

Writing the Republic: Politics and Polemics in The German Ideology

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With the significant amount of new attention being paid to the political and theoretical debates of the *Vormärz*¹, the decade prior to the March riots that signaled the beginning of the 1848 revolution in Germany, it is important to keep in mind that, in addition to their roles as political activists and public intellectuals, the left Hegelians were also writers — that is, they were attempting not only to describe social reality, but also to address and convince a reading public. When rereading and reassessing their work, then, it is crucial not to lose sight of the formal and rhetorical articulations of their various claims, and particularly the *polemical form* of so much left Hegelian discourse. Louis Althusser's famous theory of Marx's "epistemological break" with his left Hegelian contemporaries — the displacement of the humanist concept of essence in favor of a discretely "Marxist" theory of the social relation — effectively elides the fact that, with or without Marx, left Hegelian discourse consisted primarily of an overdetermined cluster of breaks and fissures, antagonisms and debates. These polemical struggles not only pitted Marx against his contemporaries, as the Marxist tradition insisted, but also Marx and Engels against Bauer and Stirner, Bauer and Stirner against Feuerbach, Bauer against Stirner, even Marx against Engels. Through such debates, examples of which are countless, the left Hegelians discussed *both* the possibilities *and* the limitations of republican thought. They also performed or enacted one of republicanism's crucial tenets — namely, the notion that the "social bond" is not a fundamental substance waiting to be revealed in

1. Douglas Moggach, ed. *The Left Hegelians: New Philosophical and Literary Perspectives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

some final apocalyptic gesture, as one myopic version of the revolutionary tradition contends, but a formal or symbolic link that is created and continuously recreated anew through ongoing, interminable debates and struggles. That is to say, just as the form of left Hegelian discourse is largely polemical, so too is the form of the republican social bond largely and irreducibly polemical. It is our contention that these two "forms" — one literary, the other political — are inseparable, and that understanding republicanism requires attention be paid to the fictional, symbolic, and perhaps especially polemical elements of republican discourse. Thus, focusing on the polemical elements of *The German Ideology*, this paper interrogates the specifically literary imagination of republican discourse during the *Vormärz*. At the same time, we situate Marx's and Engels's position in relation to contemporary post-Marxist debates, where our reading of *The German Ideology* can be seen to occupy certain tense intersections in-between a variety of current approaches — neither entirely distinct from, nor entirely reducible to, the left Kantian formalism or theory of discourse ethics and the "public sphere" associated with figures like Jürgen Habermas on the one hand,² or the more "futural" and historically articulated politics of deconstruction and "democracy to come" associated with Jacques Derrida on the other.³

Recent post-Marxist political theory, especially as it has developed in France, and particularly in the work of Claude Lefort, has sought to underscore the inescapably fictional and antagonistic aspects of the republican community. It is argued that, even if only in a hypothetical "last instance" that in fact "never arrives," Marxism in all of its manifestations invariably sought to reduce political struggles and ideological debates to some more basic structure — be it the economy, class identity, the essence of humanity, or simply "material conditions." Picking up on Hannah Arendt's notion of the "political community," and her definition of freedom as something found only in the public life of the politically engaged citizen, Lefort and others have maintained that democracy does not require the elimination or the resolution of conflict, but its "institutionalization." As Lefort puts it, politics and therefore freedom itself require the erection of a "stage" or a *mise en scène* on which ideological subjects might confront one another, not merely in the hopes of achieving

2. Craig Calhoun, ed., *Habermas and the Public Sphere* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993).

3. Drucilla Cornell, Michael Rosefeld and David Carlson, eds., *Deconstruction and the Possibility of Justice* (New York: Routledge, 1992).

full consensus and overcoming differences, but in order endlessly to generate new debates and new differences. In recent political thought, this approach to democracy has often been called “dystopic,” in that it views democracy, if not as shot through with strife and struggle, then as something never achieved, but always “to come.”

Among those engaged in recent debates, however, it has rarely been noted that these same questions and themes had already been addressed during the *Vormärz*, and that so-called “post-Marxist” theory is in this regard a return to or repetition of themes and ideas that were already extensively developed among the left Hegelians. But once again, in order to register the connections between left Hegelian republicanism and contemporary “dystopic” theories of democracy, it would be necessary to highlight the polemical form of so much *Vormärz* discourse. Even authors thought to have worked more or less in tandem (such as Marx and Engels) were in fact involved in heated disputes with one another — debates that editors often homogenize in the attempt to produce the appearance of a coherent argument or consistent position, and that commentators largely ignore as a consequence. It is therefore necessary to examine what often appear to be miniscule differences, shifts and changes that take place even on the level of the manuscript page — treating the texts of this period, not as coherent bodies of work, but as something like a complex mechanical assemblages. In this attention to differences, a more variegated, but also more effective reading of both these classical disputes and contemporary debates begins to emerge.

In this paper we interrogate a number of links between contemporary political philosophy and that of the *Vormärz*. We pay especially close attention to the performative aspect of left Hegelian discourse — the extent to which it seeks not only to represent the world, but also, through the articulation of rhetorically convincing arguments, to change it. Amidst all the discussion of previously lesser known left Hegelian figures today, we remain committed to a certain spirit of Marx. As Derrida argues in *Specters of Marx*, this name still stands for a conception of justice as something that remains incomplete — an unfinished task, a promise of the future, and hence a political responsibility. Following Derrida, we have chosen not to focus on the canonical and familiar works that have been parceled out and glossed by Marxist theorists and editors, but on an elliptical, marginal, and routinely ignored text, namely the colossally difficult and outrageously satirical second section of *The German Ideology* entitled “The Leipzig Council.” Especially when considered in view of

the reception of more canonical works such as the *Communist Manifesto*, *Capital*, or even the familiar arguments of the introductory "Feuerbach" section of this text, the Marx that emerges from reading *The German Ideology* through both contemporary debates and the text's numerous editors and authors is neither a scientist with a seamless argument nor a dogmatist with a rigid position; rather, the Marx that we evoke is a deeply conflicted, fragmented, as well as engaged figure — one who has much to offer current debates, and the contemporary world in which we live and struggle.

1. The New Republicans and the Primacy of the Political

The collapse of official Marxism in the latter part of the 20th century brought with it an explosion of new interest in theories of republicanism. The perennial argument that Marxism provides no consistent theory of the state was rejuvenated, particularly among avant-garde French intellectuals. In place of the Marxist *doxa* that politics and the state are merely indirect expressions of more fundamental class interests, or instruments of class power, there emerged a new concern with republican political institutions, and what many came to call "the political" — "the specificity of the political," "the concept of the political," "the authentically political sphere," and so forth. At the same time, this new focus on institutions seemed to be driven largely if not exclusively by a single, negative project — the critique and the averting of totalitarianism. Put briefly, the argument went as follows: Totalitarianism is a result of an effort to fuse the social and the political or civil society and the state. Democracy requires that these two registers remain distinct, or that any connection between them remain contingent, provisional, and thus open to future contestation. Freedom of speech and regular elections, for example, are the mechanisms by which citizens refashion themselves as contingently and yet variously engaged political subjects. As soon as it is assumed that politics is but a mechanical expression of interests that precede it, and that it is possible to discover the objective basis of political superstructures, freedom itself is jeopardized. Thus, democratic social relations are premised on the vested interest that all political subjects have in maintaining the gap that separates the social from the political. This gap operates as a bulwark against the totalitarian threat, which is not, as so many believed, a perversion of Marx's original doctrine, but a danger inherent in some of his most basic tenets.

