

## Dialect and Dialectic in “The Working Day” of Marx’s *Capital*

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**Rosalind C. Morris**

I have always been moved by “The Working Day” chapter of Marx’s *Capital* (volume 1).<sup>1</sup> Above all others, it holds me captive with its seamless movement between analytic and descriptive prose, its deft negotiation of argument and polemic. The caustic wit and searing indictments of the text are counterbalanced with unrelenting empiricism to convince readers of the labor theory of value. Much has been done to displace that theory over the last three decades, and consequently, the power of the text as a model of dialectical method has been increasingly overlooked. This is a grave loss, for the chapter is as aesthetically masterful as it is analytically astute. Moreover, and despite being overshadowed by the spectral and specular melodrama of the chapter on the fetish-character of commodities, “The Working Day” is particularly exemplary in its account of how abstrac-

1. Karl Marx, “The Working Day,” in *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, vol. 1, trans. Ben Fowkes (London: Penguin, [1867] 1976), 340–416. Hereafter, this work is cited parenthetically as *C*, followed by references to the German *Gesamtausgabe* edition, *Das Kapital: Kritik der Politischen Ökonomie. Erster Band. Hamburg 1972. Gesamtausgabe, Band 6* (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1987), cited as *MEGA*.

tion works concretely, and how the concrete realizes abstraction. One must therefore attune oneself to the sensuous to grasp its theoretical project. It is for this reason that I speak of being moved.

“The Working Day” moves me in a very particular manner, one whose phenomenal dimension bears theoretical significance. Quite simply, it speaks to me. It does so in the most literal and the most metaphorical senses—assuming the fictitious possibility of distinguishing between these two. No doubt, this sense of being affected and intimately addressed is related to a certain disciplinary affinity. As much as in any other text of Marx’s oeuvre, including the ethnological notebooks, “The Working Day” reaches toward ethnography in its reading and deployment of reported speech. The text is built upon an evidentiary scaffold that gives to such speech a singular role—and even the role of signifying the singular. Alongside Edmund Burke and Diodorus Siculus, Hegel, Horace, and, of course, Shakespeare, the discourse of the children employed in factories sounds forth from the reports of the inspectors of factories and the commissions on child labor. Plaintive, unself-conscious, without guile or sentimentality, they give to “The Working Day” a texture, if not a grain, in Roland Barthes’s sense.<sup>2</sup> These voices appear only in the form of a trace, it is true. Nonetheless, in their marked exteriority to Standard English, they give to be read the somatic history of a body shaped by the conditions of labor in the factories of industrializing Britain. Transcribed and redacted, but retaining syntactic and grammatical blemishes, the reported speech of the children is sufficiently coarse as to chafe at the seemingly smooth discourse of the phantasmatic worker, whose voice is heard “arising” on the factory floor in the opening pages. And it is in the dialectical movement between these two voicings—of “The Worker,” impossibly unitary and in command of the master’s discourse, on one hand; and the workers of the factory floor, speaking in a mother tongue they do not fully possess, on the other—that “The Working Day” chapter assumes its force and achieves its performative mastery. This movement calls us to think about the structural relationship between workers and The Worker, between the positing of a class position and the subjection to a system that enables such positing. It opens onto the future history of revolutionary politics and it calls forward the long history of the discourse on class to which Marx was heir and which bore within itself the metaphysical seduction of a historically concluding synthesis.

In evoking these scraps of overheard speech, I do not mean to imply

2. Roland Barthes, “The Grain of the Voice,” in *The Responsibility of Forms*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1985).

that "The Working Day" gives voice to the subalterns of the English factory floor. The reported speech of the children is not the presencing of those otherwise dispossessed urchins any more than the citations of ethnography constitute a moment of authentic self-representation, in which cultural others address their future audiences with the truth of their desire to be heard. It is not their subjective consciousnesses that speak from the text; the quotations are merely the evidence of an interpellative exchange in which they perform their own exteriority to dominant discourse, while providing the longed-for information of sociological accounting. Nor does the dramaturgy of the chapter enlivened by this reportage consist in the solicitation of sympathy via the narration of tragedy. To be sure, there is pathos to be found in "The Working Day"'s final capitulation to liberal contract—"the 'modest Magna Carta' of the legally limited working day" (C, 416; *MEGA*, 302). But if the chapter speaks, and not only to me, it is for other reasons; it is because it addresses the ear. "The Working Day" chapter addresses the ear through the fiction of a singularity that would be capable of writing itself in dialect, as dialect. In doing so, it makes audible the nature of the Marxian dialectic itself.

This essay is an exploration of the relationship between dialect and dialectic in "The Working Day" chapter of *Capital*. I write the title of Marx's work in English, for it is the English edition that speaks to me, in my mother tongue—though not in the maternal voice. The reasons for this particular resonance are not merely autobiographical, however. For the intimacy between dialect and dialectic becomes most audible in the English version of the text, as it has come to us in the aftermath of Eleanor Marx's editorial restitution of the original English reports cited by Marx in the first German edition and revised in later ones. This, despite the fact that English shares with German the etymological and phonetic linkage between the words, *dialekt*/dialect and *dialektic*/dialectic—an artifact of their shared roots.

In 1847, Marx could write, somewhat sardonically, that it was Proudhon who had made him speak English, but what he meant by English then was the discourse of David Ricardo's economics. Marx's own critique of a language inseparable from liberalism's discourse was made in French and would not be translated into English until 1900. By 1882, however, he could complain about the mistranslations of excerpts from *Capital* in the otherwise enthusiastic reports on his work that had appeared in *Modern Thought*.<sup>3</sup>

3. Karl Marx, "Letter to Friedrich Alfred Sorge, in Hoboken," December 15, 1881, in *Karl Marx, Frederick Engels: Collected Works*, vol. 46, trans. Rodney Livingstone et al. (New York: International Publishers, 1992), 24–25.

It was, however, not only in deference to her father's newly acquired concern with English precision that Eleanor Marx undertook the task of "re-Englising" the text of *Capital*. She devoted herself to the labor, with more than filial piety, so that it would be immune to the kind of criticism that had been directed at Marx when, in 1872, the Berlin *Concordia* had published an article accusing him of misquoting and even of fabricating citations from the April 1863 speech of British chancellor of the exchequer William Gladstone. Although this was not the case, Engels himself acknowledged that Marx's early reliance on French translations of English-speaking economic theorists had, on occasion, as in his readings of James Steuart, "yielded a different shade of meaning . . . and other similar instances of trifling inaccuracy."<sup>4</sup> He did not deem the translational artifacts significant for the overall argument, however, and insisted that the "laborious process of emendation has not produced the smallest change in the book worth speaking of."<sup>5</sup>

In the case of the restored English reports, then, what is at stake is not a matter of fidelity to the original argument or accuracy of interpretation. It is, rather, the affirmation of a sensuous, phenomenally perceptible dimension to class that can be conveyed and felt across the flat abstractions of the page. This material dimension of an always already dialectical formation will constitute something like a remainder before the fact, that which threatens the fantasy of an identity between the singular and the universal and which therefore demands the dialectical *method*—not merely as an analytical procedure but as the ground of a political practice without guarantees and open to the future. We shall consider both of these dimensions of dialectical practice in the pages below. I will nonetheless begin with a few further remarks about Marx's English, as well his English literature.

