

## Review Essay

### What Remains

#### *Of Marx and Marxism*

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Daniel Bensaïd, *Marx for Our Times: Adventures and Misadventures of a Critique*, trans. Gregory Elliot. London: Verso, 2002. 392 pp. 1–8598–4712–9 (hbk).

Marshall Berman, *Adventures in Marxism*. London: Verso, 1999. 273 pp. ISBN 1–8598–4734–X (hbk).

Terrell Carver, *The Postmodern Marx*. University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998. 243 pp. ISBN 0–2710–1868–2 (pbk).

Meghnad Desai, *Marx's Revenge: The Resurgence of Capitalism and the Death of Statist Socialism*. London: Verso, 2002. 320 pp. ISBN 1–8598–4644–0 (hbk).

George E. McCarthy, *Classical Horizons: The Origins of Sociology in Ancient Greece*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2003. 202 pp. ISBN 0–7914–5563–7 (pbk).

Antonio Negri, *Time for Revolution*, trans. Matteo Mandarini. New York: Continuum, 2003. 298 pp. ISBN 0–8264–7328–8 (hbk).

Eric A. Plaut and Kevin Anderson (eds) *Marx on Suicide*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1999. 147 pp. ISBN 0–8101–1638–3 (pbk).

In 1959, in the midst of Khrushchev's renunciation of Stalinism, the paranoia of an increasingly hot Cold War and the emergence of the so-called 'New Left', the body of Karl Marx was dug up and transported but a few hundred yards from its resting place on the east side of London's Highgate Cemetery to the west side of the same graveyard. There, with the help of Communist Party funds, an imposing 10-foot-tall granite obelisk was erected in Marx's memory. On top of this ostentatious monument sits an oversized bust of the mature Marx, whose blank eyes stare in dispassionate judgment of all who approach. At its base, inscribed in

tawdry gold letters, appear the famous words of the 11th of Marx's 'Theses on Feuerbach', conveniently translated into English. 'The philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways', it declares. 'The point, however, is to change it.' Of course, Marx himself could not possibly have chosen this as his epitaph, since at the time of his death the 'Theses on Feuerbach' were nothing more than random scribbles in a forgotten notebook. It was Engels who rediscovered these short notes in Marx's literary remains, and who first published a slightly edited version of them as an appendix to his *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy* – a pamphlet that began as an extended book review of Carl Nicolai Starcke's *Ludwig Feuerbach*, but soon become the standard, and still very influential, misreading of the relationship between Hegel, Feuerbach and Marx.

These two small incidents – digging up Marx's actual remains and digging through his literary remains – seem neatly to configure so much of what was to become the Marxist tradition, or traditions. Although he published relatively little in his lifetime, Marx was a prolific writer, adept at the production, but terrible at the completion, of his work. Marx's followers, moreover, were obsessive about collecting, editing and glossing every scrap of paper he and Engels might have touched, resulting in the colossal and still incomplete *Marx-Engels Gesamtausgabe* or the (so aptly nicknamed) *MEGA*. The existence of so much posthumous material has opened up countless new approaches to Marx's texts over the years, and been the cause of great difficulty for those who have sought to confine them within the limits of a single orthodoxy. We might recall Louis Althusser's rather suspicious comment that 'we do not publish our own drafts, that is, our own mistakes, but we do sometimes publish other people's' (1996: 10) – a comment that has returned to haunt him now that archivists have begun to dig through his remains. Regardless, neither the hermeneutic metaphor of a fully coherent 'body of work' nor the structuralist conjecture of an abrupt 'epistemological break' seems adequate to describe the incredible complexity of that massive assemblage of texts we retroactively label 'Karl Marx'. Marx's texts are productive, not only of innumerable different readings, but also of countless different *kinds* of readings. For a variety of reasons not all reducible to Marx's intentions, they alter what it means to read. An innovative reading of Marx is, therefore, one that also innovates what it means to read – one that alters slightly the way we think about reading and writing, judging and interpreting as such.

The clearest recent example of critics picking over Marx's literary remains is *Marx on Suicide*, which consists of a fragment from Marx's early journalism that has been edited, introduced and extensively glossed by Eric A. Plaut and Kevin Anderson. The Marx fragment in question – formerly known only to Marx experts – is itself a fragment of a book by the French bureaucrat and proto-sociologist Jacques Peuchet, parts of which Marx translated into German in 1845, and published the following year along with a brief introduction in the short-lived radical newspaper *Gesellschaftsspiegel*. The title of this little journal is significant, as

whether they are aware of it or not, Plaut and Anderson are ‘mirroring’ Marx in more ways than one. Indeed, read creatively, which is how I hope it will be read, *Marx on Suicide* amounts to a house of mirrors – an attraction at an amusement park. Peuchet’s book, *Memoirs from the Police Archives*, was originally published in 1838, eight years after the author’s death. It consists of a series of sensational crime reports that Peuchet culled together, or at least pretended to have culled together, while working as a Parisian police archivist in the 1820s. For Marx scholars, the possibility of verifying these reports does not exist, because, in an almost priceless historical irony, the building that housed the Parisian police archives was burnt to the ground during the Paris Commune of 1871. In their respective introductions to *Marx on Suicide*, Plaut and Anderson go out of their way to make serious claims about the text and its importance, not only to Marx scholarship, but also to the history of sociology in general. They suggest that Marx’s interest in Peuchet prefigures Émile Durkheim’s famous work on suicide, that it anticipates feminist critiques of the family, and even that it provides evidence of Marx’s latent ‘self-aggressive’ psychological tendencies. Ultimately, Plaut and Anderson want to suggest that this overlooked fragment of Marx’s literary remains has an important place in the history of scientific sociology. In Peuchet’s *Memoirs*, they propose, Marx first encounters an empirical approach to sociology. This discovery is then said to have become central to his rejection of speculative dialectics and his invention of historical materialism.

