

RED RHETORICS: POLITICS, POLEMICS AND THE MARX-MACHINE

by

CHARLES ANDREW BARBOUR

B.A., Mount Alison University, 1994
M.A., The University of New Brunswick, 1996

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

(Individual Interdisciplinary Studies Graduate Program)

We accept this thesis as conforming
to the required standard

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

September 2003

© Charles Andrew Barbour, 2003

In presenting this thesis in partial fulfilment of the requirements for an advanced degree at the University of British Columbia, I agree that the Library shall make it freely available for reference and study. I further agree that permission for extensive copying of this thesis for scholarly purposes may be granted by the head of my department or by his or her representatives. It is understood that copying or publication of this thesis for financial gain shall not be allowed without my written permission.

Department of Individual Interdisciplinary Studies Graduate Program

The University of British Columbia
Vancouver, Canada

Date 9/10/03

ABSTRACT

The recent past has witnessed an explosion of interest in politics, in republican traditions, and in what many have dubbed “the political.” This return to politics and to theories of ideology has, however, generally been conducted, not only in the absence of, but often in direct opposition to any extensive reconsideration of Karl Marx. Marx is treated as the chief example of a line of thought that denies the specificity of the political, that reduces it to more fundamental social or material conditions, and that treats politics, ideology and rhetoric as means to an end, not ends in themselves. Building on Marx’s early texts, and especially on his forgotten polemics with Bruno Bauer and Max Stirner, I argue that, in fact, Marx still has a great deal to offer theories of the political, and that his work represents both an affirmation of the political freedoms associated with the *res publica* or “open space” of discourse and struggle, and a powerful critique of the limitations of those freedoms – an analysis, that is to say, of those places where social conditions render political freedoms void of significant content. Reawakening Marx’s texts and the promise of justice that they announce in a post-Marxist conjuncture will, however, require that they be approached in a new fashion. I propose reading Marx, not as the author of a single, monolithic system known as Marxism, but as a politically engaged, rhetorically gifted, but also fragmentary and ambiguous writer. Marx’s texts do not constitute a single, coherent body of work. Nor, however, is his career shorn in half by a definitive epistemological break. Rather, the massive collection of documents retroactively labeled “Marx” constitute an overdetermined assemblage of cracks and fissures, gaps and breaks, skips and relays – what I call a Marx-machine.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract	ii
Table of Contents	iii
List of Abbreviations	v
Acknowledgements	vi
Dedication	vii
INTRODUCTION: LEIPZIG COUNCILS	1
PART ONE: RED RHETORICS	20
CHAPTER 1: THE POLEMICAL MATRIX	21
The New Republicans	21
Marx in <i>Res Publica</i>	54
Philopolemology / Marx and the Law	88
The Demolition of Substance	103
The Ego and Its Other	131

PART TWO: THE MARX-MACHINE	152
 CHAPTER 2: ALLEGORIES OF WRITING	 153
The Reading Lesson	153
The Marx-Machine	176
Mechanomimesis / Copying Machines	190
Proper Names	209
Aesthetic Dimensions	226
Ghosts in the Machine	236
 CHAPTER 3: THE FRACTURED ESSENCE	 249
Historical Materialisms	249
The Impure Form	272
The Visible God	288
 CONCLUSION: EXISTENTIAL REPUBLICS	 305
 WORKS CITED	 323

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Citations from Marx's work are followed by abbreviated references to their source. When the collected or selected works are used, the text indicates the specific work in question.

C *Capital*. Vol. 1, *A Critique of Political Economy*. Trans. Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling. New York: Modern Library.

CW *Karl Marx and Frederick Engels Collected Works*. New York: International Publishers.

Citations give volume and page number: (*CW* 3: 229).

G *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy (Rough Draft)*. Trans. Martin Nicolaus. New York: Vintage Books.

GI *The German Ideology*. Trans. Clemens Dutt, W. Lough and C. P. Macgill. London: Lawrence and Wishart.

MEGA *Marx-Engels Gesamtausgabe*. Berlin: Dietz Verlag.

Citations give division, volume, and page number: (*MEGA* IV: 3, 399).

SW *Karl Marx: Selected Works*. Ed. David McLellan. Oxford: Oxford UP.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The most sincere acknowledgement and gratitude goes to my research supervisor, Dr. Steven Taubeneck, whose guidance and support throughout the course of my degree has been incalculable. The current study would never have been possible without, among many other things, his encouraging direction and rigorous commentary. Other members of my advisory committee – Drs. Kevin McNeilly and Thomas M. Kemple – have also contributed immeasurably to this project. In particular, Dr. Kemple’s book *Reading Marx Writing: Melodrama, the Market, and the “Grundrisse”* has proven decisive. My work would have been unthinkable if it were not for the existence of the Individual Interdisciplinary Studies Graduate Program (IISGP), the inspiration of its members, and particularly the tireless efforts of its now former chair, Dr. Rhodri Windsor-Liscombe. The Department of English at the University of British Columbia has also generously supported this project for many years. Finally, I must mention my good friends and fellow founders of the Ephemeral Theory Collective, Richard Ingram, Joy James, and Jim Overboe.

FOR LYNN

Introduction: Leipzig Councils

The summer of 1845 was, as radicals like to say, a “hot” one in the Saxon city of Leipzig. In the wake of the Napoleonic wars, and the subsequent dissemination of republican ideas throughout Europe, Saxony had become an increasingly liberal state – establishing a constitution and a parliament, encouraging trade and commerce, and nourishing a moderate, literate civil society. From 1841 onward, however, the new Prussian king Friedrich Wilhelm IV and his reactionary, conservative regime sought to exert their influence in neighboring Saxony – to halt and even roll back the reforms of the Saxon liberals, for fear that they might spread into Prussia and throughout the German empires. By the summer of 1845, a loose cluster of political antagonisms within Saxony had taken shape around the so-called *Deutschkatholizismus* or “German Catholic” movement. Led by the charismatic, recently defrocked priest Johannes Ronge, this group called for a “new reformation” in southern Germany and for the creation of a specifically German Catholic Church with no ties to Rome or to the Papacy. It also demanded a government based on popular sovereignty, equality for women, and official recognition of human rights. Largely due to the interference of the Prussian king in Saxon affairs, the movement was harassed by government authorities, especially by agents of the monarchy. The issue came to a head in the streets of Leipzig on August 12, 1845. On that day, the city was to welcome the arrival of its Crown Prince Johann with a military parade and attendant ceremonies. A large crowd of demonstrators gathered to renounce Saxony’s capitulation to Prussian interests, and to oppose the ongoing rollback of liberal reforms. Such protests were as choreographed then as they are now. Tensions mounted, and battle lines were

drawn. But the day would not end, as it so often does in these situations, with a merely symbolic display of force. On the Prince's orders, the military surrounded the crowd, blocked them within the confines of a small hotel gateway, and proceeded to open fire.

The Leipzig Massacre was to be one of the most bloody and controversial events of the *Vormärz* – the period of German history “before March,” or before the March riots that signaled the beginning of the 1848 revolution in Germany. In an article published in the Chartist paper *The Northern Star* on September 13, 1845, a young Friedrich Engels described the atrocity for a British audience. “This massacre,” he wrote:

is by far the most villainous act of scoundrelism that military despotism ever devised in this country. When the people were shouting “Ronge forever! down with Popery!” Prince John of Saxony [...] ordered the battalion of rifles, called in by the authorities, to divide into several detachments and to block up the passages to the hotel in which his literary “royal highness” had taken up his quarters. The soldiers obeyed, and pressed the people by enclosing them in a narrow circle, and advancing upon them into the gateway of the hotel; and from this unavoidable entering of the people into the sacred gateway of the royal residence, brought on by the military acting under Prince John's orders; from this very circumstance the pretext was taken to fire on the people [...] Nor is this all; the people were taken between the several detachments, and the plan of his royal highness was executed by a crossfire upon the defenseless masses; wherever they turned they met with a repeated volley from the rifles, and had not the soldiers, more humane than Prince John, fired mostly over the heads of the people, the slaughter would have been terrible (*CW* 4, 645-6).

The event was tragic but not atypical of the reactionary politics and state sanctioned violence that eventually sparked the revolutions of 1848. Ironically, it was in Saxony, the most liberal of Germany's principalities, that state power manifested itself in this most brutal fashion. In his article for *The Northern Star*, Engels seizes on the contradiction, proclaiming that "[t]he Saxons must see, now, that they are under the same military rule as all other Germans, and that, with all their constitution, liberal laws, liberal censorship, and liberal king's speeches, martial law is the only one that has any practical existence in their country" (646). Here political liberalism has done little or nothing to prevent the most severe forms of social repression. Thus, Engels concludes, it is to the radical workers movement, and especially to the movement initiated by the Silesian weavers' strikes in June of 1844, that the Saxon people must now turn.

In one sense, the Leipzig Massacre is but a horrific footnote in the long, often significantly more horrific history of struggles for justice and democracy. One could compare it to any number of similar events of varying scale and intensity – events that occur, not only in the past, but today as well, doubtless even as I write these words. In another sense, however, the Leipzig Massacre has a crucial if all but forgotten place in the history of social and political struggles, and in the theory of those struggles. For it had a direct bearing on the development of the concept of "ideology" as it was first discussed by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels in *The German Ideology*. What is now called *The German Ideology* is actually a manuscript that Marx and Engels worked on between 1845 and 1847, but never published in their lifetimes. The text, first released in the *Marx-Engels Gesamtausgabe* or collected works in 1932, is usually reduced by readers, editors, and commentators alike to its opening chapter, which editors call "Feuerbach." Originally

intended as an introduction to the rest of the work, this brief chapter is thought by most Marx scholars to be crucial, as it is said to represent Marx's first systematic exposition of the so-called science or method of "historical materialism." In fact, the vast majority of the manuscript, over four hundred of the printed work's six hundred pages, is taken up with an extensive polemic against the left or young Hegelian philosophers Bruno Bauer and Max Stirner – a polemic Marx and Engels call "*Das Leipziger Konzil*." The reference to the city of Leipzig in this title has at least two connotations. First, it recalls the fact that, in order to elude the Prussian censors, the young Hegelians published much of their work in Leipzig, primarily with a bookseller named Otto Wigand. Second, by invoking the place at which Martin Luther faced the second of his three trials for heresy in 1519, it covertly mocks what Marx and Engels take to be the residual theological elements of young Hegelian discourse, or the sense in which their speculative philosophizing is no less empty and ineffectual than the theology they claim to have negated, transcended, or destroyed. Thus it comes as little surprise to find that "The Leipzig Council" is framed as a parody of an ecclesiastical legal proceeding, with Feuerbach, Bauer, Stirner and others being portrayed as advocates who plead "the cause of the Most High, alias the Absolute" (GI 96) – arguing the case of a new, purely theoretical reformation, even while, just under their noses, the streets rage with pitched battles between demonstrators and soldiers.

The events that occurred in Leipzig during the hot summer of 1845 might also explain, or help explain, the otherwise ambiguous opening sentences of "The Leipzig Council." Significantly, had Marx and Engels stuck with their original plan, and not dramatically redrafted the text at least three times over the course of three years, the opening sentences of "The Leipzig Council" might well have been those of *The German*

Ideology as well. Referring to a journal (published by Wigand) in which the young Hegelians had recently engaged in a series of polemical exchanges, Marx and Engels write:

[i]n the third volume of the *Wigand'schen Vierteljahrsschrift* for 1845 the battle of the Huns, prophetically portrayed by Kaulbach, actually happens. The spirits of the slain, whose fury is not appeased even in death, raise a hue and cry, which sounds like the thunder of battles and war-cries, the clatter of swords, shields and iron wagons. But it is not a battle over earthly things [*irdische Dinge*]. The holy war [*heilige Krieg*] is being waged, not over protective tariffs, the Constitution, potato blight, banking affairs and railways, but in the name of the most sacred interests of the spirit [*die heiligsten Interessen des Geistes*], in the name of "Substance," "Self-consciousness," "Criticism," the "Unique" and the "True Man" (96).

"The Battle of the Huns" or "*Hunnenschlacht*" refers to a mural completed by Karl von Kaulbach in 1837. The work, which adorns the staircase of the Berlin Museum, represents a battle between the Huns and the Romans that took place at Châlons in 451 CE. In it, two exhausted armies struggle on the ground, while in the sky above the ghosts of the slain form two far more colossal throngs of spiritual warriors, and prepare to clash once again. At the painting's center is an empty horizon that separates the people below from the spirits above – as though the connection between the two were forever in sight but forever retreating. On one level at least, "The Battle of the Huns" is an allegory for the spiritual struggle between modern Germany and classical antiquity, or Germany's effort to understand itself here in relation to, there as distinct from, the classics. It evokes the debate that took place in nineteenth century Germany between the ancients and the moderns – the confrontation (both sides of which are articulated so powerfully in Marx's writing)

between those who sought to recapture the harmony and balance of the classical world, and those who embraced modernity in all its fragmentary contradictions. In the opening scene of “The Leipzig Council,” however, Marx and Engels use Kaulbach’s mural for rather different purposes. For them, it becomes a parody of the young Hegelian philosophers, who seem to do battle in the clouds of speculation, oblivious to the very real struggles still being waged, perhaps forever being waged, on the ground below.

The standard interpretations of *The German Ideology* – virtually without exception based on the “Feuerbach” chapter alone – are well established and well known. For all their many differences, most schools of Marx scholarship agree that *The German Ideology* is a pivotal text. Whether it is characterized as a definitive epistemological break with earlier projects or as a realization of nascent intentions, *The German Ideology* is said to represent the moment when Marx first outlines his science or his method of historical materialism. For Marxists, it is in this text that Marx first clarifies the all important links between the history of productive forces, the division of labour, the function of ruling ideas or ideologies, the operation of class struggle, and so forth. It is also here that Marx first explains in detail his unique methodology, maintaining that, *pace* Hegel and the young Hegelians, he will seek to understand human history through a material analysis of conditions of existence and not a philosophical treatment of the progress of Spirit or of the speculative Idea. “Life [*Leben*] is not determined [*bestimmt*] by consciousness [*Bewusstsein*],” Marx writes in one of many familiar turns of phrase that multiply throughout *The German Ideology*, and that together constitute the framework for so much of what would later become Marxist science and Marxist method, “but consciousness by life. In the first method of approach [*Betrachtungsweise*] the starting point is consciousness

taken as the living individual; in the second method, which conforms to real life [*dem wirklichen Leben entsprechenden*], it is the real living individuals themselves, and consciousness is considered solely as *their* consciousness [*ihr Bewusstsein*]" (38). Here, then, is the small irony I propose to highlight from the outset. While it is widely recognized that, in *The German Ideology*, Marx claims ideas cannot be treated in abstraction, but must be understood in relation to the specific social and political contexts (and especially the struggles) through which they emerged and took shape, it is nonetheless commonplace to pay little or no attention to the specific struggles and disputes, conflicts and antagonisms that lead to the creation of *The German Ideology* itself.

Composed as a polemic, or rather a cluster of polemics responding to still other polemics, *The German Ideology* is a fundamentally antagonistic text – one that, through a kind of *mise en abyme*, both describes and performs, explains and enacts, the fundamentally antagonistic status of all social relations. For one thing (and this deceptively simple point often gets erased in secondary commentary) the bulk of the work is not written by Marx, but by Marx and Engels. An extraordinarily complex system of inscriptions and marginalia, annotations and corrections, the manuscript of *The German Ideology* bears the mark of countless discussions and tensions between these two authors, and remains difficult to piece together to this day. The arrangement of the some seventy manuscript pages that make up the introduction or the “Feuerbach” chapter alone has been cause for a long and as yet unresolved debate among bibliographers. After a series of redrafts, Marx and Engels left *The German Ideology* incomplete and unpublished in the spring of 1847. As its authors envisioned it, however, the finished work would have consisted of two volumes – one on the Young Hegelians, which was to be entitled

“Critique of Modern German Philosophy According to its Representatives Feuerbach, Bruno Bauer and Stirner,” and a second one on a group of philosophers whom Marx and Engels dubbed the True Socialists, and which was to be called “Critique of German Socialism According to its Various Prophets.” In the extant manuscript, the vast majority of the first volume is taken up by the two chapters of “The Leipzig Council,” polemics against Bruno Bauer and Max Stirner respectively. The second volume, which consists of a series of critical reviews of books and essays by figures such as Karl Grün and Georg Kuhlmann, also bears the title “True Socialism.” Only three of its projected five chapters were ever written – one, it appears, by Moses Hess, which was subsequently edited and recopied by Joseph Weydemeyer. The portion of the text now called “Feuerbach” – a name Engels gave it while digging through Marx’s literary estate in 1883 – was to serve as an extended introduction to the rest of the work. Thus, had it been published in Marx’s and Engels’s lifetimes, *The German Ideology* would have consisted of an “Introduction,” a large volume on the young Hegelians centered around “The Leipzig Council,” and a large volume on “True Socialism.” Almost without exception, and not without the help of an extremely invasive reconstruction of the manuscript by its Communist editors, Marx scholars generally ignore the two larger volumes, and focus their attention on the introduction. As a result, the polemical, rhetorical, and ironic contexts of Marx’s and Engels’s utterances have gone virtually unnoticed, in favor of the hypothesis that the work’s scientific intent is contained within its introductory remarks.

Stripped from its polemical and rhetorical frameworks, and reduced to its introductory remarks, *The German Ideology* loses much of its complexity and nearly all of its humor and vitality. It becomes, in other words, a scientific or methodological treatise,

and not a specific intervention into a specific (and specifically political) debate. The most striking example of misreading occurs when the work's brief "Preface" is taken to reflect Marx's and Engels's own intent, and not to parody those being attacked. "Hitherto men have constantly made up for themselves false conceptions [*falsche Vorstellungen*] about themselves, about what they are and what they ought to be," Marx and Engels write in what is now a familiar passage:

They have arranged their relationships according to their ideas [*Vorstellungen*] of God, of normal man, etc. The phantoms of their brains have got out of their hands. They, the creators, have bowed down before their creations. Let us liberate them from the chimeras, the ideas, the dogmas, the imaginary beings [*eingebildeten Wesen*], under the yoke of which they are pining away. Let us revolt against the rule of thought. Let us teach men, says one, to exchange these imaginations for thoughts which correspond to the essence of man; says the second, to take up a critical attitude to them; says the third, to knock them out of their heads; and – existing reality will collapse (*GI* 23).

Read in the context of a polemic against young Hegelianism, it is clear that this passage, the entire first paragraph of *The German Ideology*, is thoroughly parodic. It is not Marx and Engels who think men have hitherto arranged their lives according to false representations (*falsche Vorstellungen*) and imaginary beings (*eingebildeten Wesen*), but Feuerbach, Bauer, and Stirner. It is they, the young Hegelians, who believe they can escape history's false representations by revealing the truth of the human essence, by submitting such ideas to theoretical critique, or by knocking them out of their heads. That is to say, it is Marx's and Engels's enemies who wish to "revolt against the rule of thought," not Marx

and Engels themselves. Indeed, the second paragraph of *The German Ideology* makes it perfectly clear that Marx and Engels reject the “innocent and childlike fantasies” of those who believe that their will alone might force history to end and reality to collapse. For the authors of *The German Ideology*, history has not hitherto consisted of false representations that, through a speculative and apocalyptic fiat, contemporary philosophers can finally expose as the realm of chimeras and imaginary beings. On the contrary, for Marx and Engels, history is the history of material processes. What the young Hegelians call false representations, spirits and dogmas of the past, Marx and Engels understand to be effective forces – powerful ideas buttressed by concrete apparatuses. Thus *The German Ideology* does not, as the standard reading suggests, invert young Hegelian idealism and replace it with Marxist materialism. Rather, from the very first sentence, it argues that everything the young Hegelians call false or imaginary (the church, the state, the courts, the schools, and so forth), is in fact a very real articulation of power – in a word, an ideology.

At least part of the reason Marx and Engels could not find a publisher for *The German Ideology* is the fact that, even by the time they began working on it, much of the material they wanted to discuss was anachronistic and out of date. Indeed, by beginning with polemics between the young Hegelians, Marx and Engels were already engaging in something of a postmortem and dissection. Probably by 1845, and definitely by 1847, the loosely associated young Hegelian movement (or, as some called it at the time, “party”) had more or less disbanded – its most politically effective journals shut down by the external pressure of the censors, and its membership fragmented by continuous internal squabbling. The publishers originally slated to release *The German Ideology*, namely Julius Meyer and Rudolph Rempel of Westphalia, might have been more interested in the

second volume's commentary on the True Socialists (especially Moses Hess and Karl Grün), who were on the ascendancy at the time, in many ways taking the place of the young Hegelians as the preeminent radical party or literary group of the German speaking world. But once it became clear that Marx and Engels intended to attack True Socialism no less vehemently than they had young Hegelianism, Meyer and Rempel, who were advocates of the former, promptly backed out of the project. After making a few more failed efforts to have the manuscript published, Marx and Engels "abandoned" their polemic, as Marx would recall a decade later in the "Preface" to his *Critique of Political Economy*, to "the gnawing criticism of the mice" (SW 390). And yet, like a repressed memory, this "abandoned" manuscript, its imagery and its ideas, would return again and again throughout Marx's career and, more insistently still, throughout the history of Marxism, where it would take up a central position in the Marxist vulgate.

In a certain sense, even after abandoning the manuscript to the gnawing criticism of the mice, Marx spent the rest of his career writing and continuously rewriting *The German Ideology*, as if it were a nightmare from which he could not awake. Tucked away for decades, this gnawed manuscript gnawed at him. While he liked to believe that he had rejected his "erstwhile philosophical conscience," the problems introduced in his unfinished collaboration with Engels, and their various confrontations with the young Hegelians, provided much of the scaffolding for Marx's lifelong investigation of political economy. It is not incidental that, in the "Preface" to his *Critique of Political Economy*, while quickly glossing the trajectory of his own career, Marx himself refers to writing *The German Ideology* as a process of "self-clarification [*Selbstverstaendigung*]" (SW 390). Not only the theories, but also the language of *The German Ideology* lingered in Marx's mind,

burrowing its way into future texts. The rhetoric of the assault on Bauer and Stirner, crowded as it is with images of ghosts, magicians, chants, haunts, hunts, and holy wars, gets resurrected, for instance, in the famous opening scenes of the *Communist Manifesto*, where Marx and Engels portray Communism as a frightful specter that stalks about Europe, and its enemies as conducting a holy hunt against it. A much condensed version of the attack on the true socialists, especially Marx's and Engels's former collaborator Moses Hess, returns in the *Communist Manifesto* as well, where these "German *literati*" are accused of cladding themselves in a "robe of speculative cobwebs, embroidered with flowers of rhetoric" (SW 242). Marx, if it was he and not Engels who wrote the words, could have been more politic, seeing as how his own style is, as often as not, obscured by speculative mustiness and embroidered with rhetorical flourish. But this is exactly what interests me about *The German Ideology*, and about Marx's writing in general. This writer who is known as a scientist to many, a dogmatist to others, is known as a writer only to a very few. To what extent, one wonders, did Marx think of himself as a writer, or as someone whose public persona was being actively, and often ironically, constructed through his texts? To what extent did Marx see himself as someone whose language had to persuade others, or to convince an audience, regardless of scientific accuracy? Treating Marx as a writer is not a question of reducing or bracketing off the political force of his work. On the contrary, if one wishes to find democratic and republican threads running through Marx's text, then it is precisely his rhetoric and his style to which one should attend, for, since ancient times and as Marx well knew, rhetoric and republicanism are inexorably linked, and entail a certain articulation of aesthetics and politics – where

political authority is granted to those whose language convinces the citizens, and thus, to use J.L. Austin's terms, has the illocutionary force of a successful speech act.

In the introductory remarks to *his* doctoral dissertation, "On the Difference between the Democritean and Epicurean Philosophy of Nature," Marx notes that, because "an old and entrenched prejudice," indeed "a prejudice as old as the history of philosophy" itself, seeks to "identify Democritean and Epicurean physics," he will be forced to engage in what he calls "microscopic examinations" of the ancient texts – "because," as Marx puts it, "the differences are so concealed that they can be discovered, as it were, only with a microscope" (*CW* 1, 36). Like the young Marx, my intention is also, through microscopic examinations of Marx's literary remains or *Nachlass*, to reveal heretofore concealed differences – differences between and within Marx's various texts, between Marx and his collaborators, between Marx and his interlocutors, and perhaps most importantly between Marx, his editors, and his readers. At the same time, one all but forgotten text – "The Leipzig Council" – operates here as another kind of lens, perhaps even a *camera obscura*, through which I will read the rest of Marx's work. How is Marx's career refracted and rearranged when we centralize not the recognized and canonical works, but a prolix, overwhelming, deliberately elliptical and unruly text like "The Leipzig Council?" Who are the now nearly forgotten figures Marx and Engels choose to discuss at such length (not only Feuerbach and Hegel, but also Bauer, Stirner, Grün, Kuhlmann, and so on), and how do Marx and Engels use and abuse their cherished concepts and terms? How have the editorial and interpretive histories of *The German Ideology* conspired to exclude "The Leipzig Council" and more rhetorical texts like it from Marx's body of work, and from so-called "serious" considerations of his political theory and practice? How has this kind of

exclusion shaped the broader reception and understanding of Marx, and how might a reconsideration of the *Nachlass* destabilize our understanding of the ideas most commonly associated with his proper name? What, for instance, are the implications of these textual upheavals for the theory of historical materialism? Finally, but most urgently, does a “microscopic examination” of such questions in any way inform or speak to contemporary debates over culture and politics in a post-Marxist world?

The current study is broken down into three chapters, each of which approaches Marx’s work from a slightly different perspective, while at all times keeping in play a reading of “The Leipzig Council.” My first chapter, “The Polemical Matrix,” begins with a survey of post-Marxist political theory, or what I call the new republicanism, and proceeds to reassess Marx’s approach to the political, with special emphasis on his confrontations and polemical exchanges with the *Vormärz* republicans Bruno Bauer and Max Stirner. One aim in this first chapter is to show that, despite what his texts occasionally proclaim in their logic, according to what they perform in their rhetoric, Marx’s work prior to 1848 is decidedly democratic and republican. More accurately, in all of his work, Marx is constantly testing the limits of democratic republicanism, seeking to enlist republican ideals in the project of building the kind of social conditions that would make true political freedom and equality possible. Marx endeavors, not to close off, but to expand and to democratize the open space or *res publica* of republican freedom – the stage, or what Claude Lefort characterizes as the *mise en scène*, on which a plurality of ideological struggles might be articulated and played out. Marx’s commitment to free political debate will only be recognized, however, if readers take seriously those texts in which Marx engages in such debate – specifically, in this case at

least, “The Leipzig Council.” Consequently, the second chapter of my work, “Allegories of Writing,” consists of a close literary (hermeneutic and deconstructive) reading of “The Leipzig Council.” In particular, I emphasize what Marx and Engels have to say about reading and writing, or the manner in which “The Leipzig Council” constitutes an extended commentary on reading and writing practices – what Paul de Man, in the title of his best known work, helpfully dubs an “allegory of reading.” Following this line of thought, I maintain that Marx’s own texts need not be treated as a complete and internally coherent “body of work,” as the hermeneutic metaphor has it, but can also be read as a mechanical assemblage of external references and citations, tools and components – an assemblage I call “the Marx-machine.” With the figure of the Marx-machine in place, I return to Marx’s texts, and to the texts Marx read, highlighting spots where they not only speak of machines but also operate as machines. My final chapter, “The Fractured Essence,” recalls the concept or the theory of historical materialism in light of this new approach to Marx’s texts. Historical materialism, I suggest, is neither a science nor a method, but, if anything, a theoretical problem – an irresolvable puzzle or *aporia*. If the first chapter of my work is primarily concerned with politics and the second with literature or aesthetics, the final chapter is largely philosophical.

More than anything else, I call in this work for a different *kind* of reading, not only of Marx’s texts, but of texts, culture, politics, and social relations in general. The idea is not to return to the animating spirit, the hidden truth, or the forgotten intention concealed somewhere within Marx’s body of work, but to put the Marx-machine *to* work – to assemble a number of the massive and, finally, overwhelming collection of tools and components that make up Marx’s texts in a new fashion, and thus to see if it can be used

for new purposes. Francis Wheen begins his recent, very successful biography of Marx with the claim that, after generations of either hagiography or demonization, “[i]t is time to strip away the mythology and try to rediscover Karl Marx the man” (1999, 1). Wheen’s image is revealing, but in a sense this demythologizing revelation of “the man” is what every previous reading of Marx, indeed every hermeneutic reading as such, has sought to achieve. I propose something else entirely. It is not Marx the man, or the autonomous and unified subject who is first in charge of all his faculties and then proceeds to negotiate the world around him, that interests me, but Marx the body and Marx the machine, or Marx the embodied machine. Marx the man is dead. What remains is a colossal relays system of manuscripts and notes, letters and fragments – a textual system so gigantic and unruly that, even after generations of labour and massive expenditures of resources, the *Marx-Engels Gesamtausgabe*, or the so aptly nicknamed “MEGA” project, remains incomplete to this day. In the simplest sense, when I write here of the Marx-machine, I am referring to this textual system – an incomplete assemblage that can always be taken apart, arranged otherwise, attached to different texts, and rewritten in countless, perhaps infinitely new fashions. Mine, then, is an attempt, not to make sense of Marx or somehow to resurrect “the man” from the *Nachlass*, but still further to incomplete Marx, and to affirm the sense in which every interpretation of his work will only make the task of interpretation still more incomplete, and thus that much more urgent and necessary.

This approach to reading Marx is indebted to Jacques Derrida, and a great deal of what I claim in the current project is an elaboration of Derrida’s provocative essay on Marx. That said, I take as much, perhaps more inspiration here from Martin Heidegger, one of Derrida’s great teachers as well. Throughout his work, perhaps nowhere more explicitly

than in *The German Ideology*, Marx investigated the relationship between consciousness and being. Nor was he, despite a long history of misreading that starts with the aging Engels, merely concerned with reversing or opposing an “idealist” model, or subordinating consciousness to being. Rather, it is the reciprocal entwinement of conscious-being (*Bewusstsein*) and being (*Sein*) that concerns Marx. It is impossible today to read the passages in Marx’s text where he comments on ontology without taking into consideration Heidegger’s complete reformulation of the question of Being, and his destruction of ontology and the history of western metaphysics on the basis thereof. In *The German Ideology*, Marx and Engels introduce the notion that the foundation of human existence, its fundamental ontological ingredient, is neither the individual nor the collective (the distinction over which the young Hegelians argue), but what they call the social relation (*Verhältnis*). That is to say, according to Marx and Engels, before there is any identity, any subjectivity, whether particular or universal, an ego or a people, there is a relation, or more accurately a network of relations that remains irreducible and inexhaustible. It is this intersubjective matrix or “ensemble of social relations” (SW 157) that Marx occasionally attempts to signify with the term species-being or *Gattungswesen*, which he borrows from Feuerbach. Heidegger makes an analogous point when, in *Being and Time*, he maintains that human existence or *Dasein* never takes the form of a unified and self-contained subject, but is always already in the world, thrown into relations with others, with its physical environment, with history, and perhaps most enigmatically of all with its uncertain future, or that which remains yet to come – especially its finitude or its death. While Marxists are loath to appreciate such connections between Heidegger and Marx, I take them to be of central importance. Just beneath all of the claims I make here, then, one

might read a reflection on Heidegger, and especially on Heideggerean temporality – as though, like the medieval monks who, in the words of the *Communist Manifesto*, “wrote silly lives of Catholic Saints over the manuscripts on which the classical works of ancient heathendom had been written” (241), the current study of Marx were written atop another one on Heidegger.

In his extremely influential reconstruction of Marx’s career, Louis Althusser suggests that, along with the “Theses on Feuerbach,” *The German Ideology* represents an “epistemological break” (1969, 32) in Marx’s work – the moment when Marx rejects the humanism and essentialism of the young Hegelians, Ludwig Feuerbach in particular, and begins to construct his own unique, mature science of the social relation. In keeping with Althusser’s theory of the “symptomatic reading,” the figure of the Marx-machine suggests that Marx’s literary remains do not form a unified body of work, but consist of different components. However, *pace* Althusser, neither is Marx’s career shorn in two by a single, definitive, irreversible break. Rather, the Marx-machine is made up of countless fissures and cracks, lacuna and gaps, skips and jumps, relays and returns, each of which opens up the possibility of different assemblages and different interpretations. That is to say, there is a sense in which, once liberated from the orthodoxy of official Marxism, the Marx-machine itself becomes a kind of open space, *res publicus*, or *mise en scène* in which countless polemical struggles and alternative scripts play themselves out. At the same time, throughout the course of my dissertation, I am attempting to break with Althusser, whose approach to Marx’s text I, like many still (whether they know it or not), once took to be virtually axiomatic. The success of this break is uncertain, and doubtless not for me to judge. But the tension brings to the fore what, for want of a better term,

might be called the thesis, or at any rate the dominant theme, of my work. To treat Marx's texts as a mechanical assemblage, as I do here, to repudiate the orthodox reading of them and propose instead a plurality of other readings, is also to perform or enact a certain understanding of justice or of a just community. As Marx often suggests, but perhaps nowhere more explicitly than in *The German Ideology*, justice is not a determined "state of affairs [*Zustand*]" (GI 47). It cannot be contained in declarations, charters, reports, laws, statements of principle or hermeneutic protocols (although, to be sure, it cannot be divorced from such things either). Rather, justice is an active, immanent, material process that is forever incomplete, and that operates by continuously incompleting itself – by creating new tasks, liberating new potentials, and introducing new possibilities, in the name of a promised future that forever remains yet to come.

Part One: Red Rhetorics

Until now the philosophers have had the solution of all riddles lying on their lecterns, and the stupid exotic world only had to open its mouth for the ready-roasted pigeons of absolute knowledge to fly into its mouth. Philosophy has become secularized, and the striking proof thereof is that the philosophical consciousness itself has been pulled into the torment of struggle not only externally but also internally. If the construction and preparation of the future is not our business, then it is the more certain what we have to consummate – I mean the *ruthless criticism of all that exists*, ruthless also in the sense that criticism does not fear its results, and even less so a struggle with the existing power.

Karl Marx to Arnold Ruge, September 1843

Chapter 1: The Polemical Matrix

The New Republicans

Cultural criticism has, in recent years, witnessed a widespread return to theories of politics and ideology. Once associated with a relatively naïve understanding of Enlightenment reason, and believed to rely on easily deconstructed distinctions between consciousness and being, thought and life, representation and reality, the concept of “ideology” has been resurrected lately alongside the phenomena that Chantal Mouffe has dubbed “the return of the political,” or what a whole host of others have referred to as “rethinking,” “reworking,” and “retreating” the political. This attempt to bring ideology back, and once again to think through the question of the political, comes in the wake of a longstanding rejection of such categories among postmodern thinkers – a rejection, in fact, of systematic knowledge as such. To pursue a critique of ideology, the argument went, was to assume from the outset a position of objective exteriority vis-à-vis society in general. It was to assume that one could separate one’s own interests and commitments from those of the structures being analyzed. It was to reserve for oneself the capacity and the right to distinguish between illusion and reality, true and false. In brief, it was to fall prey to what the chief postmodern theorist, Jean-Francois Lyotard, called “the phantasy of a non-alienated region” (1993 [1974], 107). For many postmodern thinkers, the term “ideology” was deemed all but meaningless unless opposed to some more fundamental, objective or scientific truth. As their great teacher Nietzsche had shown them, belief in truth is but the most deceptive chimera of all – a manifestation of the weak, nihilistic

denial of life itself. It was precisely such oppositions between illusion and reality, the postmodern argument concluded, that had generated the overarching “master narratives” of the west, and buttressed the Enlightenment reason that had destroyed, or at any rate greatly suppressed, local, situated, culturally specific knowledge – the kind of knowledge Lyotard associated with “narrative competency” as opposed to logical or “scientific accuracy” (1984 [1979], 18). From this perspective, only a complete rejection of the Enlightenment project and a radical transformation of knowledge and its legitimation could address the complexities of the postmodern world.

The recent renewal of interest in ideology and politics attempts to absorb some of these criticisms, while at the same time pointing to the limitations and failures of the postmodern approach. In particular, it sets the groundwork for a repoliticization of cultural theory following the collapse of Marxism, and the near total disappearance of references to Marx among Western intellectuals. Thus it comes as little surprise, perhaps, that the new political thinkers have sought to reconstruct the concept of ideology, not along with, but almost in spite of Marx. Depending on one’s perspective, Marx conceived of ideology either as something false or as something real – either as a false illusion concealing the material conditions of existence, or as the concrete expression of class interests and economic relations. Either way, he would seem to have treated ideology in particular and politics in general as derivative or secondary superstructures. It was Marx, ostensibly, who made it possible to reduce politics and ideology, through a series of critical and scientific protocols, to economics, or to more fundamental material conditions. Against such claims, and inspired by republican traditions, the most recent generation of political philosophers tend to champion rather than condemn political

rhetoric and ideological antagonisms. More often than not in direct opposition to the Marxist tradition, they construct politics as something else entirely – not as a derivative function, but as an irreducible condition of human existence. For those committed to the “return of the political,” politics and ideology are neither distorted representations nor concrete expressions of a subject that precedes them. They are, instead, prior conditions of any subject’s being in the world.

Not surprisingly, then, while it occasionally claims to be inspired by a certain spirit or specter of Marx, the renewal of theories of ideology and the concomitant return of the political in recent years has rarely involved any extensive reassessment of Marx’s work. On the contrary, among the new political philosophers, or the cadre of new republican theorists who have sought to circumvent the postmodern impasse, Marx is generally rejected as the chief exemplar of the tradition that denied the irreducibility or the specificity of the political. While he was certainly aware of, and even engaged in, ideological struggles and debates, the new republicans contend, Marx ultimately portrayed such things as manifestations of a more fundamental social contradiction – a contradiction that, once resolved, would eliminate the need for politics altogether, and result in the infamous “withering away of the state.” In this reading, Marx’s thought is inherently anti-democratic. That is to say, Marx denies the real effectiveness of political debate and ideological struggles, ultimately portraying such things either as pure fantasy, an alibi for dominant power relations, or as the refracted image of class interests. For Marx, many of the new republicans suggest, society can be rationally administered if and only if political antagonisms are eliminated altogether. Thus it is assumed that a relatively direct line connects Marx’s theory of the dictatorship of the proletariat with the

totalitarian regimes that laid claim to his name in the twentieth century. In an effort to liberate humanity from what he saw as the contingency and accident of politics, the argument goes, Marx effectively justified the suppression of the *res publica* – the agora, forum, or open space that, since ancient times, has been associated with political discussion between the free citizens of a republic, and with the active creation of consensus through continuous democratic debate. Like their ancient counterparts, the new republicans maintain that, in order to protect the *res publica*, indeed in order to protect freedom as such, it is necessary not only to accept but also to foster the very contingency and accident that, at long last, Marx and his ilk wish to overcome. But is this a valid characterization of Marx's thought? Is Marx not being used here as a rather convenient illustration of a position that he never held, and that, in fact, very few have ever held? Might the current return to ideology, and the related effort to repoliticize social relations after the closure of the postmodern caesura, not benefit from a reassessment of Marx – more precisely still, a reassessment of the specific text in which Marx first introduced his theory of ideology, namely *The German Ideology*? Is there perhaps, within the folds and margins of his text, another Marx, one who not only informs, but even speaks directly to the contemporary, so-called “post-Marxist” conjuncture?

What I am calling the new republicanism is closely allied with the politics of deconstruction, and has roots in post-Marxist social theory, particularly but not exclusively as that theory developed among European intellectuals following the events of May 1968. I am suggesting that, since some formulation of Marxism (orthodox or humanist, existential or structural, autonomous or social democratic) ceased to be an absolutely justified point of departure for left wing intellectuals, republicanism has

become the dominant political philosophy. Attempts to rethink the problem of the social bond have, whether they are explicit about it or not, been attempts to revive republican traditions – where politics and political antagonism are seen not as an instrumental means to apolitical ends, nor as ideological chimeras concealing material reality, but as ends in themselves, and fundamental conditions of our being in the world. Very broadly, all forms of republicanism suggest that the identity of the political community is artificially rather than naturally determined. The social bond is formal or symbolic, not substantial or necessary. That is to say, the republican community has no determined essence and no common substance. Rather, its unity must be created, fabricated, or, in the precise political sense of the term, “constituted” via thoroughly contingent and ungrounded acts – be they revolutions, elections, or legislative and juridical decisions. For that same reason, the identity of the republican community is such that it can always be recreated differently in the future. It is never finished or complete, but open to interminable alteration.

Now, the radical contingency of the political act, and especially the act of constituting a state, is crucial to the republican conception of democracy. Against all efforts to reduce politics to ostensibly more fundamental terms, be they material conditions of existence, class interests, or divinely ordained rights and privileges, republican theory suggests that the uncertainty and the contingency of politics comprise necessary conditions of democracy. In other words, from a republican perspective, democracy requires a plurality of different political subjects engage in ongoing and strictly interminable struggles for power or hegemony, and that no single subject (no monarch, no party, no class) be seen to represent the interests of the community as a

whole, or possess a natural right to power. While authority rests with the will of the people rather than that of a monarch or emperor, “the people” does not refer to a substantial reality. There is, in other words, no natural sociality. Rather, as Rousseau first spells out in his article for Diderot’s *Encyclopedia* on “Political Economy” (a pivotal text in the history of republican thought), the *volonté générale* or “general will” of the people must not only be represented by some institutional authority, but also artificially constructed through the collective deliberation and direct, active participation of the citizens (1992 [1754], 142-3). In Rousseau’s terms, society itself presupposes an absolute and irreparable break with humanity’s original state of nature. Similarly, from the moment that society displaces nature, the unified, natural human being is irreparably split into a private *homme* and a public *citoyen*. Thus the social bond or the social contract can only exist as a kind of “second nature,” a civil or political order that humans must invent. In the republican tradition, therefore, society is something that a community of citizens must actively create and, through their actions, repeatedly recreate.

According to the standard reading, Marx either did not recognize or did not sufficiently address the contingent status of social relations. He sought instead a science of those relations, and attempted to bind them to a determined ontology of historical class struggle and relations of production. As Claude Lefort, the chief proponent of what I am calling the new republicanism, argues in his groundbreaking work on post-Marxist social democracy, while Marx witnessed the emergence of a plurality of new, democratic political struggles in the wake of the French Revolution, he invariably attributed those struggles and antagonisms to a deeper, as yet unresolved social contradiction – one that could be systematically examined and overcome through the analysis of political

economy. Thus Marx, for all his erudition, could never account for the phenomenon that Lefort calls “the new symbolic constitution of the social” (1988, 18), or the manner in which, following the French Revolution, the social bond is no longer distorted by, but instead articulated through, symbolic discourses – and especially through political antagonisms and debates. Marx took political representation to be an ideological chimera that concealed the real relations of production. As a result, Marxist politics could only come into existence as an effort to destroy the political, or to eliminate the specters of representation as such, and thereby reveal the truth of the human community. But in a democracy, Lefort maintains, “neither the state, the people nor the nation represent substantial entities,” rather “[t]heir representation in itself, in its dependence upon political discourse and upon sociological and historical elaboration, is always bound up with ideological debate” (18). Prior to the revolutions of the eighteenth century, power was represented by the monarch, who was quite literally the head of state or of the social body. In a democracy “[t]he locus of power is an empty place, it cannot be occupied – it is such that no group and no individual can be consubstantial with it – and it cannot be represented.” Every claim on power is provisional, subject to contestation and regular scrutiny. Democracy necessitates what Lefort calls “the institutionalization of conflict” (17) – the creation of an institutional framework, *mise en scène*, or stage on which social struggles get enacted. “The erection of a political stage on which competition can take place,” Lefort argues, “shows that division is, in a general way, constitutive of the general unity of society” (18). Paradoxically, the community is held together by being repeatedly torn asunder. Its unity is a function of division. It is founded on interminable ideological struggles and political debates – contingent, and therefore contestable, speech acts.

While his position is decidedly more radical than Lefort's, and is even articulated in opposition to Lefort's "contractualism" and "institutionalism," the Italian anarchist Antonio Negri's recent work nonetheless relies on a similar appeal to republican concepts and traditions. Drawing on an unorthodox reading of Spinoza's *Political Treatise*, which he takes to be the foundational text of modern democratic thought, Negri distinguishes between the "constituent power" (*potenza*) of the multitude and the "constituted power" (*potere*) of the state or the law. Every manifestation of the latter, Negri maintains, is initially justified, and for that reason both conditioned and threatened, by the former. That is to say, every law and every sovereign are threatened by the overwhelming and finally uncontrollable power that established their authority in the first place. Unlike state power, or the power of contracts and institutions, the constituent power of the multitude has no limit. It is "a force that bursts apart, breaks, interrupts, unhinges any preexisting equilibrium and any possible continuity" (1999, 11). The power of the multitude or *multitudo* (an organized revolutionary subject that Negri and Spinoza believe they can distinguish from the *vulgus*, or the unfocused mob) is expressed in that moment of creative and thoroughly unjustified violence that founds the republican state – the moment of violence that founds law as such. As Negri puts it, "[t]he radical quality of the constituent principle is absolute. It comes from the void and constitutes everything" (16). It is the only natural right – the absolute right to break out of all established systems of right and convention, or to break all social contracts.

Negri, then, agrees with Lefort's notion that the democratic republican community has no justifiable origin – that a certain groundlessness constitutes the necessary condition of democratic freedom. He agrees with the republican principle that

signifiers such as “the state,” “the people,” “the nation,” and so forth, represent scenes of continuous ideological debate and discord, not substantive entities. But rather than defending the established institutions of representative democracy (what Lefort calls the “political stage” or *mise en scène*) as the symbolic limit within which such antagonism must be played out, Negri seeks to liberate the antagonism from all limits. What Negri refers to as “absolute democracy” or “absolute process” would be a state in which the potential (which, significantly, is another possible translation of the Latin *potenza*) of the multitude gets realized or rendered fully actual – when the multitude, both “collective and non-teleological” (28), actualizes its potential beyond all institutions and contracts, all laws and limitations. According to Negri, an absolute democracy would liberate constituent power without, as has occurred following all past revolutions, codifying it once more in the form of constituted power or sovereignty. While his theory is complex, Negri’s political agenda is not difficult to discern. For him, a radically Jacobin subject – one characterized by the rights to assembly and resistance, by continuous democratic invention through free and open debate, and by popular armament – would fulfill the promise of a line of revolutionary republican thought that runs from Machiavelli and Spinoza, through Marx and Lenin, to Deleuze and Foucault.

The recent work of political philosopher Jacques Rancière might be located, as it were, “in between” Lefort’s institutionalism and Negri’s Jacobinism. Like Lefort and Negri, Rancière is one of a small handful of intellectuals who managed to weather the postmodern storm without losing all faith in politics, or the power of collective action. Indeed, Rancière starts out vehemently against what he sees as a postmodern consensus, and especially Lyotard’s rather sanguine and, in his opinion, basically apolitical portrait

of a world in which “[n]o one, not even the least powerful among us, is entirely powerless over the messages that traverse and position him at the post of sender, addressee, or referent” (Lyotard 1984, 15). Relying on a reading of Aristotle’s *Politics*, Rancière contends that, in the western tradition, “[p]olitics is not a function of the fact that it is useful to assemble, nor of the fact that assemblies are held for the sake of good management and common business.” Rather “it is a function of the fact that a wrong exists, an injustice that needs to be addressed” (1995, 97). That is to say, according to Rancière, politics exists not in order to administer social relations in a rational or efficient manner but because society is founded on an irreducible and inescapable injustice (*adikon*) or wrong (*blaberon*). This wrong, while it must be constantly addressed, is never finally redressed. As a result, politics is essentially polemical. It is characterized by discord and division, struggle and debate. As Rancière puts it, “[t]he political wrong does not get righted. It is addressed as something irreconcilable within a community that is always unstable and heterogeneous” (103). This fundamental, irreducible wrong generates a plurality of new social movements and thus continuous social change.

Rancière is arguing here against the kind of postmodernism that celebrates abstract principles of difference and diversity without allowing for, and even in lieu of, concrete expressions of conflict and grievance. He is arguing against all theories of discourse ethics and consensus that fail to account for the basically polemical or antagonistic character of political relations – all efforts to posit “consensus” as an impossible but nonetheless regulative ideal in the Kantian sense. From Rancière’s perspective, the community without antagonism or strife is not just apolitical, it is anti-democratic. “Democracy,” Rancière proclaims in a crucial passage, one that resonates

with a great many of the new republican arguments, “is the community of sharing in both senses of the term: a membership in a single world which can only occur in conflict” (49). Democracy is in this sense a process more than it is a state. It is, still more accurately, a polemical process – one that is driven by discord and strife. Thus, for Rancière at least, democracy “does not simply exist because the law declares individuals equal and the collectivity master of itself.” On the contrary, it “requires the force of the *demos* which is neither a sum of social partners nor a gathering together of differences, but quite the opposite – the power to undo all partnerships, gatherings and ordinations” (32). Like Negri, Rancière is sure to distinguish the politically organized *demos* from the *ocholos* or the unfocused mob. For him, in a paradoxical fashion, the *demos* unites the democratic community by dividing it. The *demos* refers to any effective and concrete political articulation of the formal wrong that conditions every democratic community.

Another important effort to radicalize republican traditions and to rethink the concept of the political in a post-Marxist context has been undertaken by Giorgio Agamben. A former student of Martin Heidegger and acolyte of the situationist theorist Guy Debord, Agamben’s more recent works revolve around the thesis that democratic politics can no longer be contained within the confines of the nation state. The experiences of totalitarianism, of so-called ethnic conflict, and especially of concentration camps, reveal that the terms traditionally associated with the nation state – the people, general will, popular sovereignty, and so forth – are devoid of content. They have become floating signifiers available to any political project, no matter how reprehensible or destructive. Agamben therefore maintains that moving beyond the nation state, opening up a new politics of and for the future, will require a complete transformation of

the meaning of politics itself – reformulating the *res publica*, not as a means to an end, but as “a sphere of pure means” or “means without end” (2000, 118). Here Agamben, like Rancière, draws heavily on Aristotle, especially on Aristotle’s distinction in the *Ethics* between production and action, *poiesis* and *praxis*. “[P]roduction [*poiesis*],” Aristotle maintains in a crucial passage, “has an end other than itself, but action [*praxis*] does not: good action is itself an end” (1140b). If *poiesis* suggests fulfilling some instrumental purpose, following a set design or a determined plan, *praxis* implies something else entirely – namely pure potentiality without actuality, pure means without end, pure process. For Agamben, both ethics and politics rely on this experience of a potential that never exhausts itself in the actual, and that forever remains potential or yet to come. Politics is not the liberation of a fixed human essence, but the articulation of infinite human potential. “There is in effect something humans are and have to be,” Agamben writes, “but this is not an essence nor properly a thing: It is the simple fact of one’s own existence as possibility or potentiality” (1993, 43). And if the individual is such a “potentiality,” Agamben argues, so too is the community. That is to say, the human community is always in the process of coming, always arriving from the future, without ever being realized in the here and now. As a result, every community is characterized by what Agamben calls a “fundamental biopolitical fracture” (2000, 33). This fracture or “split” can never be repaired. It is an irreducible condition of all contemporary social relations. Because of it, every representation of “the community,” or of a particular people’s unity, is an artificial construct. And as a construct, it can always be challenged, dismantled, and rebuilt anew.

As with the other new republicans I have been discussing, while his theory is rather complex, at least one of the political stakes of Agamben's work is surprisingly straight-forward. For Agamben, only if it is recognized that social relations are thoroughly artificial and contingent can one even begin to address the contemporary experience of global deterritorialization – especially the experience of the refugee. With the death or the closure of the nation state, Agamben argues, the coordinates of all previous theory and practice shift as well. As a young Karl Marx discusses in his essay "On the Jewish Question," traditional republican politics involves a tension between the (ideal) "rights of man" and the (material) "rights of the citizen." Put very briefly, if the rights of man are universal but empty, the rights of the citizen are exclusive but concrete. The right to liberty, for instance, is not quite the same thing as the right to an education, to health care, or to a decent standard of living. While the former can be said to be granted every individual by virtue of their birth, the latter require some specific institutional articulation, and perhaps some recognized authority – a state, for instance, that collects taxes, builds schools, hires nurses, redistributes wealth, and so forth. Thus, in classical political theory at least, the rights of the citizen limit the rights of man. Now, according to Agamben, today's politics must move beyond the man-citizen binary of traditional politics. In a radically deterritorialized world, where neither humanity nor nationality represents essential identities, both the human being and the citizen get displaced by the refugee. Though states unquestionably still exist, today the borders that define them have become, in Agamben's words, "perforated and topologically deformed" (2000, 26). Now the refugee or the nomad, and not the human being or the citizen, is the paradigmatic political subject, and the rights of refugees the paradigmatic struggle.

Struggles for human and civil rights will and even must continue. But they will always remain haunted and conditioned by the refugee – the human who is not quite a citizen, the citizen who is not quite a human.

Many of the republican principles developed by thinkers like Lefort, Negri, Rancière, and Agamben are derived from themes first articulated by Jacques Derrida, and by the philosophy of deconstruction. Derrida has often mistakenly been characterized as apolitical, even nihilistic. It has also been rather hastily suggested that Derrida's thought only recently underwent a decisive political or ethical turn. But as early as 1976, in his albeit lesser known essay "Declarations of Independence," Derrida can already be found supporting republican principles, and commenting on the formal or symbolic status of the law, particularly of the constitution, within a republican democracy. In "Declarations of Independence," a homage to the American constitution delivered as a lecture on the year of its bicentennial, Derrida argues that there is an intimate association between writing and republicanism. The republic, he insists, is founded on a "right to writing" – a right simultaneously claimed and asserted in the act of writing a constitution. Taking the opening words of the American Declaration of Independence as his point of departure, Derrida maintains that all such declarations and constitutions can be read as speech acts, in that they consist of a performative *après coup* – a moment of "fabulous" or "fictional [*fabuleuse*] retroactivity" (1984, 22). The declaration "we the people," for example, retroactively produces or creates that which, in another sense, it simply describes. In principle, the people of the United States of America do not exist, they possess no common substance or general will, prior to the moment when, through a contingent act of literature, the Declaration of Independence names them. Thus the Declaration of

Independence is a document that first calls “the people” into being by feigning to speak on their behalf. In this sense, the authority of the republican state – its right to declare itself independent, and to enact and enforce laws – is based on what Derrida calls the “undecidability of a performative and constative statement” (20). It rests, in other words, on the undecidable relationship between the accuracy and the effectivity of its claim. The statement “we the people” is only accurate if it represents the people. But it is only effective – it only creates a new and independent state – if it also invents them. In a curious, even impossible manner, the representation must simultaneously represent and invent its object. According to Derrida, it cannot do both, any yet it must do both. And this irresolvable puzzle or *aporia* is at the foundation of the republican community.

The literary slight of hand performed by the Declaration of Independence is related to what, in his later and better known essay on “The Force of Law,” Derrida calls the “mystical foundation of authority” (1992, 3). Every law, Derrida argues there, is founded on a moment of original violence – a manifestation of what continental legal theorists such as Negri call “constituent power.” But in order to maintain its authority, and particularly in order to legitimize its own use of violence or force, the law must also obscure its violent, heterogeneous or polemical origin. It must appear to be the product, not of contingency and strife, but of a natural, rational, or at any rate undeniable origin – “a foundation destined from the start to be repeated, conserved, reinstituted” (55). In this sense, and as legal positivists argue, Derrida would appear to believe that there is no natural law or natural right. Rather the law consists of the totality of enforceable declarations. Law is the product, not of nature, but of juridical fiat. But at the same time, Derrida suggests, it is precisely the contingency and groundlessness of the law that leaves

it susceptible to alteration – to continuous reformulation and interpretation. Because it is groundless, the law is in a curious sense conditioned by an unknown future, or what forever remains “yet to come.” It is this potential for altering and interpreting the law, this opening of the law onto an unknown and unknowable future, which Derrida associates with justice. As he reiterates in *Specters of Marx*, Derrida wants to oppose law or *droit* to justice, and to insist upon “the undeconstructibility of a certain idea of justice” (1994, 90). For Derrida, while the law can always be submitted to deconstruction, undermined and even completely reworked for a myriad of different purposes, the potential to engage in such a practice (which is to say, justice) cannot.

In his most recent work on monolingualism and hospitality, Derrida has sought to clarify his suggestion that there exists a link, even a necessary link, between literature and republicanism, the “right to writing” and democratic freedoms. His argument relies on what he characterizes as a certain proximity between language and law. Monolingualism, mastery over a particular language, is for Derrida what marks one as a member of a particular community, and thus what guarantees one the rights and privileges associated with such membership. In republican terms, monolingualism is the mark of citizenship. It is also, Derrida argues, impossible, as all language contains within itself the potential for error and for difference. To know how to pronounce a word, for instance, is also to recognize that word’s mispronunciation, and therefore to speak more than “one” language – to be polylingual. Thus there is a sense in which to be monolingual, to be a member of a specific community, is also to recognize certain differences, and even to recognize such differences *a priori*. And indeed, Derrida points out, almost all monolingual communities institute some law or some mechanism for recognizing the rights of foreigners – be they

refugees or immigrants, travelers or diplomats. Now, what interests Derrida is not a simple opposition between monolingual homogeneity and polylingual heterogeneity. He is not merely celebrating some indefinite cosmopolitan utopia or liberal pluralism. What would such a utopia consist of if not a new monolingual order? Instead, Derrida wants to focus on those differences that both exist within a given monolingual order and exceed its established structures of recognition – the differences that overwhelm the limits of what Derrida calls “hospitality by right,” or hospitality afforded to the foreigner one knows, and demand instead “hospitality without reserve” or “absolute hospitality” (2000, 25). Unlike the former, the latter requires that a space remain open for the arrival of absolute difference – the advent of she or he who remains radically other, who cannot be comprehended by established norms, and who has no rights as such. It is this openness – this potential to demand that which exceeds the rights of both citizen and foreigner, to create representations that seems utterly fantastic and even impossible, in short to say anything – that Derrida associates with literature. According to Derrida, literature keeps open a space within the monolingual order, not only for those it recognizes (those it must recognize as a condition of its own internal coherence), but also for those it cannot possibly recognize in advance. Literature opens up the space of infinite alterity.

The exact political implications of this line of thought remain decidedly uncertain, and debates over whether Derrida’s ideas have any specific institutional articulation are ongoing. In his book on Marx, Derrida pays his respects to Marxism, and calls rather enigmatically for a “new International” – one which, more than a little unhelpfully, he insists must remain “without status, without title, without name, barely public even if not clandestine [...] without party, without country, without national community [...] without

co-citizenship [and] without common belonging to a class" [1994, 85]). Of course, political organization requires a slightly more affirmative doctrine. At the same time, at least one consequence of Derrida's approach seems relatively clear. In a republic, or in what might be called a deconstructive republic, "the people" does not designate a static substance possessing a unified will that political institutions then endeavor properly to represent. Indeed no single subject can claim finally to represent the people. Instead, there is an ongoing, interminable political debate that effectively creates, and repeatedly recreates, just what the inscription "we the people" will have meant. To remain open to the advent of difference, the unpredictable arrival of an impossible future, the republic must keep its own limits in question. The use of the future anterior ("will have meant") is more than a little significant here. In Derridian terms, "the people" or the community is never fully self-present. The speech act "we the people" is never, as it were, fulfilled. Rather it is temporally dislocated, interminably deferred. Because it is an act of literature, "the people" remains permanently non-identical with itself. Insofar as it is an effect of writing, of text, or of representation in the broadest possible sense, the deconstructive republic or "democracy to come" is liberated from all fixed conceptions of who constitutes the people and how the community is to be organized. "The people" becomes a performative fiction, a fabulous fable that must be invented and continuously reinvented anew.