The chief proponent of this new republicanism and institutionalism in France has been the political philosopher and Machiavelli scholar Claude

Lefort. In his work on democracy and political forms, Lefort has argued that freedom is not an essence that political superstructures and ideologies obscure or distort, but a practical relationship that can only be found within politics itself — in the ideological struggles and antagonisms that constitute the political sphere. Democracy is not so much the rule of the people, if by “the people” we mean a common substance shared by all members of a political community, as it is an “institutionalization of conflict.” According to Lefort, the pivotal events of the French Revolution, and specifically the death of the king, resulted in the evacuation of the seat of power. In a republic, there is no longer any necessary connection between power and the subject who holds it. On the contrary, “[t]he locus of power is an empty place, it cannot be occupied — it is such that no group and no individual can be consubstantial with it — and it cannot be represented.”⁴ Similarly, “neither the state, the people nor the nation represent substantial entities.” Rather, “[t]heir representation in itself, in its dependence upon political discourse and upon sociological and historical elaboration, is always bound up with ideological debate.” For this reason, democracy requires the construction of a stage, an institutional *mise en scène*, on which ideological conflicts might be played out or enacted. And this problem of representation points to the paradox of democratic reason. “The erection of a political stage on which competition can take place shows that division is, in a general way, constitutive of the general unity of society.”⁵ So the democratic community shares what divides it. It is held together by that which tears it asunder.

Lefort establishes his position in direct opposition to Marxism, and to the French Marxist intellectuals who, he claims, can produce astonishingly sophisticated readings of philosophy or literature or psychoanalysis in their professional careers, but nonetheless revert to the crudest instrumentalism in their political decisions. According to Lefort, Marx misread the impact of the French Revolution. He saw its republican institutions as smokescreens intended to conceal deeper economic contradictions. With the resolution of economic contradictions or class conflict, Marx believed, politics and the state would simply “wither away.” Thus, Lefort concludes, Marx did not understand that republican institutions — the legislature, the courts, the military, and so forth — do not represent instrumental expressions of class power, but “a new symbolic constitution of

4. Claude Lefort, *Democracy and Political Theory*, tr. by David Macey (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1988), p. 17.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 18.

the social.”⁶ Lefort argues that, because they were committed to a certain model of Enlightenment reason or the project of demystification, Marx and his followers sought to destroy false representations so as to reveal an essential, universal, but heretofore hidden social truth. They therefore failed to recognize that society is equally the effect of symbolic acts — that representation is a prior condition, not just a function of social relations. Thus, in his opposition to Marx and Marxism, Lefort develops two themes: First, antagonism and struggle are constituent of the democratic community; they do not obscure a deeper social reality or reflect a more fundamental, so-called “material” struggle, but are the very shape and constitution of society. Second, the democratic social bond is a symbolic, formal link, not substantial or natural; it is created through symbolic acts, including (and often especially) the elaboration of convincing arguments and rhetorical performances. These two themes have been adopted and developed by any number of post-Marxist intellectuals, both inside and outside of France. Thus Jean-Luc Nancy⁷ writes of the “inoperative community” and, along with Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe,⁸ proposes a distinction between “politics” and “the political” — the latter referring to an ontological dimension that no specific politics can finally exhaust. Similarly, Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe⁹ transform the Marxist tradition into a defense of republicanism with their elaboration of Gramsci’s theory of “hegemony,” insisting on the irreducibility of the social antagonism, and calling for a pluralist politics void of all “essentialism.” Finally, Jacques Rancière¹⁰ argues that the democratic community is founded on a fundamental “wrong” that is constantly being addressed, but can never finally be redressed. This constituent “wrong” endlessly generates new struggles, meaning that democratic politics cannot amount to managing consensus and reciprocal exchange, but requires division and strife.

The turn towards republicanism among avant-garde socialist intellectuals tends to be constructed in opposition to Marx and Marxism, but generally on the basis of a very particular (and highly contentious)

6. *Ibid.*, p. 17.

7. Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, tr. by Peter Connor, Lisa Garbus, Michael Holland, and Simona Sawhney (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990).

8. Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy, *Retreating the Political*, ed. by Simon Sparks (New York: Routledge, 1997).

9. Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (London: Verso, 1985).

10. Jacques Rancière, *On the Shores of Politics*, tr. by Liz Heron (New York: Verso, 1995).

interpretation of Marx proposed by Louis Althusser and his students. More accurately, even as Althusser's brand of structural Marxism gets repudiated among poststructuralist thinkers, certain elements of his approach nonetheless remain very influential — they continue to haunt those who seek to reject Althusser. In particular, Althusser's critique of essentialism, his attack on all conceptions of the subject of history, and his effort to separate Marxism from humanism still form crucial elements of poststructuralist thought. Althusser argued for an "epistemological break" detaching Marx's early ideological work from his mature science, and insisted that Marxism was not, as the humanist reading implied, one ideology among many, but a unique "science of ideology." The hypothesis of the "break" allowed Althusser to focus on Marx's theory of the "social relation." For Althusser, this pivotal Marxist theory suggests that society is not a dialectical totality organized around the progressive resolution of contradictions, as Hegel maintained, but an overdetermined layering of, in Althusser's words, "specifically effective" and "relatively autonomous" structures and superstructures — a complex "social formation" determined by the economy, but only in an ever retreating "last instance" that in fact "never arrives."¹¹ Sanguine Marxist assurances about the working class being the subject of history, and a future paradise without ideology, were thus cast aside. Marxists instead began to argue that every subject is an *effect* or a product of concrete ideological apparatuses — churches, schools, families, militaries, prisons, and countless other rituals and practices. At the same time, the hypothesis of the break cut the "mature" Marx off from both his own early work and his left Hegelian contemporaries. Althusser was especially insistent on rejecting the definition of ideology he believed Marx and Engels set out in *The German Ideology*. Although he saw it as the starting point of Marx's break with humanism, Althusser also maintained that, precisely to the extent that it is "polemical" and rhetorical, *The German Ideology* should not be read as a serious expression of Marxist science. Rather it is but a theatrical "stage" on which Marxist science itself "give[s] battle."¹² The same repudiation of *The German Ideology* begins Althusser's celebrated "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses." There he claims that, to the extent that it relies on a theory of "false consciousness," the definition of ideology first

11. Louis Althusser, *For Marx*, tr. by Ben Brewster (New York: Pantheon Books, 1969), p. 111.

12. Louis Althusser, *Reading Capital*, tr. by Ben Brewster (London: Verso, 1998), p. 32.

proposed in *The German Ideology* is “not Marxist.”¹³ For Althusser, an ideology is not an illusion or a fantasy, but a system of material practices, concrete rituals, and institutional apparatuses.

In part because of the strength and influence of Althusser’s thought, the new poststructuralist republicans — even while defining themselves in opposition to Althusser, rejecting his scientism and orthodoxy in the name of the pluralism and institutionalism of postmodern social democracy — generally do not look for resources in Marx’s early work, or in that of his left Hegelian contemporaries. And yet precisely what is at stake in the polemics of the *Vormärz*, especially the typically ignored “Leipzig Council” section of *The German Ideology*, is the relationship between socialism and republicanism, and the question of the human essence and social relations. In fact, read closely, the whole of *The German Ideology* might be seen to establish a definition of ideology that is much closer to the one Althusser lays out in “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses” than it is to the humanist notion of “false consciousness” he rejects. But these elements of Marx’s and Engels’s work will only become apparent if we focus on the very features of the text that Althusser isolates as proof of its insignificance — namely the polemical rhetoric. We can put this same point another way. Althusser’s concern with the performative dimension of ideology, or the sense in which ideology exists only in rituals and acts, is paradoxically founded upon a certain blindness towards the performative dimension of Marx’s and Engels’s writing. But with contemporary debates over republicanism in mind, indeed in any consideration of the republican tradition, it is precisely this performative dimension of discourse that looms largest. The republican claim against the socialist model is just this — that there is no substantial social bond unifying “the people”; rather the social bond is the effect of performative utterances or symbolic acts. As much as the community is a logical and ontological construct, it is a rhetorical one as well. This imaginative, literary, or symbolic dimension is exactly what gets suppressed when political discourse is reduced to (accurate or inaccurate) descriptions of social reality — a procedure that, as suggested above, threatens republican and democratic freedom, as it truncates the effectivity of the political sphere.