Perhaps nowhere else in the world is the intimacy between class and speech so profound than in England, so it is not surprising that it is in the speech of the English workers that the violence of class makes itself detectable in the English edition of *Capital*. For this reason, perhaps, there are no accompanying descriptions of the waifs and hardy young lads who speak in the marked idioms of the workers. Almost nowhere does a *mise-en-scène* provide this speech with an accompanying image. The language, we might say, is the form of appearance (*Erscheinungsform*) of class. At the same time, and without relinquishing a recognition of the graphological dimension

4. Frederick Engels, "Preface to the Fourth Edition," in *Capital*, 1:114–20, esp. 114–15.

5. Engels, "Preface," 115.

of the entextualized speech, we might refer to this as the form of audibility of class. In the broken syntax, the pronomial confusion, and the grammatical errors of the English reports, so distant from the Standard English in which both Marx and the capitalist speak, one encounters the material—properly audiovisual—trace of a class-divided system. This lack of standardization is precisely what reveals legal and economic equality to be a mere “fiction.” Nonetheless, and despite Marx’s tendency to reduce the category of fiction to the status of the illusory, on a par with the fetishistic and the occult, it is by reading Marx’s “Working Day” chapter *in the mode of literary fiction* that we grasp the particular work that voice does in the theory of political subjectivity elaborated there. The mode of this fiction is characterological, but it is not psychological. And it possesses nothing of the *Bildungsroman*, with its narration of character formation across the lifetime. Nonetheless, the chapter’s theme is time: not only the time of labor and labor-time, but the temporal and yet untimely process of positing the future subject of revolution. Let us, then, consider how these two dimensions, the characterological and the temporal, are brought together via the intertextual practice of “The Working Day” chapter, and then proceed to an account of the specific problematic of voice in the development of a dialectical method.

### In the Time of Literature

Marx himself gave credit to the “current splendid brotherhood [which included Miss Brontë and Mrs. Gaskell] of fiction-writers in England, whose graphic and eloquent pages have issued to the world more political and social truths than have been uttered by all the professional politicians, publicists and moralists put together.”<sup>6</sup> Nonetheless, the uncited intertextual references of “The Working Day” chapter do not embrace the current splendid fiction. Rather, they point backward, to earlier texts, from Shakespeare to the Old Testament/Tanakh. The first such reference occurs when The Worker’s voice rises above the “sound and fury” of the production process. The phrase summons Shakespeare’s soliloquy on the burden of fate and the futility of life from the latter moments of *Macbeth*, and calls forth the question of time as its corollary. Shakespeare gives to the doomed general a melancholy sense of belatedness that expresses itself in the desire to have his wife’s death displaced into the future. Her death has come

6. Karl Marx, abstract of “The English Working Class,” in *New York Tribune* (1854), [www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1854/08/01.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1854/08/01.htm).

too soon, and Macbeth will not resign himself to the notion that there is a “time for everything,” as the narrator of Ecclesiastes would have it, except by assigning “the word” itself to temporal finitude. “She should have died hereafter; / there would have been a time for such a word. / Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow.”<sup>7</sup> It is this repetitive drumbeat of time that Marx calls up in the opening section of “The Working Day,” but he evokes the final lines of the soliloquy with mordant irony; tomorrow names the horizon of deferral by which value accumulates and to which debt is owed, and time itself is grasped as the object and the medium of capitalism’s intervention, the source of its surplus. If, therefore, the fateful word could be temporalized and natural law thereby evaded in the wish fulfillment of Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*, it is the naturalization of law that concerns Marx in his account of how capital extracts surplus value from laborers through the theft of their time in “The Working Day.” Beyond this revelatory reversal, however, is the embedded biblical referent to which both texts make recourse.

It is, from a certain perspective, possible to read “The Working Day” chapter as an ironic response to the call of the biblical discourse upon labor, one born of the shared question: “What profit hath he that worketh in that wherein he laboureth?” (King James Bible), or as the New International Version bluntly puts it, “What do workers gain from their toil?” (Eccles. 3:9). The differences between them may make the invocation (which is not yet a comparison) appear specious, but the structural affinity between the mythotext of the Old Testament/Tanakh and Marx’s chapter is revealing. What the juxtaposition casts into relief is neither an ideology that makes of labor a virtue (though that is implicit) nor secular nihilism in a pre-Nietzschean form, but the characterological dimension of Marx’s textual practice. It takes over the device of the speaker-cum-pedagogue (son of David in Ecclesiastes, The Worker in *Capital*) and places the capitalist in the position of the auditing divinity. It is in this context that the question of voice acquires its significance and its force. Let me then quote the oft-cited passage from “The Working Day” in which The Worker appears, or rather is heard, to speak. This event rends the text, interrupting both the discourse of capital and the analytic to which it is being subject: “Suddenly, however, there arises the voice of the worker, which had previously been stifled in the sound and fury of the production process” (C, 342; *MEGA*, 240).<sup>8</sup>

7. William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, ed. A. R. Braunmuller (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 5.5.17–19.

8. The German original reads as follows: “Plötzlich aber erhebt sich die Stimme des Arbeiters, die im Sturm und Drang des Produktionsprozesses verstummt war.”

The Worker speaks in a mellifluous prose and engages in a kind of disputation that presumes his equality with the capitalist, whom he greets in the market as a seller meets a buyer. He explains that "the commodity that I have sold you differs from the ordinary crowd of commodities in that its use creates value, a greater value than it costs" (C, 342; MEGA, 240). But this apparently indisputable fact, to which the capitalist is expected to accede, opens onto a point of difference that can only be gasped as the function of the different perspectives of capital and labor, which is to say the different placement of the auditors in the field of interest. Class is presented here not merely as a structure of interests determined by a relation to the means of production; it is an epistemic situation. "What appears on your side as the valorization of the capital is on my side an excess expenditure of labour-power" (C, 342; MEGA, 240).

What follows is a careful exposition, a veritable pedagogical set piece, which assumes the presence of a third party eavesdropping on the exchange. That third party is the individual laborer-cum-reader who will identify with The Worker that speaks. But The Worker, as the fictive figure in the impossible dialogue between false equals, speaks in the second person, mobilizing the structure of the "I-Thou" relation, only to mock it with an analytic of inequality: "The consumption of the commodity belongs not to the seller who parts with it, but to the buyer who acquires it. The use of my daily labour-power therefore belongs to you" (C, 343; MEGA, 240). The Worker continues to explain that "by means of the price" paid for it, he must reproduce that power every day, because he must "be able to work tomorrow" (C, 343; MEGA, 240). Thus creeps in this petty pace; the reference to Shakespeare, and thus to Ecclesiastes, continues in this barely legible form. But the capitalist's desire to extend the working day threatens even the possibility of eternal return: "By an unlimited extension of the working day, you may in one day use up a quantity of labour-power greater than I can restore in three. What you gain in labour, I lose in the substance of labour" (C, 343; MEGA, 240). Not only is there an irreducible difference between labor value and the substance of labor, between representation and the real, but the two are subject to different temporalities of both reproduction and amortization (the deathly signification of the term *amortization* should be heard clanging in this phrase).

The phantasmatic exchange between The Capitalist and The Worker continues apace here, moving into the mathematical calculation of rates of expropriation across a working life span of thirty years. Finally, the scene closes in a crescendo of indignation:

I therefore demand a working day of normal length, and I demand it without any appeal to your heart, for in money matters, sentiment is out of place. You may be a model citizen, perhaps a member of the R.S.P.C.A., and you may be in the odour of sanctity as well; but the thing you represent when you come face to face with me has no heart in its breast. What seems to throb there is my own heartbeat. I demand a normal working day because, like every other seller, I demand the value of my commodity. (C, 343; MEGA, 241)

Self-consciously claiming to inhabit the discourse of reason, The Worker delivers his own rationale for a demand that, despite its vehemence, remains trapped within the conventions of the “normal.” Such is the “modest Magna Carta” with which Marx bitterly closes the chapter. Not incidentally, the form of this last declaration is purely performative; like the promise, the assertion of a demand recoils upon itself. The truth of the statement (that a demand is indeed being made) cannot guarantee the outcome demanded. In this sense, then, the imaginary lecture dissolves into the fictive space of its appearance, when it first sounded forth as an interruption of the capitalist’s discourse.

Recall that the capitalist is in the midst of his own thought, ventriloquized by Marx in a form of indirect third-person narration. Having been described as a mere personification of capital, whose “soul is the soul of capital,” and whose “sole driving force” is to “valorize itself,” the capitalist “takes his stand on the law of commodity exchange” (C, 342; MEGA, 239, emphasis added). Here, English benefits from the homonymic play that renders the *soul* of capital as one possessed by a *sole* driving force (*Trieb*), but only insofar as the language is sounded. If it is permitted to resonate in the ear, the monomaniacal and the vampiric rhetoric gives way to a kind of possession. But if the aura of the séance suffuses this linguistically overdetermined passage (in the translation Marx did not see), the implied scene is that of a courtroom. The capitalist takes his stand. He is answered by a prosecutorial would-be dictator of proletarian interest.

