

Thinking
Blue

Marxism and the (Post)Human

Writing

Red

Stephen Tumino



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14.

Communism

'The final variant is called Communism' — meme

The 'Return' of Marx

The global economic crash of 2007–08 — as well as the subsequent government bailouts of the dominant bourgeois institutions responsible for it and their continued commitment to a program of social austerity in its wake around the world since — has dramatically revealed what is normally hidden behind the everyday glare of consumerism in the global North: capitalism systematically sacrifices the livelihood of the many to serve the interests of a privileged few. Suddenly millions were forced to confront the fact that capitalism is failing in exactly the way Marx and Engels predicted in *The Manifesto of the Communist Party* because it is 'incompetent to assure an existence to its slave within his slavery, because it cannot help letting him sink into such a state, that it has to feed him, instead of being fed by him'.¹ As more and more people are finding that capitalism is unable to 'assure their existence' even in the midst of the superabundant wealth of the western democracies, it is no surprise to see that 'class' has once again returned to the popular lexicon and there is a renewed interest in Marx, Marxism, and communism as workers begin to struggle to make sense of their immiserated lives and to investigate why the political means to address these conditions is so severely delimited.² However, as I will explain, the contemporary engagement with Marx is predominantly 'writerly' as it reinterprets

1 Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, 'The Manifesto of the Communist Party', *Karl Marx/Frederick Engels: Collected Works*, 50 vols (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1976), 6, pp. 495–6.

2 Jason Barker, 'Happy Birthday, Karl Marx. You Were Right!', *The New York Times*, 30 April 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/30/opinion/karl-marx-at-200-influence.html>.

class as a spectral presence in the circuits of the daily, rather than a serious engagement with the ‘speecherly’ truth of class found in Marx, i.e., class as a matter of how ‘the mode of production of material life conditions the general process of social, political and intellectual life’.³

What will be of particular importance in the contemporary encounter with the intellectual and political legacy of Marx today, I argue, is to engage with Marx’s speecherly theory of communism found in his speeches on the Paris Commune of 1871. Marx in his addresses, circulars, and correspondence during and after the Commune speaks as a founding leader of the first international workers’ party and the most intransigent defender of the seizure of State power by the Parisian proletariat. In them he focuses his critique of the Commune on what he calls the ‘infantile’ communism of the anarchists, whom he holds as largely responsible for its defeat because of how their doctrine of the ‘equality of classes’ led them to support class collaborationist policies and to subvert the international solidarity required for its success.⁴ An engagement with Marx’s critique of the infantile communism of the anarchists is necessary because if the emerging social movements of the twenty-first century are to abolish class inequality, they need to counter the ‘writerly’ conception of communism dominant on the North Atlantic left today in the writings of the ‘new communists’ (such as Badiou, Negri, and Žižek, to name a few), which subtract class from communism so as to affirm an egalitarian idea of the ‘common’ without the need of revolution. The ‘new communism’ is writerly because by subtracting class from communism it turns communism into ‘an ideal to which reality will have to adjust itself’, as Marx and Engels put it in *The German Ideology*, rather than grasp it as ‘the real movement that abolishes the present state of things’.⁵ The communism of Marx and Engels, by contrast, is ‘speecherly’ in that it emerges out a close examination of ‘*what the proletariat is*, and what, in accordance with this *being*, it will historically be compelled to do’, given the irreconcilable antagonism between owners and workers due to the exploitation of wage-labor by

3 Karl Marx, ‘Preface’ to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, *Karl Marx/Frederick Engels: Collected Works*, 50 vols (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1987), 29, pp. 261–65 (p. 263).

4 See note 459.

5 Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, ‘The German Ideology’, *Karl Marx/Frederick Engels: Collected Works*, 50 vols (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1976), 5, p. 49.

capital.⁶ As I will explain, the speakerly, because it reveals how conflicts over the social real are produced out of the dialectical series of class struggles over social wealth, is the suppressed other of the readerly/writerly opposition found in Roland Barthes' theorization.⁷ What I am calling Marx's speakerly communism, I argue, is the other of Barthes' 'readerly' transparency, on the one hand, which takes the meaning of communism to be fixed in its relation to the real in the form of a Platonic Ideal of 'equality', or, on the other, of 'writerly' inventiveness, in which communism is made into a floating signifier whose relation to the real is purely contingent, the effect of a desire. It is in Badiou's writings most of all that communism today is dissolved in the play of the readerly/writerly in opposition to its speakerly connection with class, as in Marx's speeches on the Paris Commune.

The speakerly in Marx is a matter of the way in which Marx intervenes in the daily struggles and demonstrates in concrete practice why the materialist theory of class as the motor of history is necessary to change it. Marx's speakerly approach is evident, for example, in such early texts as *The German Ideology*, where he and Engels oppose to the common sense of class as inequality, which cannot see beyond the obviousness of the proletariat as 'a crowd of scrofulous, overworked and consumptive starvelings', its connection to 'the necessity, and at the same time the condition, of a transformation both of industry and of the social structure'.⁸ These different visions of the proletariat as self-evident object ('class-in-itself') versus dialectical agent ('class-in-and-for-itself') testify to a class conflict at the level of theory, between a 'readerly' approach to class as a conventional understanding of 'a structure of signifieds' that 'imitates' an original, and a 'speakerly' one that moves beyond the common sensical appearance by laying bare the material cause that produced it.⁹ As an example of the readerly approach to class, take the way 'working class' is normally represented in the US with its association with such signifiers as 'blue collar, manual labor,

6 Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, 'The Holy Family, or Critique of Critical Criticism', *Karl Marx/Frederick Engels: Collected Works*, 50 vols (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1975), 4, pp. 5–211 (p. 37).

7 Roland Barthes, *S/Z*, trans. by Richard Miller (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 1974).

8 'German Ideology', p. 41.

9 Barthes, *S/Z*, p. 4.

low skill', and, as is more often the case today, 'white, rural, poor, Trump supporters', or, as one right-wing commentator put it, 'dysfunctional, downscale communities' that are 'in thrall to a vicious, selfish culture, used heroin needles' and 'cheap theatrical Bruce Springsteen crap', who as 'economically negative assets' are 'morally indefensible' and 'deserve to die'.¹⁰ On Barthes' theorization, such a text is readerly as it seeks to close down interpretation by attaching the meaning of working class to a 'principle of determination', or, a 'logic' that 'can be authoritatively declared to be the main one', which is of course in the above example, the logic of the market ('economically negative assets').¹¹ The writerly, by contrast, seeks to liberate the 'galaxy of signifiers' from 'any constraint of representation (of imitation)' to show how the meaning of the text is 'reversible' and 'indeterminable'.¹² In the example of the right-wing commentator above, this would entail our abandoning the impulse to 'accept or reject the text' so as to instead appreciate the sheer 'pleasure of writing' on display, which even despite the writer's conservative moral panic about the culture of the working class yet represents it as 'the image of a triumphant plural' that exceeds and resists closural meaning ('vicious', but into Springsteen, 'selfish', but sharing needles, 'dysfunctional', yet needing to be put down), which just goes to show that 'nothing exists outside the text' and its meaning is undecidable.¹³ The writerly in the end is not opposed to the readerly as they are simply different 'interpretations' of the real that disconnect the meaning of the text from its speakerly source of production in the historical series of class conflicts over meanings.¹⁴

On Marx and Engels' theorization in *The German Ideology*, as the 'readerly' description of class is intellectually and politically indefensible because of its deviation from the 'ideals' of the culture, it necessitates a middling 'writerly' mode of addressing class by re-interpreting it, in the way, for example, they demonstrate how Feuerbach, despite his

10 Kevin D Williamson, 'Chaos in the Family, Chaos in the State: The White Working Class's Dysfunction', *National Review*, 17 March 2016, <https://www.nationalreview.com/2016/03/donald-trump-white-working-class-dysfunction-real-opportunity-needed-not-trump>.

11 S/Z, pp. 5–6.

12 Ibid., pp. 5–6.

13 Ibid., pp. 4–6.

14 Ibid., p. 5.

materialist inversion of Hegel himself, 'relapses into idealism' when confronted with the material reality of the proletariat and 'take[s] refuge' in the "higher perception" that the proletariat finds its "compensation in the species".¹⁵ On the writerly logic, when Feuerbach describes the working class as 'a crowd of scrofulous, overworked and consumptive starvelings', what he is actually doing in a moment of sheer writerly pleasure is de-inscribing the connection of the material to the Hegelian Idea so as to re-inscribe the meaning of class by attaching it to his own materialist concept of the species.¹⁶ Marx, conversely, implicates the writerly in supporting the readerly against the speakerly when he argues in his *Theses on Feuerbach* that the 'species' is in reality an effect of 'the ensemble of the social relations' and not an abstract 'essence'.¹⁷ It was to oppose the 'writerly' negation of idealism in post-Hegelian German philosophy for the way it conflated critique with the agent of change by merely 'interpreting the existing world in a different way' rather than inquiring into 'the connection of German philosophy and German reality' that led Marx to formulate his famous eleventh thesis about how the philosopher's only 'interpret' the world rather than struggle to change it.¹⁸ The way to actually change class entails a speakerly negation of the one-sided writerly negation of the readerly common sense appearance of class as 'inequality' that is committed to speaking the truth about '*what the proletariat is*, and what, in accordance with this *being*, it will historically be compelled to do'.¹⁹ The speakerly approach to class represents the dialectical negation of the readerly/writerly, which explains why grasping the real of class requires understanding how the 'aim and historical action' of the proletariat is inscribed 'in its own life situation as well as in the whole organisation of bourgeois society today'.²⁰ Class, in short, is a material relation of economic exploitation that generates political and ideological antagonism not simply social inequality and cultural difference.

Although Marx's commitment to the speakerly as a critique of the

15 'German Ideology', p. 41.

16 *Ibid.*, p. 41.

17 Karl Marx, 'Theses on Feuerbach', *Karl Marx/Frederick Engels: Collected Works*, 50 vols (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1975), 5, pp. 3–8 (p. 4).

18 'German Ideology', p. 30.

19 Marx and Engels, 'Holy Family', p. 37.

20 *Ibid.*, p. 37.

readerly/writerly mode of sense making is evident even in his early writings, it is most forcefully manifest in his ‘speeches’, i.e., in the many circulars, addresses, pamphlets, meeting minutes, and international correspondence that Marx generated in his organizational engagement with the day to day struggles of the proletariat that make up roughly half of the fifty volumes of Marx and Engels’ *Collected Works*. It is in these texts more so than the more transdisciplinary theoretical writings with which Marx and Engels are canonically identified — produced during periods when workers’ militancy was low — that we can see most clearly demonstrated the need for the speakerly in the daily struggles so as to counter the readerly/writerly in the workers’ movement and produce the class solidarity required for international communism. Feuerbach’s theory of class is readerly: he takes the passivity of the proletariat as a self-evidency in need of no explanation, and because he abhors its misery, attempts to negate it in the only way that he can as an isolated individual, through a writerly act of re-interpretation. This is understandable given that Feuerbach was writing before the emergence of a politically organized working class movement capable of challenging bourgeois hegemony. In this period Marx and Engels themselves could only argue for the speakerly in general terms as the negation of philosophical idealism and advocate for ‘making the critique (*Kritik*) of politics’ tantamount to ‘participation in politics’ by identifying critique with ongoing ‘real struggles’ on the grounds that consciousness of the meaning of political action is something that must be acquired, ‘even if [the world] does not want to’.²¹ In the mid-1840s Marx had already grasped the need for the speakerly so that the masses would not blind themselves to the content of their own movement, but he had not yet formulated the necessity of a revolutionary organization especially dedicated to this task in an ongoing way, which would not be until the founding of the Communist League in 1847, and more significantly, the First Communist International, the International Workingmen’s Association, in 1864. In between these dates lies the continental revolutions of 1848 and the discovery that the proletarian revolutions of the nineteenth century would not simply extend or

21 Karl Marx, ‘Marx to Ruge in Kreuznach’, September 1843, *Karl Marx/Frederick Engels: Collected Works*, 50 vols (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1975), 3, pp. 141–45 (p. 144).

complete the bourgeois revolutions of the eighteenth in the way implied by Hegel's idealist dialectic in which political events are symbolically codified and philosophically ratified only through their historic repetition. In *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* of 1852, what Hegel 'forgot to add', Marx argues, is that historical repetition is not necessarily the raising of the spontaneous act of the initial event to the principle of 'self-consciousness' on its reoccurrence, but inevitably 'farcical' because of how it mystifies in the imaginary of the actors the material causes of their actions lying in the existing social relations.²² It is an irony of history, on Marx's account, that precisely during times of 'revolutionary crisis' when 'men seem engaged in revolutionising themselves and things, in creating something that has never yet existed' that they 'anxiously conjure up the spirits of the past [...] in order to present the new scene of world history' in a 'time-honoured disguise and [...] borrowed language'.²³ The irony is due to the fact that the bourgeois revolutions Marx is discussing have had to 'dull themselves to their own content' as the capitalist relations they sought to establish entail the subjugation of the working masses whose emancipation they must promise so as to enlist their enthusiastic participation. Marx therefore argues that, by contrast, the social revolutions of the nineteenth century will have to 'critique themselves constantly' so that the workers may draw the necessary lesson that the content or object of their revolutionary movement to abolish class far outstrips the revolutionary phrases of the past that have promised but failed to do so.²⁴ It is not until Marx's speecherly engagement with the Paris Commune of 1871 that we see Marx put this historical lesson into practice in his critique of anarchism for its regression back into the writerly idealism of socialism's infancy through its preaching of 'the equality of classes'.