To understand Marx’s relationship with republicanism, and to determine what elements of Marx’s thought might continue to inform current

13. Louis Althusser, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses: Notes Toward an Investigation,” in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, tr. by Ben Brewster (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971), p. 150.

political theory and practice, it is crucial that we focus precisely on what Althusser would have us ignore — not the science of ideology, but the politics of language and of literature. Close attention to Marx's polemical texts, and to the contexts in which they were intended to intervene, in fact suggests that Marx and Engels were well aware of, and in many ways anticipated, the republican criticisms of socialism that have reemerged in recent years with respect to the irreducibility of the antagonism and the symbolic status of the social bond. Indeed, reassessed in light of recent research into left Hegelian thought, *The German Ideology* in general, and the long ignored section titled "The Leipzig Council" in particular, appear as Marx's and Engels's initial responses to exactly these kinds of critiques of socialism, especially as they were developed in the work of Bruno Bauer and Max Stirner. This is a case where a return to an earlier, largely ignored debate illuminates a current one, and where it is not so much a question of how we read (or perhaps fail to read) Marx and Engels, but of how they read us.

2. *The Old Republicans and the Rhetoric of Political Action*

In his *Rhetoric of Motives*, the formalist literary critic and rhetorician Kenneth Burke recounts the story of a young Marxist (possibly himself) who, at a meeting of his comrades, was "soundly rebuked" for suggesting that they pursue a study of "Red Rhetoric," or a discretely socialist approach to persuasive discourse. The young Marxist's comrades associated rhetoric with liberal or fascist "ideology," to which they naturally opposed Marxist "science."¹⁴ Such dogmatic oppositions between science and ideology have, one hopes, since become obsolete, or at least out of fashion. And yet, the Marxist renunciation of rhetoric can still be found among those Marxists who have resisted the "linguistic turn" in contemporary philosophy. This resistance has less to do with the opposition between science and ideology than it does with a certain conception of social relations or the social bond. Despite all of the changes in Marxist and post-Marxist theory, there remains a (sometimes unconscious, unacknowledged, or even disavowed) desire to conceive of the social bond as a substance — a unity or a totality that is distorted or repressed by political discourse and ideological rhetoric. At least since the time of the *Vormärz*, the battle line between republicanism and socialism has generally been drawn across this divide. If socialists tend to conceive of the

14. Kenneth Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), p. 101.

social bond as a hidden substance, republicans conceive of it as a symbolic form — a unity that must be actively created by politically engaged citizens, and not simply revealed through revolutionary struggle or scientific inquiry. During the *Vormärz* Bruno Bauer and Ludwig Feuerbach disagreed over precisely this opposition. While contemporary arguments between socialists and republicans do not typically note this heritage, Marx and Engels followed the polemics of their time closely, and would have been very familiar with the terms of current republican arguments for the specificity of the political sphere, or the symbolic and agonistic status of the social bond. In fact, while Marxist editors reconstructed *The German Ideology* as the foundation of a unique science of history, this text is as much Marx's and Engels's attempt to come to terms with the republican critique of socialism. The same might be said of all of what Althusser calls "the Works of the Break." However, what we find in these works not a displacement but a reformulation the socialist concept of essence and the social bond — an attempt to redefine the social bond as neither substance nor form, but what the sixth of Marx's "Theses on Feuerbach" calls an "ensemble of social relations,"¹⁵ or relations that precede and condition that which they relate. The elaboration of this notion of the "social relation" takes place primarily in Marx's and Engels's polemic with Stirner. And this is why, especially today, the previously overlooked "Leipzig Council - III. Saint Max" represents an important intervention into debates between republicans and socialists.

Burke actually sets out the terms of the republican argument quite clearly in his *Rhetoric of Motives*. "If men were not apart from one another," he writes, "there would be no need for a rhetorician to proclaim their unity. If men were wholly and truly of one substance, absolute communication would be of man's very essence. It would not be an ideal, as it is now, partly embodied in material conditions and partly frustrated by them."¹⁶ From this republican perspective, the community is composed of differences that rhetoric can provisionally unify. But that unity is always conditioned, and therefore threatened, by the differences that constitute it. The socialist, on the other hand, believes that unity is something that exists independent of rhetoric — a fundamental essence that politics and ideology distort. But this approach invariably elides difference, eliminates dissent, and stagnates change. During the *Vormärz*, Bruno Bauer's 1844

15. Karl Marx, "Theses on Feuerbach," in *Karl Marx: Selected Writings*, ed. David McLellan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), p. 157.

16. Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives*, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

essay "The Genus and the Crowd" leveled exactly this critique at socialism. Targeting Feuerbach in particular, but socialism in general, Bauer contends that the socialist concept of essence, "species-being," or the sensuous *Gattungswesen* reduces the social bond to a thing that simply exists, rather than an ideal form that subjects or citizens create and continuously recreate through critical discourse. In Feuerbach, Bauer argues, "the human essence is for man a power which he may not nor cannot submit at all to critique."¹⁷ The inevitable political manifestation of this sensuous, substantialist concept of essence is "a society which neither has nor makes this essence, but rather, is purely constituted by it."¹⁸ It entails the suffocation of difference and the transformative power of critique. Similarly, the notion that political institutions might simply disappear, to be replaced by the spontaneously self-organized "crowd of free brothers," ignores the necessary, and also creative, divisiveness of the authentically political sphere. It threatens to result in a society in which "there will be but *one* dogma, and this dogma as the expression of the entire truth — rules all brothers the same way."¹⁹ Here all "interruptions of unity through the specific differences"²⁰ get swallowed up in the homogeneous crowd. So long as it is assumed that the human essence is a substance, the symbolic and agonistic status of the social bond is foreclosed.

Bauer's critique of Feuerbach is, then, more or less the same critique of socialism found among the new republicans discussed above. In the work of figures such as Claude Lefort, Marxism is attacked for ignoring the specificity of the political — the irreducibly discursive and irreducibly antagonistic character of social relations. But it has yet to be noted that, in works such as *The German Ideology*, and especially in the often forgotten "Leipzig Council" section of the text, Marx and Engels are explicitly trying to come to terms with the republican criticism of the socialist concept of essence. In one of a handful of sycophantic letters Marx wrote to Feuerbach during the summer of 1844, Marx warns the older and better established philosopher of Bauer's "unspoken polemic" against him, and takes the opportunity to defend Feuerbach's concept of essence, redefining it as "the unity of man with man, which is also rooted in actual differences

17. Bruno Bauer, "The Genus and the Crowd," tr. by Michael Molloy, in *The Young Hegelians*, ed. by Lawrence S. Stepelevich (1844) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 201.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 203.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 204.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 205.

among men.”²¹ This attempt to think “essence” as both unity and difference would become crucial in *The German Ideology*, where it would not be resolved but repeatedly mulled over. The result is an understanding of the social bond as neither substance nor form, but relation (*Verhältnis*) and exchange (*Verkehr*). These two words constitute a kind of counterpoints or leitmotif in *The German Ideology*, and become Marx’s and Engels’s chief weapons in their polemic against Stirner’s egoism. The point, then, of *The German Ideology* is not to reduce all social relations to an economic base, or to so-called “material conditions.” Rather, Marx and Engels argue that relations and exchange in the broadest possible sense – economic to be sure, but also political, philosophical, commercial, libidinal, aesthetic, discursive, and rhetorical – are constituents of the social bond. The “ideological” error occurs when one extracts a particular mode of exchange and allows it to stand in for all of the others, thereby concealing a life-world of complex and overdetermined social relations behind the veneer of a single object or a single relation. Much later, in the second edition of *Capital, Volume I*, Marx analyzed this same structure in terms of the fetishism of the commodity, in which a single object (namely money) gets magically or mysteriously transformed into a “universal equivalent,” both representing and obscuring the relations that go into the production of value. But the basic outline of the theory of fetishism is already there in “The Leipzig Council – III. Saint Max,” and in Marx’s and Engels’s debate with Stirner.