Insofar as the law is repeatedly posited by Marx as a fiction, the first juridical fiction being that society is founded upon law rather than law upon society, the scenario in which the capitalist takes the stand and is interrupted by The Worker is thus fictive.<sup>9</sup> Or rather, insofar as The Worker

9. Marx makes this argument in several contexts, perhaps most bluntly in the article “The Trial of the Rhenish District Committee of Democrats,” *Neue Rheinische Zeitung*, nos. 231 and 232, in *Karl Marx, Frederick Engels: Collected Works*, vol. 8, trans. Dutt Clemens et al. (New York: International Publishers, 1977), 323–29.



speaks as the bearer of class interest, addressing the capitalist who is, himself, the personification of capital, it does so as a fiction, and more specifically a characterological fiction. Only as such a fiction can The Worker master capital's discourse and deliver a speech unmarked by social exclusion. And only in this unmarked form can such speech be imagined capable of reaching its target and achieving that transparency and communicative efficacy that leaves nothing unsaid and that says nothing unintended. Nonetheless, it is not merely The Worker who arises here in the form of a fiction. For the capitalist, too, is a figure of fiction, albeit of a different order. The difference is that between the existent fiction and the fiction that marks the place of the in-existent, as well as the not yet existent.

As already stated, the capitalist is a mere personification of that which constitutes the only Subject of history, namely capital. He is thus analogous to the sovereign: a fiction, but one that exists. Marx adduces the existent fiction in his *Notes for a Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right* in a discussion of two kinds of sovereignty: that which ostensibly comes into being in the form of a monarch and that which arises within a people. The former is, for Marx, a mere fiction, albeit one that exists. The nature of this fiction is related to the nature of the dialectic, for monarchy is "democracy in contradiction with itself."<sup>10</sup> Because monarchy subsumes beneath itself a whole society, it makes a single mode of existence (the political constitution) stand for the totality, whereas in Marx's analysis, the political constitution ought to comprise only one instance of a society's self-determination. The political structure of sovereignty relates to the economic logic by analogy. Under capitalism, the capitalist appropriates for himself what is the product not of the people per se but of the people as the bearers of labor-power. It is in this capacity that The Worker addresses him. And it is as the bearer of labor-power that he speaks. But, insofar as The Worker is the being in which the difference between *average socially necessary* labor-power and surplus labor-power is marked and manipulated, The Worker

10. Karl Marx, *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, trans. Annette Jolin and Joseph O'Malley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, [1843] 1977), 25. The translation of this work is notoriously various, including the title *Zur Kritik der Hegelschen Rechtsphilosophie*, which is represented as either Hegel's Philosophy of "Right" or of "Law." The edition included in the *Collected Works*, for example, renders the phrase quoted above as follows: "Monarchy is necessarily democracy inconsistent with itself" (*Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels: Collected Works*, vol. 3, trans. Jack Cohen et al. [New York: International Publishers, 2005], 29). The German text reads: "Die Monarchie ist notwendig Demokratie als Inkonsequenz gegen sich selbst." In *Karl Marx/Friedrich Engels – Werke* (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1976), 1:203–333, esp. 230.

can speak as the bearer of labor-power only in generalized terms. In other words, The Worker that might be capable of dictating the interests of the proletariat is an in-existent but possible fiction, speaking on the basis of a process of abstraction. It is for this reason that I continue, with such stubborn obviousness, to indicate the word with the upper case letters to mark its status as exception and to mark it as a categorical noun rather than a particular descriptor. These typographical conventions permit the word to signify itself as a nonreferential term, a concept, properly speaking. The question that arises in this context concerns the possibility that this in-existent figure might be realized and what its relationship to “actually existing workers” could be. That question is not theorized in “The Working Day.” But it is sounded.

### **Time and Time Again, in a Manner of Speaking**

According to certain conventions of Marxism, one should read “The Working Day” chapter as an excursus upon labor-time and as an analysis of the ways in which it is made the medium of surplus value extraction. The chapter commences with an assertion that the previously operative assumption, namely that labor-power is “bought and sold at its value” is an illusory scenario in which two equal values are exchanged in the market. To the contrary, Marx will demonstrate how capital operates on the basis of the divisibility of time, and on the particular manipulation of the difference between (average socially) necessary labor-time and surplus labor-time, where the former is determined by the function of reproducing labor-power. He will argue that the working day is far from self-evident as an object of quantification, a duration to be measured. It is a mysterious concept, one that is “capable of being determined, but in and for itself indeterminate” (C, 341; *MEGA*, 238).<sup>11</sup>

At the most obvious level, the relation between the determined and the indeterminate has to do with the strange nature of human labor-power, which can be intensified and multiplied by social division and technological supplementation but which nonetheless has limits. However, determination is not merely a question of physical limits or even of moral sentiment. It is also a question of law—of the juridical system within which labor-power becomes a commodity subject to contract and of the legislated limits to the working day itself. This is why the establishment of the dialogue

11. “Der Arbeitstag ist daher bestimmbar, aber an und für sich unbestimmt.”

between capital and The Worker takes place within the idiomaticity of the courtroom. Now, insofar as law is dictation—whether of the sovereign, the people, or the interests of capital—the question of determination with which Marx opens "The Working Day" is posed from the outset as a question of the relation between the saying and the said.<sup>12</sup> The German-language version of the text opens this question in a relatively overt manner. In German, the resonance between determined and indeterminate, *bestimmbar* and *unbestimmt*, contains within it the echo of a voice, *Stimme*, otherwise absent in the English. According to a certain residual signification, that which is determined/*bestimmt* is that given by divine commandment, and which therefore appears fated. *Bestimmt* is the word made flesh, the said as the congelation and permanent presence of absolute performativity.

We can excavate this metaphorical affinity between the concept of voice (the medium of the said and the saying) and the question of determinateness from within the German and transfer it to the English context. But not because etymology guarantees (determines) the meaning of the word. Rather, to borrow from Maurice Blanchot, the indeterminateness of the word *determined* (*bestimmt*) draws it into a space in which the question of voicing can be heard to resonate at the center of the dialectical method.<sup>13</sup> To understand this, we must attend to the speaking of the workers, and specifically those workers who appear to fall beneath the threshold of possible representation. They are the children of the factories, as well as the women and the girls: in a word, the subalterns. More importantly, the male children are permitted to stand for the subalterns in general. These are the

12. There is, of course, a long tradition that insists upon the irreducibility of the saying to the said. If proper names may be permitted to stand in for these traditions, we would want to invoke the names of Jacques Lacan, Paul Ricoeur, Emmanuel Levinas, and Jacques Derrida, though many others might as easily be adduced: Tzvetan Todorov, Clifford Geertz, Edward Said, among them. Lacan's insistence on the distinction between the *énoncé* and the *énonciation* (the latter better translated as "the enunciating" than "enunciation," as is common) is here foundational, though his own position on the matter shifted over the course of his writings. I do not mean to imply that the saying is in any way autonomous vis-à-vis the said. To the contrary, I assume that the latter cannot be accessed except through the saying and, moreover, that the relation between these two levels is not one of isomorphism or homology. Hence, what is accessed is not to be thought of as a mere referent. Nonetheless, there is a relation between these levels, and the mere valorization of the saying is insufficient to the task at hand. It is indeed here that the task of dialectics must be pursued most rigorously.

13. Maurice Blanchot, *The Writing of the Disaster*, trans. Ann Smock (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, [1980] 1986), 116–17.

figures whose mediated and redacted speech is given back to English by Eleanor Marx.