In Marx's speeches on anarchism given during and after the Paris Commune, later published as *Fictitious Splits in the International* (1872), he argues that the anarchist interpretation of communism as the 'equality of classes' represents a return to the infantile phase of the socialist movement, when the proletariat 'had not yet developed sufficiently

22 Karl Marx, 'The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte', *Karl Marx/Frederick Engels: Collected Works*, 50 vols (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1979), 11, pp. 99–197.

23 *Ibid.*, p. 104.

24 *Ibid.*, p. 106.

to act as a class' and could only produce 'sectarian movements' that formed around 'certain thinkers [who] criticise social antagonisms and suggest fantastic solutions [...] which the mass of workers is left to accept, preach, and put into practice'.²⁵ By contrast, Marx argues, the 'real organisation of the working class for struggle', represented by the First International — especially in its role as public defender of the Paris Commune at 'a time when the old world is seeking a way of crushing it' — stands 'in inverse ratio' to the 'socialist sectarianism' of its early days.²⁶ The communism of the anarchists is 'writerly', on Marx's account, because it takes 'what all socialists understand... anarchy' to mean — that 'the aim of the proletarian movement, the abolition of classes, ha[ving] been attained, the power of the State, which serves to keep the great majority of producers under the yoke of a numerically small exploiting minority, disappears' (*Fictitious Splits* 121) — and inverts its meaning into a 'children's primer' about the 'equality of classes' (Marx to Bolte 252) that would dissolve the International into 'small "groupes" or "communes", which [...] are to form an "association", but not a state'.²⁷ Because the anarchists reverse the meaning of communism from being 'the aim of the proletarian movement' arising out of its class antagonism with capital, into an ideological commitment to an ideal of 'equality' as 'the most infallible means' of smashing the power of capital, it is 'abstentionist by [its] very nature', according to Marx, and thus eschews 'all real action, politics, strikes, coalitions, or, in a word [...] any unified movement'.²⁸ In short, the anarchists put forward a writerly reinterpretation of communism as a sectarian belief in equality as an abstract ideal against Marx's speakerly understanding of communism as arising out of the concrete needs of the proletariat in active struggle 'to set free the elements of the new society with which the old collapsing

25 Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, 'Fictitious Splits in the International', Private Circular from the General Council of the International Working Men's Association, January-March 1872, *Karl Marx/Frederick Engels: Collected Works*, 50 vols (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1988), 23, pp. 79–123 (pp. 106–7).

26 *Ibid.*, pp. 121–22; Karl Marx, 'Marx to Friedrich Bolte in New York', 23 November 1871, *Karl Marx/Frederick Engels: Collected Works*, 50 vols (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1989), 44, pp. 251–59 (p. 252).

27 'Fictitious Splits', p. 121; 'Marx to Bolte', p. 252; 'Marx to Engels in Manchester', 20 June 1866, *Karl Marx/Frederick Engels: Collected Works*, 50 vols (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1987), 42, pp. 286–87 (p. 287).

28 'Fictitious Splits', p. 106.

bourgeois society itself is pregnant'.²⁹ Class is what explains this infantile regression to the pre-scientific sectarian socialism, according to Marx.

In order to contrast Marx's speakerly communism as 'the *real* movement which abolishes the present state of things' with the writerly communism of the anarchists for whom communism is an egalitarian '*ideal* to which reality will have to adjust itself', it is necessary to clarify that the '*continual struggle*' of scientific socialism against the 'socialist sectarianism' within the International undertaken by Marx and Engels — both 'at the *Congresses*, but far more in the private dealings of the General Council with the individual sections' — is a class struggle.³⁰ In class terms, the struggle reflected the fact that the International admitted 'people of all sorts [...] communists, Proudhonists, unionists, commercial unionists, co-operators, Bakuninists, etc.', men and women of 'wildly differing opinions' who all aim 'for the complete emancipation of the working classes'.³¹ It was precisely because the International represented a common, a trans-class plurality, that the 'lawyers, journalists, and other bourgeois doctrinaires' were able to use it 'to organize not in accordance with the requirements of the struggle it [the proletariat] is daily and hourly compelled to wage, but according to the vague notions of a future society entertained by some dreamers'.³² Marx's speeches on the Paris Commune reveal this continual class struggle carried out by the General Council of the International 'against sects [...]' which sought to assert themselves within the International against the real movement of the working class' by preaching such 'childish' nonsense as 'abstention from politics' and the '*equality of classes*'.³³ In a speech at a conference in London in September 1871, Engels argued that the 'abstention from politics' put forward by the 'professional sectarians' in

29 Karl Marx, 'Civil War in France', Address of the General Council of the International Workingmen's Association, 30 May 1871, *Karl Marx/Frederick Engels: Collected Works*, 50 vols (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1986), 22, pp. 307–59 (p. 335).

30 'German Ideology', p. 49; 'Marx to Bolte', p. 252.

31 'Engels to Carlo Cafiero in Barletta', 1–3 July 1871, *Karl Marx/Frederick Engels: Collected Works*, 50 vols (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1989), 44, pp. 161–65 (pp. 162–63).

32 'Marx to Paul Lafargue in Madrid', 21 March 1872, *Karl Marx/Frederick Engels: Collected Works*, 50 vols (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1989), 44, pp. 346–52 (p. 347); Frederick Engels, 'The Congress of Sonvillier and the International', January 1872, *Karl Marx/Frederick Engels: Collected Works*, 50 vols (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1988), 23, pp. 64–70 (p. 66).

33 'Marx to Bolte', p. 255.

the International would put the party in an ‘impossible’ position given the ‘real life, political oppression [...] imposed on [the workers] by the existing governments... particularly after the Paris Commune’ when ‘all the European governments [were] united against it’.³⁴ Abstention from politics in the context of an ongoing class struggle, in short, amounted to ‘bourgeois politics’.³⁵ In other words, the anarchist tendency organized by Bakunin within the International represented the bourgeois influence within the vanguard party of the workers, doing the work of the police by destroying what makes the workers’ party a threat to the bourgeois State in the first place — its organization of the international proletariat from a ‘class-in-itself’ into a ‘class-for-itself’ conscious of the revolutionary necessity of taking power and using it to emancipate society from the rule of capital so as to establish a classless society.³⁶

The ‘speecherly’ Marx is the Marx who directly addresses the concrete needs of workers in their daily struggles and connects the issues of the day with the historic revolutionary tasks of the class as a whole to abolish the economic exploitation of wage-labor/capital

34 ‘Congress of Sonvillier’, p. 68; Frederick Engels, ‘On the Political Action of the Working Class’, Handwritten Text of the Speech Delivered at the Conference Session on 21 September 1871, *Karl Marx/Frederick Engels: Collected Works*, 50 vols (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1986), 22, pp. 417–18 (p. 417).

35 *Ibid.*, p. 417.

36 Not only did the anti-authoritarianism of the anarchist opposition within the International advance the ‘class terrorism’ (Marx, ‘Civil War’, p. 329) of the bourgeoisie against the workers’ vanguard from within, it also destroyed the Commune itself because, ‘if there *had been* a little more authority and centralization in the Paris Commune, it would have triumphed over the bourgeois’ (‘Engels to C. Terzaghi’, p. 293). As Engels explains, the anarchist opposition to ‘authority and centralization’ as ‘two things to be condemned outright’ shows ‘a superstitious reverence for the state’ (‘Introduction to *Civil War in France*’, p. 190) by people who ‘think they have taken quite an extraordinary bold step forward when they have rid themselves of belief’ (p. 190) in it. ‘Those who say this either do not know what a revolution is, or are revolutionaries in name only’, he concludes (‘Engels to C. Terzaghi’, p. 293). It is this that explains for Engels that which is ‘the hardest thing to understand’ about the Commune — ‘the holy awe’ with which the revolutionaries ‘remained standing respectfully outside the gates of the Bank of France’, which would have ‘been worth more than ten thousand hostages’ in pressuring the Versailles government in favor of peace with the Commune’ (Introduction, p. 187; see also, ‘Marx to Domela-Nieuwenhuis’). For Marx, what defeated the Commune was the anarchist dogma of the ‘equality of classes’ that enticed the Central Committee of the National Guard, dominated by Blanquists and Proudhonists, to forego such measures they feared would ‘start a civil war’ and caused them to ‘surrender[] power too soon, to make way for the Commune’ (‘Marx to Kugelmann’ p. 132).

relations and advance the communist revolution in which the ‘the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all’.³⁷ As Lukács argues in his study of Lenin’s thought, Marx’s speecherly interventions also demonstrate the ‘actuality of the revolution’ and how ‘the development of capitalism turned proletarian revolution into an everyday issue’.³⁸ It is in the speecherly mode of address that Marx, to put it another way, demonstrates the unity of theory and practice, specifically the unity of his materialist theory of the self-negation of capitalism through the working out of its own law of value and the dialectic of the workers’ movement that forms and is shaped by the inevitable systemic crises. I focus on Marx’s speecherly interventions within the contestations of the International following the defeat of the Paris Commune of 1871 — the first successful revolutionary seizure of power by the modern proletariat to build a classless society — because I believe that these texts provide us with necessary lessons capable of guiding the new working class struggles of the twenty-first century from their currently reactive, defensive, and reformist orientation onto the revolutionary path of building international communism. Marx’s speeches on the Commune and their speecherly mode of address are especially important today as workers are once again in a militant state to challenge capitalism while lacking a revolutionary class theory to do so because of the dominance of the ‘writerly’ view of class. As the popular anti-austerity movements around the world show — from Occupy to Bernie Sanders’ ‘political revolution’ in the US, from Syriza in Greece and the Indignados in Spain, from Nuit Debout in France to Die Linke in Germany — workers are in a militant state to challenge capitalism at a time when ‘all the *material* necessary for the social revolution’ is available, while what is lacking is the ‘*spirit of generalization and revolutionary ardour*’ to overthrow it.³⁹ These movements are guided by a ‘readerly’ view of class as ‘inequality’ that merely (re)describes what is already well known, joined to a ‘writerly’ theory of how to change it — a ‘horizontalism’, or, ‘commons-ism’, that suppresses class

37 ‘Manifesto’, p. 506.

38 Georg Lukács, *Lenin: A Study on the Unity of his Thought* (New York: New Left Books, 1970), p. 13.

39 Karl Marx, ‘Confidential Communication’, *Karl Marx/Frederick Engels: Collected Works*, 50 vols (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1985), 21, pp. 112–24 (p. 118).

consciousness in order to build coalitions around popular demands for reform that maintain the global system of wage slavery at a time of crisis. The resurgence of Left populism today has already proven itself to be unequal to the tasks of revolutionary working class politics, not only in places like Venezuela, Brazil, and Argentina, but also in Greece, Spain, and France. In all these countries the Left was brought to power by a popular wave of struggles against capitalist austerity only to be co-opted by the bourgeois state to divert the insurgent workers to the path of peaceful reform and acceptance of ever more austerity. These failures have now strengthened the rise of the reactionary Right, a 'global Trumpism', that in an economic populist rhetoric that (re)writes class as cultural pride seeks to scapegoat the cultural 'other' as responsible for the crisis.⁴⁰ It is in Marx's speeches to the International that we can find an answer to this contradiction as to why the working class fails to make the revolution despite the widespread popularity of anti-capitalist and pro-socialist sentiment due to the dominance of bourgeois ideology in the workers' movement. Against the readerly/writerly view of class dominant today, I argue that it is necessary to turn to Marx's speakerly one to advance global social(ist) struggle. By focusing mostly on Badiou, I will contrast Marx's speakerly approach to communism with the writerly theory of the anarchists, which is once again dominant today in the textwares of the 'new communists'. In the writerly new communism, class-consciousness is voided of the material antagonism inscribed in the productive base of society between capital and labor and class resignified as merely a discursive difference and lifestyle politics.