The few extant interpretations of Marx’s and Engels’s debate with Stirner range wildly, but share common themes. Nicholas Lobkowicz asserts that reading Stirner forced Marx to concoct the science of historical materialism. Confronted with Stirner’s denunciation “not only [of] a certain type of ideal, but [of] all ideals whatsoever,”²² Lobkowicz argues, Marx “simply translated his ideal into laws of history.”²³ In a similar vein, Jacques Derrida speculates that Marx rebukes Stirner at such great length because, in Stirner’s hunt for specters, he finds “a brother, a double, thus a diabolical image” of himself.²⁴ Picking up on a hunting metaphor pursued by Marx and Engels throughout “The Leipzig Council,” Derrida proposes

21. Saul Padover, *The Letters of Karl Marx* (Engelwood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1979), p. 35.

22. Nicholas Lobkowicz, “Karl Marx and Max Stirner,” in *Demythologizing Marxism*, ed. by Frederick J. Adelman (The Hague: Marinus Nijhoff, 1969), p. 85.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 90.

24. Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, tr. by Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 139.

that Stirner “poached the specters of Marx.”²⁵ Neither of these readings, nor any of the others available at this point, really addresses the specific arguments that Marx and Engels marshal against Stirner in “The Leipzig Council – III. Saint Max.” In working through Stirner’s text in meticulous detail — a painstaking labor that, in the famous “Preface” to his *Critique of Political Economy*, Marx refers to as a process of “self-clarification”²⁶ — Marx and Engels develop two related themes. The first involves what would later come to be called “ideology,” or the institutional and political articulation of powerful, hegemonic ideas. The second involves the concept of “property,” and specifically the claim that one only owns property to the extent that one owns something that can be exchanged with others — something, as Marx and Engels put it, “vendible [*Verschacherbares*].”²⁷ Along with these two broad themes, “The Leipzig Council – III. Saint Max” is also a sometimes explicit, sometimes implicit meditation on the question of language as such, and the effectivity of discourse or rhetoric. This particular aspect of the text is especially important today, as Marxism and its heirs continue to grapple with the “linguistic turn” in contemporary philosophy and in their own competing public discourses.

It is not especially well known that the comments on the concept of hegemony that now form part of the frequently cited and anthologized introductory “Feuerbach” chapter of *The German Ideology* were originally written as part of the polemic against Stirner. Only in the third and final draft of the text did Marx and Engels move those manuscript pages from “The Leipzig Council” to “Feuerbach,” where they were incorporated into the final third of the text’s introduction. While the editors of the *Collected Works* insert a section break to indicate this shift, others spackle over it to make the argument appear seamless. But when Marx and Engels tell us that each revolutionary class is “compelled, merely in order to carry through its aims, to present its interest as the common interest of all members of society” and that “it has to give its ideas the form of universality, and present them as the only rational, universally valid ones,”²⁸ it must be kept in mind that this assertion originally formed part of the polemic against Stirner. In *The Ego and Its Own*, Stirner denies the reality

25. *Ibid.*, p. 140.

26. Karl Marx, “Preface to *A Critique of Political Economy*” in *Karl Marx: Selected Writings*, *op. cit.*, p. 390.

27. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology. Karl Marx-Friedrich Engels Collected Work*, Vol. 5, tr. by Clemens Dutt *et al.* (1845-7) (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1975), p. 230.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 60.

of all ideals, all collective identity, all morality, and everything save the solitary ego – *Der Einzige*. Specifically, he rejects the Hegelian concept of the ethical community, or *Sittlichkeit*. This communitarianism, he claims, and all other forms of humanism, are nothing but specters, no less abstract and theological than a spirit or god. They invariably result, not in freedom, but in clerical and moralistic confinement of the ego's pleasure or "self-enjoyment." The religion of man is no less oppressive, and no less pious, than that of a god. "If one finds man's chief requirement in piety," Stirner writes, "then there arises religious clericalism; if one sees it in morality, then moral clericalism [*sittliche Pfaffentum*] raises its head."²⁹ A little earlier in his book, Stirner plays on the ambiguous meaning of *sittlich*, noting the cultural relativity of morals, and sarcastically claiming that "[t]o act according to the custom [*Sitte*] and habit of one's country is to be moral [*sittlich*] there."³⁰ Of course, in response to these assertions, Marx and Engels do not defend the Hegelian or communitarian notion of *Sittlichkeit*. Instead, they establish a new theory of the reciprocal relationship between any given community's material practices and its abstract political, moral, and philosophical ideals. Simply to deny the existence of ideals, as Stirner does, changes exactly nothing. Instead, one must analyze the processes by which ideas mediate material conditions, and find institutional articulation. Where Stirner sees only specters to be brushed aside via his own speculative fiat, Marx and Engels see concrete ideological apparatuses — real ideologies buttressed by real institutions.

A second major theme in "The Leipzig Council – III. Saint Max" involves an extended critique of Stirner's concept of "property," and his play on words related to the German root *eigen* – *Eigentum* (property), *Eigenheit* (peculiarity), and so forth, which are in turn ascribed to the unique individual or ego in its "ownness" (*Einzige*). Now, Marx and Engels criticize Stirner for relying on etymology and other rhetorical "conjuring tricks."³¹ But their point is not, as Derrida and others have suggested, simply to insist upon a "real life" that subtends rhetoric. It is, rather, to privilege socially effective, convincing, if not exclusively rational public discourse, as opposed to Stirner's ineffective, highly idiosyncratic self-examination. In the case of the concept of property, Marx and Engels want to prove that, exactly like language and signs in general,

29. Max Stirner, *The Ego and Its Own*, tr. by Steven Tracy Byington (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 72.

30. *Ibid.*, p. 65.

31. Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, *op. cit.*, pp. 272-301.

property only has value to the extent that it can be exchanged. Property first accrues real value through social relations. Here a quick look at Lawrence Stepelevich's work on Stirner is helpful. Taking Stirner's side against Marx, Stepelevich has argued that, while Marx sees property as a form of alienation (*Entfremdung*), and thus something that separates me from myself, Stirner sees it as the genuine expression (*Entäusserung*) of the ego's individuality – what first *makes* me myself. According to Stepelevich, for Stirner the relationship between ego and property, the willful act of appropriating a thing, “renders both subject and thing intelligible.”³² However, through their debate with Stirner, Marx and Engels come to define property not only in terms of alienation but also and far more importantly in terms of exchange. Thus, Stirner rejects communism because he fears that, in seeking to eliminate property, the communists will also eliminate what is “proper” or “peculiar” to the individual, thereby eliminating differences between egos. “In reality,” Marx and Engels retort, “I possess private property only insofar as I have something vendible [*Verschacherbares*], whereas what is peculiar to me [*meine Eigenheit*] may not be vendible at all.”³³ Property, then, is neither an expression of the subject nor alienated from the subject, but an exchange between subjects — an exchange or a mode of interaction that constitutes them as particular kinds of subjects. “The Leipzig Council – III. Saint Max” is concerned with precisely this priority of the relation or exchange to both the thing and the subject — the enigmatic sense in which a relation, or an “ensemble of relations,” might precede and condition that which it relates.