Marx indicates that he believes the “depositions of the exploited children” permit him to “deduce the situation of the adults, especially the girls and women” in those branches of industry that lack regulation (*C*, 354; *MEGA*, 250). The question of gender appears and disappears here. Marx recognizes the specific deployment of women in highly mechanized industries. He attends to the risks and consequences that such work has for their status as women. But insofar as their speech, already inaudible, is said to be representable by the otherwise muted discourse of the boys, the girls and women are, as Gayatri Spivak says, “doubly in shadow.”<sup>14</sup> It is because of this metonymic capacity—enabled by a sexual difference that is effaced in the same breath that it is acknowledged—that the boys’ depositions can function as such fecund sources of evidence. And for this reason, Marx quotes them at length, so that the repetition of similar testimony about long hours, poor wages, and extreme exposure to physical risk comes to appear as the norm. The first task of the marked speech is to generalize itself, even across the divide of sexual difference; the second will be to make visible the limits to such generalizability. Nonetheless, and despite this double function of the male children’s speech, the early citations of the reports are weighted in favor of the corporate owners and managers of the enterprises, and only gradually do the testimonials of the children acquire their contrapuntal force.

The key moment in the argument by quotation occurs almost exactly halfway through “The Working Day.” It culminates in a description of circumstances in an industry “where the proper hours were from 6 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.” There, boys are seen regularly to work outside of the prescribed hours, giving new meaning to the term “adulterated,” to which Marx has just devoted several pages. The quotations are from the *Children’s Employment Commission*, of 1864 and 1865. But it is the report and not merely the speech that is quoted, and, as a result, it is not always easy to attribute a speaking subject. The report’s sociological descriptors of the children are followed by what appear to be direct citations, but they are irregular and unmarked:

George Allinsworth, age 9, came here as a cellar-boy last Friday; next morning we had to begin at 3, so I stopped here all night. Live

14. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?,” in *Can the Subaltern Speak? Reflections on the History of an Idea*, ed. Rosalind C. Morris (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 21–78.

five miles off. Slept on the floor of the furnace, over head, with an apron under me, and a bit of a jacket over me. The two other days I have been here at 6 a.m. Aye! It *is* hot in here. Before I came here I was nearly a year at the same work at some works in the country. Began there, too, at 3 on Saturday morning—always did, but was very gain (near) home, and could sleep at home. Other days I began at 6 in the morning, and gi'en over at 6 or 7 in the evening. (C, 369–70; MEGA, 263)

It would be wrong to say that the report's recorders have transcribed the speech of the boys phonetically, or in dialect, but pronunciation is simulated with the dropped consonant in the last "gi'en," for example. What is more directly intimated is the cadence of delivery, achieved in the punctuation that underlines the clipped syntax of the sentences and the interruption of the exclamatory "Aye!" as well as the emphasis in "It *is* hot in here." The directness and transitivity of the speech is all the more apparent in contrast to the quotations in which we hear its opposite, a baroque evasion, such as that spoken by Mr. Otley, manager of a wallpaper factory, who declares, "I can understand the loss of time not being liked." Even Commissioner White, who, in the *Children's Employment Commission Fourth Report*, expresses his suspicion of the glass manufacturers' rationale for denying regular mealtimes, uses a form of discourse so laboriously indirect that Marx appears as exasperated with it as with the abuse it reports. Mr. White's text reads as follows: "A certain amount of heat beyond what is usual at present might be going to waste, if meal-times were secured in these cases, but it seems likely not equal in money-value to the waste of animal power now going on in glass-houses throughout the kingdom from growing boys not having enough quiet time to eat their meals at ease, with a little rest afterwards for digestion" (C, 374; MEGA, 267).

Where Marx is most vituperative, however, is when the factory owner or manager uses a pronomial form that simulates an identity of interests between the workers and him. The use of *we*, *us*, and *our* to describe the experience of workers leads Marx to a paroxysm of parentheticalizing outrage. Smith, "the managing partner of a Manchester factory," is quoted and derided as follows:

"We" (he means his "hands" who work for "us") "work on, with no stoppage for meals, so that the day's work of 10½ hours is finished by 4:30 p.m., and all after that is overtime." (Does Mr. Smith take no meals himself during 10½ hours?) "We" (this same Smith) "sel-

dom leave off working before 6 p.m.” (he means leave off from consuming “our” labour-power machines), “so that we” (the same man again) “are really working overtime the whole year round.” (*C*, 357; *MEGA*, 252)

Marx has urged his reader to “listen for a moment to the factory inspectors,” who have drawn attention to the unscrupulousness of the managers, but when the speech of the managers themselves is quoted, it is made the object of a critical commentary—not only at the level of the said but at the level of the saying. This is because the ideological ruse is not achieved in the mere statement of a falsehood; it is dependent on the uttering itself. So Smith can be derided for being “so fond of the plural of majesty,” and the debate about the possibility that children’s bodies suffer the same deleterious effects when deprived of light as do animals is wryly adduced as proof that the mental functions of capitalists have been adversely affected by capitalist production (*C*, 368; *MEGA*, 263).

The linguistic decrepitude of the working children is, however, seen to be a function of the poor or nonexistent education that they receive. The remarkable passage in which George Allinsworth narrates his sleepless nights under the hot furnace is followed by a lengthy footnote (in both the English and German editions), in which several children are quoted, speaking what they believe to be mathematical and historical truths. Arrayed on the page as a kind of subterranean support for the architecture of argumentation that stands upon it, the footnote deserves quotation at length—but also reading aloud:

Jeremiah Haynes, age 12—“Four times four is eight; four fours are sixteen. A king is him that has all the money and gold. We have a King (told it is a Queen), they call her the Princess Alexandra. Told that she married the Queen’s son. The Queen’s son is the Princess Alexandra. A Princess is a man.” William Turner, age 12—“Don’t live in England. Think it *is* a country, but didn’t know before.” John Morris, age 14—“Have heard say that God made the world, and that all the people was drowned but one; heard say that one was a little bird.” William Smith, age 15—“God made man, man made woman.” . . . “The devil is a good person. I don’t know where he lives.” “Christ was a wicked man.” (*C*, 370; *MEGA*, 263)

Marx notes the commissioner’s own remark that the girl who uttered the last phrase “spelt God as dog,” indicating that at least some of the inquiry had taken the form of written depositions.

The footnote, one of the longest in Volume 1 of *Capital*, seems mesmerized by this speech, at once repelled by and attracted to the litany of absurdities. Ostensibly, they have nothing to do with the question of the working day, except insofar as the absence of time for education is testified to by the ignorance expressed. But if we bear in mind Marx's own sarcasm about the mental deficiency of the capitalists, the ignorance of the children performs a different and important function—at once mimetic and alienating. The fact that "boys and girls very often work overtime, which not infrequently extends to 24 or even 36 hours of uninterrupted toil," can have no other consequence than the maddened speech cited above. The children, one might say, live as real what is foreclosed in the capitalists' discourse. According to its psychoanalytic formulation, that which is foreclosed in the symbolic returns in the real. What is foreclosed, according to the text of "The Working Day," is the irrationality of capitalism, which nonetheless functions according to reason.

The footnote in which the children are heard to speak comes at the end of George Allinworth's reported speech. It is at once a dilation and a splitting of the text, with the verbally materialized irrationality produced by the rationalization of production constituting an echo of the chapter's thematized argument to the same effect. Why does Marx insist that this argument be heard and not merely read? If I am correct, the saying is as important as the said of this argument. Recall that we have been asked to "listen for a moment to the factory inspectors" (C, 349; MEGA, 246). In German, this phrase couples the auditory and the visual senses in a particularly evocative manner: "Hören wir einen Augenblick die Fabrikinspektoren." What Fowkes translates as "a moment" might have been more "literally" rendered as the "blink of an eye" (*Augenblick*). Listen, for the blink of an eye.<sup>15</sup> The brevity of the moment is relative, of course, to be calibrated in relation to the endless prattle of the apologists for child labor and an extended working day. The internal sensory heterogeneity of Marx's German rhetoric is sometimes lost in the English, and the latter tends to privilege the visual sense. Nonetheless, Marx will ask his readers to "hear how capital itself regards this 24-hour system" (C, 370; MEGA, 264). And he

15. I am reminded by Jairo Moreno of the degree to which this term has been mobilized and amplified in the writings of Theodor Adorno, for whom the *Augenblick* is linked to the experience of a breakthrough, at once emancipatory and destructive, for the work of music. It is also redolent in Walter Benjamin's concept of the flashing, particularly in moments of historical crisis when a dialectical image arises from the inertia of second nature.

will reflect on the discourse of the inspectors by saying we have “heard” (*hörten*) them (*C*, 378; *MEGA*, 270). Repeatedly, if sparingly, he makes recourse to the rhetoric of audibility. Even so, the materiality of the text makes this dimension far more important than might otherwise appear to be the case if the mere frequency of that rhetoric provided us with the only guidance for how to read.

