

Introduction: Talking Revolution: Marx's Speeches and the Speculative Communism

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I.

*I*n his speeches, Marx treats “speech” as the language of democracy. Language, for Marx, is “practical, real consciousness” (*The German Ideology* 44), the dialectical process of humans as they produce their social world and themselves. In this sense, language is the “human manifestation” of the productivity of labor in the historical development of democracy, by which Marx means the negation of class society necessary for the actual, material realization of the “self-determination of the people” (*Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law* 30, 31). While the global North cloaks itself in the language of democracy, its basis in capitalism's exploitation of labor in which the benefits of labor flow from the producers to those who own and control the means of production – and which leads, in turn, to inequality, oppression, exclusion, and war – shows that what passes for democracy under capitalism is a formal language without content. It is the language of the “*democracy of unfreedom*” (32) – a reflection of the turning of use-value into exchange-value – made into a weapon used to normalize the private ownership of social resources. For Marx, “speech” is the expression of the means by which language in the form of critique is “brought back to its actual basis, the *actual human being*, the *actual people*, and established as the people's own work” (29). Through his speeches, Marx shows that it is only under

communism's democracy of labor that the form and content of democracy are united.

This special issue of *Nineteenth-Century Prose* takes as its focus the speeches of Marx. Marx's speeches, we argue, are "speecherly": in his speeches, Marx produces a mode of knowing that is a condition for the construction of class consciousness. Through an examination of a range of speeches – from the early speech on "free trade" and the inaugural address to the International, to speeches outlining foundational concepts of *Wage Labour and Capital*, to later speeches given to the International on the significance of the Paris Commune, the role of international organization of the working class, and the relation of communism and anarchism – the contributors to this special issue address the way Marx's speeches situate working people as historical agents in the world, and activate in them an understanding of that world as a world in need of transformation.

To address the "speecherly" in Marx necessarily poses the question of "writing" and "speech" which has been one of the major *topos* of contemporary cultural theory. In the canonized discourses of the (post)humanities, "writing" has been privileged over "speech," which is associated with a "metaphysics of presence" (Derrida, *Of Grammatology* 49) in the West since antiquity. Representing the suppression of difference through the linguistic violence of a closed system of abstract, conceptual representation that "consists in its effort to capture the ineffable and, hence, to destroy it" (Butler, *Excitable Speech* 9), speech, it is said, speaks to "self-identical" meaning, while "that which is written is never identical to itself" (Derrida, *Writing and Difference* 24). In other words, to "speak" is to install a regime of identity in meaning – what Derrida, perhaps the most influential of all contemporary theorists of "writing," calls "auto-affectation" (*Speech and Phenomena* 78-79). It excludes not only the difference of the other, but the other within (self-difference) that is a function of language itself (*différance*).

Dominant treatments of writing in the (post)humanities are versions of what Barthes in *S/Z* calls the "writerly," against which we theorize the speecherly in Marx. Through the writerly, Barthes codifies language "not

[as] a structure of signifieds," but as "a galaxy of signifiers" that resist reduction to a single meaning (a "structure" or "origin") except by a violent and arbitrary closure that is associated with "speech" (Barthes, *S/Z* 5). Writing is, therefore, "the destruction of every voice, or every point of origin" (Barthes, *Image Music Text* 142). Barthes' influential division of interpretation into two cultural logics – the "readerly" (*mimetic*) and the "writerly" (*nonmimetic*) (*S/Z* 4-6) – is in fact a relay of the division of speech and writing. Barthes treats the readerly as an identitarian logic of mimesis "committed to the closure system of the West, produced according to the goals of this system, devoted to the law of the Signified" (*S/Z* 7-8), while the writerly represents "a perpetual present, upon which no *consequent* language [...] can be superimposed" (*S/Z* 5). The writerly has thus come to stand for the play of meaning that subverts all theoretical closure in the name of a (self-) difference which "resists dialectics and history" (Derrida, "Speech and Writing according to Hegel" 476). History, on these terms, is turned into an interminable conflict between "readerly" forces which seek to "fix" the relation between representation and reality, on the one hand, and the vitalist eruption of "writerly" slippages which inevitably exceed any attempt at controlling the play of meaning, on the other.

Readerly and writerly, like speech and writing, however, are themselves the translation of class divisions into contesting interpretations of the relation of language and reality. Through the writerly, the freedom of capital to move across all borders without restriction ("law," "system," "truth") in search of profit is turned into a sophisticated appreciation of difference and nuance that refuses as "closural" and "essentialist" the notion that language can be said to reliably "reflect" reality. On these terms, readerly approaches to language, like "speech," restrict meaning by anchoring it through mimesis. One of the main consequences of such writerly theories is that those who use language to show the stubborn realities of class which, beneath the "galaxy of signifiers," radically restrict the lives of working people in meeting their own needs, including the brutality they face in seeking better jobs across borders, are reduced to

the crude voice of simplistic, identitarian determination of ideas. Which is another way of saying that in writerly discourses the struggle against epistemological “essentialism” eclipses the struggle against material exploitation, and escalating violence related to race, gender, sexuality, ability, ... are cut off from the deep structures of class. The writerly – which, we argue, derives its widespread influence in the global North from the sophisticated manner in which it normalizes global capital, and thus stalls the collective transformation of relations of property – has canonized the hermeneutics of disruption and turned speaking critique – the speakerly – into a suspicious “hermeneutics of suspicion” (Felski, *The Limits of Critique*).

Against the writerly stabilization of what is, the speakerly in Marx unearths what ought to be. It places social needs over the desires of the singular, and, inverting the inversions of the market, shows that it is the collectivity of labor worldwide that has produced the social wealth, which private property relations deny except to the few. The speakerly uses language as a means of explaining the incompatibility of capitalism and human well-being and activating citizen-theorists as agents of the collective future.

The speakerly thus challenges dominant narratives of speech as closure, and shows how the “writerly” is essentially an undemocratic notion of language that renders communism a speculative idea without material possibility. In defense of “unpresentability” (singularity), the writerly places the clerical-elite, for whom writing is not simply a means of communication (writing as use-value) but a luxuriating moment beyond reality, in command of social communicative practices and turns speech (the means of communication of people – *demos*) into the metaphysics of orality – the desire to be one with oneself. The (post)humanist left’s writerly theory of writing, Marx’s speeches show, is the discourse of exchange-value that naturalizes the conversion of the labor of the collective (use-value) into private property and, in an exemplary ideological reversal, makes the critique of singularity an arrogant metaphysical expression of “transcendence” – of language, of matter, of

the "plane of immanence" (Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?* 35). On the ground of "immanence," class critique has been replaced with a "new operation of *interpretation* (in the Nietzschean sense of the word)," on the terms of which "to interpret a text is not to give it a (more or less justified, more or less free) meaning, but on the contrary to appreciate what *plural* constitutes it" (Barthes, *S/Z* 5). Here nonmimetic "plurality" is contrasted with mimetic "identity" – in which cultural representations are analyzed in relation to a social and material outside – in order to secure the privacy of "singularity." In what is represented as a challenge to any "closure of the political" in which "community" is spoken as "*common being*" (Nancy, *The Inoperative Community* xxxviii), writing as the eruption of plurality is said to rescue the heterogeneity of the "singular" from its reduction to a homogenizing "commonality" of identification.

Writerly interpretation, however, in no way challenges ruling class interests because, whereas critique draws conclusions that demand change in the material world, interpretation interminably suspends all conclusions in order to luxuriate in the semiotic play of commodity culture. The writerly act of "interpretation" and the celebration of the infinite "singularity" of difference is a resistance to theoretical closure – without which, Marx's speeches suggest, it is impossible to understand the complex totality of everyday experiences in their deep interconnections.

The speakerly, in other words, is not simply about "speech," just as the writerly is not about "writing." They are modes of knowing and unknowing the causal relationships that produce existing social conditions. The writerly is a version of what Marx calls "the language of commodities" (*Capital* I:62), in which exchange relations in the market mask the source of surplus value under capitalism, namely the exploitation of labor at the point of production. Through the writerly's topological undermining of knowledge, class as an objective relation between owners and workers through which surplus value is expropriated is rendered unspeakable; to speak of the fundamental class difference between owners and workers is declared to be playing a failed language game. In the interpretative logic of the writerly, the social becomes a continually

changing “referent (the universe of a prior phrase taken as the referent of a subsequent phrase) of a judgment to always be done over again” (Lyotard, *The Differend* 140), making any discussion about the material relations shaping the social unreliable. In this way, the writerly activates citizens not as historical agents of transformation, but as private consumers attentive to changes in the market. Through the writerly, social relations are re-inscribed as a hybrid space of inbetweenness, making the causal analysis of class an act of unethical reduction of the multiplicity of meaning and rendering “revolution” a speculative impossibility. On the contrary, as Jennifer Cotter argues in her contributing essay on *Wage-Labor and Capital*, Marx’s speeches “break the silence on exploitation” by intervening in the “language of the market,” which is reproduced in the writerly discourses of both deconstruction and object-oriented philosophy.