However, while Plaut and Anderson do not make this point, the most interesting thing about Peuchet’s text, even from a scholarly perspective, is not its application of a scientific or positivist methodology to the study of society, but the nonchalant manner in which it mixes literary or rhetorical discourses with scientific or quasi-scientific ones. Here we find definitive proof of what Hayden White has been arguing for nearly three decades. The notion that history might be ‘factual’ or that it might exclude rhetoric and fiction is itself a very recent historical phenomenon. Like Marx’s own work, Peuchet’s *Memoirs* were written prior to the establishment of the conventions (or the conceits) of scientific sociology and scientific history. Thus, even while Marx praises the standards of Peuchet’s scholarship, and condemns both German and English writers in comparison, the *Memoirs* read more like ‘true crime’ stories, tabloid journalism or pulp fiction than earnest sociological analyses. Peuchet’s explicit attempt to promote public morality is never above appealing directly to the more prurient interests of that same public. And it seems to me that, especially today, the Marx who read Peuchet because of his ‘scientific’ approach to society should never be allowed to overshadow the Marx who read him for pleasure. Quite clearly, Marx was personally enthralled by Peuchet’s lurid, melodramatic tales of distraught Parisians driven to suicide by the intolerable structures of bourgeois morality and middle-class conformity. And he knew that, properly framed, these same stories could be pressed into the service of his own political agenda. This is where the editorial work that Plaut and Anderson do really pays off, and the house of mirrors

becomes especially complex. For, not only do they include both Marx's German text and Peuchet's French original, but in the English translation of Marx's translation of Peuchet, they also use different typefaces, fonts and footnote apparatuses to indicate the places where Marx alters the original, where he truncates or rearranges the original, and where he adds words of his own to the original, allowing them to appear as though they were Peuchet's. Thus, for example, each time Peuchet draws a Christian lesson for the tales he recounts, Marx surreptitiously transforms it into a condemnation of capitalist society. Even in the midst of praising Peuchet's scholarship, Marx is entirely comfortable altering his text for political effect.

Defying any positivist conception of knowledge, there are a number of structures of deferral built into Peuchet's text – it being a *posthumously* published *memoir* of an *archive*. If Marx was interested in the way this text produced knowledge, surely it would have been as much for its defiance of positivism and empiricism, and for its employment of literary conventions and rhetorical tropes. Reading *Marx on Suicide* as a 'house of mirrors' recalls the language of the carnival, or the traveling side-show, which has always been configured as a mysterious, fantastic, even macabre space. We urgently need a study of the fantastic, the macabre and the gothic in Marx, because it is a discourse that haunts every aspect and every stage of his work – from the embarrassing romantic poetry and specter-addled philosophy of his youth to the most rigorous political economy of the *Grundrisse* and *Capital*. *Marx on Suicide* would be a good place to begin such a study. Marx's translation of Peuchet recounts four different suicides, each incredible in its own way. But by far the most enthralling of these tales (from the crypt) is that of 'a very attractive young Creole from one of Martinique's richest families' who, according to Peuchet, 'appeared in my office' one afternoon, and proceeded to unravel a story of mysterious illness, physical deformity, sexual infidelity, interracial love, and a young woman who, because of her husband's unquenchable jealousy, was locked in a castle, tortured by solitude, and finally driven to suicidal madness. 'The slightest thing will stir jealousy,' Peuchet, or rather Peuchet's narrator, opines half-way through this lesson; 'it feeds on itself and becomes inventive' (p. 57). A little later, and by way of a moralizing conclusion, we are told that 'this suicide was an assassination perpetrated by the husband' and that '[t]he jealous man requires a slave he can love, but that love is only a handmaiden for his jealousy', to which Marx furtively adds '*[a]bove all the jealous man is a private property owner*' (p. 61). Marx's supplement to Peuchet's narrative is reminiscent of the vulgar Marxist criticism that reduced every text to an expression of economic conditions. But so much more is at stake in Peuchet's little tale – not only class relations, but also questions of race, gender, religion, sexuality, affect, nationality, hybridity, all of which get articulated through the formal conventions of gothic narrative. Far more interesting than the statistics on suicide that Peuchet appends to his *Memoirs* are the myriad literary techniques he employs throughout. Look how the racialized or creolized 'other' is used by

Peuchet as a *mise en abyme*, or a storyteller framed within the story, so as both to emphasize the authenticity of the events, and to deflect any suggestion that Peuchet himself provide conclusive evidence. And look how Marx mirrors this same structure in his use of Peuchet. Nor is this merely formal decoration, for exactly what is at issue is the relationship between archives and memories, or writing and history, arguably the question at the center of Marx's entire philosophy.

This kind of attention to Marx the writer – and not only Marx the scientist or Marx the politician – is one of the distinguishing features of Marshall Berman's work. Berman began his career as a student of the great humanist scholar and Marx biographer Isaiah Berlin, and soon went on to write one of the classic works of humanist Marxism, *All That is Solid Melts Into Air*. He is of that generation of Western Marxists first inspired by the discovery and publication of Marx's *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* of 1844. His politics, or rather his worldview, consists of an eclectic mixture of 1950s optimism and 1960s radicalism. At the same time, Berman harbors no illusions about the failures of his generation, and repeatedly refers to the so-called 'New Left' as the 'Used Left'. Here 'used' clearly means spent and tired, but it also means a left that was co-opted and compromised by the very system it sought to destroy. On some level, Berman knows that his style of humanist Marxism was adopted by late capitalism as the house critique – its existence representing both the proof of liberal freedom within capitalist society and a radical limit beyond which one cannot reasonably expect to pass. Any reader steeped in the French anti-humanism that has dominated the academic left for the past three decades (those lapsed Marxists who, in Berman's words, 'went rushing to catch the cultural Concorde') will have no trouble tearing apart Berman's fundamental assumptions. Why, for example, are we so sure that we know what a human is, and, by implication, what it is not? Do we have an essence from which to be alienated, or is every such 'essence' itself a social construct? Indeed, is not the theory of 'alienation' premised on a fantasy scenario of an ideal humanity – an ideal social body – that has routinely been mobilized to justify the exclusion, even the elimination, of difference? Those questions pending, it remains impossible not to be moved by Berman's work. After everything that has happened to Marxism since the publication of *All That is Solid*, all that was once so solid having melted into air, Berman remains resilient, even hopeful. He is possessed of the same messianic hope as one of his great heroes, Walter Benjamin. And I dare say Berman understands that heterodox and mystical materialist in a way that most of those involved in the current 'Benjamin industry' do not. For Berman, intellectual labor has nothing to do with advancing one's position in the academic marketplace, and everything to do with the creation of understanding and hope.