This brings us finally to the question of language, and the theory of language that Marx and Engels toy with throughout “The Leipzig Council – III. Saint Max.” Here it is crucial not to ignore the formal and generic frame of *The German Ideology* – a mistake that has been very common among those who read only the “Feuerbach” chapter. While it has been retroactively constructed as a science of history, this work is actually a parody and a polemic. “The Leipzig Council – III. Saint Max” ironically doubles or repeats the structure of *The Ego and Its Own* in exacting, excruciating detail. The joke, of course, is that this “unique” book can be so easily copied, meaning that it is not unique at all. An analogous point is made from a slightly different direction when Marx and Engels accuse Stirner of copying his potted history of the world from Hegel's *Philosophy*

32. Lawrence Stepelevich, “Max Stirner as Hegelian,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* (Vol. 46), p. 612.

33. Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, *op. cit.*, p. 230.

of History, a posthumously published collection of lecture notes that had a considerable influence on the left Hegelians. Far from being a heroic, individualistic, unique ego, Stirner is but a “clumsy” copier of Hegel³⁴ – a truant school boy who relies on a Hegelian “crib.” The joke is extended throughout the text, where Marx and Engels endlessly name and rename the one who thinks of himself as “unique” – calling him Saint Max, Saint Jacob, Jacques le bonhomme, Sancho Panza, Saint Sancho, the Unique, or simply “Stirner” in quotation marks. This assemblage of sobriquets recalls the fact that “Max Stirner” is not a proper name at all, but a pseudonym for (a copy of) the “parochial Berlin school-master”³⁵ Johann Kaspar Schmidt. So the self-declared unique ego’s school motto should, Marx and Engels quip, read “*Repetitio est mater studiorum*”³⁶ – repetition is the mother of learning.

These jokes could be cast aside as so much rhetorical embellishment. Or, they might be seen to articulate a very complex philosophical theory of language. According to Stepelevich, Stirner’s goal is to produce a unique discourse – a language that is owned by the ego who expresses it. This understanding of language as “property” is, Stepelevich maintains, illustrated in Stirner’s own concept of *Der Einzige* – the unique ego or owner. Stirner wants to end what Stepelevich calls the “false belief that one’s ideas are not one’s own possessions, but have an objectivity and substantiality apart from the knowing ego.”³⁷ And Stirner’s own ideas are an enactment or performance of this principle. Thus Stepelevich claims that Stirner “introduces into the philosophical literature a new term intended to convey a note of radical exclusiveness, a term that would lie outside all classification: ‘*Der Einzige*.’”³⁸ Since it remains “beyond the forms of consciousness that set definitions,” this unique term “is *undefinable*.”³⁹ Thus the very word *Einzige* is an expression (*Entäusserung*) of Stirner’s ego – his property. But if it is the case that *Der Einzige* truly is a unique concept, copyrighted and owned by Max Stirner alone, then by definition what Stirner “intended to convey” would be lost to Stepelevich (and everyone else for that matter) from the outset. As if to anticipate Wittgenstein’s well known critique of private languages, Marx and Engels

34. *Ibid.*, p. 170.

35. *Ibid.*, p. 170.

36. *Ibid.*, p. 186.

37. Stepelevich, “Max Stirner as Hegelian,” *op. cit.*, p. 613.

38. *Ibid.*, p. 607.

39. *Ibid.*, p. 609.

make the same point about *all* of Stirner's words:

The second rock against which Saint Sancho [i.e. Stirner], on reflecting a little, was inevitably bound to shipwreck, is his own assertion that every individual is totally distinct from every other, is unique. Since every individual is altogether different from any other, it is by no means necessary that what is foreign, holy, for one individual should be so for another individual; it even *cannot* be so. And the common name used, such as State, religion, morality, etc., should not mislead us, for these names are only abstractions from the actual attitude of separate individuals, and these objects, in consequence of the totally different attitude towards them of the unique individuals, become for each of the latter *unique* objects, hence totally different objects, which have only their name in common. Consequently, Saint Sancho could have at most said: for me, Saint Sancho, the State, religion, etc., are the Alien, the Holy. Instead of this he has to make them the absolute Holy, the Holy for all individuals – how else could he have fabricated his constructed Ego, his egoist in agreement with himself, etc., how else could he have written his whole “Book?”⁴⁰.

If language were not made up of signs that are exchangeable – indeed repeatable — apart from and prior to the knowing ego, communication would be impossible. Stirner's book relies, then, on a performative contradiction. He cannot both mean what he says and say what he means. Indeed any book, any inscription, any utterance whatsoever relies on a minimal affirmation of the possibility of communication, and therefore of community, or relations and exchange with others. In repeating and parodying Stirner's book section by section, line by line, Marx and Engels enact this aspect of discourse as such — the sense in which every sign acquires meaning by being repeated within a (determinate, conditioned, but still alterable) social context. And this performance is perhaps the point of Marx's and Engels's elaborate, vicious joke. Copying, repetition, or what Derrida calls “iteration”⁴¹ is a condition and not simply a function of language. Against both the nominalist and the expressivist theories of language, the meaning or value of a sign is not initially derived from reference to a thing or the expression of an intention, but from repetition within a social context, which also provides it with its power or, in the

40. Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, *op. cit.*, p. 285.

41. Jacques Derrida “Signature Event Contextm” tr. by Samuel Weber and Jeffrey Mehlman, in *Limited Inc* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1988), p. 12.

terms of speech act theory, its "illocutionary force." For his part, Stirner views every social context as a realm of false specters, chimeras and ghosts. He claims he does not believe in such things. And yet, despite all of his bluster, he must believe in such things. How else could he have written his whole book?

3. *The "Marx-Engels Machine" and the Politics of Parody*

The question of how Stirner could have written his book — without some notion that language involves intersubjective exchange within a public, symbolic life-world — opens directly onto the far more pressing issue of how Marx and Engels sought to write theirs. *The German Ideology* is quite explicitly and demonstrably not the production of a single author with a unified intention, but a collaborative work. The collaborative character of *The German Ideology* itself represents part of Marx's and Engels's critique of the subjectivism and the egoism they find in Bauer and Stirner. What is more, the text is not only the production of two (or more) authors, it also consists largely of an assemblage of copied passages, citations, quotations, and references to other works. In this sense the textual assemblage called *The German Ideology* represents a kind of primal scene of left Hegelian polemics and republican discourse. The text itself becomes something of a *res publica* — an open discursive space where a multitude of literate citizens converge, struggle, debate, and in doing so come to define and redefine themselves and each other through processes of reading and writing. The theatrics of these debates can be displayed at the level of the manuscript page through a critical-editorial approach to the text's intricate construction, transmission, and reception. Although editors have concealed most of these complications behind the veneer of a coherent argument, the manuscript of *The Leipzig Council - III. Saint Max* poses irresolvable problems of legibility, iteration and alteration on a number of distinct levels: 1) Marx's and Engels use of Stirner's citations from and interpretations of Hegel, 2) Marx's and Engels's citations from and readings of Stirner, including their mutual editing and revisions of one another, and 3) the transcription, editing, and publication of Marx's and Engels's manuscript by editors and its presentation for readers as a "definitive work of Marxism." A close analysis of the manuscript — one which attends to its laminated textual layers, its histories, its insufficiencies, and its productive lacunae — will open up a new approach to *The German Ideology*, and to the disputes which both provoked and were later produced by it.

First it is important to address the politics of interpretation within the

complex publication history of this work, which appeared only piecemeal over the course of more than a century. In spite of the best efforts of Marx and Engels, only two parts of the second volume on "true socialism" escaped suppression by the censors in their lifetime (Chapter V on Kuhlmann, which appeared in 1845, seems to have been written by Hess, copied by Weydemeyer and edited by Marx and Engels); a few pieces of the critique of Stirner were edited and published by Eduard Bernstein in 1903-1904, and only in 1924 did the section that Engels later designated as "Part I" on Feuerbach appear, but in Russian translation, followed by German and English translations from the Russian two years later; and finally, "the whole book" — insofar as such an expression can apply to an incomplete manuscript with several missing and damaged pages — was edited and published by the Institute of Marxism-Leninism in German in 1932, with the first complete English edition by Progress Publishers appearing in Moscow in 1964.⁴² In short then, the troubled textual transmission of *The German Ideology* met much the same the fate as the posthumous remains (*Nachlass*) of Marx's and Engels's theoretical and historical legacy itself, caught as it was in the struggles of nineteenth and twentieth century republicanism, scientific Marxism, and "actually existing" socialism.