Marx’s “speech,” this special issue demonstrates, is the language of critique, and, contrary to Derrida’s argument, has nothing to do with self-identity and self-sameness – what he calls “ipseity of the people (*demos*)” in *Rogues* (13) or “transcendence.” As Amrohini Sahay argues in her essay on Marx’s inaugural address to the International, the speakerly is based on a “theory of totality which engages facts not as they ‘immediately exist’ ‘in-themselves’ but always as an index of a deeper contradictory and antagonistic ‘difference-in-relation’” so as to “explode any isolated (non)dialectical understanding of labor struggles, especially as they are situated in the global horizon of class struggle.” Marx’s speeches thus advance a “red internationalism” that challenges the displacement of class by assemblages and networks in contemporary writerly theories of cosmopolitics.

The contemporary ontological turn in the (post)humanities – variously called “speculative realism” (Harman, *Towards Speculative Realism*), “actor-network theory” (Latour, *Reassembling the Social*), “object-oriented ontology” (Bryant, *The Democracy of Objects*), or the catch-all term “new materialisms” (Dolphijn and Van der Tuin, *New Materialism*) – is often represented as a break from the “avoidance” of material reality that dominated the textual turn (a turn to “things in

themselves," not their construction by human language or culture). It is in reality an extension of the writerly dematerializing of the social, as several of the essays in this special issue demonstrate.

In the writings of the new materialists, the "epistemological closure" of speech is declared a regime of anthropocentrism, a human-centered "correlationism" (Meillassoux, *After Finitude* 5-7), which privileges (human) language over the material world of matter, nature, and nonhuman life. Like the textualist "prosaic materiality of the letter" (de Man, *Aesthetic Ideology* 90), however, theorists of "new materialism" ultimately aim at displacing the analytics of historical materialism that animates Marx's speeches and that activates working people as agents of transformation. In the name of promoting "more attentive encounters between people-materialities and thing-materialities" (Bennett, *Vibrant Matter* x), the ontological current within the (post)humanities, while formally distancing itself from textualist forms of the writerly as "inadequate for understanding contemporary society" (Coole and Frost 3), in fact merely subsumes the writerly into ontology, rendering "life" and "matter" as forces of "immanence." In the discourses of new materialism, as Robert Faivre and Julie Torrant argue in their essay on Marx's speech "On the Hague Congress," it is "matter" that "writes"; yet, as they also show, what it writes turns out not just to repeat the most familiar textualist talking points, but to infinitely expand the writerly field of operation to (non)human being itself (ontology). If new materialists are attentive to the fact that it is not humanity but matter that writes, this "writing" remains in a "thinking style (and thus the writing style)" in which "normal certainties are inverted, or even dissolved" and, just as Derrida, Barthes, and other writerly theorists have declared, it is presumed that "there is no outside, no metalanguage" that grounds language in anything but itself (Morton, *Hyperobjects* 5). New materialism updates the writerly class narrative that there can be no theoretical standpoint from which to theorize the underlying class logic that connects the seemingly disparate events of social life to the mode of production. To talk of "reality" while repeating the writerly claim that "the most powerful and vivid language succeeds in saying things *without* saying

them – not for some inherent love for vague fuzziness, but because things can never be directly grasped or known in their withdrawal from human view” (Harman, *Bells and Whistles* 95) is to write the ideology of exchange-value across all being and time. By suggesting, as object-oriented philosophers like Harman and speculative realists like Meillassoux do, that it is now the human mind-independent reality that needs our attention – in other words, that ontology (being as such) needs to take the place of epistemology (being as known by humans) – the ontological turn in a sense literalizes the deconstructive focus on the “undecidability” of meaning, and makes knowing the material world a matter of “speculation.” The project of social emancipation becomes, on these terms, a speculative communism. In place of communism as “the most radical rupture with traditional property relations” (Marx and Engels, “Manifesto” 489), new communists like Badiou who are aligned with the “ontological turn” substitute a “communist Idea,” which is ultimately a meditation on the “aleatory, elusive, slippery, evanescent dimension” of the communist “event” (*Philosophy and the Idea of Communism* 247).

Marx’s speeches, we argue, have a critical role to play in understanding the relation of speech and revolution. In contrast to the illusions that Marx’s speeches are “enclosed” by the nineteenth century because Marx represents “a figure of a past historical epoch, one increasingly distant from our own” (Sperber, *Karl Marx: A Nineteenth Century Life* xiii), or that they represent, in the words of Derrida, an open “haunting” that “is not dated ... never docilely given a date in the chain of presents” (*Spectres of Marx* 3), the “return(s) to Marx” since the 2008 global financial crisis reflect the reality that reality itself cannot move past his analysis of it. In an era shaped, on the one hand, by a growing interest in Marxism and increased social activism in the richest nations of the global North and, on the other, by a left cultural theoretical framework still entrenched in the writerly consciousness (no matter how un-self-consciously), a critical re-examination of the *topos* of speech and writing and their material relations is necessary.

As the contributors to this special issue make clear, Marx’s speeches remain the boundary of the boundary because what he puts forward is not

a re-interpretive "method" – a "purely formal movement, the purely logical formula of movement" (*The Poverty of Philosophy* 164) – but a means by which to challenge the chaotic embrace of formal appearances in order to grasp reality by its roots, namely materialist dialectics. In this sense, the contributors do not read Marx simply as an "interpreter" of capitalism, as for instance Hayden White does when he proposes in his influential *Metahistory* "to specify the dominant style of Marx's thought about the structures and processes of history-in-general" (283), rather than its ability to explain the world, on the grounds that all theories regardless of their content are merely formally "different, and equally plausible, ways of organizing the social world which we create and which provides one of the bases of our experience of history itself" (284). Nor do they read Marx's texts aesthetically, as do such writers as Paul de Man (*Aesthetic Ideology*), Anna Kornbluh ("On Marx's Victorian Novel"), Fredric Jameson (*Reading Capital*), or more recently Samir Gandesha and Johan F. Hartle (*Aesthetic Marx*). Neither do they reduce Marx's language to rhetoric, as Kenneth Burke does (*A Rhetoric of Motives*). Such readings have had the effect of turning Marx's critiques into a stylistics, while diverting attention from the role Marx's speeches play in producing class consciousness through which people transform the world in the interests of the collective.

This special issue on "Marx's Speeches" is an intervention into the dominant framework of "writing" that has underwritten the (post)humanities since the 1960s in the global North, in which the project of social transformation is reduced to a series of interpretations and re-interpretations without end. Through an examination of a range of Marx's speeches, the contributors to this special issue explore how Marx's "speecherly" approach opens up a new way of theorizing both speech *and* writing in the contemporary. And, as vital contributions to knowledge of contemporary capitalism, several of the speeches addressed by contributors are reproduced as an Appendix, including, "Speech on the Question of Free Trade," "Inaugural Address of the Working Men's International," "On the Hague Congress" and selections from *Wage-*

Labour and Capital. Together, the texts comprising this special issue are part of a project to return use-value to language and undo its appropriation by neoliberal capitalism by such concepts as “writing,” “writerly,” “reader-ly” [...] and, of course, *différent-ly*.

In what follows, and as a prelude to an overview of the essays comprising the special issue, we develop a critical re-reading of writing and speech in dominant cultural theory and argue that the materialist theory of the speecherly in Marx’s speeches provides an occasion for putting some of the major idealist concepts of critical theory into question.

II.

Marx’s speeches are not only about specific issues related to capitalism and the struggle of working people to transform it. They are also *meta-texts* on the historical conditions of language and consciousness and their dialectical connection to material relations. This is another way of saying that they are informed by and advance a materialist understanding of the relation of consciousness and the material world that also creates conditions for collectively changing material relations.

“Language is as old as consciousness,” Marx and Engels write in *The German Ideology*, and is “from the very beginning a social product” (44). Developing dialectically out of humans’ relations with each other in their productive activities, “language is practical consciousness that exists also for other[s...] and for that reason alone it really exists for me personally as well” (44). Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o draws out the materialist and dialectical aspect of language when he foregrounds as a primary aspect of language

what Karl Marx once called the language of real life, the element basic to the whole notion of language, its origins and development: that is, the relations people enter into with one another in the labour process, the links they necessarily establish among themselves in the act of a people, a community of human beings, producing wealth or means of life like food, clothing, houses. (*Decolonizing the Mind* 13)

Speech, to be clear, is not the basis of revolution. Marx does not confuse changes in language with changes in material relationships. Speech, instead, can be said to play a "hand" in culture. By this we mean not only that there would be no culture without labor, but that, as we explain in our analysis of Engels' and Heidegger's contesting approaches to language below, "labor" itself plays a role in producing the human "hand" and language. As products of labor, speech and writing can become tools of revolution when they grasp ideas and practices in their class roots, activating revolutionary praxis. Speech (and writing), in this way, become "speecherly."