Berman's new book, *Adventures in Marxism*, his first since *All That is Solid*, consists largely of a series of character sketches, collecting together essays on figures such as Studs Terkel, Edmund Wilson, Georg Lukács, Isaac Babel, Meyer

Shapiro and Walter Benjamin. And yet, while his scholarship is impeccable, and his readings are as generous as they are insightful, one gets the sense that, through all of these sketches of others, Berman is really attempting, now and nearing the end of his career, to define himself. As a result, the most compelling elements of *Adventures in Marxism* are not the theoretical claims (Berman remains an unrepentant modernist, and still believes that the principal question facing all of us is how to live ‘authentic’ lives in a disjointed and dissolute world), but the autobiographical reflections and personal anecdotes scattered throughout. The essay ‘Georg Lukács’s Cosmic *Chutzpah*’, for instance, begins with the story of the young Berman first encountering Lukács’s ‘What is Orthodox Marxism?’ in the 1950s. He meets a friend in Central Park distributing copies of the text – a text that had, of course, long been condemned by the very orthodoxy it claimed to define, and by the author himself:

I’d known plenty of Marxists who were willing to admit that Marx might be wrong about many things; in spite of this, they said, he was right about the essential things, and that is why they were Marxists. Now here was a Marxist saying Marx might be wrong about *everything*, and he couldn’t care less; that the truth of Marxism was independent of anything that Marx said about the world, and hence that nothing in the world could refute it; and that this was the essence, not merely of Marxist truth, but of Marxist orthodoxy – even if it was the orthodoxy of a single believer, shut out from the communion of the ecclesiastical party, keeping the faith alone in the park.

(p. 184)

In the rest of this essay, Berman explains how, for his generation, Lukács’s early work made it possible to extend the Marxist critique of reification (*Verdinglichung*) far beyond questions of economics and social class, into all aspects of modern culture and everyday life. Along the way, he also contemplates Lukács’s inconceivable and self-annihilating political decisions, looking ‘between the lines of his text’ in order to ‘search out the emotional subtext’ (p. 200). He puzzles over how such a brilliant mind could have been willing, on so many occasions, to renounce the products of his own brilliance, and accept instead the dictates of Party dogma. The reason, Berman concludes, was guilt, especially Lukács’s sense of responsibility for the suicide of his first love Irma Seidler, and the almost impossible moral position he adopted as a result – to do nothing is to be infinitely responsible for the world, thus one can either choose to be responsible for the crimes of fascism, or one can choose responsibility for those of communism. For Lukács, there was no third option. For Berman, there is, and it is hope, or an unwavering belief, not only in an unknown future that remains to come, but also in the infinite, irrepressible complexity of everyday human existence. Thus even if

Marx and Marxism are both dead and gone, we still find Berman where he was 50 years ago – alone in the park, keeping the faith.

If, as Berman maintains, Lukács had the ‘cosmic *chutzpah*’ to claim that the truth of Marxism remained undeniable even if history proved everything Karl Marx said to be wrong, Meghnad Desai proposes almost exact the opposite – that Marx has been proven right in spite of, or more accurately because of, the fact that history has proven Marxism so dreadfully wrong. For Desai, ‘Marx’s revenge’ is not on capitalism, much less on the dictates of 18th- and 19th-century political economists; rather, it is on virtually everything that transpired during the ‘short twentieth century’ (1914 to 1989), especially the Keynesianism and Leninism that vied for power during it, or what Desai dubs ‘Socialism within Capitalism’ (SwC) and ‘Socialism outside Capitalism’ (SoC). For Desai, Marx himself believed in neither SwC nor SoC, but only SaC, or ‘Socialism after Capitalism’. Thus Desai insists that ‘if it came to a choice between whether the market or the state should rule the economy, modern libertarians would be as shocked as modern socialists . . . to find Marx on the side of the market’ (p. 3). Properly understood, Desai continues, Marx was the descendant of Adam Smith’s exploration of political economy, particularly his conception of modern society as an organic entity, and Hegel’s theory of the progressive realization of freedom or the ‘moral community’. Marx’s proper heirs, moreover, are not the advocates of state planning, who seek to run the economy like a machine, but thinkers such as the capitalist apologist Friedrich von Hayek, who, picking up the standard logic of the 19th century, argued that ‘society is a self-organizing organic process’ (p. 214), and that economic principles should be derived ‘naturally from a free play of market forces’ (p. 179). Marxism, or rather Marxist-Leninism, consisted of a colossal, destructive and ultimately deadly effort to separate Marx from these traditions, transforming him into a theorist of revolution, on the one hand, and state planning, on the other. Reiterating a familiar theme, Desai argues that this distortion of Marx’s economic theory, and of its organicist assumptions, was prompted by a historical fiat. ‘Revolution was not meant to occur in a backward country like Russia’, Desai explains. As a direct consequence of this anomaly, once the October Revolution did occur, such truths ‘became heresy, and documents were unearthed, reinterpreted and revised until the Bolshevik version became the only version of Marxism’. Under a brutally efficient Party orthodoxy, ‘[a]ll non-Bolshevik readings of Marx were traduced; their proponents were denounced. Polemics, hitherto merely verbally rude, became lethal – literally so’ (p. 42). After so many deaths, so many murders, Desai swears to resurrect the true Marx, and, belatedly, to help his ghost avenge those who usurped his name.