This importance is made abundantly clear when one compares the text of “The Working Day” to Marx’s other major expositions on the topic. Even elsewhere within *Capital*, where machinic life is discussed and the predicament of women and children addressed in particular (as in chapter 15), the phenomenological dimension of “The Working Day” is absent, and the inscription of auditory detail is entirely absent. In “Value, Price and Profit,” where much of the argument resembles the one presented in “The Working Day,” there are no citations of reported speech from Commissions of Inquiry, nor any invocation to the reader to “listen,” “hear,” or otherwise lend an ear. In “Value, Price and Profit,” the matter is one of “seeing”: “We have *seen* that the *value of the labouring power*, or in more popular parlance, the *value of labour*, is determined by the value of necessaries, or the quantity of labour required to produce them.”<sup>16</sup> The same is true for Marx’s earlier, barbed critique of Proudhon, *The Poverty of Philosophy*, wherein he accuses the French anarchist of misunderstanding the nature of surplus labor by reducing the working day to a purely formal concept. There, Marx invariably introduces his citations of Proudhon with the phrase “Let us see,” and what he sees is that Proudhon treats the working day as equivalent for all persons, who are then imagined to be individually capable of generating a comparable surplus each day.<sup>17</sup> Instead, Marx argues, the concept of labor-time must be grasped in its sociality. And, because Proudhon wrongly conceptualizes Society as a principle of generality—as the sum of relations between individuals rather than as a stratified set of antagonistic relations—he confuses surplus achieved through rationalized production with the mere surfeit of individual labor (in other words, he confuses absolute and relative surplus value). Indeed, Marx accuses him of failing

16. Karl Marx, “Value, Price and Profit,” in *Karl Marx, Frederick Engels: Collected Works*, vol. 20, trans. Cynthia Carlile et al. (New York: International Publishers, [1864–68] 1985), 100–49, esp. 138–39, emphasis added.

17. Karl Marx, *The Poverty of Philosophy*, in *Karl Marx, Frederick Engels: Collected Works*, vol. 6 (New York: International Publishers, 1976), 105–212, esp. 125–30. Although the text was originally published in 1847, the English translation is based on revisions of 1885 (German) and 1896 (French).



to "see" that Ricardo had already "unmasked" the "mysteries of bourgeois economics."<sup>18</sup>

If the analysis of the working day can be undertaken without recourse to the reported speech of workers, what then does Marx gain from its inclusion? How does that addition, and the question of voicing that it enables, change the nature of the argument—in either its substantive or performative dimensions? It is at this point that we must theorize the relationship between dialect and dialectical method. And we may begin doing so by remembering a statement, made in yet another footnote, late in "The Working Day," that describes the successful strike by Scottish dye workers who are nonetheless finally vanquished with the violence that can be written into law by virtue of linguistic ambiguities and loopholes: "Defeated in this way by the very workers in whose name it pretended to speak, capital discovered, with the help of the judicial magnifying-glass, that the Act of 1860, drawn up in equivocal phrases like all Acts of Parliament for the 'protection of labour,' provided them with a pretext for excluding from its operation the 'calenderers' and the 'finishers'" (C, 409; *MEGA*, 297). As in the case of Mr. Smith, who claimed to speak as one with the workers, the law speaks in their name but acts in capital's interests. Precisely to the extent that it speaks in the workers' name—in the name of The Worker—however, it cannot speak in their voices.

Voice names the quality of a saying that cannot be reduced to the said but also of a real that contradicts (speaks against) the concept. The Worker whose discourse is heard arising above the sound and fury of the production process speaks in no one's voice. Every time we hear an actual worker speak in "The Working Day" (if via redaction), the speech is dialectically marked by its incapacity to conform—grammatically, syntactically, phonetically—to Standard English. This is what makes it audible *as such*, as the speech of a worker. Moreover, that exteriority to the norm stands in stark contrast to the normativity of capital: "Capital only speaks of the system in its 'normal' form" (C, 371; *MEGA*, 264). The normal form does not exist, however (this is partly the basis of Marx's argument with Proudhon). It is an inexistent fiction. Now, the inexistence of "normality" is different from that of The Worker, whose transparent speech and concomitant access to universality marks its status as unreal. The Worker's discourse exceeds the cacophonous voicings of the workers in whose collective names it, too, speaks, if relatively legitimately. The Worker, we might say, is the figure of a

18. Marx, *The Poverty of Philosophy*, 124.

possibly existent fiction. In other words, The Worker must be fabricated, and fabrication is, of course, a primary signification of the very word *fiction*.<sup>19</sup> If we take this seriously, if we listen to the text, we have to take on its radically historicizing implications, as well as the repudiation that it offers to every form of spontaneist politics, whether in the form of a now outmoded workerism or in a discourse of the multitude. For if The Worker doesn't exist, it cannot be the agent or the ground of self-representation. To the contrary, the labor of self-representation must precede its existence.

### Discourse, Dialect, Dialectic

Thus far, I have sketched an opposition between the voicing of The Worker and the voicings of the workers, mainly children, whose redacted speech is embedded in "The Working Day." I have suggested that the poetic strategy of the chapter inscribes this difference by letting the "visualized sound" of a broken, grammatically marred English signify the heterogeneity not only of society but of the working class itself, that class which is otherwise imagined as the bearer of universality's future realization. And I have argued that Marx's privileging of the auditory register and his attention to the *form* of saying in this text, which distinguishes it from other of his writings on the topic, have implications for the theory and practice of dialectics. Together, these arguments may give the impression that the voicings of the workers stand in relation to The Worker's discourse as the empirical to the conceptual. I need, then, to be clear that I am not making this argument. The point may be easiest to grasp through contrast.

To make that contrast, I have in mind James Agee's famously limp introduction to *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, which declares one of the most impassioned, if self-constraining, aspirations to overcome the limits of textuality in the history of literature about poverty. Agee, it will be remembered, would have relinquished writing altogether had it been possible to insert between the covers of his book "fragments of cloth, bits of cotton, lumps of earth, records of speech, pieces of wood and iron, phials of odors, plates of food and excrement."<sup>20</sup> Walker Evans's photographs are as close to that trace of the real as the book can get, and for this reason, they, too,

19. In the case of the reference to the *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, the term translated as "fiction" is *Unwahrheit*. This would not have the implications of material fabrication, particularly in the literary sense, that accrues to the English term.

20. James Agee, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, [1941] 2001), 10.

are placed at the beginning, before the text, and thereby saved from the status of illustration. Agee writes nonetheless—with more loquacity than his fantasy might have suggested—but only because of the putative ontological difference between the empirical and the conceptual, or, as Edward Said would have it, the world and the text. He is correct in presuming the opposition between these two. But Agee grants to “records of speech” the status of the real (whether as substantial as excrement or as ephemeral as odors). This would not be so grave a problem if it did not at the same time entail an idealization of the concept and a reification of its unity. In this respect, Adorno’s “negative dialectics” offers us a more satisfying analysis, one whose proximity and seemingly direct address to Agee’s phenomenological naïveté makes it all the more instructive as a result.<sup>21</sup>

As if echoing Agee, Adorno writes that “no philosophy, not even extreme empiricism, can drag in the *facta bruta* and present them like cases in anatomy or experiments in physics; no philosophy can paste the particulars into the text, as seductive paintings would hoodwink us into believing.”<sup>22</sup> But it is not the fetishism of the empirical that worries Adorno; it is rather a fetishism of the concept. “In truth,” he continues, “all concepts, even the philosophical ones, refer to nonconceptualities, because concepts on their part are moments of the reality that requires their formation” (*ND*, 11). He advocates an “infinite” philosophy, the substance of which “would lie in the diversity of objects that impinge upon it and of the objects it seeks, a diversity not wrought by any schema; to those objects, philosophy would truly give itself rather than use them as a mirror in which to reread itself, mistaking its own image for concretion.” Above all, such a philosophy would avoid the errors of the “science of empirical consciousness,” which reduces “the contents of such experience to cases of categories” (*ND*, 13).