The dominant writerly regime of writing, however, takes its cue from a long line of idealist thinkers for whom "language is about language" (de Man, *Allegories of Reading* 153) and thus cut off from material relations. In his analysis of the relation of language and material reality, Marx addresses the idealism that has dominated philosophy. "Just as philosophers have given thought an independent existence," Marx argues, "so they were bound to make language into an independent realm" (*The German Ideology* 446). Under class relations, the relation of language and the "actual world" is cut off, so that "philosophers" fail to recognize their own language "as the distorted language of the actual world" (447). In fact, "neither thoughts nor language in themselves form a realm of their own," rather, "they are only *manifestations* of actual life" (447). As Bret Benjamin argues in his contribution to this issue, what Marx's speeches show is that "the categories of analysis are not conceived by the philosopher and fitted to the world," but rather "the historical movement of society creates the conditions under which analytical categories become visible and hold purchase as abstractions that begin to grasp the totality of determinations in a given historical epoch." What Marx calls "philosophical consciousness" is a species of what we are calling the writerly, which like all idealist philosophy suffers from the illusion of the "problem" of "descending" from language to life because it is not clear about the "nature and origin of its apparent separation from life" (449). In its "readerly" form – the idealist theory of language as advanced in the

work of writers such as Augustine – ideas precede speech and have an ideal (Divine) origin. The speaking subject uses language “in order that what we have in our minds may enter through the ear into the mind of the hearer” – which is to say that the “form of speech” materializes ideas in the same way that “the Divine Word, though suffering no change in nature, yet became flesh, that He might dwell among us” (*On Christian Doctrine* 14-15). Language here ought to “disappear,” leaving no trace of itself when meaning is grasped by the hearer, merging the minds of the speaker and listener into one. Language is thus transformed into a static entity, existing above and beyond material reality, which is deemed a poor copy of an originary ideal form. In its “writerly” mode, by contrast, the idealist theory of language assumes, as Lacan argues, that “no meaning is sustained by anything other than reference to other meaning” (*Ecrits* 498). This is to say that meaning has no reference outside the system of language that produces it. “It is the world of words,” writerly philosophers claim, “that creates the world of things” (*Ecrits* 65). Although from contrasting perspectives – which is itself a reflection of material conditions – both the “readerly” and the “writerly” disconnect language from social relations and thus ultimately produce subjects of contemplation, not militancy, who seek solace from the harsh realities of class inequality by escaping into the text, either for heavenly solace or momentary subversion.

On the contrary, Marx’s speeches make class reappear in the everyday and with it capitalism’s transformability. In his 1856 speech delivered on the anniversary of *The People’s Paper*, the paper of the Chartist movement in England, for instance, Marx makes speech and writing the extension of labor, developing in increasingly explosive class conflicts. Marx begins his speech by reading the 1848 revolutions as a sign of profound social contradictions seething below the seemingly solid “crust” of European society. In a dialectical move, Marx argues that “On the one hand, there have started into life industrial and scientific forces, which no epoch of the former human history had ever suspected” while, “On the other hand, there exist symptoms of decay, far surpassing the horrors recorded of the latter times of the Roman Empire” (655). In other

words, development in the forces of production are coming into contradiction with the property relations that prevent these forces from being put to use to meet people's needs. "This antagonism between the productive powers and the social relations of our epoch," Marx writes, "is a fact, palpable, overwhelming, and not to be controverted" (656).

In his speech, Marx situates the historic working class struggle that fought for a people's newspaper as part of a much longer, revolutionary struggle, which only by taking collective ownership of the productive forces that labor has produced but which remain the private property of the few, can become "mastered" and made to serve the needs of the people. In other words, the existence of the paper is itself a material development reflecting the developments in the working class becoming a "class for itself" (Marx, *The Poverty of Philosophy* 211). In addition, his speech can be read as a meta-text on the importance of critique, warning against mistaking the surface manifestations of capitalism for its underlying class contradictions. He says that the "signs" of class struggle "bewilder the middle class, the aristocracy, and the poor prophets of regression," but through the praxis of speecherly critique, the working class "do not mistake the shape of the shrewd spirit that continues to mark all these contradictions" (656). Marx draws on the works of Shakespeare when he says, unlike the "bewildered" ruling classes, "we do recognize our brave friend, Robin Goodfellow, the old mole that can work in the earth so fast, that worthy pioneer – the Revolution" (656). Writerly scholars, however, tend to turn Marx's materialist treatment of literature into a tropic reading of material relations. Peter Stallybrass, for example, reads this speech as advancing a "curious paradox" in which, on the one hand, "what he calls 'the new-fangled forces of society' create people who are so novel that they can no longer be grasped through prior systems of representation" while, on the other, also defining "this revolutionary moment through those very past languages which he has implicitly rejected" (22). Stallybrass argues that this paradox means that Marx "imagines revolution *both* as an epistemic break which, having 'stripped off all superstition in regard to the past,' turns its back upon the past so as to constitute itself in and through the future; *and* as parodic repetition, a repetition presided over by

the ghosts of the past” (22). This reading, in other words, turns Marx’s theory of revolution into a deconstructing trope, “the site simultaneously of cultural repetition and of social dislocation” (30). The revolution, in this sense, is read as a linguistic “subversion” (25) of existing relations, but one that can only do so parodically before slipping back into the familiar. Or, as Derrida puts it in his reading of Marx’s quotation of *Hamlet*, “as soon as one identifies a revolution, it begins to imitate, it enters into a death agony” (*Specters of Marx* 144). Turning revolution into a trope means it becomes a forever delayed and deferred “future-to-come” that “must therefore exceed any presence as presence to itself” (xix). In contrast, we argue that Marx’s use of metaphor is not a sign of a language which undoes itself, but rather a means by which language becomes part of the struggle over the organization of production. Marx’s use of “old mole” resituates supposed “literary” language, which described by writerly thinkers as not “a reliable source of information about anything but its own language” (de Man, *Resistance* 11), within the social relations of production. He brings all of language, a product of labor that appears to belong to the ruling class who use it to normalize private property, back to the material contestation over the organization of production that determines the ends to which labor is put. In short, if the writerly deploys tropes to erase the ground of language in social relations, Marx deploys metaphors and allusions precisely to show their historical and material role in explaining the world.

The speakerly, we argue, is a means of knowing what Marx, in his “Theses on Feuerbach” calls, “this-sidedness”:

The question whether objective [*gegenständliche*] truth can be attained by human thinking is not a question of theory but is a *practical* question. It is in practice that man must prove the truth, that is, the reality and power, the this-sidedness [*Diesseitigkeit*] of his thinking. The dispute over the reality or unreality of thinking which is isolated from practice is a purely *scholastic* question. (62)

This-sidedness is here-ness. On the contrary, the church (the clerical, the writerly...) is other-sided. In his speeches, Marx uses language as a means

of communication (it has use-value). By use-value, we mean that it is a product of labor that advances the productivity of labor by assisting in the development of the forces and relations of production in meeting people's needs. In other words, language, like all products of labor, is created to both meet existing human needs while also enabling the development of new ones. When language becomes part of the system of exchange-value, its primary purpose is advancing the conditions for realizing as profit the surplus exploited from the labor of working people. Foregrounding this-sidedness, the speakerly treats language in its *relation to* social relations, not as an in-itself. We place the use-value of language against the exchange-value of language where language is used as an act in-itself – which has traditionally been the most valued of all values in the Western literary tradition. Writerly theorists use language (with puns, double-meanings, parodic rewritings, etc.) not to communicate but to undo communication. Language becomes not a space in which to advance solidarity but to unleash the play of difference. The exemplary theorist of writerly difference is, of course, Jacques Derrida, and in light of the prominence of his writings in the (post)humanities in marginalizing speech as metaphysics, we examine his writings in closer detail in the following section.

III.

From the emergence of deconstruction in the 1970s, to contemporary theoretical movements such as "Speculative Realism" and "Animal Studies," Derrida continues to exert a great deal of influence in the (post)humanities (Cohen, *Jacques Derrida and the Humanities: A Critical Reader*). His writerly theorization of the history of the West in terms of a conflict between "speech" and "writing," we suggest, has played an especially significant role in undoing the very concept of this-sidedness among the (post)humanist left.

In his critique of "the metaphysics of presence as the exigent, powerful, systematic, and irrepressible desire" for a "truth" outside language (*Of Grammatology* 49), Derrida argues that Western thought is

obsessed by the notion of “speech,” in which language is assumed to be a reflection of “truth” (*logos*) without mediation. Derrida claims that this unmediated relation is, in fact, a fundamental form of linguistic violence, since the desire to make meaning outside language “present” through speech depends on, yet excludes, the absent other (“writing”). Writing, on the contrary, comes to stand in for that which always already exceeds the restrictions of the mimetic logic of speech. It is, in this sense, the unspeakable voice of “other-sidedness.” He writes, “Writing is the dissimulation of the natural, primary, and immediate presence of the soul within the logos” (37). For Derrida, the conflict between “speech” and “writing” is a sign of the politics of inclusion and exclusion that structures all forms of thought and all social relations. Derrida’s work remains so influential, we argue, because it is the language of the market *par excellence*. In claiming that all social systems regardless of their economic logic operate on an exclusionary system of binaries that will forever include some and exclude others, while also defining the potential for future transformations as the impossible to realize “democracy to come” that will “always remain aporetic in its structure” (*Rogues* 86), Derrida’s *writerly* deconstruction of “this-sidedness” essentially reinforces the idea that exchange-value – in which the products of labor are not valued for what they are, but what they represent – is the natural condition of existence, while also teaching working people that any hope for building a system based upon use-value is a false and violent epistemology that will forever exclude an imperceptible and unnameable “otherness.”