That the Bolsheviks distorted Marx, down to the most miniscule editorial details of his texts, will come as a surprise to no one, least of all a Bolshevik. At the same time, Desai intends to expose not only the terrible errors of the Bolsheviks (an easy target), but also the beautiful illusions of the New Left, and the remnants of Berman’s generation, who truncated Marx in their own way by focusing

primarily on his early, incomplete and posthumous manuscripts, specifically the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*. Desai notes how the New Left emerged in the mid-1950s, conspicuously after Stalinism had been thoroughly repudiated even by most Stalinists. It began with the question ‘when did the October Revolution go wrong?’ And it basically adopted Trotsky’s theme of ‘the revolution betrayed’ – that is to say, Stalin’s betrayal of Lenin’s vision. Thus, like the Bolsheviks, the New Left could never face up to ‘the simple truth’ that, from a properly Marxian perspective, or on the basis of Marx’s proper theory, the October Revolution could not have gone wrong or been betrayed, because it was not a proper revolution to begin with. As a result, at exactly that time when Stalinism was being attacked by Khrushchev and the Soviets, Lenin’s ideas acquired a curious afterlife among Western intellectuals. The Leninist prophecy of capitalism’s imminent, rapid demise at the hands of a highly organized revolutionary subject was cryogenically prolonged on (and to a lesser extent off) university campuses throughout Europe and North America, where, Desai believes, it continues to inspire confused intellectuals and militants to this day.

While his title is provocative, Desai’s approach to Marx is not spectacularly new. Like everyone else, his reading draws on particular Marxist traditions – it is a reading of readings. While Berman wishes to keep alive the perhaps naïve but still genuine hope of Lukács or, even more to the point, Benjamin (always remember, the messiah could arrive at any moment, we can never know what remains yet to come), Desai resurrects the far less mystical, far less confrontational arguments of figures like Karl Kautsky (one cannot rush the end of history, all in good time). Though presented as a synoptic history of political economy in the 20th century, *Marx’s Revenge* picks a contemporary fight as well. In Desai’s estimation, today’s heirs to the Bolshevik and New Left distortions of Marx are those who struggle against globalization. They are the ones who fruitlessly resist the progressive development of economic necessity, threatening to delay once again the organic maturation of the market and with it the maturation of human society as such. Now, to be certain, and by his own admission, Desai has to take considerable hermeneutic liberties to bring Marx on side with the cause of global capital, or to construct the WTO as Marx’s revenge on Marxism. To this end, he proposes a slight revision to the original theory – ‘standing Marx on his head’, as he puts it. Specifically, he suggests that today’s socialists accept the basic premise that ‘exchange is more complementary than conflictual process, even when parties to that exchange have unequal endowments’ (p. 311). That is to say, according to Desai, Marx was right about everything, literally everything, except for the tiny caveat that, as it turns out, capitalism works better without class struggle, and what is more, it works better for everyone involved, including those who are directly exploited. Here, in a boggling move, Desai insists that today’s socialists acquiesce to the central tenet of Adam Smith’s philosophy: economic equality produces universal poverty, whereas inequality produces universal prosperity. While it is difficult to believe that Desai is really invoking Marx’s name to justify



this casual dismissal of the revolutionary tradition, it is important to note that, whether we like it or not, Desai shares this gamble with many if not all of today's major social democratic parties – including the New Labour Party, for which Desai appears to have become a chief ideologue. By allowing capitalism global reign, Desai concludes, socialism will emerge spontaneously, organically, and out of purely economic necessity. Either that or it will not emerge at all.

Drawing on his impressive if sweeping history of 20th-century political economy, Desai seems to assume, as in vulgar Marxism, that social and political relations are but an outgrowth of the (organic, natural, determinate but uncontrollable) logic of the economy. However, from Hannah Arendt and Carl Schmitt to Chantal Mouffe and Claude Lefort, there exists a longstanding and polymorphous critique of Marxism's effort to construct political 'superstructures' as empty reflections of some economic or material 'base'. There exists an equally longstanding effort to divorce Marx's thought from the crude outline he provided in the 1859 'Preface' to the *Critique of Political Economy*, where the architectural metaphor is so roughly sketched. As Arendt's theory of 'political community' contends, democracy relies on the irreducibility of the political. It is precisely the contingency and uncertainty of political decisions that makes them free. Reduce politics to some more fundamental, determinate substance or quantifiable system – treat it as an elaborate detour *en route* to another discussion – and freedom itself disappears. In this sense, and excluding the ethical issues at stake, the WTO might be a highly efficient economic instrument, but it is by no means democratic. And that is why, to Desai's apparent frustration, those of us who believe in democracy struggle against the WTO – or, at any rate, against its current formulation. Relying on a very conventional reading of his texts, one that takes the 1859 'Preface' at its word, Desai wants to separate Marx's youthful rhetoric of revolution from his mature theory of political economy. In this way, he seems to think he can separate the young political Marx from the mature economic Marx, the class warrior from the scientist, and isolate the latter as the 'true' Marx. Of course, similar dissections of Marx's career have resulted in inventive readings in the past (recall Louis Althusser), and I am not against dividing and subdividing Marx's career to produce new interpretations. This process of dividing is what makes reading possible – what distinguishes a new reading from authorized and recognized ones. But perhaps it is time to dispense with the fantasy that such divisions provide us with access to the true Marx, his true intentions, or what, finally and without question, he meant to say. As the unfinished *MEGA* attests, the collection of texts retroactively labeled 'Marx' is massive, and the history of Marx scholarship is exponentially larger. The source of many specters and not just one, Marx is going to have his revenge on anyone who claims, once and for all, to speak in his name.