Perhaps the most controversial expression of the new republicanism to date, or at least the one that has caused the most consternation among Marxists, is found in the work of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe. Their explicitly post-Marxist (but nonetheless post-*Marxist*) theory of radical democracy attempts to reinvent socialist strategy without

relying on such familiar Marxist postulates as the centrality of class struggles, the objectivity of social relations, or the distinction between superstructure and base. Rejecting what they see as Marxism's various "essentialist" conceptions of political identity, and especially its effort to bind political identity to class identity, Laclau and Mouffe introduce (or more accurately reintroduce) two terms – antagonism and hegemony. All social relations, they argue, are structured by an irreducible "antagonism" – a fundamental gap or lack that forms the limit of the social, that can be neither represented nor exhausted, and that ceaselessly generates new struggles and new subjects. Unlike the contradiction, and even the overdetermined contradiction, of traditional Marxist theory, this antagonism is a condition and not a function of society. It is, like Rancière's "wrong," constantly addressed but never finally or completely redressed. More contentiously, and for related reasons, Laclau and Mouffe insist that there is no necessary relationship between a subject's social position, or their relative location within established social hierarchies, and their political identity. Significantly radicalizing the ideas of Antonio Gramsci, Laclau and Mouffe maintain that any link between the social and the political must be forged artificially (which is also to say democratically), through the articulation of a persuasive, "hegemonic" discourse. Indeed, according to Laclau and Mouffe, politics only begins to be a problem, it only emerges as a real consideration, when the relationship between the social and the political is recognized as artificial and uncertain. To think the political is thus to embrace contingency.

From this radical democratic perspective, orthodox Marxism or Marxist-Leninism made the error of assuming that a single subject, a single class and its self-appointed vanguard, could represent society as a whole. Communist states were not perversions of

Marxist theory, but destined by that theory to deteriorate into totalitarianism and single party dictatorships. A radical democracy, on the other hand, is characterized by a continuous, or at least periodic, struggle over which particular subject will provisionally represent society as a whole. Here the structure of representation can never be circumvented or overcome, as “society,” or that which all subjects endeavor to represent, does not in fact exist. Society, or the cohesive, homogenous, fully sutured or incorporated community of individuals, remains what Laclau and Mouffe call an “impossible object” (1985, 112). It is something every political subject necessarily desires, and every political subject necessarily fails, to become. Given these principles of antagonism and hegemony, Laclau and Mouffe conclude, socialists should abandon all manifestations of the Marxist claim that the Party might represent the objective interests of the working class, and that, if only in a hypothetical last instance that never arrives, the working class transparently represents humanity as a whole. Instead, socialists should take up the strategic task of constructing political discourses that bring together otherwise unrelated social struggles into chains of “equivalence” (127) – the task of creating entirely provisional, but at the same time effective, hegemonic articulations.

That such new republican ideas contravene some of the most basic premises of Marxist thought is not difficult to see. The Marxist or “materialist” critique claims to reach beyond the contingency of politics, and to ground its analysis of ideology in some kind of terra firma – what, throughout *The German Ideology*, Marx and Engels quite simply refer to as “real life [*wirklichen Leben*].” But in the republican model politics, and particularly political antagonism and ideological discord, are not merely the distorted representations of a prior social content. Political discourses (ideologies and

superstructures) cannot be reduced to material structures or infrastructures that ostensibly precede them. On the contrary, from the republican perspective, political rhetoric has the very real power to constitute social relations, even to declare the existence of new states and invent “the people.” Phillippe Lacoue-Labarthe’s and Jean-Luc Nancy’s distinction between “politics” and “the political” (1997, 108) relies on a similar line of thought. This now well known distinction is closely related to Heidegger’s separation, in *Being and Time*, of the “ontic” from the “ontological” (1962, 31). Just as, for Heidegger, no systematic explication of ontic beings, no matter how exhaustive, can resolve the ontological question of Being, or the question of existence as such, so too can no specific politics ever exhaust the potential of the political. There will always be some politics, which is to say some struggle and discord. Playing on the double meaning of the French term *partage*, Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy suggest that the democratic community “shares” what “divides” it – that, paradoxically, it is held together by that which continually tears it apart.

This notion that there will always be some politics, or that “the political” remains irreducible, would appear banal, if it were not for the fact that it seriously challenges, and offers an alternative to, the instrumental and expressivist understandings of politics favored not only by Marxism but by most western political theory. Again it is to Heideggerean principles, and especially Heidegger’s attack on the concept of subjectivity, that most of the new republicans turn. For them, politics cannot be understood as an ontic “instrument” used by a subject to achieve essentially apolitical ends. Nor does a political ideology simply “express” the interests or the will of a subject that precedes it. It cannot be characterized as the instrument or the expression of a social

class, for instance. Rather, the political is an ontological condition of every subject's being in the world. That is to say, the political, as an existential mode of Being, is a prior condition, and not an ancillary function, of all social relations. The subject, be it a class subject or otherwise, first emerges in the world, and constantly changes in the world, as an effect of politics and of ideology. Thus there can be no question of getting around or beyond the symbols and rhetoric that make up ideological discourses, or of reducing such things to a more fundamental ground, *subjectum*, or base, because who "we" are, as both individuals and collectives, consists of nothing other than those symbols and that rhetoric. As a result, the identity of every "we" remains open to interminable contestation and debate. To be "in the world" in the Heideggerean sense is to be a product of that which only appears to be one's expressions or instruments – to be spoken, for example, by the very languages one speaks.

Given his political affiliations, the invocation of Heidegger alone might be enough to indicate that republicanism is by no means axiomatically democratic. Republicanism merely insists upon the specificity of the political, or what the political theorist Carl Schmitt calls "the concept of the political." Far more so than Heidegger, with whom he corresponded and whose political declarations he undoubtedly influenced, Schmitt was deeply implicated in the Nazi regime, which his work was explicitly intended to bolster and support. And yet, as Chantal Mouffe and others have pointed out, for everything contemptible about his own politics, Schmitt does comprehend something essential about the political, and identifies a major oversight in the western tradition. In particular, Schmitt notes how the study of politics has generally been seen as a detour en route to some other study. In both Marxist and liberal traditions, politics has been

characterized as a corrupt or derivative representation of some more fundamental reality – be it what Marxists call relations of production or what liberals call the rights of man. As a result, Schmitt complains, politics itself is overlooked. It gets systematically reduced to what are essentially apolitical categories – sociological, economic, ethical, aesthetic, psychological, and so forth. In order to study politics itself, or politics *as such*, Schmitt argues, one must realize that, apart from “the moral, aesthetic and economic, the political has its own criteria” (1996 [1933], 25). And in particular, for Schmitt politics is essentially polemical. It generates social divisions and inscribes boundaries between the subject and the other. In this sense “the specific political distinction to which all political actions and motives can be reduced [...] is that between friend and enemy” (26). Political identity can only be established by distinguishing between friends and enemies, or those citizens who will receive rights and privileges within a state and those non-citizens who will not. For Schmitt politics is both irreducible and irreducibly divisive. As a result, “[a] globe in which the possibility of war is utterly eliminated, a completely pacified globe would be a world without the distinction between friend and enemy and hence a world without politics” (35). Schmitt criticizes both the liberal notion of the universal rights of man and the Marxist theory of international socialism or the universal working class by maintaining that, because politics is essentially polemical, because it involves a decision that separates friends from enemies, there can be no politics of humanity as a whole. Political factionalism is a necessary feature of human sociality, and attempts to overcome it, or to submerge differences under a universal rubric, are invariably tyrannical.

In a more democratic tradition, the idea that Marx’s thought undermines the specificity of the political is perhaps most convincingly discussed by Hannah Arendt,

who seeks from a civic republican perspective to criticize both Marxist and fascist totalitarianism. According to her, Marxism represents the height of the western philosophical tradition's "instrumentalization of politics" – the general tendency, from the time of Plato's *Republic* onwards, for philosophers to treat politics as a technique or a craft, and thus a means to an end not an end in itself. Arendt argues that Marx mistakenly replaces political *praxis*, which is a kind of acting, with economic production or *poiesis*, which is a kind of making. He thereby reinforces, and even in a sense realizes or completes, philosophy's routine "substitution of making for acting and [its] concomitant degradation of politics into a means to obtain an allegedly 'higher' end" (1974, 229). At stake in this gesture, Arendt maintains, is nothing abstract, but freedom itself – indeed, freedom in its most concrete sense. Everything depends here on the manner in which, again, the philosophical tradition has misrepresented freedom. From Augustine to Kant, philosophers have tended to configure freedom as something internal, and particularly as an attribute of the will. Philosophical freedom is autonomy, self-legislation, or the will's capacity on the one hand to exercise control over the excesses of the body or desire, and on the other to escape or transcend the social body or the body politic. As in the liberal tradition, Arendt points out, philosophical freedom is associated with "the rights of privacy and the right to freedom from politics" (1968, 149). Indeed, Arendt goes so far as to claim that "the entire modern age has separated freedom from politics" (150). But in ancient Greece, she proposes, freedom was understood to be something external, and to connote the free citizen's right to engage in intercourse with others. Originally freedom was a function, not of the subject's private will, but of the citizen's liberty "to get away from home, to go out into the world and meet other people in word and deed." Thus it

necessitated the creation of “a common public space” and “a politically organized world” (148). That is to say, in ancient times, freedom was associated with the right to be political – to speak and to act in the open space of the *agora*.

Now in this case the accuracy of Arendt’s historical claim is probably of less importance than the theoretical point or the concept she is attempting to disclose. Whether or not citizens of the Greek *polis* enjoyed the liberties Arendt describes (which *polis* and at what time, one wonders), the notion that freedom is not something internal, not a possession of the will, but something that can only be exercised in a community and through relations with others is crucial. In the republican tradition that Arendt defends, the *res publica*, the open space of association and interaction, is not simply a place where citizens are free to represent their interests, nor is it a place where business is administered in an orderly manner. It is, instead, a space that allows for the creation of new subjects – the active production of new interests and new ideals through the utterance of great words and the performance of great deeds. That is to say, in the *res publica*, subjects are first constituted and continuously altered through their relations with others – particularly but not exclusively through political debate, rhetorical persuasion, and the act of taking decisions. To attempt to reduce this activity to mere making, to treat it as an instrumental means to an end, is to threaten or even to destroy an essential part of what it means to be human – an essential component of what Arendt calls the human condition. It is to risk transforming the *zoon politikon* into an *organa empsychia*, the political animal into a tool with a mind, the citizen into a slave. In Arendt’s reading, by rooting the human community in labour as opposed to politics, Marx replaced the open space of free relations with the enclosed confines of purely instrumental tasks. He

conjured up the specter of the “republic of work” – a world where freedom involved laboring, not engaging in political debate. As a direct consequence of this reduction of the political, official Marxism liberated no one and enslaved all.

There is, then, within the republican tradition, and among those thinkers who have attempted to outline the implications of the politics of deconstruction, a very powerful critique of Marx and Marxism – an attack on the basic assumption that ideology and politics, with all of their attendant contingencies and insufficiencies, can ultimately be explained through the analysis of political economy, or in some fashion reduced to more fundamental sociological or material terms. In *Specters of Marx*, Derrida refers to this assumption as Marx’s “*ontological* treatment of the spectrality of the ghost” (1994, 91). The claim relies on Derrida’s distinction between the spirit and the specter, or *Geist* and *Gespenst* – a distinction that Derrida believes Marx overlooked. Spirit refers to a transcendental category that both exceeds and comprehends existence as such. It is simultaneously everywhere and nowhere, justifying any claim without itself requiring justification. Anyone committed to Enlightenment must submit every manifestation of such a spirit to ruthless critique, and show how at every turn spirit is invoked to make mundane, alterable power structures and social relations appear eternal, immutable, or divine. But if spirit is the external authority invoked to reinforce existing social relations, the specter is the insufficiency, the uncertainty, or the undecidable absence or alterity that conditions every social relation – the irreducible lack or gap that renders those relations forever ungrounded and thus forever open to contestation and change. According to Derrida, all of the atrocities attributable to Marxism can be traced back to Marx’s inability to see that the specter, unlike spirit, is a condition of our being in the world – his

desire to “bind” the specter, “after so many hesitations, through so many tensions and contradictions, to an ontology” (89). In order to avoid the errors of Marxism, Derrida suggests, one would have to replace Marx’s ontology with a far less certain, indeed fundamentally uncertain and undecidable, “hauntology” (10). This explains why, particularly in his more political works, Derrida is so insistent on the figure of the specter. Democracy is for him necessarily haunted by what remains unknown or what remains other – especially that which is still off in the future and yet to come. It is, to use Derrida’s terms, a “democracy to come” (65). At the same time, Derrida refuses to renounce “a certain *spirit of Marxism*,” and openly calls for “a critical, selective, and filtering reaffirmation” (92) of Marx’s thought. How, then, might such a reaffirmation proceed in a post-Marxist conjuncture, especially given the force and the scope of the new republican discourse just outlined?

The first thing to point out is that, throughout his life and especially during the *Vormärz* period, Marx had an extremely ambiguous relationship with republican political theory. As evidenced by his doctoral dissertation and his essays for the *Rheinische Zeitung*, Marx’s earliest forays into political philosophy were deeply influenced by Bruno Bauer, who was at the time one of Germany’s most outspoken republicans. The young Marx also read and annotated the works of Rousseau, Machiavelli, and other republican theorists. In 1843, when increased government censorship resulted in the collapse of the *Rheinische Zeitung*, Marx broke with Bauer, moved to Paris, and began his brief but important collaboration with Arnold Ruge – the political journal called the *Deutsch-französische Jahrbücher*. But this break with Bauer only represented Marx’s desire to engage in more directly political or practical activities, and not to be limited to what

Bauer called “pure theory.” Marx would soon break with Ruge as well, this time over the so-called “social question” – the question of what, if anything, should be done about the pauperization of working people that seemed indissociable from the liberalization of civil society and the elimination of the feudal system of corporations and estates. Ruge believed this problem would have to be addressed by political means, or a political as opposed to a social revolution, and thus cautioned against those who, like Marx, supported social movements such as the Silisian weaver’s strikes of 1844. In terms of his relationship with republicanism, Marx’s break with Ruge, carried out in the pages of the journal *Vorwärts* shortly after the release of the one and, as it turned out, only issue of the *Deutsch-französische Jahrbücher*, is probably as important as his better known breaks with either Bauer or, a little later, with Feuerbach. For it is at this point that Marx begins to question the limitations of the public sphere, and to attempt to explain political motivation or political interests in what appear to be apolitical terms. That is to say, in his argument with Ruge, Marx begins to question the specificity of the political – the hallmark of civic republicanism.

At the same time, republican ideas remain central to Marx’s thinking through his conversion to communism and to the cause of the proletariat, his brief association and subsequent break with the philosophy of Ludwig Feuerbach, his discovery and working out of the materialist concept of history in his polemics with the young Hegelians, his establishment of the Communist League and collaboration with Engels on the *Communist Manifesto*, and his direct involvement, via the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung*, in the revolutionary struggles of 1848. That is to say, a republican thread runs throughout all of his early texts, and it is only after the failure of the 1848 revolutions that Marx begins to

think in terms of the dictatorship of the proletariat rather than the creation of an open space or *res publica* of political debate. Prior to 1848, Marx is entirely committed to the principle that a free society is one founded on open debate within a public sphere. His aim is primarily to expand the public sphere – to explode the limits that bourgeois states place on public debate, and to demand the social conditions that would allow larger elements of society to engage in such debates. Particularly after his break with Ruge, Marx called for social as opposed to merely political revolution, not because he saw the social as the submerged truth of the political, but because he came to understand the acknowledged political institutions often exist to foreclose and not to occasion ideological antagonism and public debate. Thus for Marx it was a question, not merely of rejecting, but of constantly testing the limits of republican freedom. For him, freedom would require not only the existence of an open space or *res publica*, but also the right to call into question who has access to that space (who is recognized as a citizen), and what its boundaries are (how the line between private and public gets drawn).

At least part of the reason why these more political and republican elements of Marx's thought have not been highlighted in the secondary literature has to do with the organization, distribution, and parceling out of Marx's text by Marxist editors – a procedure that was first undertaken by Engels, especially in a series of pamphlets he wrote towards the end of his life and after Marx's death. It is not only a question of the editorial reconstruction of Marx's text, however, but also one of the kind of reading that Marx scholars have sanctioned and pursued. In particular, commentators invariably compose Marx's work as a system (whether a science or a method) that might be extracted from the texts in question and applied universally. As a result, the more

rhetorical, performative, or active aspects of Marx's writing go unnoticed. The best although by no means unique example of this procedure is found in Louis Althusser's famous reconstruction of Marx's career. As is well known, Althusser posited an "epistemological break" separating Marx's youthful, ideological commitment to the humanist concept of essence (which he is said to have borrowed from Hegel and, more importantly, from Feuerbach), and his mature, utterly unique and even world historical science of the social relation (1969, 32). While it has faced ridicule among humanist Marxists, the theory of the epistemological break still has many adherents, including Althusser's former student Etienne Balibar, whose recent book on Marx goes so far as to call it "undeniable" (1995, 6). When Althusser first proposed it, of course, the theory of the break was intended to intervene in a very particular conjuncture – to ensure, in the early 1960s and amidst the apparent stagnation of the workers' movement in the industrialized world, that Marxism was not reduced to a subset of humanism, but remained a science of revolution. But the effects, or perhaps certain side-effects, of the theory of the break (effects which I will argue remain very influential, perhaps most of all among those who are unaware of its influence, and can be discerned wherever contemporary theorists and intellectuals attack "essentialism"), remain to be examined.

Althusser wants Marx's early humanist works to be read with some measure of suspicion, downplaying the concept of alienation and focusing instead on the latent philosophical "problematic" (the cluster of unspoken questions) that informs *Capital*. In between Marx's youthful and his mature texts are what Althusser calls the "Works of the Break" themselves, namely the "Theses on Feuerbach" and *The German Ideology*. In terms of understanding how Marxism has policed the kinds of readings of Marx that get

sanctioned, and in doing so overlooked Marx's contribution to republican political theory, Althusser's passing comments on these two texts are very telling. Against those who might be inclined to read them too closely, Althusser counsels caution when approaching the Works of the Break, because, he writes, "to believe we can get all Marx's philosophy directly from the polemical formulations of a work that joins the battle on the enemy's terrain, i.e., the terrain of philosophical *ideology*, is to deceive ourselves as to the laws of ideological struggle." It is to overlook what Althusser calls "the necessary distinction between the philosophical ideology in which this ideological struggle is fought, and the Theory or Marxist philosophy which appears on the stage to give battle there." That is to say, for Althusser and those who follow him, the Works of the Break are ambiguous and therefore suspicious precisely because they are rhetorical and polemical. "To concentrate on the Works of the Break," Althusser concludes, "is in practice to fall into the '*oversight*' of not seeing that place we are given to *read* Marx's philosophy in person is *par excellence* his masterpiece, *Capital*" (1970, 31). To avoid such an "oversight," Althusser and his students undertake an "in person" reading, or what they call a "symptomatic reading," of Marx in *Reading Capital*.

Very few if any today would be convinced of Althusser's effort to distinguish between philosophical ideologies on the one hand and Marxist philosophy or Theory on the other. Obviously Althusser's attempt to separate the myriad of political ideologies (such as humanism) from Marxism as the solitary and world historical science of ideology is more than a little outmoded. But more interesting perhaps is Althusser's own rhetoric, and especially his suggestion that it is possible to distinguish between Marx as he appears "on stage," where he also engages in battles with others, and Marx as he exists

backstage or “in person.” Everything about the new republican theories just discussed argues that this is precisely the distinction republicanism rejects – that the republican subject first emerges on stage, as it were, or in the midst of what Claude Lefort calls a *mise en scène*, and defines itself there through its relations, especially its polemical or antagonistic relations, with others. To exclude the polemical formulations of Marx’s work on the grounds that they are polemical is thus to foreclose the opportunity for a political reading from the outset. It is to fail to acknowledge the sense in which Marx’s texts seek not only to describe social reality, but also to perform political tasks. It is, finally, to isolate Marx’s work from the (to use Althusser’s locution, “overdetermined”) ensemble of social relations that first constitute it and bring it forth. It is not to Marx’s intentions, then, or to the original but concealed idea animating his work, to which one must return, but to the complex and overdetermined network of relations that break up his work – fragment, destabilize, and rupture not only the work itself, but perhaps even more importantly all predetermined assumptions about that work.

If there is to be what Derrida dubs “a critical, selective, and filtering reaffirmation” (1994, 92) of Marx’s thought, it will have to begin by rejecting *both* the hermeneutic assumption that all of Marx’s work speak from a single, unified intention, one that is in the process of unfolding or realizing itself throughout Marx’s entire body of work, *and* Althusser’s notion that Marx’s career is shorn in half by a colossal, definitive epistemological break, or a single point of no return beyond which Marx never for an instant revives his commitment to theoretical humanism or philosophical essentialism. Neither model is able even to begin to represent the complexity of a text that here breaks away, there circles back on itself, here introduces something new, there recalls earlier

formulations, here attacks an opponents position, there occupies that same position, and so on. Nor is either the hermeneutic or the Althusserian approach equipped to address the fact that Marx's work is not composed in a vacuum, but in response to and in conflict with other texts – the extent to which Marx's writing is composed of intertextual references and insubjective relations. The alternative therefore is to conceive of Marx's texts, neither as a unified body of work nor as a structure shorn in two by a single break, but as a composite apparatus of fissures and cuts, skips and jumps, gaps and breaks – an infinitely complex relays system of adjustable components that I propose to call the Marx-machine. Lost here is any residual hope that Marx's work somehow represents a world historical moment, a complete rupture with the past. Gained is something significantly more useful – an assemblage of rhetorical tools and ideological weapons that can be mobilized in any number of new struggles for any number of new purposes.

Marx in *Res Publica*

When brought to trial in Germany on charges of inciting rebellion during the revolution of 1848, Marx spoke in his own defense. “What took place here,” he said, “was not a political conflict between two parties within the framework of one society, but a conflict between two societies, a social conflict, which assumed a political form” (*SW* 274). The republican criticism of Marx has always been just this – that he treats politics as an empty, formal reflection of social antagonisms, and thus, as Hannah Arendt puts it, he has no concept of political community, no understanding of the *res publica* or the open space in which citizens are free to meet, to interact, and to perform great deeds and speak great words. And yet, Marx spoke *these* words in a courtroom, where he was defending himself as the editor of one of the most important political journals of the 1848 revolutionary cycle, the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* – nothing if not an active member of a political community. Marx also, it should be noted, spoke these words as a nomad of sorts – someone who had been denied his Prussian citizenship, and who lived most of his adult life in exile. Thus Marx had a profound sense of both the necessity and the limitations of republican freedoms. In his work, he endeavored simultaneously to affirm political freedoms and to exposed their social limits – to expose, that is to say, the social inequalities and structural exclusions that threaten to render citizenship in a republic void of meaningful content, and that prevent great numbers, indeed the greatest number of individuals from playing any significant part in the political life of the state. For Marx, republican and democratic freedom could only mean the freedom to critique, and thereby perpetually to transform, the limits of the *res publica*. Marx believed citizenship was not

a static category, but the object of a struggle. In this new republican era, it is no less necessary to attend to and to expose those places where the concepts of the specificity of the political and the *res publica* are employed not to encourage but to regulate political activity, not to promote but to constrain debate. It is not, as Hannah Arendt and her many contemporary followers claim, that Marx has no concept of political community, or that he denies the reality and the effectivity of the *res publica*. It is rather that he has an active, dynamic concept of the political community. Democracy is either in a process of continuous alteration, creating new ways of addressing new social conditions and ever emerging political antagonisms, or it atrophies and dies away.

In a collection of notes he took on Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* during the summer of 1843, Marx attacks the German *Rechtsstaat* as a "democracy of unfreedom," where the active participation of citizens in governance gets reduced to occasional elections and where the state exists largely to defend the rights of property owners. Idealizing the world of classical antiquity, Marx contrasts this dilapidated, modern model of the state with the beautiful image of the Greek *polis* in which, he maintains, "the *res publica* was the real private concern, the real content of the citizen" (*CW* 3, 32). If Marx held to a theory of human nature, a debatable point to say the least, it was not that of the human being as a labouring animal, or an *organa empsyche* destined forever to toil in slavery, but Aristotle's definition of the human as *zoon politikon* – a political animal, or one that can only define itself through its relations with others. Marx's attack on the political institutions of his time was conducted with this concept of the *zoon politikon* in mind. He criticized them, not because they were merely political, empty chimeras that obscured a deeper, more profound social reality, but because they had been established to protect

certain social relations, especially economic ones, from political scrutiny – to construct a particular, historically relative and therefore alterable collection of social relations as natural, apolitical, private, and thus immune to anything like democratic change. For Marx, especially the young Marx, the goal was to expose the social character of these ostensibly private relations, to reveal that they are not private but public affairs, and thereby to politicize and to democratize ever greater tracts of civil society. That is to say, Marx did not claim that politics is a false reflection of social conditions, but sought a politics that could articulate or effectively mobilize in favor of those places that social antagonisms exceeded the bounds of the established political order. For Marx, politics can only begin on the borders and the margins of the political.

Some of the first articles written by the young Marx for the *Rheinische Zeitung* were defenses of free speech and the freedom of the press. Indeed, in his early work, Marx equated emancipation with free political discourse and the right to criticize all manifestations of authority. By the time he began his career as a journalist in 1842, the governments of most German states, under either the directive or the external pressure of Friedrich Wilhelm IV's regime in Prussia, were engaged in concerted efforts to quell the rise of republican sentiment among German intellectuals through media censorship. But the spread of republican ideas following the Napoleonic Wars made such a practice difficult, for the moneyed middle classes financially supported the radical presses, seeing their interests as more or less identical with the interests of free speech. At this point in his life, Marx was still very much an acolyte and a supporter of Bruno Bauer, who, in the early 1840s, had emerged as one of Germany's most outspoken republican theorists and the recognized leader of the young or left Hegelians. With Bauer, Marx believed in the

imminent triumph of secular reason and *Wissenschaft* over the theological consciousness of the past. For the young Hegelians, a loose collection of radical journalists and disenfranchised intellectuals, the Prussian authority's crackdown on dissent only served as a definite sign of the impending, final battle between philosophy and religion, republicanism and monarchy – a battle that, given history's rationality, these followers of Hegel adamantly believed only one side could possibly win. In his editorials for the *Rheinische Zeitung*, Marx not only called for the creation of a *res publica* or an open space of free debate, he also saw the journals for which he and his colleagues worked as components of such a *res publica*. Like Rousseau, Marx believed that that republican governance involved the active participation of all citizens in the creation and perpetual recreation of the social bond – that a free society could only be the invention of free public discourse. Marx sought, therefore, not to reduce the political to the social, or to treat politics as a derivative epiphenomenon of sociological phenomena, but to expand the republican notion of public debate and the *res publica* to greater tracts of civil society, and to open up public discourse on as many topics as possible – in short, to politicize social relations.

In the "Preface" to his *Critique of Political Economy*, published in 1859, Marx began the tradition of projecting his mature theory back onto his earlier work, a procedure that would be systematized after Marx's death by Engels. Recalling some notes he took on Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* in the summer of 1843, Marx maintains that "[m]y investigation led to the result that legal relations as well as forms of state are to be grasped neither from themselves nor from the so-called general development of the human mind, but rather had their roots in the material conditions of life." According to

Marx, this is the work in which he first made the all important discovery that “the anatomy of civil society is to be sought in political economy” (*SW* 389). A little later in the 1859 “Preface,” Marx lets slip the following, perhaps more interesting insight: “Just as our opinion of an individual is not based on what he thinks of himself, so can we not judge [a] period of transformation by its own consciousness” (390). If we focus on its vehicle rather than its tenor, the metaphor might be considered a clue as to how to read the “Preface” itself, as Marx’s “opinion” of his own earlier work is more than a little misleading. In fact, Marx’s “Critique of Hegel’s *Philosophy of Right*” does not suggest that legal relations and forms of state have their foundation in the material conditions of existence, nor does it point towards an anatomy of political economy. Its dominant theme concerns the specificity of the political. Following rather closely the democratic theory of Arnold Ruge, Marx attacks Hegel for treating politics as “a parentheses within logic” (*CW* 3, 18), or subordinating political questions to philosophical ones. According to Marx, Hegel’s “[p]hilosophical work does not consist in embodying thinking in political definitions, but in evaporating existing political definitions into abstract thought” (17). As a result, Hegel is able to make it appear as though the genuine source of political authority is the monarchy, the bureaucracy, and the assembly, but not, as Marx firmly believes at this time, the people. The conclusion of Marx’s “Critique of Hegel’s *Philosophy of Right*,” if a loosely organized notebook can be said to have such a thing, is not that political superstructures rest atop an economic base, but that authority should be derived from the active, democratic participation of all citizens in the political process, especially via the vote. There is no attempt here to prove that the anatomy of civil society is found in political economy. There is, however, a plea for universal suffrage.

Thus on close analysis a fissure or a gap can be seen to emerge between the Marx who wrote the “Critique of Hegel’s *Philosophy of Right*” and the Marx who commented on that work some fifteen years later in the “Preface” to his *Critique of Political Economy*. As Marx hints in the latter work, our opinion of him cannot be based on what he thinks of himself, or his own retroactive construction of his career. If I write here of the Marx-machine rather than Marx’s body of work, it is because I believe that, today and in the current conjuncture, it is most productive to approach “Marx” as a composite assemblage of such ruptures and gaps, oversights and lacunae – little cracks and breaks that, in many ways, the “Preface” to the *Critique of Political Economy* and other works like it attempt to spackle over or snap shut. When Marx’s text is treated in this fashion, it becomes, not a science or a methodology, but a kind of *res publicus* in which a multitude of different voices confront one another in an ongoing political debate – a republican text. Nor is it only Marx’s voice heard here. The Althusserian theory of Marx’s epistemological break with the young Hegelians, Feuerbach in particular, needs to be rendered more complex, nuanced, and fragmented. Marx did not only break with Feuerbach. In the early stages of his career, he also connected himself with and / or broke away from Bruno Bauer, Arnold Ruge, Moses Hess, Karl Grün, Max Stirner, and countless others. With Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of the machine in mind, it might be said that each of these links and breaks represents a different kind of assemblage, allows for different flows, joint works, and modes of production. “[M]achines work,” Deleuze and Guattari write, “only when they break down, and by continually breaking down” (1983, 8). If it is to “work,” then, or if it is to be put to work, precisely what needs to be addressed in the Marx-machine is the places where it comes apart, and thus where it

can be conjoined with other texts or assembled otherwise. Where do Marx's writings, or in Derrida's terms the *specters* of Marx, return to destabilize the assumptions that are routinely made about Marx today, in an ostensibly post-Marxist conjuncture?

Marxist editors and commentators compiled Marx's texts as though they represented the continuous development and steady maturation of orthodox Communist theory. Lost in this approach are all the little cuts and fractures that make up the Marx-machine. Aside from Althusser's theory of the epistemological break, which focuses on Marx's rejection of Feuerbach's concept of essence, there are numerous ways of mapping the topography of Marx's early career, many of which are more germane to contemporary political debates. Early in his career Marx connects with Bruno Bauer on the topic of secular republicanism and freedom of speech, but then, in "On the Jewish Question," breaks with him over the question of political pluralism. Around the same time, Marx and Arnold Ruge begin a very productive conversation over the concept or the specificity of the political, only later to disagree over the so-called social question, and over the effectivity of spontaneous and violent social protests as opposed to politically organized forms of mobilization. Along with these smaller breaks, and in terms of his political thought and activity, I would like to suggest a three part division to Marx's early career – a liberal republican phase (1841 to 1843), a radical democratic phase (1843 to 1850), and finally a recognizably "Marxist" phase (1850 to 1852). The first includes the texts Marx wrote while under the influence of Bruno Bauer – from his doctoral dissertation on the relationship between critical individualism and ancient Greek atomism to his essays for the *Rheinische Zeitung*. The second, radical democratic component of the Marx-machine begins with his work on Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* and his correspondence and

collaboration with Arnold Ruge. It lasts through his discovery of class struggle and historical materialism, and does not come to a close until the end of the 1848 revolutions and Marx's exile to London. During this period, even as he links political activity to social antagonisms, Marx prioritizes questions of political strategy and tactics, and believes in the productive, effective force of democratic interventions. The final stage, from 1850 to 1852, represents Marx's response to the failure of 1848, which he reads in many ways as a failure of the political. This is the period during which he begins to link political revolution directly to economic crises, to insist upon the independence of the working class movement, and to develop his theory of the dictatorship of the proletariat.

Marx's first important work is his doctoral dissertation, completed in 1841. At the center of this impressive study, entitled *On the Difference Between Democritean and Epicurean Philosophies of Nature*, is Marx's defense of the much maligned Epicurean theory of the "declination" or "swerving" of the atom away from its downward trajectory. Very briefly, Democritus and Epicurus are among the first materialists. They conceive of material reality in atomistic terms. According to Democritus, the world of appearances and change is but a reflection or an emanation (what he calls *eidola*) of a more substantial, infinite and immutable reality made up of atoms (*atoma*) falling downward in a void. To this theory, Epicurus added the principle that, on occasion and without cause, one of the atoms would swerve, thereby coming into contact with other atoms. The concept of the "declination," *parenklisis*, or what the great Epicurean poet Lucretius would translate into Latin as *clinamen*, performed the double service of explaining change and allowing for the existence of a kind of free will or accident in what otherwise appeared to be a very deterministic natural order. Defending this principle against a long

tradition of critics, from Cicero to Pierre Bayle, Marx suggests that it also explains Epicurean ethics or the Epicurean principle that the individual “swerves” away from determinate relations. That is to say, the theory of the declination of the atom explains why the Epicurean subject seeks to define its own existence and personal happiness (*ataraxy*) independent of either natural or social obligation. On the basis of the Epicurean philosophy of nature, Marx argues for the liberty of what he calls “subjective consciousness,” or the enlightened individual’s capacity to transcend (swerve away from) all external determination, and thereby enter into truly free relations with others. As Marx puts it, both humans and atoms “meet only by virtue of their declination from the straight line” (*CW* 1, 52). At the same time, Marx notes, the freedom of the Epicurean individual needs to be located in a cultural context – it needs to be more Hegelian, less Kantian freedom. “Abstract individuality is freedom from being,” Marx writes, “not freedom in being. It cannot shine in the light of being” (62). Thus, for Marx, the Epicurean theory of the declination of the atom supported the concept of individual liberty. Within the philosophical tradition, it represents a privileged metaphor for the liberal idea that each individual human possesses the potential to become free, or to escape the bonds of both convention and desire, and to enter into free relations with other liberated individuals.

It would be difficult to overlook the extent to which Marx’s doctoral dissertation is intended to please Bruno Bauer, with whom Marx studied at the University of Berlin, and who Marx hoped would be able to secure him a position in the German academy. By 1841, Bauer was a young, outspoken, and already very prolific Hegelian theologian, now working at the University of Bonn. He was known for his attacks on David Strauss’s *Life of Jesus*, in which he claimed that the gospels were not the mythological expression of a

particular community's essence, but the creation of individual, self conscious writers. Throughout all his work, Bauer championed the concept of the individual self consciousness, which he took to represent the pinnacle of the Hegelian system and therefore history itself. In Hegelian terms, Bauer privileged subjective self consciousness over the common substance of the community. Marx's hopes of an academic career were dashed when, in 1842, Bauer was purged from the university at the order of Johann Eichorn, the culture minister in Friedrich Wilhelm IV's regime, for espousing atheism. And indeed, as a theologian, Bauer's aim was to prove that the truth of Christianity was coextensive with the truth of Hegelian philosophy, and thus with the truth of history itself – that it was a rational as opposed to a revealed truth. The Pietist theologians and philosophers favored by Friedrich Wilhelm IV's regime instantly recognized this doctrine as submerged atheism, and saw it as a threat to the monarchical, theological state. And as soon as his academic career ended, Bauer gleefully confirmed everyone's suspicions, becoming one of the most adamant proponents of secular republicanism in *Vormärz* Germany. He also continued to espouse Hegelian principles, albeit in a somewhat heterodox form, insisting that the history of spirit was the history of ideas, and that revolutionary change would therefore be instigated by a thoroughgoing theoretical critique of the monarchical and theological state. However else Marx's dissertation might be interpreted, it is not an accident that his defense of Epicurus falls directly "in line" with the rational individualism and humane liberalism advocated by Bauer. Regardless of the radical topic of his dissertation, Marx, clearly aware of academic protocol, does not "swerve" too far from his teacher.

While it excluded the possibility of his ever having an academic career, the mounting conservatism of Friedrich Wilhelm IV's regime in the early 1840s did not immediately dissuade Marx's youthful enthusiasm. The conviction among the young Hegelians that, if not political power, then the rational design of history itself was on their side is palpable in most of their early writings. Throughout 1842 and until April of 1843 Marx developed his liberal republican position in the articles he wrote for the *Rheinische Zeitung*, first as a contributor and then as an editor. Marx's hope, indeed his conviction, was that a consistent, rational if also ruthless theoretical critique of existing institutions might peacefully bring about a liberal republican state within Germany. He was more or less committed to what, in a letter to him, Bruno Bauer called "the terrorism of pure theory" (Bauer to Marx, 28 March 1841). The free press was to be the primary vehicle for this enlightened revolution, as it not only promoted culture and educated the people, but also, as Marx put it at the time, "transform[ed] material struggle into an ideological struggle, the struggle of flesh and blood into a struggle of minds, the struggle of need, desire, empiricism into a struggle of theory, of reason, of form" (CW 1, 292). A similar privileging of theory and of ideas can be found in the first article Marx wrote as editor of the *Rheinische Zeitung*. "Communism and the Augsburg *Allgemeine Zeitung*" is a defense of Marx's paper against the accusation that, by publishing the work of the messianic socialist Wilhelm Weitling, it had promoted communism. Marx makes it clear that his paper does not support communism, but that a "thoroughgoing criticism" of communist theory will be necessary to forestall communism in practice. The "real danger" of communism, Marx maintains, "lies not in *practical attempts*, but in the *theoretical elaboration* of communist ideas," for while the former "can be answered by

cannon as soon as they become dangerous" (220), ideas on the other hand are "chains from which one cannot free oneself without a broken heart" and "demons which human beings can vanquish only by submitting to them" (221). For Marx, it is only in an open debate that such theoretical "chains" will be broken and "demons" exorcised. Therefore the real danger is not communism but censorship.

Even as the *Rheinische Zeitung* faced increased censorship, Marx consistently professed his belief in the prospect of a liberal state, one based on principles of rational order and natural law. While it was certainly to the left of center, the position Marx develops in the *Rheinische Zeitung* is far from radical by contemporary standards. Indeed, it is far from radical according to the standards of its own time, always attempting to mediate between proto-anarchists and militant communists on the one hand and liberal democrats on the other. At the end of the day when the paper went to press, Marx's explicit position was more or less in keeping with the liberal politics the *Rheinische Zeitung's* readers and financial backers. The mission of the *Rheinische Zeitung* was to defend liberal reforms from Friedrich Wilhelm IV's reactionary assault on them, and to "strive for a completely new form of state corresponding to a more profound, more thoroughly educated and *freer* popular consciousness" (265). This agenda is clearly expressed in Marx's articles "On the Commissions of the Estates in Prussia," which argue against Friedrich Wilhelm IV's reestablishment of an estates-based assembly and in favor of a more liberal, republican constitution. "[W]e demand only that the Prussian state not break off its real state of life at a sphere which should be the conscious flowering of this state of life," Marx proclaims, "we demand only the consistent and comprehensive implementation of the fundamental institutions of Prussia, we demand that the real

organic life of the state should not be suddenly abandoned in order to sink back into unreal, mechanical, subordinated, non-state spheres of life.” That is to say, Marx and the *Rheinische Zeitung* demand that the Prussian state not regress to the feudal model, but be allowed to develop into a republican state, and that “the state should not dissolve itself in carrying out the act that should be the supreme act of its internal unification” (297). Needless to say, the demands of Marx and his fellow young Hegelian journalists went unheeded, and after Prussian officials banned its distribution in the winter of 1842, making it impossible for it to reach most of its readers, the *Rheinische Zeitung* was forced to halt publication in March of 1843.

It was in part the failure of Hegelian logic, or the failure of the real world peacefully to adopt the progressive conclusions of that logic, that transformed Marx from a liberal republican into a radical democrat – someone committed, not only to the rational or theoretical critique of the monarchical and Christian state, but also to active participation in effective social movements that could challenge the existing order on a number of practical and theoretical fronts. In the midst of the collapse of the *Rheinische Zeitung*, Marx made plans with Arnold Ruge to publish a German language journal out of Paris entitled the *Deutsch-französische Jahrbücher*. The journal, which lasted exactly one issue, and this period in Marx’s life, though brief, would nonetheless prove decisive for the development of his political ideas and for his understanding of the political as such. The period coincided with a split within the young Hegelian movement between the followers of Bauer, who took up residence in Berlin and called themselves *Die Freien* or the Free Ones, and the followers of Ruge, whose approach was far more strategic. *Die Freien*, including Max Stirner, remained committed to the idea that a purely theoretical

critique of existing ideas, and especially of Christianity, would lead to revolutionary upheaval. On the other hand, Marx's and Ruge's *Deutsch-französische Jahrbücher* were explicitly intended to combine German theory with French practice, and to militate in favor of democracy. "[T]here is nothing to stop us," Marx wrote in an open letter published in the journal, "from making a critique of politics the starting-point of our critique, from taking part in party politics and so identifying ourselves with real battles." Against the ideal of theoretical "purity" espoused by the followers of Bauer, Marx states that "[w]e do not set ourselves opposite the world, saying: 'Here is the truth, kneel down here!' It is out of the world's own principles that we develop for it new principles" (*SW* 37). The idea, then, was that revolution could only be advanced through direct engagement in existing political struggles, and not through the abstract, theoretical criticism of religion. As Marx put it in a private letter to Ruge, this time explicitly attacking *Die Freien*, "religion should be criticized in the framework of criticism of political conditions rather than that political conditions should be criticized in the framework of religion" since "religion is itself without content," and will spontaneously collapse with "the abolition of the distorted [political] reality" on which it is based (Marx to Ruge, 30 November 1842).

Before they began making plans for their collaboration, Marx and Ruge corresponded extensively. They started by discussing Ruge's *Anekdoten zur neuesten deutschen Philosophie und Publicistik*, an almanac of essays censored in Germany that Ruge was to publish in Switzerland. Marx first wrote of submitting two articles to the project. One was to be an aesthetic "Treatise on *Christian Art*" (more accurately a parody of Christian art, following the model of Bauer's parody of Christianity in his *The*

Trumpet of the Last Judgment), the second a political essay criticizing Hegel's theory of the state. Neither article remains. In fact, it is likely that Marx never wrote either of them, but was stringing Ruge along. Of the second, however, Marx did note that "[t]he central point is the struggle against *constitutional monarchy* as a hybrid which from beginning to end contradicts and abolishes itself." Until Hegel's theory is repudiated, Marx concludes, "[r]es publica is quite untranslatable into German" (Marx to Ruge, 5 March 1842). Before moving to Paris to begin work on the *Deutsch-französische Jahrbücher*, Marx spent the summer of 1843 with his fiancé Jenny in the village of Kreuznach. There, on his honeymoon, he began the process of researching the essay he had promised to send Ruge more than a year earlier. Marx read and annotated extensive passages from Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*. The result was the manuscript Marx's editors called the "Critique of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*," Marx's first extensive attempt to think through the question of the political *mise en scène* or the institutional apparatus of the state. Marx begins by agreeing with Hegel in two respects. First, he approves of Hegel's organic as opposed to mechanical conception of society – his portrait of society as an integrated totality. Second, Marx notes how Hegel correctly understood the manner in which, in the modern era, a separation emerges between state and civil society – one that did not exist in the medieval world, where the political and the social orders were integrated through hierarchically organized corporations and guilds. Hegel's error, according to Marx, is his attempt to resolve the contradiction between these two points (society as an integrated organism versus society as divided into state and civil society) in a purely abstract, philosophical fashion. Thus the ideal abstraction of the monarchy, and not the concrete reality of the people, becomes the foundation of political authority.

Marx's "Critique of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*" is a partial, exploratory, and disjointed text, and it is interesting for those reasons. It also represents the beginning of Marx's radical democratic phase. Marx does not provide a systematic analysis of society, nor does he attempt to represent the state as an indirect expression of productive forces or instrument of class interests. Engels was the first to outline that Marxist theory of the state, particularly in his study of *The Origin of Family, Private Property and the State*, where he treats the state as the product of "irreconcilable antagonisms" concomitant with the invention of property, and as an inherently oppressive institution that has the function of keeping class struggle "within the bounds of 'order'" (1946 [1883], 166). In contrast to the classically Marxist models of the state and of state power, Marx's notes on Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* are a rather fragmented attempt to come to terms with certain fragments from Hegel's text – specifically paragraphs 261 to 313 of *The Philosophy of Right*, which deal primarily with the structure of the state. After breaking human society in general down into the family, civil society, and the state, Hegel proceeds to break the state down into three sections as well, namely the monarchy, the executive or bureaucracy, and the assembly. Following Aristotle, his greatest teacher, Hegel wants to view the state, indeed political life in general, not as an instrumental means to an end, but as an end in itself. Unlike civil society, which Hegel treats as the realm of private commerce and property, the state is the realm of pure altruism, in which each individual recognizes her or his belonging to a unified and harmonious community – what Hegel calls "absolute ethical life" or *absolute Sittlichkeit*. For his part, Marx is unconvinced by the hypothesis of the existing monarchical state as an absolute community. Thus he calls each component of the Hegelian state into question in turn, showing the monarchy, the

bureaucracy, and the assembly to be incapable of producing the universal harmony Hegel is after. Instead, Marx argues, the monarchical state represents the particular interests of particular social groups, not as Hegel imagines the universal interests of the community as a whole. "The state is an abstraction," Marx writes in response to Hegel's claim that sovereignty belongs to the state. "The people alone is what is concrete" (CW 3, 28). The "Critique of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*" is, in this sense, a call for popular sovereignty.

It is important to be clear that the radical democratic position Marx takes up in his analysis of Hegel's work on the state conceives of "the people," not as a static substance or an essence, but as a dynamic, changing entity – one that, in the Heideggerean sense, exists in the world. Nor is Marx calling for a direct democracy void of all mechanisms of political representation or institutional mediation. Instead, he wants those institutional mechanisms to be the free creation of the people, of the citizens of a republic, and to be open to alteration as the people themselves change over time. "Democracy," Marx writes, "is the solved *riddle* of all constitutions. Here not merely *implicitly* and in essence but *existing* in reality, the *human being*, the *actual people*, are established as the people's *own* work. The constitution appears what it is, the free product of man" (29). The key to this liberation of the "actual people" as Marx calls them is free elections. "Civil society has *really* raised itself to abstraction from itself, to *political* being as its true, general, essential mode of being only in *elections unlimited* both in respect of the franchise and the right to be elected" (121). Contrary to what he recollects fifteen years later in the "Preface" to his *Critique of Political Economy*, Marx is arguing, then, not that political superstructures rest atop an economic base, nor that the truth of the state is to be found in the anatomy of political economy, but that politics must be liberated as a process, and as

a continuously unfolding process, through which the citizens of a republic, meaning all of the people, represent, actualize, and in doing so perpetually change themselves and their existence. Against Hegel's static model of the *Rechtstaat*, in which the structure of the monarchy, the bureaucracy, and the estates assembly appear frozen in time, Marx argues that the state, its various institutions, and even its constitution cannot be abstracted from this continual process of democratic self-determination. In a republic, Marx suggests, political institutions are never immune from the changing will of the people, or from the constituent power that first establishes their legitimacy. The democratic political process must take precedence over all state institutions. Thus it is precisely the specificity, and not the reducibility, of the political that concerns Marx.

Just prior to leaving for his honeymoon in Kreuznach, Marx wrote to Ruge once again, this time to praise him on the success of the *Anekdoten*. The letter is interesting for two reasons. First, Marx mentions Feuerbach's "Provisional Theses for the Reformation of Philosophy," which Ruge had published in the *Anekdoten*, and which begin with the classically Feuerbachian claim that "[t]he secret of *theology* is *anthropology*" (1983 [1843], 156). In response, Marx writes "Feuerbach's aphorisms seem to me incorrect only in one respect, that he refers too much to nature and too little to politics" (Marx to Ruge, 13 March 1843). While working on the *Deutsch-französische Jahrbücher*, Marx would write a number of rather sycophantic letters to Feuerbach, trying to draw him into more political debates, and to show him the political implications of his own thought. The extent to which Marx was seeking to persuade Feuerbach and to construct a kind of hegemony among contemporary theorists in such letters should not be overlooked, nor should Feuerbach's influence on Marx (especially his "method" of inverting the subject

and the predicate of Hegelian claims) be overestimated. From Feuerbach, Marx borrowed the concept of the *Gattungswesen*. But in Marx's hands it became something very different – not a static substance, but, as Marx puts it in the sixth of his “Theses on Feuerbach,” a perpetually changing “ensemble of social relations” (*SW* 157). The second interesting thing about Marx's letter to Ruge is a comment he makes on the so-called “Jewish question,” a matter that would soon become the topic of perhaps his most important political essay. “I have just been visited by the chief of the Jewish community here,” Marx writes, “who has asked me for a petition for the Jews to the Provincial Assembly, and I am willing to do it.” Then, referring to Bruno Bauer's recent pamphlet on *Die Judenfrage*, in which Bauer had argued against Jewish emancipation on the grounds that all such particularistic struggles only detracted from the larger project of human emancipation, Marx writes “[h]owever much I dislike the Jewish faith, Bauer's view seems to me too abstract. The thing is to make as many breaches as possible in the Christian state and to smuggle in as much as we can of what is rational” (Marx to Ruge, 13 March 1843). If Bauer places his hope in the tactics of pure theory and rejects the struggles of particular groups, Marx sees the democratic value of a multitude of subjects struggling to emancipate themselves. Marx's attack on Bauer, then, is motivated by a commitment to political pluralism.

Marx published two essays in the *Deutsch-französische Jahrbücher* – “On the Jewish Question,” which is an extended review of Bauer's *Die Judenfrage*, and “Towards a Critique of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*: Introduction,” which introduces the concept of class and class struggle into Marx's work for the first time. These two essays are exemplary pieces of radical democratic political theory, and they need to be read and

understood independently of the orthodox Marxist position that (perhaps) Marx himself and (certainly) Engels would develop later in their careers. They also address topics germane to contemporary, post-Marxist debates over what I have been calling the new republicans. The first of these two essays, "On the Jewish Question," is particularly important for its analysis of the concept of rights, and thus for the theory of the juridical as such. The second is significant for its introduction, without naming it, of the concept of hegemony, and thus as a theory of political representation – one that will be developed considerably in *The German Ideology*. A great deal has been said about Marx's break with Feuerbach, but in terms of his specifically political thought, his break with Bauer is just as significant. Both of the essays Marx wrote for *Deutsch-französische Jahrbücher* publicly announce that break, though the first one, obviously, more explicitly than the second. In his *Die Judenfrage*, Bauer argues that the struggle to emancipate the Jewish people within Germany can only forestall the more important struggle to emancipate humanity. For Bauer, any particularistic identity that mediates between the individual self consciousness and the community or humanity as a whole, especially religious identity, is a relic of the past – something that theory, criticism, indeed history itself has already overcome. "The will of history is evolution, new forms, progress, change," Bauer proclaims. "[T]he Jews want to stay forever where they are" (1983 [1843], 190). If Bauer believes that the demands and interests of particular groups damage the larger project of human emancipation, Marx maintains that human emancipation can only be brought about through particular demands and particular struggles. More accurately, Marx understands that politics is essentially polemical, that it requires confrontations between

different groups, and that, strictly speaking, there can be no politics of the isolated individual and no politics of humanity as a whole.

Marxism always had trouble with the concept of rights, and tended to construct them, indeed to construct the juridical or law as such, as an indirect expression of class interests. For the young Marx, though, matters are significantly more complex. Building on themes introduced by Bauer, and drawing as well on his own recent study of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*, "On the Jewish Question" explains that the political revolutions of the eighteenth century effectively "abolished the political character of civil society" by abolishing the "estates, corporations, guilds [and] privileges of the feudal order" (SW 55). In a sense, political relations were lifted up out of the social order – given abstract or "allegorical" form in the democratic state. At the same time, civil society was transformed into a collection of isolated, atomic individuals. Through a close reading of France's revolutionary constitutions, Marx shows how, during the course of the revolution, the *droits du citoyen*, of those concrete rights one could claim as the citizen of a particular state, get displaced and finally overtaken by the *droits du l'homme*, or the natural rights that one is said to possess as an isolated individual. According to Marx, this means that the rights one can claim as a member of a particular community, and for which the community as a whole is responsible, disappear. They are replaced with rights one has as an egoistic individual, which are ultimately indistinguishable from property rights. As a result, Marx concludes, "citizenship, the political community, is degraded [...] to a mere means for the preservation of the so-called rights of man" and "the sphere in which man behaves as a communal being is degraded below the sphere in which man behaves as a partial being" (54). Thus mere "political emancipation," while absolutely

necessary in order to dislodge the feudal order, or the order in which all social relations are determined via hierarchically structured corporations and guilds, is also incomplete. Full “human emancipation,” Marx suggests, will require a democratic repoliticization of civil society – a repoliticization of the realm that the modern theory of natural rights exists to defend as private and apolitical. Such a repoliticization can only happen if people claim rights as citizens, or as members of a community, and not exclusively as individuals, or as owners of property. In particular, it will require a constitution in which citizenship involves the right of each individual to play a part in the collective deliberations and arguments that define the community.

Marx’s second essay for the *Deutsch-französische Jahrbücher* is “Towards a Critique of Hegel’s *Philosophy of Right*: Introduction.” Here for the very first time Marx introduces the category of social class, referring to the proletariat as “a class with radical chains” and one “that has a universal character because of its universal suffering” (*SW* 72). It is also the one work in which Marx makes extensive use of the famous “theory / practice” distinction – doubtless because he and Ruge had agreed that the *Deutsch-französische Jahrbücher* were to endeavor to articulate German theory with French practice. The essay is a highly situated piece of political strategy, not a work of political economy (much less historical prediction). Nor is this fact surprising, given that, when he wrote “Towards a Critique of Hegel’s *Philosophy of Right*: Introduction” Marx had not yet encountered Friedrich Engels’s work on political economy, which would first draw his attention to the subject. Basically, in this essay, Marx claims that a German revolution is possible so long as the well established theoretical critique of religion combines its efforts with the emerging class struggle of the proletariat. While a great deal has been

said about Marx's discovery of Feuerbach around this time, and Feuerbach's "inversion" of subject and predicate, the philosophical method Marx employs in "Towards a Critique of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*: Introduction" is of less interest than the considerable rhetorical flair he displays there. Rhetorically speaking, Marx articulates theory and practice through copious use of the figure of the chiasmus, as if laying one across the other in the form of a cross. Thus he maintains that "[t]he demand to give up the illusions about [people's] condition is a demand to give up a condition that requires illusion" (64). Revolution requires, not only the theoretical adventures of the *Freien*, but both theory and practice, both philosophy and politics, as "[t]he weapon of criticism cannot [...] supplant the criticism of weapons" (69). In the last analysis, Marx announces in one final chiasmus, "[p]hilosophy cannot realize itself without transcending the proletariat, [and] the proletariat cannot transcend itself without realizing philosophy" (73). In the little gospel narrative Marx tells, the messianic mission of the proletariat is guaranteed by their suffering, and the more absolute the latter the more certain the former.

The overtly rhetorical packaging of these claims is perhaps as important as the point Marx is hoping to make. Indeed, in "Towards a Critique of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*: Introduction" Marx is not only attempting to describe historical phenomena but to perform a political or a rhetorical task – to convince his colleagues in Germany to throw their theoretical powers behind the cause of the proletariat. And the text of Marx's essay explains in no uncertain terms why he thinks it is necessary to engage in such activity – why it would be necessary for him to *represent* the cause of the proletariat *as if* its interests were the universal interests of humanity as a whole. According to Marx, who was at the time engaged in a protracted study of the history of the French Revolution,

every revolution necessitates that “a particular class undertakes the general emancipation of society from its particular position,” and that “one class” is seen to “stand in for the whole of society.” For this to occur, Marx continues:

the deficiency of all society must be inversely concentrated in another class; a particular class must be a class that rouses universal scandal and incorporates all limitations; a particular social sphere must be regarded as the notorious crime of the whole society, so that the liberation of this sphere appears as the universal self liberation. So that one class *par excellence* may appear as the class of liberation, another class must inversely be the manifest class of oppression (71).

This same theory of political struggles would be repeated and dubbed “hegemony” in Marx’s and Engels’s *The German Ideology*, written over the next couple of years. And it is important to keep in mind that Marx’s work both describes and enacts this process – that even as he is explaining the general operation of hegemonic politics, wherein the interests of a particular class stand in for the interests of humanity as a whole, he is also advancing a particular hegemonic project. The relationship between the two elements of Marx’s writing – the descriptive and the performative – is at best undecidable. At this point in his work, did Marx really believe that the interests of the proletariat coincided with the universal interests of humanity? Or were Marx’s own texts intended to represent proletarian interests *as if* they were the interests of humanity? Is “Towards a Critique of Hegel’s *Philosophy of Right*: Introduction” a description of historical phenomena or is it a revolutionary performance?

The release and instantaneous collapse of the *Deutsch-französische Jahrbücher* was accompanied by yet another break in Marx’s career – his break with Arnold Ruge.

The debate between the two men played itself out in the pages of the radical journal *Vorwärts*, where Marx and Ruge clashed over the significance of the Silesian weavers' strikes that had erupted in the summer of 1844. The first significant proletarian uprising in modern Germany, these strikes represented a violent reaction against the exploitation and poverty that liberalized economies were beginning to inflict on the German working classes. Ruge argued that the Silesian strikes would have no meaningful effects, as such social movements were not connected with an organized political agenda capable of taking control of the state, and they had no concrete political demands. In his response to Ruge's article, entitled "Critical Marginal Notes on the Article 'The King of Prussia and Social Reform,'" Marx defended the weavers and rejected Ruge's effort to distinguish in a dramatic fashion between the social and the political. Indeed, as Marx's article points out, it was Ruge who insisted that the uprising of the proletariat would be unsuccessful because "industry in Germany is not yet so developed as in England," where Chartists had made some modest gains. Marx, however, suggested that theorists of revolution learn from those who were actively making it, something that requires a combination of what he calls "some scientific insight and some love of mankind" (*CW* 3, 190). The ethical presupposition of Marx's position (one that never goes away) is thus quite clearly indicated in his break with Ruge. So too is the subtlety of Marx's strategy – one that did not proscribe the course of historical events, but recognized their contingency and sought to respond to them in an effective fashion. Exactly what interested Marx during his radical democratic phase was the articulation of social and political demands, and the manner in which the construction of hegemony relied on such an articulation. The eruption of the Silesian weavers' strikes was indicative of one of those sites where social

antagonisms overwhelmed the confines of the political institutions and mechanisms designed to address them. And, indeed, the strikes put the so-called “social question,” or the question of how to deal with the pauperization of workers that seemed concomitant with the liberalization of civil society, on the map of German politics.

This year in Marx’s career is, of course, the decisive one from an orthodox perspective. It is at this point that, under the influence of Engels, Marx takes up his studies of political economy – a study that leads very rapidly to the materialist conception of history first outlined in *The German Ideology*. In terms of his analysis of political strategy, however, not a great deal changes in the so-called Works of the Break. Marx certainly links the emergence of political revolution and class struggle to the historical development of productive forces. In doing so, it might seem that Marx reverts to the economic determinist position that he had attacked only a year earlier in his break with Ruge. However, in *The German Ideology* Marx and Engels make it very clear that, by linking political to economic development, they are not proscribing the trajectory of history, but offering a theoretical framework within which revolutionary strategy might be constructed. Historical materialism, as it would later be dubbed, is not a determinate science but a kind of working hypothesis. More accurately still, in *The German Ideology* it is used as a polemical weapon for fighting both the young Hegelians and the true socialists – for attacking, that is to say, their overly theoretical or moralistic approaches to history and to revolutionary change. Like “Towards a Critique of Hegel’s *Philosophy of Right*: Introduction,” it is a performative as much as it is a descriptive text, and what Marx and Engels are attempting to *do* in it should not be divorced from the phenomena they are seeking to describe. Here, as elsewhere in Marx’s early work, the two maintain

that revolutionaries should take their cue from actual social antagonisms, or those places where social antagonisms burst out of the established political form and thus require new political articulations. Thus Marx and Engels insist that “[c]ommunism is not a *state of affairs* which is to be established, an *ideal* to which reality will have to adjust itself. We call communism the *real* movement which abolishes the present state of things” (GI 47). This approach is entirely in keeping with the radical democratic politics in which Marx engaged both before and after *The German Ideology*.