Badiou's Writerly Marx(ism)

Marx's speakerly engagement with the Paris Commune has once again become an important proof text for thinking about communism today. One reason for this is because of the way that Alain Badiou has made them exemplary for defending the 'Idea of Communism' against the 'dominant imperative in the world today' to 'live without

40 Mark Blyth, 'Global Trumpism', *Foreign Affairs*, 15 November 2016, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2016-11-15/global-trumpism>.

an Idea' as a 'mere human animal' following the 'Statist constraints of mere survival'.⁴¹ The idea of communism Badiou locates in Marx's speeches on the Commune is a matter of how, for him, they renounce the 'impure language of the State' by remaining true to the 'fundamental randomness' of the 'evental origins' of the communist Idea.⁴² According to Badiou, Marx's speeches 'admit' as their own real this 'aleatory, elusive, slippery, evanescent dimension' and 'invent a new political subject' that by implication 'ruptures' Marx's materialist theory of history found in such texts as *Capital* and *The Manifesto of the Communist Party*.⁴³ As in Benjamin's writings on Marxism that seek to bring dialectics to a 'standstill', Badiou's reading too seeks to 'blast a specific era out of the homogenous course of history' so as to make communism into a cause-less event, 'a messianic cessation of happening'.⁴⁴ On this messianic logic, Badiou strikes from the annals of communism the founding texts of Marxist theory that have guided the speakerly praxis of communist militancy in the daily struggles against the dominance of bourgeois ideology in the workers' movement on the grounds that by using language in an explanatory way, they identify the Real (the logic of History) and the Idea (Communism) and thus deny the need for Symbolic 'subjectivation'.⁴⁵ What Badiou is alluding to as Marx's 'impure' language is the way that the *Manifesto* argues that because 'the development of Modern Industry [...] cuts from under its feet the very foundation on which the bourgeoisie produces and appropriates products [...] its fall and the victory of the proletariat are equally inevitable', or, in the words of *Capital*, the 'expropriators are expropriated [...] by the action of the immanent laws of capitalistic

41 Alain Badiou, *The Communist Hypothesis* (New York: Verso Books, 2010), pp. 231, 233, 252. Badiou's defense of the 'Idea' of communism is part of his broader philosophical project to rethink dialectical materialism as 'materialist dialectic' that figures the real as a set of 'generic multiplicities' that 'no linguistic predicate allows [...] to be discerned' and 'no proposition can explicitly designate' that therefore 'exist as exceptions to what there is' (*Logic of Worlds*, pp. 4, 6).

42 *Communist Hypothesis*, pp. 244, 255.

43 *Ibid.*, p. 247; Alain Badiou and Peter Engleman, *Philosophy and the Idea of Communism*, trans. by Susan Spitzer (Boston and New York: Polity Press, 2015), p. 32.

44 Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. by Howard Eland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1999), p. 865; Walter Benjamin, 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', in *Illuminations* (New York: Schocken, 1977), p. 263.

45 *Communist Hypothesis*, p. 239.

production itself'.⁴⁶ According to Badiou, Marx's historical materialist theory of communism as arising from the self-negation of capitalism through its own laws of motion represents the imposition of an authoritarian 'State-fiction' that attempts to 'maintain the theory of the structure under the rupture of the revolutionary event' that, conversely, Marx remains true to in his speeches on the Commune.⁴⁷ For Badiou, the State as a material force doesn't actually exist: it is a 'fictional structure' or 'symbolic narrative' with the function of containing awareness of the 'political real' whose 'fundamental randomness' represents for him the 'evental origins' of what is taken to be true.⁴⁸ By making the idea that a classless society is a necessary consequence of class society, Badiou argues that Marx in his historical and theoretical writings constructs a 'State fiction' that identifies the Real and Idea and, by implication, reveals the 'unsuitability' of the 'Party-form' and the 'Socialist State' for the communist cause.⁴⁹

Badiou, in other words, constructs a binary according to which Marx's speeches of the Commune are to be celebrated for their embrace of the aleatory event, while his theoretical writings are read as rigid impositions on the real. Marx's speeches are thus made the space of 'openness', the 'image of a triumphant plural' that is the writerly for Barthes, while his writings are the space of 'closure', the readerly 'constraint of representation (of imitation)'.⁵⁰ Such binaries and their associated values may seem at first glance to be a reversal of the Derridean framework in which speech is associated with metaphysical presence ('logocentrism') and writing is associated with the space of free play and plurality.⁵¹ Badiou's binaries are, in actuality, a reiteration of the class logic of what Derrida calls 'writing' and what Barthes calls the 'writerly'. Badiou's treatment of Marx's speeches, I will demonstrate, updates the (ideo)logic by which what becomes privileged is that which exceeds the order of the conceptual. In short, behind what has become

46 'Manifesto', p. 496; Karl Marx, *Capital, A Critique of Political Economy*, vol. I, *Karl Marx/Frederick Engels: Collected Works*, 50 vols (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1983), 35, p. 750.

47 *Communist Hypothesis*, p. 239; *Idea of Communism*, p. 35.

48 *Communist Hypothesis*, pp. 238–39, 244.

49 *Ibid.*, p. 257.

50 *S/Z*, p. 5.

51 Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998).

known as the 'new communism' is a theory of language that, like all forms of idealism, severs consciousness from material relations in order to make consciousness (the Communist Ideal) the basis of history, and to free up 'difference' (as in the neo-/liberal discourse of freedom from the State) from determination by class. The speaking subject, for Badiou, is a subject whose agency is equated with an act of pure inventiveness, a voluntarist act that breaks from the historical material series as in the bourgeois imaginary of the subject as existing above and beyond its material determinations. Such a notion of the subject is of course necessary to justify the coercion of wage-labor/capital relations under the guise of a voluntary exchange between equal persons so that the consequences of class society appear as merely personal successes and failures that cannot be systemically explained. Marx's speeches on the Commune offer not only an urgently needed intervention into the bourgeois re-writing of communism as a post-revolutionary movement in defense of difference, randomness and the event, but also develop a materialist theory of language and consciousness that explains the dialectic of agency from out of its material socioeconomic preconditions.

By emptying Marxism of its materialist theory of history, and re-writing it as a Statist constraint upon the Idea of Communism, Badiou seeks to defend it as an exception to what he calls the reigning 'democratic materialism' that reduces life to 'bodies and languages' without access to 'truth'.⁵² What Badiou assumes, as do conservatives everywhere, is that capitalism is a cultural logic of homogenization which reduces the multiplicity of life to brute matter, thereby eliminating its value in-itself. In fact, it is this same reactionary logic which, as I have marked, leads Badiou to reject all past forms of communism as 'state fictions' because of what he deems their overly reductive theory of the social as divided by class. In contrast, he seeks to imbue matter with an immanent force of resistance to any and all 'reductive' theories of the social. In this sense, it becomes clear that what is meant by the 'material' in Badiou's 'materialist dialectic' has more in common with Barthes' idea of the 'writerly' text as 'the image of a triumphant plural' that militates against 'readerly' common sense than it does with Marx's theory of the material as class. Because of the way it voids materialism of its class base by equating

52 *Logic of Worlds*, pp. 3, 5.

the material with the uncontainable 'spacing' of language, Badiou's is a writerly idea of communism.

The way Badiou pluralizes Marx's writings into a multiplicity of voices in which the inventive literariness of Marx's speeches testifies to a desire to subtract the Commune from its class base follows Barthes' opposition of the 'writerly' to the 'readerly' code. The readerly code, according to Barthes, is that mode of intelligibility in which the text as a 'whole' possesses a value through a shared agreement between 'the producer of the text and its user, between its owner and its customer' as to its meaning.⁵³ The assumption here is that the 'literary institution' which circulates the text as a commodity requires that texts be thought to contain a singular meaning produced by the realist code of mimesis by representing a ready-made world with predetermined meanings that have already been produced.⁵⁴ Similarly, in Badiou's discourse, the 'readerly' Marx is a product of the 'contemporary consensus' brought about by the dominant 'democratic materialism' that reduces the 'plurality of languages' to a 'juridical equality' that 'aims to regulate all other languages and to govern all bodies' in a 'dictatorial and totalitarian' way.⁵⁵ In other words, what matters for Badiou is securing spaces of cultural playfulness and inventiveness of interpretation as acts of resistance within themselves. Badiou's opposing an 'inventive' or writerly Marx that uses language in a non-mimetic 'truth-full' way, as against a readerly Marx who explains the logic of capitalism by using language in an impurely mimetic and authoritarian way, relies on Barthes' ludic theory of signification in which the 'writerly' figures as an 'ideal text' that models a subjectivity freed of any regulative restraint on the pleasures of 'interpretation'.⁵⁶ Rather than interpret the text in an Author-itarian way as 'a structure of signifieds' that 'imitates' an original, Barthes proposes that the writerly foregrounds the 'plurality' of meaning that constitutes the text as 'a galaxy of signifiers' that 'has no beginning' whose meaning is therefore 'reversible' and 'indeterminable' because 'nothing exists outside the text' on which to fix a 'principle of determination' as 'there is never a *whole* of the text' or a 'logic'

53 S/Z, pp. 4, 6.

54 Ibid., p. 4.

55 *Logic of Worlds*, p. 2.

56 S/Z, p. 5.

that 'can be authoritatively declared to be the main one'.⁵⁷ It is on the basis of this same writerly understanding of signification that allows Badiou to argue that Marx's speeches on the Commune make the Idea of Communism correlative with a non-totalizable 'multiplicity' that exceeds language and thus is engaged in the 'construction [...] of a new political subject' that would have 'universal value' for 'humanity as a whole', what he calls the 'generic [...] aim of a politics', whose presence and agency, because it is missing from Marx's scientific socialist theory, voids it of any positive knowledge of the real grounded in class such as is necessary to change it.⁵⁸ The voiding of Marx's scientific conception of communism as inscribed in the logic of class is thus made synonymous by Badiou with opposition to 'Statist constraints'.⁵⁹

By saying Marx's theory is 'true' to the extent that it remains faithful to the *alea* of the real against which its explanatory grasp of history as class struggle is a 'State fiction', Badiou reveals his fidelity to the writerly Marxism that has become dominant since Derrida's *Specters of Marx*, which is predicated on pluralizing Marx into a multiplicity of 'voices' (following Blanchot in 'Marx's Three Voices') and dematerializing the social totality into a spectral 'hauntology' that mystifies class for the benefit of the owners.⁶⁰ Class, on this writerly logic, is made into a cultural difference of 'interpretations' over the real — of an 'event-al' discursive regime that is open to the other, versus a 'totalizing' one that reduces the other to the self-same — so that ending class is equated with the freedom of speech from any regulative restraint, rather than freedom from the exploitation of wage-labor by capital. Badiou's pluralization of Marx's speech into an 'impure fiction' on the one hand and 'purely inventive' on the other requires identifying the idea of communism with the language game of constructing a purified discourse subtracted of class, which actually explains language as 'an arena of class struggle'.⁶¹ In its opposition to referentiality, Badiou's voiding communism of class

57 Ibid., pp. 5–6.

58 *Idea of Communism*, pp. 32, 45; *Metapolitics*, p. 81.

59 *Communist Hypothesis*, p. 252.

60 Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, The Work of Mourning & the New International* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994); Maurice Blanchot, 'Marx's Three Voices', in *Friendship*, trans. by Elizabeth Rottenberg (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), pp. 98–101.

61 V. N. Vološinov, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, trans. by Ladislav Matejka and I. R. Titunik (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), p. 23.

echoes Paul de Man's linguistic objection to historical materialism as a 'poor read[ing] of Marx' that confuses the 'materiality of the signifier with the materiality of what it signifies', or, in other words, 'linguistic with natural reality [...] reference with phenomenalism'.⁶² The point of reading Marx on this writerly view is not to understand the world so as to change it, but to interpret Marx's text as an 'allegory of reading' in which the 'undecidability' of meaning is made synonymous with the liberation of meaning beyond all Author-itarian codes.

