two points need to be made here. First, the anti-Semitic formula does not say the Jews are not guilty; it says they are guilty of nothing – and this addition is crucial because it thwarts the uncontradictory character of the statement. The statement does not claim the Jews are *not absolutely* guilty, but more or less; it claims that the Jews are *absolutely not* guilty, while at the same time claiming they are more or less guilty – which is contradictory. In the case of jealousy, this difference between the two statements corresponds to the difference between the intuitionistic statement 'I know well she is

not an absolute cheat, but all the same I believe she *is more or less a cheat*' and the statement 'I know well she is *absolutely not a cheat*, but all the same I believe she is more or less a cheat', which once again thwarts the validity of the principle of contradiction.

The most important consequence of this first point is that in this way we pass from the intuitionistic anti-Semitic rationalisation to its paraconsistent *truth*, which has the following form: 'I know well the Jews are guilty of nothing, but all the same I believe they are guilty' or 'I know well the Jews are absolutely innocent, but all the same I believe they are guilty.' The negation is strictly paraconsistent, asserting the simultaneous veracity of extreme opposites (innocence and guilt) while excluding any third option. Yet an additional step is required, a step towards zero-degree fetishism. What is needed is a further passage from the paraconsistent to 'the fourth form of negation'. This passage is strictly correlative to the exclusion of 'external' (or paraconsistent) negation, and it takes on the form of the minimal repetition of knowledge in the register of belief. If the intuitionistic formula claimed the Jews are *more or less* guilty and if the paraconsistent formula claimed they are at once *guilty and absolutely innocent*, then the zero-degree negation implies they are *guilty of nothing itself*.

This shift, relying on minimal repetition, introduces Žižek's key distinction between Nothing and less-than-nothing. The reduction of the potency of negation should hence be formulated in terms of Žižek's triad of less-than-nothing – Nothing – Something, which I have followed in my analysis of the formulas of anti-Semitism and jealousy. The central element of the intuitionistic formula is Something (Jews as 'exploiters of productive labour', women as 'statistical cheaters'), which, however, relies on the paraconsistent formula centred around Nothing and functioning as its *truth* ('the Jews are absolutely innocent', 'she is absolutely not a cheat'). With this analytical move we subtract from external negation; but yet another subtraction is needed, namely the paradoxical subtraction from Nothing, isolating the pure leftover, the Lacanian *objet petit a*, the less-than-nothing as the Real lever of the unconscious libidinal investment. The fourth form of negation hence proves to be the truth of the third one (just as the third, paraconsistent negation, proved to be the truth of the second, intuitionistic one).

But what to call this fourth logic, if it is neither classical nor intuitionistic nor paraconsistent? The paraconsistent formula is the embodiment of antagonism, of a split, a symptomal torsion, thwarting any totality and hence corresponding to the logic of the symptom. The fourth form of negation, however, subtracts from the impossible symptomal

compromise between two irreducible positions, between the surface of the declared knowledge and the depth of the concealed belief, while at the same time bringing to the fore its phantasmatic object, the less-than-nothing as the object of minimal repetition. The relation between the third and the fourth logic could hence be reduced to the relation between the (signifying) logic of the symptom and the logic of fantasy, between the Symbolic and the Real, between the differential nature of Nothing, as an element of the interplay of presence and absence, and the inert less-than-nothing or, finally, between the dialectical tension and the Real undialectisable object of ideology. The main point can be formulated as follows: the zero-degree fetishism, which relies on the operation of minimal repetition as the impossibility of affirmation, is fetishism without the fetish.

The concept of fetishism without the fetish provides the key to 'commodity fetishism without the commodity'. The passage from 'fetishist fetishism' to my formula of 'fetishism without the fetish' should be conceived in Marxian terms as the passage from classical capitalist circulation M-C-M' (exchange of money for commodity and of commodity for more money) to 'fictitious capital', which subtracts from the mediation of the commodity and coincides with the formula M-M' (exchange of money for more money, abstracting from the embodiment of value in a commodity and hence presenting the Real core of capital's self-propelling circulation). The formula M-M' thus points to the concept of 'commodity fetishism without the commodity', which corresponds to the logic and structure of 'fetishism without the fetish'; that is, to the passage from the third to the fourth form of negation. The conclusion is the same: commodity fetishism remains operative beyond this subtraction; that is, beyond value's solidification in the commodity.

Let me conclude by returning to the beginning, the anecdotic beginning of philosophy. The anecdote tells a story of a stumbling of philosophy, of its downfall, its shortcoming, its inherent detachment and failure; a story of the mythic impossibility that accompanies the very beginning of philosophy and at once marks its entire history. But what if the anecdote should be (mis)read not as a story of the ultimate shortcoming of philosophy but, more radically, as a story of the beginning of philosophy itself, as an anecdote about the birth of philosophy from the spirit of the Fall, an anecdote that in an inverted manner reproduces the sequence developed above? Is the prelapsarian Thales, fixing his gaze on the stars, not the typical pre-philosophical figure of pagan Wisdom, which has a thoroughly intuitionistic character? And is not the Fall precisely the mythic moment of the decline of this figure of

Wisdom, a point of a symptomatic return of the repressed, a falling into paraconsistency opening up a gap between the celestial realm of worthy 'speculative' objects and the ditch? The Fall as the moment of philosophy's birth, the moment philosophy falls into its ditch and cuts the umbilical cord that tied it to its ideological prehistory? Which prepares the final turn of the screw: the passage from paraconsistency to minimal repetition, the reduction of the substantial Otherness to the stain of the subject's own inherent heterogeneity, the reduction of the symbolic antagonism to the Real of the excremental object – the excremental object embodied in the Thracian woman's final remark, in her very voice, echoing the famous words used by Parmenides to remind Socrates that philosophy will not seize him fully until he finds it in him to value objects that are presumably of no philosophical dignity or importance, such as hair, spit and shit, as embodiments of less-than-nothing.

Notes

1. This conceptual shift was already performed by the Frankfurt School (Žižek, 1989, p. 28). At this point we have to leave aside another important reference of Žižek's notion of ideology, viz. Alfred Sohn-Rethel (1978) and his concept of 'real abstraction' as a form of thought outside thought, which Žižek reads in Lacanian terms of the big Other, the 'extimate' and the unconscious thinking, which persists on an always decentred Other Scene.
2. Althusser's point about the denegation of ideology is best exemplified by the famous line from Bryan Singer's *The Usual Suspects* (1995): 'The greatest trick the Devil ever pulled was convincing the world he didn't exist.'
3. 'Hegelian "reconciliation" is not a "panlogicist" sublation of all reality in the Concept but a final consent to the fact that the Concept itself is "not-all" (to use this Lacanian term). In this sense we can repeat the thesis of Hegel as the first post-Marxist: he opened up the field of a certain fissure subsequently "sutured" by Marxism.' (Žižek, 1989, p. 6)
4. The same Hegelian dialectical twist is at work in Žižek's critique of the 'benevolent' leftist defence of communism, which tries to distinguish between the innocence and purity of its Idea and the failure of its historical Reality.
5. And, incidentally, is it not precisely this *interstitiality of ideology* that escapes Althusser's notion of ideology? Fetishism without the fetish, that is, fetishism relying on the mechanism of repetition as failed affirmation, points towards the *extimate* dimension of ideological mystification, which escapes the Althusserian couple of *internal* belief and *external* reality of the state apparatuses and hence has to be situated in a realm that, strictly speaking, is 'beyond interpellation'.
6. The sentence starting with 'Is it not clear' is misprinted as 'It is not clear', which is a brilliant example of an ideological fantasy, anti-Semitism as ideology, persisting – as Sohn-Rethel's 'real abstraction' – in the exteriority of the symbolic machine, within reality itself, in the stupid automatism of the printing machine that believes (and is anti-Semitic) instead of me.

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11

'Man Produces Universally': Praxis and Production in Agamben and Marx

Jessica Whyte

In *The Kingdom of the Glory*, in the midst of outlining what he sees as a specifically Christian account of governing as constant praxis, Giorgio Agamben turns his attention to a text that has preoccupied him for several decades: *The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts* of Karl Marx. Beginning with his first book, *The Man without Content*, Agamben has repeatedly ignored Louis Althusser's suggestion that 'Marx's early works do not have to be taken into account' (Althusser, 1971, p. 35) and turned to the *Paris Manuscripts* in the course of formulating his own accounts of praxis and of history.[1] Indeed, references to Marx in Agamben's texts can be found as early as his first published essay, 'On the Limits of Violence', in which he defends Marx from the charge that his radical transformation (or *Aufhebung*) of man and nature relies on a form of historical Darwinism 'which configures History as a linear progression of necessary laws, similar to the laws governing the natural world' (Agamben, 2009, p. 106).[2] These themes – non-linear history and 'human nature' – are ones to which Agamben returns repeatedly in subsequent decades. And again and again, he is drawn to the *1844 Manuscripts*, in which he finds an account of praxis as that which 'founds the unity of man with nature, of man as natural being and man as *human* natural being' (Agamben, 1999a, p. 83).

When Agamben returns to Marx in *The Kingdom and the Glory*, however, he dismisses him in a mere paragraph as a thinker who has secularised the Christian conception of the being of creatures as divine praxis. As the theologian Augustine articulated this, the being of creatures utterly depends on the continuous praxis of God, to the point of being indistinguishable from it (see Agamben, 2011, p. 90). Referring to *The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*, in which the young Marx pronounced the 'rich, living, sensuous, concrete activity of self-objectification' to be the

true essence of man (Marx, 1988, p. 163), Agamben (2011, p. 91) writes: 'After having conceived of being as praxis, if we take God away and put man in his place, we will consequently obtain the result that the essence of man is nothing other than the praxis through which he incessantly produces himself.' Here, Marx stands accused of secularising a theological account of praxis: in conceiving the 'being of man as praxis and praxis as the self-creation of man' (Agamben, 2011, p. 91), Marx places man in the empty space of the creator God. More seriously, Agamben implicitly suggests that the early Marx secularises a Christian paradigm of the permanent government of the world: just as, for Augustine, creatures are dependent for their being on the constant operation of God, Agamben sees in Marx's account of praxis the secularisation of a paradigm marked by the constant activity of government.

How are we to understand this charge of secularisation? Hans Blumenberg (1999, pp. 1–4) has distinguished a descriptive sense of the term 'secularisation' (associated with Max Weber), one that refers simply to the view that the world has been stripped of transcendence and become more 'worldly', and a second sense, which makes a more specific claim, apparent in propositions like 'B is the secularised A' (revolutionary politics is a secularised eschatology, e.g.). The view that Marx's thought is a secularisation of Jewish or Christian messianism, in this latter sense of the term, is hardly original. From Walter Benjamin's (2003, p. 401) positive assessment of Marx's classless society as a secularisation of messianic time to Leszek Kolakowski's (1978, p. 526) attack on Marxism as a caricature of religion which 'presents its temporal eschatology as a scientific system', these secularisation theses have tended to converge on the claim that the Marxist theory of history is a secularisation of an eschatological salvation history.

For Agamben, things are otherwise: the eschatology of salvation, he argues, is only one aspect of a far larger theological paradigm of the divine *oikonomia*. Thus, while Carl Schmitt (1988, p. 36) infamously declared that 'all significant concepts of the modern state are secularised theological concepts', Agamben suggests that this account of secularisation should be extended to economic concepts. And yet 'this thesis according to which the economy could be a secularized theological paradigm acts retroactively on theology' (Agamben, 2011, p. 3) by showing that Christian theology itself conceived the history of humanity as an *oikonomia*, or a task of household administration, and was thus *originally* economic. It was this quotidian economic meaning, he argues, that was transferred into early Christianity, which made of the *oikonomia* 'an activity or task performed according to God's will' (Agamben, 2011,

p. 17). Rather than conceiving secular concepts as deriving from theological ones, Agamben's suggestion is that Christianity takes up the secular vocabulary of the Aristotelian household and the *oikonomia* of early Christianity should therefore be conceived not as a divine plan but as 'the fulfillment of a task of domestic administration' (Agamben, 2011, p. 23).

Although Agamben identifies Adam Smith's account of the 'invisible hand' as the moment the Christian *oikonomia* was transferred to modern economics, the *economy* with which he is principally concerned is the 'economy of salvation' of Christian theology. This raises questions about the specificity of 'the economy' whose genealogy Agamben seeks to provide, especially as he situates his account of economic theology in the context of what he terms the 'current triumph of economy and government over every other aspect of social life' (Agamben, 2011, p. 1). As Ellen Meiksins Wood has noted, it was the classical political economists who 'discovered the "economy" in the abstract and began emptying capitalism of its social and political content' (Meiksins Wood, 1995, p. 19.) In contrast, in his late works, Marx sought to analyse not 'the economy' but the specificity of *capitalist* social relations. In this chapter, I examine Agamben's argument that Marx secularised a Christian account of the Being of creatures as divine praxis and highlight the extent to which this is bound up with a larger critique of the metaphysics of the will. This focus on the will as a central category of the economy, I argue, reveals the limitations of Agamben's account of secularisation for understanding the current 'triumph of the economy' (Agamben, 2011, p. 1). The form of compulsion that typifies a *capitalist* economy differs significantly from that which characterised the 'despotic' relations between master and slave in the Aristotelian *oikos*. To grasp the 'silent compulsion of economic relations' under capitalism, Marx therefore had to leave the terrain of Feuerbach's secularised Christianity, on which the *1844 Manuscripts* unfold and develop a critique of political economy.