Between 1844 and 1847 Marx worked on three extensive polemical texts, the first two with Engels, the third alone and in French. *The Holy Family* continued Marx’s assault on Bruno Bauer and his followers, who Marx and Engels labeled the “Critical Critics.” In this work, the influence of Feuerbach is palpable – not his method of inverting subject and predicate, but his concept of the human essence as sensuous *Gattungswesen* or species being. *The German Ideology* continued the assault on the circle around Bauer, this time focusing on Max Stirner and incorporating a critique of Stirner’s half baked understanding of political economy. It also included an attack on the true socialists, who, according to Marx and Engels, managed to turn revolutionary French political theory into a collection of vapid moral platitudes. This work represents the beginning of Marx’s break with Karl Grün, a friend from his school days and acolyte of Feuerbach, and Moses Hess, whose work had, only a short time earlier and as evidenced in the acknowledgment it receives in the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, been almost as influential as Engels’s had in turning Marx towards the study of political economy and the critique of capitalism. The final extended polemical work was Marx’s *Poverty of Philosophy*, an attack on Pierre Joseph Proudhon, whose limited

understanding of economics and whose influence among socialists Marx would endeavor to assuage for the rest of his life. While these texts, especially the latter two, are often represented as the groundwork of the science of historical materialism, their performative or active element needs to be borne in mind as well. Marx's polemics, simply by virtue of the fact that they are polemics, presuppose the existence of an open space or *res publica* of discourse and debate. As I will analyze with respect to the forgotten portion of *The German Ideology* below, the deeply rhetorical and literary construction of the polemical texts suggests that Marx was not only well aware of, but actively embraced the symbolic character of political debate – the sense in which it is not reducible to positive facts or the proofs of instrumental and scientific rationality, but invokes a complex life world of cultural references, persuasive arguments, and recognized conventions. If the theatre of political discussion is not overtly thematized in these works, it is everywhere enacted. Unfortunately, those performative elements of Marx's writing are the first ones to be ignored by commentators (as less than serious) and marginalized or excised by editors (as unimportant). Obviously this creates a problem for readers looking to interpret Marx's and Engels's approach to the *res publica*.

Perhaps the best example of Marx and Engels writing in the performative is also their most famous collaboration, the *Communist Manifesto*. The *Communist Manifesto* is an intensely situated document – an active text the purpose of which was first to unite under the banner of Communism a complex assemblage of progressive social and political struggles emerging throughout Europe during the 1840s. It probably should be read in this context – as Marx's and Engels's effort to hold together a particular collection of social agents and not as a universal blueprint for state reformation. It is

intended to achieve specific goals in a certain, very specific situation, and not to describe historical necessity. The image of an impending, polarized class struggle, with the proletariat and the bourgeoisie pitted against one another like two spectral armies, constitutes a *symbolic* effort to forge hegemonic links between a variety of otherwise unrelated political subjects, not an apocalyptic prophesy. The extent to which Marx was aware of the fantastic and rhetorical elements of the *Communist Manifesto* is evidenced by the far more strategic and partial approach he took during the ensuing revolutionary period. With the outbreak of revolutions across Europe in 1848, Marx moved first to Paris, and then, after things began to heat up in Germany, to Cologne. There he established the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung*, which quickly became one of a handful of important political journals circulating in Germany during the revolutionary years, with distribution reaching five thousand or more. Simply bypassing the most radical demands voiced in the *Communist Manifesto*, the editorial policy of the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* was decidedly modest. Marx divided his energy between pushing radical democrats and bourgeois republicans who lead the revolution towards the left and attempting to reign in the more enthusiastic members of the Communist League, many of whom believed that the time was ripe for a full proletarian revolution and an immediate transition to socialism. Against the latter, Marx consistently maintained that the workers would have to stagger their demands, wait for the development of favorable social conditions, and in the meantime fight alongside their future enemies.

For a brief period in the summer of 1848, the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* distinguished itself as a radical voice by its enthusiastic support for the failed "June Days" insurrection that erupted in the streets of Paris on June 23, 1848. While moderate

commentators renounced the violence, viewing it as a threat to the newly established National Assembly and thus to the French republic, the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* hailed it as the harbinger of an impending social revolution. Indeed, for Marx and Engels, the June insurrection represented the legitimate continuation of the revolution that had begun in France in February of 1848 – the heir, that is to say, to the constituent power of the multitude, or the revolutionary spirit that the National Assembly sought to quell with an appeal to “order.” In his article on “The June Revolution,” Marx discussed his conception of a radical democracy, and of the relationship between the social and the political. “The best form of state,” he wrote, “is that in which the social contradictions are not blunted, not arbitrarily – that is merely artificially, and therefore only seemingly – kept down.” Instead, Marx continued, “[t]he best form of state is that in which these contradictions reach a stage of open struggle in the course of which they get resolved” (*CW* 7, 149). As always, then, Marx took his cue from social antagonisms that exceeded the bounds of the recognized political institutions and forms. The ideal political form was, paradoxically, one in which the force of social struggles had the potential to break every established form, and not simply replace the content. The position taken by the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* on the June Days insurrection proved extremely controversial, and it lost the paper many of its more moderate backers. The liberal *Kölnische Zeitung*, chief rival to Marx’s paper, took the occasion to renounce Marx as a proponent of a “Red Republic” – a charge that Engels met with two more extended defenses of the revolutionaries, namely “The *Kölnische Zeitung* on the June Revolution” and “The June Revolution (The Course of the Paris Uprising).” After the heady days of June, however, the *Neue Rheinische*

Zeitung turned its attention to less sensational concerns, and focused on defending the democratic gains of the revolution in Germany.

As the revolution continued, the purpose of the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* (significantly subtitled *Organ der Demokratie*) became to prove that “a constitutional monarchy is impossible in Germany, and that the only alternatives are either a feudal absolutist counter-revolution or a social republican revolution” (*SW* 272). While distancing himself from the “utopian demand” that an “indivisible German republic” might be proclaimed immediately, Marx nonetheless urged the radical democratic elements of the Frankfurt Assembly “not to confuse the starting point of the struggle and the revolutionary movement with its goal” (271). It was only after the failures of 1848, when hegemony was established by the monarchical counterrevolution, that Marx began to think and write in terms of an independent workers’ party and the need for a “dictatorship of the proletariat” or a political subject that would wield power at the exclusion of all others. Marx’s *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* was banned in May of 1849, and Marx fled first to Paris and then to London. He tried to continue leading the Cologne faction of the Communist League from exile, briefly flirting with conspiratorial politics. Thus in an important “Address to the Communist League” written in March of 1850, Marx insists that “[t]he relation of the revolutionary workers’ party to the petit-bourgeois is this: it marches together with them against the faction which it aims at overthrowing, it opposes them in everything whereby they seek to consolidate their position in their own interests” (*SW* 279). To justify this new emphasis on autonomy and militancy, Marx recalls how, after the March riots of 1848, the bourgeoisie seized state power and turned it against the proletariat. The next time, Marx proclaims, things will be different. “Instead

of once again stooping to serve as the applauding chorus of the bourgeois democrats,” he writes, “the workers, and above all the League, must exert themselves to establish an independent, secret, and public organization of workers’ parties alongside the official democrats” (281). Many years later, this call would lead to the creation of the First International.

Marx’s experiment with conspiratorial politics came to an abrupt end in May of 1851, when the Cologne wing of the Communist League was arrested *en bloc*. The Cologne Communists did not come to trial until 1852, when Marx threw much of his energy into working on their defense. But by that time the fate of the 1848 revolutionary cycle in Europe had already been sealed by the, in Marx’s opinion, farcical coup d’état that restored Louis Napoleon to power in December 1851. Marx’s final resignation, as well as the final stage discussed above (1850 through 1852), can be traced in the last section of his *Class Wars in France* (actually a series of essays Engels collected together and published as a single book in 1895), and in his 1852 pamphlet on *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*. In those works, requiems for a failed revolution, Marx criticizes the few remaining militants who continued to hold out hope in conspiratorial politics (*The Great Men of Exile*, as he would call them in still another pamphlet), and argues that any further revolutionary activity will first require the emergence of a new economic crisis. This explains why, for the next decade or more, Marx would devote the majority of his time to the detailed study of economics in the reading room of the British Museum. But *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* also bears within it the lessons of Marx’s experiences during 1848. In particular, it introduces a complex theory of the relationship between class and state – not the monolithic approach found towards

the end of the “Feuerbach” section of *The German Ideology* and in *The Communist Manifesto*, where political power is identical with class power, and political struggles are characterized as struggles between classes, but a far more stratified model in which political power is held by a multitude of class interests, with one faction being dominant. So, even as, in the 1850 to 1852 period, Marx introduces the theories of working class independence and the dictatorship of the proletariat, he at the same time provides his readers with a more sophisticated approach to the concept of hegemony and to politics as the articulation of a plurality of otherwise unrelated subjects. His analysis is still a class analysis, but it is not a reductive class analysis.

While Marx did introduce many of the terms and concepts latter associated with orthodox Marxism following the failure of 1848, this does not suggest that Marx himself became an orthodox Marxist in the process. Doubtless following 1848 the questions of political strategy that interested the younger Marx take a back seat to the protracted study of economics that would eventually lead to *Capital*. And doubtless Marx’s highly rhetorical style – his intervention into the *res publica* – is tempered, or reserved for particular works instead of allowed free reign. But if Marx began to work with the model of the economic base underlying the political and juridical superstructures, and determining them in the last instance, his analysis of economics did not supplant the ethico-political dimension of his thought. Rather, like Smith or Ricardo or any of the other classical political economists he studied so closely, Marx believed that the connection between political economy and ethics was axiomatic. Smith for instance assumed at every stage in his work that there existed a relationship between market capitalism, individual liberty, and the development of moral sentiment – that is to say, of

values. For his part, Marx did not believe that there was no connection, or that ethics was but an ideological smokescreen for economics. Rather, he thought that the ethical conclusions of the classical political economists were monstrously incorrect – that the market capitalism of the nineteenth century did not lead to individual liberty and moral sentiment, but to mass slavery and rampant egoism. In political terms, Marx believed that the errors of capitalism could only be addressed by an expansion of the *res publica* or the sphere of public deliberation and debate into the economy – the democratization of economic relations and of civil society. And it is this (finally interminable) process of developing and expanding the democratic project that a contemporary reader of Marx might be inclined to associate with the term *praxis*.

Philopolemology / Marx and the Law

It is perhaps not an accident that “The Leipzig Council” begins with two images of strife and antagonism – first, with a reference to Kaulbach’s “Battle of the Huns,” a mural in which two spiritual armies clash in the sky high above another, more mundane battlefield, and then with a parody of an ecclesiastical legal proceeding, where the young Hegelians are portrayed as both prosecutors and defendants in a theological debate. Indeed, all of the polemical essays Marx worked on between 1844 and 1847 presuppose that a certain antagonism conditions free social relations – that freedom requires the preservation or the cultivation of an open space of struggle and discord. The polemical wars that raged among Marx’s contemporaries during the *Vormärz* years, their various breaks with one another and their struggles with the censors, could all be read in this context – as attempts to carve out a free space of both collective deliberation and public debate. However, as suggested in his articles for the *Deutsch-französische Jahrbücher*, Marx more than any of his contemporaries understood the close association between politics and conflict, or the sense in which there can be no politics of the isolated individual (Bauer, Stirner) and no politics of humanity as a whole (Feuerbach, Hess), as politics requires struggles between opposing social groups – what Marx came to characterize as class struggles. For Marx, political freedom is not simply a matter of rational deliberation within a recognized institutional context. It requires the possibility of struggles as well, even struggles that overwhelm or break established norms and the parameters of rational debate. Perhaps the most significant development in recent Marx scholarship has been the reassessment of the debt Marx owes to Aristotle, and especially

to Aristotle's concept of "citizenship" – the notion, developed in the *Ethics* and the *Politics*, that belonging to a political community or *polis* means possessing the right to engage in the political discourses that actively define that same community. For Aristotle, the foundation of the *polis* is friendship or *philia* – a mutual recognition among citizens that exceeds the bounds of commerce and exchange, and that remains irreducible to the achievement of instrumental ends, but is an end in itself. But is there not a sense in which such friendship must also be open to the possibility of its other, and to the potential for discord and strife? What would a free community look like without the minimal possibility of, or the slightest opening for, the worst struggle, the most ruthless antagonism, the greatest hostility? Is not *polemos*, as much as *philia*, a condition of just social relations, and of a free republican democracy?

Such questions might be opened up by way of a consideration of George E. McCarthy's recent addition to the literature on Marx and Aristotle, and particularly the unspoken consensus between McCarthy and Jürgen Habermas, whose concept of *Diskursethik* – the ideal speech situation as a regulative ideal in the Kantian sense – McCarthy wishes to critique. For all their differences, neither McCarthy nor Habermas pay much attention to the polemical condition of social relations. Thus neither of them can account for the interplay of *polemos* and *philia*, struggle and love, in Marx's text. Following Arendt's theory of civic republicanism, Habermas claims that Marx confuses political action with mechanical or instrumental making – *praxis* with *poiesis*. *Praxis*, Habermas suggests, involves both economic activity or work and symbolic action or discourse – both the "real processes of life" and, as Habermas puts it, the "transcendental conditions of the constitution of life worlds" (1971, 30). In rejecting the symbolic world

and privileging work, Habermas continues, Marx also expels the realm of collective deliberation and reflective knowledge (*Reflexionswissen*), which is the condition of ethical discussion, and favors instead instrumental rationality or productive knowledge (*Produktionwissen*). Against this approach to Marx's text, McCarthy argues that Habermas has misunderstood Marx's debt to Aristotle. McCarthy mounts a very strong argument for the case that, in Marx, *praxis* is not a mere skill or a kind of instrumental rationality set off against the symbolic life world, but, along with theory, a mode of what Aristotle calls *phronesis* or practical knowledge. As practical knowledge, theory and *praxis* together allow citizens of a democracy to engage in collective deliberation within specific historical and material contexts. Indeed, McCarthy proposes, it is Habermas and not Marx who remains incapable of engaging with the symbolic life world, for he assumes that the life world is transcendental, or at least that it is governed and regulated by a universal ideal in the Kantian sense, whereas Marx, who follows Hegel and not Kant in this instance, assumes that the symbolic life world is always specific, situated, located in a particular context and lived in by particular subjects. "[B]y replacing Marx's dialectic and social theory with Kantian logic and a theory of knowledge," McCarthy contends, "Habermas has reduced the public sphere and political discourse to pure transcendental and epistemological categories" (1990, 290). If Habermas wants a world in which consensus is an (always retreating but nonetheless unified and transcendental) ideal, Marx understands consensus to be a worldly, mundane process – one in which dialectical mediation is never finished, not even in a regulative last instance that in fact never arrives.

The debate between McCarthy and Habermas might therefore be read as an updated version of the now familiar opposition of Kantian *Moralität* and Hegelian *Sittlichkeit* – the “moral duty” of the transcendental subject versus the “social ethics,” the customs and norms, of the particular historical community. Do human rights, for instance, begin with the individual, the liberty and autonomy of the subject, or must all rights be constructed in accordance with the customs of a particular community, within which the subject must find her or his freedom? However, this struggle between liberalism and communitarianism does not touch upon Marx’s most significant political insight, the one that made him not only a democrat but a radical democrat, namely the urgency of struggle itself – antagonism between different political subjects, which in Marx’s case meant class subjects. Neither side of the liberal-communitarian debate can account for the sense in which both individuals and communities come to define themselves only through antagonistic relations with others, or the sense in which there is always already some relation and some other. Without reverting to the kind of Manichean dualism and apocalyptic battles announced in texts like *The German Ideology* and the *Communist Manifesto* (and I have already explained why I believe these to be symbolic efforts on the part of Marx and Engels, or attempts to construct hegemony by representing one class *as if* it were the universal class and another as if it were the universal oppressor), it is necessary to keep in mind that, for Marx, the republican open space or *res publica* of free, democratic discourse must always hold out the possibility of discord, and even the possibility (I stress the *possibility*) of political struggles that completely reformulate the boundaries of the *res publica* itself – revolutionary struggles. In analyzing the particular debate that has reemerged in recent years between liberals and

communitarians, it would be necessary to consider the more fundamental, irreducible antagonism that conditions every such debate, but that itself is never overcome through consensus – the *polemos* that is, no less than *philia*, a condition, and not simply a function, of every subject's being in the world. That is to say, it would be necessary to acknowledge the productive or constituent power of social and political struggles – the sense in which they not only divide but also, and in doing so, create social space.

In recent years, the most extensive analysis of antagonistic relations has been provided by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe. Following but radicalizing Althusser's theory of the overdetermination of the social formation, Laclau and Mouffe oppose the concept of antagonism to that of contradiction. If a contradiction takes place between two essentially determined or fully defined subject positions, and if it is something destined to be overcome whether through the negation of one side or the synthesis of the two, antagonism designates an ongoing process through which a multitude of different subjects come to be defined and continuously redefined. That is to say, from Laclau and Mouffe's perspective, subject positions are first established through struggles with others. They cannot be understood independently of those struggles. Thus unlike the contradiction, antagonistic relations "arise not from full totalities, but from the impossibility of their constitution" (1985, 125). Polemical struggles occur, and inevitably occur, because all subject positions are partial and limited, because none has the capacity properly to represent society as such and none is fully defined in and of itself. Now, Laclau and Mouffe believe that the fundamentally antagonistic status of all social relations, or the irreducibility of the antagonism, is something that Marxism had to learn over a long and often terrible history – a history during which belief in a more

fundamental if as yet unrealized consensus resulted paradoxically enough in the most severe restrictions on political freedoms and even a stagnation of political debate. But matters are somewhat different in Marx's own texts, where Marx's positions are constantly being defined and redefined through Marx's polemical relations with others. What is interesting, then, is the manner in which the performative elements of Marx's text in many ways outlive the descriptive powers of Marxist science.

As an example of the process of antagonism today, consider the many, overdetermined political discourses that get defined in terms of struggles for "rights." Following a particularly instrumentalist reading of Marx, orthodox Marxism generally took rights to be the ideological weapon of bourgeois class interests. As a result, Marxism could develop no positive theory of rights – indeed, no positive theory of the juridical as such. Like politics in general, rights existed only as an illusion to be destroyed. In his recent book on Marx, Etienne Balibar has suggested a somewhat different approach. Rights discourse, he argues, might "be seen *both* as the language by which exploitation is masked, *and* as that in which the class struggle of the exploited finds expression." In this sense, "rather than a truth or an illusion" rights constitute "the *object of a struggle*" (1995, 75). Human rights are not "natural rights," as the liberal tradition suggests – the rights that, in his essay "On the Jewish Question," Marx so convincingly exposes as thinly veiled property rights, and therefore not "natural" at all, but the product of very particular historical conditions and social relations. On the other hand, neither are rights the derivative expressions or instruments of class interests, or of the interests of class subjects that precede them. Instead, the phrase "human rights" denotes an object, or better a discursive process, through which a variety of different subjects do battle, and through

which they define and constantly redefine themselves. Thus there is a sense in which the struggle for rights precedes the possession of rights. A subject does not first possess a right that an authority might then be called upon to recognize. But neither are rights only those granted by the authorities. Instead, and as Balibar suggests, rights are first created in the process of struggling for them. Rights exist, in other words, to the extent that they have actual, concrete articulations – to the extent that they are demanded, fought for, and exercised in human practices. Thus it might be said that the specific *content* of “human rights” is neither universal nor immutable, but necessarily changes through different struggles and in different contexts, even as the abstract *concept* of human rights as such remains. In his work on the political forms of modernity, Claude Lefort comes very close to this understanding of rights when he maintains that they “are not simply the object of a declaration,” but “it is their essence to be declared” (1986, 257). In Lefort’s terms, “their formulation contains the demand for their reformulation” (258). What the declaration of rights indicates cannot be divorced from the act of declaring – the indication cannot be separated from the expression. Put differently, the subject that possesses a right cannot be divorced from the subject who declares it, and in declaring it reformulates it anew.

This approach to rights is, of course, very different from the classical liberal model, wherein “natural right” refers to that which precedes all political relations, and that which political institutions are invented either to limit (as in the case of Hobbes, who sees natural rights and the state of nature as the war of all against all), or to defend (as in the case of Locke, who understands natural rights and the state of nature to involve the ownership of property). In the liberal tradition, such “natural rights” are directly opposed to the artificial world of social and political relations. They are the natural possession of

individual subjects before they enter into social contracts. Now, in general, there exist two schools of thought that challenge the principle of natural rights – positivism and historicism. Positivists insist that value does not pertain to the natural world, only fact. Historicists argue that value is utterly contingent on social and historical conditions, or that it is a social construct. Because of his appeals to both science and history, and his frequent dismissals, in “On the Jewish Question” and elsewhere, of “the so-called rights of man,” it is easy, perhaps, to assume that Marx is either a positivist or a historicist. Thus orthodox Marxists, for example, attempt to administer civil society as a collection of positive facts, a sphere in which only scientific, not ethical or moral, principles obtain. Because rights are but an empty ideological expression of the more fundamental, material interests of the bourgeois class, upon seizing power the representatives of the working class can do away with rights altogether – do away, as it turns out, with the juridical dimension and due process as such. On the other hand, many inspired by Marxism take a radically social constructivist view, arguing that all values, all conceptions of right, are the product of particular, discrete, and finally incomparable historical contexts. Thus postmodern theorists have often maintained, or been accused of maintaining, that there are no universal values, and that each social and historical context, each manifestation of “situated knowledge,” must be treated independently of all others. However, none of these theories – not the modern natural right theorists, not orthodox Marxist positivists, and not the postmodern historicists – quite captures Marx’s approach. To understand Marx on this score, it would be necessary to reach back beyond the modern tradition to more antique sources.

Aside from the modern one there is another theory of natural right or natural law, namely the ancient one associated with Aristotle. For Aristotle, humans are neither warlike (Hobbes) nor acquisitive (Locke) but social. They are *zoon politikon*. Thus from an Aristotelian perspective, the rights of a free person are “natural,” not to the extent that they precede “artificial” political relations, but precisely to the extent that it is “natural” for free humans to engage in political relations with others – to take part in the deliberations that will define the *polis*. Marx’s conception of politics begins with this Aristotelian insight, developed most extensively in the third book of his *Politics*. Unlike some of his more polished treatises, Aristotle’s *Politics* is a rather disjointed text – exploratory, tentative, and multifarious if not contradictory. The uncertain structure of the text might be seen to challenge its central assumption, namely that politics constitutes a single object that can be studied according to the Aristotelian method of analysis and classification. Aristotle does posit the existence of the political, its specificity and irreducibility. But he is also wary of defining it too rigidly, doubtless because it is, for him, the decisive feature of human existence, and human existence is inherently complex. That is to say, the *Politics*, like other Aristotelian treatises on human society, stresses the impossibility of scientific knowledge or *episteme* when it comes to questions of human activity and social relations. A comprehensive social science is impossible, Aristotle maintains time and again, because the human world is fraught with contingency, thereby defying the kind of systematization, empiricization, and analysis found in Aristotle’s studies of nature. Thus the *Politics* steadfastly refuses to assign a purely instrumental function to politics, viewing it instead as an end in itself – an activity that has its own virtue, and that cannot be understood simply as a mechanism for facilitating efficient

economic or juridical relations. In an important passage, then, Aristotle argues that “a city is not an association for residence on a common site, or for the sake of preventing mutual injustice and easing exchange.” Rather “[w]hat constitutes a city [*polis*] is an association of households and clans in a good life, for the sake of attaining a perfect and self-sufficing [*autarchic*] existence.” And “[t]his sort of thing is the business of friendship [*philia*], for the pursuit of a common social life is friendship” (1280b). The *polis*, and by extension each human being’s natural sociality, is founded therefore on friendship or *philia*. And friendship is a unique kind of relation, as it is not, like facilitating economic exchange or settling grievances, a means to an end, but an end in itself. Friendship is the condition of the good life and of happiness. “It is therefore for the sake of actions valuable in themselves,” Aristotle concludes, “and not for the sake of social life, that political associations must be considered to exist” (1281a). Thus, to the extent that they are founded on friendship, political associations exist for specifically political purposes. They cannot be explained or exhausted in apolitical terms.

Marx agrees with this Aristotelian concept of natural right, natural friendship, and natural sociality or *zoon politikon*. He like many of his contemporaries accepts Hegel’s effort, especially in the wake of Kant, to reinvent the ancient notion that freedom and individuality can only exist in specific social contexts, and that they cannot be possessions of isolated individuals but have to be realized and enacted in the world. And he approves of the Aristotelian principle that the democratic community is the product of collective deliberation among citizens or friends. But Marx is also keenly aware of the limits placed on such creative deliberations by Aristotle and others who follow him – the fact, for instance, that Aristotle believes political activity cannot alter the natural relation

between the master and the slave, or that, even if democratically elected, the poor should not be allowed to expropriate the property of the wealthy. Thus Aristotle's concept of the political community as one based on friendship or *philia* also involves the exclusion or the erasure of certain points of antagonism. From a modern perspective at any rate, Aristotle's political community would seem to be bounded by a collection of only partially submerged laws (presented as inexorable laws of nature) that no political activity should be allowed to overcome, and no political deliberations should be allowed to transgress. The *philia* of the Aristotelian community is therefore conditioned by a *polemos*, or by antagonisms that it cannot contain, that threaten to overwhelm it, and that must be quelled via an appeal to a law that exceeds that of the political community itself. Thus Aristotle, after explaining how slaves are necessary because the natural construction of their bodies allows them and not others to perform certain (menial) tasks, claims that, even if "every instrument could accomplish its own work," and the shuttle could weave and the plectrum play the lyre without human hands, slaves would still be needed, as domestic service and civilized life demands them (1253b). This is precisely the kind of law – the fetishistic presentation of a particular, historically located and alterable social relation as though it were a natural relation – that Marx seeks at every stage to delimit and demystify. These are the laws that *philia*, always limited, cannot challenge, and that *polemos*, always at the limit, does. Thus from a Marxian perspective, the democratic community must affirm both the bond of friendship and the possibility of the struggle, both *philia* and *polemos*. It must remain vigilant with respect to that which exceeds friendship, or that which, in being excluded from the domain of friends, first makes that domain possible or intelligible – its constituent exclusion.

If Marx's work harbored a theory of natural law, albeit one that is almost diametrically opposed to the liberal tradition, official Marxism categorically denied the natural law tradition, both ancient and modern. It treated law as the indirect expression of class interests. It might initially seem that the Marxist approach to law has very little purchase on contemporary social relations in the west, and certainly the notion of reducing law to class interests seems less than feasible today. However, as Alan Hunt and Gary Wickham have convincingly shown, traces of the Marxist tendency to reduce the law to other, ostensibly more fundamental categories and terms can still be found in the work of a decidedly post-Marxist thinker like Michel Foucault. While he is one of the great critics of Marxist reductionism and its repressive, monolithic, state-based conception of power, Foucault still engages in what Hunt and Wickham call an "expulsion of law" (1994, 55). That is to say, in Foucault as in most Marxist theory before him (theory Foucault believed he was overturning), the law is not a constituent or productive force. It is not something that creates social space or constitutes new social identities. Instead, the law, or what Foucault calls the juridico-discursive, is "a mechanism that is ineffectual and epiphenomenal, confined mainly to providing legitimations for the disciplinary technologies and normalizing practices established by other mechanisms" (57). Thus in Foucault, the law is characterized as an instrumental means to an end. Insofar as they hold to this instrumental understanding of the law, neither Marxism nor post-Marxism can develop any positive theory of rights. They must instead conceive of rights discourse as purely ideological – which is to say, false. As a result, and in a fashion that the young Marx would have found defeatist, rights discourse and the entire field of the law is foreclosed as a space of meaningful political intervention

from the outset, as it is assumed that such things merely reflect deeper, more profound structures and forces.

At the same time, in the margins of Marxist discourse, a more subtle, complex approach to legal theory can be discerned. Two thinkers in particular deserve mention – the Soviet legal theorist Evgeny Pashukanis, who was murdered during the Stalinist purges, and the structural Marxist Nicos Poulantzas, one of Althusser's students. In his *Law and Marxism: A General Theory*, Pashukanis argues that the law is not natural, but neither is it an indirect reflection of class interests. Instead, law is an effective and productive social force – one that actively constitutes individuals as legal subjects. Thus for Pashukanis law is “a social relation in the [same] sense in which Marx called capital a social relation” (1989 [1924], 74). Capitalist economics operates by fetishizing or reifying the commodity – mysteriously making it appear to possess a natural value that exists apart from the social relations that go into producing it. Similarly, bourgeois law operates by fetishizing the subject, or making it appear that the individual, and especially the individual's will, exists independent of her or his relations with others. As a result, a single, reified construction of the subject is allowed to stand in for the many different kinds of individuals that actually exist. “All concrete particularities which distinguish one representative of the *genus homo sapiens* from another dissolve into the abstraction of man in general, man as a legal subject” (113). While his work is not without residual commitments to the instrumental conception of law, Pashukanis performed the crucial task of showing how, from within a Marxist perspective, law could be seen as a productive social relation – one that constitutes individuals as subjects. Developing a similar line of thought, but writing much later and under the influence of Althusser's

theory of the “specific effectivity” of the superstructures, Poulantzas claims that “law is a constitutive element of the socio-political field” (1978, 83). That is to say, for Poulantzas, law is a condition as much as it is a function of social and political relations. To borrow Kafka’s terms, one is a subject “before” (in front of) the law, but not “before” (prior to) the law. For Poulantzas, the point is not to return to the liberal concept of natural law, but to reconstruct law as a public sphere, or an open space of discussion and debate. In this sense, it becomes a kind of *res publica*. Founded on no prior structure, neither natural rights nor class interests, the law becomes a collection of ongoing discourses and arguments – symbolic acts that continuously transform social reality.

If rights are the object of a struggle, and the juridical is an open space in which struggles might take place, then so too is citizenship the object of a struggle, and the political community – the republic – built upon a foundationless, perpetually shifting terrain. If the citizen can be said to have a duty, it is not to submit to some established conception of what the community is, or to defend some established ideal of the nation, but actively to engage in the debates that are destined to alter what it means to be a citizen, and thereby to redefine the community anew. Carl Schmitt argues that, at root, politics involves a decision between friends and enemies – the arbitrary, forceful establishment and subsequent policing of borders, the drawing of a line separating inside from outside, us from them. The community of friendship is thus conditioned from the very beginning by a moment of unjustified violence, a *polemos* that silently threatens the community it first established. This same *polemos* that separates friend from enemy can be recalled to justify the greatest evils – all forms of racisms and apartheids, hatred and xenophobia. At the same time it represents the possibility of the smallest alteration to the

community of friends, the smallest exposure to the other and to the unknown, and thus the smallest hope for change and for difference in the future. *Polemos* then conditions *philia*, no less than *philia* conditions *polemos*. The possibility of political struggle is that of freedom as well. It is at one and the same time the condition for the possibility and the condition for the impossibility of the community. For his part, Marx would be a meager revolutionary if he merely sought consensus among the community of friends – if he did not seek to give political form to the antagonisms that emerge on the borders between friends and enemies. He would also, and at the same time, be a meager ethicist. For the possibility of difference is also the possibility of relation – of accepting the slightest responsibility, of exercising the slightest freedom.

The Demolition of Substance

Modern political theory has always been troubled by the question of the relationship, not only between the individual and the community, but also between the individual self and the social self, the private self and the public self, or what Rousseau calls *homme* and *citoyen*. Is the connection between human and citizen determined by some structure or some ontology that might be scientifically analyzed and exhaustively explained? Or is it arbitrary, uncertain, and void of determinate meaning – the function, for instance, of decisions that are themselves grounded in nothing at all, but taken during a moment of madness? Is the bond between *homme* and *citoyen* necessary or contingent, natural or artificial, substantial or formal? These questions are, of course, not really questions but puzzles or *aporia*. In the political life of a democracy, they are not meant to be resolved, but perpetually worked through, argued about, and struggled over. In *The Inclusion of the Other*, Jürgen Habermas captures the problem quite well. There he posits a distinction between conservatives, who tend to call for civic responsibility and the total participation of all citizens in the public life of the community, and liberals, who find freedom instead in individual rights, and in a private realm of conscience that cannot be reduced to established institutions and social conventions. Given this framework, Marx might initially if unexpectedly be classed among the conservatives. Marx accepts the Aristotelian definition of the human as *zoon politikon*, or an active citizen of a *polis*. And it is precisely this conception of the human as “naturally” social that modern liberal political theory (especially Hobbes and Locke) begins by rejecting, seeing it as a justification for the thoroughly integrated social and political hierarchies, or the

corporations and estates, of the medieval order. At the same time, Marx understands the Aristotelian conception of the *zoon politikon* to be a condition not only of human sociality but of individuality as well. That is to say, according to Marx, if humans are *zoon politikon*, this is so, not because they have no individual existence, but because they first come to “individuate” themselves within society, and through their relations with others (G 84). Thus for Marx the question of whether the individual or the community, the private or the public self, “comes first” cannot really be answered. Prior to all such categories, Marx suggests, prior to both the individual and the community, both the *homme* and the *citoyen*, there is a relation (*Verhältnis*). More accurately, and as Marx puts it in the sixth of his “Theses on Feuerbach,” there is an “ensemble of social relations” (SW 157). And if an ensemble of relations can be said to precede every identity, be it individual or collective, then by definition no identity is stable or self-contained, as from the very beginning and without exception every identity exists in relation to some alterity, some externality, some “other.”

Since the time of Althusser’s intervention in the 1960s, Marx scholarship has witnessed a protracted debate over the concept of essence. Is Marx’s career shorn in half by an epistemological break with this concept? Is there a moment when Marx rejects the ideological language of the human essence – of alienation and estrangement – and begins to pursue a science of the social relation? Or does Marx continue to rely on the concept of essence throughout his career, in his mature work on political economy no less than in his youthful work on philosophy? However this debate might be resolved (and as I argue in the final chapter of the current study, the real question is how Marx’s concept of essence develops and changes, not whether he maintains it or breaks with it), it is clear that

Althusser's attack on "essentialism" has significantly outlived Althusser's particular version of structural Marxism. Contemporary cultural and political theory is more or less unanimous when it comes to the critique of essentialism, and whether they know it or not all of those who follow this critique owe a debt to Althusser, and to Althusser's extremely influential reconstruction of Marx's career around the theme of the epistemological break. For Althusser, the decisive point in Marx's texts is the sixth of the "Theses on Feuerbach," where the "human essence," or a kind of abstraction that exists within each individual, an infinite and therefore infinitely divisible substance, is said to be replaced with the concrete "social relation." In fact, in the "Theses on Feuerbach," Marx does not oppose the human essence and the social relation. Rather, altering Feuerbach's static understanding of the *Gattungswesen* or the sensuous species being of humanity, Marx redefines the "human essence" *in terms of* an "ensemble of social relations" (*SW* 157). In other words, for Marx, the human essence is not a determinate, universal and unchanging substance from which all particular identities originate and to which they are all destined to return. On the contrary, it refers to an ensemble of relations – one might even, borrowing the terminology that Althusser borrowed from Freud, say an "overdetermined" ensemble – that precedes, conditions, and even retroactively produces that which it appears to relate. Thus there is a sense in which the relation creates the *relatum*. And from the time of the "Theses on Feuerbach" forward, wherever Marx employs the language of essence and of *Gattungswesen* he also invokes this logic (or this teleologic) of retroaction, where effects precede causes and the future conditions the present.

In part because of Althusser's bifurcation of Marx's career into a youthful "ideological" period and a mature "scientific" one, Marx's and Engels's various

interventions into the polemical exchanges the raged among the young Hegelians during the *Vormärz*, and particularly their attacks on Bruno Bauer and Max Stirner, have been more or less ignored by Marx scholars and commentators. The complexity of the Hegelian terminology, the assumption that Marx and Engels transcended that terminology (what, in the “Preface” to his *Critique of Political Economy*, Marx calls their “erstwhile philosophical conscience”), the employment of deeply rhetorical and ironic language, the colossal number of literary and cultural references, and the historical specificity of those references have all contributed to the general sense that, with the exception of a few choice passages, works like *The Holy Family* and *The German Ideology* are of little or no significance to the Marxian legacy. And yet, for precisely the same reasons, these polemical works have more to say now and in a post-Marxist context than ever before. Althusser’s claim that, in or about 1845, Marx breaks with the humanist concept of essence, especially as it is found in Feuerbach’s philosophy, overlooks the fact that, during the *Vormärz*, the young Hegelians spent much of their energy arguing over, precisely, the concept of essence. Indeed, Bruno Bauer and Max Stirner explicitly attacked Feuerbach’s theory of the *Gattungswesen*, largely because they saw it as a dangerous reduction of the complexity and the contingency of human existence, one might even say the “overdetermination” of human existence, to a single, determinate substance – one that threatened to subsume difference, individuality, and creativity under a single rubric. That is to say, during the *Vormärz* period, it was not Marx and Engels but Bauer and Stirner who mounted the most consistent attack on the humanist concept of essence. Marx and Engels on the other hand *defended* the concept of essence. But they did so by altering it – reworking it, not as a static and universal substance, as in

Feuerbach's philosophy, but as a historical and dynamic form, as Aristotle and Hegel had taught. While they have been ignored for generations, Marx's and Engels's efforts to redefine the concept of essence throughout their polemics with Bauer and Stirner – their efforts to conceive of the human essence in terms of “an ensemble of social relations” – have a direct bearing on contemporary debates over political identity, philosophical essentialism, and the deconstruction of substance. Indeed, in their discussions of the concept of essence, the young Hegelians were interested in precisely the same questions that continue to vex contemporary political theory – the relationship between the individual and the collective, and between the private self and the public self, or between *citoyen* and *homme*.

Reawakening these long forgotten debates between the young or left Hegelians is not, therefore, a strictly hermeneutic project. The polemics among the leading intellectuals of the *Vormärz* have a direct bearing on current debates over liberalism and communitarianism, essentialism and social constructionism, and linguistic or semiotic versus ontological understandings of identity and subjectivity, to mention but a few. In particular, a close analysis of the young Marx's readings of his contemporaries, one that seeks not only to confirm Marx's so-called “mature” position but also to locate productive fissures and gaps in his texts, might be seen to inform the recent effort to rethink the problem of universality, hegemony, and political solidarity in the wake of the postmodern age of fragmentation, diffusion, and disintegration. Without calling for a return to easy, substantialist understandings of political identity, where categories like “social class” are treated as absolute givens that do not need to be assembled through political discourses, how might the debates among the young Hegelians during the

Vormärz inform a more complex, variegated, piecemeal but still effective conception of solidarity in a post-Marxist conjuncture? For some time now Marx's polemics with Bauer and Stirner have been treated as transitional works – of interest only to the extent that they point forwards to his more serious studies of political economy or backward to his youthful flirtations with Hegelian philosophy. Indeed, among nearly all Marx scholars, the polemical and rhetorical aspects of the "Theses on Feuerbach" and *The German Ideology* – what Althusser dubbed the "Works of the Break" – have been completely obscured by Marx's celebrated "discovery" of the science of historical materialism. This is not to suggest that historical materialism needs to be abandoned. But perhaps it is time to apply other, heterodox understandings of the phrase "historical materialism," among them that of Walter Benjamin, to Marx's own text. For Benjamin, the Marxian insight makes it possible to interpret an apparently degraded period or genre (Baroque parody, for instance), not merely as a transitional stage, but on its own terms and in its own contexts. Here a "materialist" reading of history cuts into and disrupts the recognized patterns and narratives used to justify the present, or to construct the here and now as inevitable, natural, or rational. It attends to that which has been, not so much excluded and silenced, as blunted and constrained – excesses that have been forced to conform to the dominant understandings of the past. While Benjamin never made this point, the very text in which the concept of "historical materialism" first makes its appearance has become an *example* of precisely this process. That is to say, *The German Ideology*, a work of incredible rhetorical and intertextual excess, has been extracted from its contexts, reduced to a few passages, and rendered as a justification for Marxist science.

In order to understand the polemics that raged among the left Hegelians during the *Vormärz* it is important to back up, not just to Hegel or classical German idealism, but to the *Sturm und Drang* movement, to the reaction in Germany against the expansion of the French Enlightenment during the later half of the eighteenth century, and to the work of Johann Gottfried Herder in particular. The peculiar fascination with history that overtook Germany during the nineteenth century – and in many ways the history of “history” as such – begins with Herder. Herder can certainly be classed among the first to take a “materialist” approach to history, and to link historical research to the unfolding of something like a human “essence.” He was also, as Charles Taylor has pointed out, a leading figure in linguistic studies, and played a central role in the development of the “expressivist” model of language – what Taylor calls the “anthropology of expression” (1975, 15), or the idea that language does not only designate objects in a world external to it, but also expresses the internal world of individual and collective subjects. It is no exaggeration to say that, along with Vico, Herder more or less invented cultural studies, and established most of the still extant protocols of hermeneutics. Vico introduced the notion that human cultures follow coherent patterns over long periods of time – much longer than the lives or the memories of individuals could explain. To this insight, Herder added the ideas that particular cultures represent the culmination of particular histories, that human societies are located in material contexts, and that each specific people’s historical or material experience gets expressed through its culture (*Bildung*), and more specifically through its language. Herder and the *Stürmer und Dränger* introduced Europe to the notion that cultural difference is significant. Against the dominant trend of their age, they argued that the universal and *a priori* reason privileged by the French

philosophes could not explain the complexity of human existence, and even threatened to reduce that complexity to crudely scientific terms. Thus Herder and his contemporaries effectively reclaimed the language of “essence,” and especially of “spirit” or *Geist*, that had been jettisoned by early Enlightenment thinkers as so much scholastic chicanery and mystification. Prior to the seventeenth century, intellectuals tended to accept the Aristotelian notion that humans are motivated by an internal soul, psyche, or spirit – that a spirit inhabits the body, and provides it with teleological direction. This idea was thoroughly discredited by the empirical sciences of the Enlightenment, especially by the science of anatomy. But the *Stürmer und Dränger* suggested that, if the human spirit could not be empirically verified, if it did not inhabit the individual body in the here and now, it could nonetheless be seen to emerge, develop, and transform itself in cultural life worlds, over time, and through history. This idea that the human spirit or essence is historical and cultural, and that it cannot be reduced to strictly scientific terms, or to the terms of the natural sciences, was extremely important for Hegel, and via Hegel for Marx as well. It also led to the creation of the hermeneutic *Geisteswissenschaften* – the protocols that still distinguish cultural studies from the natural sciences.

While they also on occasion struggled against it, the young Marx and his colleagues within the left Hegelian movement were very much products of the humanist tradition that Herder and a handful of others – Schiller, Goethe, Humboldt, and so forth – had inaugurated in Germany a few generations earlier. Marx’s training in particular was in the classics, as evidenced by his doctoral dissertation on Epicurus and Democritus, and the theological debates that set up the framework for the left and young Hegelian movements were really only slightly veiled struggles between secular humanist and more

orthodox religious outlooks. It is important to be clear that Herder and the *Stürmer und Dränger* did not reject Enlightenment, even though many of their ideas (especially their latent nationalism) would be picked up and transformed by more Romantic thinkers during the nineteenth century. They sought instead to humanize the Enlightenment, and to carve out and preserve a space for intellectual and cultural labors that could not be immediately translated into what Horkheimer and Adorno call the “instrumental rationality” of Enlightenment science. While he and, much more so, Engels employed the language of science on occasion, Marx and his contemporaries took for granted the general contexts of humanist scholarship and learning, as is evidenced by the copious references to humanist traditions in all of their texts. Althusser’s theory of the epistemological break tends to tear Marx out of these contexts, and to conceive of his work as almost magically unique – the messianic revelation of the good news. That the break is said to occur in *The German Ideology*, a work that is largely about the importance of locating ideas in specific historical and material contexts, only serves to muddy the waters still further. Indeed, there is nothing especially unique about *The German Ideology*. All of its major claims – the theory of material and economic history, of alienation and the division of labor, of the relationship between ideas and practices, and so forth – can be found in the work of others. Like much of Marx’s and Engels’s work, the manuscript consists of extended citations followed by elaborate commentaries – hermeneutic explications of the ideas of others. It is not so much a self-contained body of work as it is an assemblage, a relays system of references, or what, following Deleuze and Guattari, I am inclined to call a machine.

Owing to the influence of figures like Herder and to the dominance of historical studies in Germany in the nineteenth century, it is not difficult to find German economists in the 1840s developing the idea, completely independent of Marx, that political economy is not a set of abstract or universal principles, as suggested by the Manchester liberals, but must be studied in historical terms and in relation to specific cultural contexts. Indeed, from the 1840s through to the 1890s, one of the dominant schools of economic theory in Germany was the so-called “historical school,” represented by figures such as Bruno Hildebrand, Karl Knies, and perhaps most importantly Wilhelm Roscher. Against the liberal principle that all economic relations are reducible to rational, autonomous, property owning individuals, these thinkers maintained that economics is a historical and a cultural phenomena – that one could only understand the massive changes in economic life going on during the nineteenth century if one first knew something about economic history. While they were not revolutionaries, the members of the historical school were interested in addressing what was at the time referred to as the “social question,” or the pauperization of the working classes and traditional craftspeople that seemed to be concomitant with the liberalization of economic life and the mechanization of production. To this end, Roscher and his colleagues sought to develop historical methodologies that could uncover the laws of economic change. Perhaps because he was not a professional academic, Marx’s approach to political economy is significantly less nomological or law oriented than that of the historical school. In fact, what distinguishes Marx’s work from Roscher’s, for instance, is not the pretension towards science (they both have that) but Marx’s distinctly literary *style*. Marx’s texts are assembled out of references to a large cross section of human culture – to literature and

art, history and politics, painting and folklore, and so forth. Nor does it make sense simply to ignore this aspect of Marx's work, despite a very long tradition of Marxist commentary that suggests otherwise. To the extent that he takes human culture in the broadest possible sense seriously, Marx's work is perhaps closer to "spirit" of the *Stürmer und Dränger* than the standard historians of nineteenth century Germany. If, in the academy and in official culture, the insights of the humanist thinkers of the eighteenth century were rendered systematic, and thereby turned into a new kind of instrumental rationality (the staid academic historicism that Nietzsche would so powerfully attack, especially in his essay on "The Use and Abuse of History for Life"), in Marx's text they remain connected to cultural studies, and to the idea that culture cannot be reduced to the terms of the natural sciences.

Shortly after Marx's death in 1883, and after rereading the first, unfinished chapter of *The German Ideology* manuscript, Engels wrote *Ludwig Feuerbach and the Outcome of Classical German Philosophy*. There he proposes that, in a moment of inspiration captured in the "Theses on Feuerbach," Marx "inverted" the idealist philosophy of his age, replacing it with a scientific historical materialism. *Ludwig Feuerbach* is also the text in which Engels first published a slightly edited version of Marx's "Theses on Feuerbach" – a few brief notes that Marx jotted down in the spring of 1845 in the form of Feuerbach's own "Provisional Theses for the Reformation of Philosophy." While the narrative told in Engels's little pamphlet has proven extremely influential, and has been established as not just the dominant but almost the exclusive interpretation of the young Marx, it is more than a little reductive. Long before Marx wrote his "Theses on Feuerbach," Herder and most of the German historians who

followed him were quite explicitly “materialists.” According to Herder, theory is always already “buried” in practice – “*Gedanke liegt in der Empfindung. Theorie in der Praxis begraben*” (1892 [1778], 261). Similarly, every idea originates as a kind of “analogy” for the material world – “*was wir wissen, wissen nur aus Analogie*” (170). The notion that ideas are not transcendental but buried in practices and in the material world put Herder in direct confrontation with the preeminent philosopher of his day – his onetime teacher Immanuel Kant. The system set out in the *Critique of Pure Reason* rested on the hypothesis of what Kant called “synthetic a priori” judgments. Similarly, the *Critique of Practical Reason* sought to establish the individual’s absolute or categorical moral duty. If Kant wanted judgments that could be universalized and held by all rational subjects, Herder insisted on the location of ideas within particular cultural contexts. For Herder, reason was not a set of abstract principles but something that could only emerge over time and through conflict. As one commentator puts it, for Herder “history and social development must not be thought of as a smooth advance towards absolute or unchanging goals, but rather as a *struggle* towards ever emerging ends” (Barnard 1965, 134). The social, political, and cultural institutions of each particular people were understood by Herder to be expressions, externalizations, or actualizations of that people’s essence – expressive creations that also reflexively altered and built that essence. Herder referred to this conflicted, elaborate, disjointed process as *Humanität* – the “humanization” of social relations. Through it the nation state (*Rechtsstaat*), or the institutions of the contemporary political order, would be replaced by the culture state (*Kulturstaat*), or a more organic, less formalized and mechanical social bond.

The concept of the human essence introduced by Herder and the *Stürmer und Dränger* was picked up and considerably developed by Hegel, especially in the early part of his career when he worked at Jena. Thus Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, easily his most influential work among the young Hegelians (so called, not because they themselves were young, but because they privileged the work of the young, revolutionary Hegel over that of the old apologist for the Prussian state), constructed history as an elaborate dialectic between "subject," or the self-conscious individual, and "substance," or the network of conventions and institutions (the state, the church, culture, language) that expressed the essence of the community. The debate among Hegel's followers after his death in 1832 was not so much between right wing and left wing thinkers, or conservatives and liberals, as it was between those who prioritized the collective substance of the community, or the established customs and norms that defined the social bond (what, in his political writings, Hegel called *Sittlichkeit*), and those who believed instead that Hegel's system and thus history itself culminated in the triumph of the self-conscious individual over all such limits and constraints. It is at this point in the history of ideas that Bruno Bauer intervenes with such force and authority. While his work has since been overshadowed by Marx's various polemics against it, during the *Vormärz* Bauer was widely recognized as the era's most gifted, if also most unconventional and heterodox Hegelian intellectual. Bauer's early career can be broken down into three relatively distinct phases – the years between 1836 and 1841, during which he was an up and coming Hegelian theologian interested in Biblical hermeneutics, those from 1841 to 1843, when he openly broke with Christianity, lost his position in the academy, and reinvented himself as a republican revolutionary and secular humanist, and finally the

years following 1843, when he moved to Berlin and became the leader of the radical, quasi-anarchist group *die Freien*. Bauer scholars continue to debate the significance of these changes in direction, but throughout all of them Bauer remained thoroughly committed to a single concept, that of “self-consciousness,” and to the systematic demolition of its dialectical opposite, namely “substance.” Thus already in his first theological studies – a series of criticisms of David Strauss’s controversial *Life of Jesus* – Bauer endeavors to prove that the history of religion, and especially the Christian revelation, represents the emergence and growth of self-consciousness, or the triumph of the free individual over the constraints of the social collective.

In terms of the history of the young or left Hegelian movement, the significance of Bauer’s criticisms of Strauss cannot easily be overestimated. Though it was couched in deeply theological language, the debate hinged on the relationship between the individual and the collective, or subject and substance. Effectively and put very briefly, Strauss became infamous for applying what Taylor calls the “anthropology of expression,” not just to any cultural product (as a whole army of folklorists and historians were doing at the time), but to the Bible. Prior to Strauss, Biblical hermeneuts argued over whether the Bible was a historically accurate document, or whether it was a work of divine inspiration, making questions of its historical accuracy irrelevant. Strauss set this whole debate aside, and treated the gospels instead as though they were myths – the mythical expressions of early Christian communities. Following the work of his teacher Ferdinand Christian Baur, Strauss argued that the “mythi” that make up the gospels were not the creation of individual authors who had personally known Christ, but the culmination of inordinately complex social and historical processes – the work, not so much of authors

as of what Michel Foucault (who owes a great deal more to historians like Strauss than is commonly recognized) would call an “author function.” Thus according to Strauss “the mythus is founded not upon any individual conception, but upon the more elevated and general conception of a whole people (or a whole religious community)” (1902 [1835], 82). That is to say, for Strauss, “it is not [...] to be imagined that any one individual seated himself at a table to invent [the gospel myths] out of his own head, and write them down, as he would a poem.” Rather, “these narratives like all other legends were fashioned by degrees, by steps which can no longer be traced; gradually accruing consistency, and at length received a fixed form in our written gospels” (58). In this sense, the gospels expressed the essence, or the collective experience and imagination, of a whole community. And it was this communitarian understanding of the gospel narratives that Bauer took issue with in his initial critiques of Strauss, published between 1836 and 1838 in the influential *Jahrbücher für wissenschaftliche Kritik*. For Bauer, the gospels most emphatically *were* written by people who sat down at desks to produce works of art. They were the creation of individual writers who expressed, not the essence of the community, but their own individual genius. Indeed, according to Bauer, the Christian revelation itself, or the embodiment of a divine God in the individual human Jesus Christ, celebrated precisely the creativity of human individuals – the manner in which individuals can break away from established social conventions, as Christ had broken with Jewish law, and freely create their own lives. In claiming that the gospels were socialized texts, or the product of social conventions or a common substance, Strauss eliminated from them that which made the Christian religion unique.

Bauer continued to argue this line in a group of theological treatises he wrote as a young professor – namely *Die Religion des Alten Testaments*, published in 1838, and *Der Dr. Hengstenberg und Kritik der evangelischen Geschichte des Johannes*, which were released in 1839. In these works, Bauer criticized both liberal and orthodox theologians for failing to appreciate the philosophical, as opposed to merely historical or mythological, significance of Christianity. For Bauer, Christianity was about the synthesis of the human and the divine in the individual self-consciousness of Jesus Christ. Thus theology confirmed Hegelian philosophy, which Bauer believed also culminated in the ascension of the creative individual. The creativity of the individual gospel writers reflected the same process. So too, in fact, did Bauer's own creativity as a writer and a critic. This position would be systematically set out in what is perhaps Bauer's most important work, the *Kritik der evangelischen Geschichte der Synoptiker* or critique of the synoptic gospels. That this book has yet to be translated into English is something of an anomaly, so important was it for the development of not only Bauer's ideas but those of his entire generation, Marx and Engels included. It was first published in two volumes between 1841 and 1842 by the Leipzig bookseller Otto Wigand. It was also the work that garnered Bauer his expulsion from the German academy, and that made him something of a celebrity among the liberal intellectuals of the *Vormärz*. In it, Bauer argues that the authors of the synoptic gospels – Mathew, Mark, and Luke – were writers with no direct knowledge of the events they recounted, and who based their stories on a mixture of tradition and imagination. In this sense, Bauer concludes, they effectively fulfilled the philosophical truth of the Christian revelation to the extent that, in writing the gospels, they freely expressed their own emancipated self-consciousnesses. Similarly, in writing

his critique of the synoptic gospels, Bauer himself freely expressed his self-consciousness. He broke with the established conventions, or the institutions said to make up the “substance” of the theological community, and freely created a work of art. Thus in the *Kritik der evangelischen Geschichte der Synoptiker* itself, subject finally triumphs over substance, and philosophical *Wissenschaft* over theological myth. Here the internal contradictions that drive the Hegelian dialectic are put to work. In finally severing his own ties to the Christian notion of divine revelation, in negating and transcending religion as such, Bauer himself realized the philosophical truth of Christianity.

Though the series of moves Bauer made in his theological works were extraordinarily clever, they were not especially appreciated by the new, decidedly Pietist, and decidedly orthodox regime of Friedrich Wilhelm IV. For the *Kritik der evangelischen Geschichte der Synoptiker*, Bauer was labeled an atheist and unceremoniously relieved of his position at the University of Bonn. Around the same time, he wrote another, equally important work – an elaborate parody entitled *The Trumpet of the Last Judgment Against Hegel the Atheist and Antichrist: An Ultimatum*. Published under a pseudonym, and written satirically from the perspective of an orthodox critic of the young Hegelians, Bauer’s *Trumpet* stands as one of the great literary achievements of the *Vormärz*, not only because of its brilliantly heterodox reading of Hegel, but also for its formal innovations and rhetorical style. In effect, Bauer praises his colleagues with faint damnation – calling the young Hegelians “the most consistent and unrestrained revolutionaries” (1989 [1841], 126), or militant terrorists whose “highest goal” is the “overthrow of the established order” (128). Under the veil of his orthodox persona, Bauer endeavors systematically to prove that the young Hegelians are the true heirs to Hegel,

and that, unbeknownst to his more conservative readers, Hegel was not an apologist for the Prussian monarchy or an advocate of Christianity, but an atheist, a republican, a Jacobin, and a revolutionary. Through a close reading of the master's texts, Bauer argues that, for Hegel, self-consciousness is not a moment in the development of substance rather substance is a moment in the development of self-consciousness. At the pinnacle of history and as the culmination of the dialectic, the individual subject negates and transcends the universal or the common substance of the community. Here as elsewhere in Bauer's work religion operates as the exemplary expression of the common substance that must be demolished, and that, in order to liberate itself, the individual self-conscious must escape. Bauer pays particular attention to the theological debate between Hegel and Friedrich Schleiermacher, father of modern liberal theology. He spends a great deal of time explaining Hegel's attack on Schleiermacher's notion of *Gefühlstheologie* or the "theology of feeling." Schleiermacher argued that faith is individual, and that it rests, not on some external, objective being that can be verified or denied, but on the individual subject's internal sense or feeling of absolute dependence. Against this position, Hegel insisted that faith relies on an external substance – not a finite individual, but an infinite deity. Conservative theologians clung to this argument as proof of Hegel's orthodoxy. But Bauer contended that, in Hegel's system, the theory of the external, infinite deity or divine substance was only introduced so as to prove that the truly self-conscious subject overcomes it as well, and in doing so realizes its own infinite nature. That is to say, the divine substance is but "a moment within the movement in which finite consciousness resigns its own finiteness" (111). And the "conclusion of this movement," Bauer maintains, "is not Substance but self-consciousness, which really posits itself as the

infinite and takes up the Universality of Substance in its *own* essence” (112). The conclusion, that is to say, is the emancipated individual.

Even as, beneath the veil of parody, it glorifies the power of the human imagination, or the individual human liberated from all external constraints, Bauer’s *Trumpet* is intended to be the creation of such an imagination. It performs what it describes. The genre of parody alone suggests that, in writing, Bauer is free to give himself his own identity, and to recreate himself as he chooses. In its original form, the text is also awash in typographical innovations – with arrows and circles humorously emphasizing particular words, and marginalia extending commentary in exorbitant trajectories. There is, therefore, an intimate connection between the freedom of writing and political freedom in general. For Bauer, the creative act, the individual’s declaration of great words and performance of great deeds, is indissociable from human emancipation. Thus Bauer triumphantly declares that “only the Ego is Substance, it is the All” (112). For the same reason, the heavily rhetorical, even bombastic tone of Bauer’s *Trumpet* cannot be overlooked. The style contains as much of the work’s meaning as does its logic. And it was the style of Bauer’s *Trumpet* that would influence the young Hegelians, especially Marx and Engels, and especially in their polemics against Bauer himself – namely *The Holy Family* and *The German Ideology*. Consider a passage in which Bauer’s persona ridicules center and right Hegelians for ignorantly believing that Hegel’s philosophy could result in anything other than atheism and revolution. “[D]o not come to us only with your talk of the Absolute Spirit or the overlapping Subjectivity, and call upon the often misused words of your master – that Substance is taken to be Subject,” he indignantly proclaims:

Oh you short-sighted imposters! Did your master then say that Substance was a definite, a unique subject? Has he said it to be the Prime Subject, the Prime individual who has created heaven and earth? Did you not notice the soul murdering Father had merely said, and set forth in his system, that Substance was generally only to be taken as a category of subjectivity? – i.e., its inner process would lead it to the point where it would draw itself out of its black abyss and take its dark and dreadful obscurity into the light-point of subjectivity? Could this Substance, if it would bring its Infinite Kingdom into consciousness, be satisfied with but One Subject? One is not enough! Infinity spews forth only out of the chalice of the Whole Kingdom of Spirit. It must bestow itself upon many, infinitely many subjects, and give itself over to finiteness so therewith it can display its inner treasure. Many a finite spirit must be crushed and pressed, a world of spirits must bring themselves to sacrifice, if substance would become subject (108).

The apocalyptic tone of Bauer's language would become typical of the radical philosophy of the *Vormärz*, as would the genre of parody. The language of young Hegelian texts, those of Marx and Engels included, was always suffused in irony, always double voiced or written with two hands. Through the rhetoric, however, Bauer's point is that Hegel's philosophy, and by extension history itself, culminates, not in the subordination of individual subjects to a collective substance or the triumph of a single, Absolute Spirit, but in the fragmentation of spirit into an infinite and infinitely multiplying number of self-conscious individuals or unique egos.