The anti-dialectics of the writerly is indebted to Saussure's synchronic theory of language as a self-enclosed system '*without positive terms*' and the formal ahistorical opposition it maintains between *langue* — language as a system of signs, the codes and conventions of a culture — and *parole* — language as a speech-act.⁶³ Classical Aristotelian poetics traditionally essentializes the speaking subject as the origin of thought and reduces language to a kind of (passive) tool or medium for the (active) communication of ideas. Derrida has foregrounded how language is not a passive thing but the cultural condition of possibility for all knowing and has argued that the experience of the speaking-subject (*parole*) is on the one hand a category error — a signifier taken to be a transcendental signified — and, on the other, the trace of a desire that exceeds and haunts language as such (as the 'singular', 'unique', or, a 'hope' to-come). However, the binary opposition of *langue*/*parole*, regardless of which is taken to be the effect of the other, reifies language from the labor process in which it is always a part — language as 'practical consciousness', which is the forum where people become aware of the class struggle and 'fight it out'.⁶⁴ Language is in actuality a social medium that people use to reflect on the material outside of language that exists independently of what they hope and desire it to be so as to change it. And, because humans are divided into classes with opposed interests we find that the way they use language to conceptualize the real reflects their material conflicts of interest, either to mystify the real so as to ideologically resecure the status quo, or, to critique

62 Paul de Man, *The Resistance to Theory* (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1986), p. 11.

63 Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, ed. by Charles Balley and Albert Sechehaye, trans. by Wade Baskin (New York: McGraw Hill, 1966), p. 120.

64 Marx and Engels, 'German Ideology', p. 44; Marx, 'Preface to *Contribution*', p. 263.

ideology and produce the knowledge necessary to make change. The recognition of language as praxical 'this-sided' relation to the world is what is speakerly in Marx, and it explains how 'speech' (the individual speaking body of *parole*) and culture (the forms of thought codified in *langue*) are produced by social labor. The speakerly, language as social praxis, is a transformative social process in which humans use sounds and images (signifiers) to conceptualize (signifieds) 'the ensemble of the social relations' so as to coordinate themselves to engage with and change their relation to the social totality.⁶⁵ As I will explain more fully below, in Marx's speeches on the Paris Commune, there is developed a dialectical theory of the material that layers the readerly/writerly with the speakerly dimension of language in such a way as to reveal how language is a revolutionary force capable of grasping the material outside of social praxis.

Against the ludic writerly Marx(ism) of Badiou I argue that Marx's speeches on the Paris Commune are neither readerly (mimetic) nor writerly (performative), but speakerly (explanatory) in how they use language to conceptualize the existing so as to practically explain how the workers alone are able to change it. It is the revolutionary value of the speakerly in Marx that I argue needs to be reactivated today against the return to Marx on the North Atlantic left as a messianic preacher for a merely heuristic idea of communism as an 'event-al' cause-less arrival in order to transform the emergent class struggles of the twenty-first century into revolutionary struggles for international communism.⁶⁶

The Speakerly Marx(ism)

What I understand as Marx's 'speakerly' theory of communism requires analyzing how, specifically in his discussions on the Paris Commune, in the Addresses to the General Council of the International that were later published as *The Civil War in France*, he goes about addressing that 'sphinx'-like question that has proven 'so tantalizing to the bourgeois mind' — 'What is the Commune?'.⁶⁷ By engaging this

65 Marx, 'Theses', p. 4.

66 On messianic materialism see Chapter 7 and, for an example, see Slavoj Žižek and Costas Douzinas, eds. *The Idea of Communism* (New York: Verso Books, 2010).

67 'Civil War', p. 328.

question, Marx is able to critique the ‘multiplicity of interpretations’ surrounding the Paris Commune so as to uncover its ‘true secret’ — that it was ‘essentially a working class government’ that set itself the task of ‘work[ing] out the economic emancipation of labor’.⁶⁸ By posing the question ‘What is the Commune?’, Marx was opposing the dismissive ‘readerly’ account of the Commune that reduces it to the self-same as the terroristic other of civilization given by the monarchist Party of Order who could only see in its advent the end of ‘family, religion, order and property’.⁶⁹ Marx’s critique of the readerly, however, is not that it is insufficiently or disastrously mimetic, as Badiou would have it. To simply show how the reactionaries are wrong about the idea of communism would not amount to a critique, of course, and for Marx it is critique alone that ‘represents [...] the proletariat’ because ‘it includes in its comprehension and affirmative recognition of the existing state of things, at the same time also, the recognition of the negation of that state’ and thereby aligns itself with the only class ‘whose vocation in history is the overthrow of the capitalist mode of production and the final abolition of all classes’.⁷⁰ What Marx therefore does in his speech on the Commune is to demonstrate how it represents a ‘ruthless critique [*Kritik*] of all that exists’ because of the way it laid bare ‘the deeper under-currents of modern society’ and exposed how the ‘multiplicity

68 Ibid., p. 334.

69 Ibid., p. 313.; The depiction of the communists as against family, religion, order, and property by the ‘feudal, liberal, and police press’ (‘Fictitious Splits’, p. 101) was the main way to culturally divide the workers to lower their wages and block their political organization as a class. Consider that the International Workingmen’s Association, that under Marx’s direction was most associated with the Commune in the public consciousness, was at that time in many ways the sole working class organization, functioning as a trade union in countries where they were illegal, as well as a mutual aid society (taking in refugees from the Paris Commune, e.g.) many years before social welfare services were adopted by bourgeois governments. It had also already proven its necessity to the workers’ movement in practice by, for example, preventing foreign workers from being used as strike breakers in Britain, building support for national liberation in countries like Poland and Italy which had yet to emancipate the peasants from serfdom, as well as leading British textile workers (themselves dependent on the cotton trade) to oppose slavery during the American Civil War. By dividing the workers along cultural lines of religion and family values, the owners sought to destroy the global working class solidarity brought about by the First Communist International.

70 Karl Marx, ‘Afterword to the Second German Edition of *Capital*’, *Karl Marx/Frederick Engels: Collected Works*, 50 vols (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1996), 35, pp. 2–20 (pp. 16, 20).

of interpretations [and] interests which construed it in their favour' failed to penetrate 'the surface of this tremendous historic event'.⁷¹ Thus, against the terrified reaction to the Paris Commune by the Party of Order — 'But this is Communism, "impossible" Communism!' — Marx explains why, despite their being factually correct — 'Yes, gentlemen, the Commune intended to abolish that class-property, which makes the labour of the many the wealth of the few' — they are unable to grasp its historic material necessity.⁷² Their failure to explain the Commune reflected their own class interest, as one of the effects of the Commune was indeed to expose the 'hideous face' of 'bourgeois civilization and justice' whose 'undisguised savagery and lawless revenge [...] comes out in its lurid light whenever the slaves and drudges of that order rise against their masters'.⁷³ But, Marx's critique does not stop there, as he encourages his working class audience to also consider the 'strange fact' that no sooner did the workers of Paris 'take the subject [of governance] into their own hands with a will' and at last concretely demonstrated how to go about 'uprooting the economical foundations upon which rests the existence of classes, and therefore, class rule', that all the 'tall talk and all the immense literature, for the last sixty years, about the Emancipation of Labour' of 'bourgeois-doctrinaires' arose in unison to mystify 'the deeper under-currents of modern society'.⁷⁴ These representatives of "'possible" Communism', he explains, speak for those 'members of the ruling classes who are intelligent enough to perceive the impossibility of continuing the present system' and have therefore 'become the obtrusive and full-mouthed apostles of co-operative production'.⁷⁵ If, on the one hand, Marx's critique of the fearful resistance to the speecherly as "'impossible" Communism' implicates the readerly mode of address in the class interests of the landlords, his critique of the "'possible" Communism' of the socialist literati, on the other, shows his opposition to the writerly attempt to contain the proletarian revolution to the maintenance of capitalism for the benefit of the bourgeoisie. Against their 'sectarian crotchets' to manage capitalism in crisis, Marx

71 'Marx to Ruge', p. 142; 'Civil War', p. 317, 334, 353.

72 Ibid., p. 335.

73 Ibid., pp. 348–49.

74 Ibid., pp. 317, 334, 336.

75 Ibid., p. 335.

put forward the revolutionary international interests of the proletariat to abolish class society itself and argued that ‘if co-operative production is not to remain a sham and a snare’ but a means ‘to supersede the Capitalist system’ the co-operative societies must be united ‘to regulate national production upon a common plan’ thus ‘putting an end to the constant anarchy and periodical convulsions which are the fatality of Capitalist production’.⁷⁶ In a later circular from the General Council of the International, Marx argued that while all socialists understand by anarchy the ‘disappearance’ of ‘the power of the State, which serves to keep the great majority of producers under the yoke of a numerically small exploiting minority’, this required opposing Bakunin’s messianic idea of anarchism because of how it ‘puts matters the other way around’ and turns communism into a ‘fantastic phrase’ in which the ‘Abolition of the State’ requires maintaining ‘anarchy in the proletarian ranks’ by dissolving the International ‘into small *groupes*’ or *communes*, which in turn are to form an ‘association’, but not a state’ and limit themselves to the local economic struggles with their employers (who were themselves internationally coordinated).⁷⁷

For Marx, the sphinx-like question ‘What is the Commune?’ does not yield its ‘true secret’ to ‘readerly’ transparency, which can only see in ‘the surface of this tremendous historic event’ an inverted reflection of its own class prejudices, rather than how it has laid bare ‘the deeper under-currents of modern society’.⁷⁸ However, Marx also explains why the Commune does not reveal itself to a ‘writerly’ approach either, as he includes among the ‘multiplicity of interpretations [and] interests which construed it in their favour’ all the ‘tall talk’ of the socialist Left who failed to grasp what is ‘completely new’ in the Commune because of their fidelity to their own ‘sectarian crotchets’, such as the egalitarian idea of communism put forward by the Proudhonian anarchists, echoed today by Badiou, who only saw in the Commune a return to an ‘older [...] defunct form[] of life’: the medieval Commune and its ‘ancient struggle against over-centralization’.⁷⁹ Marx’s critique of the ‘multiplicity of interpretations’ of the Commune is not done to ‘void’ it of all ‘impure’

76 Ibid., pp. 335–6.

77 Ibid., p. 335; ‘Fictitious Splits’, p. 121; ‘Marx to Engels’, p. 287.

78 ‘Civil War’, pp. 317, 334, 353.

79 Ibid., pp. 333–34, 336.

attempts to contain its 'evental truth', in the way Badiou claims he does, so as to 'invent' a new 'generic' communism. This is because, although Marx argues that the Commune was 'in no sense socialist', that the insurgent workers of Paris 'have no ideals to realize' — 'no ready-made utopias to introduce *par décret du peuple*' (by decree of the people) — their actions nevertheless 'set free the elements of the new society with which old collapsing bourgeois society itself is pregnant'.⁸⁰ The 'true secret' of the Commune for Marx is that it represented the 'dictatorship of the proletariat' — 'a working, not a parliamentary, body, executive and legislative at the same time' — made up of workers who had acquired 'full consciousness of their historic mission' to 'work out the economic emancipation of labor' for themselves.⁸¹ By destroying the repressive State power 'which claimed to be the embodiment of [...] the nation itself' the Commune established the 'self-government of the producers' and had begun 'a series of historic processes' that would 'transform[] circumstances and men' thereby undermining the 'systematic and hierarchic division of labour' and thus ultimately 'class-rule itself'.⁸² It was the 'expansive political form' of the Commune that created a 'completely new' form of 'working men's Government' — 'champion of the emancipation of labor' and 'emphatically international'— that led Marx to speak on behalf of the Parisian workers as the 'advanced guard of the modern proletariat' and to revise his own theory of revolution as well in its wake.⁸³

80 Ibid., p. 335; Karl Marx, 'Marx to Ferdinand Domela-Nieuwenhuis in the Hague', 22 February 1881, *Karl Marx/Frederick Engels: Collected Works*, 50 vols (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1987), 46, pp. 65–67 (p. 66);

81 Karl Marx, 'Marx to Joseph Weydemeyer in New York', 5 March 1852, *Karl Marx/Frederick Engels: Collected Works*, 50 vols (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1983), 39, pp. 61–66 (p. 62); 'Civil War', pp. 331, 334, 336.

82 Ibid., pp. 328, 331–32, 335. The 'series of historic processes' that would undermine class rule included: 'the suppression of the standing army, and the substitution for it of the armed people'; 'universal suffrage'; 'public servants, magistrates and judges [...] to be elective, responsible, and revocable'; 'public service [...] at *workmen's wages*'; 'disestablishment and disendowment of all churches as proprietary bodies'; 'education [...] cleared of all interference of Church and State [and] freed from the fetters [of] class prejudice [...] made accessible to all'; 'abolition of the nightwork of journeymen bakers'; 'prohibition, under penalty, of the employers' practice to reduce wages by levying upon their workpeople fines under manifold pretexts'; and 'surrender, to associations of workmen, under reserve of compensation [...] all closed workshops and factories' ('Civil War', pp. 331–32, 335, 339).