Early Agamben on early Marx

In his first book, *The Man without Content*, Agamben (1999a, p. 3) provides the most succinct formulation of the position that is central to all of his later critiques of Marx: 'Marx thinks of man's being as production.' *The Man without Content* contains what remains Agamben's most sustained engagement with Marx's thought. This is perhaps surprising, given that this work is devoted to a theme that is far from Marx's central

preoccupations: the nihilism of modern aesthetics. The importance of Marx becomes clearer, however, when Agamben situates his work in the context of a broader argument that, in modernity, the border between three distinct forms of human activity (praxis, *poiesis* and labour) has been lost, and all human doing has been reinterpreted simply as an expression of *the will*. Here, Agamben draws heavily on Hannah Arendt's account of the modern valorisation of labour, which the Greeks had considered a 'curse' because it tied the labourer to necessity and the biological life process (Arendt, 2002, p. 285). Marx, Agamben (1999a, p. 70) writes, is the thinker for whom labour becomes the 'expression of man's very humanity'. Yet Marx, on this account, is not only the thinker who defines man's being as production – he is also the thinker for whom '[p]roduction means praxis, "sensuous human activity"' (Agamben, 1999a, p. 79).[3]

From Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* onwards, Agamben argues, post-Hegelian thinkers have been faced with the problem of mediating between the universal concept of man and particular, sensuous men. *Gattungswesen*, or species-being, he suggests, is the concept through which this mediation has been attempted. Although the term '*Gattungswesen*' appeared in Hegel's *Encyclopedia*, it referred there 'to the "natural" component of human life, in particular, its sexual and reproductive aspects' (Breckman, 1999, p. 206). In the hands of Ludwig Feuerbach, however, this term became central to formulating a principle of collective essence that broke with the atomised individual of the Christian personalism of his time (Breckman, 1999, p. 206). On Agamben's reading, when Marx takes up the idea of a generic or species-being, he conceives it not as 'a common naturalistic character inertly underpinning individual differences' but as praxis – 'free and conscious activity' (Agamben, 1999a, p. 81). Thus, as Agamben writes (1999a, p. 83), the 'middle term, which constitutes man's genus [...] is for Marx, praxis, productive human activity'. Turning to Marx's account of the specificity of *human* praxis, Agamben notes that while the animal is at one with its vital activity, the human, for Marx, makes of it a means to its existence. 'He produces not unilaterally but universally' (Agamben, 1999a, 79).

Here, once more, Agamben follows Arendt (2002, p. 309), who writes: 'For Marx labor is the uniting link between matter and man, between nature and history.' Consequently, Agamben writes – prefiguring his later critique of Marx's secularisation of Christian *oikonomia* – man frees himself of the creator God and of nature and 'posits himself in the productive act, as the origin and nature of man' (1999a, p. 83). In this

context, Agamben is more positive about this originary praxis, which he frames as the foundation of history, through which the human essence becomes nature and nature becomes human. This is important given Agamben's own (very un-Arendtian) concern with overcoming the split between human and animal, *oikos* and *polis*, nature and history. On this account, Marx appears as a thinker who overcomes the constitutive divisions that have resulted in what Agamben (1998) sees as the abandonment of bare life. Ultimately however, Agamben's judgement is that Marx provides an account of the human that remains metaphysical: 'although he locates praxis in man's original dimension', Agamben writes, 'Marx does not think the essence of production beyond the horizon of modern metaphysics' (Agamben, 1999a, p. 83). For, if we ask what distinguishes human praxis from the vital activity of animals, Marx's answer in the *1844 Manuscripts*, Agamben suggests, refers back to a metaphysics of will: 'Man makes of his vital activity itself the object of his *will* and his *consciousness*' (Marx, quoted in Agamben, 1999a, p. 84). Thus, if we accept, with Nietzsche (2002, p. 19), that a 'person who *wills* – commands something inside himself that obeys', then Marx, according to this reading, re-establishes the cleavage between inert life and commanding will within each individual.

Given this critique of Marx's productivism and metaphysics of will, it is surprising that when Agamben returns to the question of Marx's theory of praxis in *Infancy and History* less than ten years later, he echoes Martin Heidegger's remark that 'the Marxist concept of history is superior to any other historiography' (Agamben, 1993, p. 103). In this book, devoted to reconceptualising history and temporality, Agamben stresses that, for Marx, praxis is man's original historical dimension – it is that which makes him a *Gattungswesen*. Having previously charged Marx with remaining trapped within metaphysics, Agamben now seeks to clear him of such charges. In opposition to Theodor Adorno's insistence on dialectical mediation between base and superstructure, Agamben argues that this relies on a causal understanding of their relation, which presupposes the sundering of reality into two different levels. Pre-empting his later critique of economic theology, he writes (1993, p. 119): 'A materialism which conceived of economic factors as *causa sui* and first principle of everything, in the same way in which the God of metaphysics is *causa sui* and first principle of everything, would only be the obverse of metaphysics, not its rout.' Far from attributing such a position to Marx, Agamben argues 'an interpretation of this relationship in a causal sense is not even conceivable in Marxist terms'. Against every vulgar interpretation of cause and effect, he suggests, we should

set Marx's account of praxis as 'a concrete and unitary source reality' (Agamben, 1993, p. 119).

This account of Marx's praxis is worth quoting at some length:

> If man finds his humanity in praxis, this is not because, in addition to carrying out productive work, he also transposes and develops these activities within a superstructure (by thinking, writing poetry, etc.); if man is human – if he is a *Gattungswesen*, a being whose essence is generic – his humanity and his species-being must be integrally present within the way in which he produces his material life – that is within his praxis. (Agamben, 1993, p. 119)

Here, in contrast to his earlier indictment of Marx's metaphysical splitting of praxis and will, Marx appears as the thinker who 'abolishes the metaphysical distinction between *animal* and *ratio*, between nature and culture, between matter and form' (Agamben, 1993, p. 119) through a theory of praxis for which man's humanity is immediately present in the way he produces his conditions of life.

In Agamben's earliest engagements with Marx, we find the earliest elaborations of his critiques of productivism (what he will later call *operativity*), the will and historicism. It is, at least in part, by working through Marx's early thought that Agamben develops the specificity of his own account of politics. In these early readings, however (readings that pre-date Agamben's explicitly political Homo Sacer series by decades), we find him oscillating between an Arendtian critique of the valorisation of biological life in philosophies of labour and an enthusiasm for a model of praxis in which life would be inseparable from its form. On the one hand, Marx is portrayed as a biopolitical thinker who sunders biological life from consciousness and makes of man's vital activity the object of his will. On the other, he is celebrated for overcoming the metaphysical separation of animality and humanity through a conception of praxis that 'from the beginning possesses wholeness and concreteness' (Agamben, 1993, p. 119) and so resists ontological splitting. In the following section, I turn to Agamben's more recent theorisations of praxis and will. In doing so, however, I seek to show that Marx's thought poses challenges to the way in which Agamben seeks to resolve the problems of operativity and the compulsion to labour and that these problems cannot be resolved on the terrain of the *1844 Manuscripts*. Because he inadequately theorises the problem of capitalism, I argue, Agamben is unable to bring to fruition his critique of operativity and will.

Quia voluit: because he willed it

Although Agamben's most substantial engagements with Marx's *1844 Manuscripts* are found in his own earliest works, the question of praxis has become ever more central to his project. Indeed, as Agamben has turned his attention from sovereignty to government, he has also focused on what he views as a decisive ontological transformation Christianity has brought in our understanding of the relation between praxis and being. In brief, Agamben's contention is that two distinct paradigms emerge from Christian theology and continue to shape both the theory and the practice of politics. The first, 'political theology', gives rise to political philosophy and the theory of sovereignty. The second, to which his recent works are devoted, is what he terms 'economic theology': an economic or governmental strand of Christianity in which he finds a crucial precursor to contemporary non-juridical governmental practices. While the former is a paradigm of transcendence (the transcendent God or sovereign), the latter is a paradigm of the immanent ordering, or government, of life. The central concern of *The Kingdom and the Glory* is to discover why power in the West 'has taken the form of an *oikonomia*, that is, a government of men' (Agamben, 2011, p. 3). In answering this question, Agamben is drawn not to the Christian pastorate, in which Michel Foucault (2007) had located the emergence of a specifically governmental form of power, but to the debates between the early Church Fathers that led to the construction of the doctrine of the Trinity.

The problem that faced early Christianity, Agamben suggests, was how to reconcile a transcendent God with the immanent government of the world. In attempting such a reconciliation, it was necessary to steer carefully between two heretical reefs: the Gnostic gulf between transcendence and immanence, which manifested in the belief in both an absent creator God and an evil demiurge, and the pantheistic collapse of transcendence into immanence. The administrative paradigm of the *oikonomia*, Agamben suggests, becomes central to the formulation of the Trinity, as the Church Fathers attempt to steer this course. In distinguishing between the three hypostases of God, they overcame the threat of polytheism by situating this distinction at the level of praxis rather than being. In the words of the early father Tertullian: 'The Father and the Son are two, and this not as a result of separation of substance, but as a result of an economic disposition' (quoted in Agamben, 2011, p. 41). In locating the separation between the Father and the Son (who governs the world on the Father's behalf) at the level of praxis, not being,

Agamben argues, the Fathers succeeded in preserving the unity of the divine being; '[t]he caesura that had to be averted at all costs on the level of being re-emerges, however, as a fracture between God and his action, between ontology and praxis' (Agamben, 2011, p. 53). In contrast to the Aristotelian God, or prime mover, who moves the celestial spheres simply because it is his nature to do so, the Christian *oikonomia* is 'a praxis unanchored to any ontological necessity' (Agamben, 2011, p. 66). Economic theology, as Agamben sees it, is therefore a form of governmental praxis lacking a foundation in being.

If we now return to Agamben's claim that 'in thinking the being of man as praxis, and praxis as the self-production of man', Marx secularised the theological idea of the being of creatures as divine operation, it may at first seem that this simply reiterates the earlier critique of Marx's alleged productivism in a theological key (Agamben, 2011, p. 91). However, those earlier critiques of Marx were framed in the terms of *classical ontology* and pursued using Aristotelian categories. As late as the essay 'The Work of Man', Agamben (2007b, p. 6) could argue that 'the thought of Marx, which seeks the realization of man as a generic being (*Gattungswesen*), represents a renewal and radicalization of the Aristotelian project'. In contrast, Agamben's more recent critique situates Marx in the context of what he sees as the *new ontology* of praxis bequeathed by Christianity. Thus, in commenting that, in Marx's *Paris Manuscripts*, 'the essence of man is nothing other than the praxis through which he incessantly produces himself', Agamben (2011, p. 91) connects Marx to a Christian theological belief in God as a being of ceaseless operation – a being who is not only substance but the praxis of governing the world.

We get a sense of what Agamben sees as these two distinct ontologies (one Greek and one Christian) in a work by Thomas Aquinas (2000), whose title *Of God and His Creatures* bears directly on Agamben's critique of Marx. In a chapter devoted to demonstrating that God is 'the origin of creatures', Aquinas distinguishes the perspective of the philosopher from that of the Christian by noting that, in contrast to the philosopher's concern with 'what attaches to them in their proper nature' (the question of being), the Christian 'considers about creatures only what attaches to them in their relation to God, as that they are created by God, subject to God, and the like' (Aquinas, 2000, p. 115). Directly relating his account of the second ontology to political sovereignty, Aquinas argues that the order of effects must be proportionate to the order of causes; thus, just as 'the king is the universal cause of government in his kingdom, over the officials of the kingdom, and also over

the officials of individual cities', there must be some cause of that being which is common to all creatures (Aquinas, 2000, p. 128). As pure being, Aquinas responds, God is the *cause* of the being of all creatures, who are, in turn, His effects or the result of His operation. As Agamben (2011, p. 90) stresses, in Augustine's account not only does the being of creatures entirely depend on a governmental praxis – 'it is, in its essence, praxis and government'.