To follow Adorno’s analysis requires that we read the workers as something other than a case of the category Worker.<sup>23</sup> The discontinuity between the characterological figure (The Worker) and any actual workers is, in fact, signified in and by the distance between their utterances, as *they appear to have been sounded* in “The Working Day,” as well as in their generic structure and semantic content. This imaged (and imagined) sound signifies the remainder, that which “indicates the untruth of identity,

21. Adorno is actually referring to Husserl’s phenomenology and not Agee’s.

22. Theodor Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E. B. Ashton (New York: Continuum, [1966] 1994), 11. Hereafter, this work is cited parenthetically as *ND*.

23. The linguists, who substitute the “type/token” distinction for that of case/category, merely reproduce this failure of dialectical thought.

the fact that the concept does not exhaust the thing conceived" (ND, 5). On one level, the text works by making audible both the aspiration to unity and the fact of heteroglossia in the language of the English working classes. It gives form to the stratification of the linguistic field that is, as Mikhail Bakhtin says, an artifact of industrial modernity.<sup>24</sup> If "The Working Day" were a novel and not merely a characterological fiction, then, according to Bakhtin's analysis, the multiplicity of speech genres and social languages would be completely internalized, and the movement between perspectives would be implicit. But, in fact, as we have seen, the various strata are managed, the speech forms isolated through punctuation (especially parentheses), and the spatial distribution afforded by the textual practice of footnoting. It is not doubled-voicedness that inhabits the utterances of The Worker and the workers, or even the capitalist, in "The Working Day." Marx's analytic position is always marked by its exteriority to the cited discourse, with the result being an impression of coherence within the figures—Worker and Capitalist—in relation to which the workers (appearing here in the echo of their speaking) constitute both a limit to be overcome and a residue exceeding what can be posited.

In this sense, The Worker functions like the "speaking person" of the novel, who is "to one degree or another, an *ideologue*, one who "is not a man in his own right, but a man who is precisely the *image of a language*" (DN, 333, 336). This remarkable phrase appears in Bakhtin's account of novelistic discourse, that discourse which has discourse as its object, and it is followed by an equally provocative assertion that "in order that language become an artistic image, it must become speech from speaking lips, conjoined with the image of a speaking person" (DN, 336). The Worker's disputation of the Capitalist conforms perfectly to this description, even as it plays out the pure form of the Aristotelian dialectic. The Worker is "able to syllogize about every posed problem on the basis of generally accepted opinions [*endoxa*]" and to "say nothing self-contradictory."<sup>25</sup> What makes the syllogism dialectical for Aristotle is that it commences from generally accepted principles rather than self-evident truths; Marx would refer to these principles (this *doxa*) as ideological. But what does this mean for the sayings of the workers? Perhaps that they are the image not of language

24. Mikhail Bakhtin, "Discourse in the Novel," in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 259–422. Hereafter, this work is cited parenthetically as DN.

25. Aristotle, "Introduction to Dialectic," in *On Rhetoric: Theory of Civic Discourse*, 2nd ed., trans. George A. Kennedy (New York and London: Oxford, 2007), 263–66, esp. 264.

and not of the voice of The Worker as it arises but of dialect arising. What Marx's voluminous quotation makes clear, even if consigned to the nether regions of the page, is that the form of these sayings contains within itself a meta-signification. It indicates what Bakhtin would call a "potential dialect" (DN, 356). Full dialecticization would require the norming of pronunciation and speech in relation to a community of speakers' historical unification but also the sedimentation of their marginality, their nonnormativity. Transcribed as it is, the speech of the workers is thus only a potential dialect. Whether Marx "intended" for this to be the reading of "The Working Day" is here irrelevant. It gives itself to be read insofar as it makes audible the difference between the image of language as transparency and of dialect as *audibility*.

Again, a novel would have internalized this heterogeneity, importing it into the text's narration—as in the novels cited by Bakhtin and included by Marx in the category of "splendid fiction." Nonetheless, *Capital* shares this capacity to "talk about it [i.e., a language] and at the same time to talk in and with it" (DN, 358). It is therefore interesting that the moment in which "The Working Day" appears to approach most closely the generic form of novelistic fiction—when the voice of The Worker suddenly arises and a pseudodialogue occurs—is that in which "authoritative discourse" is given free rein. Authoritative discourse can be transmitted, according to Bakhtin, but not represented (DN, 344). It is defined by inertia, semantic finitude, and antipathy to stylistic innovation. But if authoritative discourse would be unconvincing as a mode of fictive speech, this very attribute enables it to function as the self-reflexive signifier of its own fictiveness in "The Working Day." Its formality and hyperbolic appeal to reason mark it as untrue, because it is overly and fetishistically conceptual. Why? Because it lacks that very heteroglossic sociality that is testified to by the reported speech of the workers.

The realism of "The Working Day" thus consists in making the speech of the workers signify the real, which, heterogeneous by definition, then provides the point of departure for The Worker's drive to universality and thus unity. Indeed, if The Worker, as figure, is the image of a language, it is the image of a language aspiring to universality, one shorn of its accent, its dialectic specificity. The tragedy of "The Working Day" is that this aspiration takes place within the terms of liberal contract, without disputing the legitimacy of the wage system.<sup>26</sup> So, if The Worker speaks in an authorita-

26. Marx, "Value, Price and Profit," 149.

tive discourse and achieves the image of universality when engaging the capitalist *by speaking in his language*, it is not truth but the *endoxa* of capitalism that he inhabits and articulates. That position has no real ground outside of history, of course; it is governed by the epistemic and material conditions of the context in which capitalism dominates (where economy functions as the determining instance of social life).

What can it mean for dialectics (as a philosophy and a method) that the workers appear as the signifiers of the real? What can it mean that their speech *contra-dicts* The Worker and only becomes audible, if not intelligible, in so doing? Among other things, that dialectic cannot be confined to the problematic of class contradiction. Contradiction, speaking against, speaking otherwise: this is the truth of dialectics and what makes it available for a history without teleology, despite the fact that, since Hegel, it has been the very medium of all teleological thought.

When Marx wrote the “postface” to the second edition of *Capital*, he had to underline his own difference with Hegel but also distance himself from those who would merely dismiss him as a “dead dog.” The famously sharp distinction was one between idealism and materialism:

My dialectical method is, in its foundations, not only different from the Hegelian, but exactly its opposite. For Hegel, the process of thinking, which he even transforms into an independent subject, under the name of “the Idea” is the creator of the real world, and the real world is only an external appearance of the idea. With me the reverse is true: the ideal is nothing but the material world reflected in the mind of man, and translated into forms of thought.<sup>27</sup>

This is Marx at his most reductionist, when rhetorical formula has overwhelmed critique, so it is not surprising that he must quickly add a qualifier, emphasizing the revolutionary threat and potential of the dialectic as a mode of thought characterized by negativity: “In its mystified form, the dialectic became the fashion in Germany, because it seemed to transfigure and glorify what exists. In its rational form it is a scandal and an abomination to the bourgeoisie, because it includes in its positive understanding of what exists a simultaneous recognition of its negation” (*C*, 103; *MEGA*, 709).