83 Ibid., pp. 333–34, 338, 354.

Marx's speeches on the Paris Commune are a marker for the revolutionary truth of Marxism that 'it is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness'.⁸⁴ It is on this principle that the speakerly for Marx is 'a historically dynamic, revolutionary force' that when applied to an assessment of the Paris Commune led him to conclude after close observation of its practices, and against the multiplicity of interpretations generated in its wake, that 'the class struggle necessarily leads to the *dictatorship of the proletariat*' and subsequently 'the transition to the *abolition of all classes* and to a *classless society*'.⁸⁵ By contrast, in the *The Manifesto of the Communist Party*, the transition from capitalism to socialism was initially conceived as 'winning the battle of democracy' by the proletariat using

its political supremacy to wrest, by degree, all capital from the bourgeoisie, to centralise all instruments of production in the hands of the State, i.e., of the proletariat organised as the ruling class; and to increase the total productive forces as rapidly as possible

and so begin the process of abolishing class society.⁸⁶ What the Commune taught Marx was that the *Manifesto's* conception that the working class could establish democracy by 'simply lay[ing] hold of the ready-made state machinery, and wield[ing] it for its own purposes' had become

84 'Preface to *Contribution*', p. 263.

85 Frederick Engels, 'Karl Marx's Funeral', *Karl Marx/Frederick Engels: Collected Works*, 50 vols (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1989), 24, pp. 467–71 (p. 468); 'Marx to J. Weydemeyer', pp. 62, 65; In a speech at a public meeting in Amsterdam after the Hague Congress (September 1872), Marx gave his critical assessment of the Paris Commune, arguing that 'it fell because there did not simultaneously occur in all the capitals, in Berlin, in Madrid, and the rest, a great revolutionary movement linked with the mighty upheaval of the Parisian proletariat' (Stekloff, Chapter Fourteen). What 'we can learn [...] from the great example of the Commune of Paris', he concluded, was that '*The revolution must be the work of solidarised efforts*'. In a letter written contemporaneously with the events (April 1871) cited above, when Marx argued that it was the anarchist dogma of the 'equality of classes' that led the Central Committee of the National Guard, dominated by Blanquists and Proudhonists, to forego such measures they feared would '*start the civil war*' that caused them to 'surrender [] power too soon, to make way for the Commune' ('Marx to Kugelmann', p. 132), he echoes Engel's assessment that 'if there *had been* a little more authority and centralization in the Paris Commune, it would have triumphed over the bourgeois' ('Engels to C. Terzaghi', p. 293).

86 'Manifesto', p. 504.

outdated and had to be revised.⁸⁷ The brutal crushing of the Commune by the ruling classes showed that in order to realize democracy the workers needed to ‘smash’ (*zerbrechen*) the ‘ready-made state machinery’ and replace it with a workers’ state guided by the principles of workers’ self-governance to make the revolution ‘permanent’.⁸⁸ It is precisely this materialist commitment to draw ‘theoretical conclusions’ that ‘express, in general terms, actual relations springing from an existing class struggle, from a historical movement going on under our very eyes’ that is speakerly in Marx and stands in stark contrast with the metaphysical idealism of the writerly approach of ‘other working-class parties’ whose ‘ideas or principles [...] have been invented, or discovered, by this or that would-be universal reformer’.⁸⁹ It was because the International ‘was established by the working men themselves and for themselves’ rather than by ‘radicals among the ruling classes’ that Marx saw in it the opportunity to negate the negation of philosophy announced in Thesis Eleven decades prior — to ‘change the world’ rather than only ‘interpreting’ it — by ‘entering into real struggles and identifying ourselves with them’, by ‘taking sides in politics’, in other words, not with ‘new doctrinaire principles’ but by simply showing the world ‘why it is struggling’.⁹⁰

87 Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, ‘Preface to the 1872 German Edition of the *Manifesto of the Communist Party*’, *Karl Marx/Frederick Engels: Collected Works*, 50 vols (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1986), 23, pp. 174–75 (p. 175).

88 ‘Marx to Kugelmann’, p. 131; cf., V. I. Lenin, ‘State and Revolution: The Marxist Theory of the State and the Tasks of the Proletariat in the Revolution’, *V. I. Lenin Collected Works*, 45 vols (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1968), 25, pp. 381–492 (pp. 411–22); Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, ‘Address of the Central Authority to the League’, March 1850, *Karl Marx/Frederick Engels: Collected Works*, 50 vols (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1978), 10, pp. 277–87 (p. 281).

On ‘permanent revolution’ see Marx: ‘While the democratic petty bourgeois wish to bring the revolution to a conclusion as quickly as possible, and with the achievement, at most, of the above demands, it is our interest and our task to make the revolution permanent, until all more or less possessing classes have been forced out of their position of dominance, the proletariat has conquered state power, and the association of proletarians, not only in one country but in all the dominant countries of the world, has advanced so far that competition among the proletarians in these countries has ceased and that at least the decisive productive forces are concentrated in the hands of the proletarians. For us the issue cannot be the alteration of private property but only its annihilation, not the smoothing over of class antagonisms but the abolition of classes, not the improvement of the existing society but the foundation of a new one’ (‘Address of the Central Authority’, p. 281).

89 ‘Manifesto’, p. 498.

90 Karl Marx, ‘Record of Marx’s Speech on the Seventh Anniversary of the

Marx's speakerly approach to the Commune is a matter of how a truly materialist theory of class, taken in the totality of its determinations, necessitates opposing all one-sided non-dialectical ideas about class as the 'event-al' rupture of dissonance from within homogenizing cultural formations. For example, Marx opposes both the descriptive readerly view of class, held by the anarchists, as 'autonomy' and 'freedom from below' on the one hand, and the performative writerly view of class, articulated by the Blanquists, as constituted 'from above', on the other.⁹¹ Marx's speeches on the Commune thus represent a critique of all 'interpretations' put forward in the 'oracular tone of scientific infallibility' — not only such nostrums as the 'equalization of all classes' and workers' 'autonomy' from authority put forward by the Proudhonists, but also the messianic voluntarism of the Blanquists — for stifling working class political action which comes from the fact that the workers 'have no ready-made utopias to introduce' and because of this are able to learn in their daily struggles how to 'work out their own emancipation for themselves' by coming to 'full consciousness of their historic mission' to establish 'that higher form to which present society is irresistibly tending by its own economical agencies'.⁹² It is Marx's dialectical opposition to both the common sense appeal of the readerly mode of address on the one hand, in which the Commune was transparently taken to be 'terroristic' and the end of 'civilization', and the 'oracular tone' of the writerly on the other, which saw in it a ready-made classless society, that makes Marx's addresses to the working class speakerly and therefore able to connect the local and immediate concerns of workers with the aim of the workers' movement as a whole to abolish class and establish communism.⁹³

International', 15 October 1871, *Karl Marx/Frederick Engels: Collected Works*, 50 vols (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1986), 22, pp. 633–34 (p. 634); 'Marx to Ruge', p. 144.

91 Frederick Engels, 'Introduction to Karl Marx's *Civil War in France*', *Karl Marx/Frederick Engels: Collected Works*, 50 vols (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1990), 27, pp. 179–91 (pp. 187–89).

92 'Civil War', p. 335.

93 The success of Marx's speakerly approach can be seen in the policies of the International which under Marx's leadership was able to end the importation of strike breakers in Europe, organize international opposition to slavery in the U.S., support Italian and Polish independence, as well as eject the anarchists from the International for advancing the 'class terrorism' of the bourgeoisie against the workers' vanguard party from within (Marx, 'Civil War', p. 329).

It is the same praxical use of speech in the workers' struggle that I argue divides the speakerly Marx from the writerly interpretation of Marx which is currently dominant in the texts of the 'new communists' who make communism the sign of an impossible otherness that subverts the 'Master-Signifier' in culture.⁹⁴ In the writerly new communism, class-consciousness is voided of the material antagonism inscribed in the productive base of society between capital and labor and class is resignified as merely a discursive difference and lifestyle politic. The consequence is to immunize capitalism from a root critique that alone can explain what is to be done to change it.

The 'New' Infantile Communism

In the writings of the 'new communists', Marx's speakerly theory of communism as 'the real movement that abolishes the present state of things' (the outside as produced from inside the logic of class) is co-opted to a writerly approach in which communism is 'an ideal to which reality will have to adjust itself' (the outside as unknowable and constitutive of the inside).⁹⁵ The truth of Marxism is writerly, on this view, as it is predicated on the question as to what extent Marx's idea of communism remains true to the 'fundamental randomness' of its 'evental origins', 'admits as its own real this aleatory, elusive, slippery, evanescent dimension' and renounces 'the impure language of the State' by acknowledging the 'unsuitability' of the 'Party-form' and the 'Socialist State' for the communist cause.⁹⁶ The result is that Badiou, in his defense of the Idea of Communism, returns communism to its infantile origins as merely an egalitarian norm of Western humanism 'since Plato' and turns it away from being 'the real movement that abolishes the present state of things' by the class-conscious vanguard of the global proletariat.⁹⁷

According to Badiou the Idea of Communism is best conceived as a Platonic conception of equality because the role of language for him

94 Slavoj Žižek and Mao Zedong, 'Introduction,' *On Practice and Contradiction* (New York: Verso Books, 2007), p. 94.

95 Marx and Engels, 'German Ideology', p. 49.

96 Badiou, *Communist Hypothesis*, pp. 244, 247, 254, 257.

97 *Ibid.*, p. 254.

consists 'in giving a general or generic meaning to, the ultimate aim of a politics'.⁹⁸ On this logic, communism and democracy are synonyms for the same idea of 'equality'.⁹⁹ However, because 'democracy' is also a 'form of the State', this raises the question of the relation of politics (the aim of which is 'generic communism') to the State (the form of which is inegalitarian). The 'democratic' State form is inegalitarian because it 'authorizes a placement of the particular under the law of the universality of the political will'.¹⁰⁰ On these terms, communism cannot be 'spoken in the impure language of the State' because the State must subsume the general, or what Badiou calls 'the truth of the collective', under the particular and pragmatic — using some 'identitarian assignation' of a 'racial or sexual [...] or [...] social status' nomination — thereby dividing the social whose 'generic' aims it professes to express.¹⁰¹

The State thus always assumes a fictional 'communitarian' form such that while it symbolically legitimates itself in terms of 'mass sovereignty', it also necessarily embodies a performative contradiction as it cannot realize the egalitarian aim of 'generic communism'.¹⁰² Because the State form is doomed to divide the social — as it 'authorizes a placement of the particular under the law of the universality of the political will' of some 'identitarian assignation' of a 'racial or sexual [or] social status' nomination — it is imperative, according to Badiou, to 'retrieve[] democracy as a philosophical category' but in a form that is both 'freed from its subordination to the State' while yet being politically 'effective'.¹⁰³ Badiou's final word on this political designation is 'justice'.¹⁰⁴ Communism, however, is not synonymous with justice, democracy, or equality as these forms presuppose the continued existence of the very class inequality they purport to ameliorate politically. On the contrary, communism, as Marx explains, refers to a classless society that has abolished the need for the 'government of persons' because it has established the principle of 'from each according to his abilities, to

98 *Metapolitics*, p. 81.

99 *Ibid.*, p. 93.

100 *Ibid.*, p. 92.

101 *Communist Hypothesis*, p. 254; *Metapolitics*, pp. 81, 93–94.

102 *Ibid.*, pp. 88, 93.

103 *Ibid.*, pp. 92–94.

104 *Ibid.*, p. 94.

each according to his needs'.¹⁰⁵ Badiou's defense of communism as an egalitarian idea relies on the common sense of bourgeois ideology that class society cannot be materially superseded.

Badiou's discussion of the State is fundamentally writerly. Rather than consider the material State as an inventory of the historical ways in which the ruling class in society organizes the relations of production they require and control at a given stage of development, he reduces the State to an 'impure' language that normalizes a 'knowledge' of being (code words for materialism) and thus mars the immaterial void of the Platonic idea of egalitarianism (e.g., what he calls 'being *qua* being'). Because politics on his theory is synonymous with the activity of thought — which consists of de-materializing communism by giving it 'a general or generic meaning' such as 'equality' or 'justice' devoid of class — it is necessary to have some concept of effectivity, but because effectivity requires that transformations of the material world be translated into positive 'knowledge' (an 'impure' form of thought) it then becomes necessary to make effectivity synonymous with the 'impossible' to save the Communist Idea from 'subordination to the State'.¹⁰⁶ Thus, on the one hand, there is 'the impossibility, in the situation, of every non-egalitarian statement concerning this situation' because of how the hegemonic State language cannot actually capture the Multiple and make 'two into one' and, on the other, the impossibility of the communist idea becoming an actuality because of the ethical imperative that communism not be articulated 'in the impure language of the State'.¹⁰⁷ The 'impossible' is thus raised to the status of the 'Real' and it seems impossible that any politics could possibly advance on a materialist basis because, as Badiou must ultimately conclude, is not any political 'designation' a form of inequality and thus self-defeating?¹⁰⁸ Because on this logic all politics is 'impossible' as it can only be put forward under 'generic' terms that cannot actually explain inequality thus leaving it intact, no actual movement can take place as that would

105 Karl Marx, 'Critique of the Gotha Programme', *Karl Marx/Frederick Engels: Collected Works*, 50 vols (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1984), 24, pp. 75–99 (p. 87).