In the name of an ethics of other-sidedness which recognizes that “There is no ethics without the presence of the other” (*Of Grammatology* 139-40), Derrida argues that “writing” has been the repressed term in Western thought since Plato – a sign of the repression of the other that occurs when anyone claims to speak from a position of “truth.” In his analysis of the association of speech and presence in Aristotle, for example, for whom “spoken words [...] are the symbols of mental experiences [...] and written words are the symbols of spoken words” (qtd *Of Grammatology* 11), Derrida argues that Aristotle assumes that “the

voice, producer of *the first symbols*, has a relationship of essential and immediate proximity with the mind" (11), or, in other words, that "the essence of the *phonè*" is "immediately proximate to that which within 'thought' as *logos* relates to meaning, produces it, receives it, speaks it, 'composes' it" (11). The voice's essential relation to *logos*, Derrida emphasizes, means that it "signifies 'mental experiences' which themselves reflect or mirror things by natural resemblance" (11). Logocentrism is the logic by which speech is assumed to bring meaning to "presence," through a mimetic "universal" and "natural signification." In other words, "speech" is equated with a "natural" and "ideal" presence that represents the language of reason (*logos*) itself. According to this logic, writing is relegated to a (merely) secondary (derivative) "convention," a relegation premised on a series of oppositions (speech/writing, presence/absence, signifier/signified, inside/outside) through which writing (removed from the presence of voice) is associated with externality, with the threat of ambiguity. In effect, his critique of Aristotle is that in defining "speech" as the expression of "truth," Aristotle assumes a mimetic relationship exists between the signifier and the signified, and that anything that disrupts or deviates from this relationship is "inauthentic" and thus to be excluded. However, Derrida claims that the very nature of all language is that there is always an excess, a slippage that cannot be captured by language, either in speech or writing. This is because all signs, regardless of their form, are representations of something absent and therefore unrepresentable. Speech does not have any more "authority" to represent the unrepresented except that which it gives itself. It is such, he argues, that the elevation of "speech" over "writing" becomes the logic by which all forms of exclusion operate. Writing, as a sign of a sign, by contrast, exposes that all communication is based upon a play of immanent differences that "does not depend on any sensible plenitude, audible or visible, phonic or graphic" (62).

Aristotle's mimetic approach to speech is contrasted by Derrida to writings of Mallarmé, who both pluralizes reference and treats reference as an event within language itself. Mallarmé's *Mimique* is "a textual

labyrinth paneled with mirrors” (*Dissemination* 195), at the center of which is a mime who mimes an event that did not actually take place. Consequently, what is described by the text is “a scene of writing within a scene of writing and so on without end, through a structural necessity that is marked in the text” (223). Discussing the significance of Mallarmé’s observation that “*That is how the Mime operates, whose act is confined to a perpetual allusion without breaking the ice or the mirror*” (qtd *Dissemination* 206), Derrida writes, “every time Mallarmé uses the word ‘operation,’ nothing happens that could be grasped as a present event, a reality, an activity” (216). Here, Derrida emphasizes, it is not that Mallarmé’s text does not allude to a referent. Rather, it “does allude, but alludes to nothing, alludes without breaking the mirror, without reaching beyond the looking-glass” (206). Mallarmé’s writing is embraced for its refusal to identify an outside to the text that is not always already embedded in a series of other texts: it “preserves the differential structure of mimicry or *mimēsis*, but without its Platonic or metaphysical interpretation, which implies that somewhere the being of something that *is*, is being imitated” (206). In Mallarmé’s writing there is reference to a referent, but it is a referent without presence. In arguing “The referent is lifted, but reference remains” (211), Derrida makes the referent both spectral and plural, placing a text beyond any kind of analysis that would seek to determine the truth or falseness of a text. Language, Derrida concludes, is at its most truthful when it self-consciously “reflects no reality” and instead “produces mere ‘reality-effects’” (206).

In this way, Derrida’s writing on Mallarmé provides a theoretical framework for putting the very concept of this-sidedness under erasure – preserving it and cancelling it out at the same time. The “this-sidedness” of the speecherly becomes, on these terms, a metaphysics of presence whose ultimate desire is a return to a mythical natural language, a nostalgia for a pre-social community. In the writerly terms Derrida sets up, “this-sidedness” excludes “other-sidedness” from its own constitution, falsely assuming that it is not the “other” side (language, culture) that we know “this” side through and that constitutes this-sidedness. To theorize the

meaning of an event or a text in relation to the material relations shaping it (and to not recognize the extent to which language in turn constructs and influences the material world) "would place a reassuring end to the reference from sign to sign" (49), exposing "the exigent, powerful, systematic, and irrepressible desire" for a "transcendental signified" (49). For the writerly analytics, the speakerly repeats the metaphysics that associates meaning and "presence," only by excluding the "absence" of the "other-side" and of course "arche-writing," which makes all reference unreliable.

Having identified speech with the natural and mimetic, Derrida's deconstruction of the association of speech and natural meaning in effect makes difference the (ontological) ground of all meaning that simultaneously ungrounds meaning. In this way, Derrida dematerializes writing by equating it with an "arche-writing" (writing as difference) and making it the foundation of all communication, while equating speech with a metaphysics of presence that silences the other. It is this reduction of speech to the natural and mimetic by Derrida – which conflates idealist approaches to voice and language (as in Plato, Aristotle, and Rousseau) with materialist approaches like those of Marx, for whom language is not a natural reflection but a historical and dialectical mediation of social life – that has served to marginalize speech as the site of homogenization while making writing the exclusive ally of the other. In his treatment of speech, Derrida makes "this-sidedness" fundamentally "undecidable," and the very notion of speech as having a use-value in the community is turned into a species of mimetic metaphysics. By undoing the relation of material and immaterial, this-sidedness and other-sidedness, Derrida reproduces the class ideology that treats consciousness as determining as social life. In this sense, changing how one thinks about inequality is privileged over changing the actual structures of inequality. After all, "material structures" are articulated in language and thus open to the endless play of meaning. The illusion, so the writerly argument goes, is assuming that they can be distinguished at all except by a violent reduction. It is such that in place of social transformation from the speakerly outside of class relations,

deconstruction proposes a writerly immanence that “does not destroy structures from the outside” but instead, always operates “necessarily from the inside” to subvert linguistic conventions through playful, though always “hesitant” and “trembling,” reinterpretation (*Of Grammatology* 24). Such thinking – in the name of self-awareness of the other-side as the self-difference of this-side, makes it impossible for working people to understand the root causes of the myriad contradictions that shape their lives, much less change them.

“Writing” for Derrida, of course, does not refer to “empirical” writing or writing “in the narrow sense of linear and phonetic notation” (109) but writing as difference: “inscription within a system of linguistico-social differences” (111). When he re-claims the centrality of writing, therefore, he is not merely reversing the hierarchy that prioritizes speech over writing, which would assume speech and writing possess a self-presence that makes them fundamentally opposed, but establishing writing as “writing, that takes place *before* and *within* speech” (315).

However, theorists like Walter Ong and more recently Justin E.H. Smith have challenged the prioritization of writing in Derrida and connected it to the marginalization of speech in literate cultures. They have foregrounded the importance of oral cultures and orality, which, Smith emphasizes, is the medium of “the bulk of human experience” (“How Philosophy Came to Disdain Oral Cultures”). For Walter Ong, the expansion of writing and writing technologies have led to the marginalization of oral cultures and the inability of literate cultures to appreciate the complex forms of knowing constituted in and through orality – what he refers to as “the differences in ‘mentality’ between oral and written cultures” (*Orality and Literacy* 3). Drawing on Ong, Smith suggests that words in ancient oral cultures, rather than simply describing the world, “bring about new states of affairs in the world.” Orality, he writes, is a means of storytelling, of conjuring up the past in the present, and carrying forth tradition and values, by means of memory (Smith). While such arguments have served to counter the narrative canonized by Derrida that writing is the free play of meaning while speech “fixes” it, by

demonstrating instead how the development of writing in antiquity helped (in the words of Smith) to "anchor" meaning and to "systematize" language on the part of the powerful, their arguments have also idealized speech and romanticized both oral cultures and orality. In the name of de-centering writing and Western, rich cultures, such theorizations have, as E.A. Biakolo argues in "On the Theoretical Foundations of Orality and Literacy," reproduced the divisions that "poststructuralists" like Derrida have identified with "ethnocentrism": the "classical oppositions of cultures: prelogical versus logical, wild versus domesticated, primitive versus civilized, hot versus cold, traditional versus modern, magical versus scientific [...] all of the discursive baggage of Western anthropological thought" (50). Biakolo examines the extent to which many analyses, like those of Ong and Claude Lévi-Strauss, Charles Taylor, and Deborah Tannen, proceed on the basis of a "common" assumption, "perhaps the commonest in all anthropological-philosophical discourses of this sort. This is the notion that the magical, with its connotation of, and connection with, ritual and religion, is the dominant characteristic of all primitive thought and behavior" (52).