It goes without saying that, in order to strip Marx's thought of its revolutionary content and transform it into a purely formal economic theory, Desai has to ignore the red, revolutionary thread that runs throughout all of

Marx's work – from his impassioned defense of the Silesian weavers' strikes in 1844 and the June Days riots of 1848 to his reflections on the Paris Commune of 1871 and the leadership role he played in any number of revolutionary associations. The Silesian weavers' strikes were decisive in that, when defending them against his erstwhile friend and republican theorist Arnold Ruge in his article 'Critical Marginal Notes on the Article "The King of Prussia and Social Reform. By a Prussian"', Marx first insisted on the principle that political struggles must follow social uprisings, and not the other way around – meaning that politics must always be attuned to antagonisms as they occur on the ground, or what, in *The German Ideology*, Marx and Engels referred to as 'the real movement', as opposed to 'an ideal to which reality will have to adjust itself' (Marx, 2000: 171). From this moment forward, it is clear that Marx no longer accepts the weak Hegelian notion that history consists of contradictions that get progressively resolved, necessarily leading to the organic maturation of a free society or a moral community. On the contrary, from now on, everything will begin with the antagonism, real grievances and concrete struggles, discontinuous ruptures and unpredictable breaks, and even the seriously misunderstood theory of historical materialism will only be proposed as a general framework for following broad tendencies and making effective decisions. Revolutionary politics are not an afterthought for Marx. At every stage, Marx is vigilant, always on the lookout for the eruption of social forces that justifiably sweep away old and desiccated political forms so as to replace them with the new.

Over the last 40 years, Antonio Negri has conducted a fierce campaign against the kind of evolutionary capitulation proposed by Desai. Negri is now and has always been a revolutionary. In the 1960s, along with Mario Tronti, he was a principal theorist of the militant *Operaismo* movement, which advanced the creative argument that it is not developments in the mode of production that result in contradictions and class struggle, but *class struggle that generates or necessitates changes in the mode of production*. Here all of the so-called 'advances' that capitalism has made – especially technological ones – are indirectly attributable to the struggle against capitalism, and the crises it sparks. Negri fleshed out these claims considerably in his *Marx Beyond Marx*, a detailed reading of Marx's *Grundrisse* written in the midst of the Italian mobilizations of the 1970s. From this study, which argues that the *Grundrisse* is a political text that should be put to use by revolutionary militants, and not merely an early outline of the economic theory found in *Capital*, Negri derived two related concepts – 'real subsumption', or the collapse in late capitalism of any distinction between use value and exchange value, and the 'social worker', or the integration of social existence and productive labor. In a state of real subsumption, all social activity produces surplus value, which means that all subjects, and not only the industrial working class, are potentially revolutionary. While the world has changed dramatically since the 1970s (largely, in Negri's opinion, in response to the post-1968 mobilizations, which necessitated the neo-liberal reconfiguration of capital), these two concepts

continue to inform Negri's most recent work – although, now under the influence of Machiavelli and Spinoza as much as Marx, Negri sometimes calls real subsumption 'immanence', and the social worker 'the multitude'. In the republican, almost Jacobin, tradition to which Negri appeals in his recent work, revolution is an expression of the 'constituent power' of the multitude, or the violent force that first justifies, and therefore perpetually threatens to destroy, every form of 'sovereignty,' and every established authority. What Negri calls 'absolute democracy' would be a state in which the constituent power of the multitude was not subordinated to a new sovereign, but allowed permanently to transform the social.

It is perhaps unfortunate that the success of *Empire*, co-authored with Michael Hardt, will for some time overshadow Negri's more difficult theoretical work, just as more accessible works like *Capital* and *The Communist Manifesto* tend to overshadow *The Grundrisse* or *The German Ideology*. But the argument established in *Empire* is especially tricky to locate unless considered alongside Negri's materialist, heterodox reading of Spinoza in *The Savage Anomaly*, and his extensive genealogy of constituent power in *Insurgencies* – not to mention the earlier book on Marx, his analysis of crisis and the planner state, his readings of the Italian constitution, and a great deal of theoretical material that has yet to be translated. *Time for Revolution* is a clever attempt on the part of Negri's editors to bring a little more of his theoretical work to an English-speaking audience by publishing in tandem two essays on the materialist concept of time: 'The Constitution of Time', which Negri wrote in 1981, while imprisoned on notoriously trumped-up charges of 'masterminding' the Red Brigades; and '*Kairòs, Alma Venus, Multitudo*', which he wrote in 1999, after having returned to Italy and to prison from exile in France. The essays are framed by reflections on the time that has passed between them, which suggest that this very passage tells us something about time or temporality as such. In both essays, the 'time for revolution', the materialist temporality of the instant, the event and the rupture (*kairòs*), is opposed to the time of deferral and delay, awaiting and anticipation. In other words, Marxian time is opposed to Heideggerian time. For Negri, time is teleological, and not merely a string of mechanically or accidentally related efficient causes. Teleology, however, does not mean predestination, nor does it, as in Heidegger, entail the individual's or *Dasein's* projection towards, and resolute anticipation of, an unpredictable but inevitable death. Rather, it refers to the sense in which every present moment is conditioned by an unknown, immeasurable future that remains 'to come'. This future relentlessly tears into the present, demanding innovation and virtuous decision, or the perpetual, collective creation of that which is new out of the 'void of being'. While I could only find one slightly veiled reference to Walter Benjamin in *Time for Revolution*, its theory of temporality bears close resemblance to that of 'messianic time' – a phrase Negri, a committed materialist, is doubtless cautious to adopt because of its quasi-mystical

overtones. Negri's main point, however, is clear enough. Any time could be a 'time for revolution', because time itself is fundamentally revolutionary.