Any presumption to read this text, or any part of it, as somehow constituting the original doctrine of dialectical materialism, or as "a comprehensive exposition of the materialist conception of history," as editorial notes and interpretive commentaries have tried to establish, must therefore be met with suspicion.⁴³ Since Marx and Engels never completed a final version but were continuously engaged in planning, writing, revising, rearranging, supplementing, deleting, editing, and recopying the manuscript — usually in collaboration with each other though also individually — from April 1845 until they finally abandoned it in April 1847, the published text must at best be approached as an unstable and provisional unity, rather than as a definitive statement of their ultimate intentions.⁴⁴ Notwithstanding these precautions, however, the famous opening section which supposedly provides the definitive exposition of the doctrine of historical materialism titled "I. Feurebach" offers what is perhaps the richest

42. See editors' note 7 to Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology*, *op. cit.*, pp. 586-588.

43. *Ibid.*, pp. 588-589.

44. W Hiromatsou, ed. *Die deutsche Ideologie. I. Band, I. Abschnitt* (Tokyo: Kawadashobo-Shinsha, 1974), and G. Thomas Tanselle "The Editorial Problem of Final Authorial Intention," in *Selected Studies in Bibliography* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1979).

concept and the most “dialectical” of images in the work as a whole. Indeed, the celebrated figure of the *camera obscura* suggests a way of projecting a coherent image of the text as a model for the agonistic politics of reading and misreading itself.⁴⁵ In their attempts to restage the debates of their fellow Young Hegelians textually, Marx and Engels “develop a picture,” so to speak, of this polemical field as a potentially open forum for democratic dialogue, civil discussion, and republican reasoning:

The production of ideas, of conceptions [*Vorstellungen*], of consciousness, is at first directly interwoven with the material activity and the material intercourse [*materiellen Verkehr*] of human beings [*Menschen*], the language of actual life. Imagining [*Vorstellen*], thinking, the mental intercourse [*geistige Verkehr*] of humans still appear here as the direct product or outlet [*Ausfluß*] of their material behaviour. The same applies to mental production as represented [*dargestellt*] in the language of politics, laws, morality, religion, metaphysics, etc. of a people. Human beings are the producers of their conceptions, ideas, etc., that is, actual, active humans as they are conditioned by a definite development of their productive forces and of the intercourse corresponding to these, up to its furthest forms. Consciousness [*das Bewusstsein*] can never be anything else than conscious being [*das bewusste Sein*], and the being of humans is their actual life-process. If in all ideology humans and their relations appear upside-down as in a *camera obscura*, this phenomenon arises just as much from their historical life-process as the inversion of objects in the retina does from their physical life-process.⁴⁶

Often overlooked in commentaries on this passage – which appears on the last of the opening five pages of the “clean copy” that Engels carefully edited and rewrote from an earlier draft in preparing the text for publication — is the manner in which it recommends reflexively resituating the philosophical and literary debates among the Young Hegelians — Marx and Engels included — within the historical and political struggles of the day. Thus, to posit a clean break (epistemological or otherwise), a sheer opposition or simple negation between the “science” of Marx and Engels and the “ideology” of their cohorts and adversaries, as many later readers have tried to do, contradicts both the critical spirit of their concept of ideology and

45. W.J.T Mitchell “The Rhetoric of Iconoclasm,” in *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986).

46. Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, *op. cit.*, p. 36, and Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Die deutsche Ideologie*, in *Karl Marx – Friedrich Engels Werke*, Band 3. ([1845-7] Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1959), p. 26, trans. modified.

their actual practice in this text. In other words, the "German ideology," the philosophical ideas and world outlook of their colleagues and rivals (in these opening pages, Feuerbach is both the target of attack and a congenial ally), can be understood as both the form and the content of *The German Ideology*, that is, as a kind of textual instrument or medium that Marx and Engels were constructing in order to see and think (*theoria*) more clearly about social and political relations. Considered in the light of both its circumstances of composition and the contexts of its reading and interpretation, the text of *The German Ideology* might therefore be characterized as the *camera obscura of left Hegelianism* — not just simply as the intellectual reversal of its theses and claims, but as a reading and recording machine, an assemblage of citations and commentaries, syntheses and criticisms that both invert and displace the thought-images of ideological writing.

As already noted, in spite of the prevailing wisdom of Marxist commentary, this opening discussion on "I. Feuerbach," along with the "Preface" to the text and Marx's celebrated eleven theses "ad Feuerbach" from 1845, serves mainly as a kind of pretext or prologue to the main argument, with the more massive second section titled "The Leipzig Council," which makes up well over half the manuscript, occupying the centre stage of this theoretical theatre. This Marx-Engels co-production is itself divided into two parts or "acts" — subtitled "II. Saint Bruno" and "III. Saint Max" — that ostensibly wage a war of words against Bauer's and Stirner's critiques of Feuerbach and others appearing in volume three of *Wigand's Vierteljahrschrift* in 1845. The opening shots in this skirmish take the form of a brief rejoinder to the critique of Marx's and Engels's *Holy Family* by "B. Bauer and Consorts," followed by a more extensive engagement with Stirner's "apologetic commentary," that is, his defensive review of his own book, *Der Eigene und sein Eigentum* (*The Ego and His Own, or The Unique and its Property*), which Marx and Engels ridicule in the form of a series of "episodic insertions" into and "meditations" upon the "original." In presenting what they call "another reading" (*Lesart*), they elaborate on a satirical pseudo-hermeneutics that mimics the division of Stirner's book into an "Old Testament" whose hero is "Man," and a "New Testament," whose hero is "the Ego, the Unique," the latter itself occasionally recast as the adventures of Sancho Panza (Stirner) and his knight errant, Don Quixote (Franz Szeliga). This extraordinary weave of cross-references and self-citations, textual doublings and displacements which originally appeared in Wigand's periodical is in turn dramatically rescripted by Marx and Engels first as a meeting of "church fathers"

gathered for a holy "inquisition," with Marx and Engels in the role of backstage witnesses "taking a verbatim report of the proceedings," and then as a "cordial dialogue" which occasionally breaks out into a "touching duet" between Saint Max and Saint Bruno, with Marx and Engels interrupting as a diabolical chorus from off-stage.⁴⁷ Their critical commentary thus enacts and redeploys the etymological meaning of "parody," which refers to a repetition or imitation that both appears beside (*para*) and aims to mock or ridicule the original, often in the form of a poem or song (*oide*).