106 *Metapolitics*, p. 92.

107 *Ibid.*, p. 93; Alain Badiou, 'One Divides Itself into Two', in *Lenin Reloaded: Toward a Politics of Truth*, Sebastian Budgen, Stithies Kouvelakis, and Slavoj Žižek (eds) (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 7–17.

108 *Metapolitics*, p. 93.

require that the social be conceptually and practically divided in relation to class ‘assignments’. This cessation of movement is what is truly desired — the proclamation of a stalemate between capital and labor, i.e., a merely formal ‘equalization’ of the classes. In this way abstention from class politics is made the height of politics and synonymous with communism in Badiou’s discourse.

In *The Manifesto of Communist Party*, Marx and Engels argue that the ‘first step in the revolution’ is ‘to win the battle of democracy’ by ‘rais[ing] the proletariat to the position of ruling class’ and they defend the Paris Commune as the concrete example of workers’ self-governance. The question is — *Why?* Why do communists who argue that society has reached the stage of development which affords it the ability to abolish classes, and therefore the need of the State (which arises out of class relations), advocate for the working class to become the ruling class in the State, and call the proletarian state dictatorship ‘democracy’? Is this fundamentally contradictory in the way Badiou argues because it contradicts the communist principle of egalitarianism? Does it reduce communism to a populist ‘communitarianism’ that subjugates others (along ethnic and gender lines)? Along the same lines, is rejection of the claim that the ‘fall’ of communism is ‘inscribed in the very origins’ of Marxism but rather due to ‘outside’ (material) forces necessarily ‘anti-Semitic’, as Žižek claims?¹⁰⁹ Is there really no difference between the dictatorship of capital, fascist dictatorship, and communist dictatorship then?

On Marx’s terms what makes a workers’ state *democratic* is that it advances the interests of the majority of society, the working class. What makes it a *dictatorship* is that it must do so by subordinating the interests of other classes to its goal of abolishing exploitation in production as a means to abolish the existence of classes as such.¹¹⁰ It is this

109 ‘Introduction’, *On Practice*, p. 1.

110 Although the Commune was a working class government that did not include the ‘rural proletariat’, ‘the large mass of producers not directly involved in the struggle of capital and labor’, it nevertheless represented ‘the direct antithesis to the Empire’ in terms of its agrarian policy. Thus, while the populist government of Louis-Napoléon Bonaparte which ‘professed to rest upon the peasantry’ was all the while increasing ‘the debt, lying like an incubus upon [...] the rural proletariat’, so as to expropriate them from the land and ‘enforce at a more and more rapid rate’ the ‘development of modern agriculture and the competition of capitalist farming’ in the countryside, it was the Commune alone, however, that ‘was able, and at the

'identification' of the rule of the working class with the interests of the whole of society (and against the narrow self-interest of other classes) that Badiou argues is ineffective politically because it does not appear to be a change at all to the normal state of affairs (the 'communitarian' form of the State). The difference, however, cannot be grasped at the formal level of appearances where Badiou contains the discussion of the State, but must move 'outside' philosophy to include an awareness of the class struggle, of how the State is used in accordance with the interests and aims of different classes: the exploiters or the exploited.¹¹¹

On Marx's understanding the proletariat as a class has an interest in abolishing classes because of its shared conditions of life in capitalist society: besides sharing an antagonistic relation to their exploiters, they also set in motion the means of production and share a condition of life in which class distinctions are counter-productive and self-defeating. This is what Marx argues makes the proletariat a truly revolutionary class uniquely positioned to use democratic means to realize freedom from necessity for all. It is only when and to the extent that the proletariat organized as the ruling class can abolish class in material practice (by raising the level of productive forces to meet the needs of all, excluding the needs that contradict the goal of communism), will the need for the coercive power of the socially democratic State 'wither away' and society move beyond 'socialism' (workers' state) to communism (classless, and so, stateless, society).¹¹²

On Badiou's theory the workers' state should be opposed, however, because its 'communitarian' or 'identitarian' populism promotes the State fiction that 'two becomes one' that masks how its 'pragmatic' use of force militantly divides the social in two and actually undermines 'democracy' (the generic ideal of equality). However, democracy is always class divided, not because social equality is impossible in reality and is always doomed to be a communitarian populism excluding difference and producing an other, but because democracy reflects its origins in class division which alone gives it its reason for being. Badiou's opposition of the Idea of Communism to communitarian populism fails

same time compelled, to solve [the debt problem] in favor of the peasant' ('Civil War', pp. 330, 338).

111 See, 'One Divides Itself into Two'.

112 See, Marx, *Critique of the Gotha Programme*.

to grasp the material interests at work behind the democratic form of the State, which are not simply the dominance of one or another 'identity' assignation, but classes. Is it a bourgeois populism that is disguising the bourgeois interest to exploit the labor of the many as in the interest of all, or is it a proletarian form of governance that actually works in the interests of the majority to abolish their own exploitation and end class society? Badiou's opposition to 'populism' as such and retreat to Platonic idealism and infantile Leftism expresses a petty bourgeois reaction to the 'battle of democracy' going on between capital and labor 'right before our eyes' that fears the struggle will disrupt its normal privileges in class society. His writerly defense of the 'fundamental randomness' of the 'evental origins' of the generic idea of communism, is, in other words, a contemporary example of the kind of "'left-wing" communism' that Lenin, following Marx's critique of anarchism, calls the 'infantile disorder' of the petty bourgeoisie who, 'driven to frenzy by the horrors of capitalism' and an 'acute and rapid deterioration in his conditions of life [...] easily goes to revolutionary extremes, but is incapable of perseverance, organisation, discipline and steadfastness'.¹¹³ In fact, this social layer (a part of the working class that misrecognizes its relation to capital), gravitates to bourgeois populism because it will not fundamentally change the existing social arrangements in which it has found a niche for the time being (through credit and debt financing). This explains the popularity of Trumpism to this class fraction — Trump is writerly: he makes class into a 'generic' classification without class content which appears radically egalitarian all the while undermining class-conscious solutions to the crisis of capitalism. Marx's speakerly communism is the antidote to the sectarian disorder of infantile communism that emerges at times of crisis because it not only explains why capitalism is unsustainable for systemic structural reasons, but also why, for the same reasons, the proletariat alone is a truly revolutionary class as it concretely possesses both the material interest as well as the practical means to build a classless society.

The ethics of egalitarianism Badiou substitutes for Marx's idea of communism is ideologically the same as Rancière's, another of the leading post-1968 'new communist' re-writers of Marx, despite

¹¹³ V. I. Lenin, "'Left-Wing" Communism – An Infantile Disorder', *V. I. Lenin Collected Works*, 45 vols (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1966), 31, pp. 17–118 (p. 32).

whatever surface differences there are between them (e.g., Rancière preferring 'democracy' to 'communism'). Rancière also assumes that politics is basically a cultural matter (writerly). Politics, he writes, is not a matter of 'state institutions' that establish some 'basic wrong' in terms of 'the distribution of jobs, roles, and places', nor is it 'the organization of powers [...] and the systems for legitimizing this distribution', but, rather, it is in itself an empty form that stages a discursive conflict of values between, on the one hand, the organization of bodies by the 'police', and, on the other, the 'dissensus' that results when the bodies move out of their assigned places.¹¹⁴ Marx, on this reading, is said to be 'policing' the proletariat in his speeches on the Paris Commune by 'assigning' the workers the task of establishing a dictatorial State socialism. As in Badiou's discourse, by using 'the impure language of the State' (in which the Multiple counts as One), Marx violates the truly radical egalitarian idea of communism (that divides One into Two so as to clear the void of the Real for transvaluation). Democracy, on Rancière's reading, is the 'dissensus' of communism (the multiple) within Marx's police-State language that wants to dominate the world. The writerly Marx(ism) which passes as a more subtle and radical interpretation of Marx for a 'new communism' today is on closer inspection indistinguishable from the normal crude anti-communism of regular Right-wingers.

What is considered revolutionary on the North Atlantic left today is the hollowing out of Marxism of what makes it Marxism — Marx's theory of class as a matter of grasping '*what the proletariat is*, and what, in accordance with this *being*, it will historically be compelled to do' — so as to construct a 'marxism beyond marxism' as an egalitarian commons-ism without class.¹¹⁵ However, the proletariat is the class of propertyless wage-laborers who have nothing but their labor power to exchange for their means of subsistence and whose unpaid surplus labor is accumulated as profit by the owners. What this condition compels them to do is unite and struggle to emancipate themselves from the dictatorship of capital. Marx's speakerly relation to class is a critique of the readerly common sense of class as 'inequality' and the writerly

114 Jacques Rancière, *Disagreement* (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1999), pp. 28, 33, 35.

115 'Holy Family', p. 37; Antonio Negri, *Marx Beyond Marx: Lessons on the Grundrisse* (Brooklyn: Autnomedia/Pluto Press, 1991).

view of class as cultural ‘difference’ which fail to see beyond the surface effect of the exploitation of wage-labor by capital as merely different ‘life chances on the market’.¹¹⁶ Marx’s theory of class is speecherly because it goes beyond the merely descriptive and interpretative modes of making sense of class that underwrite the dominant market logic by explaining its roots in the capitalist relations of production. Marx’s explanation of class is necessary for changing it. Without Marx’s materialist theory of class, there can be no revolutionary movement to end class, which is why the ideology of class as cultural differences is so popular and the voiding of Marx’s theory of class so lucrative in the academic theory market. Marx’s speecherly mode of addressing class goes beyond the mystifications of class of the readerly/writerly mode that form the dominant common sense of class and, in doing so, is able to address the needs of workers with a transformative way of making sense of their lives — a method that is able to explain why, for example, despite working long hours in alienating jobs they find themselves unable to meet their basic needs for nutritious food, safe and healthy environments, accessible quality education, fulfilling and meaningful relationships, stimulating recreational activities,... while the wealth of their labor is accumulated to benefit a tiny minority — and speak for them in the *agora*, as Marx so forcefully does in his speeches on the Paris Commune.

Badiou’s focus on Marx’s idea of communism in his speeches on the Paris Commune represents a tutor-text of the ‘new communism’ which is attempting to turn the popular movements that have emerged around the world to contest the austerity culture of capitalism in decline away from the path of socialist revolution toward ‘saving capitalism’. Consider, for instance, how Michael Hardt, who along with Antonio Negri has turned class into a mystical idea of the ‘autonomy of the Multitude’, argues that Marx’s theory of class must be rejected because of its ‘negative’ stance toward the ‘positive project to generate an ontology of ourselves and create a new social world’ in common.¹¹⁷ On

116 Max Weber, ‘Class, Status, Party’, *The Inequality Reader: Contemporary and Foundational Readings in Race, Class, and Gender*, ed. by David B. Grusky and Szonja Szelényi (London and New York: Routledge 2011), pp. 64–74.

117 Michael Hardt, ‘The Militancy of Theory’, *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, 110:1, Winter (2011), pp. 19–35 (p. 26).

this account, Marx's speaking of class as the irreconcilable antagonism between capital and labor inscribed in the economic base is to be rejected for an empty populist phrase of class as the common. For Marx, class is the relation of exploitation of labor by capital that explains why there can be no common while classes exist. The problem with Marx's critique of the post-class 'commons'-ist theory of the social, according to Hardt, is that it produces an authoritative knowledge of class that denies the 'autonomy of those it is aimed to help', and thus has no place in the process of social change.¹¹⁸ Against the *radical* negation of the existing that comes with 'grasping things by the root' in exploited labor, as Marx argues, cultural theory should instead become more affirmative, according to Hardt, by having 'the courage not only to speak the truth to and about ourselves but also to live in a way harmonious with that truth'.¹¹⁹ The harmonious 'truth' of the autonomous subject is 'beyond critique' according to Hardt, because it 'seeks to change social life while being a part of it', rather than 'stand above the lives of others [...] as a vanguard'.¹²⁰ Thus, the problem with Marx's speeches, in this framing, and precisely because of their speakerly insistence on producing class-consciousness of the objective material 'outside' of ideology lying in the extraction of the surplus-value of wage-labor by capital, is its ethical blindness to the desire of the other, those whom Hardt embraces because they are in 'voluntary insubordination' of global knowing.¹²¹ In place of Marx's speakerly critique of class, which negates the ideological 'inside' by bringing to bear upon it the 'outside' of class that explains why the critique of the false-consciousness of class in culture is necessary to change it, Hardt puts forward what he takes to be the more 'positive' idea that a 'new mode of life' comes from within, by a change in 'moral attitude' by anyone who so desires it.¹²² The appeal here of course is to the market subject who experiences their desire as free of need, as in the libertarianism of consumerist ideology. Rather than speak to the need of workers for their emancipation from capital, Hardt instead speaks on behalf of bourgeois interests by mystifying the social in terms of desire.