The speakerly, in contrast to Derrida, Ong, Smith, *et. al*, is not a prioritizing of speech over writing. It is not a reversal that (re)places speech as a kind of "ontotheology" (Derrida, *Of Grammatology* 50) or as the materiality of voice prior to the abstraction of writing. It does not suggest, in the words of Brian Stock, that "speech and writing answer to different social priorities" (6). The speakerly recovers not speech or writing, but a materialist approach to language, which makes Marx's speeches vital in the contemporary struggles against capitalism. The speakerly shows that all language is dialectically related to labor and the material relations and that the conflicts between speech (orality) and writing (literacy) are class issues.

The class issues shaping conflicts over speech and writing are, for instance, at the core of Plato's *Phaedrus* – regarded by Derrida as a tutor text of logocentrism – but they have been obscured by Derrida's writerly readings. His exhaustive teasing out of the immanent contradictions,

reversals and layerings of the text, all of which hinge on the double meaning of “pharmakon” in Socrates’ telling of the short “myth” on writing, are well-known, if not “famous” (Jon Hesk 186, n.82). Yet, what remains unspoken is the fact that the myth of writing that is at the center of both Plato’s and Derrida’s texts is fundamentally about class relations in ancient Greece. When they are not overlooked entirely, they are the target of textualization in Derrida’s canonized interpretation.

In the myth told by Socrates, Theuth, the god of astronomy, geometry, calculation, and writing, comes to Thamus, King of Egypt and god of gods, and exhibits his arts and “declares they ought to be imparted to the other Egyptians” (qtd Derrida, *Dissemination* 75). Upon which

Thamus questioned him about the usefulness of each one; and as Theuth enumerated, the King blamed or praised what he thought were the good or bad points in the explanation. Now Thamus is said to have had a good deal to remark on both sides of the question about every single art [...]; but when it came to writing, Theuth said, “This discipline (*to mathēma*), my King, will make the Egyptians wiser and will improve their memories (*sophōterous kai mnēmonikōterous*): my invention is a recipe (*pharmakon*) for both memory and wisdom.” (qtd *Dissemination* 75)

In the myth told by Socrates, the property relations of ancient Greece are translated into relations between gods, and language’s foundation in “practical consciousness” is made a result of immaterial (divine) “invention.” The question of writing – and whether it will benefit the people and therefore be given (back) to them – emerges in an inverted world. Derrida reads the myth, however, not to invert the inversion, but to make it impossible to read the world of ideas as a reflection of material relations, since the very nature of writing, by which “the signified always already functions as a signifier” (*Of Grammatology* 7), makes all such binaries as material/ideal undecidable. In the process, Derrida shifts attention from the immaterial (religious) nature of language in Plato – what

Marx calls the "inverted world-consciousness" of religion (*Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law* 175) – to the mimetic dimensions of metaphysics. In doing so, Derrida merely substitutes one (mimetic) inversion for another (nonmimetic) inversion.

Derrida's reading of the myth does not deny class. In a double move, he writes and unwrites the class relations manifest in the text. Theuth, Derrida writes, presents writing to King Thamus as "a kind of present offered up in homage by a vassal to his lord (Theuth is a demigod speaking to the king of the gods), but above all as a finished work submitted to his appreciation. And this work is itself an art, a capacity for work, a power of operation" (75-6). Thamus, however, does not need writing, since he "speaks," and it is through his speech, Derrida emphasizes, that he communicates logos, truth, without the need of writing. In this economy of presence/absence, speech/writing, vassal/lord, Derrida writes that Thamus "experiences" the gift of writing from the outside – from outside himself – and from "below" – because, as he argues in his analysis of Thamus' rejection of writing, he determines and eventually demeans the value of it.

For Derrida, this scene depicts the extent to which writing has been rendered "other" to speech in the West and, in turn, how the belief in the "presence" of speech over the "absence" of writing has enabled anyone who is authorized to speak to silence the other. In this sense, Derrida re-writes class as power, expressed through access to speech. Power, in other words, is defined as that which gives itself the authority to fix the play of meaning. But, on his own terms, what makes Thamus's speech more powerful than Theuth's, given that they both "arrest" the free play of the signifier "writing" (one as "antidote," the other as "poison")? What Derrida's writerly interpretation cannot account for is that Thamus's power (of speech) is first and foremost an effect of his position in the social relations of production. Derrida alludes to this when he represents writing as a "finished work" submitted to the king, who experiences it as from the "outside." But of course, all products "given" to a king are products of the labor of the other. In the case of ancient Greece, they are appropriated by

him through the relations that divide property owners from slaves. Ancient Greek society, like all other class societies, was based on surplus labor and its appropriation. The wealthy (propertied classes) of ancient Greece, Geoffrey de Ste. Croix explains in his pioneering work *The Class Struggle in the Ancient Greek World*, “derived their surplus, which freed them from the necessity of taking part in the process of production, [not] from wage labour, as in capitalist society, but mainly from unfree labour of various kinds” (39). This society, in which the producers have to “produce more than what they themselves consume” (36-37) so that others – the property owners as well as philosophers, orators, and others – can be “released from directly producing the material necessities of life” (36) was the basis of leisure, that, in conjunction with the productive forces reached, made it possible for the development of sciences and the arts, including the arts of speaking and writing (orality, rhetoric).

Speech plays a crucial role in the *demos*, but the material roots of speech are made invisible when they are reduced to a mimetic will of gods, as by Plato, or by a metaphysics of presence, as by Derrida. Jon Hesk points to some of these issues in his analysis of Demosthenes in *Deception and Democracy in Classical Athens*. Demosthenes’ speech *Against Leptines*, Hesk writes, insists “that the democratic constitution of Athens is a system based on ‘words’ or ‘speeches’” (164). According to Demosthenes, the orator “Aeschines’ lies to the *ecclēsia* are the worst kind of injustice because the democratic ‘city of words’ is extremely vulnerable to this exploitation of what Detienne calls ‘the ambiguity of speech’” (164), or the ability of speech to be used falsely, to lie. Hesk in this context explicitly references Derrida’s critique of logocentrism, noting, “in line with Derrida (1981) and its famous analysis of Plato’s *Phaedrus*, the tendency of democratic oratory to attribute deceit of the *demos* to the workings of the sophist and the logographer can be seen as a mark of the encroachment of ‘logocentric’ prejudice in democratic discourse against writing as a phenomenon which contaminates ‘self-present’ spoken communication” (note 82, 166). But, as Hesk notes, the sophists and the logographers were often used by the wealthy to advance the interests of

the wealthy (165-66). Language could be used to take advantage of other citizens without resources to pay for rhetors (i.e., through bribery). Speech's "vulnerability," in other words, is related to the use of rhetors to substitute the private for the common in the *polis*. The "true" represents here not simply a will to truth or to presence but to the "common" interests. The "city of words" should not simply be read immaterially – to conclude that language or speech is the foundation of the city because it is the space of dialogue and debate. Rather, language is an extension of material relations, and it is in language that class interests are fought out in the *polis*.

It is also important to point out here, as de Ste. Croix does, that while Greek democracy "must always have depended to a considerable extent on the exploitation of slave labour" (*The Class Struggle in the Ancient Greek World* 284), it also represented "the political means by which the non-propertied" members of the *demos* – for instance, peasants and free laborers – "protected themselves [...] against exploitation and oppression by the richer landowners, who in antiquity always tended to be the dominant class" (96). In contrast to earlier periods in Greek history, in Greek democracy of the fifth and fourth century BCE,

making its decisions [...] by majority vote, the poor, because they were the majority, could protect themselves to a certain extent. They could sometimes even turn the tables on the rich, not only by obliging them to undertake expensive liturgies (especially, at Athens and elsewhere, the trierarchy), but also by occasionally confiscating their property when they were convicted in the courts. (96-97)

Through the *demos*, the poor could advocate for a "redistributive" politics, advocating more "progressive taxation" and at times even the cancellation of debts (97).