In 1873, the time of the “postface,” Marx could reflect that his contempt for the easy dismissal of Hegel had led him to stylistic mimicry, admitting that he had “coquetted with the mode of expression peculiar to him” in the chapter on value (*C*, 103; *MEGA*, 709). But if his late critique of Hegel reiterated

27. Karl Marx, “Postface to the Second Edition,” in *C*, 94–103, esp. 102; *MEGA*, 709.

the repudiation of his idealism, Marx's early engagement was motivated by his recognition of Hegel's concern with labor: "The outstanding achievement of Hegel's *Phenomenology*—the dialectic of negativity as the moving and creating principles—is . . . that he grasps the nature of labour, and conceives objective man (true, because real man) as the result of his own labor."<sup>28</sup> The problem, to begin, is that Hegel can only conceive of "abstract mental labor."<sup>29</sup> From the point of view of Hegel's idealism, which makes mental labor the measure of all labor, the verbally stunted unreason of the worker children quoted in "The Working Day" would be mere evidence that manual labor renders individuals incapable of functioning as the incarnation of spirit.

In the early writings, Marx displaces spirit with human species-being and puts society in the place of the universal: "The *real, active* orientation of man to himself as a species-being, or his manifestation as a real species-being (i.e., as a human being), is only possible if he really brings out all his *species-powers*—something which in turn is only possible through the co-operative action of all of mankind, only as the result of history—and treats these powers as objects: and this, to begin with, is again only possible in the form of estrangement."<sup>30</sup> Adorno pays particular attention to this early moment of Marx's response to Hegel, implying that it is the point of greatest convergence in their thought but also the point of most radical departure. He clarifies the import of the materialist rereading, however, insisting that it is not a matter of displacing the conceptual (The Worker) with the empirical (actual workers):

The moment of universality in the active, transcendental subject as opposed to the merely empirical, isolated, contingent subject, is no more a fantasy than is the validity of logical propositions as opposed to the empirical course of individual acts of thought. Rather, this universality is an expression of the social nature of labor, an expression both precise and concealed from itself for the sake of the general idealist thesis; labor only because labor as something for something else, something commensurable with other things, something that transcends the contingency of the individual subject.<sup>31</sup>

28. Karl Marx, "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844," in *Karl Marx, Frederick Engels: Collected Works*, 3:229–346, esp. 332.

29. Marx, "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844," 333.

30. Marx, "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844," 333.

31. Theodor Adorno, "Aspects of Hegel's Philosophy," in *Hegel: Three Studies*, trans. Sherry Weber Nicholsen (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, [1963] 1999), 1–51, esp. 18. Hereafter, this work is cited parenthetically as AHP.

In his own rebuttal of Hegel's idealism, which follows Marx in approving the dialectic as a method beyond method and a philosophy beyond philosophy, Adorno credits Hegel with overcoming the opposition between subject and object, form and content, and thereby, of escaping Kant's melancholically modest conclusion that humans are confined to the world of phenomena, incapable of knowing the absolute. For if Hegel acknowledges the oppositions, he also claims that in grasping the limit of human subjectivity, "in understanding subjectivity as 'mere' subjectivity, we have already passed beyond the limit" (AHP, 6). But this is precisely the moment of idealism that gives to Spirit the appearance of a process of negation and reconciliation with itself toward the end of pure identity. Adorno rebukes Hegel in this context for not being sufficiently inconsistent in a manner consistent with dialectics. In other words, he accuses Hegel's system of failing on its own account, because it effaces the moment of nonidentity. And he calls for the dialecticization of the dialectic. That process receives its poetic form in "The Working Day," where the sonic staging of the inadequation between The Worker and the workers allows Marx to demonstrate not only that the concept exceeds the facticity of which it nonetheless partakes but also that the idealist absolutization of labor is itself both a material and an ideological process that short-circuits the task of politics.

If Marx is able to realize the potential of the Hegelian dialectic, it is by making contradiction work, of holding open the nonidentity of concept and empiricity as a source of invention and self-transformation. Even with the "I," which Kant, Fichte, and Hegel all attempted to abstract from the empirical "I," abstraction remains incomplete (AHP, 16–17). Shorn of any reference to a spatiotemporally bound, individuated consciousness, "I" can mean nothing, even when its functional vacuity is held open (anyone can say "I," but in saying "I," the one speaking becomes something other than "not-I"). The same is true of the term *society*, which Hegel uses to refer to a "functional complex of empirical persons" as well as the concept of labor. However, if it is true that Hegel's own rhetoric, inherited from earlier idealisms, is one that conceived spirit as original production, this conception is far from Marx's notion of labor, though both assume an initial division between mental and manual labor. The Worker is, of course, the agent of manual labor, but the manual comes to stand in for both materiality and particularity in the set of oppositions that unfold from the first division, indicating the slippage between the concept and the empirical that Adorno had diagnosed in Hegel's concept of society and that Marx had felt it necessary to theatricalize in "The Working Day." As Adorno argues, the distinc-



tion between mental and manual labor is the means by which one class reserves for itself the easier part, while making mental labor appear to be the mediation of merely physical activity, of matter itself. But by absolutizing labor, by rendering every action of spirit as labor, in order to escape its painful demands, Hegel recapitulated the ideology of his own moment and ontologized it. In "The Working Day," the characterological fiction and the staging of empirical voices as the limit of The Worker's capacity to achieve identity in self-representation stage the process by which class actually effects the absolutization of labor. The chapter assumes that "a humankind free of labor would be free of domination. Spirit knows that without being permitted to know it; this is the poverty of philosophy" (AHP, 26).

Hegel's moment is not ours. But ours, or at least that of the mid-twentieth century, had, for Adorno, become what Hegelian philosophy asserted and Marx's *Capital* critiqued: a "societalized society," in which subject and object have become one, in which everything is produced for something else, and where contradiction goes unrestrained such that pauperism increases with wealth. A philosophy that makes production into an essence is a philosophy that worships production and, implicitly, the fact that it is organized by domination. Hegel's mistake, then, is to insist that society is a concept. But it is not not concept, either. If there is no identity between the concept and its referent, the thing-in-itself, merely asserting this nonidentity only fetishizes the concept. It is as jejune to say that there is no "society in general" as to say there is no individual who is not also social. The contradiction between every real and every concept is at once an excess in the real and a negativity in relation to the concept. If this relation is confined to a narrow conception of negativity, however, the possibility for political invention is nullified. The Worker is the figure of universality for Marx, one that does not nullify the individual workers, and especially the doubly shadowed subalterns, so much as subsume them in a transcendent movement toward a value from which they have been constitutively excluded. This negation is not destructive but productive, in a manner that must remain infinitely open to a future which is, by definition, the realm of the in-existent empirical.

One must acknowledge here the degree to which the value of universality has been eviscerated in political and social movements that have arisen since the fall of the party-state, a process that commenced in the 1960s and continues to this day. And social movements organized by identitarianism (as are many rights-based movements) do not escape the charge of such universalism to the extent that they aspire to a representation iden-

tical to the interests of existing constituents. Adorno's project, aimed, it must be admitted, at the critique of totalitarianism, would force us to recognize that every aspiration to forge an adequation between concept and facticity is guilty in this respect. But the dialecticization proposed here is not, either, a mere invocation of the "to-come." If Marx shows up the fictiveness of *The Worker*, it is in order to make clear that this figure cannot close the gap between a concept's universality and a concept of the universal, on one hand, and between a concept of universality and the actuality of a violently divided world, on the other hand. The concept born of the communist hypothesis is one of radical equality. *The Worker* is the voice of that concept. The workers sound forth its inexistence, but in so doing they open the horizon in which the negative is, as already stated, a source of more.

*Capital* is not primarily a philosophical text, of course. It cannot be satisfied with emphasizing the mere opposition between mental and manual labor, as was the young Marx. Its analysis is relentlessly specific. "The Working Day" traverses the industries of potting and spinning, glass making and dye making. Yet, reading from within Adorno's nonschematic schema permits us to grasp the significance of those utterances that are so strikingly absent in Marx's other writings on labor-time. Alongside the duel within each concept, in the exchange between the Capitalist and *The Worker*, there is something like a duel between concepts. The Worker who speaks in the name of workers claims for himself the capacity to point out the inadequacy of the Capitalist's argument, but only insofar as it is not true to itself. Here, nonidentity serves the purpose of identity. What can be gained from making capitalism true to itself? In this case, merely gaining a limited working day. But such limits will have no capacity to address the fact that time itself is the medium of an extraction, of surplus value's production via the division of socially necessary and surplus labor. *The Worker* stands against the Capitalist as a mirroring identity, a reciprocal unity, the image of Capital's concretion, as Adorno says.