118 Ibid., p. 26.

119 Ibid., p. 30.

120 Ibid., pp. 29, 33.

121 Ibid., p. 22.

122 Ibid., p. 31.

The evacuating of Marx's speecherly relation to class is done so as to make Marx more writerly and construct a pluralized Marxism that deploys communism as an empty signifier of 'equality' to contain awareness of the failure of capitalism and what is to be done to change it. This hollowing out of Marxism of its commitment to speaking for the workers — that has become popular through the writings of Badiou, Negri, Rancière, and Žižek — has of course most famously replaced Marx's explanation for why the working class alone is a revolutionary class with its own 'post-class' theory: what Badiou calls the 'new political subject' is what Rancière calls 'the part of no part', Negri, the 'multitude', and Žižek, 'slum dwellers'. The multitude are of course those who work within the circuits of immaterial labor who desire to 'invent' a common, while Badiou's 'new political subject' refers to those who have 'absolute conviction' in 'event-al' ruptures with the historical material series who form group adherence to this messianic idea, while Žižek's 'slum-dwellers' are those he considers 'free' to so identify because, like those Rancière say play 'the part of no part', they lack any 'social substance' due to their 'exclusion' from the neoliberal economic order.¹²³ What the 'new communist' writings show in their writerly transvaluation of class from its speecherly roots in the division of labor is abstention from class politics (speaking for what is to be done to end class) and its replacement with the cultural politics of the sign (learning to live with class by resignifying it). In Marx's speeches on the Paris Commune, the communism of which he spoke stands for the interests of the global working class and in intransigent opposition to this petty-bourgeois tendency to conflate revolution with a doctrine that appeals to a socially marginalized group with a messianic message that absolutizes their local agency in the voluntarist terms of bourgeois ideology.

123 Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (London: Penguin Books, 2004); Badiou, *Communist Hypothesis and Philosophy of Communism*; Slavoj Žižek, 'Learn to Live Without Masters', *Naked Punch*, 3 October 2009, <http://www.nakedpunch.com/articles/34>.

Readerly/Writerly, or Speecherly?

In order to clarify why Marx's speeches reveal a speecherly use of language that argues against the writerly Marx(ism) put forward in the writings of the 'new communists' today, it will be useful to consider Barthes' theorization of the difference between the readerly and writerly in more detail. In the following I will first outline how the 'writerly' acquires its value against the 'readerly' in Barthes' theorization of the literary text and then show how Lukács develops a concept of the speecherly to explain the readerly and writerly (what he calls 'narration' and 'description') in terms of the development of capitalism and the conflict between opposed class methods of revolt against it, before relating these terms again to Marx's speeches on the Paris Commune.

The readerly text, according to Barthes, is that mode of intelligibility authorized by the 'literary institution' which circulates the text as a commodity (hence, 'we call any readerly text a classic text', i.e., timeless) through a shared agreement between 'the producer of the text and its user, between its owner and its customer' as to its value.¹²⁴ In the logic of the market, the text as a '*whole*' possesses a value (meaning) that has been instilled in it by its owner-producer such that the act of reading is thought of as an act of exchange in which ownership of the meaning is transferred to the reader-consumer.¹²⁵ The act of market exchange requires agreement between the owner-producer and reader-customer that the text has a meaning or value, moreover, it requires the reader to believe that 'reading is nothing more than a *referendum*' in which the reader is free to choose to 'accept or reject the text', as if its meaning could be decided and further interpretation closed.¹²⁶ Such a reader is 'idle' or passive in relation to meaning, on the assumption that meaning is 'found' in the text rather than 'produced'. They are also 'serious' and 'intransitive', and, therefore, 'impoverished', because they are barred from enjoying the 'pleasure of writing' which comes with 'appreciation' of the playfulness of the signifier.¹²⁷ In short, the 'readerly' mode of making sense of the literary devalues the text and reader both. Barthes'

124 S/Z, p. 4.

125 Ibid., p. 6.

126 Ibid., p. 4.

127 Ibid., pp. 4–5.

theorization of the literary text is concerned with how 'to make the reader no longer a consumer, but a producer of the text' and thereby move them from their 'impoverished' state to one where they 'gain[] access to the magic of the signifier'.¹²⁸ This magical epiphany, by abandoning the 'readerly' and coming to an 'appreciation' of the 'writerly' dimension of literature, represents for Barthes an 'escape' from the authoritarian logic of the market.¹²⁹

What makes the passive-reader become an active-writer/producer of meaning is an act of '*interpretation*' that is no longer bound to 'any constraint of representation (of imitation)'.¹³⁰ The assumption here is that the logic of the market that reduces the literary to a commodity requires that texts be thought to have a singular meaning produced by the realist code (mimesis) by representing a ready-made world with predetermined meanings that have already been produced. Rather than interpret the text as 'a structure of signifieds' that 'imitates' an original, the writerly foregrounds the 'plurality' of meaning that constitutes the text as 'a galaxy of signifiers' that 'has no beginning'.¹³¹ The meaning of the writerly text is thus 'reversible' and 'indeterminable' because 'nothing exists outside the text' on which to fix a 'principle of determination', and 'there is never a *whole* of the text' or a 'logic' that 'can be authoritatively declared to be the main one'.¹³² The writerly text is an 'ideal text' — 'the image of a triumphant plural' — that models a subjectivity that is freed of any regulative restraint on the pleasures of interpretation.¹³³ Free of any reality principle, the reader 'gain[s] access to the magic of the signifier, to the pleasure of writing'.¹³⁴ Against the 'impoverished' reader who reads 'seriously' in order to extract a decided meaning about the world, Barthes places the mystical interpreter who luxuriates in the plurality of meanings and thus appreciates the true pleasures of writing.¹³⁵

Barthes' literary theory traces itself in the writerly Marx(ism)

128 Ibid., p. 4.

129 Ibid., p. 5.

130 Ibid.

131 Ibid.

132 Ibid., pp. 5–6.

133 Ibid., p. 5.

134 Ibid., p. 4.

135 Ibid.

dominant today. Take Rancière, for instance.¹³⁶ What makes Marx's speeches on the Commune revolutionary for Rancière is a matter of how the question of the subject emerges unexpectedly in them where it was thought not to exist before, in 'the part which is not a part' of society — the proletariat. By giving the workers human status at a time when they were taken to be non-human tools or beasts of burden, Marx's speech makes them into a political subject that are due all the rights and privileges of human beings while at the same time assigning them a place in the social order as the source of value and subject of history. Marx is said to be applying the principle of 'equality' to 'knowledge' — as he assumes that the workers have 'spoken' and established a name for themselves as 'communists' in the Paris Commune — even as he attributes the reason for the failure of the Commune to their 'ignorance' of scientific socialism. For Rancière, Marx's speech is 'writerly' as he reconfigures the idea of the proletariat and thereby constructs his own 'part that is not a part' of it, the part that remains 'invisible' and 'ignorant' that Marx calls 'anarchist' or 'peasant'. But, against this writerly Marx whose speech constitutes the proletariat as an 'outside' that 'exceeds' the logic of the 'inside' to which the discourse of scientific socialism of Orthodox Marxism seeks to contain it, there is the speakerly Marx who speaks for the vanguard of the workers by producing the concepts necessary for their grasping and changing the world.

In Barthes' account of the writerly, the agency of the signifier is alienated from itself in the code of the readerly when it is taken to have a singular meaning — the text 'as a whole' that 'reflects' a prior reality unmediated by language. The mechanism of this alienation is the literary institution that produces the text as a commodity to which it attributes a mimetic (readerly) value. The result of the reification of meaning is the alienation of the reader who encounters the text as a passive consumer rather than active producer of meanings. Rather than an escape from this condition, as Barthes supposes, the equation of agency with the 'appreciation' of the 'plurality' of possible 'interpretations' of the text only deepens the alienation of the text with itself as well as of the reader. Leaving aside for now the equation of agency with the production of meaning and how this reinforces through a textual relay the social

136 *Disagreement*, pp. 28–35.

alienation of the worker from the material conditions of production, to equate the production of meaning to the 'appreciation' of the writerly is simply a Nietzschean revaluation of the alienation of the reader, not its abolition in practice — the text remains objectified as 'the image of a triumphant plural'.¹³⁷ The reader is still related to their own labor (of interpretation) as an alien object (writerly) to which, Barthes insists, they must subordinate themselves (appreciation). Furthermore, such an act of interpretation simply leaves the literary institution intact which has reified the writerly as the readerly in the first place. Barthes' identification of a consumer who lacks access to and appreciation of the 'pleasure of the text' is, despite its rejection of mimesis, a repetition of the same market logic of the readerly it opposes. In other words, it represents a 'mirror that does not reflect things', that therefore redoubles the realm of necessity by failing to engage the speakerly dimension of language to produce the concepts necessary to change it.¹³⁸ It is the common sense of advertising that it does not sell the practical virtues of the product but the 'better' in some way person the buyer will become by consuming it. The logic of the market is desire-al, writerly rather than readerly, and thus the equation of language with the writerly against the speakerly represents the hegemony of ruling class ideology in Barthes' writerly theory. Barthes' theory is really an affective rather than conceptual one that localizes the production of meaning to readers' 'interpretations' of the textual rather than a rigorous interrogation of the place of the literary in the social. As it assumes that the value of language is due to the disposition of the subject who is either 'impoverished' or 'appreciative' of the mystical properties of the writerly, it functions as a class allegory on behalf of the ruling class. It is precisely at the point where Barthes assumes the freedom of speech (interpretation) in the writerly as against the 'logic' of capitalism when he speaks most forcefully on behalf of capital. It is this speaking for the logic of capital in the code of the free agency of the writerly that Barthes' text surfaces the speakerly dimension of language in its relation to class that is suppressed in his theorization under the rejection of the readerly.

Although at a surface level Barthes opposes the writerly to the readerly,

137 *S/Z*, p. 5.

138 V. I. Lenin, 'Leo Tolstoy as the Mirror of the Russian Revolution', *V. I. Lenin Collected Works*, 45 vols (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1977), 15, pp. 202–09 (p. 202).

under Lukács' theorization the speecherly dimension underlying them becomes apparent as they are understood to be modes of side-taking under capitalism. On Lukács' terms, the readerly/writerly — what he variously calls narration/description or realism/naturalism — are not just 'two basically divergent styles' or 'artistic methods of handling content', but 'two basically divergent approaches to reality' that reveal the 'need to adapt fiction to provide an adequate representation of new social phenomena' appropriate to 'two different periods of capitalism'.¹³⁹ Because 'style is socially and historically determined and is the product of a social development', it is necessary to grasp the 'readerly', as in the narrative realism of Balzac, Scott, Stendhal, Dickens, and Tolstoy, as a depiction of 'bourgeois society consolidating itself after severe crisis, the complicated laws of development operating in its formation, and the tortuous transitions from the old society in decay to the new society in birth'.¹⁴⁰ Because these writers 'were not 'specialists' in the sense of the capitalist division of labor' they did not 'stand aloof as observers and critics of capitalist society' but 'participated variously and actively in the great social struggles of their times' by dramatizing them.¹⁴¹ Conversely, the 'writerly' modernism of 'western avant-garde movements' represents a more 'perfected' consolidation of capitalism in which 'the book ha[s] become merchandise, the writer, a salesman of this merchandise' and a 'specialist[] in the craft of writing'.¹⁴² Under conditions in which the arts become 'absolutely dependent [...] upon capital' (113) those like Flaubert and Zola who yet express their 'contempt for the political and social order of their time' (119) and resist being turned into 'lying apologists for capitalism' (119) do so by staging a 'subjective protest' against the 'emptiness of capitalistic life' (147) as 'observers and critics' (119).¹⁴³ Their protest takes the form of representing events through a hypertrophy of descriptive details whose significance 'does not arise out of the subjective importance of the events, which is scarcely related, but from the artifice in the formal stylization' (115).¹⁴⁴ Barthes' self-reflexive textuality (the writerly), despite its opposition to the mimetic (as readerly),

139 Georg Lukács, 'Narrate or Describe?', *Writer & Critic and Other Essays* (The Universal Library, 1971), pp. 110–48 (pp. 116, 119–20).

140 *Ibid.*, pp. 118–19.