For the ancients, who naturalise potentiality by deriving praxis directly from being, 'there is no need to presuppose the existence of a special will or a specific activity aimed at the care of the self or the world' (Agamben, 2011, pp. 53–4). In contrast, in treating God as the cause and creatures as effects, Aquinas stresses that God acts not by physical necessity but by free will: 'whoever does some and leaves out others of the things that he can do, acts by choice of will and not by physical necessity', he writes (Aquinas, 2000, p. 128). God creates not as an expression of his being but gratuitously. Once God's praxis was separated from his being, Agamben argued, this led to the heretical question of *why* he created the world, if it was not simply in his nature to do so: '*quia voluit*', was the answer provided by Augustine: because he willed it (Agamben, 2011, p. 56). Once praxis is conceived as free rather than as a necessary expression of one's nature, the will, Agamben argues, is the apparatus that is necessary to link praxis and being together again. The 'primacy of the will' in contemporary thought 'has its roots in the fracture between being and acting in God and is, therefore, from the beginning in agreement with the theological *oikonomia*' (Agamben, 2011, p. 56). The will of God is the attempt to find a foundation for anarchic divine praxis: God created the world because He willed it, and thus all creation is conceived instrumentally as material to be manipulated by a sovereign will.[4]

This can help us to understand more fully the stakes in Agamben's critique of Marx for turning man's vital activity into the object of his will. In retaining the split between activity and will, Marx, according to this critique, replicates this command structure within each individual. The consequences of this become clearer in Aquinas's commentary on the *De anima* (On the Soul) of Aristotle (1986), which Agamben views as marking the 'decisive moment' in which 'bare life as such' was identified in the history of Western philosophy (Agamben, 1999b, p. 230). In that text, Aristotle sets out to determine what it means to say that something – whether a plant, an animal or a human – is alive: 'For living beings', he writes, 'Being is life' (quoted in Agamben, 1999c, p. 147). To this end, Aristotle establishes a series of divisions in the continuum of life between what he terms nutritive, sensitive, appetitive, locomotive and

intellectual life. For Aquinas, it is a short step from this to conceiving the will as the only properly human function, which rules over the body just as God subjects his creatures to his will. '[I]n every mere man', Aquinas (1952, pp. 3869–70) writes, 'the operations of the elemental body and of the vegetative soul are distinct from the will's operation, which is properly human [...]. The operations of the sensitive and nutritive parts are not strictly human.' At stake in this is the transformation of human potentiality into brute vital power, subjected to the command of a transcendent will.

Bringing our essence back to earth: on Feuerbach

For Agamben to suggest that Marx of the *1844 Manuscripts* secularises a theological conception of praxis may at first seem surprising, given the extent to which the *Manuscripts* were written under the influence of the materialism of Ludwig Feuerbach, for whom man projects his own essence onto an exterior power that he calls God, which then subjects him to its government and command. 'The Divine Being', as Feuerbach (2012, p. 111) famously wrote, 'is nothing other than the being of man himself'. In the will of God, Feuerbach saw a projection of our own moral nature, which we then treat as an external obligation to which we are obedient and enthralled. As Warren Breckman (1999, p. 10) has noted, like his Young Hegelian contemporaries, Feuerbach was deeply engaged in a struggle against Christian personalism and its affirmation of the link between God, monarch and egoistic atomised property owner. For Feuerbach, then, the omnipotent God was not only a projection of the human essence – it was the projection of an *egoistic* conception of the human that reflected the decline of ancient political life.

In an early text, Feuerbach (1980, pp. 6–12) noted that while the Greeks and the Romans had sought immortality in the posterity of their actions in the public sphere, the collapse of the Greek polis and the Roman Republic led newly atomised individuals to project themselves *out* of the world. These individuals were unsatisfied with a worldly personhood in which their supposedly unique individuality was, in Feuerbach's words (1980, p. 11), 'restricted on all sides, determined, oppressed, depressed and bothered by all kinds of conditions and painful qualities that contaminate and tarnish it'. Thus, these atomised individuals established a second, unrestricted life, 'a life that is lived out in an element as bright and transparent as the purest crystal water' (Feuerbach, 1980, p. 12). Although this direct political context is absent from *The Essence of Christianity*, Feuerbach continues to argue that God's

will is not a projection of the real, restricted human will but a fantasy: 'the will of the imagination – the absolute subjective, unlimited will' (Feuerbach, 1989, p. 101). Thus, while Feuerbach sees the creator God as a projection of our own productive natures, in the doctrine of creation ex nihilo he sees a projection of a human subjectivity that makes Nature 'merely the servant of his will and needs, and hence in thought also degrades it to a mere machine, a product of the will' (Feuerbach, 1989, p. 112). Notably Feuerbach overcomes this egoism by complementing the will with love and reason to provide a Trinitarian account of the human essence. The 'divine trinity in man, above the individual man', he writes (2012, p. 99), 'is the unity of reason, love, and will'. Here the Christian *oikonomia* comes down to earth, where it is revealed as the very essence of man.

Agamben's charge that, in the *1844 Manuscripts*, Marx secularises a theological conception of the human was prefigured more than a century and a half earlier in Max Stirner's (2002, p. 33) critique of Feuerbach's 'thoroughly theological' liberation of humanity from religion. In Feuerbach's account of God as a projection of the human essence, Stirner (2002, p. 33) sees simply a redesignation, whereby what was formerly called 'God' is now 'our essence'. Feuerbach, Stirner (2002, p. 34) charges, 'clutches at the total substance of Christianity, not to throw it away, no, to drag it to himself, to draw it, the long-yearned-for, ever-distant, out of its heaven with a last effort, and keep it by him forever'. As Althusser (2003a, p. 258) puts it, Stirner's charge is that Feuerbach does not get beyond the limits of religion but simply 'replaces God with himself in calling Him Man'. At the hands of Stirner, Althusser argues, 'Man' was 'dealt a mortal blow'. No longer would 'Man' and 'Humanism' appear as the real, the concrete; rather, 'Man and Humanism were the stuff of priest's tales, a moral ideology of an essentially religious nature, preached by a petty bourgeois in laymen's dress' (Althusser, 2003a, p. 258).

It was on the basis of his own reading of Feuerbach's rational theology that Marx developed his early insights into the alienation and instrumentalisation of human potentiality. In the *1844 Manuscripts*, Marx analysed the way in which, under capitalism, our own activity takes on objective form (as capital) and becomes an independent power hovering over us. 'Capital', or stored up past labour, as Marx puts it (1988, p. 71), 'is thus the *governing power* over labour and its products.' Thus while Feuerbach (2012, p. 124) argues that '[i]n order to enrich God, man must become poor', Marx (1988, p. 71) locates this poverty in the structure of alienated labour: 'The worker becomes all the poorer

the more wealth he produces, the more his product increases its power and range.' Under capitalism, human praxis creates a powerful, alien, objective world that lurks over the individual worker. In Marx's words (1988, p. 72), 'the life which he has conferred on the object confronts him as something hostile and alien'. What is alienated, according to the *1844 Manuscripts*, is no longer simply a product of the human mind but the products that are the result of a labour process. Yet, as Althusser (2003b, p. 122) stresses, what Marx retains of the Feuerbachian schema is the view that the 'human essence' can be disclosed in its object and that there remains a privileged object 'that constitutes a compendium of the human essence'.

In the *1844 Manuscripts*, Marx tends to portray the alienation that is inherent to capitalist labour as *analogous* to the religious alienation identified by Feuerbach. Thus, after describing the impoverishment of the worker's inner world as he creates an objective world outside himself, Marx (1988, p. 72) writes that it is 'the same in religion. The more man puts into God, the less he retains in himself.' If Agamben (2000, p. 82) is able to situate his own thought within what he terms 'an integrated Marxian analysis', this is in no small part because of the extent to which he takes up the early Marx's analogy between religious and worldly separation. Not only does Agamben define *sacrifice* as an apparatus of separation, but he depicts law, politics, praxis and even capitalism as marked by a form of separation whose model is religious: 'capitalism, in pushing to the extreme a tendency already present in Christianity', he writes, 'generalizes in every domain the structure of separation that defines religion' (Agamben, 2007a, p. 81). By modelling worldly separations on religious ones, Agamben takes up a Marxian inheritance that remains Feuerbachian.

Within a year of the *1844 Manuscripts*, however, Marx brought the critique of heaven down to earth and replaced this analogical account of religious and productive alienation with the argument that the separation of the secular and the theological world can be understood only on the basis of 'the inner strife and intrinsic contradictoriness of this secular basis' (Marx, 1976b, p. 4).[5] It was only by overcoming the alienation and instrumentalisation of human capacities in the labour process, he now argued, that these powers could be returned to human beings. This means that Marx ultimately criticised Feuerbach's attempt to resolve the religious essence into the human essence both because his focus on overcoming false ideas was insufficient for overcoming the real alienation of capitalist society and because it presupposes an overly abstract and ahistorical account of the human essence. The 'essence of

man is no abstraction inherent in each single individual', Marx (1976b, p. 4) writes in his sixth thesis on Feuerbach. 'In reality it is the ensemble of social relations.'

Here, he criticises Feuerbach for abstracting from the historical process and inadequately breaking with the presupposition of the atomised individual. On the basis of such abstraction from history and from society, Feuerbach, Marx argues, can regard man's essence 'only as "species", as an inner, mute, general character which unites the many individuals *in a natural way*' (Marx, 1976b, p. 4). For Marx, there is no essence innate in each individual. He thus criticises Feuerbach for failing to see that both the religious sentiment and the isolated individual are social products and for his insufficiently critical attitude to *this* world. The Young Hegelians, Marx and Engels argued in *The German Ideology*, see in history only spectacular events and religious and theoretical struggles. They forget that the root of religious 'fancies' lies in real material conditions, and ultimately, for them, 'the *theatrum mundi* is confined to the Leipzig book fair' (Marx and Engels, 1976, p. 64). To Feuerbach's 'contemplative materialism' Marx famously opposes a 'practical materialism', which, in the words of the famous thesis 11, seeks to *change* the world, rather than merely interpret it (Marx, 1976b, p. 5).

A 'major epistemological blockage': on the concept of labour

Agamben's analytical reliance on an account of separation modelled on the relation of heaven to earth can help us to understand why, while he criticises the early Marx's account of praxis, he repeatedly returns to the *1844 Manuscripts*, to the exclusion of Marx's later works, and explicitly rejects Althusser's suggestion that the works of the early Marx should be abandoned. Nonetheless, there are aspects of Althusser's critique of the early Marx that not only prefigure much of the critique that Agamben will later direct at the Paris manuscripts but also break with the lingering reliance on secularised Christianity that informs that work's account of praxis. Of all the concepts that Althusser sees as evidence of 'idealist blackmail' and 'unbearable, if not criminal demagoguery' (Althusser, 2003a, p. 265), he singles out a concept that has been taken to be central to Marxist thought: labour. The 'concept of labour', he writes (2003a, p. 289), '*is not a Marxist concept*'. Althusser goes further than Agamben in rejecting 'all the ideologies of labour' whether they take their starting point from the *1844 Manuscripts* or set out to produce a 'phenomenology of "praxis"' (Althusser, 2003a, p. 289). The language of project, praxis and creation, Althusser argues (2003a, p. 265), is a form of spiritualist

idealism – 'the most reactionary form of idealism because it is craven enough to model itself on religion'.

Marx's theoretical innovation in the *1844 Manuscripts*, Althusser argues, was to introduce the concepts of labour and history into Feuerbach's conceptual schema – the former from Smith, the latter from Hegel. The ultimate consequence of this union of classical political economy, the Hegelian dialectic and a humanist theory of history as the alienation and disalienation of man was, in Althusser's view, a great theoretical impasse; moreover, the concept of labour was 'a major epistemological blockage' (Althusser, 2003a, p. 289). As is well known, Althusser's view is that Marx would not overcome this impasse until 'the break' in 1845. 'Marx's whole critique of classical Political Economy', he writes (2003a, p. 289), 'consisted in exploding the concept of *labour* accepted by the Economists' in order to replace it with a new set of concepts, including 'labour process', 'labour power (not labour)', 'abstract labour', and the like.

Here, I do not wish to enter into the voluminous debate about this supposed break, except to suggest that Althusser is right to note that the Marx of *Capital* had become critical of such abstractions as 'labour' and 'production' because they obscure and naturalise the specificity of capitalist labour and the capitalist mode of production. Indeed, such a position was central to Marx's critique of the classical political economists, who presented a historically specific figure of the human as 'the Natural Individual appropriate to their notion of human nature, not arising historically but posited by nature' (Marx, 1973, p. 83). By the time of the *Grundrisse* (1857–58) Marx had isolated the object of his investigation, which he defined as '*material production*' (Marx, 1973, p. 83) – that is, individuals producing in a specific form of society. The point Marx (1973, p. 87) stresses is that '[a]ll production is appropriation of nature on the part of an individual within and through a specific form of society'. The labour of the slave is not the labour of the serf or the labour of the proletarian, and none can be viewed as the essence of man. Although 'labour' appears to be a simple category, Marx notes in the introduction to the *Grundrisse*, the abstract category 'labour' presupposes a developed totality of real kinds of labour and a form of society in which individuals are not bonded to a single form of labour but 'can with ease transfer from one labour to another', making the specific kind of labour a matter of chance or indifference (Marx, 1973, 104).