The same heroic individualism at the center of Bauer's theological and philosophical works can be found in the more explicitly political theory that he began to develop after his expulsion from the academy, and especially in his attacks on Feuerbach's concept of the *Gattungswesen*. Like many contemporary post-Marxist thinkers, Bauer is quite explicitly an anti-essentialist, and his criticisms of socialism are directly parallel to those found among the postmodern thinkers I have dubbed the new republicans. After moving to Berlin and becoming leader of *die Freien*, Bauer and his followers set up the journal *Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung*, in which he published his important article on "*Die Gattung und die Masse*" or "The Genus and the Crowd" – a systematic repudiation of socialist politics and of the humanist concept of essence. Bauer's politics are thoroughly republican, meaning that the social bond is for him formal as opposed to substantive. That is to say, the "community" is not an absolute given or a static substance, but something that free individuals or republican citizens must create and perpetually recreate through their self-conscious acts – and especially through what Bauer calls "critique." The republican community is free precisely to the extent that its citizens possess the right and the power to invent that community's limits out of the void. Thus for Bauer, Feuerbach's theory of the species-being or *Gattungswesen* represents but one more iteration of substance – one more universal category that effectively subsumes the individual self-consciousness under some external determination and constraint. It will not allow for the advancement of individual freedom, but can only lead to the violent imposition of a single order, a single *Gattung*, on all individuals. Thus in the socialist model, Bauer contends, "the human essence is for man a power which he may not and cannot submit at all to the critique." It is "an infinity which he does not possess and

which possesses him” (1983 [1844], 201). The followers of Feuerbach, including at this point Marx and Engels, naively promulgate “a society which neither has nor makes [its own] essence, but rather, is purely and solely constituted by it” (203). In such a state, freedom, and especially the freedom of individuals to submit all models of the community and all universal ideals to perpetual critique, would have to be suppressed. 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” (201). Every theory of the human essence, every attempt to unify humanity with a common substance, amounts then to an erasure of difference, and can only result in the oppressive destruction of individual freedoms.

In retrospect, the prescience with which Bauer predicted the trajectory of socialist politics is more than a little astonishing. Already during the *Vormärz* period Bauer understood how, in his own words, “[t]he crowd of free brothers can only assure its freedom and equality through a state which also abolished freedom in the smallest thing” (204). Feuerbach’s concept of the *Gattungswesen* not only failed to relinquish the theory of substance, it also effectively obliterated the contingent, purely formal foundation of human communities. It made the human community appear to be something natural, even sensuous, and not the artificial creation of individual citizens. Thus in seeking to unify the human community it denied humans the power to create that community through their words and deeds. It denied, in other words, the basis of republican freedom. In a letter from the summer of 1844, Marx informed Feuerbach of Bauer’s attack on his concept of essence, and of Bauer’s journal in general. Referring to Bauer’s *Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung*, Marx tells Feuerbach of how “[t]here is much unspoken polemic against you in

it,” and goes on to say that “I intend to publish a small brochure against this aberration of your criticism” – a text that would balloon into *The Holy Family*, anything but a “small brochure.” In the same letter, Marx provides his own gloss of Feuerbach’s concept of the *Gattungswesen*, one that seems designed to rebuff Bauer’s criticism. He defines it as “[t]he unity of man with man, which is also rooted in actual differences among men” (Marx to Feuerbach, 11 August 1844). Thus from Marx’s perspective *Gattungswesen* comprehends both the community and the individual, both unity and difference. But it seems as though Bauer’s criticism of the Feuerbachian concept of essence required of Marx a more extensive response, as by the time he worked on *The German Ideology* less than a year later, his understanding of essence had shifted dramatically. The human essence is no longer a static substance, as it is for Feuerbach, but instead a dynamic, changing, reflexively altering form. There Marx and Engels attack any theory that “takes refuge in a double perception, a profane one which sees only the ‘flatly obvious’ and a higher, philosophical, one which perceives the ‘true essence’ of things” (GI 57). An essence is no longer something opposed to appearances, or a substance in which a cluster of qualities inhere. It is, instead, an immanent form that actualizes itself through appearances, through history, and in the material world. It has a kind of regulating effect on human actions and decisions, locating them within a particular social and historical context, even while it is reflexively altered by those actions and decisions.

In his letter to Feuerbach, Marx is still willing to call Bauer “my friend of many years,” even though he qualifies the statement by noting how they are “now somewhat estranged” (Marx to Feuerbach, 11 August 1844). Their friendship, and Bauer’s influence on the young Marx, form crucial components of the Marx-machine. In particular, they

help explain how Marx negotiated the problem of the relationship between the individual and the community, private and public life, *homme* and *citoyen*. The dominant reading of Bauer, still heavily influenced by Marx's polemics against him, suggests he was, in Karl Löwith's terms, a "critical nihilist" – someone who "devoted himself to a permanent criticism the 'purity' of which did not permit a practical application" (1964, 106). Similarly, and in a more recent study, Harold Mah has characterized Bauer as a heroic individualist who negotiates the "*verkehrte Welt*" of *Vormärz* Germany by reserving for himself "the pure, knowing gaze of a detached Olympian reason" (1987, 85). Against this tradition, however, Douglas Moggach has sought to reposition Bauer as a "civic humanist" – a republican political thinker who "proscribes that the general interest must emerge from the conscious strivings of individuals" and that "the voluntary and constant reproduction of the community is the political function of citizenship" (2000, 61). This new interpretation of Bauer might also be seen to cast new light on Marx's criticisms of him in "On the Jewish Question," *The Holy Family*, and *The German Ideology*. It is not only Bauer the idealist whom Marx and Engels attack. It is also Bauer the individualist and the republican. Thus if Bauer comes out against Jewish demands for emancipation within Germany because he believes that individuals should have no particularistic ties or collective identities (especially not religious ones) save that of humanity as a whole, Marx has a more pragmatic and more pluralistic approach to politics. That is to say, Marx believes that the project of human emancipation can only be furthered through the struggles of particular groups. Unlike Bauer, Marx is a radical democrat, in that he begins his analysis of politics with real social antagonisms, and then endeavors through his practice to articulate those otherwise diffuse and unrelated antagonisms into effective

political forces. Through the course of his exchanges with his contemporaries, Marx comes to believe that the dominant social antagonism, the struggle around which all others tend to coalesce, is class struggle. Unless it is coupled with an effective struggle to produce the social conditions that would make the right to participate in debates that define the community possible for all, the republican ideal of “citizenship” is insufficient. For Marx, it is not only a question of citizens having the right perpetually to redefine the limits of the community. It must also be possible to redefine what a citizen is, what rights they can access, and who gets counted among their numbers.

If there is one element of Bauer’s text that calls, even today, for some response from socialists, it is his attack on the concept of essence or the metaphysics of substance – the idea that communities do not exist as absolute givens, but must be actively created or called into being, and therefore have a formal as opposed to a substantial identity. For Bauer as for other republican theorists, it is not that there exists no community, but rather the community is understood to be the retroactive effect of a creative act that names or “constitutes” it – a speech act that, because contingent, formal, or grounded in no necessary substance, can always be repealed, altered, and transformed in the future. If, in *The German Ideology*, Marx breaks with a certain, very static understanding of the human essence, if he begins instead to conceive of essence as a dynamic and historical form, something which is reflexively altered by its various discrete expressions, this is at least in part a response to Bauer’s critique of essentialism. The problem Bauer points to in Feuerbach’s concept of *Gattungswesen* is closely related to contemporary, post-Marxist and new republican critiques of Marx and Marxism. To posit a human essence in the Feuerbachian sense – a common substance of which all individuals partake, and that

is infinite and therefore infinitely divisible – is to deny the possibility that, as engaged citizens of a republic, individuals might actively and imaginatively create that which binds “the people” together. It is to overlook what Althusser calls the “specific effectivity” and “relative autonomy” (1969, 111) of the superstructures, or their capacity, not only passively to represent, but actively to change social conditions. For Marx and Engels, however, if the community does not exist as an absolute given, neither does the individual. Individuals and communities, or both individual and collective identity, can only be understood as products of an ensemble of social relations – a differential matrix that precedes and conditions every identity, and that makes the experience of identity possible. Thus it is not surprising that, in his “Theses on Feuerbach,” Marx redefines the concept of essence, not as “an abstraction inherent in each individual,” or an infinite and therefore infinitely divisible substance, but as an “ensemble of social relations” (*SW* 157). Political identity, indeed identity as such, whether it is collective or individual, is always underwritten, as it were, by social relations. More accurately, identity is always a formal, partial articulation of the ensemble of social relations – a provisional effort to represent certain relations *as if* they constituted a definite or internally coherent subject. That is to say, as Bauer argues, collective identity is not a given, but the product of particular human practices. It is something that, through their actions, humans must create and perpetually recreate.

Perhaps Marx and Engels did not pay enough attention to the manner in which the dynamic movement of social relations, and the concomitant emergence of ever new social antagonisms, always returns, if only at long last, to overwhelm every set identity and every established norm – the sense in which no representation of the ensemble will

ever be adequate or final, and every representation will be subject to contestation and critique. More accurately, Marx and Engels would begin to deal with this question when, towards the end of the “Feuerbach” chapter of *The German Ideology*, they introduced the theory of hegemony – the idea that each political subject or social class engaged in revolution is compelled to represent its particular interests *as if* they were the interests of humanity as a whole. “Each new class which puts itself in the place of the ruling one before it,” Marx and Engels write, “is compelled, merely in order to carry through its aim, to represent its interest as the common interest of all members of society, that is, expressed in ideal form.” In other words, each new class must endeavor “to give its ideas the form of universality” (GI 61-2). Now when, on the exact same page of the text, Marx and Engels claim that the working class or the proletariat is in fact a universal class, that its interests really are the interests of humanity, and that “the rule of a certain class [...] comes to a natural end [...] as soon as class rule in general ceases to be the form in which society is organized” (62), the text seems to open up the possibility of a number of different readings. One of them is, of course, that Marx and Engels are simply saying what they believe – that the triumph of the working class will inevitably put an end to class rule and to social antagonism as such. Another, however, is that they are practicing what they preach – that, as political activists committed to advancing certain struggles in a radical democratic context, they are endeavoring to represent the particular interests of the working class *as if* they were the universal interests of humanity as a whole. Why not read these passages, not as ontological descriptions of historical necessity, but as performative speech acts, or as attempts to create a hegemonic discourse? Indeed, Marx and Engels themselves have just finished arguing that, in order to engage in revolutionary

politics, one would be “compelled” to perform such conjuring tricks. In *The German Ideology* as in all of their political texts, Marx and Engels are not only describing a political subject that exists as an absolute given. They are calling that subject into being, constituting it out of diffuse social antagonisms, and thus, in an attempt to articulate a hegemonic discourse, creating it.

The Ego and Its Other

While the theory of hegemony has become very well disseminated, and is the one element of Marx's work that continues to have great influence in post-Marxist circles, it is not especially well known that Marx and Engels first constructed that theory in the midst of their critique of Max Stirner, and as part of the extensive, all but forgotten "Leipzig Council" section of *The German Ideology*. The passage on hegemony in *The German Ideology* comes from a digression Marx and Engels wrote while polemicizing against Stirner's *The Ego and His Own*. Only in a later draft did Marx and Engels relocate it, along with a second digression on the real basis of ideology, towards the end of the chapter now known as "Feuerbach." Originally, the definition of hegemony formed part of a section of "The Leipzig Council – III. Saint Max" entitled "Hierarchy." And this original context, while it does not exhaust the meaning of the text, is nonetheless significant. For, against Stirner's rather cavalier rejection of all ideas and all abstractions as empty and spectral, Marx and Engels want to explain the specific effectivity of ideas – the manner in which certain ideas articulate concrete practices, and carry with them the very real institutional authority of, for example, the church, the state, the bureaucracy, the military, and so forth. According to Marx and Engels, whether or not, in the pages of his book, Stirner declares his liberation from ideas and abstractions, the institutional power articulated by certain ideas, in short the power of ideology, remains firmly in place. Thus Marx and Engels are interested in the interaction between, for example, political ideas and social conditions, or the reciprocal determination of ideologies and social relations. This is a process that Stirner, in simply denying the reality of ideas and abstractions,

cannot hope to influence in any meaningful way. The concept of hegemony, indeed Marx's and Engels's entire discussion of the problem of ideology, needs to be understood, then, in relation to the extended, prolix and unruly polemic against Stirner in "The Leipzig Council." In fact, and as only a few commentators have ever noted, everything in *The German Ideology*, all of the passages that have over the years become synonymous with the science of historical materialism, emerge in the midst of a work that is almost entirely dedicated to an attack on Stirner. As Nicholas Lobkowitz points out in one of the few extant discussions of the issue, "no one ever seems to have suspected that there might be a close relationship between Marx's concern about Stirner's position, and the emergence of his own 'historical materialism'" (1969, 71). Perhaps even more importantly, Marx's theory of the social relation is first established and discussed within a particular, ultimately overdetermined, and deeply polemical ensemble of social relations. And those relations – between Marx and Engels, Bauer and Stirner, Feuerbach and Grün, and so forth – are themselves symbolically articulated in particular texts. Although it is contrary to the orthodox reading of the work, which follows the older Engels in treating it as a simple inversion or opposition of idealism and materialism, Marx's and Engels's polemic against Stirner is very much about the specific effectivity of ideas, of ideologies, and of what would later be dubbed superstructures.

Though it arrived on the scene somewhat late, in the final month of 1844, in the context of young Hegelian polemics Stirner's *The Ego and Its Own* was groundbreaking nonetheless. It represented a serious challenge to anyone, like Marx and Engels, who relied on a theory of the human essence. Indeed, it represented a serious challenge to anyone who believed in community or collective identity as such. Stirner's work, which

builds on and develops the anarchistic elements of Bauer's individualism, has all the characteristics of typically young Hegelian discourse. It is sprawling and apocalyptic, narrating the entire history of humanity (twice) and representing itself, or its own publication, as the cataclysmic overturning of that history. The arrogant tone of the text reinforces its dominant concept – *der Einzige*, or what is very usefully translated into English as “the ego.” At least part of what is stake in both Stirner's *The Ego and Its Own* and Marx's and Engels's overwhelming response to it in “The Leipzig Council – III. Saint Max” is, precisely, the ego. Or rather, what is at stake in both texts is the relationship between the ego and its other – Stirner insisting on the priority of the former, and Marx and Engels the much more enigmatic priority of the latter. Derrida makes this point in *Specters of Marx*, where he reserves a special place for a close reading of “The Leipzig Council – III. Saint Max.” Following the tradition of excising Engels's name, he argues that Marx rebukes Stirner so excessively, that he pursues him at such great length, to the point where his polemic is nearly as extensive as that which it feigns to be dismissing, because Stirner resembles him too closely. When reading Stirner's hunt for specters in *The Ego and Its Own*, Marx comes face to face with what Derrida calls “a brother, a double, thus a diabolical image” of himself (1994, 139). In the race to collect in one book all the forms of illusion and fantasy that have befuddled humanity throughout history, Derrida suggests, Stirner beat Marx to the chase. In effect, Stirner “*poached* the specters of Marx” (140). Thus, in Derrida's reading, Stirner's book on the ego bruised Marx's ego. Marx's ego is so hurt that he must spend nearly four hundred pages denying Stirner's claim – denying, that is to say, the reality of the ego. “Why this hunt for ghosts,” Derrida asks. “What is the reason for Marx's rage?” Because, he replies, when reading

The Ego and His Own, when confronted with his strange, diabolical brother, “Marx scares himself [*se fait peur*], he *himself* pursues [*il s’acharne lui-même*] relentlessly someone who almost resembles him to the point that we could mistake one for the other [...] A kind of ghost of himself. Whom he would like to distance, distinguish: to *oppose*” (139). Thus Marx could go on chasing Stirner forever, as he might just as well be chasing his own shadow.

Derrida’s reading of “The Leipzig Council – III. Saint Max” is very creative, and it uncovers material that has too often gone ignored by commentators. It is not, however, Marx who chases Stirner, but Marx and Engels. The distinction is significant, especially given that the debate is over the relationship between the individual ego, or what translators have dubbed the “unique ego” (*der Einzige*) and the social relation. As a collaborative text, *The German Ideology* is the product of a social relation. Indeed it is the unfinished product of a social relation – one that is not entirely pacific or harmonious. Thus into the debate between Marx and Engels on one hand and Stirner on the other must be inserted various confrontations and struggles between Marx and Engels themselves. Derrida, like almost all others before him, simply overlooks the whole problem of the relationship between Marx and Engels – of how they were involved in a process of constructing themselves and constructing one another through their collaborations, and how editors have since attempted to smooth over the differences and present their texts, *The German Ideology* in particular, as though they contained a singular, animating intention, one associated with the science of historical materialism. I will take up these problems at length in the next chapter of my dissertation. What is interesting here is the extent to which *The German Ideology* – an unfinished and unpublished manuscript – was

itself and from the very beginning a kind of *res publicus* or open space of discussion and debate between a variety of different subjects, friends and enemies, and not the expression of a unified intention or a coherent ego. Indeed, to the extent that it remains open to interpretation, *The German Ideology* also remains a textual *res publicus* or a socialized text – a rhetorical assemblage that can be taken apart and reassembled in countless different fashions. To publish, to write, perhaps to use language at all, is already to presuppose some other – a reader, a recipient, and thus a kind of double. In “The Leipzig Council – III. Saint Max,” this phenomenon – what we might call the discourse effect – forms a central component of Marx’s and Engels’s polemic against Stirner. For as soon as he publishes his ideas, as soon as he addresses himself to another, as soon, that is to say, as he engages language in any fashion, Stirner has already relinquished the unique ego, and admitted that the ego is only defined in relation to another, and to that which it is not. This is the contradiction, or rather the *aporia*, that Marx and Engels both tease Stirner with and tease out in their collaborative reading of Stirner’s book.

Far and away Stirner’s most important theoretical work, *The Ego and Its Own* consists of a sustained assault on all abstraction, and especially on Feuerbach’s concept of the human essence or *Gattungswesen*. This perhaps explains why Marx and Engels dealt with it in such detail. Any universal ideal said to transcend the isolated ego, any category intended to comprehend two or more individuals, is characterized by Stirner as a manifestation of the Holy, no less spectral or ephemeral than divine spirits and theological speculation. According to Stirner, “[m]an has not really vanquished Shamanism and its spooks until he possesses the strength to lay aside not only belief in

ghosts and spirits [*Geisterglauben*] but also belief in the spirit [*Geistesglauben*]" (1995 [1844], 66). But Stirner is not only out to get Feuerbach. He wants to negate and transcend all philosophy hitherto, including that of all the left Hegelians. Ridiculing its political (Arnold Ruge), socialist (Moses Hess), and humane (Bruno Bauer) modes, Stirner equates left Hegelianism with liberalism, and liberalism with a kind of secularized religion. "[L]iberalism is a religion," he vehemently insists, "because it separates my essence from me and sets it above me, because it exalts 'man' to the same extent as other religion does God or idol, because it makes what is mine into something otherworldly" or because "it makes some of what is mine, out of my qualities and my property, something alien – namely, an 'essence'" (158). Against such alienation from oneself, Stirner argues that all relations with others, no matter how altruistic they may appear, are in fact reducible to the ego's desire. "I do not want the liberty of men, nor their equality; I want only *my* power over them. I want to make them my property, *material for enjoyment*" (281). As Nietzsche, who was so suitably born the same year that *The Ego and Its Own* was first published (1844), reiterates a generation later, denial of this desire to dominate or this will to power is ultimately denial of life itself – sheer nihilism. But "if I no longer serve any idea, any 'higher essence,'" Stirner concludes rather triumphantly, "then it is clear that I no longer serve any man either, but – under all circumstances – *myself*" (318). Once the ego comes to understand that it possesses its own ideas as it possesses property, once it is subject to no external determination, no universal ideals, and no human essence, its emancipation is complete. And given this philosophy, it is hardly surprising that, other than *The Ego and Its Own*, Stirner's only major contribution to German letters and ideas are his translations of Adam Smith.

In Lobkowitz's estimation, Stirner took the left Hegelian critique of abstraction as far as it could go. He reduced all social relations to "the naked individual self" and "denounced not only a certain type of ideal, but all ideals whatsoever" (1969, 85). After Stirner, holding to any ideal, admitting that communities are united in any fashion, that there is anything like a human essence or common substance, was tantamount to regressing to a religious position. If he wished to remain a communist, Marx could not help but respond to this provocation. And according to Lobkowitz, Marx's response was not especially inspired – although it would have grave and long lasting effects. Following Stirner's attack on all ideals, Lobkowitz maintains, "Marx simply translated his ideal into laws of history" (90). Thus in *The German Ideology* Marx's ideal image of what the human community ought to become gets magically transformed into a science of what it will become. The same conjuring trick is said to produce a tension between Marx's theory and his practice. "On the one hand," Lobkowitz writes, "[Marx] translates all his ideals into historical necessities; on the other he wants to remain a critic and a voice for revolutionary action" (94). But why engage in political action if the course of history is thoroughly determined? Indeed, why even write a polemical refutation of Stirner? These kinds of questions have dogged Marxism since its inception, and the history of Marxist thought provides more than enough examples of attempts to find a solution – Lenin's and Gramsci's work being but the two most notable. But, directly contrary to what Lobkowitz maintains, the question might already be answered in *The German Ideology* itself. Indeed, read closely, *The German Ideology* might be nothing other than an extended effort to address precisely this question – not a deterministic science of history, but an elaborate meditation on political strategy, and on the specific effectivity of

political ideas, ideals, and rhetoric. Faced with Stirner's systematic repudiation of all ideals, Marx and Engels do not transform their ideals into a science. Rather they set out to show the manner in which ideas or what today we would call "ideologies" effectively articulate real life social relations and concrete political institutions. More precisely, Marx and Engels set out to prove that the phenomena that Stirner calls the "unique ego" (*der Einzige*) and its "property" (*Eigenthum*) are social constructs, and that they have no consistency, no value, no meaning whatsoever outside of or beyond the very social relations, discourses, and institutions that Stirner, for his part, proclaims false, and wishes to have done with. However, Marx and Engels explain, simply declaring such ideals and institutions "false" liberates one from exactly nothing. It provides no concrete freedom whatsoever. Indeed, it effectively isolates one from all of the collective structures (including language) that make any struggle for liberation possible in the first place.

"The Leipzig Council – III. Saint Max" endeavors to prove that what Stirner calls the ego and property are not irreducible elements of human existence but, no less than Feuerbach's "Man," the product of specific, historically located social relations. Moreover, though Stirner rails against morality, he at all time relies on an implicit deontological claim. Stirner argues that humanist essentialism does nothing to change the content of Christian morality, but simply transposes it from the divine to the human world, rendering it all the more material and therefore all the more oppressive. "If one finds man's chief requirement in piety," Stirner claims, "then there arises religious clericalism; if one sees it in morality [*Sittlichkeit*], then moral clericalism [*sittliche Pfaffentum*] raises its head" (1995 [1844], 72). Now this use of the term *Sittlichkeit* when discussing "morality" throughout *The Ego and Its Own* is far from incidental. In "On the

Scientific Ways of Treating Natural Law” Hegel makes a distinction between *Sittlichkeit* and *Moralität*. This distinction remains central throughout Hegel’s political work, including his *Philosophy of Right*. In Hegel, *Sittlichkeit* refers to the recognized, established, institutionalized customs and ethos of a particular community, while *Moralität* connotes the categorical moral duty of the Kantian subject – a universal duty that must originate with the autonomous will of the individual. Stirner is well aware of the association between *sittlich* and cultural difference, and like Hegel (though for the exact opposite purposes) he deliberately plays on the word’s ambiguous meaning. “To act according to the custom [*Sitte*] and habit of one’s country,” Stirner sarcastically declares, “is to be moral [*sittlich*] there” (65). What Stirner dislikes about *Sittlichkeit* is precisely the manner in which it locates the subject in a particular community, making the unique ego’s actions contingent in some fashion upon established norms and communitarian principles. But, as Marx and Engels point out in “The Leipzig Council – III. Saint Max,” in rejecting *Sittlichkeit*, Stirner inadvertently, perhaps even inevitably retreats to a Kantian position. Thus while Stirner claims to have rejected morality tout court, his writing and his rhetoric are nonetheless riddled with categorical imperatives – absolute assertions as to what one “ought” to do. As Marx and Engels note, “[w]henver difficulties arise, Saint Sancho hacks his way through them by means of a categorical imperative: ‘turn yourself to account,’ ‘recognize yourself,’ ‘let each become an all powerful Ego,’ etc” (*GI* 316). Thus it would seem that Stirner’s renunciation *Sittlichkeit* and valorization of the autonomous will itself relies on a moral principle. In the place of the concrete institutions that articulate *Sittlichkeit*, which Stirner simply proclaims to be false specters, and then denies out of hand, the ego is left with the *Moralität* of the

abstract Kantian will. And in this sense, for all Stirner's bluster, the egoist or *der Einzige* is not liberated from a single concrete institution, but only saddled with the categorical duty to be an egoist.

A somewhat more generous reading of *The Ego and Its Own* has been proposed by the preeminent scholar of left Hegelianism, Lawrence Stepelevich – especially in his essays “Max Stirner and Ludwig Feuerbach” and “Max Stirner as Hegelian.” The first of these essays claims that, in arguing for “the actual dependency of all normative and regulative concepts, such as God, man, mankind, state, society, or law, upon the willful determinations of the singular ego,” *The Ego and Its Own* represents the most radical break with the dominant intellectual trends of its time (1979, 457). More ambitiously, Stepelevich's second essay claims that Stirner's philosophy represents “the ultimate consequence of Hegelianism,” that he is “the *perfected* Hegelian,” even “the *completed* Hegel” (1985, 602, 604). In other words, according to Stepelevich, by rejecting the abstract communitarian ideals of his fellow left Hegelians, and by positing a unique ego fully in charge of its own property, Stirner in fact remains true to Hegel – true, that is to say, to the real Hegel, who most have mistakenly treated as a communitarian, but who is in fact more on the order of a libertarian. Taking as his point of departure the conclusion of *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, Stepelevich argues that “the ego [*der Einzige*]” is Hegel's pure subjectivity – a “creative nothingness,” as Stirner calls it, void of all external determination. On the other side of the equation, “property [*Eigentum*]” is Hegel's pure objectivity – the concrete expression of the pure subject's freedom. With Stirner's ego, Stepelevich maintains, “the negative aspect of reason is no longer required, for there is no longer a cognitive need for self-criticism” (608). The dialectic, the

progressive development of spirit through negation and transcendence, comes to an end. At the same time, the ego is not solipsistic because, in Stepelevich's words, "[t]he actual being, i.e. the 'objectivity' of the unique ego, is found in property" (611). Here Marx's analysis of property as a form of alienation (*Entfremdung*) is rejected out of hand. Instead, property is understood (in what, according to Stepelevich, are properly Hegelian terms) as the genuine expression (*Entäusserung*) of the ego's individuality. For Marx, private property can only exist insofar as it can be exchanged. One only owns property to the extent that one possesses something of value to someone else – something "vendible [*Verschacherbares*]" (GI 247). For Stirner, on the other hand, it is the relationship between the ego and its property, the act of will appropriating material, that first "renders both subject and thing intelligible" (Stepelevich 1985, 612). That is to say, for Stirner, nothing can have any meaning (for me) except insofar as it is (my) property.

Though he does not put it in these terms, Stepelevich's argument turns on the idea that *The Ego and Its Own* is a performative text – that it is, to use Paul de Man's definition of *mise en abyme*, "an example of what it states" (1986, 86). Stirner seeks to annihilate "the false belief that one's ideas are not one's own possessions, but have an objectivity and substantiality apart from the knowing ego" (Stepelevich 1985, 613). And *his* ideas, the ideas expressed in *The Ego and Its Own*, are an illustration of this principle. Stirner "introduces into the philosophical literature a new term intended to convey a note of radical exclusiveness, a term that would lie outside all classification: '*Der Einzige*'" (607). A "unique ego [...] being beyond the forms of consciousness that set definitions, is *undefinable*" (609). Thus the very word *Einzige* is an expression (*Entäusserung*) of Stirner's unique ego. It is his property, his *Eigentum*, his own. However, if it is the case

that Stepelevich has correctly identified what Stirner “intended to convey,” then for that very same reason, what Stirner intended to convey cannot be true. For if *der Einzige* is a “new term,” if it has meaning only because Stirner “owns” it, then its original intention is foreclosed to readers from the outset. It is utterly unique for and to Stirner. Anticipating Ludwig Wittgenstein’s critique of the theory of private languages, Marx and Engels make the same point about *all* of Stirner’s words. Calling Stirner by one of the (significantly multiple) nicknames they invent for him, Marx and Engels write:

[t]he second rock against which Saint Sancho, on reflecting a little, was inevitably bound to shipwreck, is his own assertion that every individual is totally distinct from every other, is unique. Since every individual is altogether different from any other, it is by no mean necessary that what is foreign, holy, for one individual should be so for another individual; it even *cannot* be so. And the common name used, such as State, religion, morality, etc., should not mislead us, for these names are only abstractions from the actual attitude of separate individuals, and these objects, in consequence of the totally different attitude towards them of the unique individuals, become for each of the latter *unique* objects, hence totally different objects, which have only their name in common. Consequently, Saint Sancho could have at most said: for me, Saint Sancho, the State, religion, etc., are the Alien, the Holy. Instead of this he has to make them the absolute Holy, the Holy for all individuals – how else could he have fabricated his constructed Ego, his egoist in agreement with himself, etc., how else could he have written his whole “Book?” (*GI* 307).

That is to say, if ideas did not have some “substantiality” (or, more accurately, some “exchangeability,” some vendibility, some value) apart from the knowing ego, if signs did not first accrue their meaning by being exchanged with others, then there could be no communication whatsoever, indeed no language as such. In this sense, *The Ego and Its Own* relies on a performative contradiction. Stirner cannot both mean what he says and say what he means. Indeed, to open one’s mouth or inscribe a mark at all is already to have submitted to language, and thus to a world of relations with others – a world completely haunted by the specters and abstractions Stirner so desperately wishes to exorcize. Stirner says he does not believe in such things, but in fact he *must* believe in them. How else could he have written his whole book?

If not the property of a unique ego, then what is an idea, what is a sign? Baroque, teeming with references to external sources, and intricately self-reflexive, “The Leipzig Council – III. Saint Max” is also a performative text. Its rhetoric here reinforces, there defies, its logic. The central motif of Marx’s and Engels’s polemic is repetition – the point being that the ego itself is not unique as Stirner insists, but the effect of always prior social relations, and thus a kind of repetition. The very text of “The Leipzig Council – III. Saint Max” is a repetition, a section by section parody of *The Ego and Its Own*. The genre of parody alone suggests that what Stirner calls “unique” can in fact be copied. It can be reworked and redistributed in distinct contexts, producing meanings that the author could not possibly have intended. Moreover, this parody of Stirner is itself based on another parody in turn – namely Cervantes’s great comic novel *Don Quixote*, a book that is all about the manner in which two very different friends, Don Quixote and Sancho Panza, slowly become copies of one another. And Marx and Engels are sure to point out

that, in this retelling of the story, Stirner is akin to Sancho Panza, having his head stuffed full of idealist nonsense by the Don Quixotes of the world (*GI* 266). Indeed, Marx and Engels go to exorbitant lengths to show that Stirner's version of history, far from being unique, is but a poor copy of Hegel's. Stirner is a "clumsy" copier of Hegel" (180). He is both a truant schoolboy who relies on a Hegelian "crib" (174) and a pedantic teacher and dogmatist who seeks to educate his students through rote repetition (169). Here the language of pedagogy reminds the reader that the one who calls himself "Max Stirner" is in fact not Max Stirner, but a "parochial Berlin school-master" (285) named Johann Kaspar Schmidt. That is to say, no matter what he might claim, "Max Stirner" is not unique, but a replication, a repetition, or a discursive supplement for someone else – some other. Stirner's school motto should, Marx and Engels quip, read "*Repetitio est mater studiorum*" – repetition is the mother of learning (198). The fact that the author(s) of *The German Ideology* is / are also copies of one another only reinforces the point further – the ego is always already split off from itself, (dis)located over there and on the side of the other. As all of this repetition implies, language is not, as a nominalist like Stirner believes, a collection of false "common names" that refer only to abstract classes of things and true "proper names" that refer to discrete, unique objects. Rather, it is something more on the order of an infinitely complex network of iterations and citations – a system of repeated signifiers that remain irreducible to an original referent or intention. And whether or not its authors *claim* this to be the case, "The Leipzig Council III. – Saint Max" *shows* it to be the case.

The conception of discourse and writing enacted in "The Leipzig Council – III. Saint Max" is, therefore, closely related to what Derrida says in his early work, especially

in his seminal essay "Signature Event Context," about citation and iteration. It is not so much that, for Marx and Engels, language is what Stepelevich calls a "substance." Rather it is a dynamic ensemble of relations or, to use one of Marx's and Engels's favorite words, "exchange [*Verkehr*]." At the very least, "The Leipzig Council – III. Saint Max" contains in its margins and folds a highly sophisticated theory of discourse, and of language as public action – one that is related to J.L. Austin's theory of speech acts. *Pace* the logical positivism of his time, Austin argues that certain utterances do not describe an external reality, but of themselves perform tasks. Austin is especially interested in legal discourse – the kind of speech acts that pass judgments, bind contracts, constitute states, enact laws, and so forth. These utterances, Austin maintains, are effective, successful, or what he likes to call "happy" because they possess "illocutionary force." That is to say, they are effective because they are uttered in certain, generally recognized contexts – or because, before the words are uttered, there already exists "*an accepted conventional procedure having a certain conventional effect*" and this procedure includes "*the uttering of certain words by certain persons in certain circumstances*" (1962, 26). Thus Austin links the fulfillment of the speech act, or the fulfillment of its author's intention, to the social context in which the act is uttered – what he calls the "total speech act." This, however, means that the speech act is only effective if it is a citation or a repetition of a previous act – one that has been successful in the past, and that is recognized as effective within particular contexts. As a result, no speech act is utterly original, or reducible to the animating intention of an individual – what Stirner would call *der Einzige*. Rather, as Derrida argues in "Signature Event Context," every speech act is "secondary, inscribed,

and supplementary" (1988, 3). It is the product of social conditions, or rather social relations, that exceed its intention and that provide it with its force.

In "Signature Event Context," Derrida extends this theory of the speech act as a citation or what he calls "iteration" to all language and all signs. What he calls the "law of iterability" has at least two possible consequences. On the one hand, it may be the case that all speech acts are structurally determined – that, because they require the prior establishment of a recognized social context, recognized rituals and conventions, no speech act is original. On the other hand, it could just as well be the case that, as pretty much the entire philosophical tradition suggests, from Plato through to Austin himself, every repetition increases the potential for error, for corruption, and thus for difference. Thus the very thing that makes a speech act effective, or that allows it to fulfill the intentions of its author, namely iteration, is also what threatens to distort those intentions, or transform them into something unknown. It is this double move that interests Derrida most – the relationship between repetition and difference, iteration and alteration. "Every sign," he writes, "linguistic or nonlinguistic, spoken or written [...], in a small or large unit, can be *cited*, put between quotation marks; in doing so, it can break with every given context, engendering an infinity of new contexts in a manner which is absolutely illimitable" (12). This is exactly the principle that Marx's and Engels's parody of Max Stirner's *The Ego and Its Own* relies on at every turn. Because he announces himself in language and in a published book, Stirner is not unique, but secondary, supplementary, inscribed within discursive and therefore collective contexts. Even his declared name – Max Stirner – is already a corrupted repetition, a double or iteration, in that it is a pseudonym for Johann Kaspar Schmidt. Playing on this original repetition, and showing

that in principle it can be extended in an infinite fashion, Marx and Engels pile up nicknames and sobriquets for Stirner, calling him Saint Max, Saint Jacob, Sancho Panza, Saint Sancho, Jacques le bonhomme, and "Stirner." And the use of *polyonomasia*, borrowed in this case from Cervantes's *Don Quixote*, where the hero's real name is never revealed, but has been forgotten from the very outset, is not incidental, as it highlights the sense in which every individual, every unique ego, is divided off from itself and constructed amidst an ensemble of relations with others – the sense in which being split in two is the condition, not only of writing and publishing, but of discourse, of language, and of symbolic relations as such.

It is possible, then, to read "The Leipzig Council – III. Saint Max," not only as a polemical exercise, but also as a very complicated theory of language, of the operation of speech acts and the specific effectivity of ideas or ideologies. Thus there is a sense in which, when he writes that, upon reading Stirner's *The Ego and His Own*, Marx "scares himself," or comes face to face with a "diabolical image" of himself, Derrida is also describing his own experience of reading Marx – or rather, Marx and Engels. To what extent does Marx or Marx's text represent a kind of diabolical image of Derrida's? To what extent does Marxism constitute a diabolical image of deconstruction? When Derrida claims that Stirner "*poaches* the specters of Marx" and that Marx "scares himself" when reading *The Ego and Its Own*, he fails to mention that he, Derrida, has borrowed or poached both of these images of hunting and haunting from "The Leipzig Council" itself, where they have borrowed them from others in turn. Thus Marx and Engels write of how "Sancho poaches [*Jagdfrevel*] snipe existing only in the mind" (GI 470). They also recall how, upon first encountering another human being, Stirner's unique ego is "seized with

immediate ‘horror’ – ‘he is terrified of himself [*er erschrickt von sich selbst*],’ he sees in every man a ‘frightful specter [*grausigen Spuk*],’ a ‘sinister specter [*unheimlichen Spuk*],’ in which something ‘stalks [*umgeht*]’” (167). This language of hunting and haunting that permeates “The Leipzig Council – III. Saint Max” would be incidental, if it were not for the fact that it reemerges once again in the opening scenes of the *Communist Manifesto* – a work that was not “abandoned to the gnawing criticism of the mice,” not by a long shot. Now Derrida’s reading of the *Communist Manifesto* hinges on the single word, “manifesto,” which he interprets as a dangerous attempt to make manifest or render fully present the specter – to provide a determinate ontology of the ghost. And this is fundamentally Derrida’s criticism of Marx – that, while he invoked them for rhetorical purposes, he did not really like specters and ghosts, that he was committed to the metaphysics of presence, or to the manifestation of pure presence. But one could just as well read the word “manifesto” in the title of the *Communist Manifesto* in the precise etymological sense of the word, as an attempt to strike a blow (*manus / festus*) – not, that is to say, an effort to describe social reality in some exhaustive fashion, but a performative speech act, or a highly provisional attempt to constitute a particular political agent capable of addressing a particular political context. If, in *Specters of Marx*, Derrida both apes and criticizes Marx’s texts, and especially Marx’s rhetoric, this only points to the problem that is operative throughout Derrida’s essay – namely Derrida’s desire simultaneously to associate himself with and to distance himself from Marx.

This approach to the text might help explain what is really most intriguing about Derrida’s book on Marx – not his reading of Marx per se, but the manner in which he frames that reading with an extended reflection on *Hamlet*. Off the top, this reference

invokes the irreducibly theatrical character of politics, or the sense in which politics takes place, as it were, on a stage – what Claude Lefort calls a *mise en scène*. Following Lefort, most post-Marxist and new republican thinkers claim that Marx gravely misunderstood this staging of the political, and sought to reduce the open space or *res publicus* of political discourse (one aspect of what Derrida calls the specter) to a determinate social ontology. Throughout this chapter of my dissertation, I have attempted to prove otherwise – that Marx was actively engaged with the political, and was as committed as any of his contemporaries to republican conceptions of political freedom, open discourse or conflict, and continuous transformative debate. The *Hamlet* reference also provides Derrida with the “time is out of joint” citation, which he spins out into an extended reflection (a very Hamlet-like reflection) on Heideggerean temporality and the Greek conception of justice as *dike* or jointure. But Derrida’s use of *Hamlet* as a leitmotif has another, less explicit implication as well. Albeit in an indirect fashion, it “stages,” as it were, the relationship between Derrida and Marx, deconstruction and Marxism. Or rather, through the *Hamlet* reference, Derrida stages one interpretation of that often puzzled over relationship. For, in the traditional reading at any rate, *Hamlet* is a play about a once heroic, but now slain and usurped king, or more accurately the ghost of that king, and his bookish, melancholic, indecisive son – a prince who is sworn to avenge his father’s death, but who gets bogged down instead in perpetual deferral, endless delay, and uncertain ontological questioning (“to be or not to be”).

Who is the king in this scenario if not the young Marx – author of a social movement that, for better and for worse, sometimes for the very worst, dominated an entire century of human history, and of a dream or a promise that was so violently

usurped? And who is the indecisive prince if not the aging Derrida – someone with many friends among the scholars, but who has always been accused of lacking political effectiveness, and who, even in *The Specters of Marx*, seems to prefer philosophical speculation and endless pondering of questions of the sort “what is x” to decisive political action? Thus indirectly, passively even, Derrida would seem in the margins of his text to be acknowledging the standard Marxist critique of deconstruction – the claim that it is, or that it always runs the risk of becoming, ineffective, academic, and incapable of operating in “the world.” Derrida will insist otherwise of course – that there is always something at stake in deconstruction, that it is always a kind of intervention, and that its consequences are as real as the nose on the end of your face. That particular debate aside, it is interesting to note how infrequently the Marxist critique of Derrida and of deconstruction is based on a reading of Marx – how frequently, that is to say, a reified system labeled “Marx,” a network of received categories and terms, takes the place of the overwhelming assemblage of texts and documents, manuscripts and traces that, for us today, “is” Marx. Perhaps, then, it is not a question of distinguishing between text and world, the semiotic and the phenomenal, the virtual or imaginative and the real or the practical, but of treating the text as a machine – as a productive, if also composite and fragmented structure that works not only to interpret the world, nor simply to represent it, but also and at the same time to effect it, to articulate it otherwise, in a word, to change it.

Part Two: The Marx-Machine

In doing this, I acquired the habit of making excerpts from all the books I read – such as Lessing's *Laokoon*, Solger's *Erwin*, Winckelmann's history of art, Luden's German history – and to jot down reflections on the side. At the same time, I translated Tacitus' *Germania* and Ovid's *Libri Tristium*, and began on my own, that is, out of grammars, to study English and Italian, in which I have not yet accomplished anything. I also read Klein's criminal law and his *Annals*, and all the latest works of literature, the latter on the side however [...] I had read fragments of Hegel's philosophy, the grotesque, rocklike melody of which did not appeal to me [...] From grief over Jenny's illness and my fruitless intellectual labours, from a consuming anger over having to make an idol of a view I hated, I fell sick, as I have already told you, dear Father. My health restored, I burned all my poems and sketches for short novels, etc., labouring under the illusion that I could abandon them altogether – of which there is as yet no evidence.

Karl Marx to Heinrich Marx, 10 November 1837

Chapter 2: Allegories of Writing

The Reading Lesson

Taking up the vast majority of *The German Ideology*, “The Leipzig Council” is a colossal polemical assault on the left Hegelian philosophers Bruno Bauer and Max Stirner. Throughout the history of Marx scholarship its two chapters – a short one on Bauer called “Saint Bruno” and a considerably longer one on Stirner called “Saint Max” – have been routinely denigrated and ignored by commentators, and even completely excised from the work by editors. With only a small handful of exceptions, it has been all but universally accepted that the primary intention or message of *The German Ideology* is contained within the opening chapter entitled “Feuerbach,” and that the polemics found in “The Leipzig Council,” not to mention the incomplete second book “True Socialism,” constitute at best a historical curiosity, at worst so much irrelevant rhetorical embellishment, excess and waste. Even before the work was posthumously released in 1932 as the fifth volume of the *Marx-Engels Gesamtausgabe*, Marx’s official biographer Franz Mehring had set the tone for subsequent commentaries when he characterized it as a “discursive super-polemic” and an utterly unnecessary exercise in “purely intellectual gymnastics” (1966 [1918], 111). The judgment would be echoed by, among others, Isaiah Berlin, who refers to “The Leipzig Council” as a “confused, verbose and ponderous work” (1963, 123), and by the editor of Marx’s *Selected Writings* in English David McLennan, who calls it an “extremely tedious” text consisting primarily of “acres of diatribe” (1979, 159). More recently, and in an otherwise very illuminating book on left

Hegelianism, Daniel Brudney has called "The Leipzig Council" a "staggeringly crude" polemic full of "endless tirades against figures remembered only because Marx and Engels wasted vitriol on them" (1998, 268). Even Etienne Balibar, who in other contexts cannot say enough good things about the open and uncertain status of Marx's writing, has chimed in, describing Marx's debate with Stirner as an "inconclusive" example of "verbal jousting" clouded almost to the point of opacity by its reliance on "typically 'ironic' argumentation" (1995, 35). Now the fact that these renunciations of "The Leipzig Council," not to mention many more like them, seem to operate by replicating the polemical hyperbole they claim to condemn should not be overlooked. It suggests that the stain of rhetoric will leave its mark even and perhaps especially there where one endeavors to expunge it. Nor should it be ignored that, by bracketing this work off as "crude" or "inconclusive," one is also spared the trouble of having to read it. Echoing what Paul de Man once said of Rousseau scholarship, it would seem that, in Marx studies, "[t]he more ambivalent the original utterance, the more uniform and universal the pattern of consistent error in the followers and commentators" (1983, 111). But instead of attempting to eliminate the ambivalence of so many of Marx's and Engels's utterances, I would like to highlight and even privilege it. For it is precisely in such ambivalence, in the uncertain excesses of his work, that contemporary theorists might find another Marx, one who continues to speak to the post-Marxist world.

The standard "uniform" and "universal" interpretation of *The German Ideology* was in fact inaugurated by Friedrich Engels himself, but only many years after having collaborated on it with Marx. In 1883, the year of Marx's death, Engels appears to have reread the first part of the manuscript. He then inscribed the words "I. Feuerbach.

Opposition of the materialist and idealist outlooks” on the final page of the first chapter (*CW* 5, 588) – providing that chapter with the title it still has, and the text as a whole with a dominant, all but intractable interpretation. It is difficult to underestimate the significance of Engels’s apparently innocent bibliographical gesture. To this day, the conviction that, in *The German Ideology*, Marx and Engels “oppose” their materialist outlook to the idealist position of the young Hegelians, or that they “invert” the young Hegelian fascination with abstraction and replace it with the study of real life, remains firmly in place. So too does the notion that *The German Ideology* represents the moment of a decisive “break” in Marx’s career and, more magnanimously still, in the entire history of western thought – the moment when Marx heroically rejects philosophy, leaves ideology behind, and begins to construct a genuine science of social relations. That such claims are generally based on the most cursory analysis of the text, let alone the various polemical contexts into which it was intended to intervene, has rarely stopped them from being repeated. Thus one can still find an internationally respected and renowned cultural theorist such as Slavoj Žižek dismissing the whole text offhand with the parenthetical words “is not the entire *German Ideology* based on the opposition of the ideological chimera and the study of ‘actual life?’” (1999, 72). Now Žižek must know that the rhetorical question is a dangerous strategy, as it runs the risk of someone responding to it, and responding, moreover, incorrectly. And, indeed, in this case the answer to the question is most emphatically “no.” In fact, if anything, Marx’s and Engels’s systematic assault on their left or young Hegelian contemporaries criticizes *them* for relying on precisely such an opposition – for dividing the world up into essence and appearance, reality and fiction, or the empty chimeras of politics and the fundamental truth of human

existence. At stake in *The German Ideology* is precisely the complex, dialectical interplay between ideas or consciousness (*Bewusst-sein*) and being (*Sein*). “Consciousness [*das Bewusstsein*],” Marx and Engels insists, “can never be anything else than conscious existence [*das bewusste Sein*], and the existence of men is their actual life-processes” (*GI* 37). But because the standard, uniform and universal reading is not confirmed by such complications, they tend to get swept aside or simply ignored.

While Marx mentions the work in the “Preface” to his *Critique of Political Economy*, describing it as the point at which he and Engels “settle accounts with [their] erstwhile philosophical conscience” and in doing so achieve a kind of “self-clarification [*Selbstverstaendigung*]” (*SW* 390), the full significance of *The German Ideology* as a turning point in Marx’s career would only be recognized (or rather announced) in the 1930s, after the Soviets had gained control of the Marx archive and began producing the *Marx-Engels Gesamtausgabe* or so-called *MEGA*. Only then would it be realized (or, again, announced) that the brief introductory chapter Engels had retroactively named “Feuerbach” in fact represents the first systematic exposition of the science of historical materialism. Thus, working under the direct supervision of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, and in conjunction with the Institute of Marxism-Leninism in Germany, the editors of *MEGA* (notably Victor Andoratskij) introduced *The German Ideology* to the world by claiming that “Feuerbach” constitutes “*die erste systematische Darlegung ihrer historisch-philosophischen Auffassung der ökonomischen Entwicklungs-Geschichte der Menschen*” (*MEGA* I: 5, x). From this moment forward, when commentators and scholars spoke of *The German Ideology* they almost invariably meant its opening chapter. The rest of the manuscript, two large octavo volumes that take

up over six hundred pages in print, has been conveniently relegated to the dust-bin of history – “abandoned,” in Marx’s own prophetic words, “to the gnawing criticism of the mice” (*SW* 390). In the English speaking world, while a partial version of the text, edited by Roy Pascal and published by Lawrence and Wishart, was available as early as 1938, it did not include “The Leipzig Council,” only “Feuerbach” and “True Socialism.” It was 1965 before a complete translation was released by Progress Publishers, and a decade latter still before a scholarly edition came out as volume five of the *Collected Works*.

The complexity of what has happened to the text of *The German Ideology* since its initial publication in 1932 is surpassed only by that of what happened to the manuscript before that date. First, it had at least three authors, possibly four – Marx, Engels, Moses Hess, and perhaps Joseph Weydemeyer as well. Indeed, chapter five of book two, entitled “‘Doctor Kuhlman of Holstein’ or The Prophecies of True Socialism,” appears to have been written by Hess, copied out by Weydemeyer, and finally edited by Marx and Engels. In all of these hands, the manuscript went through a number of drafts, with the introductory chapter now called “Feuerbach” only emerging in the last one, and having been left incomplete by its authors. In the earlier drafts, Feuerbach, Bauer, and Stirner were all dealt with simultaneously. Later Marx and Engels excised the sections on Bauer and Stirner, turned them into separate chapters, and developed what was left into the first half of “Feuerbach.” The second half of “Feuerbach,” which deals with hegemony and with the relationship between the ruling ideas and modes of exchange, was originally two separate digressions written as part of the attack on Stirner. In the final draft, these passages were moved to their current position. This explains, perhaps, why the comments on hegemony in the second half of “Feuerbach” seem so much more

sophisticated and complex than the potted history of the division of labour and speculations on the origin of consciousness in material practice found in the first half. If the first half of "Feuerbach" represents the beginning of Marx's and Engels's work on this project, the second half represents its culmination. While the editors of *MEGA* and of the *Collected Works* indicate this breach in the text by interjecting a section break, other editions, including the Progress Publisher edition and McLennan's *Selected Works*, swallow it up in a single section, making it appear as though the text and therefore the argument were perfectly seamless.

Marx and Engels worked on the manuscript from April 1845 until April 1847, engaging in significant modifications and amendments right up until the end. Indeed, nothing like a "complete" version of the manuscript exists. Marx and Engels left the project *in medias res*, as it were, after realizing that no publisher was interested in releasing it. In his correspondence, Marx tends to suggest that his polemic against the left Hegelians and the true socialists never saw the light of day because it was too radical. Thus in a letter to Pavel Annenkov sent in the winter of 1846, Marx complains about his inability to find a publisher for his "criticism of German philosophers and socialists," writing "[y]ou would never believe the difficulties that such a publication encounters in Germany, on the one hand from the police, and on the other from the booksellers, who are themselves the interested representatives of all the tendencies which I am attacking" (Marx to Annenkov, 28 December 1846). While there is doubtless much validity to Marx's complaint, at least part of the reason for this lack of interest among publishers must have been that *The German Ideology* was such an untimely, almost anachronistic text. As a political movement, left Hegelianism had more or less disappeared by 1846. Its

journals were all shut down by the censors and its key figures had all repudiated former ties with one another. Because the work was written by a variety of different authors, and because the original publishers (the Westphalian businessmen Julius Meyer and Rudolph Rempel) backed out of the project after realizing that the second book on “True Socialism” was directed against their allies, portions of the manuscripts seem to have been scattered throughout Europe, certain pages having been uncovered for the first time as late as the 1960s. Only a single chapter of what is now *The German Ideology* appeared in Marx’s or Engels’s lifetimes – namely chapter four of book two, which consists of a review of Karl Grün’s 1845 work *Die soziale Bewegung in Frankreich und Belgien*, and which was published in the journal *Das Westphälische Dampfboot* in August and September of 1847.

The one chapter of *The German Ideology* Marx and Engels saw published during their lifetime is remarkable for its innovative comparison of Grün’s ideas with those of the French socialist Etienne Cabet. The comparison comes to a head a section entitled “The ‘Limitations of Papa Cabet’ and Herr Grün.” The so-called “True Socialists,” Grün included, basically believed that their work represented the philosophical (which is to say, German) “truth” of French socialist practice, and that French practice, with all its violence and messiness, all its crass practicality, had to be negated and transcended by German theory. In an effort to restore the force of French socialism, “The ‘Limitations of Papa Cabet’ and Herr Grün” (which as probably written, or at least very heavily edited, by Joseph Weydemeyer) sets Grün’s and Cabet’s words side by side in parallel columns. The typographical technique, not by any means the most radical textual innovation used by left Hegelian writers during the *Vormärz*, reveals the astonishing similarity between

the basely practical French socialist and his “true” philosophical German counterpart. That is to say, it reveals the fact that Grün did not philosophically transcend Cabet, but merely purloined the latter’s philosophy and stripped it of its effective practical expression. Thus, whoever might have written it, the one section of *The German Ideology* to see publication while Marx was alive dealt explicitly with the complex problem of authorship and ownership, intention and iteration, originality and “truth” – the same problems, that is to say, which any rigorous reading of the manuscript called *The German Ideology* must address as well.

Even if the extraordinarily complicated question of who authored *The German Ideology*, or whose intentions it ostensibly conveys, gets provisionally reduced to the relationship between Marx and Engels, matters become only marginally less Byzantine. While there is a tendency among commentators to let Marx’s name stand in for both Marx and Engels, if only to avoid copious verbiage, it is far from certain that Marx was the primary author of *The German Ideology*. Much of the manuscript is in Engels’s hand, with marginal commentary and amendments in Marx’s. Given that the prose style is distinctly Marx’s, cluttered as it is with often irritatingly clever literary and cultural references, it seems very likely that Marx dictated while Engels wrote. Particularly in the case of “The Leipzig Council – III. Saint Max,” which deals with Stirner’s *The Ego and Its Own* in such excruciating detail, one can imagine a scene in which Marx stood reading an opponent’s text and commenting on it aloud, while Engels sat busily scribbling those comments into the manuscript. Here Marx becomes a performer, and *The German Ideology* an almost theatrical text. But this image of Marx and Engels working in tandem (which is also in part a scene of domination and submission) by no means ensures us of

the authenticity of Marx's voice, nor does it get us all that much closer to his original intent. It only reconstructs the problem as one of the relationship between Marx and Engels – these two lifelong friends who also, it should not be forgotten, possessed dramatically different understandings of and approaches to the world. The collaboration between Marx and Engels, with its only slightly occluded homoerotic elements (*The German Ideology* is, it should be pointed out, littered with dirty jokes and sexual innuendos, most of them calling into question the virility of its victims), is all the more incredible given that the two had only met a year earlier. The suggestion that Engels was somehow instantly aware of Marx's luminous brilliance and superior intelligence is less than convincing – although the idea that he quickly recognized Marx's superior arrogance and fragile ego is slightly more convincing. Regardless, if it is the case that Marx's voice is mediated by Engels's pen, then it is impossible to imagine that the latter had no influence, or that it did not frequently struggle with (and frequently win struggles with) the former. What intentions did Marx wish to convey? What intentions did Engels? What did the two of them wish to say together, and what did one of them wish to keep silent? How might (unresolved, overdetermined) struggles between Marx and Engels be constituent of their polemics against others? How was Engels engaged in a process of constructing "Marx," not only following Marx's death in his role as keeper of the Marx archive, but also during Marx's life in his role as scribe? Was Marx, perhaps, engaged in a similar process vis-à-vis Engels?

While the editors and scholars associated with *MEGA* were rather traditional German hermeneuts, working under Soviet supervision and before the theoretical revolution in literary studies, after thirty years of deconstruction, it is difficult to imagine

anyone today accepting in an unproblematic fashion the idea that Engels's inscriptions transparently represent Marx's intentions. What would a new edition of *Die deutsche Ideologie*, one that sought to take into account some of these complications, even look like? Do we in the west yet possess the hermeneutic protocols and bibliographical techniques necessary to explain such complex intersubjective and collaborative processes? How would one represent the striated, three dimensional space of the text – the axes of 1) narrative and argument, 2) drafting and rearrangement of the manuscript, and 3) multiple authorship? As it turns out, the Japanese Marx scholar Wataru Hiromatsu has tried to create such a document in his 1974 edition of the “Feuerbach” chapter. In the original German language, and including commentary in Japanese, Hiromatsu's edition uses various typographical techniques and footnote apparatuses to indicate the three aforementioned textual axes of the manuscript. However, while Hiromatsu's is an incredible bibliographical and editorial accomplishment, it still does not solve the problem of establishing intentionality. Indeed, it might be said to add to the text still another author, namely Hiromatsu himself. As Terrell Carver points out in his consideration of Hiromatsu's work, the “degree of collaboration” between Marx and Engels suggests that, despite Hiromatsu's labours, “[i]deas cannot be ascribed to one author or another, as they may have been held independently before composition, they may have arisen in mutual exchange, or they may have been adopted by one or the other on reading their separate contributions as the progressed” (1998, 105). Moreover, and like almost everyone before him, Hiromatsu deals only with the “Feuerbach” chapter, and fails to situate it in the context either of *The German Ideology* as a whole or of the polemics with Bauer and Stirner. In the case of *The German Ideology* at any rate, it

would seem that the more sophisticated or complex editorial techniques become, the more impossible becomes the hermeneutic fantasy of reconstructing an author's animating intention or original message.

About a year after making what appears to have been one more effort to have it published in the summer of 1846 (Marx to Leske, 1 August 1846), Marx finally did abandon *The German Ideology* to "the gnawing criticism of the mice." Nor was this claim merely a figure of speech. While it sat among Marx's papers mice bored holes through the manuscript, causing quite a bit of damage, and saddling Marx's editors with the unenviable task of reconstructing portions of the text that only hungry rodents had properly digested. Much latter, after the death of Marx's daughter Jenny, the ethical Marxist and German Social Democrat Eduard Bernstein would gain control of the Marx archive. He did not immediately recognize the significance of the opening "Feuerbach" chapter, although he did allow portions of "The Leipzig Council" to be published in 1903 and 1904. Bernstein also, as the communist editors of both *MEGA* and the English *Collected Works* are sure to note, crossed out sections of the text, leaving it still more illegible than before. Always aware of the political implications of their work, Marx's communist editors take the opportunity to intervene in the struggle between their Party and the German Social Democrats, swiping at Bernstein and ascribing all sorts of nefarious motives to his failure to publish the text in its entirety. It is, they suggest, certainly suspicious that a Social Democrat, a self-described "revisionist" committed to ethical and evolutionary Marxism, would fail to release the one work in which Marx so clearly outlines his scientific and revolutionary approach. However, one might reply, it is equally suspicious of Marx's communist editors to take this excessive, overwhelming

text, and to position it as, in their own words, “a comprehensive exposition of the materialist conception of history,” or a Marxist science that can be reconstructed “in accordance with the intentions of Marx and Engels” (*CW* 5, 588-9). Without denying the great accomplishments of Marx’s official editors, both German and English, the claim that the “intentions” of *The German Ideology* can be reduced to the introductory chapter, and even further to a signal phrase (namely “historical materialism,” a phrase that is found neither in that chapter nor in any of Marx’s writing), is questionable to say the least. Indeed, it is hard to imagine anyone believing that this morass of citations and references, inscriptions and erasures, consultations and collaborations, speculations and hypotheses, might contain even a coherent thesis or consistent argument, let alone a singular, tremendously unique and world historical scientific theory. And yet, with the possible exceptions of the *Communist Manifesto* and selected portions of the first volume of *Capital*, the first chapter of *The German Ideology* has probably been the most important reference for all of the many attempts to construct Marxism as a materialist science of social relations.