Writing, too, was a site of class struggle. Writing is at first largely the privilege of the wealthy and those who lived off of the labor of others in part by hiring others to represent their class interest for them. Smith, for instance, points to the role of "fixing" meaning and to the "systematization"

of writing, by which the “wisdom” of orality was excluded by written philosophy (“How Philosophy”). In this regard, Frances Pownall argues that in Greece in the fourth century, “the intellectual elite grasped for the first time, it appears, the political possibilities of the written word” (245), and she connects the “text-dependent” education of the elite, “particularly those who aim at political power,” with their desire to do so “in a private, rather than a public, forum” (“From Orality to Literacy: The Moral Education of the Elite In Fourth-Century Athens” 235). At the same time, Ellen Meiksins Wood argues that “what happened in Greece, and especially Athens, has been described as the democratization of writing” (17). She explains, “although we should not overestimate its extent, a kind of popular literacy, especially in the democracy, replaced what some scholars have called craft literacy, in which reading and writing were specialized skills practiced only, or largely, by professionals or scribes” (17). In other words, the more writing and literacy become widespread – that is, as a technology becomes available as a means of expanding the productivity of humanity – the more it becomes a site of class conflict over how the technologies of language will be used.

Democracy under class relations has always traded political freedoms for economic freedom – freedom from need. It has played an important role in advancing political and cultural freedoms and even for helping to mitigate the effects of class exploitation. But political democracy is never a challenge to exploitation. The first century Greek historian Diodorus points to the profound contradiction of political democracy and private property relations when he says, “It is foolish to make laws on a basis of equality for all, but to make the distribution of property unequal” (qtd Ste. Croix 79). To suggest, as Derrida does, that the “common” of the *polis* is no less metaphysical, no less violent than the Platonic appeal to logos, is to take away the basis of any collective struggle against the powerful, much less more revolutionary struggle against the existing order. Indeed this is why Hesk ultimately worries about the dominance of what he sees as a Baudrillardian-influenced approach in the contemporary moment in which there is no longer any need to “understand the difference between a

truth and a falsehood" (297), pointing to the implications of this for [legitimation of] the first Gulf War. Writing well before the "post-truth" era of "fake news," he argues, "We may now inhabit a world where *logoi* are transmitted and doctored electronically but we still need to be aware that those *logoi* can lie and engage in the struggle to determine which logos is lying to us. Without that struggle, we may as well give up on democracy altogether" (297-98).

The political limits of Derrida's writerly dismantling of Marx's speecherly "this-sidedness" is particularly evident in his erasure of labor as a consequence of readerly interpretation rather than economic systems of exploitation in his reading of Rousseau. Rousseau's work on language represents a problem for Derrida for the way it connects writing and speech to social relations outside of language, and, in doing so, erases the (self-difference of writing) that makes Rousseau's own notion of speech, like his writings, part of a long legacy of logocentrism and ethnocentrism, and fraught with (unavoidable) internal contradictions – the effect of a violent desire for mastery.

In his extensive analysis of Rousseau in *Of Grammatology*, Derrida "isolate[s] Rousseau, and, in Rousseauism, the theory of writing" (99), through an analysis of several of his texts, especially *Essay on the Origin of Languages*. There Rousseau argues that "Speech differentiates man from the other animals" (*Essay* 240). Through a historical narrative beginning with the first "sentient, thinking Beings" who "desired or needed to communicate" their sentiments to each other (240), and moving through different stages of human society, he proceeds to differentiate speech from writing along with people and language in the "South" from those of the "North." That is to say, for Rousseau, the division of the global South from the global North is one of communication technologies, in which "One conveys one's sentiments in speaking, one's ideas in writing" (253). According to Rousseau, "a language that is written cannot possibly retain for long the liveliness of one that is only spoken" (253). On these grounds, he argues that writing in the North "substitutes precision for expressiveness" (253), linking it with "need" and "reason" (and corresponding

“harsh” tones), while he celebrates the languages of the “South” as those based on “passion” and “feeling” (musicality). Rousseau treats this difference as rooted in the differences of environment and climate (“warm” and “cold”) between these regions (260-72). These distinctions are then related to a political theory in which Rousseau identifies nature/speech with freedom and society/writing with servitude. “Among the ancients,” he argues, “it was easy to be heard by the people in a public square,” but “Nowadays, an academician who reads a paper on a day of public session can hardly be heard in the back of the hall” (294).

At stake for Derrida are not ultimately the material relations that make it possible for Rousseau’s theory of language to erase from the “South” the productive role of labor in meeting people’s own needs and the needs of the colonizers from the North who exploit them. Derrida does address the ethnocentrism of Rousseau, of course, which he later traces in Lévi-Strauss (“The Violence of the Letter: From Lévi-Strauss to Rousseau,” *Of Grammatology* 101-40). But he is mainly concerned with the relation of ethnocentrism and *logocentrism* – with the metaphysics of presence, not the material relations of exploitation. It is above all the manner in which Rousseau attempts to locate the origin of language *outside* language, which is another way of saying, *in a relation to* something other than language, which is Derrida’s focus. Rousseau, Derrida demonstrates, associates speech with nature and writing with culture, and thus treats oral cultures as cultures closer to nature and farther from the corruption he identifies with the social. However, Derrida claims that Rousseau’s writing continually contradicts itself, and makes writing (also) prior to speech, the implication of which is that there is no “natural” society, no language that is not always already social (cultural). The very effort to root language in nature, to anchor meaning, finds Rousseau fundamentally implicated in language. The supplemental logic of Rousseau’s writing means that “the absolute present, Nature, that which words like ‘real mother’ name, have always already escaped, have never existed; that what opens meaning and language is writing as the disappearance of natural presence” (*Of Grammatology* 159). That is,

"beyond and behind what one believes can be circumscribed as Rousseau's text, there has never been anything but writing" (159). The logic of supplementarity continually shows both that there is no speech without writing, and that writing is the name of an originary arche-writing that exceeds representation. Rousseau's privileging of speech, in other words, is central to his romanticization of so-called natural communities before culture. The metaphysics of speech, Derrida argues, is the metaphysics of an impossible community: "The ideal profoundly underlying this philosophy of writing is therefore the image of a community immediately present to itself, without difference, a community of speech where all the members are within earshot" (136).

But Rousseau's romanticization of "natural" communities is not an effect of metaphysics. It is a mediation of class. What is missing in Rousseau's imagined "natural" community is not difference – and especially not *différance* – but labor, and the social relations of labor that exploit the labor of the (colonized) other. Although Rousseau addresses the history of language in relation to meeting of "social need," according to his narrative, the earliest societies were societies *without labor*, because the fruit, he suggests, essentially fell from trees, animals were readily available to hunt, and insofar as human subsistence was met through nature without labor, not even speech was required. He writes, "Fruit does not shrink from our grasp, one can eat it without speaking" (245). In effect, Rousseau reads this absence of labor in the South as an "explanation" of the divisions between "warm" and "cold" climates. He argues, "In southern climates, where nature is prodigal, needs are born of the passions, [while] in cold countries, where nature is miserly, the passions are born of the needs, and the languages, sad daughters of necessity, reflect their harsh origin" (273). Language, like labor, thus becomes the response to an absence. He writes, "in order to move a young heart, to repulse an unjust aggressor, nature dictates accents, cries, complaints: here are the oldest invented words" (245-46). According to this narrative, language is a secondary development responding to the *inability* of labor to meet people's needs. That is to say, in Rousseau's account, language, like labor,

is an invention of society created in response to want, which he makes separate from any activity that meets needs. He writes, "It is claimed that men invented speech in order to express their needs; that seems to me an untenable opinion. The natural effect of the first needs was to separate men, not to unite them" (245). Labor, in this respect, becomes both the cause and the effect of poverty and social divisions, rather than the means of their elimination. He argues that while "Nature does so much for those who live there [the global South] that there is almost nothing left for them to do" (274), it also means that those in the global North, who face "dreadful climates where everything is dead nine months of the year," had to give up "Idleness, which feeds the passions" and "yield[] to labor, which represses them" (273). Despite recognizing that the development of language is "neither accidental nor arbitrary," but is "naturally formed according to men's needs" (293), Rousseau displaces labor as the basis of human existence, replacing it with freedom of consumption. However, as Marx and Engels argue, "what individuals are depends on the material conditions of their production" (*German Ideology* 32). In other words, culture is a product of labor under specific social arrangements. There are no unmediated relations, nor is there a transparent reflection of reality in language; language is already an abstraction of social life. Contrary to Rousseau's claims, it is not culture or climate that explains the relations between the global North and the global South, nor is it labor that fails to meet human need. Rather, it is the relations of production that determine the ends to which labor is used that explains why some have their needs met and others do not. As Marx explains in his speech "On the Question of Free Trade," the relation of the global North and the global South is an entirely historical relation, shaped by the global organization of production, and has nothing to do with "nature" as the free traders presume (464). What appears in Rousseau and other bourgeois thinkers as a zone of "nature" or a kind of inevitable "destiny" is, in other words, an expression from the viewpoint of capital. Rousseau's romantic idealism of supposedly pre-labor, pre-linguistic communities, although it reverses the traditional accounts in the West of the supposed cultural "superiority" of

the global North over the global South is, nonetheless, an inverted depiction of the lifestyles of the ruling classes, whose entire existence appears "labor-less" because it is made possible by the labor of others.