Seen from this perspective, Marx's early account of labour in the *1844 Manuscripts* can be seen to obscure the specificity of labour under capitalism. What is definitive of labour under capitalism is *not* that the

labourer is subjected to the will of another but that he or she is subjected to the impersonal domination of capital: 'the rule of past, dead labour over the living' (Marx, 1976a, p. 988). As Marx put it (1976a, p. 899), '[t]he silent compulsion of economic relations sets the seal on the domination of the capitalist over the worker'. This does not mean that direct force becomes unnecessary or that relations of coercion – slavery, for instance – disappear. And yet, as Wood notes, under capitalism 'it is the "autonomous" laws of the economy and capitalism "in the abstract" that exercise power, not the capitalist willfully imposing his personal authority upon labour' (Meiksins Wood 1995, p. 41). Agamben's deconstruction of the metaphysics of will inherited from Christianity tends to conflate the paradigmatic figure of the slave of the Aristotelian *oikos*, who is subjected directly to the master's will, with the contemporary labourer in a capitalist economy. Thus, it leaves untouched the specifically economic compulsion of capitalism that the late Marx sought not only to understand but also to overthrow.

Agamben (2005, p. 30) seemed to recognise this several years before *The Kingdom and the Glory*, when he turned to analyse the specificity of *capitalist* labour, in *The Time that Remains*, and singled out what 'Marx presents as the redemptive function of the proletariat'. Not only does the proletariat incarnate the contingency of every specific vocation or form of labour, he wrote there, but the proletariat is 'only able to liberate itself through autosuppression' (Agamben, 2005, 31). Agamben's development of Marx's account of this revolutionary self-negating proletarian subject as the model for the subject that could break with the homogenous time and deferred redemption of the Christian *oikonomia* is a topic for a further investigation.

Notes

1. According to Althusser (2003a, p. 251), 'the *1844 Manuscripts* is, theoretically speaking, one of the most extraordinary examples of a total theoretical *impasse* that we have'.
2. This essay was originally published in Italian in 1970 in the literary journal *Nuovi argomenti*.
3. As an aside, in this chapter I refer on numerous occasions to 'man' and 'men'. I have retained these terms not because I think they are adequate terms to designate a universal humanity but in order to signal the extent to which these thinkers are, to a large extent, preoccupied with men – in the sense of the male of the human species. Obscuring this by referring to 'men and women' or 'humanity' may bring the terminology into line with contemporary sensibilities, but it would also obscure the extent to which what is at stake in many of the debates on 'the nature of man' is a form of thought for which

women, along with slaves, foreigners and children, were relegated from the *polis* to the *oikos* and, consequently, excluded from what the Greeks saw as the properly human activities of the *zoon politikon*.

4. For a reading of Agamben's account of the way this paradigm was transferred into modern political thought by Rousseau, see Whyte (2013).
5. For Althusser, Marx's transition from the critique of religion to the critique of politics is not a *theoretical* shift but only the addition of another object to be analysed with the help of Feuerbach's theory. Yet this underestimates the importance of the shift from the criticism of the heavens to the criticism of earth (see Althusser, 2003a, p. 245).

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12
The Discreet Charm of Bruno Latour

Benjamin Noys

Michel Houellebecq's 2010 novel *La Carte et le territoire* (The Map and the Territory) concerns an artist, Jed Martin, French despite his American-sounding name, whose work is in various ways concerned with work and labour. Martin begins, as a student, taking photographs of industrial objects in his aim to give an objective description of the world. His next project, which will make him famous as an artist, is a series of photographic close-ups of Michelin maps of provincial France in an exhibition titled 'The Map Is More Interesting Than the Territory'. Then he turns to painting with a 60-work series in oil titled the 'Series of Simple Professions' and made over seven years, which explores the division of labour in contemporary society. The paintings include *Ferdinand Desroches, Horse Butcher* and his masterpiece *Bill Gates and Steve Jobs Discussing the Future of Information Technology*. Defeated by attempts to paint *Damien Hirst and Jeff Koons Dividing Up the Art Market*, particularly by his difficulty in painting Koons's face, Jed Martin turns to Michel Houellebecq, a fictional character in his own novel, as a subject (for the painting *Michel Houellebecq, Writer*). The writer then composes an essay for the exhibition catalogue in which he reflects that Martin's view of capitalism is 'that of an ethnologist much more than that of a political commentator' (Houellebecq, 2011, p. 122). The canvases sell for half a million euros apiece.

It is not difficult – when thinking of this ethnographic gaze that reflects and perhaps inadvertently valorises contemporary capitalism, rather than directly criticising it – to recall the anthropological work of the contemporary French intellectual Bruno Latour.[1] His project of actor-network theory speaks to the descriptive project of mapping and charting 'objects'; hence the well-known 'Latour litanies' that recur in his studies – for example, 'painting, bird-watching, Shakespeare,

baboons, proteins, and so on' (Latour, 2004, p. 241). Beginning in the social study of science, Latour's articulation of networks has, appropriately, extended everywhere: urbanism, law, art, philosophy, politics. His work has been, according to Andrew Barry, 'extraordinarily influential across the social sciences in Britain' (Barry, 2011, p. 36) and, we might add, beyond. This influence has extended as promiscuously as the networks Latour traces, including into philosophy, with the articulation of object-oriented philosophy (Harman, 2009), and into literary and cultural studies (Love, 2010).

Houellebecq's scene, in which the artist profits from his descriptions, also speaks to the equivocal status of such gestures. While Latour's work is premised on the novelty of network analysis as a mode, even Latour notes how it seems to mirror the operations of network capitalism (Latour, 2005, p. 252n351). Critiques of Latour have not been lacking, and some of the most violent emerged slightly before the recent moment of Latour's take-off in popularity. There has already been an 'anti-Latour' (Bloor, 1999), and Steve Fuller (2000) wrote a vituperative critique that argued Latour's success was the result of his convergence with new technocratic tendencies in France, noted actor-network's theory 'affinity with the metaphysics of *capitalism*' (Fuller, 2000, p. 20) and even went so far as to associate it with totalitarian and fascist ideas in the form of a '*flexible fascism*' (Fuller, 2000, p. 23) that glorified technology, heroic creators and the treatment of people as means.

My aim here, while also critical, is rather different. I want to place Latour in the context of a new mutation of the disenchantment with Marx amongst French intellectuals. Latour is unusual in that he has no primary reference to Marx, and unlike the *nouveaux philosophes* of the 1970s (Christofferson, 2004), he attaches no pathos to 'abandoning' Marx. This is one way, we could say, that Latour belongs to a 'new' formation of the intellectual. In the case of Latour, this formation is explicitly anti-Marxist, as we will see. What I also want to consider is how this anti-Marxist formation has also been influential on those on the left and how it converges with a number of contemporary left thinkers who share Latour's disenchantment with critique. Latour stands as symptom, in precisely the way he would decry as the typically reductive and violent gesture of critique. This symptom, I argue, speaks to a continuing discomfort with Marxism even at the moment of capitalist crisis that would seem to confirm some of Marx's key insights (Kunkel, 2011).

Reticular revisionism

To understand Latour's project on its own terms, we can take a recent self-characterisation in which he takes as the image of his work Tomas Saraceno's artwork *Galaxies Forming along Filaments, like Droplets along the Strands of a Spider's Web* (2008), exhibited at the Venice Biennale in 2009. This work consists of strung elastic rope that is formed into a 'web' that creates spheres and lines. Latour takes this as a metaphor for integrating his own theory of networks and Peter Sloterdijk's (2011) argument for a thinking of spheres and envelopes:

> What Saraceno's work of art and engineering reveals is that multiplying the connections and assembling them closely enough will shift slowly from a network (which you can see through) to a sphere (difficult to see through). Beautifully simple and terribly difficult. (Latour, 2011)

It also usefully metaphorises Latour's insistence on construction, or composition, as the condition of existence. In this case, a filament network creates a world or networks and spheres, links and environments, delicately connected together and linked to forms, including the art market itself.

One of the key features of the work, one crucial for Latour's project, is that, according to Latour, 'there is no attempt at nesting all relations within one hierarchical order' (Latour, 2011). Latour does not deny local hierarchies, but he does deny that there can be any global hierarchy, and this obviously has implications for critical practice. What Latour is denying, as we will see in more detail, is any place or site of exception for a critique that would presume to hierarchise over a network. Disabling critique is a result of the fact that

> networks have no inside, only radiating connectors. They are all edges. They provide connections but no structure. One does not reside in a network, but rather moves to other points through the edges. (Latour, 2011)

For Latour, this form allows us to avoid the sin of modernism – presuming a hierarchy from a central point – and that of postmodernism – presuming a levelling (Latour, 1993). Instead, we can have precision without hierarchy.

This, then, is the image of Latour's thought. We can see why this might be to the taste of our times, and Latour makes much of the contemporaneity of his work and of the fact, as he says, 'we don't wish to have too much to do with the twentieth century' (Latour, 2010, p. 476). More precisely, what Latour wants little to do with is any Promethean revolutionary project, any attempt to change the world radically or any 'passion for the real', to use Badiou's expression (Badiou, 2007). In this he very much belongs to our moment (see Toscano, 2009). Beneath an innocuous methodological recommendation and a sometimes modest styling of claims, Latour explicitly refuses to think any possibility of critique that would not conform to his ideological pseudo image of critique as a melange of Enlightenment reductionism, Marxist economism and Nietzschean barbarity.

To unpack Latour's anticritique, I want to begin with a particularly clumsy metaphor he chooses to explicate the limits of critique: 'With a hammer (or a sledge hammer) in hand you can do a lot of things: break down walls, destroy idols, ridicule prejudices, but you cannot repair, take care, assemble, reassemble, stitch together.' (Latour, 2010, p. 475) The point is obvious: critique is only good for destroying and damaging, for attenuating, for taking away from reality, for lessening and worsening, while Latour's alternative of compositionism makes possible constructing, repairing, caring, building and adding. Unfortunately, the elisions speak volumes; with an actual hammer what you can, precisely, do is 'assemble' and 'reassemble', as anyone who has used a hammer well knows – although obviously you can't 'stitch together'. So we find the 'hammer of critique' substituted by a 'sledge hammer', a rather different tool, but one still crucial to many forms of 'assembly' and not entirely destructive. The 'sledge hammer' of critique is then used to sound the usual Nietzschean accents of 'breaking the world in two', while at the same time, Nietzsche is used to argue that critique depends on the positing of a 'netherworld of reality' (Latour, 2010, p. 475). In fact, Nietzsche often plays such a double role in Latour: as a kind of *pharmakon* for the probing of 'critique' – poisonous, insofar as he remains within the heroics of a 'grand politics', salutary, insofar as he undermines any claim to another 'reality' that would underpin any critique of appearances.

What Latour objects to critique is this supposed positing of a superior 'true' reality that can be grasped only by the few. Robbed of this imperative, this 'juvenile' and 'naive' belief in Latour's words, we have to engage with 'the suspension of the critical impulse' (Latour, 2010, p. 475). So critique is not simply abandoned but reinscribed

and reanalysed as a gesture struck by its own necessary failure, its own futility. In Latour's terminology, we have to switch from accepting the *iconoclasm* of critique to grasping it as an *iconoclash*, unable to achieve its stated aims but acting all the same (Latour and Weibel, 2002). Again, there is something of a slippage that takes place in this transition. We begin with the suspension of the 'usual' terms of critique (*-clasm*), which we might take as innocuous enough, and an interest in redescribing or reposing what takes place in the gesture of critique (*-clash*). The problem is that this reposing of critique, which might seem to conform to Bernard Stiegler's call for a critique not based on metaphysical oppositions (Stiegler, 2010, p. 15), rapidly becomes the complete *dissolution* of critique. Critique becomes an impossible act, unable to really affect the world except through a spiral of intellectual and physical violence. Trying, in Latour's cliché, to hold on to a point of security with which to hammer away at the world, critique, like a bad carpenter, strikes itself, rebounds from the object and is left in impotent rage.

Latour's replacement for critique is to shift the question to *composition* and so to 'the crucial difference between what is *well* or *badly* constructed, *well* or *badly* composed' (Latour, 2010, p. 474). Against what Latour regards as the reductionism of critique and its tendency to take a position transcendent to the world, he poses compositionism as an addition to reality that is always immanent to that reality. It is not surprising that such a position is attractive in all its consonance with the 'democratic ideology' that places itself within and amongst a thoroughly equalised set of 'things' and takes fright at any hierarchisation and 'imposition' of planning and structures. In Badiou's description, '[e]mpirically, it is clear that atonic worlds are simply worlds which are so ramified and nuanced – or so quiescent and homogeneous – that no instance of the Two, and consequently no figure of decision, is capable of evaluating them' (Badiou, 2009, p. 420). This dual description, at once 'ramified and nuanced', so 'quiescent and homogenous', is the image of Latour's network, or 'web-like' world of complexity and connections. Of course, as with all ideologies, this appeal to equality is factitious. The discourse of 'difference', shorn of its explicitly Nietzschean aristocratism, is used to instantiate a 'rich' world that encompasses 'equality' within 'variety' and which reinstantiates a 'soft' hierarchy. Rather than leap to the obvious points of critique, I want to stay a little longer with the charms and attractions of Latour's approach. After all, no ideology is simply a matter of deceit but always has material and psychic instantiation and appeal.