Baroque in their construction, complexly layered and repeatedly folding back on themselves, both 'The Constitution of Time' and '*Kairòs, Alma Venus, Multitudo*' defy summary. At the same time, both further Negri's concerted effort to define a social and political field (the 'biopolitical', as he and others have taken to calling it) that contains antagonism without reference to externality. Here Marxian antagonism is opposed to the Hegelian contradiction, which is always destined to be transcended and resolved at a higher level. Unlike the contradiction, antagonism is constituent of every social relation – a condition, and not a function, of sociality as such. This approach might sound similar to the radical democratic theory of antagonism advanced by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe. However, while for radical democrats antagonism is a kind of void or gap at the center of every social relation, or the impossible limit of representation that engenders countless representations (akin to what Lacanian's call 'the Real'), for Negri antagonism is both irreducibly multiple and thoroughly immanent. Because antagonism is multiple, the subject of antagonism, the subject adequate to articulating it, can only be 'the multitude'. And because it is immanent, it does not configure the limit of representation, but its annihilation – the annihilation, that is to say, of the politics of representation, and of any detour through established institutional systems. Now, anyone familiar with classical political theory is going to know that there are a number of obstacles facing Negri at this stage. First, Negri proposes, even valorizes, struggle, but he does not define the borders across which this struggle is to take place. In a state of 'real subsumption', 'immanence' or what Negri sometimes calls 'postmodernism', the social field has no externality, making it difficult to see how it will be divided, even in a provisional and symbolic fashion, between friends and enemies – the division that Carl Schmitt locates at the foundation of all politics. Can we have politics without such a divide? What would a politics of the immanent multitude look like? How would it organize, how would it mobilize, and, most importantly, who would it attack? Perhaps Negri would claim that these questions apply only to an old way of doing politics, one that evaporates along with the evaporation of the nation state and the establishment of an international empire. But if so, then it must also be the case that the opposition between 'constituent power' and 'sovereignty' on which Negri's argument rests belongs to that same politics of the nation state, and is just as obsolete.

As Negri well knows, the breakdown of the nation state does not axiomatically portend the emergence of a global republic out of the ashes of a global empire. Can there even be a global republic, global citizenship, with global rights and a global constitution? Or are all of these categories not by definition limited and exclusive? It seems quite clear that, with or without the death of the nation state, new political formations are taking shape in the postmodern world, and new borders being drawn – borders that, terrifyingly but successfully, the

dominant states wish to characterize as religious and cultural, rather than economic or social. Certainly, as classical political theory suggests, politics entails antagonism. The *polis* assumes *polemos*. The two are inseparable. Similarly, unless one wishes to appeal to a theory of natural justice or natural law, antagonism precludes ‘the multitude’ in any simple sense. Just as there is no politics of the individual, so too is there no politics of humanity as a whole. Politics means confrontation between (shifting, overdetermined, but still relatively organized and relatively autonomous) groups, whether within or without an agreed upon institutional framework. The question is: can ‘the multitude’ constitute such a group? Can it oppose itself in a meaningful fashion to some other, external force – an enemy? If not, how is it going to be politically effective? As his mischievous author’s photo implies, Negri is feisty as ever, and he wants even today and even from prison to pick a fight. But who with? If it is the case that, with postmodernism, the subject of revolution has become a multiple, fractured assemblage, then it is also the case that the object of revolution has multiplied, and that the notion of a single, coherent, integrated and Polybian world capitalist empire threatens to reify the complexity of the struggles that continue to define politics today. At the very least, even Negri’s allies will ask for some elaboration with respect to gender and race, or the manner in which empire achieves its goals through the oppression of women and minorities. Contemporary avant-garde political theory seems to break down along two broad lines – either one thinks in terms of multitude, immanence and excess (following the work of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari), or one employs the language of antagonism, transcendence and lack (following Slavoj Žižek). Negri wants to fuse these two approaches – to have both multitude and antagonism. Political history and political philosophy suggest they are discrete. If one really thinks that global capital establishes a dramatically new kind of political order the likes of which the world has never seen, one might follow Negri. If, however, one suspects that today’s ‘empire’ is old Bismarckian business as usual, doubts will abound.

Not incidentally, Marx faced a similar conundrum during 1843 and 1844 – just after moving to Paris – where he first became involved in revolutionary politics, and just before encountering Engels, who would point him in the direction of political economy. We know from his notebooks that Marx, at the time influenced by and working alongside Arnold Ruge, was reading republican theory, from Machiavelli to Rousseau, and that he was engaged in a protracted study of the history of the French Revolution. Marx always had communist friends, but only after reading Engels’s work on the conditions of the English working classes did he formulate an image of the proletariat as a privileged revolutionary subject. The two essays that Marx published in his and Ruge’s *Deutsch-französische Jahrbücher* in many ways straddle this revelation. ‘On the Jewish Question’, a discussion of citizenship and human rights, is a call for universal ‘human emancipation’, while ‘Towards a Critique of Hegel’s *Philosophy of Right*: Introduction’ takes up the particular struggle of the working class. If the

latter essay is the first time in Marx's work that he explicitly takes the side of the working class, it is also the first time that he explains his theory of hegemony, or the manner in which a revolutionary subject must represent its particular interests *as if* they were the universal interests of humanity, and its enemy's interests as the source of all injustice:

So that the revolution of a people and the emancipation of a particular class of civil society may coincide, so that one class may stand for the whole of society, the deficiency of all society must inversely be 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 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.

(Marx, 2000: 71)

The revolutionary subject is, in this sense, a 'concrete universal' – a particular subject that is symbolically, and therefore provisionally, represented as universal. And from this perspective, all politics is hegemonic, in that all politics involves particular groups representing their interests *as if* they were universal. What distinguishes democratic politics is the nature or the status of the 'symbolic act' that constitutes such a subject. Without going into the details of a terrifically complicated argument, this is where Negri's reflections on naming and the 'common name' in *Time for Revolution* are important to theories of both radical and absolute democracy, for, in assembling together a multitude of discrete elements, the common name always produces that which it appears only to represent. The political act is an act of naming otherwise.