What is required, then, is not a return to the text of *The German Ideology* in search of its true intentions, but a reevaluation of the editorial and bibliographical practices that assume such things exist in the first place (including the practices of Marx and Engels themselves). In recent years, precisely such a task has been taken up by the new bibliographers, most notably Jerome McGann. Perhaps no other text in the entire tradition better corroborates McGann’s central thesis – namely that, “[a]s the process of textual transmission expands, whether vertically (over time) or horizontally (in institutional space), the signifying process of the work becomes increasingly

collaborative and socialized" (1991, 58). What is more, *The German Ideology*, and especially "The Leipzig Council – III. Saint Max," is also explicitly *about* such a process of "socialization." In other words, this manuscript that has been so heavily "socialized," so widely disseminated and exchanged, worked over and manipulated by a whole host of authors and editors, also argues very explicitly that all meaning and all value are the product of social relations (*Verhältnis*) and symbolic exchange (*Verkehr*) in the broadest possible sense – that, *pace* Stirner and his fellow egoists, meaning and value cannot possibly be the property (*Eigenthum*) of an isolated individual (*der Einzige*), as they require that others exist before and around me, and that I come to know who I am through my relations and exchanges with those others. That is to say, the editorial history of *The German Ideology* is a performative – *mise en abyme*, a play within the play of *The German Ideology* itself. It does what the text says. It constitutes a kind of collective, intersubjective and transhistorical enactment of Marx's and Engels's principle argument. The work has not only produced a variety of interpretations, and thus become the scene of countless exegetical divisions. The manuscript itself, the material object, has also been worked over by a plurality of writers, readers, and editors, and thus become, not a science of history or transparent intention, but a kind of *res publicus* or open space of discourse and debate, struggle and antagonism. Attempting to take these ambiguities into account, or to show the manner in which they return to destabilize every reading, every account, and every effort to, as Marx himself put when reflecting on *The German Ideology*, "settle accounts" (*SW* 390) does not, as critics of deconstruction suggest, amount to denying the possibility of reading or of understanding what has been read. On the contrary, looking into such complexities might be the minimal condition of any reading – the minimal

condition, that is to say, of *reading* a text, as opposed to reducing it in a systematic fashion to a unified “meaning” or “intention” that ostensibly speaks through it.

Partly in response to the controversy over the discovery of Paul de Man’s wartime journalism, and the related rejuvenation of the so-called “Heidegger affair,” the final decade of the twentieth century saw the emergence and rapid expansion of a discourse on the ethics and the politics of deconstruction. At the expense of the kind of close reading still pursued by Derrida himself, those interested in deconstruction have struggled for about a decade over the relative merits of historical versus theoretical practices. Thus figures such as Ernesto Laclau and Slavoj Žižek have insisted on the necessity of theory, claiming that the imperative to historicize is itself a theoretical position (one among many). On the opposite side of the debate, people like Judith Butler and Anna Marie Smith claim that theory, and especially psychoanalytic theory, must itself be historicized – that it is not neutral, but emanates from a particular social and historical location within a very rigid power structure. The historicists call for, as Smith puts it, “concrete empirical research” (1998, 80), especially research into the history of marginalized subjects. Theorists, on the other hand, believe it is more important to construct “a theoretical horizon whose abstractions are not merely analytical but *real* abstractions on which the constitution of identities and political articulation depends” (Laclau 2000, 87). The difference is, in many ways, another iteration of the debate between Gramsci’s absolute historicism and Althusser’s theoretical practices. Regardless, the debate was perhaps most exhaustively pursued in a series of polemics exchanged between Žižek and Butler during the 1990s – beginning with Butler’s very critical review of *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, republished in her influential *Bodies that Matter*, and culminating in Žižek’s

equally critical rebuke of Butler in *The Ticklish Subject*. Very simply put, Žižek and Butler disagree over the status of “the Real” in Lacan’s system. Žižek argues that, for Lacan, “the Real” configures the non-symbolic and pre-ideological limit of all discourse and of society in general – the impossible, unthinkable register of psychosis and absolute loss. Less interested in getting Lacan right than in appropriating his ideas for her own political project, Butler suggests that “the Real” represents a social space that remains densely inhabited by excluded or abjected “others” – marginalized groups and individuals who lead very real lives, but who have little or no access to the mechanisms of social power. If, for Butler, the aim of deconstruction is in some sense to recognize those who have been excluded (recognize them without seeking to normalize them), or to create a history for those who have been denied a voice, for Žižek it is to liberate the chaos of the Real – to allow, even if only for a revolutionary instant, complete disorder or a world without any identity whatsoever to emerge, and in doing so to reconfigure every identity, even to think subjectivity otherwise. The latter project, Žižek well knows, is doomed. But, he maintains, freedom consists in repeatedly experiencing this very moment of doom – in experiencing the loss of one’s sense that something essential has been lost, or that something true has been obscured by an illusion, and thus in glimpsing the real truth that it is nothing other than our sense of loss or of deprivation that is the illusion. These debates, convoluted and complex as they are, will not end any time soon. To them I would only add that, along with both theoretical and historical practices, it is important not to forget reading and writing, the meticulous analysis of textual detail, or what might be called textual practices.

Commentators have yet to point out that the polemic against Bauer and Stirner developed in "The Leipzig Council" (and thus the vast majority of *The German Ideology*) very explicitly addresses the question of reading and writing. Partly as a way of poking fun at Stirner, whose "real" alter ego Johann Kaspar Schmitt is a "parochial Berlin school-master," the rhetoric of pedagogy and of the schoolroom resounds throughout the text. And on one level "The Leipzig Council" is generically framed as a reading lesson. Marx and Engels impishly set out to teach the young Hegelians both the hermeneutic practice of analyzing a text line by line, from beginning to end, or in its entirety, and the deconstructive practice of undermining a text from within, or on the basis of the resources that the text itself provides. They begin by berating Bauer for his meager response to *The Holy Family*. They accuse Bauer of failing to read their book (failing to do his homework), and of relying instead on a single review of their book (a kind of Cole's Notes approach). "All his quotations," Marx and Engels point out, referring to Bauer's reply to their *The Holy Family*, "are quoted from passages in *Das Westphälische Dampfbboot* and apart from this nothing is quoted" (115). After establishing Bauer's resistance to reading or refusal to read, Marx and Engels then cite the famous passage from the "Preface" to Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* – the one in which Hegel castigates modern philosophers for believing it best, in his words, "to trust common sense and, for the rest, in order to keep up with the times and advance with philosophy, to read *reviews* of philosophical works, perhaps even their *prefaces* and introductory paragraphs; for these latter [supposedly] give the principles on which everything turns" (116). In this context, the meticulously close reading of Stirner that takes up "The Leipzig Council – III. Saint Max," a text that has always caused perplexity among Marx commentators and

that most have deemed excessive and unnecessary, might begin to make some sense. If, led by Bauer, the Young Hegelians have forgotten how to read, then Marx and Engels will remind them in “The Leipzig Council – III. Saint Max.” Thus the polemic against Stirner takes the form of an obsessively close line by line reading of *The Ego and Its Own*, stretching on for almost as many pages as the original text, and repeating its structure in exact detail. Here again the structure of the text reinforces the key theme of repetition – or rather, of repetition and difference, iteration and alteration. On the one hand, Marx’s and Engels’s text is true to Stirner’s. It provides an accurate or felicitous representation of Stirner’s argument. On a number of occasions it even clarifies Stirner’s argument. Thus it fulfils its hermeneutic responsibilities. But on the other hand, “The Leipzig Council – III. Saint Max” is also a parody of Stirner, one that constantly turns the logic of *The Ego and Its Own* back on *The Ego and Its Own*. Thus it performs a deconstructive task. Marx and Engels write, in this sense, with two hands – indeed, including Hess, Weydemeyer, and so many others, *The German Ideology* is written in a multitude of hands.

Understood as a reading lesson, at one and the same time serious and full of mirth, “The Leipzig Council” ceases to be a historical anomaly of interest only to those obsessed with the details of Marx’s intellectual development, and becomes instead a text that reads “us,” and addresses today’s readers (and non-readers) of Marx directly. At the very least it points to a curious irony, one that has persisted throughout the history of Marx scholarship. For it is precisely this section of *The German Ideology* – this extended lesson in how to read closely and carefully, following both hermeneutic and deconstructive protocols – that students of Marx have almost all *failed* to read. Virtually

without exception Marx commentators have ignored "The Leipzig Council." Marx editors have occasionally gone so far as to excise it from the text completely. Thus even contemporary scholars read Marx and Engels without paying the slightest bit of attention to the one place where Marx and Engels themselves go out of their way to provide extensive instruction in the practice of reading. In this extremely telling sense, the resistance to reading that one finds among Marx scholars and editors grows particularly powerful when it comes to (not reading) a text in which Marx and Engels explicitly condemn the resistance to reading among the Young Hegelians – condemn, that is to say, the Young Hegelians for failing to read them. At the same time, if Marx and Engels endeavor to teach this very serious lesson, and if in this matter their pedagogy is more than a little heavy handed, they also and at the same time go out of their way to lampoon their opponent's pedantic style. Indeed, as suggested above, the rhetoric of pedagogy that permeates "The Leipzig Council" forms part of the parody of Johann Kaspar Schmidt – the real person behind Max Stirner who, in his real life, is a teacher at a Berlin school for girls. Thus Stirner is set up as both a teacher (of Szelgia, another pseudonymous Young Hegelian) and a student (of Hegel, whom he claims to have surpassed). More precisely, Stirner is characterized as a particularly bad teacher, because he offers instruction only through rote repetition, and as a particularly bad student because he operates by imitating or copying his teacher's work and trying to pass it off as his own. In keeping with this theme of pedagogy, Marx and Engels go so far as to deliver a mock lecture entitled "Instructions in the Rudiments of Ghost Seeing" (160) – again a parody of Stirner's work. The strategy is as clever as it is effective. Because their own pedantic tone is constructed as a parody of Stirner's, Marx and Engels never have to answer for it. Rather,

they can operate in a clandestine fashion, disguised at all times behind the absurdly serious tone of, as they put it, “the solemn ‘Max Stirner’” (169).

There is, of course, any number of reasons not to read “The Leipzig Council.” It is complex, prolix, even clumsy and incomplete. It deals with more or less non-canonical figures whom few people know or care much about, and with debates that seem to be located in the distant past. It is extraordinarily ornate and rhetorical, demanding its reader possess knowledge of a whole range of arcane and elliptical topics. But through all of that complexity and prolixity, it still articulates one clear injunction – read. For the authors of *The German Ideology* a willingness to read, and to engage in the hard labour of reading, is a minimal condition of political discourse, whether that discourse is in search of rational consensus, or whether it is a pitched polemical battle among bitter enemies. Reading is, in the republican sense, a minimal condition of the *res publicus*. Of course, as seen in the previous chapter, reading this text in particular (which also means clarifying the various intellectual history and political contexts of the *Vormärz* period) takes a bit of work. In a post-Marxist world, where it is no longer necessary to ascribe prophetic powers to Marx, or to view him as the herald and sole progenitor of a radically new science of society, it finally becomes possible to demystify the old story that *The German Ideology* breaks with or inverts idealism, and to suggest that an investigation of previously overlooked complexities can make Marx’s work relevant today. But beyond the hermeneutic labour of reconstructing certain historical contexts and philosophical claims, the persistent attack on “The Leipzig Council” among Marx commentators – the refusal to see it as anything more than excessive embellishment or a wasteful squandering of intellectual reserves – is, I contend, symptomatic of a much broader repudiation of the

kind of discourse it represents. It is symptomatic of a very widespread and almost unavoidable desire to control, contain, and regulate this textual economy or this mode of discursive production. That is to say, "The Leipzig Council" is the target of such scorn and irritation because it represents such an excess and a surplus – a surplus production of text. What is significant about "The Leipzig Council," and what many possess a vested interest in concealing, is not that Marx and Engels invert idealism or oppose it to materialism, but that they articulate this defense of "real life" and their attack on "false consciousness" in the midst of such a densely rhetorical, ornate work – a polemic that is also a parody, and that gets assembled almost entirely out of references, not only to left Hegelian philosophy, but also to painting, theatre, and poetry, to folklore and fairy tales, to Christian hagiography and Biblical prophesy, to Shakespeare's *Timon of Athens* and Cervantes's *Don Quixote*, to traditional masques and classical music, to Hellenic Greece and modern Germany, to Aristotelian and Hegelian philosophy, and to a whole range of humanistic learning, scholarship, and culture that extends virtually ad infinitum. "The Leipzig Council" is not so much a unified intention to be recovered or received as it is a colossal mechanical assemblage of citations and allusions, allegories and images, figures and tropes – passages that lead elsewhere, outside of the text, beyond its borders, in myriad directions and toward myriad purposes.

It should be made clear that by singling out "The Leipzig Council" I am not ascribing to it any unique status, but instead privileging this particular kind of text – by Marx, to be sure, but by others as well. Here is a text designed to overwhelm the reader, never allowing for a hermeneutic fusion of horizons, but relentlessly producing a kind of discursive surplus without reserve – what de Man calls "abyssal frames that engender

each other without end or *telos*" (1986, 60). Densely layered and ornate, "The Leipzig Council" can also generate a different theory of reading, and hence a different approach to itself, each time it is read. Like Joseph Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* and Cervantes's *Don Quixote* (both of which, as I have noted in passing, Marx admired greatly, and read throughout his life [Mehring 1966, 503-5]), it makes an explicit theme of its own prolixity, and of the insufficiencies that attend any practice of reading or writing. Above all else, "The Leipzig Council" is a comic text, always eliciting laughter, often very cruel and mean-spirited laughter, at the powerful and at those who unwittingly support them. Like so much of Marx's rhetoric and so many of his best works (a comprehensive study of Marx's humor, of his acerbic and stunningly accurate wit, is still waiting to be written), it endeavors to create solidarity among the weak and the suffering through its dry, droll, but also viciously humorous castigation of the powerful. But it is also a parody, and most of its cruelty comes from the well timed repetition of the enemy's own sentiments and language. In this sense, its cruelty is not really attributable to Marx alone, as it merely exposes the cruelty of those it attacks, or those who would deny the emotional complexity of both social relations and individual desire. No one who has read "The Leipzig Council" could possibly perceive Marx to be a humorless technocrat or grim social engineer. The text both describes and enacts the pleasure of excesses, the great joy of the surplus – of ornamentation and elaboration, digression and deviance. Stylistically at any rate, "The Leipzig Council" has more in common with Burton or Borges than it does with Hobbes or Locke. In the categorizing terms of art history, it is more Baroque than it is Neo-Classical or Romantic. How much more surprising, then, that after being uncovered from the Marx archives and finally published under the

supervision of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, this work – *The German Ideology* – would become the basis, not only for so many subsequent theories of ideology, but also for the so-called “science” of historical materialism. And how much more tragic that this prodigious literary text, a work that delights in excess and ornament, and that calls on its readers to do the same, would come to form the foundation for so many of the most rigid scientific and political orthodoxies to emerge in a century that will doubtless be remembered for its insatiable, destructive quest for the orthodox.

The reading lesson taught in “The Leipzig Council” is pedantic, then, and even didactic. It parodies the pedantic and didactic style of its targets. But it is not dogmatic. In its rhetorical excess, its overwhelming intertextuality, and its collaborative or, to recall McGann’s terms, “socialized” composition, it configures the *impossibility* of reading as well – the sense in which every reading is partial and limited, and every text open to a plurality of interpretations. A text like “The Leipzig Council” belies all efforts to isolate the unified intention that ostensibly animates it from without and from beyond the grave. Thus it was destined to add very little, almost nothing, to the colossal project of reconstructing Marx’s texts as a Marxist science. For the same reason, to focus on this text in particular, but also on Marx’s writing in general (the operation of his text as opposed to what it supposedly describes or intends), is to risk or even summon the charge of “idealism.” It is to risk being accused of reducing material conditions of existence, economic conditions in particular, to hermetic problems of reading and interpretation. But the surgical excision of “The Leipzig Council” from Marx’s body of work performed by so many readers, commentators, and editors is precisely an economic question. It reenacts the logic of capital, and does so precisely as Marx and Engels describe that

logic. It involves an attempt to reign in and control what, in the *Communist Manifesto*, Marx and Engels call an “epidemic of overproduction” (SW 226). Just as capital periodically destroys its own overproduction in order to maintain price levels and secure the value of property, the elimination of “The Leipzig Council” and texts like it involves an attempt to limit and even destroy an almost mechanically produced surplus that seems to threaten the full value of his “proper” body of work. Thus the excesses of Marx’s rhetoric must be eliminated so as to preserve the (falsely inflated) price of his method or his science – the textual remainder that he truly intended his followers to transform into a systematic description of social reality. But, just as, even when highly regulated, capitalist economies are characterized by serial crises, with slightly altered viral forms of the epidemic of overproduction returning at unpredictable intervals, so too does Marx’s rhetoric come back in cycles and refuse to be stabilized. Like a machine his texts relentlessly manufacture new associations and articulations – new theories and practices, new heuristic possibilities and polemical weapons to be put to use in new contexts and in the inexhaustible, interminable struggle for justice.

The Marx-Machine

In the final few pages of *Allegories of Reading*, Paul de Man introduces a distinction between the “text as body” and the “text as machine,” one that maps onto a related methodological distinction between hermeneutics and deconstruction. At a certain point in the history of literary criticism, or in his own development as a literary critic (de Man is not clear which), “[t]he text as body, with all its implications of substitutive tropes always retracable to metaphor, is displaced by the text as machine” (1979, 298). According to de Man, the first model (the body-text) corresponds to the hermeneutic view, or the approach that understands texts as metaphorical detours en route to some determined, non-textual referent, whether it is the internal intention of the author or an external object in the world. The second model (the machine-text) corresponds to the deconstructive approach, or the approach that treats texts as a series of substitutions – not references to objects and intentions, but catachrestic chains of supplements for always already absent origins, or what Derrida dubs a “trace” (1982, 21). As de Man quips elsewhere, “the ultimate aim of the hermeneutically successful reading is to do away with reading altogether” (1986, 56) – to collapse the text, through a series of recognized protocols, into its referent, and to treat it, not on its own or as a piece of writing, but as a sign for something else. In hermeneutics, de Man insists, the text is a representation of a non-textual phenomenon. In deconstruction it is an articulation of other texts. More elaborately, in the hermeneutic model, where reading and writing are conceived of as processes that lead towards the self-understanding of an individual subject, each individual writer’s production is thought to constitute an internally coherent and complete

body of work – a body of work that, as it were, metaphorically represents or stands in for another, more original idea. Thus from Herder and Schleiermacher to Dilthey and Collingwood, the assumption that writing is an expression or an externalization of a subject's inner life (*Erlebnis*) or individual intention, and that reading involves reconstructing that original, animating intention on the basis of its textual remains, is central to the hermeneutic project. But for de Man, once machine-texts displace body-texts, once the deconstructive approach displaces hermeneutics, writing can no longer be understood as a system of intentionality, representation, and semantics. It must be reconfigured as a practice of assemblage – a practice undertaken by writers and readers, and an ongoing process that folds the interpretation into that which it interprets. That is to say, in the deconstructive model outlined by de Man, texts are no longer thought to be containers of fixed or animating intentions that precede them, but extremely complex, intertextual assemblages of references and citations, figures and tropes, genres and styles. What were once treated as messages to be received or encrypted codes to be deciphered now become ornate rhetorical productions – mechanical productions that (always already) overwhelm the limits of their original intention and their original context. As a result, de Man concludes, texts “suffer the loss of the illusion of meaning” (1979, 298). They lose the illusion of a single meaning so as to acquire the potential for infinite interpretations.

Since the posthumous revelation of de Man's wartime collaborationist journalism and the ensuing controversy, this question of reading, of whether texts have fixed intentions and whether a reader can accurately reconstruct those intentions, has taken on a far more urgent ethical and political dimension. The result has been a *détente* of sorts in

what were once a rather caustic methodological debate between deconstruction and hermeneutics (cf. Michelfelder and Palmer 1989). Derrida in particular has responded to questions about ethics, a task he takes up most candidly in his more or less impromptu "Afterword" to *Limited Inc.* The meaning of a text or a discourse, Derrida stresses in that discussion, is not arbitrary but undecidable. Against those who view it as nihilistic or even crypto-fascist, Derrida now maintains that deconstruction has always been about justice, and is even synonymous with justice. Ethics is not undermined but conditioned by the insufficiencies and the undecidability associated with reading and with textuality. That is to say, the experience of reading in a deconstructive fashion, of affirming the radical alterity of the text and the other who has written it, is analogous to the "ordeal of undecidability" that first makes ethical decisions possible – an ordeal that distinguishes ethics as the taking of uncertain decisions from both deontological duty and teleological fulfillment, and that distinguishes justice from the programmatic application of law and the appeasement of one's good conscience (1988, 148). Thus for Derrida it is precisely by refusing the hermeneutic model that deconstruction articulates justice. For the hermeneutic model ultimately reduces the alterity of the other to the identity of the same. Its goal is the establishment of consensus (Habermas) or reciprocity (Gadamer), even if only as a regulative ideal in the Kantian sense. But to read in a deconstructive fashion is, in Levinasian terms, to be exposed to the radical even infinite alterity of the other. Whatever else one might say about it, this new conception of deconstruction as ethics or as an ethical encounter dramatically changes the practices and methods previously associated with Derrida and, perhaps even more so, de Man. The idea that texts are machines that produce myriad interpretations gets transformed into the much less

materialistic, and quasi-mystical notion that texts are like specters. In this sense, it is not difficult to trace the emergence in Derrida's writing and in that of his followers of a entirely new rhetoric of "deferral" – not the one associated with Derrida's non-concept of difference, but a certain genteel etiquette of deferral or of passive deference. Where there was once a polemical edge to Derrida's work, an incision that violently cut into the texts under consideration, there is now an infinite generosity and amicability. Derrida has, in fact, become the great eulogizer of his generation, seeking posthumously to heal wounds with figures who, during their lives, he and his followers submitted to the most meticulous critiques – Althusser, Lacan, Deleuze, Levinas, and even Foucault now being claimed by the onetime "arche-debunker" as close personal friends, and the polemical edge of deconstruction being increasingly blunted by an almost wistful irenics.

Even as deconstruction, as it were, traded the figure of the machine for that of the specter, the discourse on the body regained ground within cultural theory. Thus a thinker like John O'Neill can be found deliberately inverting a familiar Derridian phrase, and championing instead Marx's "complete rejection of the *metaphysics of absence*" (1995, 103) – his critique of alienation, and of those discourses and practices that tend to conceal our historical, material, embodied existence. Alienation is, of course, a deeply problematic concept, as it seems to require that one posit a state of pure plentitude and original presence – a natural, authentic, or true body, from which humanity has been estranged and to which it must return, or an ideal body that is both *arche* and *telos*, beginning and end. The same metaphor of cyclical return or entelechy is at the root of the hermeneutic idea that texts deliver messages, and that the purpose of reading is to return to or reanimate an author's original animating intentions. It is possible, however, without

invoking the traditional theory of alienation, to think the body otherwise – neither as an ontological given, nor as the corrupted image of an ideal, but as the effect of complex practices of regulation and control, resistance and affirmation. Here bodies are, as it were, always already worked over by external forces, inscribed within mechanical structures from the outset. But for the same reason, they can always be assembled otherwise – rearranged and reconfigured for different purposes and new projects. What emerges is a kind of cyborgian body-machine or, as Deleuze and Guattari put it, a “*machinic assemblage* of bodies” (1987, 88). It is not a question of separating one from the other, of distinguishing between bodies and machines, but of investigating the irreducibly complex articulation of the two – the sense in which, from the very beginning and without exception, bodies are the (very real, material) effects of prosthetic supplements. To point out that the body is mechanically assembled, and that one cannot think the body without the machine, is not to reduce it to the machine, much less to replace it with the machine. Rather, it is to suggest that, once it is no longer defined in relation to an alienated origin and a teleological ideal, the body becomes something multiple or polymorphous. Indeed, it is no longer possible to think or to write of or on “the” body, as it is always already a question of multiple bodies.

Now, Derrida’s turn towards the language of specters and haunting certainly helps him articulate his continued interest in Heidegger, temporality, and the problem of death. It provides him with a language to write about the themes of finitude and alterity, mourning and loss – themes to which he turned following de Man’s death, and in the wake of the de Man affair. The figure of the specter also allows Derrida to develop his interest in the relationship between writing and death, or the sense in which to inscribe a

mark is to presage one's final disappearance – to carve, as it were, one's own tombstone. But in the case of Marx, where he applies the figure of the specter and the rhetoric of mourning most aggressively, it may not be the most successful approach. It is one thing to point out, as Derrida does, that while Marx is today a specter, “a ghost never dies” but “always remains to come and come-back” (1994, 99). It is one thing to suggest that Marx's ghost looms around waiting to spook anyone who thinks they might forget the history and the promise that his name represents. It is, however, quite another thing to claim that Marx's texts are both bodies and machines, and that they can be put to use in the here and now – that there is a Marx-machine that consists of a concrete assemblage of speech acts, language games, or rhetorical weapons, and that these weapons can be mobilized in previously unpredictable ways and for previously unheard of purposes.

In *Specters of Marx* Derrida goes so far as to assert that “the figure of the ghost is not just one figure among others” but “perhaps the hidden figure of all figures” (1994, 120). Whether or not there is a figure of all figures, I propose approaching Marx's text, not with the figure of the specter, but with Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the machine – both the “war machine” they discuss in *A Thousand Plateaus*, and the “desiring machines” they consider in *Anti-Oedipus*. If Derrida focuses his attention on Marx's “spectropoetics,” I will develop instead a theory of Marx's mechanopoetics. For Deleuze and Guattari, it should be made very clear, the figure of the machine does not in any way connote technocratic efficiency and cold instrumental rationality. By activating the rhetoric of the machine, Deleuze and Guattari are certainly recalling and even appealing to the mechanistic materialism of the Enlightenment, the French Enlightenment in particular. They take the side of the materialists against, for instance, Kant, who feared

they threatened moral freedom and especially the subject's capacity for judgment. But the machine that interests Deleuze and Guattari is one that is effective, productive, or creative because it is inefficient and because it is an assemblage of components that are constantly coming apart. Thus it is crucial to realize that, for Deleuze and Guattari, "machines work only when they break down, and by continually breaking down" (1983, 8), and that machines connect with one another at the point of disruption. "Every machine," Deleuze and Guattari maintain, "functions as a break in the flow in relation to the machine to which it is connected, but at the same time is also a flow itself [...] in relation to the machine connected to it" (36). The idea, then, is to consider Marx's texts, not as a homogenous body of work, nor as a structure shorn in two by a single, monumental break, but as a complex, composite assemblage of fissures and cracks, ruptures and cuts – a Marx-machine. In this sense Marx's text is also a war machine. It is, in Deleuze's and Guattari's terms, "[a] thought grappling with exterior forces instead of being gathered up in an interior form; operating by relays instead of forming a [completed] image" (1987, 378). It is not an internally coherent, organically developing order, but a system of relays – citations and references beyond itself and to still other texts and contexts, all of which can be taken apart and assembled differently through countless readings and writings. While it is not reducible to his intentions, the concept of the Marx-machine is still related to Marx's own practices as a reader and a writer. As Thomas Kemple points out in his work on the *Grundrisse*, Marx writes at the intersection of countless readings – he "reads as he writes and writes as he reads" (1995, 65). If the figure of the machine conveys this practice of assemblage, of Marx actively piecing together components, and of his readers doing the same in turn, that of the specter does

not. Nor does the specter really capture the sense in which Marx's writing is both productive and dangerous, or the sense in which it tears into the world with a polemical violence that must at all times be negotiated.

It is not so much specters that emerge from Marx's monumental literary remains or estate (*Nachlass*) as it is machines, or a machine producing machines. Repetitive, fragmented, and circuitous as they are, manuscripts such as "The Leipzig Council" seem to operate like machines – not organically unfolding a unified argument, but articulating a series of clefts, cuts, skips, breaks, and jumps. Like Marx's *Grundrisse* (a gigantic machine-text that is also explicitly a text about machines and factories), "The Leipzig Council" assembles together a complex network of citations and commentaries, figures and tropes – never resting with final or conclusive statements, but always referring the reader through a relays system to something other or something else. Picking up on de Man's use of the word, one could argue that "The Leipzig Council" is "allegorical" in the precise sense. It is *allos agoria* or other speaking. It is an open space – a republican agora or forum – where others, friend and enemies, meet and speak. Moreover, it is, and again in de Man's sense, an "allegory of reading," in that so much of its argument is taken up with a reflection on what it means to writing and to read – how, *pace* Stirner, reading and writing are irreducibly public experiences, and how they cannot be comprehended as the property of a unique ego, but presuppose the existence of particular social relations, intercourse and exchange, commerce and traffic (*Verkehr*). If Marx's texts are mechanical in this sense, so too was Marx himself. Or rather, if Marx's texts constitute "war machines," Marx himself was a prolific "desiring machine." In his *Understanding Marx*, Richard Paul Wolff notes that, even after restricting the field to Marx's work on

political economy, “we have, at a conservative estimate, five thousand pages of theoretical material.” Little wonder, then, that the *MEGA* project remains unfinished to this day. “There is not,” Wolff continues, “in the whole history of Western thought, a similar body of writing by a single author – not the three *Critiques* of Kant, not the works of Hegel, not even the *Summa* of Thomas Aquinas” (1984, 1). Unlike the other figures Wolff mentions, however, Marx was not a professional intellectual. He was, like many of his generation, a gifted graduate student who, owing to large scale restructuring of state institutions under the reactionary regime of Friedrich Wilhelm IV, found himself unable to secure an academic position, and forced to piece together a living as a freelance journalist. Spending most of his life in exile, amidst notorious financial and physical hardship, Marx was nonetheless driven by a relentless desire to write – one matched only by figures such as de Sade or Nietzsche, Kafka or Joyce, none of whom held academic positions for any length of time either. Like such figures, Marx was not so much a writer as he was a writing machine. Unlike such figures, though, limiting the overproduction of the Marx-machine, reducing it to a unified intention or a rational science, has had very real, and often very tragic, social and political effects.

At the same time, it is important not to lose sight of the manner in which the Marx-machine is also an embodied machine – a cyborg. Jean-Francois Lyotard was perhaps the first commentator to suggest that Marx’s name does not so much represent a coherent body of work as it does a boundless, impossible desire to assemble such a body – a “desire named Marx” (1993, 102). Lyotard is also among the first to suggest that commentators put aside their errant quest for the “Truth” of Marx, and begin instead “to treat him as a ‘work of art’” (96). To be sure, such claims do not sit well with Marxists,

or with those committed, even today, to doing something with Marx's text, rather than simply acknowledging its complexity. But I would like to suggest that Lyotard's reading is limited, not because it begins to treat Marx as a desiring body and as a work of art, but because it refrains from taking the next step. Marx is not only a desiring body whose frustration is his *jouissance*, or who desperately wants what he cannot have precisely because he cannot have it (justice, completion, freedom, reason). He is also what Deleuze and Guattari call a "desiring machine" – a machine constantly making and breaking connections with other machines, inaugurating and interrupting flows and relays. The colossal assemblage of writing that Marx left behind, his literary estate, represents not so much a thwarted desire to complete a body, or what Lyotard calls a "desire named Marx," as it does an incredible overproduction of text – an epidemic of overproduction, a mechanical excess, or a surplus named Marx. It is almost as though Marx's style as a writer was infected by the operation of the machines and the factories he studied so closely. He overproduced text far in excess of what any reader could possibly consume, making the hermeneutic reconstruction of intentions, at least as it is traditionally understood, quite simply impossible. Indeed, excessiveness was a crucial component of Marx's style. In the polemical works in particular, his rhetorical weapon of choice was *pleonexia*, or the strategy of overwhelming one's opponent with the excess of one's reply.

Marx's prodigious output and obsessive approach to his work is only matched by that of his editors. The editors of the so aptly nicknamed *MEGA* project gathered together every scrap of paper Marx or Engels might have touched – this work, in their eyes, being not only of scholarly, but of world-historical, if not religious significance. Indeed, as

Althusser liked to point out when attacking what he called “the religious myth of reading” (1970, 17), or the idea that texts convey singular truths, the relationship between Marx scholarship and Biblical scholarship is not to be overlooked, very traditional hermeneutics being the dominant trend in both cases. In this context, it is interesting to note that the work of publishing the definitive edition of Marx’s and Engels’s writings in their original languages (they both wrote in more than one) has been halted on two occasions – first, by Stalin’s terror in the 1930s, when a number of leading Marx scholars were executed, and then by the collapse of the German Democratic Republic in the 1990s, soon after which an army of scholars stood up from their desks and left their work one day, never to return. The case of Marx and of the *MEGA* offers definitive proof, if proof be needed, that editing is politics by other means. Nor have the politico-editorial struggles over *The German Ideology* ceased since the collapse of the official communist movement. As Hiromatsu’s work suggests, a whole series of philological questions remain unanswered, especially with regard to the arrangement of the first few pages of the “Feuerbach” chapter. The confusion is doubtless part of the reason why *The German Ideology* is one of the works that the second edition of the *MEGA* was never released. Will, one wonders, a definitive version of this crucial text ever see the light of day?

If it is impossible to resurrect Marx’s body from his body of work, this does not mean that reading Marx is therefore impossible as well. On the contrary, the impossibility of completing Marx’s body of work is the condition for the possibility of any reading of him whatsoever – the condition for the possibility of building ever new Marx-machines. That is to say, unless the text were incomplete, unless there were fissures and gaps, lacuna and breaks, reading or actively interpreting the text would be unnecessary, as its

full meaning would be entirely transparent and self-evident. As evidenced by the editorial history of *The German Ideology* discussed above, even the most rigorous hermeneutic labour, the most genuine effort felicitously to reconstruct an author's intentions, involves important decisions about emphasis and organization, distribution and interpretation. Louis Althusser liked to point out that, as soon as truth is understood to involve production as well as representation, as soon as the construction of knowledge is recognized as a kind of labour, or as soon as theory is conceived of as a "theoretical practice" (which is to say, as soon as Marx arrives on the scene), it must be admitted that "there is no such thing as an innocent reading" (1970, 14). To read is always already to be partial and implicated. For Althusser, reading is not only the location, but also the dislocation (*décalage*) of a text. One knocks the text off its hinges or, as Derrida likes to put it, "out of joint" (1994, 18). Now when it comes to their readings of Marx, what Althusser and Derrida do not really explore is the manner in which the text itself is already dislocated and disjointed – that it is already a complex machine-text produced by an embodied text-machine. Nor do they explore the sense in which the text also returns to knock its reading or interpretation out of joint and off its hinges. As a result of the great labours of the editors and scholars involved in the still incomplete *MEGA* project, commentators have access to, among other things, a detailed account of what Marx was reading and working through (what machines he was engaging) literally on a month by month and often daily basis for the entirety of his adult life. In the special case of Marx, readers can examine the precise manner in which he assembled his war machines out of external sources. Of course, there can be no question here of saturating these contexts, and thereby reanimating Marx's buried intentions. But there are in this surplus of textual

remains countless components that might aid in the construction of ever new war machines – ever new Marx-machines.

While I will focus on the mechanical, the predominance of organic metaphors in Marx's text cannot go without comment. Marx likely gets the organic metaphor from Hegel, who in turn borrows it from two sources – first, the *Sturm und Drang* reaction against the mechanistic reason and instrumental rationality of the French Enlightenment, most notably Herder, and second, Aristotle. The impact of Aristotle's tendency to explain both natural and sociological processes in biological terms (potential, maturation, and decay) on German letters in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries would be difficult to overestimate. Hegel treated human history according to this model, and via Hegel so too did Marx. The "Preface" of the first volume of *Capital* begins by comparing the study of political economy to the study of biology, characterizing society as a "body" or an "organic whole" in which the "commodity-form" is an "economic cell-form" that can be submitted to the same kind of scrutiny as one finds in "microscopic anatomy" (C 12). The idea that a society is an organic whole, or a totality that unfolds in a rational and predictable manner, is, of course, far from unproblematic. It was, however, very widespread in the nineteenth century. Equally widespread in the eighteenth century was the notion that both the human body and the social body are machines – apparatuses that can be studied, regulated, and rationally administered. Both metaphors – the organic and the mechanical – can contribute to the worst possible outcomes, as both can be used to posit a single, totalizing and unified conception of human existence. Human society is neither a natural totality nor an artificial invention, but an infinitely complex, radically

indeterminate or “overdetermined” assemblage of practices and performances that no single metaphor can comprehend.

But if, in the case of Marx’s work, I privilege the figure of the machine, it is only to highlight the manner in which Marx’s texts insert themselves or get inserted into such an overdetermined assemblage. For the Marx-machine designates, not only a particular cluster of images and themes in Marx’s writing (the construction of machines with bodies, the treatment of machines as bodies, the assimilation of bodies into machines, and so forth), but also and perhaps more importantly the performative operation of his texts, and the performative operation of every reading of those texts. It designates the manner in which Marx’s texts not only speak of machines, but also function as machines. The figure of the Marx-machine attempts provisionally to set aside what Roland Barthes would call “readerly” concerns, or the business of passing judgment on how well or how poorly Marx’s texts represent a social reality that exists independently of them, so as to clear a space for what Barthes calls “writerly” questions – to address the manner in which Marx’s writing rhetorically performs or enacts what it purports to describe (1974, 4). At work in the Marx-machine, therefore, is not only the often very grim social reality that Marx’s texts depict, but also, and perhaps more importantly, the innumerable potential realities that those texts create. And it is the creative, productive, active side of Marx’s work that continues to inform political practices in the post-Marxist world – that continues to allow for the construction of new apparatuses, new assemblages, and new practices in the name of promise and a future (many futures) that remains to come.

Mechanomimesis / Copying Machines

It is a cliché, perhaps, to claim that Marx's work brings together three distinct and often contradictory intellectual traditions – specifically French socialism and materialism, British political economy and empiricism, and German historicism and philosophy. It is precisely the asymmetry between these traditions, the fact that Marx can only articulate them as a very fractured and unstable totality, that makes his work so polymorphous, and open to so many divergent interpretations. But while this claim is often repeated, it is rarely worked out in any detail. It is much more common to choose one of these traditions, and to explore how it influenced Marx's thinking. Very few look into the manner in which the differences and even antagonisms between these different schools of thought are actually constitutive of Marx's ideas and work. Marx was a prodigious reader, and while reading he constantly copied passages from texts into his notebooks. In an early letter to his father, Marx writes "I acquired the habit of making excerpts from all the books I read [...] and to jot down reflections on the side" (Karl Marx to Heinrich Marx, 10 November 1837). The habit would stick with him throughout his life. Thus there are scores of manuscripts and notebooks that consist exclusively of passages Marx copied out of texts and interspersed with commentary and reflections. If Marx was a prodigious reader, then, he was also a prodigious copier – a flesh and blood copying machine. Marx's copying went on long before any intention or systematic argument got superimposed over top of it. In this sense, his notebooks might be seen to represent a kind of intellectual unconscious, or an overdetermined array of images and texts very much akin to a dream. There is an intelligence behind them, but they do not have the order or

rigidity of what Freud liked to call “secondary process” thought, or the structure of the daytime ego. And indeed, as any graduate student will confirm, the experience of sitting in a library copying notes from texts is more than a little hypnotic. As the French and Latin languages attest, there is a certain madness involved in research, and a certain delirium associated with reading – to be in the furrow, the *lira*, of the text is also to be out of one’s head, or delirious. Marx spent much of his waking life in such a delirious state, toiling away in the British Museum, following the furrows of thousands, indeed tens and hundreds of thousands of pages of text. The experience could not have failed to alter him in profound ways. It could not not have constructed his identity otherwise. In this section, I will look at three specific figures Marx read and contemplated, one from each of the three aforementioned traditions. In order to build a new Marx-machine, I will not consider the familiar names (Fourier and Saint-Simon, Smith and Ricardo, Hegel and Feuerbach), but highlight instead marginal, previously unnoticed or only rarely noticed ones – the French physician and vehement materialist Julian Offray de La Mettrie, the British mathematician and political economist Charles Babbage, and the German writer and aesthetic theorist Friedrich Schiller. What might the Marx-machine have copied from these writers? What might he or it have copied from what they had to say *about machines*?

La Mettrie is among the chief representatives of the so-called “iatromechanical” school of anatomy. Some context will lead into a closer examination of his ideas. Prior to the seventeenth century, European physicians based their theory and their practice on the metaphysical systems of the scholastic philosophers. Relying on a Thomist reading of Aristotle, and following the work of Galen in particular, they generally claimed that the

human body houses a divine soul or, in Aristotelian terms, a “psyche,” and that this psyche instills the body with a formal order and directs it towards its final purpose. Now, modern science begins in the seventeenth century by rejecting the Aristotelian concepts of formal and final causes, and reducing causality to efficient cause, or the transferring of force from one object to another. In this context, Descartes’s separation of the mind and the body, the *res cogitas* and *res extensio*, represented a great advance for the empirical sciences. While Descartes himself was wary of such things, his work made it possible for physicians to treat the human body separately and as an empirical object – to dissect it, study it, examine its operation and its systems irrespective of speculations about the psyche or soul. And indeed, Descartes himself had engaged in this type of study, though he prudently restricted himself to the body of animals – whence his so-called “animal-machine.” Among the increasingly materialist physicians who followed Descartes, the barrier between animal and human bodies did not last long, nor did the effort to keep separate body and mind.

The generation following Descartes saw an explosion of anatomical research. By the end of the seventeenth century, and to put things in very broad terms, two schools of thought had emerged – the iatrochemical school, which had its roots in alchemy and viewed the human body as a collection of chemical processes, and the iatromechanical school, which treated the body as a system of mechanical and mathematical operations. While the former had the virtue of being able to explain the complexity of the body’s operation, especially the dynamic relationships between its organs, and would eventually win out over the latter (it returned, in a slightly modified form, toward the end of the eighteenth century), the iatromechanical approach caught the imagination of a generation

of intellectuals who were greatly impressed by Newton, and especially by his ability to explain natural phenomena according to mechanical laws. Physicians such as Lorenzo Bellini, Giovanni Alphonso Borelli, William Harvey, and Archibald Pitcairne all made some effort to explain the operation of the body according to mechanical and mathematical principles. If Newton could prove that nature is governed by mechanical laws, the iatromechanists reasoned, why could a similar set of laws not be shown to govern the operation of the human body – thereby making it possible to heal the body the same way that an engineer could build bridges, an astronomer could calculate the movement of the planets, or an artillery officer could shell a city?

During the first half of the eighteenth century, the iatromechanical school of anatomy became extremely popular in France and Belgium, where the empiricism and materialism of the new sciences were coupled with particularly virulent strains of atheism and political radicalism. The iatromechanical approach was especially appealing for those who sought completely to eliminate even the most minimal reference to or reliance on the concept of a soul, or a “vital force” that transcends or exceeds the strictly material operation of the body. Thus, while they tended to treat the body as a structure and not as a process, and therefore did not really possess the explanatory powers of the iatrochemists, the iatromechanists were more, as is said today, politically correct. That is to say, iatromechanical theories better articulated the French *philosophes* general contempt for the metaphysical systems, and the concomitant political systems, of the *ancien régime*. La Mettrie’s primary contribution to this debate was a book entitled *l’Homme-machine*, or *Man a Machine*, first published in 1748. In one sense, this text represents the pinnacle of iatromechanical thought. It sets out rigorously to reduce human existence, and

especially human consciousness or ideas, to physical and material reality. La Mettrie is completely contemptuous of the metaphysical systems, or Aristotelian forms, and of speculations on the human soul. On the other hand, Le Mettrie's *l'Homme-machine* represents an attempt to explain what causes the body's motions and operations on the basis of some kind of internal motivation. That is to say, prior to La Mettrie, the iatromechanists were interested in how the body's parts related to one another, and how they were influenced by external forces – all the while assuming the principle of efficient causality, and rejecting formal and final causes out of hand. But La Mettrie's work attempts to uncover or address internal motivations for the body's operation from within the purview of a materialist perspective. Thus, while he does not suggest for an instant that the body is animated by a spirit or Aristotelian psyche, while he insists that it is a purely mechanical object, La Mettrie nonetheless argues that “[t]he human body is a machine which winds its own springs” and that it is “the living image of perpetual motion” (1991 [1748], 93). Thus, with La Mettrie, questions of motion and internal motivation begin to creep back into discourses on the body, and on human anatomy.

In order to explain how the body is motivated, or how it “winds its own springs,” La Mettrie constructed a sophisticated theory of repetition and pleasure. According to its critics, the problem with the mechanistic world view was, of course, that it left little room for human morality, and thus human sociality. It explained everything in terms of natural facts, and, in a proto-positivist fashion, suggested that values do not pertain to the natural world. La Mettrie believed he could circumvent this criticism by arguing that morality is a question of repetition, or repeating the moral action of others, and that humans, like certain animals, engage in such repetition because it gives them a kind of pleasure. Thus,

for La Mettrie, “to be a machine and to know how to distinguish good from bad are no more contradictory than to be an ape or a parrot and to give oneself pleasure” (143). Humans replicate the moral (and, presumably, immoral) behavior of others, not because they are gifted with a divine or innate sense of the difference between good and bad, but because repetition is pleasurable. Humans, like apes and parrots, desire repetition – they are motivated by an internal compulsion to repeat. This does not mean that they will necessarily repeat the good actions of others, but it does explain why they act the way they do – their motivation.

The iatromechanical model could never really offer convincing arguments for what motivates the body’s dynamic operation. Anatomy would very quickly see the end of the iatromechanical school. Physicians would soon reinstate the distinction between the organic and the mechanical worlds, and to view the former as governed by chemical processes rather than mathematical laws. But the body that emerges on the other side of the iatromechanical caesura is very different from the body that precedes, and the difference is significant. By the second half of the eighteenth century, the attempt to explain the movement and dynamic operation of the body in terms of a single cause, whether it be a psyche, a soul, or simply a brain, was completely displaced. Physicians now saw motivation as something dispersed throughout the body, especially via the nervous system. Thus a physician like Thèophile Bordeu could observe that the body is motivated by clusters of nerves or ganglia, generally associated with particular organs. The image of the body that emerges, then, is not of a machine or an organism governed by a single brain, but of a decentered “federation of organs.” Motivation is no longer located in the psyche or the brain, but distributed throughout the body. Certain organs

have, as it were, a mind of their own. And certain motivations are unconscious or subconscious. The physical and emotional lives of human beings are related, and related in astonishing complex fashions. By the end of the eighteenth century, the body and the mind are no longer machines or organisms to be empirically examined and explained. They have once again become difficult questions, requiring new disciplines and methods (anthropology and psychology both emerge at this time), and attracting the attention of idealist philosophers as well as materialist scientists.

For his part, Marx was well aware of these debates, and of the extent to which eighteenth century materialism threatened to reduce human existence to mechanical and mathematical processes. He was well aware of the dangers or problems of an overly mechanistic world view – what, in their *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno would dub the “instrumental rationality” of much Enlightenment thinking. But he also quite correctly saw in La Mettrie’s work an approach that mitigated some of the alienating or dehumanizing effects of the mechanistic conception of the human body. The issue comes up, albeit rather elliptically, in *The Holy Family*. There Marx attempts to correct Bruno Bauer’s very partial and dismissive characterization of eighteenth century materialism. In a thumbnail sketch of the history of materialist thought, Marx locates La Mettrie as a central figure in the Enlightenment’s war on metaphysics and abstraction. According to Marx, La Mettrie was among those thinkers who “declared that the soul is a *modus* of the body, and *ideas* are *mechanical motions*” (*CW* 4, 126). So La Mettrie is a committed materialist, treating even ideas as mechanical constructs. But, Marx continues, his work must also be understood in its cultural context. It represents a “synthesis of Cartesian [or French] and English materialism.” On the one

hand, La Mettrie takes the side of figures like Hobbes and Locke against Descartes. He rejects the Cartesian effort to divide physical reality up into two separate substances, or to carve out and preserve a separate space for the mind – a *res cogitas*. On the other hand, Marx explains, La Mettrie's work, or rather his style, has the "wit, flesh and blood, and eloquence" associated with French language and French culture. According to Marx, French materialists like La Mettrie, while militantly empiricist (even more so than their English counterparts), also provided materialism with "the temperament and grace that it lacked." In short, Marx concludes, "[t]hey *civilized* it" (130). Thus La Mettrie's contribution to the history of materialist thought was not only his insistence on the material nature of ideas. He also "fleshed out" the materialist conception of the body. Even while he made the human more mechanical, he made the machine more human.

Predating Donna Haraway by two and a half centuries, La Mettrie's *l'Homme-machine* is the first cyborg manifesto – the first attempt to treat the human and the machine as inextricably linked. For La Mettrie as for Haraway, "[i]ntense pleasure in skill, machine skill, ceases to be a sin, but an aspect of embodiment. The machine is not an *it* to be animated, worshiped, and dominated. The machine is us, our processes, an aspect of our embodiment" (Haraway 1991, 180). La Mettrie's *l'Homme-machine* does not reduce human existence to rigidly determined laws of nature. On the contrary, and as part of the attack on metaphysics, it seeks to overturn the assumption that the social order and human relations are determined by divine laws. Towards the end of the eighteenth century, Kant would warn that materialism effectively destroys human freedom by destroying the individual's capacity to make moral judgments based on reason – the individual's autonomy or self legislation. But for La Mettrie, freedom is precisely what

l'Homme-machine offers, as it affirms the pleasures and the passions of the material world, especially the pleasure associated with repetition, duplication, iteration, or copying – a kind of pleasure that Kant's autonomous, isolated subject would, in order to remain autonomous and unique, have to deny or suppress, and that, in a text like "The Leipzig Council – III. Saint Max," Marx and Engels celebrate as a condition of sociality or social relations.

In the eighteenth century, when people spoke of "machines," they did not generally mean productive industrial machinery. They meant, instead, toys and curiosities – automata that ran on delicately balanced clockwork, moving mannequins constructed for the amusement of salon patrons, apparatuses used to enhance the illusion of theatre, and so forth. Eighteenth century machines were the work of people like Christian Huyghens, who created a pendulum clock that measured the reciprocal movements of the planets, Julien Leroy, who pioneered still more sophisticated clockwork, and especially the great inventor Jacques de Vaucanson, whose mechanical flute player, swimming duck, and hissing asp delighted and amazed the French academy. It was scandalous for thinkers like Le Mettrie to call the human being a machine, not because it made people seem like mere cogs in an inhuman system of production, but, in almost the exact opposite sense, because it appeared to reduce human existence to a playful, unproductive curiosity. By the nineteenth century, only a short time later, the machine referred to something else entirely – namely the engine of mechanized industry and factory based economies. To conceive of the human body as in some sense mechanical, or as a structure that could be adapted to a machine, was now thought to be extremely productive and efficient. Indeed, by the middle of the nineteenth century, a whole phalanx of very

serious political economists were engaged in the study of factory life, and attempting to calculate in quantifiable terms the exact relationship between the human body, what it could and could not withstand, and the operation of machines. If the study of anatomy had given up on the mechanical model, realizing that it could not account for the complex dynamics of the body, the study of political economy did not. Political economists were quite convinced that, when it comes to factory life, human behavior could be studied mathematically, with no less accuracy than the study of machines themselves. The examination of factory life became something of a genre in the early nineteenth century, as seen in the work of people like Auguste de Gasparin, Andrew Ure, and Charles Babbage. And, in the summer of 1845, Marx began to read and copy out passages from this factory literature (*MEGA* IV: 3, 322-88). Of course, Marx's approach to this material was deeply critical and even cynical. The notes he took during this period would reemerge in *Capital*, where he would dryly call Andrew Ure the "Pindar of the automatic factory" (*C* 458), and refer to his 1835 *Philosophy of Manufactures* as the principle example of the heartless, inhumane, and frigidly calculating nature of capitalist economic theory. At the same time, even while he was critical of this factory literature, Marx was also impressed by it – just as he was both critical of and impressed by the advances of capitalism itself. The impression that these texts left on Marx, especially with respect to the work of Charles Babbage, has never really been explored.

Charles Babbage was a brilliant Cambridge mathematician responsible for introducing the English speaking world to advances made in the field of mathematics on the continent during the early part of the nineteenth century. A polymath, he is perhaps best known today as the inventor of the so-called "Difference Engine," an early

calculating machine and predecessor to the modern computer. In 1832, he published an important book on political economy entitled *On The Economy of Machinery and Manufactures*, a work that Marx read in French translation in 1845. While he was certainly interested in applying mathematical models to the study of factory production, Babbage was also a Whig and a political reformer. He was especially convinced of the need to create some institutional mechanism that would give the workers a stake in factory production, and was aware of the (from his perspective) dangerous political potential of working class trade unions, or what at the time were called "combinations." More importantly, Babbage was the first political economist to begin his calculations with the factory, and not, as in classical political economy, with agriculture. This approach would influence Marx's thinking greatly, as it helped circumvent the assumption among classical political economists such as Adam Smith and David Ricardo that value was something natural, or something that emerged directly from the natural world. For Marx, of course, value is not natural, but the effect of specific sets of social relations. A change in the mode of production could change, not only the distribution of wealth, but also the determination of value. Overcoming the agricultural metaphor, realizing that machines produced value differently, was crucial to overcoming the natural theory of value as well. In particular, and as Babbage understood, with the machine it is not the individual worker who produces value (like a lonely farmer toiling away in a field), but a group or a collection of workers. It is a small step from this insight to Marx's claim that labour is a social rather than an individual phenomenon. It was also Babbage and not Marx who initially prophesied that a steady increase in factory size would necessitate a steady increase in the size of the working class. Finally, Babbage was

among the first political economists to address the sharp division between manual and mental labour created by factory reproduction, noting that the factory would ultimately reduce human labour to manual tasks assigned by the structure of the machine.

What is interesting about Babbage's work is not so much the manner in which, here and there, it presages things Marx says as well (ascribing originality and influence is not particularly useful in this context, given the mechanical interrelations between intellectuals at the time). Rather, it is the fact that Babbage's rhetoric seems so out of joint with the scientific and rationalistic spirit of his argument. Babbage is not just interested in factories and machines, he is completely obsessed. He writes effusive, panegyric hymns to the machine – to its efficiency and productivity, to be sure, but also to its moral and aesthetic virtues. Factory life, Babbage believes, might contribute to the moral improvement of the nation, indeed of humanity as a whole. Properly managed, it could teach not only the science but also the virtue of industry. Babbage's is an almost passionate Enlightenment, so convinced is he of the potential of science and technology to advance human civilization. While he never managed to build it, Babbage drew, and clearly took great pleasure in drawing, elaborate diagrams and plans for a massive, factory sized "Calculating Engine" – a computer that would be exponentially more powerful than his earlier Difference Engine. The aesthetics of the factory appeal to him as much as the science, and it is not entirely clear that he would have understood there to be a difference. The symmetry and balance of the factory on paper conveniently idealizes the chaos and drudgery of working class life. Babbage's writing style similarly combines rigorous analyses of political economy with extraordinary futurist peons to the majesty of science and technology. And the latter, science and technology, are characterized as

direct extensions of human culture – the concrete fulfillment of what poetry and mythology could once only imagine. Here, in an ornate but not uncharacteristic passage, we find Babbage at the height of rhetorical afflatus:

Even now the imprisoned winds which the earliest poet made the Grecian warrior bear for the protection of his fragile bark; or those which, in more modern times, the Lapland wizards sold to the deluded sailors; – these, the unreal creations of fancy or of fraud, called, at the command of science, from their shadowy existence, obey the holier spell: the unruly masters of the poet and the seer become the obedient slaves of civilized man (1832, 390).

Babbage is so thoroughly convinced of the imminent potential of science and technology that he concludes *On the Economy of Machinery and Manufactures* with some casual speculations about life on other planets. Here his economic and mathematical science meld effortlessly with complete science fiction, as he insists that it would be “unphilosophical” to doubt that “those sister spheres, obedient to the same law, and glowing with the light and heat radiant from the same source [...] should each be no more than a floating chaos of unformed matter” (391). Babbage apparently believed that some kind of empirical confirmation of such claims was relatively close at hand.

Now if, like Babbage, Marx was a child of the Enlightenment, if he like the political economists he studied also believed in the incredible potential of science and technology, he was at the same time critical and wary of this trend. He was critical, that is to say, of the uses to which technological advances were being put. In order to address this issue, Marx develops a distinction between means of production and modes of production. The former emphasizes the dominant tools and technologies within a

particular society, while the latter highlights the dimension of social relations or power relations. Marx believed that, in nineteenth century Europe, there existed a contradiction between the means and the modes of production – that an industry-based means of production was in conflict with a manufacturing-based mode of production. Whereas, in a manufacturing-based economy, the skill of the individual worker has value, and workers can trade their skill on an open market, in a factory-based economy individual skills get eradicated, and socialized or collective labour tends the machine. Marx is ambivalent about this situation. On the one hand, he sees it as terribly unjust and dehumanizing. The individual can no longer take pleasure or pride in their labour, nor does their labour have any discrete value. On the other hand, the machine represents the possibility of being liberated from labour as such. If mechanical reproduction were rationally administered, if it were not subordinated to surplus value, Marx thought, it might be possible to construct a world in which people were free to create their own identities without having at all times to refer back to their occupation or their labour. That is to say, for Marx the machine represented the potential for doing away with, or at least greatly diminishing the effects of, the division of labour. It is this latter, highly idealized conception of the world that Marx and Engels invoke in *The German Ideology*, where they claim that, in a “communist society [...] nobody has one exclusive sphere of activity but each can become accomplished in any branch he wishes.” Society is so well organized that “it is 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, criticize after dinner, just as I have in mind, without ever becoming hunter, fisherman, shepherd or critic” (GI 44-5). The pastoral image, tempting though it may be, is also deeply problematic, involving a potentially

reactionary nostalgia. But it is interesting to note that, in making this kind of claim, and in discussing the division of labour, Marx and Engels were by no means saying anything new, but invoking a discourse that would have been instantly recognizable to their nineteenth century German readers as an example of so-called *Griechensehnsucht* – the longing or yearning for ancient Greece that was so prevalent in Germany during the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and that one cultural historian calls the “tyranny” of Greece over Germany (Butler 1935). During the late eighteenth century, or the age of *Humanismus*, perhaps no one was more enthusiastic about classical antiquity than the writer and aesthetic theorist Friedrich Schiller.

Unlike the champions of the French and British Enlightenments, Schiller and other writers associated with Germany’s *Sturm und Drang* movement were inclined to think of the modern world, not as the pinnacle of human development, but as a distortion or a corruption of the original symmetry and plenitude of ancient Greek society. If the Greeks had an “organic existence,” with each particular individual (or each citizen at any rate) living in harmony with others and with their environment, modern society was at best an “ingenious clock-work,” at worst a “clumsy mechanism” (Schiller 1967 [1795], 39). If classical antiquity was humanity’s happy childhood, and the future promised maturity and fulfillment, the present state of affairs was akin to our petulant adolescence, with every semblance of balance and order having been lost or forgotten. For Schiller, the greatest problem facing contemporary society was the division of labour, or the mechanical compartmentalization of work and hence of life itself. Indeed, the division of labour fragmented not only society but individuals themselves. It relegated them to the repeated performance of single tasks, and thus prevented them from realizing their full

potential. In classical antiquity, Schiller imagined, the individual was both personally rounded and socially integrated into the community – part of an organic totality, not a mere component in a machine. As with other *Stürmer und Dränger*, Schiller's target here was the French Enlightenment, and the mechanistic reason of the French *philosophes*. By preaching universal reason and the laws of nature, they overlooked the fact that humans live in particular communities with particular customs and cultures that play a very real part in shaping who they will become. Now Schiller did not believe that he had in any way escaped the fragmentation associated with modern life. Indeed, as a reflection of the modern condition, his writing itself is often fragmented and piecemeal. Thus his best known theoretical work was took the form of an epistolary essay entitled *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*. Drawing on a strong misreading of Kant's *Critique of Judgment*, Schiller argued that aesthetic pleasure or joy can provisionally mend the modern psyche, and that an artistic play-drive or *Spieltrieb* might mediate the apparent rift between empirical sensation and transcendental ideas, or, in Kantian terms, practical ethical knowledge and pure scientific reason. Thus exposure to culture or *Bildung*, classical humanist culture in particular, might operate as a countermeasure to the malaise of modern life.