The attractions of anticritique

One crucial element of the attraction, much played on by Latour, is the restoration of agency. Contrary to the 'disabling' effects of total critique, which promises lucidity at the expense of praxis, Latour claims his work restores the necessary 'play' in 'structure' through the reinscription of power in networks:

> With respect to the Total, there is nothing to do except to genuflect before it, or worse, to dream of occupying the place of complete power. I think it would be much safer to claim that action is possible only in a territory that has been opened up, flattened down, and cut down to size in a place where formats, structure, globalization, and totalities circulate inside tiny conduits, and where they need to rely on masses of hidden potentialities. (Latour, 2005, p. 252)

Networks are acts of dereification, bringing down to earth the seemingly intractable abstractions of capitalism and its critics. In a reversal of the usual sense of 'economies of scale', we gain from a *reduction* in scale ('tiny conduits') that makes it possible to intervene.

In Latour's formulations, this gain is quickly taken away, as we are encouraged to add, build, develop, compose and so work with the 'grain' of reality, following the threads or adding more threads rather than unravelling them. The result is a strange entanglement of agency in which points of intervention are multiplied as the 'global' horizon recedes. We can also see how Latour proceeds through a radicalisation of critique – pushing the logic of dereification, usually seen as the purview of the Marxist tradition, to the ultimate extent of 'evaporating' the object 'capitalism'.

It is these two gestures – the 'expansion' of agency and the pluralisation of capitalism – which have been striking points of influence and congruence with contemporary 'left' formulations. In explicit terms of influence, we have J. K. Gibson-Graham's 'deconstruction' of capitalism (Gibson-Graham, 1996; 2006), Timothy Mitchell's work on 'economy' (Mitchell, 1998; 2011) and Eyal Weizman's work on spatial politics (Weizman, 2007; 2010). The examples of Weizman and Mitchell give a good indication of the two issues of agency and pluralisation, respectively.

Eyal Weizman's critical architectural work has focused on the 'ecology' of the Israeli occupation (Weizman, 2007). In an interview he reflects on the methodological form of his work to argue that it consists of a

'political plastics' (Weizman, 2010). Discussing the 'Separation Wall' between Israel and the Palestinian West Bank, he argues that all political actors involved are 'constantly pushing and pulling at the path of this line as it is being built, routing and rerouting it' (Weizman, 2010, p. 260), and that 'when it "solidifies", you can see in every twist, turn and detail of the route itself the material imprint of forces as they applied within a particular human and topographical terrain' (Weizman, 2010, p. 261). Although not directly referencing Latour, we can see a similar concern with a plurality of actors, of breaking up the solidities of power into a series of decisions, an attention at once 'concrete' or 'material' and immaterial – a 'material politics' (Weizman, 2010, p. 262).

This results in a gain in agency, as the 'wall' is no longer simply the blunt tool it so apparently seems to be but a 'gain' that displaces agency in all directions: 'Ultimately, what goes into that kind of layout are so many natural, political, artificial, micropolitical force fields, influences in which the Wall itself participates as an agent, in this kind of complex ecology of things' (Weizman, 2010, p. 263). Plural agency is distributed everywhere but results in a lack of traction compared to the particular forms of compact and directed agency required by political intervention (see Hallward, 2005). Here again, the tension lies in the gain that actually appears as a loss.

Timothy Mitchell's *Carbon Democracy* (2011) traces the effects of carbon extraction, notably the shift from coal to oil, on the forms of state and capitalist power. Mitchell follows the Latourian path of dereifying structures of dominance by tracing the networks and forms that constitute it – in this case the intertwining of carbon-based energy and democracy. He states:

> The carbon itself must be transformed, beginning with the work done by those who bring it out of the ground. The transformations involve establishing connections and building alliances – connections and alliances that do not respect any divide between material and ideal, economic and political, natural and social, human and nonhuman, or violence and representation. The connections make it possible to translate one form of power into another. (Mitchell, 2011, p. 7)

Again, we can see certain gains from this approach – in analysing the empirical forms of power, the relationship to localisation of workers and the possible 'malleability' of these 'structures'. The result is a typical 'litany': 'In order for these flows of oil, military actions, industry rumours, supply figures, political calculations and consumer reactions to

come together as a textbook case of the laws of economics, a new socio-technical world had to be assembled to hold them together.' (Mitchell, 2011, p. 176)

While Weizman demonstrates (or tries to demonstrate) how the 'network' or assemblage model multiplies agency, Mitchell's work stresses also the dereification of capitalism as its flip side. He refers to 'so-called global forces of capital' to contest any conception of what he calls 'capitalism's homoficient historical logic' (Mitchell, 2011, pp. 204, 213). This is replaced with a new formulation: '[O]il-based industrial capitalism no longer appears self-sufficient. Its success depends on other forces, which are both essential to and disjunctive with the process we call capitalist development.' (Mitchell, 2011, p. 214) The implication of this formulation is that capital is no totalising form or dominant but rather depends on a series of 'exterior' forces or forms on which it parasites. In Mitchell's analysis the result is a downscaling of the forms and 'forces' of capital.

Although of a remarkably different formation, we could also note how the work of a figure as unimpeachably on the left as Jacques Rancière converges with these kinds of thematics. In particular, Rancière is a consistent enemy of critique, for what he regards as its totalising claim to knowledge that disempowers radical forms of action (Rancière, 2007, p. 266). Rancière tends to embody this 'extremity' of critique by reference to the situationists, regarded by him as ultraleft purists who envisage capital as total domination. Also, in a similar fashion to Latour, Rancière chides the 'economic reductionism' of critique, targeting certain forms of Marxism, and like Latour, extends this characterisation to neoliberalism as well (Rancière, 2010, p. 26). In this way, we witness a strange collapsing of capital and its critics, all seemingly fixated on the economic. Finally, Rancière also encourages a 'modest' sense of agency in the form of his valorisation of the power to reconfigure the sensible through artistic and political practice against any historical necessity (Rancière, 2007, p. 257).[2]

So we can note both influence and convergence, and it would not be difficult to expand this further through reference to various forms of Deleuzian politics that also share certain reference points with these conceptions. To return to Latour, we can see that the appeal lies in a freeing up, an entry into the empirical not immediately burdened with the risk of reproducing the world as we find it. The act of dereification allows access to the minutiae of reality that certain forms of critique tended to displace or disable. The difficulty, however, is that this restoration of analysis occludes other forms of 'reality' – notably, that of

capitalism – and does not *necessarily* lead to a restoration of agency. The very means that allow tracking the networks struggle if those 'networks' ramify or solidify too far. In fact, for all the dereification we can in fact say that capitalism operates as a 'network', but this doesn't seem to multiply agential possibilities of interventions. This, I think, is the kind of impasse reached by this sort of work. While providing excellent local analyses of forms of power and dominance and while being able to follow more widely the threads of the networks, it seems incapable of grasping the particular *form* of capitalism, which precisely lies between immanence and transcendence. The result is that while agency seems to become possible, this inflation of 'local' agency is bought at the cost of an inability to change or challenge any of the terms of the game. Capitalism seems to remain as an 'untranscendable philosophy', contra Sartre's famous remark about communism.

Decaffeinated capitalism

What I want to suggest is that the attraction of these forms of anticritique emerges out of a misunderstanding of the form of capitalism. Latour and other proponents of anticritique set the 'bar' of capitalism at once too high and too low. Too high, by projecting onto critique the form of capitalism as absolute and total dominance, from which only the theorist escapes; this straw-man argument – which obviously could find exemplars but does only comparatively rarely – makes of capitalism a monstrous dominance from which nothing can escape. The alternative, which sets the bar too low, is to dereify 'capitalism' into various local forms and arrangements that, somehow, fit together in a network but in a network which is never totally dominant, which is open to intervention and can be disrupted. In this conception, capitalism is lightened, and large realms of the social and natural are taken as external to it. This is summarised by Latour's deliberate provocation:

> It has often been said that 'capitalism' was a radical novelty, an unheard-of rupture, a 'deterritorialization' pushed to the ultimate extreme. As always, the Difference is mystification. *Like God, capitalism does not exist*. There are no equivalents; these have to be made, and they are expensive, do not lead far, and do not last for very long. We can, at best, make extended networks. Capitalism is still marginal even today. Soon people will realize that it is universal only in the imagination of its enemies and advocates. (Latour, 1988, p. 173; my emphasis)

Capital is marginalised, treated as a phantom generated by its defenders and critics, but what evaporates is any attempt to *abolish* capitalism. In this we find conformity with the neoliberal model, which supposes plural singular capitalisms, which can (only) 'invent a different capitalism' (Foucault, 2008, p. 167). This is a weakened capitalism, a 'decaffeinated capitalism', to borrow from Žižek, but one we can never be rid of.

To return to the two seeming strengths of Latour's anticritique, agency and plurality, in the first case we can note that Latour's misconception of the power of agency, which rapidly flips over into constraint, is based on a failure to understand the *mediating* function of capitalism, which does not, strictly speaking, depend on the conscious behaviour of agents, whether that be capitalism itself as macrosubject or various 'agents' of capitalism. I. I. Rubin had noted that capitalism is 'a thick network of *indirect* production relations' (Rubin, 1973, p. 8). Ignoring this, network orientations remain, symptomatically, focused on the state or other clearly identifiable forms of 'agency' – in terms of actual actors (human or otherwise). Of course, this is not to deny the 'personifications' of capital (Marx, 1976, p. 92) nor what Marx notes as the 'despotism' of the factory or workshop but to inscribe this 'despotism' as a result of the 'indirect' drive to accumulation that drives this process; as Marx puts it: 'in the society where the capitalist mode of production prevails, anarchy in the social division of labour and despotism in the manufacturing division of labour mutually condition each other' (Marx, 1976, p. 243). It is this conditioning, along with the abstract 'drive' of capital, that is displaced by the models of Latour and anticritique on to critical discourse itself.

This leads seamlessly to the question of plurality. In crisis capitalism becomes *visible*. Those who were frantically emphasising the plurality and dispersion of capitalisms now seem happy to invoke a singular capitalism, qua global system, when it requires saving. György Lukács noted that 'in periods when capitalism functions in a so-called normal manner, and its various processes appear autonomous, people living within capitalist society think and experience it as unitary, whereas in periods of crisis, when the autonomous elements are drawn together into unity, they experience it as disintegration' (Lukács, 2007, p. 32). In fact, we could argue that the appearance of 'autonomous' subsystems characterises the kinds of analysis we have been tracing, which were paradoxically dependent on the 'unity' of capitalism. In this period of global capitalist crisis, we now face a unity that appears as the disintegration of the life world – no longer the 'happy' disintegration of autonomous systems and 'difference' but rather the more 'unhappy' disintegration of

catastrophic collapse and withdrawal. In this case, the everyday 'emergency' state of capitalism is revealed as its normal state through the extremity of crisis.

Crucial, in both cases, is the consideration of capital as a *form* of value. For Latour, following Gabriel Tarde, value is psychological (Latour and Lépinay, 2009, p. 8). Latour also uses Tarde's arguments to suggest, again, that there is no fundamental 'break' that constitutes capital as a 'regime' (Latour and Lépinay, 2009, pp. 59–65). Without wanting to reconstitute the whole of Marx's analysis of value, we can suggest the crucial fact that it operates as a 'real abstraction' (Sohn-Rethel, 1978). Value, for Marx, takes the form of an 'objectivity [Wertgegenständlichkeit]' (Marx, 1976, p. 142), but contra Latour's image of this as a reductive and inert standard, this is a 'phantom-like', more precisely, 'spectral objectivity [gespenstige Gegenständlichkeit]' (Marx, 1976, p. 128; see Heinrich, 2012, p. 49, for the translation correction). This 'objectivity' originates in the specific dominance of the commodity form under capitalism (Lukács, 1971, p. 83). It is this form, particularly in the constitution of 'abstract labour' as the commodity that generates value, that 'performs' the work of equalisation that forms the 'surface of bourgeois society' (Marx, 1973, p. 255) and which Latour replicates. All the while that Latour invokes the concrete, he in fact, I suggest, invokes the 'spectral', which he mistakes for the concrete.