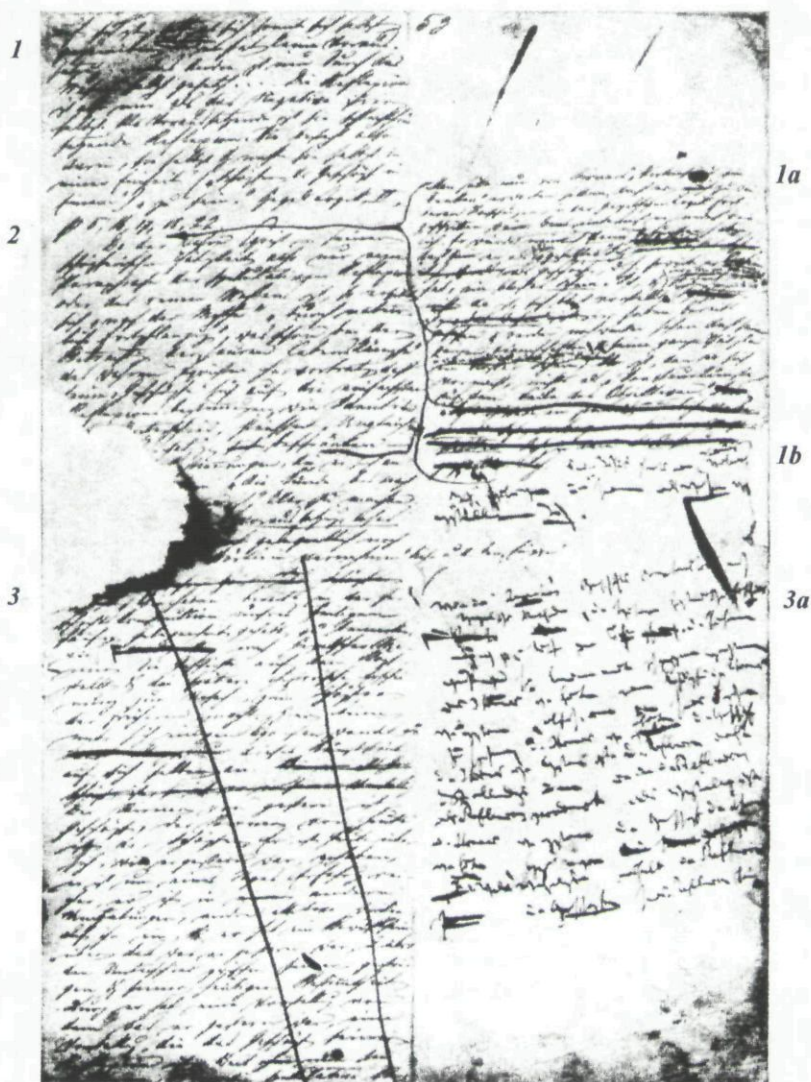
This play within a play (*Stück in Stücken*), or *mise-en-abime*, is probably best understood when its performance is displayed and observed rather than merely described and read, as on the manuscript page numbered "53" (see Figure 1). This page provides a remarkable but not atypical example of Marx's and Engels's collaborative method of research and writing, and of the apparent textual division of labour between them, with Engels apparently serving as amanuensis or initial draftsman and Marx as commentator and critical editor, but each routinely correcting and revising the other. The result is a sometimes chaotically coordinated collection of intersecting quotations and critical interpretations, with a first draft or core text on the left-hand column (usually in Engels' hand), marginal addenda and elaborations in the right (by both Marx and Engels), and multiple overlaying insertions, deletions and substitutions by each of them throughout. Complicating matters in this instance is what Marx famously described in 1859 as "the gnawing criticism of the mice" from the left side of the page, to which he admits he eventually had to abandon "this large manuscript in two octavo volumes," the product of an extensive "written exchange of ideas with Engels," when "altered circumstances" made publishing it impossible.⁴⁸

47. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels *The German Ideology*. *Karl Marx-Friedrich Engels Collected Works*. *op. cit.*, p. 451-453.

48. Karl Marx, "Preface to *A Critique of the Political Economy*," *op. cit.*, p. 390.

Figure 1: The Marx-Engels Machine

Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, op. cit., pp. 226-27; reproduced by permission



Engels's parodic portrait on the previous page of Stirner as a "gesetzter Mann" (a play on the meaning of "gesetzt" as both "posited" and "sedate") who is caught up in "the 'machinations' of the 'creative nothing' [*die 'Machinationen' des 'schöpferischen Nichts'*]" that he has forged out of Hegel's doctrine of essence.⁴⁹ Copying and exaggerating Stirner's own procedure, Marx and Engels seize the opportunity to "episodically insert" a few passages from Hegel's explanation of self presupposition "for comparison with Saint Max's explanation." The sequence and connections between the distinct components of their quotations and commentary (labeled 1-3a in the margins of Figure 1) can be plausibly reconstructed as follows:

1. A series of Stirner's quotations from five pages of Hegel's *Logic*, Book II, written in Engels's hand: E.g. "essence presupposes itself and is itself the transcendence of this presupposition," and "reflection is and is not a unity ('creator and creation in one')."

2. Commentary in Engels's hand (partially damaged) on the above quotations: "Since the true egoist in his creative activity is, therefore, only a paraphrase of speculative reflection or pure essence," it follows that the "creations" of Stirner's "*pre-suppositionless* [ego]" are "limited to the simplest determinations of reflection."

3. Further elaboration in Engels's hand on the preceding commentary: E.g. "The Stirner of 'yesterday' " and "the Stirner of 'today'" are mere "creations" of one another.

1a. Critical commentary on the quotations in 1 inserted in Engels's hand: Since Stirner has not done "further research into Hegel's *Logic*," he only posits a pseudo or "*seeming* ego [*Schein-Ich*]" that performs mere "juggling tricks on the tightrope of the objective."

1b. A deletion and one-sentence addendum in Marx's hand to the above commentary: Stirner's ego "is always a dumb, hidden 'ego,' hidden in his *ego* imagined as *essence*."

3a. A restatement, revision, and amendment of 3 in Marx's hand: Through

49. See Marx and Engels, *Die deutsche Ideologie*, *op. cit.*, p. 266 and *The German Ideology*, *op. cit.*, p. 269.

the inversions of "reflection," "the Stirner of today" can alternately be pictured as either the creation of or as created by "the Stirner of yesterday," just as "in reflection the conditions of the external world are merely *creations* of his reflection."

The text is thus a complex montage of hyperbole and citation, repetition and ridicule, in which Marx and Engels recast Stirner's glosses on Hegel by treating them as an occasion to work through their own dynamic and historical concept of essence (*Wesen*). In the process, quite a lot of "poaching" (*Jagdfrevel, braconnage*) is on display here beyond what Derrida has observed,⁵⁰ including Stirner on Hegel, Engels and Marx on Stirner, as well as Marx and Engels on one another. Even the editors and the mice appear to be in on the hunt within this intricate textual economy, as it is not just Marx and Engels who struggle to restore what Stirner has destroyed in Hegel, but also the editors who repair the damage done by the mindless intervention of the forces of nature by interpolating the missing portions of the text (in #2 above), while at the same time allowing the deletions (such as the whole of #3) made by Marx, Engels, or some later editor (such as Bernstein) to disappear in the published version.

Against Stirner, Marx and Engels argue that Hegel could not have grounded the concept of essence in the fictional expressions of a fully formed abstract and autonomous ego but rather in the concrete social relationships and historical struggles of an ethical community-in-the-making, in an ensemble of relations that are potentially or in the process of being realized. In the continuation of this argument on the following manuscript page, Stirner's empty "moral postulate" to "become an all powerful ego" is revealed to be "nothing, a non-thing [*Unding*], a phantasmagoria," a kind of lure that Stirner has concocted out of Hegel by following the delusions of his own imagination and of his knight-errant, Szeliga. In effect then, we can say that Marx's and Engels's procedure here is to analyze the elements of the "Ego," which Stirner invents out of the "the 'machinations' of the 'creative nothing' in Hegel," in order to reverse and reassemble them into their own interpretive apparatus, or what can be called (on the model of their own fanciful coinages throughout this text) *the Marx-Engels machine*. This "ME-machine" should not be imagined as a unitary egological-philosophical invention pitted against the fantastic mental products of Stirner and Hegel, either separately or in combination, but rather as an interpretive-political construction which *both Marx and*

50. Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, tr. by Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 140.

Engels have concocted through their collaboration with one another. As Marx later reports in the 1859 "Preface" to *A Critique of Political Economy*, their ultimately fruitless efforts to "settle accounts with [their] erstwhile philosophical conscience" at least allowed them to achieve their principal aim, namely, mutual understanding of one another or self-clarification (*Selbstverständigung*). *The German Ideology*, or what we are calling the ME-machine, is thus not just as a moral or philosophical accounting device for intervening in the ideological debates among post-Hegelian thinkers, but above all a technology of reflection and illumination designed for personal and public as well as political and theoretical enlightenment (*Aufklärung*).