The discussion of the division of labour in *The German Ideology* clearly picks up on themes found in Schiller, and resonates with the idealization of classical antiquity within broader German culture during the nineteenth century. However, since he was best known for his epistolary essays, it is interesting to look for references to Schiller in Marx's correspondence. Two such references immediately present themselves, both involving questions of aesthetic education. First, there is a letter from Marx's father

Heinrich written to Marx in early 1836, while Marx was an eighteen year old student attending the University of Bonn. Enlightenment is the order of the day, and order is the dominant theme of the letter – specifically the pressing need for more of it in the young student’s life. Marx has, of course, asked his father for money. Heinrich Marx responds by rebuking his boy for the state of his accounts, and then grudgingly agreeing to pay. Along the way, he takes the time to suggest that his son study more practical subjects – natural history, physics, chemistry, and especially “financial economics [*Kameralistik*].” He also gently but unequivocally dissuades the young man from his declared interest in, of all things, poetry. This is where the reference to Schiller emerges. “I tell you frankly that your talents please me deeply, and I expect much of them,” Heinrich Marx writes, “but I would be grieved to see you make your appearance as a little poetaster [*Poetlein*], merely adequate for deification in your immediate family circle. Only the first rate has the right to claim attention of a pampered world – which Schiller had, and which poetical minds would probably call ‘Gods’ had” (Heinrich Marx to Karl Marx, early 1836). Heinrich Marx’s rhetorical move is quite sophisticated, and it mirrors (copies) the manner in which official culture often appropriates the arts and humanities. Schiller, the great champion of culture (*Bildung*), the partisan of aesthetic education and of the joyous play-drive (*Spieltrieb*), is deftly invoked to prevent the young, Romantic Marx from pursuing a pointless career as a poet. Schiller’s greatness serves to prove that only the Schillers of the world should deign to pursue aesthetic pleasure. The poet thus becomes an object lesson in the need for practical reason and pious common sense.

Twenty five years later, Karl Marx himself would refer to Schiller in a letter to his young cousin, Antoinette Philips. Writing in English, Marx reflects on his first trip back

to Germany in decades. As his father did so many years earlier (although for dramatically different reasons and purposes) Marx invokes Schiller, and discusses the question of “aesthetic education.” He begins by flirtatiously chiding his much younger cousin for not responding to an earlier letter – calling her “a cruel little witch” and invoking the Homeric myth of Circe. Indeed, playfully and with great conviviality, Marx refers to classical mythology throughout the letter. At the center of the letter, however, is a discussion of his impressions of Berlin. “*Ans Vaterland, das theure schliess’ dich an*” he writes, citing Schiller’s *Wilhelm Tell*, “is a fine sentence, but, quite confidentially, I may tell you that Germany is a beautiful country to live out of.” Marx would not wish, nor counsel another, to “join the dear fatherland.” “For my part,” he continues, “if I were quite free, and if, besides, I were not bothered by something you may call ‘political conscience,’ I should never leave England for Germany, and still less for Prussia, at least for all that *affreux* [frightful] Berlin with its ‘*Sand*’ and its ‘*Bildung* [cultural education]’ and ‘*seinen überwitzigen Lueten*’ [super clever people].” From Marx’s perspective, it is as though an excess of culture, or of the wrong kind of aesthetic education, has left Berliners so very clever, and so very dull. “At Berlin everybody who has some spirit to loose, is of course extremely anxious for fellow suffers. If the *ennui*, that reigns supreme in that place, be distributed among a greater lot of persons, the single individual may flatter itself to catch a lesser portion of it” (Marx to Philips, 13 April 1861). The dispassionate, systematic study of culture or *Bildung* has paradoxically dehumanized Berliners. It has lead, not to the development of the *Spieltrieb*, and thus the reintegration of the human psyche, but to a pandemic of boredom and *ennui*. What Marx hates is exactly this culture that takes itself so seriously, and that, as a result, cannot help but

become bored with itself. What he loves is what his own letter enacts – not the cold, sonorous study of culture, or the idea that culture should somehow lead to improvement and growth, but the teasing, engaging, imaginative invocation of cultural references – the humor, warmth, and playfulness culture can provoke. This is the aspect of Schiller’s work Marx copies, and the aspect of Schiller’s work he would have his cousin copy. It is the aspect of Marx’s work I would feign to copy as well. “And now, my little charmer,” Marx’s letter to Antoinette concludes, “farewell and do not altogether forget, *Your knight errant, Charles Marx.*”

Proper Names

What, then, *is* ideology? The question has been at the center of Marxist theory almost since its inception. Throughout the history of Marxist and now post-Marxist thought, defining just what “ideology” means has remained so problematic largely because, in *The German Ideology*, Marx and Engels do not do so. Indeed, Marx and Engels do not treat “ideology” as a specialized term at all, nor do they construct it as a new theoretical concept. On the contrary, for them, “ideology” is more or less interchangeable with “philosophy” or “world view.” At most, it designates any overly philosophical approach to social and political questions. The phrase “the German ideology” refers to the theoretical or philosophical discourse dominant among young German intellectuals, and little more. Only much later, in the work of the aging Engels, does the term “ideology” come to mean something like an “illusion” or “false consciousness.” And it is later still, in Lenin’s and Stalin’s work, before Marxists begin to speak of a specifically bourgeois ideology, and to distinguish it from proletarian ideology. While such things are impossible to know for certain, when Marx and Engels came up with the title *Die deutsche Ideologie*, they probably had at least two references in mind – first, Destutt de Tracy’s *Elémens d’idéologie*, which was released in five volumes between 1801 and 1815, and which sought to construct human morality on the basis of an empirical “science of ideas” or ideology; and second, Jacob Grimm’s *Deutsche Mythologie*, which was first published to great acclaim in 1832, and which Marx’s and Engels’s intended audience would have known very well (this, perhaps, also helping to explain the profusion of references to mythology and folklore throughout

Marx's and Engels's text). As part of his ongoing study of political economy, Marx read and annotated the fourth and fifth parts of de Tracy's monumental work in 1844 (*MEGA* IV: 2, 489). That study finds its way into *The German Ideology*, where Stirner is criticized for unwittingly repeating certain of de Tracy's concepts and locutions. In particular, both Stirner and de Tracy (one in German, the other in French) capitalize on the etymological connections between words related to proper, propriety, and property. In order to concoct a "natural basis for private property," Marx and Engels write, "de Tracy undertakes to prove that *propriété*, *individualité* and *personnalité* are identical, that the 'Ego' [*moi*] also includes 'mine' [*mien*]." He accomplishes this "with a play on the words *propriété* and *proper*, like Stirner with his play on the words *Mein* [mine] and *Meinung* [opinion], *Eigentum* [property] and *Eigenheit* [peculiarity]" (*GI* 245-6). But it is not only etymological chicanery linking Stirner with de Tracy. They both seek to reduce social phenomena to the individual, and thus fail to appreciate the sense in which the individual is itself a social phenomenon – the product, not of an egoistic will, but of complex and even overdetermined social relations. A good portion of *The German Ideology*, both its argument and its rhetoric, will be devoted to clarifying the sense in which the individual subject gets produced or constituted through an ensemble of social relations. Only much later, with the work of Louis Althusser, will Marxism begin to think of "ideology" – a word, once again, that is not defined in *The German Ideology* – in these terms as well.

For much of the history of Marxist thought, two very broad and opposed definitions of ideology held sway. Either one conceived of it as false consciousness, an illusion concealing material conditions of existence, or one understood it to be the expression of essential class interests or identity, and thus sought to distinguish between

bourgeois and proletarian ideologies. Both of these approaches to ideology were overturned almost in an instant with the publication of Louis Althusser's brief but extraordinarily influential essay "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses: Notes Toward an Investigation." There Althusser hypothesized that ideology neither deludes subjects nor expresses their collective will, but first interpellates them *as subjects* – hails them or calls them, as it were, into being. According to Althusser, "all ideology has the function (which defines it) of 'constituting' concrete individuals as subjects" (1971, 160). That is to say, "all ideology hails or interpellates concrete individuals as concrete subjects, by the function of the category of the subject" (162). As a result, Althusser concludes, "[t]here are no subjects except by and for their subjection" (169). So the function of ideology is to create subjects, and to create them as (always already) subjected. And this process occurs, not in consciousness alone, but through specific, concrete rituals and practices – rituals and practices that get articulated through discrete institutions or, as Althusser calls them, "apparatuses." Thus ideology is not false, but always "exists in an apparatus and its practice or practices." Moreover, "this existence is material" (156). That is to say, according to Althusser, ideology consists of "material actions inserted into material practices governed by material rituals" (158). To speak of ideology is to speak of something real – something with real institutional articulations, such as schools, military bases, churches, courts, prisons, and so forth. As Althusser put it a few years earlier, "ideology" refers to "the *lived* relation between men and their world" or the "imaginary" and often unconscious manner in which they negotiate their "real" conditions of existence (1969, 233-4). Picking up on Lacanian psychoanalytic theory, Althusser constructs the subject as the effect or the product of a moment of

méconnaissance or misrecognition, configured in Lacan as the unsettling experience of first recognizing oneself in a mirror, or outside of oneself and in the place of the other. According to Lacan, it is through this experience (of being split) that the individual enters the symbolic order, or the realm of social relations with other. The subject is therefore conditioned from the outset by a lack or a gap. It presupposes, in Althusser's words, a "reality which is necessarily ignored [*méconue*] in the very forms of recognition" (1971, 170). The subject first knows itself by at the same time not knowing itself, or knowing itself as something else – something other. It emerges through what Althusser calls a "mirror-structure" or a "double specular." It is always already split in two. This "mirror duplication," Althusser concludes, "is constitutive of ideology and ensures its functioning" (168). The sense that one has lost one's true identity, that something essential has been relinquished or purloined, is therefore the condition of having any identity whatsoever. Put formulaically, and in the kind of terms Lacan would use, we know who we are because we know we are not who we are.

Now, if Lacan explains the splitting of the subject in terms of seeing oneself in a mirror, Althusser does so in terms of being interpellated, hailed, or named by another. The subject's identity is established and reinforced when someone, especially an anonymous authority figure, calls out to it, and in doing so locates it within a network of power relations. While contemporary social theorists have criticized Althusser for placing too much emphasis on the role of the state (one is interpellated in numerous ways within civil society as well) and for his singular emphasis on class identity (one is also interpellated as a gendered subject, a racialized subject, an embodied subject, and so forth), this notion that identity is a function of ideological interpellation remains very

prominent, even long after the collapse of Althusser's "theoretical revolution" and of the official Marxist movement he intended that theory to rejuvenate. Thus, to pick just one example among countless others, in his influential theory of "symbolic power" Pierre Bourdieu reserves a special place for his discussion of "the power of naming," linking "the monopoly of legitimate symbolic violence" with "the monopoly of *official naming*" or the power to decide the parameters "of the right classification [and] of the right order" (1994, 242). In a very different but equally influential context, Judith Butler relies heavily on Althusser for her theory of subjection, conscience, and gender identity – of "a subject who comes into being as a consequence of language [especially naming], yet always within its terms" (1997, 106). According to Butler, the subject's response to the call of power in Althusser's little primal scene or narrative suggests a pre-ideological, guilty desire for the law – a desire to be subjected, which takes the form of the conscience, or what she calls "the psychic life of power."

Now, significantly, Althusser goes out of his way in "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses" to distinguish his approach to ideology as interpellation from the position he believes Marx and Engels hold to in *The German Ideology*. In keeping with his theory of the epistemological break (which only begins with *The German Ideology* and is not complete until *Capital*), Althusser maintains that the theory of ideology constructed in Marx's and Engels's joint work, while certainly very interesting, is nonetheless "not Marxist" (1971, 150). It should be made clear that, like many before him, Althusser is simply assuming that *The German Ideology* contains a theory of ideology – which, in fact, it does not. Thus, without once citing the text in question, Althusser asserts that, in *The German Ideology* "ideology is conceived as pure illusion,

pure dream, i.e. a nothingness" (156). Althusser's claim presents the reader with an interesting problem, given that his (genuinely "Marxist") theory of ideology is going to ascribe to Marx a position he never took, and then reject that position as insufficiently Marxist. At one and the same time, Althusser becomes filial son of the mature Marx, the ostensibly Marxist Marx, and bitter rival of the young Marx. It is as though he kills Marx the brother so as to please Marx the father. But is the theory of interpellation all that radical after all? Does *The German Ideology* itself not have something, and indeed even a great deal to say about names, the power of names, and the power of naming?

Because Marx's rhetoric has generally been ignored by commentators (Althusser included), or treated as an excess dross to be discarded once the gold of his intention or his meaning has been extracted, very few have paid much attention to the principle gag or running joke at the center of "The Leipzig Council – III. Saint Max" – specifically the *polyonomasic* naming and renaming of the one who calls himself "Max Stirner." Stirner is variously referred to as Saint Max, Saint Sancho, Saint Jacob, Jacques le bonhomme, Sancho Panza, The Unique, The Owner, "Stirner," and so forth. Again, this naming articulates the theme of repetition and difference, iteration and alteration. Stirner is "a 'clumsy' copier of Hegel" (GI 180). And Marx and Engels are very meticulous copiers of Stirner. The structure of Stirner's "Book," as Marx and Engels facetiously call it, is divided into two parts, suggesting a kind of repetition. This mirrors the old and new testaments of the Bible, and Marx and Engels mirror this mirror in turn. All this naming and mirroring serves to undermine the credibility of Stirner's central claim – namely that he is unique, or that he is singular and without double or equal. It also serves to underline or recall the great irony that this champion of the unique ego, this partisan of nominalism

and self-declared enemy of the specter, has himself used not his real, unique name (Johann Kaspar Schmidt), but a second, invented, entirely spectral pseudonym. Who is Max Stirner? He is no one. He is the empty reflection of Johann Kaspar Schmidt. And yet, in the public world, in the world of publication or in what Lacan would call the symbolic order, this empty specter “Max Stirner” *is* Johann Kaspar Schmidt. It is precisely the radical uncertainty or original division of Schmidt / Stirner’s identity that makes Marx’s and Engels’s (another split identity) running gag “work.” Marx and Engels can name and rename Stirner repeatedly because, long before they emerge on the scene, “Max Stirner” is already a name for someone else. Max Stirner does not designate a unique ego. It is not a proper name for a discrete entity. Rather it commences a (strictly irreducible) chain of supplements for an always already absent origin. Marx and Engels merely add to that chain of supplements – one that, in principle, could be extended indefinitely. The serial interpellation or catachrestic misnaming of Stirner is significant because it reenacts over and over again the purely fictional moment that first *created* a creature named “Max Stirner.” And by implication, all identities are so created. The subject is not a static substance or essence waiting to be afforded an appellation. Rather, from the very beginning, the subject is inscribed within complex and overdetermined ensemble of social relations. The ensemble of social relations constitutes the subject’s identity, constitute it as multiple and, in principle at any rate, keep open the possibility of constituting it otherwise.

So, while it is the case that they do not define the term “ideology” in *The German Ideology*, it is also the case that, in the rhetorical folds and margins of their text, Marx and Engels say something very similar to what, over a century later, Althusser will

introduce as the theory of ideology as interpellation. Indeed, it could be argued that the approach to interpellation set out (or rather performed and enacted) in *The German Ideology* actually goes beyond what Althusser says about the topic – and even that Marx's and Engels's approach exceeds that of their follower precisely because, as no one other than Althusser himself points out, it "is not Marxist." Or, put differently, Althusser's approach to interpellation is limited precisely because it *is* Marxist. In his model, the subject is interpellated (in the last instance) as a class subject. Ideology has the function of calling one into existence as a member of a particular social class. Because he is a committed communist, Althusser must centralize class identity, and even show all other modes of identification to revolve around it. However, as post-structuralists have argued now for three decades, and as new social and political movements have made abundantly clear, identity is not reducible to class identity, nor is political struggle reducible to class struggle. Each subject's identity is multiple. One is interpellated in a myriad of different ways, within a myriad of different contexts, for a myriad of different purposes. And indeed, it is this serial interpellation that keeps open the possibility of difference and change. It circumvents the rigid determinism of Althusser's concept of "state apparatuses," and liberates the potential of a variety of different subjectivities and unexpected social antagonisms. Moreover, while Althusser is undoubtedly correct to insist upon the concrete and material status of the rituals, institutions, and apparatuses that perform the function of interpellation, it is equally and perhaps more important to point to the fictional or symbolic construction of those same rituals, institutions, and apparatuses. This, at any rate, is the curious paradox or *aporia* that Marx and Engels suspend in *The German Ideology*, and in their debate with the left or young Hegelians.

The young Hegelians think liberation is simply a matter of eliminating the chimeras that conceal the true essence of things – whether that essence is conceived of as a collective species being or as an isolated ego. Thus Stirner believes it is enough for him, via a personal speculative fiat, to deny the existence of the church, the state, the courts, and so forth – to claim that he himself is beyond all of those institutions and rituals, and that his ego transcends them. Marx and Engels, on the other hand, realize that the individual ego is an effect of social relations, and that who Stirner “is” (who anyone is for that matter) only makes sense in relation to those simultaneously very real or concrete and very symbolic or fictional apparatuses. That is to say, the fact that such things are social and historical constructs is precisely what makes them real and effective.

While most simply repeat the ontological dualism that Marx and Engels seek to critique, and claim that it is they who oppose the ideological chimera to actual life, there are theories of ideology that attempt to do justice to the complexity of their thought. One such theory has been proposed by W.J.T. Mitchell. In his study of “iconology,” Mitchell argues that Marx’s own imagery should be read, not as deviations from his effort to produce a scientific discourse that transparently describes social reality, but as an attempt to give concrete symbolic form to concepts derived from the study of that reality. What Mitchell calls “concrete concepts” (1986, 161), images such as the commodity fetish from *Capital* or the *camera obscura* from *The German Ideology*, are effective (they perform social and political tasks) to the extent that they are, in Mitchell’s words, “historically situated figures that carry a political unconscious along with them” (203). Thus, for example, in “yoking” together “the most primitive, exotic, irrational, degraded objects of human value with the most modern, ordinary, rational, and civilized” ones, the

figure of the “commodity fetish” performs the task of dislodging the assumption among Marx’s nineteenth century readers that the contemporary Europe is in some sense more developed or more orderly than the rest of the world or the people of the past. At one and the same time, Mitchell suggests, Marx’s image of the commodity fetish exposes the racist assumptions of nineteenth century imperialism (the result of capitalism around the world) while critiquing the regressive elements of nineteenth century industrial production (the result of capitalism within Europe itself). For all the complexity of his theory, Mitchell still remains committed to the notion that ideology, whether in the form of a specter or in that of a fetish, is a distortion, finally, of some more substantial reality that subtends it. The purpose of the “concrete concept” is still to represent or to gain access to that deeper or more fundamental register or base. Thus, while he speaks of a “dialectic of iconoclasm” (192), and suggests that the iconoclast realizes the effective power of rhetoric and of images, Mitchell at no time relinquishes the assumption that the world can be divided up into reality and representation, actual relations and their discursive expression. And he at no time denies the doctrine that the latter are reflections of, and therefore ultimately subordinate to, the former. But what if the matter were not that simple? What if the relationship between reality and representation, world and text, was neither hierarchical nor dialectical but, as Derrida might put it, undecidable? What if text folded into world, and world into representation or text?

Here, perhaps, it becomes a question of reading Marx’s and Engels’s text against the grain, or in a deconstructive fashion – considering what these two writers have to say about the difference between text and world, and interrogating whether the (rhetorical) performance of their text undermines its (logical) argument. That is to say, it may be

necessary to locate those places in Marx's and Engels's text where, if they are saying what they mean, then they cannot be meaning what they are saying – the moments, deliberate or otherwise (but who will ever know?) of performative contradiction. The issue comes to the fore when Marx and Engels criticize Stirner for failing to distinguish between the literary diversion of writing a homage to one's own ego and the collective labour of engaging in political activities that effectively change the world. Stirner's *The Ego and Its Own* culminates in an impassioned plea for the Dionysian "self-enjoyment" of the egoist as opposed to dreary and nihilistic "self-sacrifice" of the humanist (1995 [1844], 282). With reference to this distinction, Marx and Engels castigate Stirner for failing to realize that his "self-enjoyment" depends not so much on the humane sacrifices of others as on the concrete reality of the division of labour. For Marx and Engels, communism has nothing to do with sacrificing oneself for the community and everything to do with rigorously studying and effectively engaging social and historical reality. It is thanks to the very real, material "division of labour," Marx and Engels maintain, that someone like Stirner can take up "the predominant pursuit of a single passion; e.g. that of writing books" (GI 284). Picking up on a well worn trope, Marx and Engels draw out the relationship between Stirner's egotistical "self-enjoyment" and his myopic approach to writing by comparing both to masturbation. While they claim that they will proceed "without dwelling on the more or less dirty forms in which the 'self' in 'self-enjoyment' can be more than a mere phase" (460), in fact they do dwell on it. Put in formulaic terms, they mention it by mentioning that they will not mention it – what rhetoricians call *apophasis*, a trope that is intimately connected with both sexuality and the dialectic of revelation and concealment. "In general," Marx and Engels write, "it is an absurdity to

assume, as Saint Max does, that one could satisfy a passion separated from all others” (284). The covert references to masturbation become explicit when Marx and Engels finally state that “[p]hilosophy and the study of the actual world have the same relation to one another as onanism and sexual love” (255). Philosophy is full of vapid phrases and conjuring tricks. It is empty and impotent, unlike the fecundity of the study of actual life. Now, that these kinds of claims appear in the midst of hundreds of pages of deeply philosophical text is perhaps telling on its own. Marx and Engels voice their rather traditional attack *on* writing *in* writing (meaning that their own collaboration would amount to mutual masturbation). More importantly, the entire critique of Stirner, and particularly as it gets articulated through the *polyonomasic* misnaming, revolves around the idea that Stirner is not a unique ego standing independent of all relations with others but, in the precise sense, *inscribed* within an ensemble social relations – that “Max Stirner” is the effect of symbolic exchange and intercourse. Thus despite Marx’s and Engels’s explicit and traditional attack on writing, “The Leipzig Council – III. Saint Max” implies that the ego, like all social phenomena, is written or textual.

For this same reason, and as W.J.T. Mitchell suggests as well, one cannot overlook Marx’s or Engels’s figurative language, or their own rhetorical flourishes. Because the point of this study is to reread Marx’s and Engels’s text as a kind of rhetoric-machine, it might be useful to look at those places in their work where they invoke a rhetoric of machines, or use a particular mechanical apparatus as a configuration of the social relation they are attempting to describe. Early on in *The German Ideology*, Marx and Engels introduce the image of the *camera obscura* in order to explain the young Hegelian’s overly philosophical approach to the world. They begin with a hermeneutic

principle familiar to German intellectuals at least since the time of Herder, namely that theory is “buried” in practice, or that “[t]he production of ideas, of conceptions, of consciousness, is at first directly interwoven with the material activity and the material intercourse of men, the language of real life.” In this sense, and as the German language captures quite well, consciousness (*Bewusstsein*) and being (*Sein*) are correlative. “In all ideology,” Marx and Engels continue, “men and their circumstances appear upside-down as in a *camera obscura*, this phenomenon arises just as much from their historical life processes as the inversion of objects on the retina does from their physical life-process” (*GI* 37). First, it is significant that the functioning of the apparatus (the *camera obscura*) gets compared to, even conflated with, the functioning of the body (the retina). But more importantly, what do the words “this phenomenon” indicate? What is their referent? Marx and Engels are not merely saying that, in ideology or in philosophical discourse, the world is turned upside-down, with ideas appearing to be the cause of matter rather than matter and actual life being the cause of ideas. Rather, and far more complexly, they are claiming that the phenomenon of ideology itself, the inversion of the relationship between matter and ideas, occurs as a result of historical life processes, just as the inversion of an image on the retina occurs as a result of very real physical life processes. Not only are history and actual life inverted, but history and actual life also produce this inversion. The claim is complex, but it has important consequences for the way ideology gets defined, especially today. For it suggests that ideology cannot be overcome or escaped – that it is a condition, and not an ancillary function, of our being in the world.

The person who has done the most to rethink the concept of ideology in the post-Marxist conjuncture is probably the unorthodox Hegelian and psychoanalytic theorist

Slavoj Žižek. In a characteristically iconoclastic move, Žižek insists that, for it to make any sense or be of any use today, the concept of ideology “must be disengaged from the ‘representationalist’ problematic.” According to Žižek, “*ideology has nothing to do with illusion*, with a mistaken, distorted representation of its social content” (1999, 60). Ideology does not refer to the repression or the distortion of a more profound, material truth. Rather, it is ideology that produces the conviction that there is some more profound, repressed truth – some fundamental social content hidden behind the symbolic discourses and exchanges that constitute social relations. In Lacanian terms, an ideology operates by offering a sense of identity or subjectivity that is based on a sense of lack. More precisely, every subject is based on a fundamental, irreparable lack or loss that is its condition of entering into the symbolic order. An ideology is a discourse or a fantasy scenario that attributes that fundamental lack (the loss of the Real) to some specific, identifiable other – someone with whom one might struggle, in the hopes of retrieving what, in fact, remains forever irretrievable. In this manner, the ideological fantasy masks the true horror of the Real. But “at the same time,” Žižek maintains, “it creates what it purports to conceal, its ‘repressed’ point of reference” (92). An ideology conceals the fundamental, unbearable truth that there is no fundamental truth to conceal – that my sense of lack is not due to a repression of my full subjectivity by some malicious and more powerful other, but a necessary condition of my subjectivity, and of my being in the world. Here the critique of ideology is no longer aimed at revealing or exposing a truth hidden behind the representation. Rather, and in Žižek’s terms, it is “to designate the elements within an existing social order which – in the guise of ‘fiction,’ that is, of ‘utopian’ narratives of possible but failed historical alternatives – point towards the

system's antagonistic character, and thus 'estrangle' us as to the self-evidence of its established identity" (61). Ideology allows one to construct one's identity as something the full expression of which has been repressed by some other. For Žižek, the paradigmatic cases of this process are nationalism and racism, both of which blame some external force (or some internal difference) for corrupting the authentic unity and purity of an otherwise homogeneous and content people. The critique of ideology interrogates such discourses, not simply in order to expose them as false, but to expose them as fantasy-scenarios by pointing to other "fictions" or "utopian narratives" that represent alternative fantasies. That is to say, the critique of ideology involves, not revealing a true identity, much less a complete identity, but repeatedly setting out to think, to live, and to create these identities otherwise.

Žižek pursues this problem of identity and ideology in his complex but insightful essay "Hegel's 'Logic of Essence' as a Theory of Ideology." He begins by overturning more or less the entire history of Hegel scholarship, and insisting upon, in his words, "the radically anti-evolutionary character of Hegel's philosophy" (1999, 228). In particular, Žižek claims that, for Hegel, an "essence" is not a formal principle that progressively realizes its internal necessity in the external world, or an idea that fulfills itself through history. It is not a potential that, through dialectical contradiction and strife, is destined to become actual. Instead, Žižek maintains, the Hegelian "essence" is a purely "symbolic act." An essence is a speech act that binds or bundles together a collection of otherwise unrelated (or only accidentally related) external conditions or qualities. Thus a thing's "essence" is nothing other than the symbolic act that holds together its various properties. As Žižek explains:

after we decompose an object into its ingredients, we look in vain for some specific feature which holds together this multitude and makes of it a unique, self-identical thing. As to its properties and ingredients, a thing is wholly “outside itself,” in external conditions: every positive feature is already present in the circumstances which are not yet this thing. The supplementary operation which produces from this bundle a unique, self-identical thing is the purely symbolic, tautological gesture of positing these external conditions as conditions-components of the thing and, simultaneously, of presupposing the existence of ground which holds together this multitude of conditions (233-4).

It is this symbolic act of bringing a collection of unrelated particulars under one name, and thereby provisionally uniting what are in fact distinct components or ingredients, that Žižek associates with ideology and with politics. This act of naming “does not contribute anything new; it only retroactively ascertains that the thing in question *is already present in its conditions* – that is, that the totality of these conditions *is* the actuality of the thing” (234). Naming retroactively conjures up the illusion of a foundation (a *subjectum* or common substance) on which all the particulars rest. While each of the particulars is real enough, the foundation is purely symbolic, purely formal, and thus subject to repeated alteration over time. According to Žižek, the actuality of this possibility, the fact that the potential to name or bundle the components differently remains forever inexhaustible, is what Hegel means by freedom:

Hegel points out that freedom realizes itself through a series of failures: every particular attempt to realize freedom may fail; from its point of view, freedom remains an empty possibility; but the very continuous striving of freedom to

realize itself bears witness to its “actuality” – that is, to the fact that freedom is not a “mere notion,” but manifests itself as a tendency that pertains to the very essence of reality (243).

Thus freedom is to be found, not in the final revelation of a heretofore repressed essence, but in the fact that new essences and new identities are constantly being produced – both composed and decomposed, both constructed and destroyed – through contingent, provisional, purely formal symbolic acts. In this sense, freedom is not the long awaited appropriation of a proper name, but the creation and continuous recreation of ever new common names. It is not merely a state of affairs. It cannot be contained in a social contract, nor can it be guaranteed by a social bond. Like justice, freedom will never be in accord with the law. Instead, freedom is the real, actual, immanent, and inexhaustible potential for continuous change. It is the inexhaustible potential of that which forever remains yet to come.

Aesthetic Dimensions

If, as Žižek suggests, an “essence” is symbolically created, and if political identity in particular is the effect of a radically contingent “symbolic act,” then a special place must be reserved for the study of rhetoric, of symbolism, and even of art within social and political texts. Poetic or imaginative discourse is, of course, what a science such as “historical materialism” endeavors to eliminate, and to replace with empirical descriptions of reality. So long as Marx was treated as a scientist (by both his acolytes and his detractors), the poetic and imaginative elements of his writing had to be bracketed off, explained away, or, worse still, completely expunged. At the same time, within the secondary literature, the debate over Marxist aesthetics or a Marxist approach to art has been almost as extensive, and almost as vehement, as the debate over the proper definition of ideology. Might it be possible to supplement and perhaps even considerably expand these debates by considering not only Marxist aesthetics but also the aesthetic *in Marx*? Modern aesthetic theory, like much modern philosophy, can be said to begin with Immanuel Kant, who was interested in using the experience of art to explain the process of judgment. In doing so, Kant also internalizes the experience of art – making it a private as opposed to a public experience, and a passive as opposed to an active one. On the one hand, this internalization of aesthetic experience suggests that judgment is a faculty of the transcendental imagination (*Einbildung*) and not the understanding (*Verstand*). Beauty, as Kant sees it, has no concept, meaning that a work of art, or indeed any discourse that calls for a judgment, can have a variety of different interpretations. On the other hand, and in a subsequent gesture that almost immediately cancels out everything that was so radical

about the first, aesthetic experience becomes the purview of the individual, autonomous subject, and is ultimately subordinated, therefore, to the (synthetic a priori) forms and categories of pure reason, next to which even the overwhelming experience of the sublime appears small and insignificant. Thus Kant's internalization of aesthetic experience liberates the imagination only to then confine it once again to reason, or to an almost worshipful genuflection before the power and scope of reason. While he is by no means an aesthetic theorist, in Marx (in Marx's texts, or in the Marx-machine), an effort is made to liberate the imagination not only of the individual but also of the community, or the ensemble of social relations. Marx conjures up a kind of external, collective imagination that supplements the internal, subjective one. Beauty is experienced and judgments are made, not in the lonely privacy of one's own mind, but intersubjectively, or in discourse and debate with others. And if there is a rational framework that ultimately limits or contains these discourses and debates (I stress *if* there is such a thing), it is not the pure reason or synthetic a priori forms and categories of the individual subjective consciousness, but public reason, or the constantly changing, fundamentally contestable principles of "common sense," or what Kant calls the *sensus communis*.

Before opening up the question of Marxist aesthetics and the aesthetic in Marx, I will briefly outline Kant's theory of beauty and aesthetic judgment. In his *Critique of Judgment*, the capstone of his philosophical system, Kant maintains that beauty has no concept. The claim rests on the distinction, just mentioned, between imagination and understanding, *Einbildung* and *Verstand*. While our subjective imagination apprehends purposiveness in the beautiful object, recognizing (or constituting) its various components as a harmonious unity, and as a result experiencing pleasure, our

understanding ascribes no purpose, no a priori concept, to that object. Thus beauty is, in Kant's terms, "purposive without purpose" (1987 [1790], 220). Confronted with a beautiful object, one intuits purposiveness without comprehending a purpose. Consequently, one can only understand an aesthetic experience, or pass judgment on it (make what Kant refers to as a "reflective judgment"), *as if* it had a purpose. The moment of the fantastic or the hypothetical, of the *as if*, is therefore inscribed within the process of aesthetic judgment. It can never be circumvented or surpassed. By extension, Kant reasons, all judgments (including political, ethical, and perhaps most importantly juridical judgments) are conditioned in some way by a speculative *as if*, which is to say an element of uncertainty. They are all in this sense irreducibly marked by contingency. To judge is not simply to establish the "truth" based on factual evidence. It also and necessarily involves an ordeal or experience of undecidability – an exposure to that which remains unknown, and finally unknowable.

From Kant's perspective, beauty is a pure form (the formal harmony or unity of various elements) to which reflective judgments can ascribe any number of ostensible meanings or contents, without ever arriving at a final or a decisive one. "What is formal in the presentation of a thing, the harmony of its manifold to a unity (where it is indeterminate what this unity is meant to be), does not by itself reveal any objective purposiveness whatsoever," Kant maintains. "For here we are abstract from what this unity is *as a purpose* (what the thing is to be), so that nothing remains but the subjective purposiveness of the presentations in the mind" (227). In a move that is characteristic of his work, as soon as Kant makes this claim, he sets about trying to limit it, or to bring it in under the purview of universal reason. He does this by developing a very complex

theory of common sense, *Gemeinsinn*, or what he sometimes calls *sensus communis*. This notion of the *sensus communis* allows Kant to claim that, while beauty has no concept, and while the experience of beauty cannot be circumscribed by the understanding but remains unique to the subjective imagination, judgments about the beautiful can still be intersubjectively communicated, or mutually recognized by all rational subjects. Indeed, even though beauty is experienced by the subjective imagination, and reflective judgments can only be made *as if* there were a concept for the beautiful, Kant seems to desire that it be possible for all rational subjects to agree about aesthetic judgments. The “communicability” or *Mittelbarkeit* of the aesthetic judgment is, for Kant, a function of the fact that all rational individuals possess the same cognitive capacities. Or rather, Kant derives it from his overriding assumption that all rational subjects are equipped with the same internal faculties – that subjectivity is a single, universal form to which all concrete or specific individuals conform.

But is judgment, aesthetic judgment in particular, a question of an internal, purely subjective process that one then sets about attempting to communicate to an external world of others? Are the experience of beauty and the judgments that go along with it not located within particular social and cultural contexts from the very beginning? Is the *sensus communis*, the community of other subjects and other judgments, not the condition of aesthetic experience and aesthetic judgment? Where does one acquire one’s sense of the beautiful if not from the external world of relations with others? Why else would a culture or a community take it upon itself to educate its members in the experience of beauty, or hone their capacity for aesthetic judgment? While he wants to posit it as universal, even Kant’s own description of the beautiful as a harmony of manifold parts is

suspiciously similar to the Neo-Classical conception of beauty that was so prevalent in Germany towards the end of the eighteenth century. In contrast to this particular, socially and historically located understanding of beauty, can one not imagine taking pleasure in the disharmony of manifold parts, or even in excess and waste? There are certainly periods in the history of art (if one chooses to accept the postulates of art history) during which harmony was not the hallmark of beauty, and excess or surplus were (the Baroque, for instance), just as there are artistic genres (if one wishes to accept such distinctions) that call for excess as opposed to harmony, turmoil as opposed to unity (for example, melodrama). Now there is a sense in which Kant does address some of these issues when, immediately after his discussion of beauty, he considers the experience of the sublime – the mathematical sublime, which overwhelms the individual with its excessive magnitude, and the dynamical sublime, which does so with excessive power or force. However, while one may be deceived into thinking so, Kant maintains that, in themselves, these experiences of the sublime are actually not pleasurable. Rather, Kant claims, we feel pleasure as a kind of secondary reflux of the sublime, when we realize that the sublime is not so overwhelming, but “small when compared with the ideas of reason” (115), or our own cognitive faculties. Thus the mathematical sublime serves, as it were, to remind us of the rational idea of totality, while the dynamical sublime reminds us of the rational idea of morality.

So, Kant addresses aesthetic experience and aesthetic judgment in an attempt to maintain order, as it were – the order of the universal, rational, and autonomous subject. Both the external world of relations with others and the overwhelming experience of the sublime are circumscribed and comprehended by the internal life (*Erlebnis*), and thus the

moral freedom or self-legislation, of the individual subject. Not surprisingly, then, and given the power of Kant's legacy, Marxist theory has always had trouble dealing with aesthetics. In fact, when Marxism has sought to develop a theory of the aesthetic, it has generally contravened the one element of Kant's approach that seems so radical and liberating – namely the idea that art or beauty is “purposive *without* purpose,” that it cannot be reduced to the understanding but appeals instead to the imagination, and that it is not a means to an end but an end in itself. That is to say, Marxism almost always overlooks what might be called the *specificity* of the aesthetic, or the idea that aesthetic experience and aesthetic judgment cannot be explained in what are essentially non-aesthetic terms (in terms of class struggle, ideological propaganda, modes of production, conditions of existence, and so forth), but must first be appreciated *as* aesthetic. The one major exception to this trend in Marxist thought is Herbert Marcuse's short and deceptively simple essay *The Aesthetic Dimension*. As his title suggests, Marcuse argues that art or the aesthetic has a discrete “dimension” of its own – distinct, especially, from politics, or from the instrumentalized conception of politics. More precisely, Marcuse argues that art both exceeds the register of the political and represents the greatest potential for revolutionary social change. But in order to realize both of these points, it is, Marcuse claims, first necessary to destroy every trace of the old Marxist dogma of social realism. For Marcuse, art's “radical qualities” are to be found, not in its capacity accurately to represent or depict social reality, but in its “indictment of the established reality and its invocation of the beautiful image [*schöner Schein*] of liberation.” That is to say, art is that which “*transcends* its social determination” (1978, 6). It is radical to the extent that it “break[s] the monopoly of established reality” and endeavors, not passively

to represent, but actively “to *define* what is *real*” (9). Consequently, Marcuse concludes, “the radical potential of art lies precisely in its ideological character” (13), or the manner in which it manifests a social ideal as opposed to a social reality. This claim is, of course, directly opposed to Marxist dogma, which treats any reference to an ideal as completely *idealist*. Pitting himself against the official party line, Marcuse goes so far as to say that, “[i]n all its ideality,” art “bears witness to the truth of dialectical materialism” or “the permanent non-identity between subject and object, individual and individual” (29). Thus according to Marcuse the “truth” of dialectical materialism is expressed in art. And, incredibly, that “truth” is not what unites people in a community, but what distinguishes between individuals.

For Marcuse, it is precisely the artificiality of art, the unreality and abstract ideality of artistic form, that constitutes its capacity to transform society. Art that does not accord with the world as it is, but expresses instead a beautiful or charming image (*schöner Schein*) of liberation and of what could be, opens up a rift, as it were, between reality and representation. It thereby produces an experience of estrangement from the established social order, making it possible to recognize that order, not as something natural or eternal, but as a malleable human construct – something that we might endeavor to construct otherwise. The claim, then, is very similar to one made by Kant. The experience of the aesthetic shows that judgment is not grounded in an understanding of the facts, or so-called objective social reality, but in the transcendental imagination. It is a small leap to extend this principle to political and ethical judgment as well, indeed to all judgments that involve the human as opposed to the natural world. At the same time, once again like Kant, Marcuse insists on locating the imagination and the capacity for

judgment within the private, internal world of the individual subject. Indeed, according to Marcuse, art's radical capacity is ultimately found in its preservation of "the inwardness of subjectivity" (4) against the calculating or instrumental rationality of politics. For Marcuse, that is to say, only a "flight into inwardness" and an "insistence on the private sphere" can provide the necessary "bulwarks against a society which administers all dimensions of human existence" (38). Only a rigid distinction between public and private spheres (between "subject and object, individual and individual") can defend against the one-dimensional nightmare of totalitarianism. Either the inwardness of subjectivity is protected against politics, and against the external world of relations with others, or the cold administration of society as a whole threatens to reign supreme.

Given that he is writing in the wake of fascism, and amidst the experience of the Cold War, Marcuse can perhaps be forgiven some of his reliance on binary logic – either private or public, either inward or outward, either individual or community. But what would become of the aesthetic dimension, one wonders, if what Marcuse calls the "truth of dialectical materialism," or the "permanent non-identity between subject and object, individual and individual," was construed as an internal phenomenon as well – if the subject were always already existing in relation with others, and therefore permanently non-identical with itself? What if privacy were already the effect of a certain publicity, or a certain relation to the other? Indeed, is this not the case? Is privacy not the effect of a complex and overdetermined network of social relations – of laws and customs, formal and informal agreements among particular individuals within particular communities? To recognize and attempt to interrogate the public character of claims to privacy is not, as Marcuse seems to fear, irreversibly to relinquish all control to the rational administration

of all dimensions of human existence. Indeed, it may be a minimal condition for arguing that, as social and political creatures (*zoon politikon*), citizens of a republic have a collective responsibility to protect privacy – to enact laws, establish institutions, and debate procedures that might preserve and enhance the right to privacy.

With Kant and Marcuse, then, the question of aesthetics is a question of both privileging and preserving the individual subject – the internal, private world of relating, not with others, but with oneself. It is at this point that the question of Marxist aesthetics might be traded for that of the aesthetic in Marx, or one of Marx's and Engels's very brief and very infrequent reflections on art. Toward the end of "The Leipzig Council – III. Saint Max," Marx and Engels attack Stirner's notion of an association or union of egoists – his vision of a society in which each unique individual, in unfettered independence, pursues her or his unique passions, and is free to develop her or his inherent talents. Such a society, Stirner somewhat romantically opines, would be akin to a loose federation of individual artists, each creating their own masterpieces in isolation from one another – a whole nation of Mozarts and Raphaels. Marx and Engels are quick to jump on Stirner's gaff. "Here as always," they write, intermittently citing *The Ego and its Own*:

Sancho is again unlucky with his practical examples. He thinks "no one can compose your music for you, complete the sketches for your painting. No one can create Raphael's work for him." Sancho could surely have known, however, that it was not Mozart himself, but someone else who composed the greater part of Mozart's *Requiem* and finished it, and that Raphael himself "completed" only an insignificant part of his own frescoes (430).

That is to say, Stirner's examples perfectly undermine the principle he is attempting to establish. For Raphael, far from being an individual genius in the sense that Stirner suggests, employed a whole team of apprentices to finish his frescoes. And Mozart's *Requiem* was not the product of solitary inspiration, but completed after his death by Franz Xavier Süssmayer. In the case of Raphael and Mozart, then, it was precisely not a unique ego, but an ensemble of social relations, that created the work of art. As with the word "Marx," the proper names "Raphael" and "Mozart" serve only to spackle over a fragmented, composite group of different individuals and collaborative relations between them.

Ghosts in the Machine

In *Reading Marx Writing: Melodrama, the Market, and the "Grundrisse,"* and especially "The Ledger: Marxian Science Fiction in the Critique of Political Economy," Thomas Kemple argues for the productive and creative potential of reading Marx's work on political economy, not only as science, but also as literature – and not only as a scientific system, but also as science fiction. For Kemple, Marx's deeply rhetorical style "need not be understood as a mere literary ornamentation, but rather as an integral part of his critical apparatus" and as a way of "highlighting the unavoidable anachronistic and fictional aspects of what he is writing about." Kemple provides the example of Marx's many references to *Don Quixote*. These, he claims, "impl[y] that [Marx's] own theoretical discourse has a kind of narrative structure or story line that recounts a loss of illusions or the realization of a quest" (1995, 127). Of course, in Cervantes's novel, Quixote does not exactly lose his illusions, nor does he realize his quest – namely, to rescue his mistress Dulcinea, the image of purity, beauty, and perfection who, in fact, does not exist. As Cervantes scholar Manual Durán puts it, Dulcinea is "a ghost in the mind of another ghost" (1974, 113). Quixote, an aging hidalgo and deluded idealist, dreams her up after reading too many romances. She is, as it were, the sublime object of his desire, or of the fantasy scenario that organizes his quest. The closest Quixote comes to realizing his desire is in a famous scene on the road to El Toboso, where Sancho Panza and Don Quixote meet three peasant girls. Quixote believes his mistress is being held captive in the village, and sends Panza in to retrieve news of her. Panza, who has already nourished his master's illusions on the matter, has no choice but to pretend to do

Quixote's bidding. Returning from the village, he spots three peasant girls approaching, and, believing he can dupe his master as he has in the past, tells Quixote that they are Dulcinea and her maids. To both Panza's and the reader's great surprise, for the first and last time in the novel, Quixote sees reality as it actually is, not refracted through the lens of his romance-addled imagination. "Don Quixote cast his eye along the El Toboso road and seeing nothing but three peasant girls, asked Sancho in great perplexity whether he had left the ladies outside the city" (1950 [1614], 528). Panza makes one more effort to convince his master, describing the donkeys that the peasant girls ride as beautiful horses, but Quixote is not deceived. "It is as true that they are asses, or she-asses, as that I am Don Quixote and you Sancho Panza" (which, of course, is not true at all). The peasant girls are incredulous, and rail at Quixote and Panza, accusing them of being among the "petty gentry" who visit the road to "make fun of us village girls" (529). Finally, Quixote rationalizes the situation in his own uniquely insane fashion, claiming that his inability to see Dulcinea, which is to say his one brief glimpse of reality, must be the work of a "malignant enchanter" who "has put clouds and cataracts into my eyes" (530). Thus Dulcinea, the impossible ideal, remains impossible, and Quixote and Panza are free to continue their quest, now seeking out the magician who has stricken Quixote's vision.

Don Quixote was one of Marx's favorite novels, and a number of his biographers suggest he read it repeatedly throughout his life. It also serves as the model in many ways for the parody of Max Stirner found in "The Leipzig Council – III. Saint Max." Interestingly enough, Stirner is compared there, not to Quixote himself, but to Sancho Panza. Like Panza, Stirner is a professed materialist and egoist who has nonetheless had his head "stuffed with all kinds of nonsense" (GI 266) by quixotic idealists like

Feuerbach and Hegel. As "The Leipzig Council" attests, Marx's sense of humor was as vicious as it was incisive. The cruelty with which he could attack his enemies was matched only by the impressiveness of the intelligence he displayed while doing so. Marx, like many of his fellow left Hegelians, was not given to false modesty, nor was he given to real modesty either – this being at least part of the reason why left Hegelianism consisted primarily of a series of aggressive polemics between the left Hegelians themselves. It is, however, difficult to imagine that, as he matured, Marx did not see more and more of *himself* in Cervantes's famous errant knight – an aging idealist and closet romantic cloistered away in the British Museum reading books, dreaming up fantasies of great battles and noble quests, all the while protected from the realities of the external world by his own Sancho Panza, Friedrich Engels. On one level, there is a very palpable sense in Marx's so-called "mature" texts that the failures of the 1848 revolutions were disillusioning. A closer study of the political articles Marx wrote for the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* between 1848 and 1849 would, I suspect, bear this out. Prior to and throughout the revolution, Marx believed that socialism was axiomatically democratic, and that it would both emerge through and result in democratic institutions. By the time of *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, published in 1852, his thinking had changed dramatically. Now the idea of constructing a hegemonic discourse that articulates a wide range of social and political interests is replaced with a call for the unity, purity, and independence of the working class. Republicans and social democrats are no longer conceived of as potential allies, but as turncoats and traitors. Gone is the commitment to spontaneous self-organization of progressive movements. In its place is the infamous theory of the dictatorship of the proletariat. From now on political thought and political

rhetoric will have to be grounded in a concrete scientific analysis of material conditions and economic modes of production. Where his polemics once employed the same literary tools and rhetorical flourishes as those against whom they were directed, Marx is now, more often than not, contemptuous of overly literate bourgeois society, and approving of what he believes to be working class values such as austerity and firmness. On another level of his discourse, however, the younger Marx remains, or finds his way back into the margins of his text, like the return of the repressed. It is here, in this more or less unconscious layer of Marx's latter work, that one will find the "science fiction" of which Kemple writes. And in many ways these aspects of Marx's work (these components of the Marx-machine) only become visible (or operational) in a post-Marxist world.

Marx's extant correspondence suggests that it was his father Heinrich who first advised him to set aside his youthful dreams of becoming a poet and pursue instead the more pragmatic study of law or economics. The issue comes to a head in a letter Marx wrote to his father in November of 1837. Responding to his father's request that he send news of his progress in his university studies, Marx constructs a great pleonasm of literary and scholarly references, clearly intended to overwhelm and impress its recipient with its scope and variety. Whether Marx actually read the material he claims to have is perhaps open to question – seeing as how he was at the time a nineteen year old college student living at his father's expense. Regardless, at the end of the list, which includes dozens of books of philosophy and law, representing thousands of pages of text, Marx attempts to reassure his father that he is doing battle with his literary aspirations, and notes "I burned all my poems and sketches for short novels, etc., labouring under the illusion that I could abandon them altogether – of which there is as yet no evidence"

(Karl Marx to Heinrich Marx, 10 November 1837). These were, as it turns out, prophetic words, as Marx would spend much of his life labouring under the delusion that he could quell his erstwhile literary conscience and focus instead on practical, scientific tasks – or at any rate, separate the two. In many ways, Marxism would follow suit. But, as if arising from the ashes of the young poet's fiery purge, Marx's writing would repeatedly return to literary matters, and be everywhere inflected by a certain aesthetic style.

With the exception of his early literary experiments (some of which appear to have survived the purge), Marx's first extended consideration of aesthetic issues comes in *The Holy Family*, about a third of which consists of a critical review of Eugène Sue's sentimental novel *Mystères de Paris*. More precisely, it consists of Marx's repudiation of the "Critical Critic" Franz Zychlinski's effusive praise for Sue's novel. Broadly speaking, Marx attacks the novel for its failure to depict the complexity of actual human emotions, and for relying on abstract character types rather than constructing rounded human individuals – its lack, that is to say, of verisimilitude. Like all of the philosophers and writers Marx refers to as the "Critical Critics" (also called "Herr Bauer and Co."), Sue and Sue's hero Rudolph are guilty, according to Marx, of privileging "mystery" over "sensuality." They endeavor to "turn *real human beings* into *abstract standpoints*" (CW 4, 193). Thus they experience the world, and encourage others to experience the world, not as it actually is or in its sensuous reality, but via the detour of abstract philosophical or moral concepts. As Marx puts it, in place of "real apples, pears, strawberries and almonds" they privilege "the general idea '*Fruit*,'" and deem the latter to be the "essence" or the "substance" of the former (57). The "Critical Critics" have, as it were, no taste for reality. They prefer to bland world of moral principles and formal abstraction.

And yet, Marx maintains, there is one exception to this love of abstraction in Sue's novel – a longsuffering female prostitute named Fleur de Marie. In an effort to animate her, Marx plucks Fleur de Marie from *Mystères de Paris* – rescues her, as it were, from the cloying sentimentality of Sue's novel, and treats this fictional character as though she were a real person. "We meet Marie surrounded by criminals," Marx writes, "as a prostitute in bondage to the proprietress of the criminals' tavern." However, even in the midst of this awful situation, "she preserves a human nobleness of soul, a human unaffectedness and a human beauty." Unlike all the other characters in Sue's novel, who are but character types in Marx's view, Fleur de Marie possesses "vitality, energy, cheerfulness, resilience of character – qualities which alone her human development in her *inhuman* situation" (168). Even as Marx rails against the "Critical Critics" for treating other people and the very world around them as abstractions, Marx cannot help but construct a slightly ironic ideal out of the young prostitute, whose very name reflects back the flowery rhetoric Marx uses to describe her. "*Good* and *evil*, as Marie conceives them, are not *moral abstractions* of good and evil," Marx proclaims:

She is *good* because she has never caused *suffering* to anyone, she has always been *human* towards her inhuman surroundings. She is *good* because the sun and the flowers reveal to her her own sunny and blossoming nature. She is *good* because she is still *young*, full of hope and vitality [...] She measures her situation in her life by her *own individuality*, her *essential nature*, not by the *ideal of what is good* [...] [S]he is herself neither good nor bad, but human (170).

The influence of Feuerbach's sensuous humanism on Marx's thought is perhaps nowhere more evident than in this passage, written in the summer of 1844. But Marx's review of

Sue's novel also introduces an interesting aesthetic problem, one that, in the context of "socialist realism," Marxism would have to grapple with as well. By what right does Marx ascribe flesh, blood, and indeed an entire life to a character in a novel? Does Fleur de Marie become any less textual, or any more human, when she is transplanted from Sue's text to Marx's? Is the fecundity of the folio, whether Sue's or Marx's, such that it can nurture and grow living human beings? Has Marx, even while insisting on a rigid distinction between the virtual and the actual, the imaginary and the real, not become something of a Quixote figure – as though, after reading too many sentimental novels, he has come to believe in some of their contents, and conjured up a singularly unchaste, but equally ghostlike, Dulcinea of his own? The act of the imagination that Marx appears to be condemning – that of confusing a mental abstraction with a sensuous thing – is precisely the act that his idealization of Marie performs. In Kantian terms, it is as though Marx's understanding (*Verstand*) cannot keep up with his imagination (*Einbildung*), the latter recognizing Sue's novel, or the character of Fleur de Marie at any rate, as purposive, but the former being unable to deduce its rational purpose. Thus, whether he wishes to admit it or not, it must be aesthetic beauty, even the sublime, that Marx experiences in the character of Marie, and that he feels compelled to write about in *The Holy Family*.

While, after 1848, his work becomes decidedly more serious, and his tone more sonorous, the aesthetic dimension remains a component of Marx's writing throughout his life. It returns over and over again, like the return of the repressed. But it often returns in more sinister guises. Indeed, a dark thread of imagery that can only be called "gothic" runs throughout Marx's "mature" work on political economy – especially evident in his

phenomenological descriptions of machinery and factory life. In such passages, humans become ever more mechanical, and machines both human and monstrous. In the *Grundrisse*, for instance, Marx writes of how, if it was once individual workers who possessed “virtuosity” or “skill and strength,” now “it is the machine which possesses skill and strength in the place of the worker, is itself the virtuoso, with a soul of its own in the mechanical laws acting through it.” It is as though the machine enchants the workers, steeling not only their strength but even their souls:

The production process has ceased to be a labour process in the sense of a process dominated by labour as its governing unity. Labour appears, rather, merely as a conscious organ [*bewusstes Organ*], scattered among the individual living workers at numerous points of the mechanical system [*Punkten des mechanischen Systems*]; subsumed under the total process of the machinery itself, as itself only a link in the system, whose unity exists, not in living workers, but rather in the living (active) machinery [*lebendigen (aktiven) Maschinerie*], which confronts his individual, insignificant doings as a mighty organism [*die seinem einzelnen, unbedeutenden Tun gegenüber als gewaltiger Organismus ihm gegenüber erscheint*] (G 693).

Workers become, not cyborgs merged with the factory, but cogs in servitude to the machine – a conscious organ, *bewusstes Organ*, or *organa empsyche*. The same language dominates the “Machinery and Modern Industry” chapter of *Capital*. “Modern Industry has a productive organism that is purely objective,” Marx writes, “in which the labourer becomes a mere appendage to an already existing material condition of production” (C 421). Here “the instrument of labour confronts the labourer, in the shape of capital, of

dead labour, that dominates, and pumps dry, living labour-power" (462). Industry becomes a monster of "cyclopean scale" (421) that first expels adult workers into the streets and then proceeds to devour their children, "converting immature human beings into mere machines for the fabrication of surplus-value" (436). At long last there emerges "a mechanical monster, whose body fills whole factories, and whose demon power, at first veiled under the slow and measured motions of his giant limbs, at last breaks out into the fast and furious whirl of countless organs" (416-7). In Marx's text, the factory is described a grizzly, terrifying monster composed of both mechanical parts and human remains, stalking about the slums, spitting out adults and devouring children.

How does Marx do battle with this colossus, this mechanical monster of cyclopean scale? How does Marx *the writer* do battle? Recalling the work of Andrew Ure (which he first read, along with that of Charles Babbage, at the beginning of his investigations into political economy and so many years earlier), Marx writes in *Capital* "[s]ince the motion of the machine does not precede from the workman, but from the machinery, a change of persons can take place at any time without an interruption of the work." For the individual worker forced to trade her or his labour on the open market, the result is catastrophic. Classical political economists treat work as the value producing activity of individuals. But the machine sees it, not as the activity of individual humans, but as a series of "*relays systems*" (C 460) – trading one worker for another with no concern for their embodied existence. Thus it comes as no surprise that, at the outset of the industrial era, in the form of the Luddite movement for instance, the workers attack the machines themselves, and not the class that owns and operates them. But Marx suggests something slightly more sophisticated. Assembled in the factory, forced to work

as a part of a single industrial organism, the workers themselves become a “mechanical monster” of sorts – one that the capitalist both needs and fears. Thus, through the communities that form on the factory floor, the system provides the tools that will dismantle it as well. It conditions its own impossibility.

Something very similar happens in Marx’s text, and in his analysis of classical political economy. Marx does not so much mount an attack on people like Andrew Ure as he does damn them by allowing them to speak for themselves. He need only cite Ure’s words to destroy Ure’s position. Thus Marx quotes Ure’s chilling claim that “training human beings to renounce their desultory habits of work, and to identify themselves with the unvarying regularity of the complex automaton” requires “a successful code of factory discipline, suited to the necessities of factory diligence,” and that this “Herculean enterprise” was “the noble achievement of Arkwright,” whose factory codes set out a system of penalties and defaults for workers who failed to fulfill their tasks as appendages of the machine. Dropping his own, slightly more sophisticated reference to classical antiquity, Marx responds by sardonically noting that, with the establishment of such factory codes, “[t]he place of the slave driver’s lash is taken by the overlooker’s book of penalties” where “punishments naturally resolve themselves into fines and deductions from wages, and the law giving talent of the factory Lycurgus so arranges matters, that of violation of his laws is, if possible, more profitable to him than the keeping of them” (464). Thus its own proponents are shown to admit that the logic of capital is but a bureaucratized version of the logic of slavery – the “factory Lycurgus” having simply codified, and thus exposed for all to see (or to read), the brutal subjugation

of the workers. In works like *Capital* and the *Grundrisse*, Marx takes full advantage of such codifications, but treats them instead as criminal confessions.

In his *Moneybags Must Be So Lucky*, one of the few extant studies of the literary elements of Marx's texts, the Kantian philosopher Richard Paul Wolff suggests that Marx's writing, *Capital* in particular, is suffused with an ethical subtext – one that can only be understood in terms of "Socratic irony" (1988, 28). That is to say, according to Wolff, Marx's words imply both a double meaning (apparent and real), and a double audience (lower and higher). There must be one audience that receives only the apparent meaning of Marx's discourse, and a second, as Wolff puts it "epistemologically higher" (37) audience that *both* hears the true (ethical or polemical) intent of that discourse *and* witnesses the first audience mistaking it. Wolff's discussion of Socratic irony is interesting, and in keeping with the dualism one might expect of a Kantian. But, in the case of his references to Ure at any rate, parody might be a better description of Marx's rhetorical strategy. For Marx attacks Ure and his fellow capitalist apologists, not by arrogantly appealing to an "epistemologically higher" audience, or by winking at someone behind their back, but by *repeating* their words and *imitating* their style. Marx's apparent "critique" of Ure is, therefore, more on the order of a deconstruction, in that it does not seek to transcend its object, or transcendently deduce capitalism's conditions of possibility, but employs only those rhetorical resources that can be found in the text being considered. Here Marx's description of modern industry as a "*relays system*" takes on a whole different meaning. Marx, or the Marx-machine, is also a kind of relays system, in that it does not simply express the intensions of a single author, but copies and "relays" the words of countless others. In this sense, the entire "Machinery and Modern

Industry” chapter of *Capital* might be thought of as a *mise en abyme*. It not only *describes* a mechanical relays system, or the potentially infinite series of substitutions of one body for another, one worker for another, it also, but with very different effects and for very different purposes, *performs* or enacts such a procedure. Thus, in the penultimate section of the chapter, on “The Factory Acts,” we watch the Marx-machine degenerate into a series of citations relaying the voices of a multitude of workers – voices Marx, while cloistered away in the British Museum, has found buried in factory inspector reports and government documents, or the so-called “Blue Books” (C 542). Even as Marx explains the deleterious effects of the mechanical relays system on the workers, his text becomes a kind of relays system or a “war machine” of its own – repeating the questioning and cross examination of workers, this repetition alone being sufficient to expose the absurdity of the inspector’s position, and the logic of the worker’s.