To celebrate Mallarmé's writing, as Derrida does, because it "no longer belongs to the system of truth," instead articulating "the manifold play of a scene that, illustrating nothing – neither word nor deed – beyond itself, illustrates nothing" (208), as an alternative to Rousseauian metaphysics does little to address the historical and material conditions that have turned language into a weapon against the other; the process by which, as Ngũgĩ writes, "the destruction or the deliberate undervaluing of a people's culture, their art, dances, religions, history, geography, education, orature and literature, and the conscious elevation of the language of the colonizer" (16) has its roots in the "control of the people's wealth" (16). Much less does it provide a basis for the collective struggle of workers in the North and the South for freedom from exploitation. In fact, as Derrida makes clear in his critique of the Rousseauism of Lévi-Strauss, any analysis of the material roots of such violence outside language is a repetition of the violence it has isolated within language, since the meaning of words is ultimately reversible: "What is going to be called *enslavement* can equally legitimately be called *liberation*. And it is at the moment that this oscillation is *stopped* on the signification of enslavement that the discourse is frozen into a determined ideology that we would judge disturbing" (*Of Grammatology* 131). In the name of unfreezing the oscillation of the signifier, Derrida ideologically stabilizes the relations of private property within which the freedom of some is always the unfreedom of others. Class, as a relation to the means of production, becomes a site of indeterminacy: in what sense can a "worker" be said to be "property-less" if the very notion of "property" is never itself, but always divided by its other? Class, on this basis, becomes a violent act of "essentialism" that excludes the other to say that "workers" share a common class position in dialectical opposition to the class of owners. But of course, if the worker is really the self-difference of the owner, and the owner is the self-difference of the worker, there can be no material or

political basis of revolution. Revolution itself, Derrida indicates, would be part of the metaphysical system of truth, “suppressing the double or making it dialectical” by which (self) difference is excluded (*Dissemination* 207). This more flexible theory of reference emerges, however, not out of language’s own forces of self-difference, but owing to significant changes in post-war capitalism.

IV.

As the result of a long crisis of profitability beginning in the mid-1960s, capital sought to develop new means of production and more “flexible” modes of accumulation in order to raise the profit rate. This “crisis,” which reached its highest points during the “oil shock” and “stagnation” of the leading global economies in the 1970s, pushed capital toward investment in new technologies that led to the dot.com boom, on the one hand, and the “neo-liberal ‘reforms’ of anti-trade legislation, privatization of state companies, cuts in pensions and government services, the lowering of taxes on the corporate sector, and an increase in taxes on spending plus the deregulation of the financial sector,” on the other (Roberts, *The Long Depression* 61). The growth of computerized and automated production in this period facilitated greater extraction of surplus value, and the deregulation of laws that got in the way of increased profits legalized the setting of limits on – if not the elimination of – strikes and other political forms of organization among workers that had been fought for in previous decades. The culture of capitalism that developed became increasingly focused on the belief that “knowledge work” (ideas, culture, language) was the primary source of value. While capitalism continues to be based in exploitation at the point of production, shifts in the labor relations in the global North – along with the growth of imperialist consuming habits that foster the rights of the powerful nations over the less powerful and the corresponding cultural eclipse of solidarity in favor of the rights of the “individual” – helped to foster several important illusions. They all contribute significantly to the cultural justifications of privatization, that is, to the substitution of singularity for

the public that have been integral to discussions of speech and writing among the (post)humanist left.

First and foremost is the illusion that capital no longer exploits labor at the point of production, despite the fact that the expansion of global capital after the fall of the Soviet Union has led to the proletarianization of working people across the world and the expanse of immiseration of the many alongside unprecedented accumulation of profits – meaning that eight individuals now own the same wealth as half the world's entire population (Elliot). Second, closely aligned with the assumption that profit is produced now through "creative" and "immaterial" labor (not manual labor) is the assumption that manual labor is devoid of mental thought (abstraction) and especially of creativity. The shift to knowledge-work has, culturally, induced a mode of thinking that disconnects its own conditions of labor not only from productive labor but from other workers in general. That is to say, it is not a coincidence that in the post-WWII period of capitalism, and especially with the rise of cognitive capitalism, which is described as an economic system "based on the appropriation of knowledge and on the use of new information and communications technologies" (Boutang 42) rather than "muscle-power consumed by machines driven by 'fossil-fuel' energy" (37), the role of both labor and "speech"/the "speecherly" have become increasingly side-lined in cultural theory in the global North.

This is because, despite the focus on the cultural politics of language and discourse, the debate over "speech" and "writing" in (post)humanist left theory, and the idea that language is "not something simply added on to [...] social relations" but, as Judith Butler puts it, "is one of the primary forms that this social relation takes" (*Excitable Speech* 30), is a reflection at the level of ideas of the dismantling and deregulating of the social that has been the driving economic policy of capitalist governments since the middle of the twentieth century. For instance, the "alt-right" political figure Steve Bannon describes the goal of the right-wing nationalists rising to power in the United States and Europe as the "deconstruction of the administrative state" (Rucker and Costa A01). Similarly, as Michael Behrent shows, "In the late 1970s, the same Foucault whom academic

radicals have lionized flirted with an outlook anchored on the political Right: the free-market creed known as neoliberalism” (26), which is evident in his anti-statist theory of “biopolitics.”

According to Foucault, the “bio-political” impulse to “incite, reinforce, control, monitor, optimize, and organize” all elements of social life (*History of Sexuality* 136) should not be read in terms of economic logic or “moral” imperative, as he claims it crosses over all state forms inherited from the nineteenth century – from capitalism to socialism, and from the Nazi gas chambers to the development of the welfare state programs of the twentieth century. The issue, he proposes, is the modern “state,” which takes as its aim issues of “propagation, births and mortality, the level of health, life expectancy, and longevity” (139). Of course, as Engels explains, the bourgeois state is “nothing more than the organisation with which the ruling classes – landowners and capitalists – have provided themselves in order to protect their social privileges” (“Letter to Cuno” 306). However, like other writerly theorists, Foucault reduces the “state” to any system which attempts to fix the play of meaning, regardless of its economic relations of production. In other words, Foucault is essentially repeating the anarchist claim that “the state is the chief evil, the state above all must be abolished” (Engels, “Letter to Cuno” 307). Yet, to simply call for the dismantling of the state, without addressing its economic logic, is to end up doing little more than reproducing the libertarian ideology of a “friction-free” capitalism without regulation. In fact, as Michael Scott Christofferson points out, Foucault’s critique of “biopolitics” was not simply directed against the modern state in general, but against socialism in particular (“Foucault and the New Philosophy” 19-21). In *Society Must be Defended: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975-76*, Foucault writes the problem with socialism is that it “has made no critique of the theme of biopower, which developed at the end of the eighteenth century and throughout the nineteenth; it has in fact taken it up, developed, reimplanted, and modified it in certain respects, but it has certainly not reexamined its basis or its modes of working” (261). It is not surprising that Foucault’s romanticizing of the uncertainty and precarity that defines the life of most workers under

capitalism as the writerly eruption of "irregularity into an uncertain world" (*Language, Madness, and Desire* 111) is resolved in an embrace of neoliberalism rather than socialism.

As Mitchell Dean and Daniel Zamora explain, Foucault found neoliberal capitalism to be "an innovative and stimulating form of governmentality, which allows both resistance to older forms of subjectification by law and discipline and also the deployment of new forms of subjectivity" ("Did Foucault Reinvent His History of Sexuality Through the Prism of Neoliberalism?"). As they discuss, in *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978-1979*, Foucault muses that in contrast to the all of the "bio-political" states of the nineteenth century, neoliberalism represents

the image, idea, or theme-program of a society in which there is an optimization of systems of difference, in which the field is left open to fluctuating processes, in which minority individuals and practices are tolerated, in which action is brought to bear on the rules of the game rather than on the players, and finally in which there is an environmental type of intervention instead of the internal subjugation of individuals. (259-60)

In other words, for Foucault, the marketization of all aspects of social life meant that the individual was no longer bound to either older "religious" models of subjectivity, or "restrictive" requirements of the emerging socialist models, whether the post-WWII "welfare state" or the socialist blocs, which sought to remove the uncertainty of existence by working toward meeting the needs of all. Instead, in a commodified world in which everything and every act is theoretically available (for a price), the individual is represented in the writerly logic of becoming increasingly free to "desire without law, without restriction, without an exterior, and it is the suppression of exteriority with respect to desire" (*Language, Madness, and Desire* 114). Of course, that such "freedom" is available to an owning minority only insofar as the working majority remains "unfree" represents precisely the limit of democracy under capitalism.