While Daniel Bensaïd's work is stylistically very different from Negri's, which is to say that it is void of Deleuzoguattarian pyrotechnics, it also picks up on the idea that, at least since Louis Althusser, Marxist philosophers have neglected the question of time, seeking to map spatial grids of social power, and not provide theories of social change. Now, the dust-jacket of *Marx for Our Times* intimates a very different book from the one Bensaïd has actually written. An image of Marx's head hovers on a screen over what appears to be Times Square, its presence altering – or, sadly, failing to alter – each of the glowing advertisements that surround it. This cover alone will lead a cultural studies professor to copious digressions on the sliding of the signified under the signifier, the commodity fetishization of revolutionary imagery, and the sense in which the specter of communism terrifies no one, but stalks about as a harmless simulacrum, or a spongy signifier, soaking up whatever errant meaning happens to be spilt around it. However, do not be fooled by the surface. All of the books reviewed here suggest that, since the death of official Marxism, Marx scholarship has become

extraordinarily grave, and Bensaïd's is the gravest of them all. *Marx for Our Times* is often a polemical work, in that it seeks to distinguish Marx from those who have endeavored to comprehend, and thus to capture, him in recent years. Bensaïd pays particularly close attention to Analytical Marxism and Anglo-American readings of Marx, which he correctly censures as naïvely empirical, and committed to models of (positivist) science and of (natural) justice that Marx himself explicitly rejected. Exactly what the Analytical Marxist readings overlook is the problem of time, because they believe 'truth' is simply an adequate representation of what is present, and thus never address the murkier question of what is no longer, and, murkier still, what remains yet to come. From a philosophical viewpoint, Bensaïd's great contribution is his elucidation of 'immanent teleology', which explains how time can be seen to be purposive – each present moment accruing meaning only in relation to past and future moments – without having any fixed or final purpose. And as in Berman and Negri, Bensaïd's book, which provides an incredible, and incredibly useful, inventory of philosophical debates, seems to revolve around Benjamin's gnomic 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', especially his concept of 'messianic time'.

*Marx for Our Times* is divided into three parts. The first argues that Marx breaks definitively with every theory of universal history, that he reconceived time as essentially fragmented or disjointed ('profane' as opposed to 'sacred' time), and that he therefore privileged the immanent political act over the ideology of evolution or progress. The second section is an elaborate and, one has to admit, surprising defense of the old Marxist conception of class and class struggle – both welcoming the proletariat back after so many have bid it adieu, and distinguishing the constituent power of class struggle from toothless ethical calculation or Rawlsian theories of distributive justice. The final section establishes with admirable clarity the difference between scientific positivism and historical materialism, although Bensaïd is careful to avoid the one word that has been forbidden in French intellectual circles since Althusser, but that would also explain a great deal, namely 'essentialism'. On display in *Marx for Our Times* is Bensaïd's incredible breadth of knowledge and reading, as well as his capacity to isolate and carve up the heart of an opponent's argument – both skills that Marx had as well. Lacking is what Negri remains so desperate to provide, namely the assurance of a revolutionary subject. Bensaïd concludes with an effort to forge a link between Marxism and ecological politics, and to the extent that he does this through a discussion of Marx's philosophy of nature rather than simply claiming all radical subjects for Marxism's political aspirations, the novelty of the gesture is admirable. Marx, naturally, is not often thought of as an environmentalist. But neither Negri nor Bensaïd is able to convince that configuring time or temporality itself as fundamentally revolutionary is going to accomplish much on the register of politics. What we require now is a study of the sense in which each revolution also involves a revolution in what revolution means – what *changes* from 1789 to 1848 to 1871, 1917, 1968, 1989, and so forth. This approach might, in fact, employ

the Marxian concept of essence as ‘immanent form’ or ‘immanent teleology’, in that, from the essentialist perspective, the form is indistinguishable from, and reflexively altered by, each of its concrete expressions. There is something like a general law, but it remains immanent to its articulations. It is akin to a game in which each move changes the rules.

Of the recent books on Marx, George E. McCarthy’s *Classical Horizons* and Terrell Carver’s *The Postmodern Marx*, while furthest apart temporally, are closest together temperamentally. Though one seeks to link Marx back to the classical tradition and the other forward to postmodernism, both McCarthy and Carver are relatively traditional scholars, working closely with Marx’s primary texts, although Carver has proven to be more open to new methods of investigation, making especially good use of what some have come to call ‘the new bibliography’. For those familiar with McCarthy’s *Marx and the Ancients*, a work that spawned a short renaissance in Marxology, *Classical Horizons* will not provide a great deal of new insight into Marx’s work. As in the earlier book, here McCarthy shows how the young Marx was inspired by his study of classical literature, Aristotle in particular – both the ethical and political philosophy of the *Nicomachean Ethics* and *The Politics*, and, perhaps more profoundly, by the Aristotelian concept of essence (the ‘immanent form’, *dynamis*, or emerging potentiality) outlined in *The Physics* and *The Metaphysics*. As mentioned already in relation to other texts reviewed here, this concept of essence, which is also crucial to Hegel’s philosophical system, provides the key to understanding the place of teleology in Marx’s work, and helps explain the complex operation of the dialectical method as opposed to the simple ‘determinism’ or blind faith in historical ‘progress’ that both Marx and Hegel have been saddled with on more than one occasion. Along with clearing up points of interpretation, and drawing attention to Marx’s late *Ethnological Notebooks* of 1880–2, McCarthy’s consideration of Marx’s classical heritage might also contribute to contemporary debates over citizenship, participatory politics and deliberative democracy. In *Classical Horizons*, moreover, McCarthy extends his earlier discussion of Marx and the ancients to two other founders of modern sociology, Émile Durkheim and Max Weber. And this is perhaps the value of McCarthy’s work – it forges a horizontal link between the classics and classical sociology, suggesting that, read patiently, they can be understood on related terms, and form part of a consistent tradition of humanist inquiry. At the very least, McCarthy’s research belies the often repeated fantasy that Marx (or anyone else for that matter) accomplishes an absolute break with all previous thought, or a definitive turn in some imaginary ‘history of metaphysics’.