Beginning with the mechanical “relays system” deployed in the “Factory Acts” section of “Machinery and Modern Industry,” one could extrapolate the principle that everything Marx writes about machinery, about both its productive and its destructive potential, can be read otherwise – as an of allegory of writing. In this sense, Marx’s texts not only represent a social reality outside of them, but articulate their own mechanical operation as well. That they have only rarely been read in this fashion by Marx scholars does not mean that they have never been used in this fashion by activists and intellectuals. Indeed, it could be argued that the collected works of Marx and Engels have *always* been used by activists and intellectuals as rhetorical tool boxes or polemical war machines. Regardless, as the tattered and well worn manuscript of *The German Ideology* alone attests, texts are not static entities containing messages from long dead authors, but,

like language and culture in general, active and changing things – constantly altering themselves, and constantly altering the world. The figure of the Marx-machine is intended to invoke this dynamic, purposive, productive aspect of his writing and his texts – the sense in which Marx is still alive, perhaps even more than ever, in a post-Marxist context. Thus the Marx-machine is not an aesthetic subtlety or a literary embellishment – or rather, it is not *only* a literary embellishment. It also has specific and concrete effects. It connects everywhere with the so-called “real” world of labour and love, struggle and desire. And from the complex network of figures and tropes, genres and styles, references and citations that constitute Marx’s body of work, it will always be possible to take components that can be put to use in other machines, for other purposes. That is to say, it will always be possible to activate the Marx-machine in different ways, to make it function and speak otherwise, to mobilize it in the continuous struggle to create new rights, new freedoms, and new equalities that itself represents the absolute and inalienable promise of justice.

Chapter 3: The Fractured Essence

Historical Materialisms

While it is all but synonymous with his name, “historical materialism” is a phrase Marx himself never used. Like all such phrases, it has a tendency to reify extraordinarily complex processes and utterances – to reduce, in this case, the operations of the Marx-machine to two words. Shlomo Avineri began his classic study of Marx’s social and political thought by quite candidly admitting that “[a]nyone who adds another volume to the already prolific literature on Marx can be expected to be accused of either repetitiveness or immodesty” (1971, vii). In a post-Marxist context, the accusation might include irrelevance as well. Perhaps it is best, as J.L. Austin once quipped in a somewhat different context, “to let sleeping dogmatists lie” (1979, 75). But instead of simply consigning “historical materialism” to the dustbin of history, or abandoning it once again to the gnawing criticism of the mice, I propose to think this phrase otherwise. If the Marxist tradition tended to characterize historical materialism as a science, and even as the definitive science of human social relations, I would like to suggest that the conjunction of these two words represents a problem, a puzzle, or an *aporia*. Marx, or the young philosophical Marx at any rate, the Marx who wrote his doctoral dissertation on ancient physics and atomistic theories of nature, would have recognized the puzzle as well. In the western philosophical tradition, at least since the time of Aristotle, the relationship between time and matter has represented a problem – the problem, simply put, of presence and absence. Certainly one can examine static or present matter, observe

it and classify it, study it in detail. But how does one observe changes in matter over time? While one can account for that which is present (matter), how can one account for that which is no longer present (what is past), and that which is not yet present (what remains off in the future, or yet to come)? How can it be thought that the past and the future are what are not? In his *Physics*, and indeed throughout his philosophy, Aristotle attempts to resolve this problem by expanding on the concept of form (*eidos*) as it emerges in what are believed to be Plato's latter dialogues. According to Aristotle, every discrete being or entity, every particular collection of properties that can be identified as something distinct, possesses and is motivated by a form. This form or essence constitutes the entity's inherent potential (*dynamis*). The potential strives to become actual, or acquire material content, over time. In this sense, change occurs and can be discussed in a coherent fashion because every entity is, from the outset, directed towards a particular purpose (*telos*) – namely the state of fulfilled potential, total maturity, completion (*entelekheia*), or actuality (*energeia*). However, while it helps explain the phenomenon of change, Aristotle's distinction between form and matter, potentiality and actuality, only begs the question – what is the status of the form? What does it consist of, if it is not matter? Can a philosopher observe or examine it, or is it purely abstract? Is it present or is it absent? Does it exist in the here and now, or only in the no longer and the yet to come? Or is it, perhaps, the formal condition of both presence and absence?

A version of this same problem is at the center of Hegel's philosophical system. Hegel applies Aristotle's model, not only to the physical world, but also to social relations, and to human history as such. According to Jurgen Habermas, Hegel's work signals the beginning of "modernity's consciousness of time" (1987, 11) – the moment

when reason gets extracted from the internal world of the subject's mind, and relocated in the external, intersubjective world of social and, especially, historical relations and developments. For Hegel, human history is rational – it has a coherent design, one that can be encyclopedically studied and laid bare. According to the traditional reading at any rate, Hegel believes that history is characterized by the gradual actualization of human potential, or the realization of a formal essence, spirit, or idea in the material world of things. Indeed, according to the traditional reading, Hegel believes that human existence in general can be understood as a gigantic if not infinite number of such essences manifesting themselves in various kinds of material bodies, progressively overcoming internal contradictions, and thereby developing and growing over time. Thus, in his late lectures on *The Philosophy of History*, Hegel directly references “the Aristotelian *dynamis*,” claiming that “Spirit begins with a germ of infinite possibility” and that this “*possibility* points to something destined to become actual.” As a result, “[i]n actual existence Progress appears as an advancing from the imperfect to the more perfect.” However, upon closer inspection, it becomes clear that “the former must not be understood abstractly as *only* the imperfect, but as something which involves the very opposite of itself – the so-called perfect – as a *germ* or impulse” (1901 [1837], 108). It is this “germ” or “impulse” of possibility, this great potential represented by the unknown future, that Marx and his generation will take away from their readings of Hegel.

Now, while Hegel's system is notoriously complicated, and while it would be impossible to do justice to his work in this study, it would seem that Hegel still fails to answer the burning question – what is the status of this spirit, this essence, this potentiality or form? What is this “germ” or this “impulse” of perfection and of the future

that oversees human history? Is it present, absent, or the formal condition of both presence and absence? From a materialist perspective, how can I study what is potential, still off in the future and yet to come? One solution would be to deny that this is a real problem. That is to say, one could simply reject the Aristotelian concepts of the formal and final causes, reject all types of teleology, or every suggestion that human history is purposive, and restrict one's study instead to questions of efficient causality, or observable relations or force between material bodies located in space. This is in fact what early Enlightenment thinkers proposed when they rejected the Aristotelian world view of the schools. However, while reducing causality to efficient cause might provide for more scientific (or at any rate more efficient) explanations of natural phenomena, it also threatens to result in a profound disenchantment of the world of human phenomena. In particular, it entails what might be called "the pulverization of history." Unless it is under the purview of some overarching purpose or design, bound together even in the loosest of fashions by something like an essence or an idea, does human history not disintegrate into a series of unrelated, or only accidentally related, moments or events? Is it not crushed into so many specs of dust, with no sequence and no direction? Thus it would appear that there must be something like a formal cause and teleology for anyone to claim to make any sense of historical change. But again, how does one characterize that form – especially if one claims to be a materialist? How does one even begin to discuss in a coherent fashion that which explains the relationship between present, past, and future, without ever existing as an observable phenomenon in the present, the past, or the future?

Of course, by positing a God, a prime mover, or another such onto-theological mystery, it is possible avoid or at least spackle over this *aporia*. In that case, there would be no need to ask what intelligence works to bind human history together into meaningful totalities, as the answer would be immediately available to faith, even if it could never be made available to science. For his part, Marx does not believe in such things, not even for the briefest of instants. Thus, unlike an onto-theologian, he is forced to deal with the problem directly. And while, once again, Marx himself never used it, the phrase “historical materialism” captures his quandary quite well. On the one hand, Marx is a materialist. He like most of his left Hegelian contemporaries rejects the idealist language of essences and spirits, transcendent forms and rational ideals. A child of the Enlightenment and a committed *Aufklärer*, he treats such things as empty theological fantasies – the last remnants of primitive fetishism and idol worship. They serve only to confuse the masses and cloud rational discourse almost to the point of opacity. On the other hand, and at the same time, Marx is a historicist. He believes that history is more than a collection of accidentally related events, that it has purposes, and follows meaningful patterns or designs. He also believes that a historian like himself can more or less accurately trace and discuss those historical designs. While he is by no means a determinist, and would never have recognized Stalin’s infamous “iron laws” of history, Marx does make the minimal assumption that there are meaningful connections between historical events, and that these connections exceed simple questions of efficient causality. Indeed, this assumption reveals the lasting influence of Hegel on Marx’s work. Now, the question is, how can Marx hold both positions? How can he consistently profess to be both a materialist and historicist? Do the two positions not cancel one

another out? Without appealing to some idea or some form that transcends and therefore comprehends history's discrete particulars, or binds them together in some kind of organized fashion, how can one claim that history has a meaningful pattern or design, however provisional and contingent one wishes to make it? With his two hands, how does Marx juggle the curious puzzle contained in the phrase "historical materialism?"

In this chapter I will look closely at a variety of debates over essentialism and the concept of essence – both the broad based repudiation of so-called "essentialism" among postmodern and poststructuralist thinkers, and the forgotten or occluded origins of that repudiation in intellectual history, and in Marx scholarship in particular. While it is almost universally maligned in contemporary cultural and political theory, just what "essentialism" means, where the concept comes from and who first called it into question, is not particularly well known. Marx discusses some of the first debates over the philosophical concept of essence in his doctoral dissertation on *The Difference Between Democritean and Epicurean Philosophies of Nature*, where he explores the work of the earliest anti-essentialist thinkers, namely the ancient atomists Democritus and Epicurus. Their arguments with Aristotle over the nature of the physical universe represent the first recorded attempt to circumvent the concept of essence, and to conceive of the universe in terms of purely accidental relations between discrete atoms – an approach that also lead them to deny the existence of the prime mover, a first cause, or what the scholastic Aristotelians associated with God. In the seventeenth century, a similar attack on the concept of essence and on Aristotelian philosophy in general was undertaken by Enlightenment scientists, especially Francis Bacon. Bacon rejected what he called "the idols of thought," including scholastic appeals to unobservable phenomena,

in the name of empiricism and materialism. The rejection of the Aristotelian principles of final and formal causality, and the elevation instead of efficient causality, was central to the birth and development of Enlightenment science throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, especially in France. As was discussed in detail above, the attack on the humanist concept of essence was renewed in the nineteenth century by Bruno Bauer and Max Stirner, who saw it as being responsible for the residual metaphysical commitments of even the most radical German philosophy of their day. Of course, one might index any number of other thinkers and movements that called into question the concept of essence, and that sought to replace it with a more materialistic, scientific understanding of both natural and human phenomena. But in terms of the current, very widespread renunciation of essentialism, perhaps the most important, if also rarely acknowledged, context is Louis Althusser, and specifically Althusser's groundbreaking rereading of Marx as it is laid out in *For Marx* and *Reading Capital*.

It would be difficult to underestimate the significance of Althusser's "theoretical revolution" in Marxist thought during the 1960s and 1970s. The intention of Althusser's intervention (which he always insisted had to be read in context, or in relation to its specific historical conjuncture, and the history of the communist movement) was to reinvigorate Marxist theory – to recreate that theory so as to allow it to speak to a world dominated by Cold War brinksmanship, the Sino-Soviet break, official de-Stalinization in the East, a more or less stagnant workers' movement in the West, a new series of revolutions occurring primarily in the so-called "Third World" or the decolonized world, and the emergence of the new social movements, the student's movement in particular. In order to address this new world, one Marx and Lenin could have never imagined,

Althusser proposed two related tactics – first, the development and expansion of “theoretical practices,” which would provide Marxist theory with new concepts needed for new struggles; and second, the pursuit of a “symptomatic reading” of Marx, or a reading that endeavored to find a heretofore unknown Marxist philosophy hidden in the silences and oversights, gaps and lacuna of Marx’s latter writing. Both the call for “theoretical practices” and the attempted “symptomatic reading” of Marx were, for Althusser, related to the “epistemological break” in Marx’s text, or the moment, in 1845, when Marx rejected Feuerbach and Hegel. Althusser wished to dissuade his fellow Marxists from adopting the humanist philosophy found in Marx’s early manuscripts – works that, at the time, were just beginning to receive a large amount of scholarly attention, particularly in the West and particularly under the influence of the Frankfurt School. He believed that such humanism would eventually blunt the more radical and more scientific elements of Marx’s later, mature work. For Althusser, humanism was one ideology among many. It could be put to use for a myriad of reasons by any number of different political subjects. But Marxism, Althusser insisted, was not an ideology, but a science. Indeed, Marxism was the science *of* ideology. For the same reason, Althusser renounced Antonio Gramsci’s “absolute historicism” – the idea that every practice and every theory had to be historically located. This, Althusser feared, threatened to annul the distinction between ideology and the science *of* ideology (1970, 131). However, for Althusser, the greatest danger to Marxism was not Gramsci’s theory, but the very real possibility that the science of Marxism would get lost in the “philosophical humanism” or “theoretical essentialism” of Marx’s own youth (1969, 32). In Althusser’s opinion, Marxism would gain nothing by revisiting Feuerbach’s critique of alienation, or by

maintaining that humanity had been estranged from its own essence. It could only be politically or economically effective if it engaged with specific social formations, intervened into specific conjunctures, and sought to revolutionize particular structures and superstructures. Thus Althusser undertook to dismantle essentialism both within Marx's text and within leftist philosophy in general. While it departs in many ways from Althusser's work, and especially from his effort to privilege Marxist science above all other discourses, the contemporary post-structuralist attack on essentialism is very much an heir to Althusser – the specter of Althusser still haunting cultural theory. Indeed, the turn away from Althusser and towards Gramsci among socialist theorists has not left behind, but if anything entrenched and reinforced that critique of the concept of essence.

But what exactly does Althusser mean when he claims that Marx "breaks" with the theoretical humanism and philosophical essentialism of his youth? What exactly does Althusser mean by "essence," and is it the same as Marx would have meant? According to the argument set out in *For Marx*, every concept of essence relies on two interrelated postulates, both of which Marx dismisses in the sixth of his "Theses on Feuerbach." First, Althusser claims, essentialists believe that "there is a universal essence of man." Second, they maintain "that this essence is the attribute of '*each single individual*' who is its real subject." In other words, an essentialist holds that every particular subject partakes, and partakes in full, of the universal essence of humanity. Althusser continues:

If the essence of man is to be a universal attribute, it is essential that *concrete* subjects exist as absolute givens; this implies an *empiricism of the subject*. If these empirical individuals are to be men, it is essential that each carries in himself the whole human essence, if not in fact, at least in principle; this implies an *idealism*

of the essence. So empiricism of the subject implies idealism of the essence and *visa versa*. This relation can be inverted into its “opposite” – empiricism of the concept / idealism of the subject. But the inversion respects the basic structure of the problematic, which remains fixed (1969, 228).

The language in this passage and others like it in Althusser’s work is dense and complex. Althusser tends to use familiar terms (here “empiricism” and “idealism”) in idiosyncratic ways. That said, the main point seems clear enough. To be an essentialist, Althusser argues, is to believe that subjects somehow exist “as absolute givens” prior to the moment of their concrete articulation. It is thus to extract the subject from what, in the sixth of his “Theses on Feuerbach,” Marx calls “the ensemble of social relations” (*SW* 157). From an essentialist perspective, the subject’s identity and value is ultimately determined, not through its concrete relations with others, but by its having a share in the human essence. And indeed, for an essentialist, each individual subject has an absolute share, a total share, an infinite share in the universal human essence – “if not in fact,” as Althusser puts it, “at least in principle.” In other words, the human essence is something on the order of an infinite substance – a substance that, because infinite, can also be infinitely divided, or offered in infinite measure to the finite number of subjects (which is what Hegel, the essentialist with whom Marx is supposed to have “broken,” would call a “bad infinity”). Within this framework, one can say that the subject is empirical while the substance is ideal, or one can say that the substance is empirical while the subjects are ideal. According to Althusser, either way, it does not change the “basic structure of the problematic.” In both cases, the hypothesis of an infinite and therefore infinitely divisible essence remains intact.

Althusser conceives of the human essence, or believes that essentialists conceive of the human essence, then, as a substance, or what the ancient Greek philosophers called *ousia*. And it seems quite clear that Marx would never have accepted such a model of the human essence, neither before nor after his so-called “epistemological break.” But might there not be another way of thinking about the human essence, one that treats it, not as a static substance, but instead as a dynamic form – not *ousia*, but something more on the order of what Aristotle, developing some ideas that emerge in Plato’s later dialogues, calls *eidos*? And might Marx not have developed such a theory of essence, not only in the early stages, but throughout his career? Shortly after *MEGA* published Marx’s and Engels’s early writings in 1932, the young Herbert Marcuse wrote a brief but important essay on something he called “the materialist concept of essence” (1968 [1936], 74). Marcuse begins by attacking the ascendant phenomenology of his day, and particularly what he took to be the return to transcendental claims in Husserl’s philosophy. To be fair, the real, thinly veiled target of this attack is not Husserl but Marcuse’s former teacher and recent convert to fascism, Martin Heidegger, who Marcuse thinks subordinates human existence to the individual. It is not entirely clear that Marcuse fully understands Heidegger’s philosophy at this stage. Regardless, the essay is interesting for its reading of Marx’s concept of essence. Marcuse argues that, in Marx’s work, an essence is not a transcendental form, nor is it a substance that remains identical through time and to which various properties adhere. Rather, for Marx, an essence is an immanent, temporal, dynamic potentiality. For Marx, an entity’s “essence” is utterly indistinguishable from its “appearance.” It is something that “originates in history and changes in history” (74). In developing this dynamic, historical concept of essence, Marcuse maintains, Marx drew

heavily, not only on Hegel, but also and perhaps even more so on Hegel's great teacher, Aristotle.

In Aristotle, a thing's essence is its form (*eidos*), and a form is the actual existence of a future potential – the concrete existence of a principle of change. In a famously opaque passage from the *Physics*, Aristotle defines change as “the actuality of that which exists potentially, in so far as it is potentially this actuality” (201a). The passage is difficult to interpret, but one thing seems clear: the Aristotelian concept of essence attempts to explain the enigmatic sense in which the present can be seen to be conditioned or even caused by the future. For Aristotle, actuality can be understood to be an effect of potentiality, and the present an effect of that which remains yet to come. As W.K.C. Guthrie puts it, Aristotle posits not a “transcendental” but an “immanent form” (1976, 128). The *eidos* exists, not behind or above, but within and through the realm of appearances – as a constituent element of time and motion, difference and change. If the pre-Socratic philosophers thought that what was “essential” was also infinite and immutable, Aristotle believed almost the exact opposite. For him, an essence is a principle of change and mutation. It is even something destined to pass away. An essence is a potentiality (*dynamis*) striving to become fully actual (*energeia*). Finding this same principle at work in Marx's texts, Marcuse maintains that the “materialist concept of essence is a historical concept.” For both Aristotle and Marx, “[e]ssence is conceived only as the essence of a particular ‘appearance,’ whose factual form is viewed with regard to what is in itself and what could be (but is not in fact)” (1968, 74). To speak of a thing's “essence” is not to speak of a static substance or foundation on which it is based, but, in more Heideggerean terms, of its ec-static temporality – the sense in which it exists

in the here and now (the present) only in relation to what is no longer (the past) and what is not yet (the future). Essence refers to the movement of a particular thing through time – its “essence-ing.”

An essence for Althusser and an essence for Marcuse are, therefore, two very different things. *Pace* Althusser, the Aristotelian concept of essence as a dynamic and immanent form does not require one posit that “*concrete subjects* exist as absolute givens.” Neither does it mean all subjects must partake of a common substance, and partake of it in infinite measure. What Althusser attacks in his polemic against essentialism is not the concept of a dynamic and immanent form or *eidos*, but that of a static, foundational substance or *ousia*. Althusser is against the idea that, beneath the ensemble of social relations, or behind the world of overdetermined contradictions, there exists a more profound, unified human reality that patiently awaits revelation, and that, once revealed, will make it possible to wipe away the confusion of contradiction and overcome the struggles of ideology. This is the humanism from which Althusser wishes to distance not only himself, but Marx as well. And to be sure, Feuerbach can be said to have held to such a theory – maintaining that philosophy “is knowledge of *what is*” and that “[t]hings and essences are to be thought and to be known *just as they are*” (1983 [1843], 162). It could even be claimed that Marx “breaks” with all such simplistic approaches, and all efforts to divide existence up in to appearance and essence, absolute illusion and absolute truth (although, one might well ask whether Marx breaks with this approach, or whether he simply confirms that he does not accept it). However, Marx rejects Feuerbach’s theory, not in order to reject essentialism *tout court*, but in order to think essence otherwise. For Marx, essences are not obscured by appearances and

difference, contradiction and change. Instead, they are immanent to and articulated through such things. Thus, in *The German Ideology*, the moment of his ostensible “break” with essentialism, Marx criticizes Feuerbach and by extension all of the young Hegelians for their reliance on a “double perception, a profane one which perceives only the ‘flatly obvious’ and a higher, philosophical, one which perceives the ‘true essence’ of things.” However, Marx’s point is not to reject essentialism, but to show that, precisely because they possess dynamic essences, each particular thing, each individual phenomenon, must be viewed as a “historical product, the result of the activity of a whole succession of generations, each standing on the shoulders of the preceding one” (GI 57). In other words, if Marx leaves Feuerbach behind, it is not to overcome essentialism. On the contrary, it is first and foremost to complicate and thereby to re-entrench the more dynamic concept of essence he borrows from Aristotle and Hegel.

Since the time of Althusser’s intervention, Marx scholarship has witnessed a protracted debate over the concept of essence, with some maintaining that Marx’s work is shorn in two in or around 1845 when he rejects Feuerbach and Hegel (Balibar 1995), and others insisting that he remains committed to Hegel and to the Hegelian dialectic throughout his career (Meikle 1985). While the political stakes of this debate have not always been self-evident, the methodological stakes have. Does Marx call for theoretical practices, or does he call for historical scholarship? Althusser believed that the radical potential of historical scholarship, at least in its traditional form, had been more or less exhausted. It was not enough simply to trace the trajectory of history, or to rely on history to solve its own problems. Marxists, Althusser insisted, would have to intervene directly into particular conjunctures. Thus it would be necessary to study societies, not as organic

totalities developing through successive contradictions towards more or less determined ends, but as complex “social formations” – overdetermined, synchronic, spatial configurations of “specifically effective” and “relatively autonomous” structures and superstructures (1969, 111). At the time a young student of Althusser, Etienne Balibar outlined this approach in one of his contributions to the *Reading Capital* project entitled “Elements for a Theory of Transition.” If historicism tends to view the past in terms of a series of “periods,” Balibar maintains that Marx overcame this “periodization” by calling instead for “the synchronic analysis of the mode of production” (1970, 298). That is to say, thanks to Marx, one no longer needs to understand history in terms of internally coherent periods or totalities progressing towards higher stages and thus more comprehensive totalities. Rather, one can study a social formation as an overdetermined assemblage of structures and superstructures, or a conjuncture of different, often antagonistic forces.

For Althusser, then, the Hegelian theory of history as directed and purposive – the conception of history as the evolutionary unfolding of a rational idea through progressive stages – is set aside. In its place one finds a theory of social change as something that occurs with great rapidity, through dramatic ruptures and breaks, in which one synchronic structure displaces another such structure without any continuity between the two. History involves, not the unfolding of a rational idea or potentiality, but unpredictable, revolutionary transitions between discrete social formations. Indeed, in Althusser, it is almost as though the very idea of temporality must be left in the dustbin of history, in favor of a highly spatialized model of human society. Again, while today very few refer to Althusser directly, this spatialized conception of social relations remains more or less

intact. To be sure, in reaction against certain elements of Althusser's brand of structural Marxism, there has been a revival of Gramsci in almost all corners of post-structuralist theory and practice, and a return to historicism. But with this return history itself has become a kind of geographically mapped space – what Heidegger might have called a spatialization of time. Thus the language of contemporary historicism is one of historical *location*, historical *situation*, historical *position*, historical *embeddedness*, and so forth – as though understanding the past were a question, not of narrating a process, but of establishing the relative coordinates of each character. Put briefly, subjects are historical, but they are not historicized.

The spatialization of social relations – a residue, I would argue, of structuralism, and of Althusser's scientism – can still be discerned in certain elements of the work of figures like Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, whose *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* inaugurated the era of identity politics in cultural theory by introducing the concept of the "subject position." It can also be found in the work of postmodern feminists such as Donna Haraway, whose concept of "situated knowledge" had an enormous impact on left wing cultural and political theory during the 1990s. These interventions were doubtless necessary when they were first articulated. The importance of recognizing the fundamental difference between different kinds of political struggle, the irreducibility of politics to class, and the necessity therefore of forging links between various left-wing or what might be very provisionally called "progressive" struggles (rather than banking on the assumption that they are essentially or naturally connected), must not be overlooked. The same goes for distinguishing feminist politics from Marxist politics, and carving out a distinct space for various local or situated forms of feminist struggle that are not

subsumed under the broader socialist one. But the current conjuncture is characterized, not by a dearth of identity politics, but, if anything, by a dearth of convincing or effective hegemonic discourses on the radical left. At the very least, it is probably time to supplement the spatial distinctions between subject positions pursued by identity politics with the articulation of a hegemonic or quasi-universal project on the left – considerations, not only a spatial differences, but also of utopian futures. What vision or visions of the future, for instance, are capable of the hegemonizing radical forces currently involved in things like the alternative globalization movement, the new student and labour movements, the peace movement, or the various subjects demanding an alternative to the (integrated) military and economic policies of the west?

As a reaction against structuralist discourse about the “death of the subject,” post-structuralism announced a “return of the subject.” The subject who returned, however, was not a universal humanist subject, but a located and situated subject. But it was also a spatialized subject, who did not so much develop or change over time as occupy a particular position within a social geography. This spatialized subject is perhaps nowhere more evident than in feminist standpoint theory and discourse analysis – an approach that has accomplished the very important political task of representing power relations and social hierarchies in a new fashion, but that has in many ways failed adequately to think through the problem of time, temporality, and social change. The work of Dorothy Smith is exemplary in this regard. Smith suggests that discourses need to be analyzed in terms of what she calls their “deictic locking procedures,” or the manner in which they employ deictic or indexical terms (here, there, now, then, I, you, we, they, and so forth) to situate subjects or discourse partners vis-à-vis one another on a kind of power grid (1990, 56).

She suggests that one can, as it were, map the operation of both power and resistance by attending to the manner in which they employ *deixis* – a grammatical term taken from the Greek for pointing. In this sense, even deictic terms that appear to be temporal (now, then) are understood as spatial or geographical designators. Smith endeavors to ground this method in a reading of *The German Ideology*. Like Althusser before her, she focuses, not on Marx's and Engels's historicism, but on their introduction of the theory of the social relation. For Marx, she claims (significantly, she omits Engels's name), the "social relation" refers to "the actual coordinated activity of actual people." Through a reading of social texts, the sociologist attempts to map the specific "social relations" that are implicitly "coordinating individual activity and giving people's activities form and determination" (94). By omitting Engels's name, of course, Smith also overlooks "the actual coordinated activity of actual people" or the particular "social relation" that resulted in the social text of *The German Ideology*. But, more importantly, Smith shunts aside the whole question of whether social relations as Marx and Engels describe them are purposive or directed towards the future in favor of a politics of space, and of geographically locating subjects within complex power matrices. Here sociology risks being reduced to a new kind of empirical descriptivism – a method of representing or, as Marx puts it in the eleventh of his "Theses on Feuerbach," "interpreting" social relations, but not one of "changing" them.

So there is a certain amount of continuity between Marx's concept of essence and Hegel's. Althusser's claim that the mature Marx "breaks" in a categorical fashion with "theoretical humanism" and "philosophical essentialism" of his youth is, at best, overstated. At the same time, there is an important difference between the essentialist

tradition that Hegel continues, and the one that Marx inaugurates. Marx's essence is a fundamentally fractured essence. It is broken, fissured, ruptured at its point of origin – a *Grund-risse*. That is to say, for Marx, for Hegel, and indeed for all “essentialists” in the Aristotelian sense, the present can only make sense in relation to the past and the future, or what is no longer and what is yet to come. It is, therefore, ec-static – located both within itself and beyond or outside of itself at the same time. However, Marx also intuitively feels that the past and the future do not begin at an origin or finish in an end, but themselves exist in relation to other pasts and futures, other “no longer” and other “not yet.” Marx does not conceive of time in a spatial fashion. He does not treat it as a series of points or a sequence of independent “nows” arranged on a line. Rather, he treats time as temporalized – each point and each now only accruing meaning in relation to other points and other nows. It is important to realize that this “temporalization of time,” as Heidegger would call it in *Being and Time* (1962, 377), is not only an abstract philosophical problem. It also has very real, concrete effects. In particular, it works to counteract what, in his lectures on *The Philosophy of History*, Hegel calls “the geographical basis of history” (1901 [1832], 134). Perhaps his most read work in the nineteenth century, Hegel's posthumously published lectures on history were very important for all of the young or left Hegelians, and Marx and Engels refer to them throughout *The German Ideology*. In them, Hegel suggests that history is essentially spatial, in that it unfolds through a series of geographical locations. It is as though historical spirit marches from east to west, beginning in China, moving through India, Persia, Greece, and Rome, until finally arriving, to no one's great surprise, at Hegel's own doorstep in nineteenth century Germany. At each stage in its journey, historical spirit expresses itself through the culture

and the ideas of a particular nation and a particular race. Now, in *The German Ideology*, Marx and Engels reject this approach to history. Instead, they argue, it is necessary to trace the history, not of nations and races, but of modes of production and social classes. History is no longer nationalist history. It is now international. Its analysis is now world-historical. Modes of production and social classes cut across national boundaries. The borders that separate nations are now understood to be artificial and radically contingent constructs, not necessary expressions of historical spirit. And it is precisely because they are artificial and constructed, the results of ongoing relations, struggles, and exchanges, that such borders have and will continue to have very real, concrete effects. The old method of geographically mapping human history gets displaced by a new attempt to construct history as an open field of ongoing struggles and exchanges between spaces. The political space of social relations is, in this sense, temporalized.

In Marx studies, the ongoing debate between the anti-essentialists and the essentialists can be seen in the recent work Etienne Balibar, a former student of Althusser and keeper in many ways of the structural Marxist flame, and H.T. Wilson, a committed essentialist and humanist who is interested in Marx's methodology, and who follows the tradition inaugurated by Georg Lukács. Althusser, it will be recalled, rests his theory of the epistemological break on the sixth of Marx's "Theses on Feuerbach," where Marx is said to have traded the ideology of the "human essence" for the science of the "social relation" (1969, 227). Balibar accepts his teacher's bifurcation of Marx's career, and adds that Marx rejects essentialism so as to discover the "transindividual." – "[n]ot what is ideally 'in' each individual, but what exists *between individuals* by dint of their multiple interactions" (1995, 32). That is to say, for Marx, before there is any identity, any origin

whatsoever, whether collective or individual, there is a social relation. The relation precedes, even invents, that which it ostensibly relates. As a direct consequence, every analysis of social relations, no matter how exhaustive or rigorous, remains incomplete, as it is invariably bound up with that which it portends to describe. It is, to use the Althusserian locution, "in the conjuncture." According to Balibar, this also explains the incomplete status of Marx's body of work. However, it is important to point out that, contrary to Althusser's reading of it, the sixth of Marx's "Theses on Feuerbach" does not distinguish between the human essence and the ensemble of social relations, but defines the former in terms of the latter. Thus Marx writes that "the human essence is no abstraction inherent in each single individual." Rather, "[i]n its reality it is the ensemble of social relations" (*SW* 157). For Marx, essence is not a sensuous reality, as it is for Feuerbach. But neither is it an empty spectral fantasy or idealist illusion, as it appears to be in certain readings of Hegel. Rather, and in Aristotelian terms, an essence is a real potentiality, an "immanent form" or a "concrete totality." H.T. Wilson explains this approach in his work on Marx's critical / dialectical procedure. "Materialist dialectics is essentialist," Wilson writes, "because it begins in the whole, is after it, and subordinates its conception of law to it without, however, denying the significance of law or lawfulness." There is, that is to say, always some totality and some lawfulness governing that totality. However, these "laws hold only for a given social formation, because *it is this very formation that gives rise to the laws*, laws discovered through the careful investigation of and reflection on the social formation itself" (1991, 105). Scholarship and research thus have the task of recollecting the order or lawfulness of given social

formations, or explaining what would otherwise appear to be arbitrarily or accidentally related phenomena in terms of complex historical totalities or meaningful wholes.

The most powerful argument against Althusser's theory of the epistemological break is probably the broken and fractured machine-text known today as the *Grundrisse*. Written between 1857 and 1858 (which is to say, long after Marx is supposed to have rejected philosophical essentialism and theoretical humanism), these notebooks begin by setting out a methodology for the study of political economy – one that is quite explicitly essentialist, and that draws heavily on Hegel and Aristotle. Marx explains that the particular elements of any given social formation can only be understood, or can only be seen to be meaningful, if the sociologist begins with some minimal abstract representation – some, as Marx puts it, “chaotic conception [*Vorstellung*]” – of that formation as a totality. Thus, to use Marx's example, one might start with the abstract concept of “population,” and proceed from there to investigate particular people within a particular nation. Beginning with this *Vorstellung* of the totality, the sociologist must then examine discrete social phenomena in relation to others, eventually returning to or recollecting the totality “this time not as a chaotic conception of the whole, but as a rich totality of many determinations and relations” (*G* 100). The circle, then, starts with an abstract or empty totality, proceeds through the analysis of specific relations, and returns with a full, rich representation of the totality. It has, like any good Aristotelian narrative, a beginning, a middle, and an end. But is the narrative as straight forward as Marx suggests, or as he hopes, when he sits down to write the specific text now called the *Grundrisse*? Does Marx manage to perform the task he describes? Does his investigation of concrete particulars in the *Grundrisse* take him from a “chaotic conception” of

political economy to a “rich totality?” Or does it unravel and fall apart, as though both it and what it seeks to examine were fractured at the point of origin – as though there were an irreducible “rift,” a rupture or a glyph, in the “ground” of all social relations? Is the essence Marx attempts to describe not a fractured essence? And is every representation (*Vorstellung*) of that essence, Marx’s included, not an attempt artificially to reconstruct something that has always already been lost – to create the image of a foundation or an origin that was never there in the first place?

The Impure Form

The phrase “historical materialism” is not, therefore, a science, but a puzzle or an *aporia*. To conjoin these two words is to open up a series of questions – a cluster of irresolvable but nonetheless productive philosophical problems, or what Althusser liked to call a “problematic.” It is to propose a conundrum. On the one hand, “historical materialism” implies that history is directed and purposive. On the other, it suggests that there is no spirit or idea transcending each of history’s discrete instances, and thus nothing giving it a purpose. History is, one might say (and borrowing Kant’s definition of the beautiful), purposive without purpose. In his book on Marx, Derrida nicknames this puzzle “messianic without messianism” (1994, 59). For Derrida, history has something like a promissory structure. It must promise, at the very least, that there remains some future yet to come. It is in this sense “messianic.” But the promised future is also radically unknown and unknowable. It will not unfold according to any determined pattern or design, and is therefore “without messianism.” The future thus remains, and indeed must remain, a “pure form,” utterly “without content.” Derrida explains:

This indifference to the content here is not an indifference, it is not an *attitude* of indifference, on the contrary. Marking any opening to the event and to the future as such, it therefore conditions the interest in and not the indifference to anything whatsoever, to all content in general. Without it, there would be neither intention, nor need, nor desire, and so forth [...] Apparently “formalist,” this indifference to the content has perhaps the value of giving one to think the necessarily pure and purely necessary form of the future as such, in its being-necessarily-promised,

prescribed, assigned, enjoined, in the necessarily formal necessity of its possibility – in short, in its law. It is this law that dislodges any present out of its contemporaneity with itself. Whether the promise promises this or that, whether it be fulfilled or not, or whether it be unfulfillable [sic], there is necessarily some promise and therefore some historicity as future-to-come. It is what we are nicknaming the messianic without messianism (1994, 73).

Since it has no immediate instrumental application, and indeed appears to suggest that one defer such things, Marxists have often attacked the kind of philosophical speculation pursued by Derrida. One should reject empty theoretical contemplation and engage instead in “concrete empirical research,” the Marxist maintains. Derrida, while recognizing the critique, argues quite the opposite – that the kind of formalism he pursues is in fact a necessary condition for any understanding of history and, perhaps more importantly, of justice. The uncertainty of the future, and the sense in which the present or the here and now is always conditioned by that uncertainty, means that the present is never contemporaneous with itself. It is always structured by a moment of deferral. And, according to Derrida, only the uncertainty of the future and its effect on the present can ensure the division between law and justice. Because the future remains unknown, the laws of the present are never identical with justice, but can always be submitted to critique and to deconstruction *in the name of* a justice that remains yet to come.

It is not difficult to see why Marxists would respond with ambivalence or even irritation when confronted with Derrida’s more abstract formulations of temporality and historicity. Often based on a reading of *The German Ideology*, Marxism has generally constructed itself in opposition to philosophy, and to any discourse that can be accused of

“idealism.” Between Marx’s brief comment in the “Preface” to his *Critique of Political Economy* about rejecting his “erstwhile philosophical conscience” in 1859, and Engels’s inscription of the words “I. Feuerbach: Opposition between the materialist and idealist outlooks” on the manuscript of *The German Ideology* in 1883, it is easy enough to find reasons to exclude excessive philosophical discussion from Marxist theory and practice. The result, unfortunately, is something of a philosophical lacuna in Marxist thought, one that often carries over to post-Marxist thought as well. Althusser and his students attempted to address this lacuna, not by returning to Marx’s early philosophical texts, but by engaging in theoretical practices that would actively produce or constitute a new, distinctly Marxist philosophy, one built up out of a close, symptomatic reading of *Capital*. Here Marx was completely reconstructed, not as a Hegelian, but as a Spinozist, or a Spinozist who does not know it. I propose a slightly different strategy – not to read a philosophy into the oversights and silences in Marx’s so-called “mature” work, and thus retroactively to constitute the hidden “truth” of Marx, but to assemble a Marx-machine out of certain philosophical texts (especially Derrida’s reading of Heidegger) and Marx’s earliest study, his doctoral dissertation. Here again it is a question of engaging with some of the problems or the puzzles that emerge out of the conjunction of the words “historical” and “materialism.” In particular, how does one think through the problem of temporality in relation to historical materialism? Once it has been recognized as a puzzle rather than a science, how might this curious phrase “historical materialism” effect the way philosophers think about time?

I will begin elliptically, or tangentially rather, with an often overlooked essay that Derrida wrote on Heidegger during the early, more traditionally philosophical stage in his

career – “*Ousia and Gramme: Note on a Note from Being and Time.*” Derrida’s essay also begins on a tangent, and in the margins of philosophy, with a long note appended by Heidegger to *Being and Time*. Very briefly, Derrida wants to explore what happens to the representation of history when, on the one hand, it is not thought to have a cyclical structure, or a beginning, a middle, and an end, while, on the other, it is still thought to be purposive or directed, with each of its moments or each present “now” existing only in relation to other, absent moments. Can one think of history as purposive or meaningful without thinking of it as a totality, or as something with a determinate, identical origin and destination, *arche* and *telos*? One of the objectives of *Being and Time* is to reintroduce philosophy to the notion that history and human existence are meaningful – that time is not “a pure sequence of ‘nows,’ without beginning or end” but composed of ecstatic relations between the past, the present, and the future (1962, 377). Unfortunately, Heidegger maintains, almost the entire philosophical tradition thinks otherwise. Thus, in the footnote that Derrida highlights in “*Ousia and Gramme*,” Heidegger maintains that Aristotle, Augustine, Hegel, and Bergson all rely on the same “leveled off” or “vulgar” concept of time (500). That is to say, the entire philosophical tradition conceives of the “now,” or the present moment, as the fundamental component of time. Consequently, time has been represented via a spatial metaphor, as though its structure was analogous to a series of independent points or segments (nows) arranged on a line. Against this “vulgar” concept of time, Heidegger posits what he calls “authentic temporality.” Understood authentically, each present moment or now is determined or has meaning only in relation to other, absent ones. In particular, in authentic temporality, the present always exists in anticipation of the future, or as a kind of an anticipatory *prolepsis*.

Heidegger's aim, in *Being and Time* at any rate, is to overturn or "destroy" the history of ontology, or of the philosophical tradition that has propagated the vulgar, spatialized concept of time. In doing so, he hopes to reclaim authentic temporality, and thus to assert the ontological priority of time over space, ecstatic change over stasis.

To understand Heidegger's argument here, it is first necessary to unpack the manner in which traditional ontology subordinates time to space, and ultimately to *ousia* or substance. Since Aristotle's *Physics*, Heidegger points out, time has been represented in western philosophy via a spatial metaphor. But the original *metaphorical* aspect of this representation has been forgotten, leading to the assumption that time actually *is* spatial. In the *Physics*, Aristotle begins his contemplation of time by pointing out that, while all beings exist in time, time itself is not a being (217b). Time is not a particular being, but the prior condition of all beings. Thus time presents the philosopher with a puzzle or an *aporia*. How can it be thought that time is what is not? If we want to consider time empirically, or provisionally picture it in our imaginations, Aristotle suggests, we might think of it as something *like* a line made up of separate segments – what would much later be dubbed the "cinematographical" model of time, as it bears some resemblance to the manner in which film mimics the passage of time by projecting a rapid succession of still images. Thus Aristotle sidesteps the *aporia* of time, or the fact that it is not a being but the condition of all beings, by introducing the metaphor of the line. The problem, as Heidegger sees it, is that this metaphor has taken the place of the *aporia*. What once seemed so puzzling and perplexing (the *aporia* of time) has been reduced to a systematic analysis, or a scientific description. Since Aristotle, it has been assumed that time can be treated under the rubric of physics, as though it were part of the physical world, or as

though it were, in Heidegger's terms, one ontic being among many, and not the ontological condition of all beings. For the same reason, it has been assumed that time can be grounded, finally, in an atemporal or unchanging substance – what the Greeks called *ousia*. In fact, Heidegger maintains, quite the opposite is the case. Everything that appears to be a static, fixed, or present substance, everything that appears to be unchanging and atemporal, is actually ecstatically temporalized, existing only in relation to what is not longer and what is not yet, the past and the future. This is especially true of human existence or what Heidegger calls *Dasein*. Humans can only make sense of their lives, or live “authentically,” if they understand their present state in relation to the past and, much more importantly, the future. And for *Dasein* the latter, the future, is radically uncertain and unknown save one absolute certainty – death. Thus to live authentically, Heidegger believes, is resolutely and without dread to accept one's unpredictable but equally unavoidable end.

Interestingly enough, the book Heidegger published immediately after *Being and Time* was not its promised second volume (in fact, Heidegger would never complete his meditation on the necessity of living resolutely in relation to an inevitable end), but *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*. In that work, Heidegger portrays Kant as a kind of anomaly in the metaphysical or ontological tradition. If everyone else, from Aristotle to Bergson, misunderstood the problem of temporality, Heidegger maintains, Kant managed to glimpse it in the first edition of his *Critique of Pure Reason*. For there Kant realized that time is not part of the physical world but, in his own terms, a “pure form of sensible intuition” and “the formal a priori condition of all appearances generally” (1996 [1781/1787], 86). That is to say, in the first edition of his *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant

realized that time is located, not in the physical world of ontic objects, but in the human imagination – that it is a “pure form” of the imagination. Indeed, Heidegger maintains, Kant’s subject is founded on time. Or rather, temporality is its condition of possibility. It can relate itself to itself, influence itself or engage in “self-affection,” because it is essentially temporal (1965, 194). For Heidegger, this means that human existence cannot be reduced to questions of efficient causality. It cannot be understood exclusively in terms of relations of force between spatially extended bodies. As soon as the problem of time and temporality is distinguished from physics and from the study of the physical world, it becomes possible to reclaim the sense in which time is not one ontic being among many, and not grounded in a static substance or *ousia*, but the ontological condition of all beings, and the horizon of Being as such. It thus becomes possible to reclaim “authentic temporality.” Freed from the spatial metaphor propagated by Aristotle, time no longer needs to be understood as a series of present moments located on a line, or a pure sequence of nows. Instead, it becomes possible to contemplate once again the enigmatic sense in which the past and, still more radically, the future condition the present – what Heidegger calls the “ecstasies” of time.

Throughout *Being and Time* Heidegger attempts to reawaken the, in his opinion, waning sense that both an individual’s life and history in general consist of meaningful totalities – that they are not simply sequences of events linked by efficient causes, but purposive designs, or intelligible patterns. Dasein exists, not only from moment to moment, but through projects that extend back into the past and, more significantly, forward into the future. Indeed, in a deliberately paradoxical passage, Heidegger writes of “[t]he priority of the future” – the strange notion that what has not yet occurred, and what

cannot be predicted, effects, conditions, and even precedes the present. "*The primary phenomenon of primordial and authentic temporality*," Heidegger emphasizes, "*is the future*" (1962, 378). Because Dasein is thrown or projected into the world, intended towards a future, it is not grounded in a fundamental substance, but exposed to the pure form of what remains yet to come. Thus the present, when lived authentically, is laden with possibility, with potentiality, and with anticipation of the future – even the anticipation of finality or death. Indeed, for authentic Dasein, it is the inevitability of death – finitude – that affords life meaning. It represents a horizon of intelligibility against which everything else can be measured. It is, curiously enough, recognizing the inevitability of death that imbues Dasein's life with meaning, potential, and possibility. Death is a condition of life.

Now, in "*Ousia and Gramme*," and indeed throughout his work on Heidegger, Derrida attempts to radicalize this "futural" temporality. He tries to show that death and the future also serve to dislodge and dismantle the meaningful totalities people construct for themselves. And he maintains that, in the margins and folds of its texts, the history of metaphysics can be shown to admit everything Heidegger accuses it of forgetting or overlooking. In "*Ousia and Gramme*," then, Derrida performs two gestures – writing, as it were, with both hands. On the one hand, he engages in a meticulous rereading of Aristotle, Kant, and Hegel, so as to show that what Heidegger calls "authentic temporality" can already be found there. Indeed, according to Derrida, "every text of metaphysics carries within itself, for example, *both* the so-called 'vulgar' concept of time *and* the resources that will be borrowed from the system of metaphysics in order to criticize that concept." That is to say, all metaphysical texts submit, only in a subsequent

gesture to subtract, the principles of their own critique, or the concepts that can be shown to dismantle them. "This play of submission and subtraction," Derrida insists, in what now seems like a classic expression of the deconstructive method, "must be read as a *formal rule* for anyone wishing to read the texts of the history of metaphysics" (1982, 62). Thus, even while it introduces the vulgar concept of time, or the idea that time is a sequence of nows, Aristotle's *Physics* also contains the meontological puzzle or *aporia* at the core of what Heidegger calls "authentic temporality," or the curious relationship between presence and absence, and the sense in which time is neither a present nor an absent being, but the prior condition of both, and indeed of all beings in general. Aristotle submits the *aporia*, Derrida explains, only to subtract it, or to "evade" it. If one wishes to read Aristotle, or at any rate to read him in a deconstructive fashion, one must attend to this play of submission and subtraction.

So, on the one hand, Derrida shows how the metaphysical tradition already contains Heidegger's critique of it, tucked away in its margins. But Derrida's reading of Heidegger also performs a second gesture. Thus, and on the other hand, Derrida wants to show that metaphysical texts, Heidegger's included, do in fact share a common assumption about time – one that it might only now be possible to interrogate. In particular, Derrida claims that all metaphysical reflections on time and temporality share the assumption that time is organized as a circle – that it is set in motion by, and eventually returns to, what Aristotle calls a "prime mover" and what Hegel calls "absolute subjectivity." "This," Derrida maintains, "is what will not budge from Aristotle to Hegel. The prime mover as 'pure act' [...] is pure presence." In the metaphysical tradition, the temporal play of presence and absence is inaugurated by, and eventually

culminates in, pure presence. Thus in Aristotle's system, while the temporal world is made up of a multitude of changes and motions, the prime mover guarantees the system as a whole by remaining the one who, as Derrida puts it, "animates all movements by means of the desire it inspires." Similarly, in Hegel's system, the same function is performed by absolute subjectivity, which "itself thinks itself, is for itself and near itself" and which "has no exteriority" (52). In the metaphysical tradition, then, time is configured, not so much as a line, but as a circle. Each temporal sequence must be understood to start out from, and be destined to return to, a determinate origin. And with equal certainty, all the temporal sequences combined start out from and return to the prime mover or absolute subjectivity. It is at this point, Derrida suggests, with the figure of the prime mover, that we find the metaphysical commitment to presence. For the prime mover can only be a "pure act," or a pure cause caused by nothing other than itself, if it also has no exteriority – that is to say, no other. Derrida's aim is to show that there is no such "pure act," and no supernatural entity completely void of exteriority or without any other. Every moment or element within a system is determined in relation to other moments, and is thus dislocated, "out of joint," or ecstatically divided from itself. It is therefore impossible to identify an origin from which temporal sequences initiate and to which they are destined to return. Or rather, every such origin is itself internally divided, or defined in relation to something else – a spatially exterior other that necessarily exceeds the circle of time. Thus it is not simply a question, as Heidegger suggests, of reversing the metaphysical priority of space over time, and thereby returning to authentic temporality. Rather, it is necessary to realize that space and time determine one another by dividing one another – that space is always temporalized, time spatialized.

“*Ousia and Gramme*” develops a conception of time that, on one hand, suggests each present moment garners meaning only in relation to other, absent ones, while on the other hand, refrains from positing a prime mover or absolute subjectivity governing the totality of all such moments. The result could be characterized as a materialist theory of historical change, in that it does not require a divine spirit or a rational idea governing that development from the outset. A very similar claim is made, albeit in the more *ex professo* style of a manifesto, in Derrida’s best known essay “Différance.” There he invokes Saussurean linguistics, which suggests that signs accrue meaning, not by referring to non-linguistic objects or things, but through their arbitrary and differential relations with other signs. From this principle, Derrida extrapolates the more general claim that “the moment of signification is possible only if each so-called ‘present’ element, each element appearing on the scene of presence, is related to something other than itself.” As a result, the present element only emerges by:

keeping within itself the mark of the past element, and already letting itself be vitiated by the mark of its relation to the future element, this trace being related no less to what is called the future than to what is called the past, and constituting what is called the present by means of this very relation to what it is not: what it absolutely is not, not even a past or a future as modified present (1982, 13).

Thus according to Derrida, presence relies on and is conditioned by what it is not, by absence, or by the alterity of the past and the future – not past and future as modified present, but as absolute absence and absolute alterity. But it is not simply a question of reiterating Heidegger’s theory of ecstatic temporality, as for Derrida spatial differing plays an equally important role in fracturing the experience of presence. Both the spatial

location and the temporal moment are ecstatic, or conditioned by something outside of them. The present is conditioned by what Derrida calls an “interval” – an irreducible (spatial) differing and interminable (temporal) deferral. “In constituting itself,” Derrida insists, “in dividing itself dynamically, this interval is what we might call *spacing*, the becoming-space of time or the becoming-time of space.” For Derrida, the present is the effect of this interval or *espacement* – a *différance* “[w]hich (is) (simultaneously) spacing (and) temporalization” (13). *Différance*, differing and deferral, opens a rift in the present. And this rift, Derrida wants to suggest, is the very space and time of the other. Because the present is never self-contained, always determined in relation to that which is absent, some other, some unknown alterity conditioning its possibility (or rather, and as Derrida occasionally puts it, conditioning its *impossibility*). Thus *différance*, even while it ensures that such relations will never be symmetrical, and that they will not result in a fusion of horizons, informs any ethical or political relation whatsoever. It withdraws identity and cedes relation.

The typical Marxist response to these kinds of speculations is to dismiss them as empty abstractions, or the last redoubt of idealist philosophy and speculative metaphysics. But there is little question that Marx himself would have recognized the language Derrida and Heidegger adopt – namely that of ancient Greek physics, Aristotelian physics in particular. Indeed, Marx’s doctoral dissertation explicitly addresses a number of the questions discussed by Derrida and Heidegger, framing them in terms of a consideration of ancient atomist theories of nature and of physics. In his doctoral dissertation, Marx is particularly interested in the philosophical problems of space and time. He focuses on defending the maligned Epicurean theory of the

declination or unmotivated swerving of the atom away from the straight line in which it falls, and on explaining Epicurus's unique approach to the concept of the *eidola*, or the empty, temporal appearances that emanate from the atoms and die or pass away. Put simply, the *clinamen* constitutes a theory of spatial differing, while the *eidola* provide a theory of temporal deferral. The "difference" between Democritean and Epicurean philosophies of nature, in other words, is *différance*. In a rather bold gesture for a young graduate student, Marx begins his dissertation by rejecting pretty much the entire tradition of interpretation – a tradition that, from Cicero to Pierre Bayle, makes fun of the Epicurean *clinamen*, and sees it as a corruption of Democritus's more original philosophy. Against this long tradition, and employing extremely close readings or what he calls "microscopic examinations" (*CW* 1, 36) of the ancient texts, Marx sets out to prove that the declination of the atom from the straight line is not a joke, but an absolutely necessary condition of any consistent atomist physics or philosophy. Very briefly, Democritus claimed that the fundamental structure of the universe consisted of discrete atoms falling downward in a void. To this, and in order to explain the phenomenon of change, Epicurus added the notion that, on occasion and without cause, one of the atoms would swerve, thus coming into contact with others. Marx argues that, because the atoms described by Democritus fall downward in a straight line, they are not singular or discrete, but determined by the line in which they fall. Thus the swerving of the atom away from the line is the only thing that makes it discrete – the only thing that makes it an atom:

Just as the point is negated [*aufgehoben*] in the line, so is every falling body negated in the straight line it describes. Its specific quality does not matter here at

all. A falling apple describes a perpendicular line just as a piece of iron does. Every body, insofar as we are concerned with the motion of falling, is therefore nothing but a point, and indeed a point without independence, which in a certain mode of being – the straight line which it describes – surrenders its individuality [*Einzelheit*] (48).

To the extent that it falls in a line, the atom is not singular, but “surrenders its individuality” to the line. In order to overcome its “relative existence” in the line, it must negate its downward motion with another motion – the declination or *clinamen*. In doing so, in asserting its individuality, the atom also enters into relations with other atoms. Thus the *clinamen* cedes both singularity and relation. The atom withdraws from determination so as to enter into relations.

After establishing that the *clinamen* is not a joke but the condition of any consistent atomist position, Marx goes on to claim that Epicurus also surpasses his teacher Democritus when it comes to the theory of time. Indeed, Marx argues that “[f]or Democritus, time has neither significance nor necessity.” He is interested only in the timeless world of the atoms, and everything having to do with “emergence and passing away, hence the temporal, is removed from the atoms.” For Epicurus, however, matters are more complex:

Time, excluded from the world of essence, becomes for him *the absolute form of appearance*. That is to say, time is determined as accidens of accidens. The accidens is the change of substance in general. The accidens of the accidens is the change as reflecting in itself, the change as change. This pure form of the world of appearance is time (63).

Democritus had introduced the concept of the *eidola* or of that which appears to the senses only to dismiss it – to claim that it is a derivative reflection or epiphenomenon of the true realm of the atoms. Epicurus, however, conceives of the *eidola* as purely temporal, and of time as the accidens of accidens – not the alteration of substance, but change reflected in itself, or the “pure form” of appearances. “[T]he *eidola*,” Marx explains, “by constantly separating themselves from the bodies and flowing out into the senses, by having their sensuous existence outside of themselves as another nature, by not returning to themselves, that is, out of diremption, dissolve and pass away.” In this sense, Marx concludes, “*the temporal character of things and their appearance to the senses are posited as intrinsically one*. For it is precisely because bodies appear to the senses that they pass away” (65). If the atoms exist on the infinite register of essence and matter (which is available only to reason, and which Marx associates with abstract, subjective self-consciousness), the *eidola* make up the finite world of appearance and form (which is available to sensation, and which Marx treats as concrete, objective self-consciousness).

For Epicurus, Marx explains, time is a “pure form” – not any particular or predictable change, but change as such, or change reflected in itself. Therefore, that which appears in time (that which changes) cannot be grounded in a more substantial, material foundation, and is not destined to return to its point of origin, but instead “dissolve[s] and pass[es] away.” This conception of time does not rely on the metaphor of the circle identified by Derrida in “*Ousia and Gramme*” as the defining feature of the metaphysics of presence. There is no prime mover or absolute subject guaranteeing from the outset the return of the *eidola* to its origin. Rather, in Marx’s reading, the *eidola* emerge and dissipate, and only exist to the extent that they leave an impression on the

senses – an experience which is destined, over time, to expire. The problem of existing in time is thus the problem of death – of an end that is not a return to origins, but instead absolute, or an end that everywhere conditions the present, but that is utterly other than the present. This, at any rate, would be the puzzle of a materialist account of time and of temporality, or of “historical materialism” – a theory of history as on the one hand meaningful but on the other void of any transcendental assurance, or messianic without messianism, purposive without purpose. Little wonder, then, that Marx concludes his dissertation by praising Epicurus as “the greatest representative of Greek Enlightenment,” and by repeating Lucretius’s pronouncement that, following Epicurus, “*religio pedibus subiecta vicissim / Obteritur, nos exaequat victoria caelo*” – “religion in its turn lies crushed beneath his feet, and we by his triumph are lifted level with the skies” (73).

The Visible God

For his entire adult life, Marx had a profoundly ambivalent relationship with money – both in theory and in practice. On the day he finished his *Critique of Political Economy*, after deferring and delaying for nearly a decade, he wrote to Engels to say “[t]he unfortunate manuscript is complete, but cannot be mailed because I don’t have a *farthing* [in English] to prepay and insure it.” Requesting yet another loan from the friend who kept him financially solvent for years, Marx quipped “I don’t believe that anybody had ever written about ‘money’ while suffering such a lack of money. Most authors on this subject have been in deep peace with the *subject of their research* [in English]” (Marx to Engels, 21 January 1859). Marx was not exactly at war with the subject of money, but he did struggle with it. Nor was it, for him, a question of abolishing money with its distorting effects, or, in a utilitarian fashion, substituting false “exchange value” and “surplus value” with proper “use value.” Instead, Marx asked what is exchange, what is use, what is property? How do these phenomena, and discourses about them, arise in particular social contexts, and how do they change over time? Is there not a sense in which exchange (*Verkehr* if not *Austausch*) is a condition and not a function of social relations, and that social reality is not distorted or obscured by, but first of all created through exchange? Beginning with *The Poverty of Philosophy*, and continuing throughout his career, Marx’s extended series of polemics against the French socialist Pierre-Joseph Proudhon centered around precisely this topic. If Proudhon thought that capitalism involved taking from the workers a “surplus” that properly belonged to them, and that its injustice could be rectified by returning that surplus to its proper owners,

Marx argued that capitalism involved a certain understanding of property (one that Proudhon shared), and that its overturning would also involve a complete reconfiguration of property, and a concomitant reconfiguration of what is proper, valuable, or useful. According to Marx, the phenomenon of “surplus value” represents *both* the creation of profit through exploitation *and* the potential for organizing social relations differently. The creation of surplus value requires that economies, or the means of production, already be socialized – that, even though wages are paid to individuals for their work, it is not individuals but collectives who do the work. In this sense, Marx believed, the surplus points the way beyond the system that first made it possible. It is the one element that the system cannot do without, but must also repress and fail to understand. It is, as it were, the system’s constituent excess. It makes the system possible even while it threatens to destroy the system – to expose its fundamental contradiction or antagonism. Marx does not simply deny that money and surplus value are real. Nor does he demand that they be destroyed so as to reveal the truth of use. On the contrary, precisely because it is a social product, precisely because it is the creation of socialized labour, surplus value configures the artificial fabrication of all social phenomena – even and perhaps especially those phenomena that the classical political economists sought to define as natural.

With his *Mirror of Production*, Jean Baudrillard effectively shattered orthodox Marxist economics. He argued that, in a post-industrial context such as our own, exchange value actually precedes use value. For Baudrillard, the exchange of commodities might even be said to create the structures of desire that make it possible reflexively or retroactively to fabricate the conviction that this or that commodity is “useful,” or that one “needs” it. Baudrillard makes his case in direct opposition to

Marxism, suggesting that the latter was intended for the analysis of industrial rather than consumer-based capitalism, and thus will never comprehend the new reciprocal relationship between production and consumption. But if *Marxism* failed to comprehend the complexity of the relationship between exchange and use, it is not entirely clear that the same applies to Marx. Throughout his work on political economy Marx reiterates over and over again the argument that, when it comes to human matters, what seems to be most natural and thus inescapable can always be shown to be the product of contingent social relations. In particular, and against both classical liberal political theory and bourgeois economic theory, Marx maintains that individual property is not natural, as one can only be said to own property to the extent that one owns something of value to another – something vendible, something that can be exchanged for something else. Even though they champion the exchange of commodities in the marketplace, and go so far as to insist that healthy competition encourages moral virtues, classical political economists such as Adam Smith and David Ricardo nonetheless seek to prove that value is natural, and not the product of exchange – that value comes from nature as surely as plants spring from the ground and rain falls from the sky. Indeed, proving this hypothesis is crucial, for only if value is natural can the classical political economists also claim that individuals have a natural right to property, one that stems from the individual's natural capacity to create value. Thus (and this point is often overlooked) it is they, the classical political economists, and not Marx, who introduce the so-called "labour theory of value," or the idea that the value of a product is determined by the amount of labour, or labour time, that has been "congealed" in it. Individual humans naturally labour, the classical political economist reasons, and the result of that natural labour is natural value. But as soon as

they introduce this theory, Smith and Ricardo run up against a paradox, for which they never provide a satisfying solution – the paradox of natural price. If the value of a product is fixed by the amount of labour that has been expended in its creation, then why is it, the classical political economists wonder, that the price of a commodity can fluctuate so dramatically in the marketplace? If there is such a thing as natural value, then why is there no such thing as natural price? In *Capital*, Marx argues that these questions can only be answered on the condition that classical political economy renounce its commitment to possessive individualism, and realize that value is a social, not natural, phenomenon.