141 *Ibid.*

142 *Ibid.*, pp. 9, 119, 145.

143 *Ibid.*, pp. 113, 119, 147.

144 *Ibid.* p. 115.

represents a further hypertrophy of the descriptive turned in upon itself. Separated even more from the narrational, it reflects the greater alienation of the writer dependent on capital in the post-war period, a time when (post)structuralist theory was subsidized by the United States while the CIA was weaponizing it, as it did with modern art, against the Soviet Union in the Cold War.¹⁴⁵ The principle effect of modernist literature in which description is no longer 'a base for the [...] dramatic' representation of events as it is under realism and instead becomes 'the principle mode', as in French naturalism after 1848, is one of ironic detachment that 'debases characters to the level of inanimate objects'.¹⁴⁶ They become 'abstract' like 'dabs of color in a painting' that presents a 'tableau' to the spectator in a way that reflects, but does not explain, how 'the individual [...] is transformed into a soulless appurtenance of the capitalist system'.¹⁴⁷ In the descriptive method we see 'the result but not the struggle of opposing forces' in capitalism.¹⁴⁸ We do not, in other words, watch someone 'whom we have come to know and love being spiritually murdered by capitalism in the course of the novel, but follow a corpse in passage through still lives becoming increasingly aware of being dead'.¹⁴⁹ Thus, although 'modern bourgeois literature bears witness against bourgeois society' by reflecting its dehumanization and decline into 'fascist bestiality' in the posthuman alienation of the signifier from the signified, it does so from the vantage point of the 'proprietary class' who 'feels at ease and justified in this alienation, recognizing in it a source of power' to derive ironic pleasure from taking an artistic stand, rather than from the standpoint of the proletariat who 'feels destroyed in this alienation, recognizing in it its helplessness and the inhumanity of its existence' (Marx, qtd. in Lukács) and requires revolutionary politics (freedom from necessity) not just more cultural politics (freedom of speech).¹⁵⁰

145 Frances Stoner Saunders, *The Cultural Cold War: The CIA and the World of Arts and Letters* (New York: The New Press, 2001); Gabriel Rockhill, 'The CIA Reads French Theory: On the Intellectual Labor of Dismantling the Cultural Left', *The Philosophical Salon: A Los Angeles Review of Books Channel*, 28 February 2017, <https://thephilosophicalsalon.com/the-cia-reads-french-theory-on-the-intellectual-labor-of-dismantling-the-cultural-left>.

146 Lukács, 'Narrate or Describe?', pp. 115, 117–18, 133, 147.

147 *Ibid.*, pp. 112–15, 146.

148 *Ibid.*, p. 146.

149 *Ibid.*

150 *Ibid.*, pp. 145, 147.

When Marx is summarizing the experience of the Commune in his address to the International, given two days after the last barricade had fallen in Paris, he formulates the doctrine of the dictatorship of the proletariat. In doing so, he demonstrates how the speakerly goes beyond both the readerly (mimesis) and writerly (poesis) in the way he very much earlier in the *Eighteenth Brumaire* (1852) theorized how the proletarian revolution of the nineteenth century could not 'present the new scene of world history' in a 'borrowed language' whose words exceed their class content, but, rather, would require a 'new language', a 'poetry of the future' whose social and historical 'content goes beyond [...] words'.¹⁵¹ There he argues that because the bourgeois revolutions of the English, the Germans and the French, were 'dramatic' and 'storm swiftly from success to success' they could only 'soberly [...] assimilate the results' after their 'storm-and-stress period', and were therefore prone to 'magnifying the given task in imagination' by 'glorifying the new struggles' in a borrowed 'time-honoured disguise'.¹⁵² Hence, 'Cromwell and the English people had borrowed speech, passions and illusions from the Old Testament for their bourgeois revolution', 'Luther donned the mask of the Apostle Paul', and the 'French Revolution performed the task of their time in Roman costume and with Roman phrases'.¹⁵³ For them the 'resurrection of the dead' served to 'dull themselves to their own [class] content'.¹⁵⁴ The proletarian revolution, on the other hand, 'cannot begin with itself before it has stripped off all superstition about the past' and in order to succeed must first soberly assess the relation of class forces through 'constant critique' so that in the meantime their class 'adversary [...] may draw new strength [...] and rise again, more gigantic, before them' until a 'situation has been created which makes all turning back impossible, and the conditions themselves cry out'.¹⁵⁵ On Marx's account, while bourgeois revolution necessarily falls short of its democratic promise, proletarian revolution always goes beyond what is imagined because what is imagined is always written in the borrowed language of its bourgeois antagonist. Hence Marx on how 'im-/possible

151 'Eighteenth Brumaire', pp. 104, 106.

152 Ibid., pp. 104-06.

153 Ibid., pp. 104-05.

154 Ibid., p. 106.

155 Ibid., pp. 106-07.

communism' is precisely the bourgeois response to communism.¹⁵⁶ On this view, because the 'true secret' of the Paris Commune was according to Marx historically unprecedented — 'essentially a working-class government [...] for uprooting the economical foundations upon which rests the existence of classes' — it necessarily generated a writerly 'multiplicity of interpretations' through which a 'multiplicity of interests [...] construed it in their favour'.¹⁵⁷ What proved 'so tantalizing to the bourgeois mind' about it was on the one hand its raw entertainment value as a spectacle of the 'vile multitude' run amok and, on the other, a reflection of its own self-image because of how it 'made that catchword of bourgeois revolutions, cheap government, a reality'.¹⁵⁸ In Marx's speecherly representation of the Commune he critiques the bourgeois mind for failing to grasp the 'new language' of proletarian revolution because of its dependence on a 'borrowed language', not that of the heroic revolutionary struggles of the past, but of the Theatre de la Porte-Saint-Martin. Thus, on the 'Paris of the Boulevards'

male and female — the rich, the capitalist, the gilded, the idle Paris, now thronging with its lackeys, its blacklegs, its literary *bohème*, and its *cocottes* [...] considering the civil war but an agreeable diversion, eyeing the battle going on through telescopes, counting the rounds of cannon, and swearing by their own honour and that of their prostitutes, that the performance was far better got up than it used to be at the Porte St. Martin. The men who fell were really dead; the cries of the wounded were cries in good earnest; and, besides, the whole thing was so intensely historical.¹⁵⁹

For Marx, on the contrary, the story of the Commune is a civil war epic told in the language of the Grand Guignol, in which 'the real Paris' of 'heroic, noble, and devoted [...] women', those once vilified as the 'vile multitude' who are now like rebel angels 'storming heaven', is faced with 'a phantom Paris' of 'ghouls', 'cannibals', 'blood suckers', and 'vampires', the 'absconding men of family, religion, and above all property'.¹⁶⁰ Certainly, Marx too, of necessity, here 'borrows language', but the

156 'Civil War', p. 335.

157 *Ibid.*, p. 334.

158 *Ibid.*, pp. 328–29, 334, 342.

159 *Ibid.*, pp. 342–43.

160 *Ibid.*, pp. 329, 337, 341–42; 'Marx to Kugelmann', p. 132.

language is used in a speecherly way to reveal the class structure, the 'hideous face' of 'bourgeois civilization and justice' whose 'undisguised savagery and lawless revenge [...] comes out in its lurid light whenever the slaves and drudges of that order rise against their masters'.¹⁶¹ The Commune thus speaks the truth about bourgeois democracy as 'class terrorism'.¹⁶² Marx, speaking for the Commune as 'the intellectual child of the International', cuts through the multiplicity of interpretations which seek to contain the 'new language' of the Commune to the terms of the old by showing how "'impossible" Communism' is only really *possible* when the workers 'have no ideals to realize' — 'no ready-made utopias to introduce', nor, 'miracles' to hope for — and come to 'know that in order to work out their own emancipation [...] they have [...] but to set free the elements of the new society with which the old collapsing bourgeois society itself is pregnant'.¹⁶³ Despite its being 'in no sense socialist', the true secret of the Commune that goes beyond the words borrowed to describe it is that it represents 'that higher form to which present society is irresistibly tending by its own economical agencies'.¹⁶⁴

Today the speecherly is not, nor can it be, a return to readerly realism, and neither can it be more writerly anti-capitalism because of the subsumption and commodification by capital of culture as a whole. The speecherly must therefore go beyond the 'dramatization' of 'humanist revolt' of narrative realism as well as the 'ironic' reification of the social in a way already foreseen by Lukács when he argues how it will need to give a much more 'revolting and shocking' depiction of the 'daily and hourly unremitting transformation of thousands of human beings with infinite capacities into "living corpses"' than the merely ironic mode of the writerly work of art.¹⁶⁵ To do so requires recognizing why 'critique represents a class', why the 'living dead', in other words, are class-conscious appendages of a system in the process of self-destruction that strips 'civilization' of its venerable aura of 'justice'.¹⁶⁶

161 Ibid., pp. 348–49.

162 Ibid., p. 329.

163 Frederick Engels, 'Engels to Friedrich Adolf Sorge in Hoboken' (12 [-17]. September 1874), *Karl Marx/Frederick Engels: Collected Works*, 50 vols (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1991), 45, pp. 40–45 (p. 41); Marx, 'Civil War', p. 335.

164 Ibid., p. 335; 'Marx to Domela-Nieuwenhuis', p. 66.

165 Lukács, 'Narrate or Describe?', pp. 146–47.

166 Karl Marx, 'Afterword to the Second German Edition of *Capital*', *Karl Marx/Frederick Engels: Collected Works*, 50 vols (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1996), 35, pp. 2–20

The writerly for Barthes, despite its opposition to the readerly (mimesis), represents in its purely formal understanding of the text as a collection of signifiers, a hypertrophy of the descriptive that reflects a 'higher level[] of "perfected" inhumanity'.¹⁶⁷ Its protest against the market logic that has turned literary art into a commodity is a purely subjective one that can only see in a speakerly approach to language as an arena of class struggle a boring and naive conformism in which the value of literature is determined by the State ('referendum') rather than being a pure 'disinterested' invention. Far from being an avant-garde practice to *épater la bourgeoisie*, writerly radicalism rehearses the common sense of bourgeois ideology. Class is the real that explains the appearance of the readerly/writerly as a local reification of the class relations of production that only benefits the ruling class. The readerly/writerly is always a product of the speakerly. The speakerly in Marx, however, functions as a critique of the appearance of difference between readerly/writerly by surfacing the totality of class relations and taking the side of the proletariat. The speakerly is not a matter of the location of the text in relation to its readers, or, an idealization of its potential meanings as a zone of pure pleasure in endless interpretation, as the writerly imagines. These are simply descriptive understandings that fail to explain the place of *langue/parole* in the totality. By surfacing the social totality, the speakerly relates language to its 'outside', which is not a pre-made world of fixed meaning nor an ideal pluralism, but the world as it is, the world made by exploited and alienated labor and the ongoing class struggle over the social real.

The point of surfacing the speakerly is not to democratize meaning by distributing it among a rich plurality of potential readings. Such a ludic operation simply transfers the alienated (from labor) agency of the writerly to the readerly and has become a popular way to further naturalize reading/writing in the affective and reject the implication of both in the speakerly, the ongoingness of side-taking in the agora.¹⁶⁸ But, it is only by grasping the speakerly dimension of language as

(p. 16); 'Civil War', pp. 328–43. For more on the tropics of 'horror', the 'power of abstraction', and the emergence of the new, see, *Weird/Dark/Gothic: Capitalism and the Literary Fantastic* (Tumino, forthcoming).

167 Lukács, 'Narrate or Describe?', p. 146.

168 On the affective as postcritique-al reading see, Rita Felski, *The Limits of Critique* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2015).

'practical consciousness' that it will cease being a tool of class oppression underwriting the alienation of wage-labor that commodifies the world on behalf of capital and become instead part of the struggle of human freedom. For this it is necessary to focus on the speecherly dimension of Marx(ism) against his writerly readers who want to pluralize Marx(ism) so as to empty it of its critique-al opposition to class ideology.

The speecherly represents the negation of the one-sided writerly negation of bourgeois society by producing awareness of its systemic cause in the class organization of society. It represents that mode of reading/writing/thinking that 'break[s] with descriptive mannerism' that believes "'artistry" can exist independently of and in isolation from social, historical, and subjective conditions' by committing itself to producing 'a rich, comprehensive, many-sided and dynamic artistic reflection of objective reality'.¹⁶⁹ The result is that the speecherly is able to 'demonstrate the significance of the revolt of the proletariat' and its 'struggles to restore meaning to life' at a time when capitalism has failed the masses of people and lost all legitimacy.¹⁷⁰

169 Lukács, 'Narrate or Describe?', p. 121.

170 *Ibid.*, pp. 145, 147.