There is no doubt that Marx invokes an 'economic form-determination [ökonomische Formbestimmung]' (Heinrich, 2012, p. 40), but this determination is not simply the equation of value with the quantity of labour. Rather, the value form is constituted through 'abstract labour' 'congealed [Gallerte]'[3] in the commodity and realised in the network and mediation of the commodity form through money (Heinrich, 2012, p. 63). Therefore, this 'reduction' in fact reveals, as Marx remarks of the commodity, 'metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties' (Marx, 1976, p. 163). Marx's analysis reveals the complexity of what we take for granted as, precisely 'objects', deflated into our 'concrete' experience. In fact, 'objects' take on value only in relation to other objects, and we treat this 'value' as a natural or, dare we say, psychological fact. The result is that 'things take on a life of their own' (Heinrich, 2012, p. 73) but not in the sense Latour supposes. This is because this is a 'real' situation, one not generated by us or by the objects but by the form of value that inheres in them. Therefore, our interactions with the world are not illusory but formed in social processes which constitute a social reality and necessity which dominates us. Therefore, contra Latour, it is social relations that produce the reification of capital, which is nonetheless

real for all that. We can't wish away or dismantle these relations by the fiat of network analysis but rather have to grasp capitalism's constitution of itself as 'automatic subject [automatisches Subjekt]' (Marx, 1976, p. 255).

Marx thinks together the seemingly oxymoronic propositions of 'real abstraction' and 'spectral objectivity'.[4] In contemporary thought, these tend to be split into an antinomy between the inflation of the spectral at the expense of 'objectivity' (Derrida, 1994) or, as in the case of Latour, the inflation of the 'concrete' at the expense of the 'spectral objectivity' of value. In either case we find, to quote Marx, that they 'smudge over all historical differences' (Marx, 1973, p. 105). The specificity of the capitalist value form is sacrificed at the altar of general spectrality or general 'objects', missing the commodity form. For Marx, the value form constitutes the specificity of capital in the social form of value and its determinate character (Tomba, 2009, p. 48). While exchange had obviously existed before capitalism, it is only under capitalism that it takes on this 'totalising' domination – one abstract and indifferent to the 'concrete'. Latour's answer is to try and re-enchant the world, to re-establish its concretion, but in doing so, he flattens out capital to our eternal condition.

The lonely hour of the last instance

Louis Althusser once remarked that 'the economy is determinant, but *in the last instance*', and that 'the lonely hour of the "last instance" never comes' (Althusser, 2005, pp. 112, 113). This is obviously a refutation of the kind of clichéd economic reductionism that Latour regards as the signature of Marxism. While I wouldn't want to reassert an unmediated determinism, what we can say is that with the global financial crisis certainly capitalists are happy enough to recognise the determining power of the 'last instance' of the economic. Of course, the separation of the economic from the political, as ideological effect, is the sign of capitalism. We can also add so is the determination of the political by the economic – considering the imposition of political leaderships on the European crisis states by monetary technocrats, which almost literally instantiates capital as the 'dictatorship of finance capital'. Capitalism, as a totalising 'system', aims at the production and constitution of 'economic' determination.

Anticritique displaces this activity onto critique, accusing it of the very sins of capitalism. We might speak of a 'Cassandra complex', in which dire prognostications are ignored or downgraded by being projected on

to the critic. Christopher Nealon has noted, in the context of writing on poetry, that 'the idea seems to be that, in developing a critical analysis of capitalism, the critic forsakes daily life, the small beauties; he becomes arrogant, unable to see what's right in front of his nose; or she becomes preachy, solipsistic, hypnotized by abstractions' (Nealon, 2011, p. 7). Nealon goes on to point out that 'it is hard to imagine a more durable twentieth-century victory for the right than the persistence of this structure of feeling' (Nealon, 2011, p. 9). The 'charm' of Latour is that he retools this structure of feeling for our present moment, generalising out this sense of the 'small beauties' that defy the snobbish and arrogant critic of all objects.

Certainly, it might be seen as a waste of time to devote energy to the critique of Latour; for the Latourian, it might seem a deliberate and wilful missing of the point. What concerns me, however, is the very seductiveness of this minor tone and its undoubted appeal to a humanities and social sciences that often structure their appeal on the grounds of the concrete, the everyday, the density of the historical, and the 'small beauties' around us. In a moment of crisis this kind of appeal only gains in effect as, to borrow a phrase from Marx, 'a haven in a heartless world'. The return to the modesty of objects, the tracing of networks, the preservation of what is, all gain a hold in the face of the devastations of the present. It also happens to conform to an emergent research agenda concerned with the 'impact' of research on the public, how the academic might speak to that mythical construct, the 'real world', and how they might themselves make networks and connections (Fuller, 2000). We live, or some of us live, in what I think it is no exaggeration to call a 'Latourian moment'.

Of course, for Latour and Latourians the spread of his ideas is merely the sign of their success at grasping reality. Rather than decrying their proximity to the processes of capitalism, they can welcome this as a sign of interventional capacity. The critic, already accused of violence and abstraction, is now accused of that most Nietzschean of sins: resentment. Even more ironically, this resentment turns on the desire to preserve 'clean hands', whereas the Latourian gets involved, although with an involvement that constantly disavows any violence (Cohen, 1998, pp. 64–90). In this wilderness of mirrors, the difficulty becomes, as I have attempted to do, to establish some of the true coordinates. This, perhaps, is a sign of how pervasive this tone or mood is and how it is reinforced, precisely, by the 'materialities' of the present.

In fact, this contest turns on the very status of the 'material'. Latour, like many others today, claims the truth of a true materialism, one not

limited by the economic or the anthropocentric. Writing in 1978, Étienne Balibar, in Althusserian mode, identified the danger of philosophies of crisis as not lying in their overt irrationalism but in their *positivism* (Balibar, 1978, p. 12). While this diagnosis may resonate in the present moment, with the work of Latour and others, Balibar's confidence in a counteroffensive, a restatement of Marxist materialism, seems to lack the resources on which his analysis could rely. This is our first problem. The second is that, in fact, the struggle at present turns more and more on materialism itself. Today everyone is materialist.

Therefore, it would be foolish to expect the simple ending of Latour's style of thought by the invocation of Marxism or a clarification of what Marxism really is as a solution. That said, while existing in a moment of dispersion, including the dispersion of Marxism, it is not enough to either valorise this dispersion or call for some kind of receding unity. Instead, if Latour stands as another mutation in the long history of anti-Marxism, one resonant far beyond his own theses, then this suggests the difficult terrain in which the attempt must be made to wrest materialism away from its own pluralisation and dispersion. Today, to update the diagnosis, the irony may be that the main enemy is materialism itself. On this unpropitious ground we find the conflicts of the present.

Notes

1. For an intellectual autobiography by Latour of his own development, one which stresses the role of philosophy and theory in that development, see Latour, 2012.
2. In the case of Rancière, this convergence with Latour could be explained by the influence of Foucault and Foucault's own dispersive vision of the 'social' as a creation of technologies of power. On Rancière's own 'anti-sociology', see Toscano, 2011.
3. Marx, 1976, pp. 128, 130, 135, 141, 142, 150, 155, 160. Keston Sutherland, (2011) has pointed out that the German *Gallerte* does not mean 'congealed' but refers to a gelatinous foodstuff made of meat, bone and connective tissue; it thus suggests the violent 'reduction' of the worker to mere animal mush.
4. In fact, we could say he treats these as speculative propositions, in the Hegelian sense, which 'means that the identity affirmed between subject and predicate is seen as equally affirming a lack of identity between subject and predicate' (Rose, 2009, p. 53).

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13

The Fate of the Generic: Marx with Badiou

Bruno Bosteels

Alain Badiou opens one of his most recent books, *The Rebirth of History: Times of Riots and Uprisings*, with an affirmation that to many of his long-time readers may have come as a surprise: 'Here, without concerning myself with opponents and rivals, I would like to say that I too am a Marxist – naively, completely and so naturally that there is no need to reiterate it.' (Badiou, 2012b, p. 8) To readers of his older works this affirmation indeed may seem surprising insofar as Badiou devotes many pages in these works to a sustained reflection upon the undeniable crisis of Marxism. Such a reflection not only takes the form of a critique of Stalinism, marked by Badiou's notorious fidelity to Maoism, it also goes much further to declare a certain end of the referentiality of Marxist discourse in general. For example, in *Theory of the Subject*, which corresponds to Badiou's seminar between January 1975 and June 1979 and which, when it is finally published in 1982, constitutes a belated summa of his peculiar version of French Maoism, he writes: 'Yes, let us admit it without detours: Marxism is in crisis; Marxism is atomized. Past the impulse and creative scission of the 1960s, after the national liberation struggles and the cultural revolution, what we inherit in times of crisis and the imminent threat of war is a fragmentary and narrow assemblage of thought and action, caught in a labyrinth of ruins and survivals.' (Badiou, 2009, p. 182) Three years later, in *Peut-on penser la politique?* (Can Politics Be Thought?), he similarly and if possible even more forcefully restates the fact that, measured against the force of its beginnings in Marx himself, the crisis of Marxism constitutes 'the event of which we are the contemporaries' today. Thus, Badiou writes:

> About the crisis of Marxism, we must say today that it is *complete*. This is not just an empirical observation. It is of the essence of the crisis as

> crisis to unfold itself all the way to its last consequences. For Marxism, this means entering in the figure of its completion. And this, not just under the promise of the joint completion of a prehistory but on the contrary in the properly historical modality of its completion, which would turn Marxism into a fact, both ideological and practical, that is purely and simply expired. (Badiou, 1985, p. 25)

If from this point of view, by the early to mid-1980s, the crisis of Marxism appears to be both inevitable and complete, then surely more than a few readers familiar with those older writings will have been surprised to hear Badiou affirm his Marxist credentials in *The Rebirth of History* as though this were the most natural thing in the world.

On the other hand, to many newcomers or to readers less familiar with Badiou's overall thought, the affirmation about his being a Marxist 'naively, completely and so naturally that there is no need to reiterate it' will have appeared to be less surprising than unconvincing. This is so because to many of these readers, who in the same breath proudly present themselves as trustworthy authorities on the matter, this French Maoist is not really a Marxist or he is insufficiently Marxist. Of course, Badiou is the first to acknowledge the prevalence of this criticism, which is aimed with particular force at his recent renewal of the defence of the communist Idea, supposedly divorced from the economic and material realities of post-Fordist times. 'I am often criticized, including in the "camp" of potential political friends, for not taking account of the characteristics of contemporary capitalism, for not offering a "Marxist analysis" of it. Consequently, for me communism is an ethereal idea; at the end of the day, I am allegedly an idealist without any anchorage in reality' (Badiou, 2012b, p. 7). Ironically, this is true even of Badiou's analysis of the age of riots in *The Rebirth of History*, which was quickly taken to task by reviewers for failing to grasp, among other things, the historical links between the riots and the restructuration of capital that is happening in the current cycle of financialisation and post-Fordist flexibilisation (see, in particular, Bernes and Clover, 2012; see also the slightly more sympathetic reviews by Smith, 2012 and, in the same publication, Brown, 2012).

Whether they come from the left or the right, the problem with all such summary trials and prompt condemnations of Badiou's insufficiency as a Marxist is that they presume to know in advance the answer to the question What is Marxism? But not only may the answer be completely different from the one that the target of these criticisms might give; even the question is posed differently. For Badiou, this question is not

theoretical but practical; it is not philosophical but political. Beyond the naive, spontaneous and nowadays entirely naturalised principle of a certain dominance of the economic ('It's the economy, stupid!'), Marxism always means political Marxism for Badiou. Therefore, it is also as a militant political discourse that Marxism must be periodised, criticised, rectified and, if necessary, destroyed and recomposed; namely, on the basis of the obstacles it encountered, the solutions it proposed and the problems that it left unresolved to this day:

> Genuine Marxism, which is identified with rational political struggle for an egalitarian organization of society, doubtless began around 1848 with Marx and Engels. But it made progress thereafter, with Lenin, Mao and a few others. I was brought up on these historical and theoretical teachings. I believe I am well aware of the problems that have been resolved, and which it is pointless to start reinvestigating; and of the problems that remain outstanding, and which require of us radical rectification and strenuous invention. (Badiou, 2012b, p. 8)

It thus turns out that many of the objections raised against Badiou for being insufficiently Marxist depend on a prior definition of Marxism that is foreign to Badiou's own. Whether they point to Marxism as the science of history, as the critique of political economy or as the philosophy of dialectical materialism, such objections fail to take into account the fact that for Badiou and his comrades in the different organisations that he helped found, Marxism has no real existence other than as a militant discourse of political subjectivity. Paul Sandevince (pseudonym for Sylvain Lazarus), in the brochure *Qu'est-ce qu'une politique marxiste?* (What Is a Marxist Politics?) published by the Maoist organisation of the UCFML (Union of French Marxist-Leninist Communists), in which both he and Badiou were active until the early 1980s, sums up this significance with his usual concision: 'Marxism is not a doctrine, whether philosophical or economical. Marxism is the politics of the proletariat in its actuality. [...] Marxism is the politics of communism' (Sandevince, 1978, p. 6; for a more detailed account of Badiou's Maoism, see chs 2 and 3 in Bosteels, 2011).