If the text hosted no other voices in the sound-image of a potential dialect, signifying the inadequacy between the concept and the thing, the "modest Magna Carta" might appear as an adequate solution, or, more precisely, a moment of true reconciliation, rather than what Marx elsewhere declares it to be, namely a deferral of more radical contradiction and, on that basis, the end of contradiction in a laborless world (let us not forget the literal signification of contradiction: of speaking against and otherwise). *The Worker* might thereby appear to be an already existent fiction, one in whom the workers find their voice and the means to be heard saying what

they wish to say. Their desires and their interests would converge in a perfect identity. But only a pious nostalgia or a blind messianism can imagine that the end of contradiction is a historical possibility rather than the end of history—if the end of history means not capitalism's victory but its overthrow. "The Working Day" makes it possible to think beyond this nostalgia and otherwise than messianism. That Marx did not sustain this suspicion throughout *Capital*, or that he may not even have intended it, does not change the fact that the text holds open this possibility, if not in theory, as Adorno said of Hegel, then in word, or, more precisely, the saying of the words of the workers.

### **Concluding Contra-Dictions; or, Speaking Otherwise than Capitalism**

It has been a long time since the systematic critiques of workerism were first proffered and the last nostalgias for proletarian internationalism relinquished in the name of either critical philosophy or historical realism. Those critiques came from various quarters and made different claims. Jean-François Lyotard's late lament for the tragedy of politics expresses the disappointment of the European left in the aftermath of post-Stalinism: "The Solidarity movement, which was Marx's criterion for the existence of the proletariat, never developed. Today, such an alternative no longer exists, especially after the collapse of Stalinism and post-Stalinism, the proletariat's official representative, which, after all, in the 1960s we of *Socialisme ou Barbarie* always criticized as just another fraud. Today . . . we are now dealing with an enormous System, once called capitalism, which today has no 'challenger.'"<sup>32</sup> Addressing the same historical moment, this time with China as his referent, Alessandro Russo rereads the crisis in the discourse of the Proletariat in terms of its collapse under the pressures of a technologically mediated governmentality driven by the confusion of governance with control:

In Shanghai's January Storm of 1967, the clash between millions of "red" workers and millions of "scarlet" workers led to a subjective breakdown within the very category of "working class" and therefore within the entire conceptual chain "worker-factory-class-party-

32. Jean-François Lyotard, "Resistances: A Conversation of Sergio Benvenuto with Jean-François Lyotard," *JEP: European Journal of Psychoanalysis*, no. 2 (Fall 1995–Winter 1996), [www.psychomedia.it/jep/number2/lyotard.htm](http://www.psychomedia.it/jep/number2/lyotard.htm).

state” that constituted the ideological and organizational pillar of the socialist state. The first result was in fact the collapse of the entire institutional machine of Shanghai’s party-state. . . . The promise, essential to the existence of the socialist state, of a full political recognition of workers was reduced to forms of productive and social control, disguised with loyalty to a historical-political ideal.<sup>33</sup>

And to provide one last example, Gayatri Spivak chastised both European philosophy and subaltern studies for their secret recourse to a metaphysics of presence, on which basis the working class could be imagined as spontaneously capable of self-representation. Effaced in this verily primitivist adoration of the working class as bearer of true self-knowledge were not only the tasks of ideological counterproduction (education) but also the fundamental and structuring differences encoded in gender and sexual difference, which vanished in the positing of an identity between The Worker and the workers.

As we have seen, Marx himself raised and nullified the question of gender and sexual difference in his claim that the words of the boy children could suffice, in their representative subalternity, to express the dilemmas of the women workers in the factories. Despite this failure, he did not thereby negate the task of transformative education. The voices of “The Working Day” are adduced as testimony to the failure of education, if partially reduced to a question of time for study. We cannot indulge the errors of a generation that reduced the question of education and ideological counterproduction to a matter of “consciousness raising” nor defer to the new antidialectical materialists, who claim that biopolitics negates the problem of subject formation. With the *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon*, Marx made clear that ideology is never reducible to ideas and consciousness. Epistemic transformation (education, rather than ideology) is, dialectically speaking, only possible in and through material intervention and structural change.

It is not my intention to repeat or debate the sometimes different, sometimes converging arguments cited above about the limits of The Worker as a figure around which to organize struggles for economic jus-

33. Alessandro Russo, “The Conclusive Scene: Mao and the Red Guards in July 1968,” *positions* 13, no. 3 (Winter 2005): 533–74, esp. 564. Russo is here writing in conversation with Alain Badiou, with whom he shares an understanding of Maoism as a global signifier of political inventiveness betrayed. See Badiou, “The Cultural Revolution: The Last Revolution?,” trans. Bruno Bosteels, *positions* 13, no. 3 (Winter 2005): 481–514.

tice, let alone opposition to capitalist exploitation. Nor do I aim to augment those critiques with an expanded theorization of exploitation in an era that no longer makes wage labor the exclusive medium and goal of "originary accumulation" or surplus value production. I have explored that issue elsewhere, as have many other scholars.<sup>34</sup> My aims here are more modest: to reread "The Working Day" in a manner that makes it legible as an exemplary experiment in dialectical writing—a writing that grasps dialectics as a method beyond method, and a philosophy beyond philosophy. In that project, which attempts to address the political problem of acquiring a voice in the field of representation, Marx makes the auditory register the vehicle of a performative textuality. The Worker, a concept in the mode of a character, a person in the image of a language, can be thought of dialectically not because he addresses The Capitalist but because, in his shadow, workers can be heard speaking otherwise, contradicting the transparency of his discourse, and revealing, therefore, the limits within which the concept appears to speak in their name while holding open an ideal of having a voice. We should listen, carefully.

What Adorno wrote in 1963 is all the more valid today: dialectical thought "is subject to the paradox that it has been rendered obsolete by science and scholarship while being at the same time more timely than ever in its opposition to them."<sup>35</sup> Around the world, the clamor to be heard resounds among those excluded from the surplus generated by the organization of a globalized, and not merely internationalized, economy, with a division of labor that extends across nations and that often uses gender as its alibi and medium. Often enough, these vociferous individuals imagine that they can bypass the labor of representation thanks to technologies that promise immediate expressivity. And they are abetted by those who insist on the need to avoid any and every mediating structure. (The protesters of "Occupy Wall Street" and in squares around the world assertively eschewed spokespeople.) Not incidentally, the medium for this aspiration to immediacy is termed *social media*, a word that implies that the task of socialization can adequately be assumed by technomedia rather than the exchange relations of a system governed by production. In substituting social media for a restructured sociality, they disavow representation

34. Rosalind Morris, "*Ursprüngliche Akkumulation: The Secret of an Originary Mistranslation*," forthcoming in a special issue of *boundary 2* edited by Nergis Ertürk and Özge Serin.

35. Theodor Adorno, "The Experiential Content of Hegel's Philosophy," in *Hegel: Three Studies*, 53–88, esp. 55.

but only because they assume that life can be contained within the field of representation. History has shown that spring quickly becomes autumnal. These social movements, depoliticized because totally politicized, become ephemeral in the moment that they collapse the difference between the real and the immediate. Their failure is thus the inverse of Hegel's, a fetishism not of Spirit but of concreteness; they do not grasp that what they lack vis-à-vis the concept (whether that concept is *The Worker* or the *Citizen-Subject*) is also a source of more, of what they might become if the universal is truly to be read as the social, and thus as that whose material incompleteness—its openness to the future of generations yet to come—is the form of its existence. Replacing *The Worker* with another more capacious concept, which would be more “adequate” to the real, is not a sufficient solution. Nor is dialectics itself a political solution. But as the name of a movement irreducible to “social movements,” it speaks otherwise than in the name of power without collapsing into the mere sum of speakers who have already spoken.