To the extent that he is concerned with ‘horizons’, McCarthy takes Gadamerian hermeneutics as his own methodological horizon. Whereas McCarthy, enamored with the formal symmetry of neoclassical aesthetics, seeks at all times to fashion a coherent whole out of Marx’s body of work, Carver is far more interested in drawing our attention to those places where Marx’s texts come apart,



and their assumed coherence starts to break down. At the beginning of his book, Carver proposes a 'shift', as he calls in, in 'what Marx is read' (which texts), 'how Marx is read' (which methods), and 'why Marx is read' (which purposes). He proceeds to treat Marx as a writer above all else, and as someone who needs to be completely rethought in the wake of the 'linguistic turn' – the very turn, as no one needs reminding, that so many Marxists resisted so vehemently for so long. Although he does not put it this way, Carver reads Marx's texts as performative rather than descriptive, or as rhetorical productions of meaning rather than logical representations of truth. Here he inadvertently points to a lacuna in McCarthy's studies of Marx and the ancients. While he is exhaustive in his documentation of Marx's classical references, McCarthy does not dwell on the fact that, as a young man, Marx read and translated portions of Aristotle's *Rhetoric*. Insofar as he is associated with the Enlightenment, Marx is thought to have privileged science over rhetoric, dialectical knowledge over political ideology. But would it not be interesting to reread all of Marx's work in light of the very first words of Aristotle's *Rhetoric* – 'Rhetoric is the counterpart [*antistrophos*] of dialectic?' (1354a). Classics scholars generally agree that this sentence contains an ironic reference to Plato's *Gorgias*, where Socrates does his best to separate true dialectical knowledge from false rhetorical persuasion. Unlike Plato, who wants to preserve the realm of transcendental truths and forms, Aristotle sees how every form exists amidst the contingency, the unpredictability, and the uncertainty of the world. In a certain sense, and as Richard Rorty suggests, 'postmodernism' and the 'linguistic turn' are but reminders of this irreducible contingency. And rereading his texts through Carver's eyes, it is difficult to imagine that anyone could have believed Marx took the side of positive science and universal truth over uncertainty and rhetoric, contingency and chance.

Carver is most convincing when, with an astonishing mixture of concision and precision, he addresses Marx on the level of the manuscript, indicating where editors, in good hermeneutic style, have smoothed over its ragged construction so as to produce a coherent whole, and how interpretation has been distorted as a result. For instance, Carver explains how the famous 'hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, [and] criticize after dinner' passage from *The German Ideology* must be completely reassessed when it is noted that the whole passage is written in Engels's hand, save the phrase 'criticize after dinner', which Marx added to the text so as to highlight its ironic elements, transforming Engels's words (if they were serious to begin with) into a parody of the utopian fantasies of the 'critical critics' Bruno Bauer and Max Stirner. At this stage, the implications of Carver's readings go far beyond correcting hermeneutic errors, or more effectively fusing horizons between Marx and us. What if the desire to manufacture coherent arguments out of what are necessarily fragments of text is itself to blame for misprision? *The German Ideology* is exceptional in this case, for not only is it a manuscript with multiple authors (Marx and Engels, but also Moses Hess and Joseph Weydemeyer), it was also damaged by mice (Marx's claim

in the 1859 ‘Preface’ that he and Engels ‘abandoned the manuscript to the gnawing criticism of the mice’ was, in fact, not a metaphor), and it was further inscribed by at least two more editors – Engels, who reread the first chapter in 1883, and Eduard Bernstein, who actually crossed bits out, leaving a very illegible text still more illegible. Finally, and most significantly, *The German Ideology* was initially published in 1932 by the Soviets, whose editorial interventions made it almost certain that this 800-page polemic directed primarily against Max Stirner would be reduced to its 70-page introductory chapter, which interpreters treat not as a brief introduction to a political parody, but as the definitive moment in Marx’s discovery of the science of ‘historical materialism’.

As I have argued in my doctoral dissertation on ‘The Marx-Machine’ (Barbour, 2004), ‘Karl Marx’ is not an individual author possessed of animating intentions that the reader endeavors to see through his writing, as though the text itself were but a detour *en route* to an extra-textual ‘truth’. Nor, however, is he merely a specter or a host of specters, all the more threatening because living beyond the grave, as Jacques Derrida has proposed. Marx, I would suggest, is better understood as a machine, or an assemblage of machines – a relay machine, a copying machine, a desiring machine, a war machine. The last is, perhaps, the most important. As much as it is the product of an individual’s mind, the colossal textual factory that we retroactively label ‘Marx’ is a product of countless struggles (between Marx and his contemporaries, Marx and his coauthors, Marx and his editors, and even Marx and his interpreters), and together these struggles constitute the performative dimension of his work. Carver’s approach to Marx is crucial if this dimension is going to be exposed, but those who wish to follow Carver need to do more than indicate the inescapable textual complexity that editorial decisions expunge. The analogy needs to be taken a step further, or even generalized, in order to stress the sense in which every apparently complete or finished system, every coherent totality, is conditioned by both an excess and a lack that it seeks to contain, but that everywhere threatens to overwhelm it. That Carver’s argument works most effectively with the text of *The German Ideology* is, in this sense, almost mystically fortuitous, for an ‘ideology’, at least according to one definition (Marx, of course, never defined the term), is precisely such a symbolic organization of disparate elements into a coherent whole. And that explains why every ideology is threatened by the very elements that compose it, just as the logic of capital is threatened by its own labor theory of value and the practice of capital by those whom it exploits.

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