With regard to the political definition of Marxism, at least, there has been no significant change in Badiou's point of view. Already in the early Maoist pamphlet *Théorie de la contradiction* (Theory of Contradiction) from the mid-1970s, he writes: 'We must conceive of Marxism as the accumulated wisdom of popular revolutions, the reason they engender,

and the fixation and precision of their target' (Badiou, 1975, p. 16). Similarly, in *Theory of the Subject*, Badiou asks about the nature of Marxism as a science of history before rejecting this hypothesis, which even Marx and Engels (1976, pp. 303–4) had put under erasure in their manuscript for *The German Ideology*: 'We know only a single science, the science of history. One can look at history from two sides and divide it into the history of nature and the history of men. The two sides are, however, inseparable; the history of nature and the history of men are dependent on each other so long as men exist.' Against this scientificist view, still dear to his old mentor Louis Althusser, Badiou in *Theory of the Subject* underlines once again the militant political nature of genuine Marxism: 'Science of history? *Marxism is the discourse through which the proletariat supports itself as subject*. We must never let go of this idea.' (Badiou, 2009, p. 44) And in *Peut-on penser la politique?* the same idea appears again: 'Marxism is not a doctrine. It is the name of the One for a constituted network of political practices.' And again: 'Marxism in no way constitutes a grand narrative. Marxism is the consistency of a political subject, of a heterogeneous political capacity' (Badiou, 1985, pp. 52, 53). As a matter of fact, in support of this militant understanding of Marxism, we could go on citing nearly any text from any period of his work in which Badiou refers to the discourse that Marx and Engels inaugurated with *The Communist Manifesto*.

There is no longer anything surprising, then, if in *The Rebirth of History* we find what is only the latest in a long series of statements about the nature of Marxism as the living knowledge and militant discourse of communist political subjectivity:

> Any living knowledge is made up of problems, which have been or must be constructed or reconstructed, not of repetitive descriptions. Marxism is no exception to this. It is neither a branch of economics (theory of the relations of production), nor a branch of sociology (objective description of 'social reality'), nor a philosophy (a dialectical conceptualization of contradictions). It is, let us reiterate, the organized knowledge of the political means required to undo existing society and finally realize an egalitarian, rational figure of collective organization for which the name is 'communism'. (Badiou, 2012b, pp. 8–9)

This privileging of the political over the critical or of the prescriptive over the descriptive can be seen even in the preferred choices of texts from the canon. Rather than concentrating on the discovery of a new, structural

type of causality in *Capital* or even, for that matter, in the *Grundrisse* as the dynamic centre of Marxian thought, Badiou always favours the more historical and interventionist writings, such as Marx's *The Civil War in France*, Engels's *The Peasant Revolt in Germany*, Lenin's *What Is to Be Done?* and Mao's *Problems of Strategy in China's Revolutionary War*, in addition to the all too obvious choice of *The Communist Manifesto*. Marxism, Leninism and Maoism are thus tied to the principal episodes in the periodisation of revolutionary activity:

> The great stages of Marxism are punctuated by the proletarian revolutions and, precisely, the great Marxists are those who have directed and synthesized the findings of the theory, ideology and politics of the proletariat in the light of these same revolutions: Marx and Engels for the Paris Commune, Lenin and Stalin for the October Revolution, Mao Zedong for the Cultural Revolution. (UCFML, 1976, p. 3)

In particular, without wanting to submit the canonical texts for each of these sequences to a nostalgic reconstruction, for Badiou and his fellow militants, to be a Marxist today means first and foremost to take cognisance not of the solutions so much as of the problems left unsolved during the last revolutionary sequence from the twentieth century, the one of the Cultural Revolution that between 1966 and 1976 was marked by the name of Mao Zedong. One thus necessarily must remain a Marxist even or especially when it comes to pushing the unresolved problems all the way to a destruction and recomposition of Marxism itself. 'What does it mean to be a Marxist today?' Badiou asks in *Peut-on penser la politique?* 'It means to be someone who stands in a position of the subject in the destruction of Marxism, who pronounces what must die in an immanent way, and who thus dies in person, disposing of this death as the cause of a recomposition of politics' (Badiou, 1985, p. 55).

By contrast, what Badiou seems to have in mind when he affirms his naive and spontaneous adherence to Marxism in *The Rebirth of History* is actually limited to being little more than expedited praise for the analytical strengths of Marx's original diagnosis in *Capital*. This is a diagnosis that today, in the midst of a rampant worldwide crisis, may well be truer than it was a century and a half ago: 'Basically, today's world is exactly the one which, in a brilliant anticipation, a kind of true science fiction, Marx heralded as the full unfolding of the irrational and, in truth, monstrous potentialities of capitalism' (Badiou, 2012b, p. 12). For Badiou, though, it has become ever more painfully evident that the essence of Marxism is not analytical but political. Not only does

he consider communist politics to be of the order of a wager, essentially disjoined from the critique of political economy – 'We must wager on communist politics, you will never deduce it from Capital' – but also in *Peut-on penser la politique?* he goes so far as to suggest that what marks a defeatist stance, even or especially when it finds shelter and couches itself in the Marxological orthodoxy of the university discourse, is the witting or unwitting inability to separate one from the other: 'For me, an intrapolitical defeat is the inability of an intervention to disjoin the political from the analytical. To fail means not to interrupt a given state of certainty' (Badiou, 1985, pp. 87, 104).

* * *

Marxism in Badiou's understanding, in sum, is neither the science of history that is inseparably human and natural nor the dialectical philosophy that puts Hegel back on his feet; it is neither a critique of classical or bourgeois political economy nor an objective sociological description of the misery of the world with an underlying anthropology of the true nature of humanity as generic species-being. Instead, it is or was a militant intervening discourse to sustain the real movement of communism.

Is or was? There clearly exists some ambivalence in this regard, as is only to be expected in the case of a discourse that constantly comes under the sway of the trials and tribulations of the specific conjuncture in which it intervenes. If Marxism in effect is neither an objective science nor a perennial philosophy but an intervening discourse of the political subject, then the historical referents and conceptual operators of this discourse can be expected to undergo major changes as well. Marx, Lenin and Mao – to limit ourselves to the only names systematically summoned by Badiou – are far from presenting a homogeneous doctrine that would go by the official name of Marxism or Marxism-Leninism, to be protected by the guardians of orthodoxy from all kinds of ideological deviations. To the contrary, all efforts to safeguard such a doctrine are symptoms of academic conservatism at best and dogmatic sclerosis at worst due to the fundamental inconsistency of its object: 'To put it bluntly, *Marxism doesn't exist*', because 'between Marx and Lenin there is rupture and foundation rather than continuity and development. Equally, there is rupture between Stalin and Lenin, and between Mao and Stalin' (Badiou, 2005, p. 58).

As far as the breaks and discontinuities between Marx, Lenin and Mao are concerned, Badiou sometimes adopts another of Sylvain Lazarus's arguments, which refers precisely to the changing roles of history and

politics, of the relations between the so-called objective and the subjective factors from one figure to the next. For the author of *Capital*, there thus would exist a close union or fusion between history and politics, enabling a certain transitivity between the working class as a social category and the proletariat as an organisational operator devoid of all substance; for the author of *What Is to Be Done?*, the need for a vanguard party already hints at a symptomatic gap between social being and consciousness or between the class in itself and the class for itself; and for the author of 'On Contradiction' and 'On Practice', who is also, not coincidentally, responsible for a 'Critique of Stalin's *Economic Problems of Socialism in the USSR*', politics is put in the command post as a relatively autonomous practice or instance, whereas history, instead of serving as an external referent at the level of social being, becomes absorbed into politics as the name for the latter's entirely contingent unfolding according to a periodisation of its own.[1]

Along similar lines, over the course of the past two or three decades, Badiou has increasingly come to disjoin the analytical role of Marxism from the political one. As a diagnostic, Marx's critique of political economy may well be more valid today than yesterday, but this does not help the militant actors in the political riots and uprisings of our time to devise the appropriate tactics and strategies for intervention. Something has entered into a profound crisis in the articulation between these two aspects or logics of Marxism, which I have called the analytical and the political and which others call the logic of history and the logic of struggle, supposedly marked by an incommensurability overcome only by the imaginary glue of communism (see Dardot and Laval, 2012).

In other words, Badiou is less and less convinced that we can understand politics, like the development of religion, '*through* history, *in* and *with* history', as the early Marx said in *The Holy Family*, in a phrase often repeated by the late Daniel Bensaïd (Marx and Engels, 1975, p. 109; see also Bensaïd, 2006). This is so because, for the author of *Being and Event*, politics is entirely of the order of the event, which cannot be understood unless we put to the side all mere facts and opinions about facts. 'The paradox of the endeavor in which we are engaged by the retreat of the political is the following: since the determination of the essence of politics cannot be guaranteed by structure (inconsistency of sets, delinking) or by sense (History does not add up to a totality), its only point of reference is the event' we can read already in *Peut-on penser la politique?* (Badiou, 1985, p. 67). And along the same lines, Badiou will increasingly come to see a political intervention – like art, mathematics and love as the other three domains in which events can take place – as

self-referential and authorised only by itself. This is especially clear in the period from the late 1980s to the mid-1990s, roughly from *Being and Event* to *Metapolitics*, when the antihistoricist and antidialectical impetus of Badiou's work is effectively at its peak. But many commentators perceive a similar stance in the return to communism proposed in *The Communist Hypothesis* and *The Rebirth of History*. The potential drawbacks rightly or wrongly associated with this position should be obvious enough: a seemingly ethereal aloofness, a privileging of the philosopher-intellectual to the detriment of the masses in revolt and, in general, a separation of praxis and Idea under the openly accepted philosophical guardianship of Plato rather than Marx. Conversely, the potential risks involved in the opposite position should be no less evident: an anti-intellectual disdain for theory in favour of the pedagogy of the deed, a tendency to explain away the emergence of autonomous political tactics on the basis of the historical cycles and crises of the capitalist world system and, in general, a reduction of the political or interventionist Marx of *The Communist Manifesto* or *The Civil War in France* to the more analytical or systemic Marx of *Capital*, with or without the supplement of the *Grundrisse*.

However, the perceived shift in the trajectory of Badiou's evaluation of Marxism as a militant discourse is less radical than appears at first sight. Even as he will come to interpret the sense or meaning of the term 'history' differently, Badiou in fact has always defended the thesis that politics – while necessarily *anchored* or *rooted* in history – cannot be *inferred* or *deduced* from history alone. This is why all events of politics are necessarily forced events.

Let us consider, for example, how in *Theory of the Subject* Badiou attempts to devise a dialectical articulation between history and politics, mapped onto the dialectic of productive masses and partisan class. 'Class, apprehended according to the dialectical division of its dialecticity, means partisan political action anchored in the productive historicity of the masses', he claims. 'The whole point is to know how all this works together, because it is this working together that *is* class. This entails nothing less than to make the rectifiable singularity of politics rise up in the real movement of history' (Badiou, 2009, p. 27). It is true that Badiou subsequently comes to abandon this view of the transitivity or, at the very least, the dialectical working together of history and politics or of masses and classes organised through partisan action. Thus, in *Peut-on penser la politique?*, intransitivity becomes the new key in determining the essence of politics, which marks the point of the real even of the beginning of Marx's

discourse, which only the Marxist critique of political economy ended up fixating into a fiction:

> What should have been a strategy of the event, a hypothesis about the hysterias of the social, an organ for the cut-interpretation, a courage of chance, has finally been presented, by way of the economy, as giving a convenient measure of social relationships. Thus, Marxism was destroyed by its own history, which is that of its fixion, with an x, the history of its fixation into the philosopheme of the political. (Badiou, 1985, p. 14)[2]

Between *Theory of the Subject* and *Being and Event*, with *Peut-on penser la politique?* serving as a pivotal transition, the old Marxist paradigm of base and superstructure, of forces and relations of production and, in militant terms, of the dialectic of masses, classes, party and state is thus abandoned in favour of the seemingly disparate paradigm of situation, intervention, event, fidelity, subject and truth, which we have come to associate with Badiou's own philosophy.

Yet this does not mean that Badiou henceforth will abandon Marx's dialectic and forgo the category of history altogether. In fact, in *Peut-on penser la politique?* he proposes that the new vocabulary remain that of the dialectic: 'I state that the concepts of event, structure, intervention, and fidelity are the very concepts of the dialectic, provided the latter is not reduced to the flat image, which was already inadequate for Hegel, of totalisation and the labour of the negative' (Badiou, 1985, p. 84).[3] And, as recently as in *The Rebirth of History*, he revisits much of the grammar of the articulation in question; however, now the history in which all politics is said to be 'anchored' or 'rooted' no longer refers to objective factors but instead becomes wholly internal to the subjective process of sustaining a political event as such. For the post-Marxist or post-Maoist in Badiou, the point is no longer to politicise history but to historicise politics. If there is a rebirth or reawakening of history, it is no longer based in the objective history of class struggle but in the becoming-historical of certain spontaneous revolts and uprisings and in the making-political of those historical riots. Henceforth, in other words, all there is to the dialectic, if this is still what we want to call the theory of the event, is an immanent periodisation of spontaneous riot, historical movement and political organisation. And so the new version of the old question asked in *Theory of the Subject* in terms of masses and class becomes the following one in *The Rebirth of History*: 'How are we to inscribe politically, as active materiality under the sign of the Idea, a

reawakening of History?', particularly if such inscriptions are no longer socially predetermined but instead both rare and contingent: 'Let us simply note that if every political truth is rooted in a massive popular event, it nevertheless cannot be said that it is reducible to it' (Badiou, 2012b, pp. 67, 89; for Badiou's changing views of history and politics, see also chs 3 and 7 in Bosteels, 2011).