Before beginning to consider Marx's response to these problems, it is important to realize that, by the time he finally published the first volume of *Capital* in 1867, the basic principles of political economy he deals with there were no longer being debated in the discipline. Classical political economy of the sort discussed by Marx had been vulgarized by the so-called "post-Ricardians," notably J.S. Mill. The kinds of questions that Smith and Ricardo took to be central were, by 1867, either deemed elementary or simply forgotten. What is more, less than a decade after the publication of Marx's masterpiece, economic theory would be completely revolutionized by the "marginalists," who replaced the whole discussion of value, and the mysterious problem of how value gets created, with less volatile questions of economic management and control. The kind of fundamental political economic issues addressed by Marx in *Capital* were, by the end of the nineteenth century, simply not on the table. Having studied political economy for twenty five years, and deferred publication of his work for so long, Marx entered the debate as something of an anachronism. From the perspective of the science of political

economy, Marx offered a solution to a question that once consumed the best minds of the discipline, but was now asked by almost no one. So, while it was no longer a pressing issue, Marx believed he had solved the paradox of natural price. But he also argued that, in order to understand his solution, political economists would have to change and indeed completely reverse the foundational assumptions of the discipline. In particular, they would have to conceive of the economy, not as a collection of discrete, orderly exchanges between isolated and fully autarchic individuals (as though society consisted of so many Robinson Crusoes occupying so many islands), but as a complexly integrated system of social relations. Thus Marx set out mathematically to prove that, while the price of any given commodity constantly fluctuates on the open market, at the aggregate level of the economy as a whole, the relationship between labour and value is symmetrical. According to Marx, the paradox of natural price can be solved so long as the economy is understood to be a socialized totality, and not a collection of individual exchanges. The classical political economists were unable to arrive at or even approach this solution because they began with the assumption that it is the individual who produces and thus possesses value, that the individual is the basic and irreducible economic unit, and that all calculations and speculations must start with that unit. From Marx's perspective, then, it was not so much that Smith or Ricardo failed to see the empirical reality of the situation, for like Marx they thought that only labour can produce value. No, what they failed to see was the abstraction, or the sense in which the economy is an abstract totality made up of innumerable discrete exchanges.

Capital begins, then, with a distinction between what Marx calls "concrete" and "abstract labour," and an extended discussion of "value," leading up to a consideration of

what Marx takes to be his greatest discovery, and his most important contribution to the field of political economy – the theory of “surplus value.” For Marx, concrete labour refers to the particular labour that produces a particular commodity – the work of actual people in actual circumstances. Abstract labour, on the other hand, is socialized labour, or labour as such. Classical political economists base their theory on the former. They begin and end with the value-producing work of individuals. But only an analysis of the latter, Marx argues, can resolve the paradox of natural price, and thereby balance the relationship between labour and value. Now, Marx’s claim is not only that classical political economists fail to understand the difference between concrete and abstract labour. No, according to Marx, they *both* fail to understand it *and* tacitly presuppose its operation. Indeed, Marx argues that the production of profit in the form of surplus value requires the existence of abstract labour. This is where the theory of surplus value comes into play. Marx insists that surplus value is something new. It first emerges along with capitalism, and does not exist prior to capitalism. At the same time, it also points to the inevitable collapse of capitalism, and represents the antagonism that capitalism must at all times both put to work and endeavor to repress. In order to clarify matters, Marx introduces another distinction – between surplus labour, which all previous economic systems used to create profit, and surplus value, which is unique to capitalism and to capitalist profit. This, Marx believes, is the distinction that Proudhon fails properly to comprehend (*G* 612). Surplus labour is something extracted from the concrete labour of individual workers – from the work, for instance, of slaves or serfs. But surplus value requires the existence of abstract labour. That is to say, it requires labour already be socialized. Thus the principle of capitalist profit – surplus value – contains within itself

the principle of socialized labour. For their part, the classical political economists refuse to see it, resulting in their inability to resolve the paradox of natural price. And yet, even as they refuse to see it, even as they remain stubbornly committed to the idea that it is the work of individuals and not of collectives that produces value, they still presuppose it all along. It is the constitutive exclusion of all their work – that which, at one and the same time, they must and they must not have. It is a condition for the possibility, and a condition for the impossibility, of their entire economic system.

However, Marx points out, if classical political economists do not understand the operation of surplus value, neither do some of the most successful and well known socialist economists. This is why Marx believes he must engage in his polemics against Proudhon, who renounces the principle of capitalist exploitation while remaining entirely committed to, and even reinforcing, the bourgeois understanding of property. Proudhon famously claims that “property is theft,” and that capitalists skim a “surplus” off the production process which they keep for themselves as profit. Now, there is certainly some validity to this claim, and some ideological power in its rhetoric. However, Marx points out in his attacks on Proudhon, in an industrial capitalist economy, it is not only the case that individual capitalists force individual workers to work in excess of what it takes for them to fulfill their own needs, and appropriate that “surplus” for themselves as profit. To accept this model without further elaboration is ultimately to buy into the very conception of property – of what “properly” belongs to the workers, or what their “sacrifice” at work entitles them to – that socialism, if it is to create a just society, must overcome. The conviction that property is natural, and that work is a kind of sacrifice intended to acquire property, is precisely what Marx hopes socialism can defeat. Marx

wants to reinvent work, not as a “sacrifice,” but as “a *positive, creative activity*” (G 614). Thus it is not only a question of showing how, in capitalism, individuals exploit individuals, and that this exploitation can and should be stopped. Rather, Marx argues, it must also be realized that, at the aggregate level of the economy as a whole, capitalism as an economic *system* requires an excess of abstract labour for the production of profit. If surplus labour is the amount of concrete labour the capitalist takes from the worker (a relationship of exploitation that exists in all economic systems heretofore), surplus value, which is specific to capitalism, designates the amount of *abstract* human labour accumulated within capitalist economies as a whole. An individual capitalist might exploit his or her workers, force them to work far in excess of what it takes for them to meet their own needs, then sell the product of their surplus labour on the open market, and still fail to make a profit. Because price fluctuates so dramatically, there is no guarantee that exploiting workers will pay off (although, if you have the money, it is not a bad gamble). But capitalism as an economic system, taken as a totality, will always produce surplus value by accumulating the product of abstract human labour. In other words, according to Marx, capitalist exploitation is systemic. However (and here is the key), the very fact that economies can be understood to be systemic, the fact that only a systemic approach can solve the paradox of natural price, suggests that it should be possible to plan economies as a whole, and thus to eliminate the mechanism of exploitation.

So, how did this eminently rational approach to political economy, developed in an attempt to end the exploitation of the workers, result in the nightmare of official state communism or “real socialism?” How did it lead to a state in which workers were

exploited, not by capital and in the name of profit, but by their self-appointed representatives and in the name of their own interests? For one thing, by distinguishing between concrete and abstract labour, Marx made it possible for his followers to subordinate the concerns of the former to the administration of the latter. Thus the experiences of actual human beings engaged in actual work, while privileged in Marx's texts, were often erased by Marxism in favor of the instrumental rationality of planned economies and technological efficiency. But, perhaps even more significantly, Marx also failed to think the concept of the "surplus" radically enough. Or, at any rate, he did not publish or propagate his most radical formulations of surplus value – especially those found in the *Grundrisse*. Marx showed how capitalism must both presuppose and repress surplus value, or how it must at one and the same time assume and deny the social as opposed to individual production of value. But he failed to take the next step, and explain how all value, including exchange and use value, are effects of the surplus. The surplus, as it were, comes first. Capitalism does not only produce surplus value, it also and much more urgently needs to control, contain, and even on occasion to destroy it. This is a process Marx and Engels glimpse in the *Communist Manifesto*, when they discuss the effects of the serial crises associated with capitalism:

In these crises a great part not only of the existing products, but also of the previously created productive forces, are periodically destroyed. In these crises there breaks out an epidemic that, in all earlier epochs, would have seemed an absurdity – the epidemic of overproduction. Society suddenly finds itself put back in a state of momentary barbarism; it appears as if famine, a universal war of devastation, has cut off the supply of every means of subsistence; industry and

commerce seem to be destroyed; and why? Because there is too much civilization, too much means of subsistence, too much industry, too much commerce. The productive forces at the disposal of society no longer tend to further the development of the conditions of bourgeois property; on the contrary, they have become too powerful for these conditions, by which they are fettered, and so soon as they overcome these fetters, they bring disorder into the whole of bourgeois society, endanger the existence of bourgeois property [...] And how does the bourgeoisie get over these crises? On the one hand by the enforced destruction of a mass of productive forces; on the other, by the conquest of new markets, and by the more thorough exploitation of the old ones. That is to say, by paving the way for more extensive crises, and by diminishing the means whereby crises are prevented (*SW* 226).

Capitalism is, in both senses, sick with its own excesses. It cannot at one and the same time sustain the concept of property and continue to produce value at accelerated rates. The engines of its machinery run at ever faster revolutions per minute, threatening as well countless *revolutions* per minute. Thus the surplus must be destroyed, so as to shore up the value of already existing property. That is to say, surplus value is the condition for the possibility and the condition for the impossibility of property in the capitalist sense. It is the constituent repression, the original threat, on which property is based.

In *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, Žižek notes that “Lacan modeled his notion of surplus-enjoyment on the Marxian notion of surplus-value” (1989, 50). According to Žižek, every discursive system or symbolic order, whether economic or libidinal, requires that which exceeds and overwhelms it. That is to say, every system is in some measure

founded on that which threatens its existence, or threatens to strip its fragile veneer of order and expose its fundamentally contingent and antagonistic status – to reveal how what appear to be natural or fixed points of orientation (what Lacan calls “nodal points”) are in fact arbitrary and without justification. In psychoanalytic discourse, Žizek argues, this “something” that the system needs, but that threatens the system at the same time, is called a “symptom.” Following up this line of thought, Žizek argues:

Marx’s great achievement was to demonstrate how all phenomena which appear to everyday bourgeois consciousness as simple deviations, contingent deformations of the “normal” functioning of society (economic crises, wars, and so on), and as such abolishable through the amelioration of the system, are necessary products of the system itself – the points at which the “truth,” the immanent antagonistic character of the system, erupts (128).

For Žizek, then, Marx did not show how, behind the chimeras of ideology and political fantasy, there exists the truth of economics or material conditions of existence. Rather, he showed how any given ideology is conditioned by that which exceeds it. Every symbolic presentation of “the truth” must include (even if only symbolically to exclude) the antagonistic or excessive element capable of exposing that symbolic presentation as a fantasy. From Freud to Lacan, the psychoanalytic theory of the symptom would have to, as it were, catch up to Marx’s insight. Thus, with Freud, psychoanalysis begins by treating the symptom as a false representation or a metaphor for some repressed trauma. Then, in the early Lacan, the theory of the symptom changes. It is no longer viewed as a metaphor for a repressed childhood trauma, but as a signifier for something that has been excluded from the symbolic order – a social taboo. Finally, in the later Lacan, the theory

of the symptom is detached entirely from the logic of repression and exclusion. Instead, it comes to refer to that which at one and the same time conditions and exceeds the symbolic order – that which makes the symbolic order coherent, possible, and potentially even enjoyable by keeping in play that which is impossible, or what Žižek likes to call a “kernel” of the Real.

The symptom has, in this sense, a twofold purpose. First, it operates as a constant reminder of the traumatic abyss of the Real, and thus buttresses the symbolic order, securing its limits and justifying its laws. But in doing so, the symptom also enables enjoyment or *jouissance*. It makes possible the small acts of transgression that produce pleasure. In exceeding rational explanation, or explanation within the terms of the symbolic order, the symptom reinforces the security or protection of symbolic limitations while at the same time producing the joy, the “surplus-enjoyment,” of transgressing them. “It is this paradox which defines surplus enjoyment,” Žižek argues. “[I]t is not a surplus which simply attaches itself to some ‘normal,’ fundamental enjoyment, because *enjoyment as such only emerges in this surplus*, because it is constitutive of an ‘excess’” (52). The symptom, in relentlessly exceeding the system, also generates and motivates it. For this reason, in his final works, Lacan began to speak not of the “symptom” but of the “*sinthomme*” – a neologism intended to suggest, among other things, that the symptom actually assembles or “synthesizes” the man or “homme.” The subject, whether individual or collective, is in a certain sense founded upon and created by a supplement or a surplus that exceeds and threatens it at the same time. The surplus is a condition and not a function of human social life. This is, in many ways, what Marxist economists and state planners failed to take into account. The fantasy that it is possible to get rid of

surplus value, and thus to expose the more fundamental reality of utility and need, or a concrete reality of use values, can, if Lacan and Žižek are correct, only result in a disciplinary restriction of human expression – a suppression of the complexity of emotional life, of pleasures and desires, and of *jouissance*. This is, of course, the exact opposite of what Marx imagined a communist society would entail. But it is difficult to deny that Marx's own commitment to the idea of a universal human essence, and a certain economic configuration of that essence (the human being as a labouring animal), had some influence on the makeup and the operation of the societies that, throughout the twentieth century, adopted his philosophy, his ideas, and even his proper name. In so far as this is the case, and that Marxism was both a perversion and a direct extension of Marxian principles, the only responsible reading of Marx is a deconstructive one.

If Marx identifies surplus value operative in capitalist economies, indeed if he stakes his scientific credentials on this discovery, a deconstructive reading might begin by exposing and interrogating certain excesses or surpluses in the economy of Marx's text. The disruptive moment of citation, which tears into a text, and establishes a trajectory outside of it, constitutes such a surplus. Great tracts of Marx's body of work or of the Marx-machine are composed of citation – assembled out of references to others, and to the colossal amount of reading Marx undertook. Here I want to draw attention to one quotation in particular – a passage from Shakespeare's *Timon of Athens* that Marx cites and re-cites on a number of occasions. Significantly, with each recitation, Shakespeare's words are used for different, even in some sense diametrically opposed purposes. In the passage Timon, literature's great misanthropist, castigates humanity for its slavish devotion to the "visible god" money. The passage first appears in the

Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts, where Marx invokes Shakespeare's considerable authority in his discussion of "The Power of Money." Religious, industrial, and libidinal or erotic imagery are all bound together in Timon's invective: "Thou visible god, / That solder'st close impossibilities, / And makest them kiss!" (4, 3: 389-90). With these words, Marx proclaims, Shakespeare "depicts the real nature of *money*" – that it is both a "visible divinity" and a "common whore" or "common procurer of people and nations" (CW 3, 325). A god, a prostitute, and a pimp, money is for the young Marx "the universal *agent of separation*" (324). It is the universally recognized symbol through which each individual pursues their own particular, egotistical interests. It holds humans together for the sole purpose of tearing them apart. Money turns the imaginary world of desire into reality. It "converts my wishes from something in the realm of the imagination, translates them from the mediated, imagined or desired existence into their *sensuous, actual* existence," transforming them "from imagination to life, from imaged being to real being" (325). Worse still, it makes it possible to trade dissimilar properties. It "serves to exchange every quality for every other, even contradictory, quality or object." Like Timon in Shakespeare's play, Marx is repelled by these powers money possesses. He views them as alienating and dehumanizing. Money represents, for him, "the fraternization of impossibilities. It makes contradictions embrace." Clearly under the influence of Feuerbach at this point in his career, Marx calls on his reader to imagine a world without money – a fully human world in which money does not mediate all relations, where "you can exchange love only for love, trust for trust," where "if you want to enjoy art you must be an artistically cultivated person; if you want to exercise influence over other people, you must be a person with a stimulating and encouraging

effect on other people” and where “[e]very one of your relations to man must and to nature must be a *specific expression*, corresponding to an object of your will, of your *real individual* life” (326). Here all exchange is equal. One expresses and exchanges only those attributes one possesses by nature.

So the young Marx, like Timon, renounces money. He dreams of a world without its alienating excesses. However, in citing Shakespeare as his authority on the matter, Marx also overlooks the context of Timon’s speech within the play. Shakespeare portrays Timon as something of a dupe – someone who, after squandering his great fortune on sycophants and fair-weather friends for the first half of the play, spends the second half wasting rhetorical reserves, bombastically renouncing all of humanity and even the earth itself for the results of his own experiences. Timon fails to realize that the exaggerated rhetoric and supernumerary of his polemics against money merely reiterate the very excess and squandering he seeks to condemn. The play is not, then, a simple jeremiad against money. If anything, it suggests that the excesses Timon so excessively condemns are a condition of social relations, and that friendship, properly managed, involves a kind of absolute generosity without expectation of return – what George Bataille would call a “general economy” or a generosity “without reserve.” It seems significant, then, that Marx re-cites Timon’s speech once again in the midst of his own excessive polemic against his own erstwhile friends, “The Leipzig Council.” In this second iteration, Marx has become a curious double for Timon – performing the role of Timon while he recites his words. At the same time, in “The Leipzig Council,” the passage from *Timon of Athens* is used for dramatically different purposes. Indeed, if Timon’s speech is read (as it was in the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*) as a relatively straightforward and

accurate description of money, it would no longer confirm, but perhaps even contradict, what Marx is trying to say. Marx is attacking Stirner, and particularly Stirner's somewhat confused idea that private property (*Eigentum*) is ultimately indistinguishable from an individual's unique features or properties (*Eigenschaft*) – that the two are the same and that to deprive someone of the first is tantamount to depriving them of the latter. “In reality,” Marx claims, “I possess private property only insofar as I have something vendible, whereas what is peculiar to me [*meine Eigenheit*] may not be vendible at all” (GI 247-8). That is to say, I possess property insofar as I possess something of value to someone else – to the extent that I live in a community. “How little connection there is between money, the most general form of property, and personal peculiarity,” the text continues, “was already known to Shakespeare better than to our theorizing petty bourgeois.” Marx then recites Timon's speech (from his own earlier manuscript? from Shakespeare? from memory?) against the “visible god” that “solder'st close impossibilities.” And then, immediately following Shakespeare's words, Marx states that “rent of land, profit, etc., these actual forms of existence of private property are *social relations* [...] and they are ‘*individual*’ only so long as they have not become fetters on the existing productive forces” (248). While they might have innumerable personal properties, individuals cannot possess property in isolation, as property is not a thing but a social relation, an exchange.

Now, whatever else he might mean, Timon, literature's great misanthropist, cannot possibly be saying that humans are irreducibly social creatures, or that their possessing property depends on their living in a community. Though Shakespeare's authority is invoked, the gloss Marx pretends to provide of his text is entirely misleading.

Unlike in the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, written less than a year earlier, Marx now seems to be saying that social relations *necessarily* “solder” close impossibilities” – that the “fraternization of impossibilities,” as he puts it in the earlier work, is a *condition* of human sociality, and that even one’s sense of individuality is in some measure an *effect* of such “fraternization.” Here Althusser’s theory that, in leaving behind the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* and taking up *The German Ideology*, Marx “breaks” with the essentialism of his youth (and with Feuerbach’s philosophy in particular) seems to have some validity. In *The German Ideology*, money and property are no longer conceived of as distortions of a fundamental human essence. Contemporary social relations are no longer thought to alienate humanity from its true essence, or estrange it from itself. Instead, Marx introduces the whole problem of ideology alongside the claim that every social phenomena is an effect of a network of social relations that precede it – that, in a certain enigmatic sense, the relation precedes and even creates that which it appears to relate. From now on, if there is something like a human essence in Marx’s work, it is no longer anything on the order of a homogeneous substance, species-being, *Gattungswesen*. It refers instead to this dynamic, fundamentally fractured and overdetermined matrix of relations – an infinitely complex and also creative system of relays and exchanges, references and citations, transmissions and dispatches. The human essence will have been something mechanical and something textual – not a lost origin to be reclaimed or an hidden substance to be revealed, but an assemblage that gets created and repeatedly recreated through human practices in human history.

Conclusion: Existential Republics

When introducing the current study, I suggested that it could be read as a palimpsest of sorts – that obscured beneath a dissertation on Marx there is another work on Heidegger, as though one were written over top of the other. I am not, of course, the first to try to posit a link between Heidegger and Marx, or existentialism and Marxism. But the idea that this link, or at any rate one such link, might have something to do with the way they understand, not just politics, but “the political,” is perhaps less familiar. While a number of extremely good books have been published on the topic in recent years (notably Fred Dallmayr’s *The Other Heidegger*, which greatly influenced my efforts to uncover other Marxs, and which I follow here quite closely), the question of Heidegger and the political has yet to be explored in full. Indeed, like that of Marx and the political, the relationship between Heidegger and politics is probably a question that will never be explored “in full.” Each new interpretation only serves to generate the need for more interpretations. Such would be the condition of any responsible approach to Heidegger and the political – any approach, that is to say, which does not begin with the assumption that Heidegger’s utterly inexcusable association with the Nazi party also provides an excuse for failing to read or to think about his philosophy. Because of the hermeneutic work that has gone into editing and publishing his lecture notes, and the recent translation of crucial texts into English, just what Heidegger’s philosophy is, and what the name “Heidegger” represents, will undoubtedly change dramatically over the next few decades. One element of this change will certainly involve the representation of Heidegger and the political. Heidegger is often characterized as a more or less apolitical

thinker (even an anti-political thinker) who made one terrible, colossal political error. Even Heidegger's critics cite his reluctance to deal with political questions as part of the reason for his political mistakes – specifically his active participation in the Nazi party, his acceptance and administration of the Freiburg Rectorship, and his long silence following the war on the question of his decisions. But the more recently published material suggest that there is, as Dallmayr puts it, an “other Heidegger.” Especially in the lectures delivered during the war, but also throughout the work that is only now being published and translated, reflections on social and political questions are abundant in Heidegger's thought – even though they are generally couched in that indirect, quasi-mystical language that Heidegger liked to think of as the “voice of Being.” Heidegger does not so much overlook the political as he does completely reformulate it, and place it on a radically new ontological (anti)foundation.

The reading of Marx I pursued throughout my dissertation would have been impossible without a parallel but, in the document itself, relatively unspoken reflection on Heidegger. Particularly in *The German Ideology*, Marx sought to think through the complex relationship between consciousness or conscious-being (*Bewusst-sein*) and being (*Sein*) – not, as is often mistakenly believed, so as to ground the former in the latter, but in order to interrogate the specific institutions and ideologies that intertwine them with one another. Marx's approach to this problem is all the more complicated still in a post-Heideggerean context, where the question of being has been so dramatically rethought. Even if one accepts the well known hypothesis that Heidegger's work is characterized by a decisive “turn” or *Kehre* (a theory that seems so similar to, and as problematic as, Althusser's claim that Marx's work is shorn in half by a single

epistemological break), it is clear that both the early Heidegger, with his theory of “fundamental ontology,” and the latter Heidegger, with his reflections on “the history of Being,” dismantle the concepts of being and ontology as they have been presented throughout the western philosophical tradition. Heidegger never engaged in anything like a systematic analysis of Marx – certainly nothing on the order of his readings of Kant, of Aristotle, of Schelling, or of the pre-Socratics. His references to Marx and Marxism, while interesting for this reason perhaps, are sparse. And indeed, Marxists have generally been unfriendly towards Heidegger, seeing him and his followers as responsible for what Georg Lukács calls “the destruction of reason,” or what Jurgen Habermas calls “the mysticism of Being.” Whether they intend to or not, both Lukács and Habermas reiterate the familiar Marxist dismissal of all philosophy as “idealism.” As I tried to show in my dissertation, this kind of critique, and the distinction between materialism and idealism on which it depends, goes back not to so much to Marx as to Engels, and especially to the older Engels’s reconstruction of “Marx” from the level of the manuscript up. Neither Marx nor Heidegger would have seen the opposition between materialism and idealism as particularly sophisticated, or particularly useful. Indeed, both of their approaches to ontology attempt to get in between these kinds of dichotomies – to pry them apart, to submit them to what Marx called a “microscopic” analysis, or, to use Heidegger’s terminology, to “destroy” them. Thus any attempt to forge a link between Marx and Heidegger, and especially between their respective conceptions of the political, would have to begin by rejecting every effort to distinguish between the materialist sociologist and the idealist philosopher. A better starting point would probably be their mutual interest in ancient Greek philosophy, and especially in Aristotle’s theory of time –

Aristotle's notion that the present is conditioned and thus unhinged in some manner by a potentiality or *dynamis*, or the absence represented by the unknown future. In lieu of that study, I will outline the manner in which my reading of Marx relies on Heidegger's still not well known, but extremely important disclosure of political ontology.

While it erupted once again towards the end of the 1980s, and will doubtless continue to erupt in different iterations for many years to come, the so-called "Heidegger affair" is by no means a new phenomenon. And it has often involved clashes between Marxists and Heideggereans. Lukács, for instance, concludes his monumental study of *The Destruction of Reason*, first published in 1962, with a broadside against Heidegger, whose philosophy he associates with Carl Schmitt's political theory, and with the political practices of the Nazi party. According to Lukács, Heidegger is exemplary of the "unworldly, world-despising thinkers" who effectively "deduce a dogmatic incognito as the essence of all historicity from an extension of the familiar theory [...] that there is a world-history only in the sight of a god" (1980, 832). Writing in Hungary in 1954, Lukács defends the power of Enlightenment reason against what he sees as Heidegger's late Romantic obscurantism. For Lukács, Heidegger's fascination with things like "errancy" and "unconcealment" – with the "dogmatic incognito," or the sense in which every insight involves a certain blindness, every disclosure a certain disguise – constitutes little more than a hypocritical refusal to admit his own involvement in the most regressive, unpardonable political regime in human history. Such deliberate obfuscation, Lukács contends, must be rooted out and submitted to the patient critique of Enlightenment reason. According to Lukács, the latter is the purpose and the promise of Marxism, and of the official communist movement. However, without relinquishing all

commitments to reason or Enlightenment, it is important to consider the degree to which the position Lukács defends in *The Destruction of Reason* and elsewhere unwittingly reinforces the totalitarian brutality that, shortly after writing his polemic against Heidegger Lukács himself would face. Cold war propaganda notwithstanding, “real socialism” was never a question of arbitrary violence or the unpredictable, anonymous exercise of power. On the contrary, Soviet totalitarianism operated in almost the exact opposite fashion – by constructing a complex, but still rationally demonstrable, machinery of rules and regulations. It involved state administration of civil society down to its most minute elements, even a collapsing of the distinction between state and civil society. Thus, as Slavoj Žižek recalls, one of the battle cries of the velvet revolutions that swept eastern Europe in the final decade of the twentieth century was “give us more alienation” – not fulfill our lack, or return us to our essence, but make possible a lack and deliver us from our essence, or from this oppressive rational totality that our self-appointed representatives have dubbed our “essence.”

In this context, Heidegger’s philosophy offers a number of possibilities that appeals to Enlightenment reason cannot comprehend, and even threaten to repress. In particular, Heidegger makes it possible to conceive of politics, not simply as an instrumental means to an apolitical end, but as an ontological condition of being in the world. Like Carl Schmitt, whose work he read and who he knew personally, Heidegger treats politics as irreducible – an element of the human condition that can be neither escaped nor eliminated. And like Schmitt, Heidegger suggests that the fundamental political act is a decision – one that separates friends from enemies, or citizens who have access to concrete rights and others who do not. But Heidegger’s thought is much more

radical than Schmitt's, or it opens up far more radical possibilities. For Heidegger seeks at all times to circumvent the assumption, in his opinion endemic to modern or post-Cartesian philosophy, that the subject is a *subjectum* or a foundation – that it is a self-generating, self-sufficient, or even self-legislating entity. This does not mean that there is no subject, or that the subject is dead. Rather, it suggests that there can be no stable subject prior to the moment of decision. Thus in a certain sense, *the decision invents the decider*. The subject arrives on the scene as the effect of a particular political act or a specific political performance. From a Heideggerean perspective, then, the subject is the effect of that which is thought to be its expression. It is void of any substantial foundation, and thus subject to continuous alteration, transformation, and change. Here all definitions of “the citizen” and “the nation” become radically contingent. Just who is a citizen and what bounds the nation state become scenes of permanent contestation, antagonism, and debate. So too do the rights possessed by the citizen of the nation state. The rights of the citizen are now, as Balibar puts it in his book on Marx, “the *object of a struggle*” (1995, 75). They are not granted from on high, through an authoritarian or hierarchical power structure, nor do they reside in nature as something that need only be recognized and protected. Instead, rights exist to the extent that they are demanded, fought for, and exercised within particular cultural contexts, through particular social and political institutions. Heideggerean philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy associates a very similar understanding of rights with what he calls “the experience of freedom.” According to Nancy, “[f]reedom cannot be awarded, granted, or conceded according to a degree of maturity or some prior aptitude that would receive it.” Rather “[f]reedom can only be *taken*.” This, Nancy maintains, “is what the revolutionary tradition represents [...] No

one begins *to be* free, but freedom *is* the beginning and endlessly remains the beginning” (1993, 77). Freedom is the beginning without the origin, even the beginning as opposed to the origin. It involves an inaugural leap out of the present, into the future.

Now, without a doubt, the very idea of a political interpretation of Heidegger is going to strike some as unlikely, even counterintuitive. In his most popular works at any rate, Heidegger would seem to be more or less indifferent to politics and interested in more, as he puts it, “fundamental” ontological questions. Indeed, in *Being and Time*, Heidegger makes it very clear that, in order to reopen the long forgotten “question of Being” or to engage in a phenomenological study of “fundamental ontology,” one must be willing to bracket, reduce, or set aside political concerns. Through his meticulous analysis of its everyday existence, Heidegger discovers that Dasein’s basic relationship to the world is one of “care” or *Sorge*. The translation is perhaps a little misleading, as Heidegger is not referring to an ethical or an ecological relationship. His point is not that one must “care” for one’s environment. There is no normative dimension to the concept of *Sorge* – not, at least, in the traditional sense. It is not an ethical imperative or duty. Instead, for Heidegger, care is “a primordial structural totality.” It is that which “lies ‘before’ [‘vor’] every factical ‘attitude’ or ‘situation’ of Dasein, and it does so existentially *a priori*.” It is the *a priori* structure of all of Dasein’s relations with the world, ethical or otherwise, and cannot be comprehended through any analysis of those relations, no matter how exhaustive. And yet, at the same time, care is indistinguishable from the relations it conditions. Dasein is not a transcendental subject or consciousness that surveys and controls its world, but a being in the world, existing in and through relations with others. Picking up on the Marxist terminology, Heidegger indicates that

“this phenomenon by no means expresses a priority of the ‘practical’ over the theoretical.” Instead, “[w]hen we ascertain something present-at-hand by merely beholding it, this activity has the character of care just as much as does a ‘political action’ or taking a rest and enjoying oneself.” From the perspective of care, the existential *a priori* structure of all relations with the world, there is no difference between the experience of beholding an object, the experience of taking a rest, or the experience of taking part in a political action. “‘Theory’ and ‘practice,’” Heidegger concludes, “are possibilities of Being for an entity whose Being must be defined as ‘care’” (1962, 238). Care, then, is ontologically prior to both theory and practice, which are restricted, in this instance at any rate, to the ontic realm of beings. To understand what Heidegger means by care, it is necessary to bracket off questions of theory and practice, and to pursue instead the analysis of the one being for whom Being is a question, the one being who questions its own Being, and the one being whose Being is always in question – namely Dasein. Not incidentally, Heidegger goes on to argue that, to gain authentic self-knowledge and have an essential relation to the question of Being, Dasein must differentiate itself from *Das Man* or “the They.” It must reject the relentless chattering of the crowd, confront its finitude, and learn to embrace its own individual death.

In *Being and Time*, then, political questions appear to be subordinate in every respect to ontological ones – subordinate to *the* ontological question of Being. Following *Being and Time*, and during his so-called “turn” or *Kehre*, Heidegger would leave behind his efforts to ground ontology in a phenomenological description of Dasein’s average everyday existence, and begin to address more recognizably social if not exactly political issues – alienation and nihilism, technology and aesthetics (cf. Richardson 1963). But

Heidegger takes up such issues in order to insist that the problems associated with modernity are only intensified so long as they are not contemplated within the context of a rejuvenated ontology. That is to say, Heidegger discusses nihilism, alienation, or technological rationality in order to show that the modern efforts to overcome or in some sense transcend and control nihilism, alienation, and technological rationality are in fact the causes of nihilism, alienation, and technological rationality, and ensure their perpetuation. The “solution” to such “problems” will not be found in politics, but will require a complete reformulation of the ontological groundwork of all human relations, and of Dasein’s relations with its world. Thus, when asked to discuss ethics in “The Letter on Humanism,” a text generally thought to represent the completion of his *Kehre*, Heidegger rejects both the teleological and the deontological approaches to ethics, or both the idea that ethics directs action according to an end and the idea that it directs action according to duties. Ethics for Heidegger has nothing to do with suggesting a proper course of action. Rather, “‘ethics’ ponders the abode of man.” It has to do with the manner in which Dasein dwells in its world – an *ethos*. In this sense, “that thinking which thinks the truth of Being as the primordial element of man, as one who ek-sists,” in other words, ontology, “is itself the original ethics” (1993, 258). Ontological thinking is the original condition of every ethics, or every dwelling in the world. Deducing ethical imperatives and duties seems insignificant in comparison. The same goes for everything that might be characterized as law. “*Nomos* is not only law,” Heidegger declares, “but more originally the assignment contained in the dispensation of Being.” As in *Being and Time*, Heidegger once again references the Marxist distinction between theory and

practice, only in order to indicate the priority of ontological questions, or what he now calls “thinking,” with respect to both:

But now in what relation does the thinking of Being stand to theoretical and practical behavior? It exceeds all contemplation because it cares for the light in which a seeing, as *theoria*, can first live and move. Thinking attends to the clearing of Being in that it puts its saying into Being into language as the home of ek-sistence. Thus thinking is a deed. But a deed that also surpasses all *praxis*. Thinking towers over action and production, not through the grandeur of its achievement and not as a consequence of its effect, but through the humbleness of its inconsequential accomplishment (262).

It is to primordial thinking, then, and not to the agora or to the barricades, that Heidegger calls the philosopher. Indeed, the noise of the agora and the clatter of the barricades only threaten to drown out the ontological thinking that alone can open a space for an authentic relation to the world.

The same prioritization of ontology pervades what otherwise might appear to be Heidegger’s most politically “engaged” work, his essay on “The Question Concerning Technology.” Heidegger begins his reflections with the assertion that, in order properly to understand the danger that technology represents, one must move beyond the necessary but insufficient assumption that technology is an instrument used by humans, or an instrumental means to anthropological ends. Instead, Heidegger insists, “the essence of technology is by no means anything technological” (1993, 311). It will not be found in a steam engine, a turbine, a factory, or a laptop, nor will it be discovered in the sum totality of all such “technological” entities. In a more primordial sense, technology is a way of

thinking, and of relating to the world. It has to do with a phenomenon that, translating the Greek *aletheia*, Heidegger calls “bringing-forth” and “unconcealment” – the revelation, disclosure, or happening of truth. Long before it is a particular instrument or tool, Heidegger proclaims, “[t]echnology is a mode of revealing” (319). It is one of the modes in which the truth is revealed by and to humans. It is thus related to both *poiesis* and *episteme*, both making and knowing. Now, modern technology is for Heidegger no less a mode of revealing, no less a question of unconcealment, than ancient technology. But it reveals beings exclusively as what Heidegger calls “standing reserve,” or as a reserve of instrumental means to still further instrumental ends. At the exclusion of formal and final causes, which suggested that beings were brought forth into unconcealment within some kind of purposive context, modern technology knows only efficient causality – the reduction of all beings to cause and effect without purpose or direction. Heidegger concludes his reflections on technology with the suggestion that art might represent the “saving power” in all of this. “Because the essence of technology is nothing technological,” he reiterates, “essential reflection on technology and decisive confrontation with it must happen in a realm that is, on the one hand, akin to the essence of technology and, on the other, fundamentally different from it.” That is to say, addressing the question concerning technology requires a mode of revealing or a “realm” that is, like technology, a kind of *poiesis* and *episteme*, making and knowing, but that is also “fundamentally different” from technology, presumably to the extent that it is not a means to an end, or that it has no instrumental utility. “Such a realm,” Heidegger concludes, “is art” (340). Thus Heidegger’s reflections on the question concerning technology lead him finally to the privileging of art. Other, more practical or political

responses to this question will, Heidegger insists, only serve to deepen the “danger” and further conceal the “saving power.”

Given the regularity and the certainty with which Heidegger prioritizes ontological questions, and even insists on the necessity of this priority, one might wonder whether there is any opening in his text for a political interpretation. Is there, in all of this, the possibility of a new political ontology? Perhaps, but only if everything Heidegger says against politics is read as an attack on a purely instrumental approach to politics, or what he sees as a dangerously instrumental reduction of the political. For Heidegger, it is not as though politics does not exist, or that it should be abandoned in favor of a kind of inconsequential meditative repose or “thinking.” Instead, Heidegger wants to show how, so long as politics is thought to be an ontic means to an end, and not an ontological condition of being in the world, it remains only partially understood. More importantly, for Heidegger, to conceive of politics as an instrumental means to an end is ultimately to overlook the political, to attempt to reduce this dimension of Dasein’s being in the world to some more fundamental, essentially apolitical category. It is such a reduction of the political that Heidegger wishes to challenge, for it results finally in an effort to destroy the political – to eliminate a dynamic and always unfolding dimension of human existence so as to reveal what is thought to be its hidden truth, its substance, or its base. From a republican perspective, this is where the real danger emerges. The *res publicus* or open public space of discourse and debate is not an illusion concealing a deeper reality, nor is it a superstructure layered overtop of a structure or base. It is, instead, an ongoing conversation that creates as much as it represents the interests and the makeup of “the people.” To attempt to overcome it, or to claim (as Marxism claimed) to

possess scientific tools that allow one to see through it, is to threaten democratic freedom as such. It is precisely the unfounded and thus contingent status of the *res publica* that makes democratic freedom possible, in that it and it alone guarantees the endless, creative fabrication of new freedoms and new subjectivities. The question for the republican is not what lies beneath the *res publicus* or what interests and struggles does politics conceal, but what if any are its limits. Is there a private sphere on which the *res publica* has no purchase, which remains distinct from social life, or is human existence irreducibly social and socialized? Or, what is more likely the case, is the divide between the public and the private something that is itself constantly being defined and redefined through public discourse, struggle, and debate?

While they are as yet not well known, or at least nowhere near as well known as *Being and Time* and certain of his latter essays, Heidegger deals explicitly with this question of the *res publica* in his lectures on *Parmenides* – lectures he delivered, significantly enough, while teaching in Germany during the Second World War. The meaning of Heidegger's utterances in these lectures remains radically ambiguous, and both his penchant for indirect discourse and his elevated style or rhetoric are in evidence throughout. In the midst of the lectures, Heidegger posits a distinction between the Greek *polis* and the Roman *res publica*. He wants, as always, to privilege the former, and to suggest that the Greeks had a more authentic relationship with Being, one that the Romans destroyed. While the *res publica* of the Roman republic refers to "that which concerns the organized and established people," the Greek *polis* on the other hand "is grounded in the essence of *aletheia*." That is to say, the *res publica* is the place or the space of a subject that has already been constituted ("organized and established") before

entering into relations with others and with itself. It merely represents a truth that is already there. The *polis*, however, refers to a site where truth reveals itself, or where it first comes into being as such. Thus Heidegger asks “[w]hat is the *polis*?” and responds, “[t]he *polis* is the *polos*, the pole, the place around which everything appearing to the Greeks as a being turns in a particular way” (1992, 89). It is not a particular collection of institutions or laws, natural or otherwise. It is, instead, the ontological condition for the revelation of political beings. As Heidegger puts it, “each *politikon*, everything ‘political,’ is always only an effect of the *polis*” meaning that “the *polis* is just as little something ‘political’ as space is something spatial” (96). Now, of the many possible interpretations these reflections might elicit, I will limit myself to two. First, Heidegger’s words may be intended to distinguish between the *res publica* of the allied democracies and the *polis* of the German state. The former represent, or believe they represent, an “organized and established” subject, while the latter, grounded in the “unconcealment” of truth, and thus open to truth’s uncertain “happening,” has a different mission – one that necessitates its expansive redefinition of its own borders, and its heroic declaration of its own destiny. In this case, Heidegger’s words are nothing less than a repugnant apology for fascism. But another interpretation is equally possible and equally valid. If, in the Roman *res publica* or republic (after which, of course, the fascists modeled so much of their imagery and ideology), the subject possesses a stable essence that need only be properly represented (an essence that can be represented by, for example, a single party and a single leader), in the Greek *polis*, the subject is the effect of an ongoing debate, exposed at all times to the uncertain happening of truth. In this sense, the *res publica* refers to a dictatorship, and the *polis* to a democracy, even to a radical democracy.

How, then, might these reflections on what Dallmayr calls the “other Heidegger” be related to my consideration of the other Marx or the Marx-machine? Marx addresses some very similar questions, albeit in a less philosophical fashion, in the fourth and fifth notebooks of the *Grundrisse*, written between mid-December 1857 and February 1858. While it would not be uncovered until long after his death, this was perhaps the most productive period in Marx’s entire intellectual career. “I work quite colossally,” he wrote to Engels at the beginning of these few months, “mostly until four in the morning.” This work, Marx says, involves a “double labour.” First, “on the foundations of the economics book.” And second, on what Marx calls the “*present crisis*,” namely the economic crisis that resulted from the first American gold rush, which Marx hoped would ultimately lead to a new cycle of revolutionary movements (Marx to Engels, 18 December 1857). In the midst of this period, during which he appears to have discovered the secret to the theory of surplus value, Marx returned to a consideration of social relations in classical antiquity, and especially to the difference between the ancient commune found among the Germanic tribes and the political state found in the city of Rome. The commune, Marx explains, involves a transient “gathering-together” or a “coming-together [*Vereinigung*]” of a group of otherwise independent individuals, while the city is a more permanent “being-together [*Verein*]” of a group of citizens. According to Marx, the difference depends on the way that each form of social or political organization conceives of public space, or what he calls the “*ager publicus*.” For the people of the ancient commune, the *ager publicus* is but a supplement to the privately owned land of each individual. It is a piece of land that all individuals within the commune agree to defend from enemies, and that they all use for the purposes of hunting and gathering. But, Marx claims, it does not

in any way effect or mediate the individual's privately held lands. The opposite is true of the *ager publicus* in the city. There the *ager publicus* is not a piece of land that all individuals defend and all individuals use. It is, instead, the state itself – the institutions and apparatuses that enforce the rule of law. That is to say, in the city, the *ager publicus* is the prior, social condition of all individually held property. The difference between the two conceptions of public space or public property is crucial. "For the commune to come into real existence," Marx explains, "the free landed proprietors have to hold a *meeting*." The individuals who make up the commune have to come together in a particular spot at a particular time. The city, on the other hand, "*exists* even apart from these assemblies in the existence of the *city itself* and of the officials presiding over it." For the Germanic tribe, the *ager publicus* is protected in addition to privately held lands, as what Marx calls a "compliment" to the individually held lands. In the Roman city, the *ager publicus* is "the particular economic presence of the state as against the private proprietors, so that these latter are actually *private* proprietors as such, in so far as they are *excluded*, deprived, like the plebeians, from using the *ager publicus*" (G 483). If the commune only exists when its members come together and hold a meeting, the city always exists in the institutions and apparatuses that represent the citizens, and that protect their rights.

As soon as the city replaces the commune, Marx suggests, private property must be understood as something that is conditioned by the public sphere, or by an *ager publicus* of state institutions, recognized laws, and enforceable social contracts. Individuals can only be said to own private property if they first submit, and agree to contribute, to the maintenance and operation of the public sphere, or the state. Anyone who does not do these things can be excluded from the city – deprived, like foreigners or

plebeians, of the benefits and protections of citizenship. At the same time, with the emergence of city, political association gets transformed into a static “being-together” of the citizens, rather than a dynamic “gathering-together” or “coming-together” of the people. Whereas, with the Germanic tribes, the commune only existed to the extent that all recognized members periodically assembled to take decisions and make plans, in the Roman city, the state now has an existence independent from its individual members. It can therefore take decisions and make plans irrespective of their active participation. The *ager publicus*, which once referred to a piece of land held in common by all members of the commune and to which they all had access (primarily for hunting and gathering), now becomes the infrastructure of the state itself – that collection of bureaucratic, legislative, and juridical institutions designed for the administration of civil society. As it turns out, it does not matter all that much how society is organized – whether it is a loose association of individuals who possess private property, or an organized collective that holds the means of production in common. In both cases, the state remains something abstract. It no longer requires the assembly of citizens – their periodic coming-together or their active participation in decision making processes. Rather, the state becomes a representation or an expression of the citizenry’s static being-together.

How, then, to couple the dynamic coming-together of the commune, or the sense in which the community only must engage in the process of actively constituting itself, with the formal being-together of the city state, or the contracts and agreements that afford citizenship both its continuity and its significance? How to combine the participatory elements of communal life with the concrete institutions of city life? These would be the questions that the Marxian and the Heideggerean traditions pose to

democratic political theory – the questions that open onto a consideration of existential republics. Here democracy would have to defend the institutions that make up the *ager publicus*. But at the same time, it would also have to defend the possibility of the complete reformulation of those institutions. That is to say, democracy would have always to keep open a space for antagonisms and struggles that break apart the established being-together in the name of a new coming-together. And this would also be the space of politics, of *polemos*, of *praxis*, and even of revolution. It would be the open space of the *res publica* – the irreducible void at the center of every community that constitutes both its formal limit, and the potential for eternal change.

WORKS CITED

- Agemben, Giorgio. 1993. *The Coming Community*. Trans. Michael Hardt. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- , 2000. *Means Without End: Notes on Politics*. Trans. Vincenzo Binetti and Cesare Casarino. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Althusser, Louis. 1969. *For Marx*. Trans. Ben Brewster. New York: Pantheon.
- , 1970. *Reading Capital*. Trans. Ben Brewster. London: New Left Books.
- , 1971. *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*. Trans. Ben Brewster. New York: Monthly Review.
- Apel, Karl-Otto. 1998. *From a Transcendental-Semiotic Point of View*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Arendt, Hannah. 1974. *The Human Condition*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- , 1968. "What is Freedom?" in *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought*. New York: Viking Press.
- Aristotle. 1954. *Rhetoric and Poetics*. Trans. W. Rhys Roberts and Ingram Bywater. New York: Modern Library.
- , 1995. *Politics*. Trans. Ernest Barker. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- , 1996. *Physics*. Trans. Robin Waterfield. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Aune, James Arnt. 1994. *Rhetoric and Marxism*. Boulder: Westview Press.
- Austin, J. L. 1962. *How to Do Things with Words*. London: Oxford University Press.
- , 1979. *Philosophical Papers*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Avineri, Shlomo. 1971. *The Social and Political Thought of Karl Marx*. Cambridge.

Cambridge University Press.

Babbage, Charles. 1832. *On the Economy of Machinery and Manufactures*. Second

Edition. London: C. Knight.

Balibar, Etienne. 1970. "Elements for a Theory of Transition." In *Reading "Capital."*

Trans. Ben Brewster. London: New Left Books.

-----, 1995. *The Philosophy of Marx*. Trans. Chris Turner. New York: Verso.

Barnard, F.M. 1965. *Herder's Social and Political Thought*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Barthes, Roland. 1974. *S/Z*. Trans. Richard Miller. New York: Hill and Wang.

Bataille, Georges. 1988. *The Accused Share: An Essay on General Economy*. Trans.

Robert Hurley. New York: Zone Books.

Baudrillard, Jean. 1975. *The Mirror of Production*. Trans. Mark Poster. St. Louis: Telos

Press.

Bauer, Bruno. [1843] 1983. "The Jewish Problem." Trans. Helen Lederer. In *The Young*

Hegelians. Ed. Lawrence S. Stepelevich. Cambridge: Cambridge University

Press.

-----, 1983 [1844]. "The Genus and the Crowd." Trans. Michael Malloy. *The Young*

Hegelians. Ed. Lawrence S. Stepelevich. Cambridge: Cambridge University

Press.

-----, 1989 [1841]. *The Trumpet of the Last Judgment Against Hegel the Atheist and*

Antichrist: An Ultimatum. Trans. Lawrence Stepelevich. Lweiston: Edwin Mellon

Press.

- Benjamin, Walter. 1977. *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*. Trans. J. Osborne.
London: New Left Books.
- , 1978. *Illuminations*. Trans. Harry Zohn. New York: Schocken Books.
- Berlin, Isaiah. 1963. *Karl Marx: His Life and Environment*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Brazill, William J. 1970. *The Young Hegelians*. New York: Yale University Press.
- Brudney, Daniel. *Marx's Attempt to Leave Philosophy*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Burke, Kenneth. 1966. *Language as Symbolic Action: Essays on Life, Literature and Method*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- , 1969. *A Grammar of Motive*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Butler, E.M. 1935. *The Tyranny of Greece over Germany: A Study of the Influence Exercised by Greek Art and Poetry over the Great German Writers of The Eighteenth, Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*. Cambridge. Cambridge University Press.
- Butler, Judith. 1990. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge.
- , 1994. *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex."* New York: Routledge.
- , 1997. *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Butler, Judith, Ernesto Laclau and Slavoj Zizek. 2000. *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality: Contemporary Dialogues on the Left*. London: Verso.

- Carver, Terrell. 1998. *The Postmodern Marx*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press.
- Cervantes, Miguel de. 1950. *Don Quixote*. Trans. J.M. Cohen. New York: Penguin.
- Critchley, Simon. 1992. *The Ethics of Deconstruction*. London: Blackwell.
- Dallmayr, Fred. *The Other Heidegger*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Deleuze, Gilles and Felix Guattari. 1983. *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem and Helen R. Lane. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- , 1987. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Trans. Brian Massumi. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- DeMan, Paul. 1979. *Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke and Proust*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- , 1983. *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- , 1986. *The Resistance to Theory*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Derrida, Jacques. 1976. *Of Grammatology*. Trans. Gayatri Spivak. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- , 1982. *Margins of Philosophy*. Trans. Alan Bass. Chicago: Chicago University Press.
- , 1984. "Déclarations d'indépendance." In *Otobiographies: L'enseignement de Nietzsche et la politique du nom propre*. Paris. Galilée.
- , 1985. "De Tours de Babel." In *Difference in Translation*. Trans. Joseph F. Graham. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

- , 1988. *Limited Inc.* Trans. Samuel Weber and Jeffrey Mehlman. Evanston: Northwestern University Press.
- , 1992. "Force of Law: The Mystical Foundation of Authority." Trans. Marie Quaintance. In *Deconstruction and the Possibility of Justice*. Eds. Drucilla Cornell, Michael Rosenfeld and David Grey Carlson. New York: Routledge.
- , 1994. *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, The Work of Mourning and the New International*. Trans. Peggy Kamuf. New York: Routledge.
- , 1998. *Monolingualism of the Other, or, The Prosthesis of Origin*. Trans. Patrick Mansah. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- , 2000. *Of Hospitality* Trans. Rachel Bowlby. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Durán, Manuel. 1974. *Cervantes*. New York: Twayne Publishers.
- Feuerbach, Ludwig. 1957 [1841]. *The Essence of Christianity*. Trans. George Elliot. New York: Harper and Row.
- , 1967 [1852]. *Lectures on the Essence of Religion*. Trans. Ralph Manheim. New York: Harper and Row.
- , 1983 [1843]. "Provisional Theses for the Reformation of Philosophy." Trans. Daniel Dahlstrom. In *The Young Hegelians*. Ed. Lawrence S. Stepelevich. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press..
- Guthrie, W.K.C. 1976. *The Greek Philosophers from Thales to Aristotle*. London: Methuen.
- Habermas, Jürgen. 1972. *Knowledge and Human Interests*. Trans. Jeremy J. Shapiro. London. Heinemann Educational.

- , 1987. *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures*. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- , 1998. *The Inclusion of the Other: Studies in Political Theory*. Eds. Ciaran Cronin and Pablo De Greif. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Haraway, Donna. 1991. *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*. New York: Routledge.
- Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich. 1901. *Philosophy of History*. Trans. J. Sibree. New York: Collier and Son.
- , 1977. *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Trans. Arnold Vincent Miller. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- , 1999. "On the Scientific Ways of Treating Natural Law." Trans. H.B. Nisbet. In *Political Writings*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Heidegger, Martin. 1962. *Being and Time*. Trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson. New York: Harper.
- , 1992. *Parmenides*. Trans. André Schuwer and Richard Rojcewicz. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- , 1993. *Basic Writings*. Ed. David Farrell Krell. New York: Harper Collins.
- Hiromatsou, W. Ed. 1974. *Die deutsche Ideologie. 1. Band, 1. Abschnitt*. Tokyo: Kawadashobo-Shinsha.
- Horkheimer, Max and Theodore Adorno. 1972. *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Trans. John Cumming. New York: Herder and Herder.
- Hunt, Alan and Gary Wickham. 1994. *Foucault and Law: Towards a Sociology of Law as Governance*. London: Pluto Press.

- Kant, Immanuel. 1987. *Critique of Judgment*. Trans. Werner S. Pluhar. Indianapolis. Hackett.
- , 1996 [1781/1788]. *Critique of Pure Reason*. Trans. Werner S. Pluhar. Indianapolis. Hackett.
- Kemple, Thomas. 1995. *Reading Marx Writing: Melodrama, the Market, and the 'Grundrisse'*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Laclau, Ernesto. 2000. "Identity and Hegemony: The Role of Universality in the Construction of Political Logics." In *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality: Contemporary Dialogues on the Left*. London: Verso.
- Laclau, Ernesto and Chantal Mouffe. 1985. *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards A Radical Democratic Politics*. London: Verso.
- Lacoue-Labarthe, Phillippe and Jean Luc Nancy. 1997. *Retreating the Political*. Ed. Simon Sparks. New York. Routledge.
- La Mettrie, Julian Offray. 1991. *Man A Machine*. Trans. Gertrude Carmen Bussey. La Salle: Open Court.
- Lefort, Claude. 1986. *The Political Forms of Modern Society: Bureaucracy, Democracy, Totalitarianism*. Ed. John B. Thompson. Cambridge: Polity.
- , 1988. *Democracy and Political Theory*. Trans. David Macey. Cambridge: Polity.
- Lobkowitz, Nicholas. 1969. "Karl Marx and Max Stirner." In *Demythologizing Marxism*. Ed. Frederick J. Adelman. The Hague: Marinus Nijhoff.
- Lowith, Karl. 1964. *From Hegel to Nietzsche: The Revolution in Nineteenth Century Thought*. Trans. David E. Green. New York. Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

Lukács, Georg. 1971. *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*.

Trans. Rodney Livingstone. Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press.

-----, 1980. *The Destruction of Reason*. Trans. Peter Palmer. London: The Merlin Press.

Lyotard, Jean Francois. 1984. *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*.

Trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Brian Massumi. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

-----, 1993. *Libidinal Economy*. Trans. Iain Hamilton Grant. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Mah, Harold. 1987. *The End of Philosophy, The Origin of "Ideology": Karl Marx and the Crisis of the Young Hegelians*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Marcuse, Herbert. 1968. "The Concept of Essence." In *Negations: Essays in Critical Theory*. Trans. Jeremy J. Shapiro. Boston: Beacon Press.

-----, 1978. *The Aesthetic Dimension: Toward a Critique of Marxist Aesthetics*. Boston: Beacon Press.

McCarthy, George E. 1990. *Marx and the Ancients: Classical Ethics, Social Justice, and Nineteenth-Century Political Economy*. Savage: Roman & Littlefield.

McCarthy, George E. Ed. 1992. *Marx and Aristotle: Nineteenth Century German Social Theory and Classical Antiquity*. Savage: Rowmann & Littlefield.

McGann, Jerome. 1991. *The Textual Condition*. Princeton. Princeton University Press.

McLennen, David. Ed. 1977. *Karl Marx: Selected Writings*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Mehring, Franz. 1966. *Karl Marx: The Story of His Life*. Trans. Edward Fitzgerald.

London: George Allen and Unwin.

Meikle, Scott. 1985. *Essentialism in the Thought of Karl Marx*. London: Gerald

Duckworth.

Michelfelder, Diane P. and Richard E. Palmer, Eds. 1989. *Dialogue and Deconstruction:*

The Gadamar-Derrida Encounter. Albany: State University of New York.

Mitchell, W.J.T. 1986. *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology*. Chicago: Chicago University

Press.

Moggach, Douglas and Paul Leduc Brown Eds. 2000. *The Social Question and the*

Democratic Revolution: Marx and the Legacy of 1848. Ottawa: University of

Ottawa Press.

Mouffe, Chantal. 1993. *The Return of the Political*. New York: Verso.

Nancy, Jean-Luc. 1993. *The Experience of Freedom*. Trans. Bridget McDonald. Stanford:

Stanford University Press.

Negri, Antonio. 1984. *Marx Beyond Marx: Lessons on the Grundrisse*. Trans. Harry

Cleaver, Michael Ryan and Maurizio Viano. South Hadley: Bergin and Garvey.

-----, 1999. *Insurgencies: Constituent Power and the Modern State*. Trans. Maurizia

Boscagli. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

-----, 1991. *The Savage Anomaly: The Power of Spinoza's Metaphysics and Politics*.

Trans. Michael Hardt. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

O'Neill, John. 1995. *The Poverty of Postmodernism*. London: Routledge.

Pashukanis, Evgeny. 1989. *Law and Marxism: A General Theory*. Trans. Barbara

Einhorn. London: Pluto Press.

- Poulantzas, Nicos. 1978. *State, Power, Socialism*. Trans. Patrick Camiller. London: NLB.
- Rancière, Jacques. 1995. *On the Shores of Politics*. Trans. Liz Heron. New York: Verso.
- Rousseau, Jean Jacques. 1992 [1754]. "Political Economy." Trans. Judith R. Bush et. al.
In *Collected Writings of Rousseau*. Volume 3. Hanover: University Press of New England.
- Schiller, Friedrich. 1967 [1795]. *On the Aesthetic Education of Man: In a Series of Letters*. Trans. Elizabeth M. Wilkenson and L.A. Willoughby. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Schmitt, Carl. 1996 [1933]. *The Concept of the Political*. Trans. J. Harvey Lomax.
Chicago. University of Chicago Press.
- Smith, Anna Marie. 1998. *Laclau and Mouffe: The Radical Democratic Imaginary*. New York: Routledge.
- Smith, Dorothy. 1990. *Texts, Facts and Femininity: Exploring the Relations of Ruling*.
New York. Routledge.
- Stepelovich, Lawrence. 1979. "Max Stirner and Ludwig Feuerbach." *Journal of the History of Ideas*. Volume 39. 451-63.
- , 1985. "Max Stirner as Hegelian." *Journal of the History of Ideas*. Volume 46.
597-614.
- Stirner, Max. 1995 [1844]. *The Ego and Its Own*. Trans. David Leopold. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Strauss, David. 1901 [1835]. *Life of Jesus*. Trans. George Elliot. London: Swan Sonnenschein.
- Taylor, Charles. 1975. *Hegel*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Toews, John. 1980. *Hegelianism: The Path Towards Dialectical Humanism, 1805-1841*.

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Wheen, Francis. 1999. *Karl Marx*. London: Fourth Estate.

Wolff, Richard Paul. 1984. *Understanding Marx: A Reconstruction and Critique of Capital*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

----- . 1988. *Moneybags Must Be So Lucky: On the Literary Structure of Capital*.

Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press.

Zizek, Slavoj. 1989. *The Sublime Object of Ideology*. New York: Verso.

----- . 1999. *The Zizek Reader*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers

----- . 1999. *The Ticklish Subject: An Essay on Political Ontology*. New York: Verso.