In recognizing *The German Ideology* to be the joint-work of both Marx and Engels in their encounters with Stirner, Hegel and others, and in view of the supplementary interpretive activities of editors in their attempts to restore sense to a damaged, disordered and incomplete work, we have tried to resist any reading which reduces the text to the spectral or specular opposition between Marx and Stirner alone (or between Marx and Feuerbach or Bauer), each the ghostly double of the other, as Derrida has tried to do in *Spectres of Marx*.⁵¹ Rather, as Terrell Carver has pointed out, in light of the text's character as a dialogue and debate with predecessors and contemporaries *and between Marx and Engels themselves*, any reading must at least also take the following questions into account: "When is Engels speaking for himself? When is Marx speaking through him, together with him (and visa versa)? When is Marx speaking for himself against Engels (and was there ever a visa versa)? ... What are they saying to each other rather than to readers? To readers in agreement with each other?"⁵²

In Volume Two of *The German Ideology* on "The Critique of German Socialism According to its Various Prophets," which follows "The Leipzig Council," Marx and Engels explain that they are ultimately interested in retelling the intellectual histories of Stirner and his ilk, or rather, his ghost stories (*Geistesgeschichten*), as a narrative concerning the spirit of revolution and the spectre of communism that is terrorizing the old powers of Europe. Like Stirner and his academic colleagues, the "'true' socialists as they call themselves regard foreign communist literature not as the expression and the product of a real movement but as purely theoretical

51. *Ibid.*, pp. 120-147.

52. Terrell Carver "Writing and Reading: Marx's Voices," in *The Postmodern Marx* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998), p. 168.

writings which have evolved ... by a process of 'pure thought.'⁵³ In a remarkable dual-column display, Marx and Engels show how the usual method employed by literary radicals such as Karl Grün is to "translate" or "annex," to "copy" or "erase" the original writings of utopian socialist writers such as St. Simon, Fourier, Cabet and Proudhon in a way that "emasculates" their polemical connection to actual social movements and abandons their prophetic vision. The figure of the "spectre" that haunts *The Communist Manifesto*, that other Marx and Engels co-production from 1848 (in particular, the famous opening lines as well as the third section which specifically addresses the "'true' socialists"), thus does not just reiterate the critique of Stirner and his politically minded counterparts as much as it re-cites and re-collects the potential institutional (that is, "illocutionary") force of the radical utterances of these intellectuals as a revolutionary speech-act with potentially real historical consequences.⁵⁴ The collective appeals to "we communists" and "you proletarians" in the *Manifesto* are thus pronounced to acknowledge, anticipate, and activate the provisional unity and class constitution of a plural political subject that has only been abstractly individualized and ideally intellectualized in the esoteric debates among the German literati.

As Engels remarks in his retrospective account from 1886 of what he called "the end of classical German philosophy" that the Young Hegelian philosophical movement helped to bring about, in contrast to "the French [who] were in open combat against all official science, against the Church and often also against the State," the Germans "were professors, State appointed instructors of youth" whose writings were even raised "to the rank of a royal Prussian philosophy of State."⁵⁵ As Althusser might put it, the promoters of the "German Ideology" ("GI") had therefore themselves become functionaries in the ideological state apparatus of the education system, which had already become a philosophical manufactory for producing government issued (GI) ideas and utterances stamped with the endorsement of the nation-state.⁵⁶ Against the petty bourgeois individualism and provincial German communitarianism asserted in the philosophical treatises, political circulars, prosaic journalism, and poetic outpourings of their

53. Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, *op. cit.*, p. 456.

54. Thomas M. Kemple, "Post-Marx: Temporal Rhetoric and Textual Action in 'The Communist Manifesto,'" in *Rethinking Marxism* 12 (Vol. 2, 2000), pp. 44-60.

55. Friedrich Engels, "Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy," in *Karl Marx - Friedrich Engels Collected Works*, Vol. 26. ([1886/1888]London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990), p. 357.

56. Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," *op. cit.*, pp. 152-157.

contemporaries, Marx and Engels hoped to undermine the established relations of power that threatened to mute and weaken the radical voices of change. The practice of deconstructive reading that they engaged in through their collaboration on *The German Ideology* is inspired by a desire to remain open to unknown forces that may yet body forth the spirit of political revolution from the letter of philosophical writing.

Conclusion: Reading the Republic

The discursive genres constituting the project of "writing the republic" that we have invoked above in terms of polemical debate and rhetorical argument, philosophical discussion and scientific description — but which would also include more official discursive forms such as political charters and legal constitutions — pose distinctive interpretive and political problems of *reading*. In various ways, republican writing presupposes and anticipates the response of the members of a *reading public* who are called upon, solicited or interpellated to take up its prescriptions and pronouncements according to their own circumstances and cultural habits. For this reason, writing and editing, publishing and reading the texts of republican philosophizing are not simply intellectual exercises but also social and political activities. Caught up in the web of historical relationships, not only is a text's readership redefined or expanded with every new edition, but so also are the ways of interacting with that readership. In literary studies, for example, this notion has been explored by the new bibliographers. "As the process of textual transmission expands," Jerome McGann writes, "whether vertically (over time) or horizontally (in institutional space), the signifying process of the work becomes increasingly collaborative and socialized."⁵⁷ Considered as a method for the discursive mediation and documentary coordination of social relations, the performance of republican writing is in this view inseparable from ongoing debates among both reading publics over the politics of interpretation, and professional writers and editors regarding the technical processes of publication.

As evidenced by *The German Ideology* perhaps better than any other work in the Marxist canon, the practice of reading is philosophically far more intricate and politically problematic than any formal hermeneutic model might suggest. It involves much more than endeavoring to reconstruct the coherent, animating intention of a single author, or a fusion of horizons between reader and author. Along with the, broadly

57. Jerome McGann, "What is Critical Editing?" in *The Textual Condition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), p. 58.

speaking, “external” institutional and editorial frames that condition the production, dissemination, and thus the consumption of texts, it is equally necessary to pay close attention to their “internal” literary, rhetorical, and aesthetic forms. As we have demonstrated above, a single page of manuscript can become a kind of *camera obscura* in which not only a whole text, but also a whole history of interpretation and application may be reflected, inverted, and distorted in multifarious ways. Such an insight might also open onto dramatically new and newly effective readings of works that many have too hastily set aside. Precisely because of the irreducibly symbolic and fictional — literary and imaginative — status of the republican social bond, more research needs to be conducted into the discursive, rhetorical, and even visual aspects of the texts of the *Vormärz* — the range of genres, tropes, and styles employed, as well as the typographical innovations, the insertion of non-linguistic characters, figures, and illustrations into texts, the dismantling of established or authorized forms of public discourse, and the incredible if often vicious humor and wit displayed by almost all of the left Hegelian writers, but perhaps none more powerfully than Marx and Engels. It must be known that this movement, in all its diversity, was as much an attack on the seriousness of official German culture as it was a serious political discourse of its own. As often as not, a large part of the meaning of these polemical debates and textual exchanges is contained in a joke, an aside, even a slip of the pen — in what conventional scholarship treats as an excess, an embellishment, something to be avoided or eliminated altogether. But there is no understanding left Hegelian republicanism or the revolutionary work of the *Vormärz* without close attention to everything that even today’s official cultures continue to elide. It is not merely out of a perverse desire for Byzantine complication that we highlight these excessive, incommensurable elements of *The German Ideology*, but in an effort to ensure that the somber dogmatism and moribund pedantry that Marx and Engels so despised are never again allowed to take control of their legacy, or to silence the emancipatory promise that their names should rightly continue to evoke — even today, especially today, and into a future that remains to come.

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