* * *

The militant lesson that Badiou draws from the Arab Spring, the Occupy movement in the USA and, for example, the *indignados* of Puerta del Sol is that the philosopher should put an ear to the ground to listen to the rumble of massive popular events while avoiding at all costs becoming the police or judge of history – or, even worse, helping the existing cops or judges by becoming a snitch: 'For now, though, the philosopher will be allowed to lend an ear to the signal, rather than rushing to the police station.'[4] Philosophy (or what I prefer to call theory) is neither a waiting room in the police station nor a world-historical tribunal from which to judge everything and nothing but an activity of thought under the condition of events that are partially beyond its control. Throughout *The Rebirth of History*, Badiou repeats a number of expressions to make sure that philosophy both lets itself be conditioned by and learns from the riots as the actually happening political events of our time. Thus, in French, he most often uses the expression *être à l'école de*, meaning 'to learn from' or, literally, 'to be schooled by' the riots and uprisings of the last decade – exactly in the same way (or so it seems) as, in the 1970s, it was common usage among French Maoists to rely on this expression to refer to the task of theory (the reference to philosophy conversely being far less common at the time) in the face of the events of the 'red years' that took their inspiration from the Cultural Revolution. In any case, we should not in turn rush to judgement by imputing to the philosopher a desire for teaching a lesson to the participants in the riots. Doing so would mean, ironically, turning oneself into a mirror image of the philosopher rushing to the police station: instead of blaming the rioters for their lack of an Idea, we would quickly and somewhat predictably blame the philosopher for his excessive confidence in the Idea. Any day now I picture somebody along these lines writing a book called *Badiou's Lesson*, echoing and extending Jacques Rancière's harsh attack on the master thinker in *Althusser's Lesson*. But while in *The Rebirth of History* Badiou does indeed speak of 'lessons', the fact of the matter is that these are to be modestly *learned from* the rioters and not magisterially *taught to* them, very much in the same way that in an earlier book,

The Century, Badiou presents a series of 'lessons' taught *by* rather than *to* the artistic, political and psychoanalytic experimenters of the twentieth century. 'In the condition of political misery that has been ours for three decades, is it not obvious that it is we who have everything to learn from the current popular uprisings?' Badiou also asks in an article written for *Le Monde* with regard to the events of 2011 in Tunisia and Egypt and reprinted in *The Rebirth of History*. 'Yes, we must be the pupils [écoliers] of these movements, not their stupid teachers' (Badiou, 2012b, pp. 106–7).

Accusations against the philosopher's overreaching ambitions with regard to the recent riots depend very much on an unspoken and profoundly un-Marxist presupposition that these accusers attribute to Badiou's recent work on communism; namely, the presupposition that it belongs to the philosopher and to the philosopher alone to formulate, develop and propagate what he calls the Idea, without which there could be no reawakening of History. This would place the rioters in the position of impatient schoolchildren with a likely attention deficit disorder having to wait for the master's class about the role of the Idea. The latter, then, would be the philosopher's brainchild with which to shepherd the rioters and looters around the imposed resurgence of communism. Similarly, certain readers will have concluded from the title of another of Badiou's recent books, *Philosophy for Militants*, that political militancy seems to be dependent on the prior development of theoretical work, which would have to be performed by the professional philosopher. This, too, would lead us straight back into a form of speculative idealism along the lines of how Marx, in his 1873 postface to the second German edition of *Capital*, reproaches Hegel for placing the driving motor of history in the realm of the Idea: 'For Hegel, the process of thinking, which he even transforms into an independent subject, under the name of "the Idea", is the creator of the real world, and the real world is only the external appearance of the idea' (Marx, 1976a, p. 102). However, while there is certainly no shortage of vagueness surrounding the notion of the Idea as brandished by Badiou, neither *The Communist Hypothesis* nor *The Rebirth of History* bears out the presupposition that elaborating this notion of the Idea would be the exclusive purview of the professional philosopher. To the contrary, if there is one presupposition consistently at work in all of Badiou's writings on the political condition, it is the notion that politics is an active and generic form of thought in its own right with its own ideas, thoughts, watchwords and scripts. And whereas Marx speaks in this regard about the role of praxis in overcoming the inertia of the

traditional opposition between theory and practice, Badiou prefers to describe politics as a *pensée-faire*, a collective and generic 'thought-practice' or 'thinking-doing', which is not in need of the philosopher to know either what it is or what is to be done. 'If politics is the practice of a thought in an absolutely self-sufficient register', Badiou writes in *Metapolitics*, 'then we can say that philosophy's tasks is to seize the conditions for the practice of thought within this singular register known as politics' (Badiou, 2005, pp. 86–7).

Even the call to ensure that an Idea be rooted in the historical events that mark the present age of riots and uprisings so as to give them greater durability and expansiveness should not be treated as the symptom of a philosopher's unsavoury desire for hegemony over the future of politics. For, aside from the fact that from the materialist principle that it is philosophy that is conditioned by politics and not the other way around, part of this call furthermore stems very much from the opposite desire; namely, the wish for politics to bring about a situation in which everyone can be a philosopher. 'Of course, you will recognise in this a Platonic desire, though expanded from the aristocracy of the guardians to the popular collective in its entirety', Badiou writes in *Philosophy for Militants*. 'This wish could be expressed as follows: wherever a human collective is working in the direction of equality, the conditions are met for everyone to be a philosopher' (Badiou, 2012a, p. 37).[5] And so, not only are ideas and thoughts immanent to actual political struggles, but even the communist Idea, for all its seemingly glacial Platonism or speculative Hegelianism, can be translated as the wish for politics to create a generic place in which rioters and philosophers – like the hunter, fisherman, herdsman and critic in the (still overly masculine and pastoral) version of communist society famously prefigured in *The German Ideology* – become gathered into a single figure, perhaps even without having to split their time into morning, afternoon, evening and after-dinner activities, as was still the case for Marx and Engels. 'In this sense', writes Badiou, 'all emancipatory politics contains for philosophy, whether visible or invisible, the watchword that brings about the actuality of universality – namely, if all are together, then all are communists! And if all are communists, then all are philosophers!' (Badiou, 2012a, p. 38).[6] According to this formulation, the time may not yet seem ripe for the possibility of the universal sharing of philosophy to become a reality. Still, instead of setting our expectant eyes on the distant future of a state of affairs that would be yet to come, we could also read this

desire for everyone to become a philosopher as something that already becomes actualised in every instance of collective struggle, no matter how local or short lived it may well turn out to be. In this sense, once again, the argument would be in favour of politics as a generic thought-practice in which theoretical ideas are not transcendent but immanent to the actions and initiatives that are their only practical existence. Of course, what remains to be seen is whether and to what extent Badiou himself, in recent works such as *The Rebirth of History* and *The Communist Hypothesis*, facilitates such an understanding of politics as immanent thought-practice.

In fact, we can easily see how the notion of thoughts or ideas appears as if redoubled in this context. There are, first, the ideas and thoughts inherent in any political practice but then, second, the ideas and thoughts that would belong to philosophy or theory, conditioned by actually existing politics. This redoubling of the category of thought not only goes to the heart of the problem about the relation between events and concepts: where or at which level, for example, should we locate the category of what Badiou calls the Idea? But what is more, this redoubling of thought also begs the question of the place of the third category, namely history, in the articulation between philosophy and politics.

In this last regard, we face a decision between two basic positions: either we maintain the necessity of a double occurrence of thought, first within politics and then within philosophy, or else we strive as much as possible to dissipate such reduplication in the name of strict historical immanence or what Marx in the 'Theses on Feuerbach' calls the 'earthliness' or 'this-sidedness' of practical activity, with the likely result of a gradual or axiomatic withering away of philosophy as a separate activity. If Badiou is reluctant to accept the last position as a simple given or self-evident point of departure, it may very well correspond to the ultimate aim of his entire philosophy, which for this reason always harbours certain antiphilosophical elements as well. Like the Idea, then, truths are immanent to the situation in which they are worked out. 'A truth is something that exists in its active process, which manifests itself, as truth, in different circumstances marked by this process,' Badiou also writes in *The Rebirth of History*. 'Truths are not prior to political processes; there is no question of confirming or applying them. Truths are reality itself, as a process of production of political novelties, political sequences, political revolutions, and so forth.' (Badiou, 2012b, p. 87) Ideas, too, would be part of the ongoing political processes. Rather than

operating at a theoretically superior level, they would be active on the ground or at the grassroots level in the militant rationality of the struggles themselves.

On the other hand, just as the notion of truths in the systematic elaboration of this philosophy always seems to escape and exceed the circumstantial grip of the worlds in which they are uttered and embodied, Badiou is equally adamant about always drawing a clear line of demarcation between philosophy and the various non-philosophical procedures – among them politics – in which events can take place and truths can be produced. And, while such a line of demarcation is meant as a lesson in restraint to keep philosophy from making the disastrous claim that it can be a politics (or a science or an art) in its own right, it is also true that this insistence runs counter to the wish to dissolve the heterogeneity between politics and philosophy into a single thought-practice whose unity would be guaranteed by the mediating term of history as the sole realm of all human activities.

In the end, the simplest way of summarising what Marx and Badiou have in common is to consider both as thinkers of the generic. The location of this genericity is certainly different – with the young Marx, especially, situating the generic on the side of human being as a collective entity or species-being and Badiou, by contrast, assigning the generic to being qua being as revealed in a singular truth procedure. However, just as for Marx the collective or communal nature of the human being should not be seen as an anthropological given but as an axiomatic presupposition enacted in the here and now of concrete struggles, so, too, must we avoid the false impression that Badiou's ontology would depend on a phenomenological gift or donation as the appearing of pure being in the miracle of an event. Instead, both Marx and Badiou are versions of a materialist and dialectical understanding of the link – which is at the same time a delinking – between being, truth, event and the subject. The author of *Being and Event* merely pushes the deconstruction of being all the way to the point, marked as a symptomatic site, where the impasse of being presupposes and at the same time coincides with the pass of the subject. This means that in the end, generic thought-practices such as those of politics, which organise a material fidelity to the chance occurrence of an event, can still be considered instances of what Marx, in his 'Theses on Feuerbach', calls revolutionary practice or praxis – even if for Badiou the age of revolutions definitively ended with the end of the Cultural Revolution: 'The coincidence of the changing of circumstances and of human activity or self-change can be conceived and rationally understood only as *revolutionary practice*' (Marx, 1976b, p. 4).

Notes

1. Aside from the texts collected in Lazarus, 2013, see also Lazarus, 1992, an anonymous text most likely authored by Lazarus and available in English as Lazarus, 2005. For Badiou's critical rejoinder to the work of Lazarus, see ch. 2 in Badiou, 2005.
2. The best account of the destruction or deconstruction of Marxism that occurs in the mid-1980s in Badiou's work can be found in two chapters written by Alberto Toscano (Toscano, 2004; 2007). For a recent attempt to put the critique of political economy back into the evaluation of Badiou's Maoism via the UCFML, see Walker, 2012.
3. Before the systematic account in Bosteels, 2011, I discussed the role of the dialectic in Badiou's philosophy in Bosteels, 2004. On the comparison with Hegel, see Bosteels, 2010.
4. In French this sentence reads as follows: 'Dans l'instant toutefois, on permettra au philosophe de prêter l'oreille au signal, plutôt que de se précipiter au commissariat.' (Badiou, 2011, p. 37) Gregory Elliott's translation is less evocative of the philosopher as a tattletale who hastens to tell on the rioters in the police station: 'For now, however, a philosopher will be permitted to lend an ear to the signal rather than rushing to judgement.' (Badiou, 2012b, p. 21)
5. Badiou does not elaborate on the Gramscian undertones of this formulation. In fact, to my knowledge Antonio Gramsci is conspicuously absent from all of Badiou's writings.
6. Compare with *The German Ideology*: '[I]n communist society, where nobody has one exclusive sphere of activity but each can become accomplished in any branch he wishes, society regulates the general production and thus makes it possible for me to do one thing today and another tomorrow, to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticise after dinner, just as I have a mind, without ever becoming hunter, fisherman, herdsman or critic' (Marx and Engels, 1976, p. 47).

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