As Marx explains in his “Speech on the Question of Free Trade,” when we speak of freedom under class relations, we should “not be deluded by the abstract word Freedom” because the only freedom available under capital is “Not the freedom of one individual in relation to another, but freedom of Capital to crush the worker” (463). What Foucault celebrates as “desire without law” is the same kind of deregulated “desire” that leads capital to roll back healthcare coverage, eliminate environmental protections, and outlaw unions. Celebrating the desire of the bourgeois individual to “avoid ever having to encounter anything other than their own unique individuality” (Foucault, *Language, Madness, and Desire* 112), Foucault transforms the “aleatory” nature of life under capitalism – in which workers are forced to live precarious lives because their only means of survival depends upon the sale of their labor-power for a wage – into a vitalist ontology in which social “risks” are re-written as marks of individual freedom which continuously erupt, unguided by social forces, except when they are violently “fixed” by any state that seeks to end the daily brutalities of class society. In the end, Foucault’s attack on the “state” is, in practice, the theoretical defense of the deregulation of social programs and the silencing of social movements dedicated to eliminating capitalism’s structural inequality. It prevents any serious analysis – needed to build a stronger, international socialist struggle – of the material limits of previous socialist struggles, namely the all-scale, ongoing war fought by capital militarily, economically, politically, and culturally to crush any movement around the world seeking to even marginally put the needs of people before profit. Instead, what brought Foucault’s work to the attention of the CIA (“France: Defection of the Leftist Intellectuals”) is that it teaches working people that there is no reason to organize against capitalism on the grounds that all social formations will reproduce the same “aleatory” reality they currently face in the market. In addition, as Stephen Tumino demonstrates in this issue, the logic of Foucault’s writerly rejection of socialism continues on in the work of “new communists” such as Antonio Negri and Alain Badiou, who propose that “socialism and capitalism [...] even though they have at times been mingled together and

at others occasioned bitter conflicts, are both regimes of property that exclude the common" and that what is necessary is "a new space for politics" that is "neither private nor public, neither capitalist nor socialist" (Hardt and Negri, *Commonwealth* ix).

It is telling that in adopting the post-Foucauldian rejection of an ahistorical and conceptually empty notion of the "state" on the grounds that it attempts to "control life," the (post)humanist left continues to take its cues from the fascist poetics of Martin Heidegger, the writer Foucault describes as "the essential thinker" who determined "my whole philosophical development" (qtd Ijsseling 413). The logic of Heidegger's famous declaration that "Language itself is – language and nothing else besides" ("Language" 188) is the keystone in the attacks on the speecherly by the "alt-right" (Dugin, *Martin Heidegger: The Philosophy of Another Beginning*) and the (post)humanist left (Shaviro, *The Universe of Things*). What has made Heidegger so influential on the left, despite his long and thorough commitment to fascism (*Ponderings: Black Notebooks II-XV*), is the way in which his writings on the alienation of modern life provide ideological cover through thick linguistic troping of material contradictions to what is, in actuality, a thinly veiled attack on what he derisively calls "the existent conditions of man's historical-social life today [...] the collective" ("...Poetically Man Dwells..." 212). As Teresa L. Ebert and Mas'ud Zavarzadeh explain, Heidegger's de-materializing poetics provide "a master lesson in anti-labour cultural critique" (*Class in Culture* 62) in that he "attenuates the objectivity of 'housing' by converting it into the spirituality of 'dwelling'" and "the historical alienation of the 'truck driver' and 'the working woman' produced by wage-labor (the relations of 'owner' and the 'workers' in 'building') is re-Thought as an inability to listen to the silences of language" (63). The popularity of Heidegger's work is not, they write, the result of it being "a subtle interpretation of 'dwelling'/'housing,'" but rather precisely because it is "a crude masking of class binaries" (64). In other words, if Heidegger's influential conclusion that only "language speaks" has any significance, it's that his fundamental premise that in order to study

language one must disconnect it from material conditions, such that all elements of social life become nothing more than tropes which no longer even gesture toward the historical and material relations they emerge from, is turned in his writings into a poetical and immaterial style one can luxuriate in because words are stripped of all meaning until they “[fly] fantastically above reality” (“...Poetically Man Dwells...” 215).

According to Heidegger, the primary cause of the alienation of modern life – what he calls the “*disempowering of the spirit*” (*Introduction to Metaphysics* 50) – is located not in the exploitative class relations of capitalism, but rather in an “ontic” logic of instrumentality through which “difference” (“Language” 200) – that which is “neither distinction nor relation” (“Language 200) but what “sustained the middle in which the two, the outside and the inside, penetrate each other” (“Language” 201) – is reduced to a homogenized commonality focused on “mere cleverness in the examination, calculation, and observation of given things, their possible modification, and their additional elaboration” (*Introduction to Metaphysics* 51). In this context, Heidegger argues that under the tyranny of technological and scientific instrumentality, humanity is given over to believe that everything around it exists only as “standing-reserve” (“The Question Concerning Technology” 17), a form of “regulating and securing” (16) in which “Everywhere everything is ordered to stand by, to be immediately at hand, indeed to stand there just so that it may be on call for a further ordering” (17). That is to say, “things” are no longer appreciated as they “reveal” themselves through *poiēsis* or “bringing-forth” (10), but what they can “do” for an instrumentally-driven humanity. What makes Heidegger’s reading of the rise of technology, mass media, and commodity culture as plunging humanity “into an eminent oblivion of being” (*Parmenides* 86) so influential on the left today is the way in which it takes the alienation of life under capitalism – what Marx explains as the process by which “the object which labour produces – labour’s product – confronts it as *something alien, as a power independent of the producer*” (*Economic Manuscripts* 272) – and turns it into a cultural struggle against “common-ness” and “homogenization.” For Heidegger and his writerly

disciples, the threat of the modern world lies not in exploitation and its effects, but in the dangers of a reductive "common-ality," reflected in an increasingly instrumental and homogenized world, in which "the equal or identical always moves toward the absence of difference, so that everything may be reduced to a common denominator [...] of mere uniformity" ("...Poetically Man Dwells..." 217).

It is such that in his influential writings on language, one finds Heidegger concerned primarily with the way in which "The place of language properly inhabited, and of its habitual words" was being "usurped by common terms" (*What is Called Thinking?* 119) in which "with a worn-out language, everybody can talk about everything" (127). According to Heidegger, the failure of "modern" philosophy in its abandonment of "essential" ontological questions has been the instrumental reduction of language to "the voicing of the inner man" and the instrumental notion that "the nature of language can never appear as anything but an expression and an activity of man" ("Language" 206). The "social" approach to language becomes its most "common," Heidegger claims, in the development of writing technologies, which "degrade[] the word to a means of communication" (*Parmenides* 81). Arguing that "It is not accidental that modern man writes 'with' the typewriter and 'dictates' [...] 'into' a machine" (80), Heidegger dismisses "modern" technological advances on the grounds that "The typewriter makes everyone look the same" (81) and thus "veils the essence of writing and of the script" (85). Just as Plato aristocratically rejects writing as a social act because it enables anyone to learn "many things without teaching," meaning that they "seem to know much, while for the most part they know nothing; and as men filled, not with wisdom, but with the conceit of wisdom, they will be a burden to their fellows" (*Phaedrus* 157), Heidegger derides speech as a social act of debate and critique over the ends to which human labor should be put in favor of writing as a private mode of questioning without conclusion for the clerical-élite. He writes, "In order to hear the pure resonance of a mere sound, we must first remove ourselves from the sphere where speech meets with understanding or lack of understanding" (*What*

is Called Thinking? 129). In other words, we must retreat from the public sphere into a privileged private space of writing without reference. In this sense, it becomes clear that Heidegger is not only making a simple, nostalgic gesture to a pre-technological lifestyle when he argues that “Writing, from its originating essence, is hand-writing” (*Parmenides* 85). More significantly, it is in his immaterial reading of the hand, in a troping of labor, as “rooted in thinking” (*What is Called Thinking?* 16) that he establishes the writerly “destruction” of the materiality of labor that has come to dominate contemporary left discourses.

Just as poetry refuses to use language as “merely the field of expression” or “merely the means of expression” (*What is Called Thinking?* 128), for Heidegger the “hand” represents “a peculiar thing” whose “essence can never be determined, or explained by its being an organ which can grasp” (16). That is to say, within Heidegger’s linguistic ontology the “hand” is re-written as a measure – that is, a sign of a sign – a trope of humanity’s spiritual relation with the world. “The hand,” he argues, “sprang forth only out of the word and together with the word” (*Parmenides* 80) and, for the same reason that “language is neither expression nor an activity of man” (“Language” 194), Heidegger writes that humanity “does not ‘have’ hands, but the hand holds the essence of man, because the word as the essential realm of the hand is the ground of the essence of man” (*Parmenides* 80). The “hand” is here transformed into a trope precisely to render unspoken the relation between the productivity of labor and the development of society. The kind of “handiwork” that Heidegger celebrates is an escapist thinking divorced from materiality. It fosters the illusion that labor is all too “common” to be considered the basis of humanity’s existence and instead promotes the ruling-class belief that it is the intellectual fancy of those whose lives are divorced from the drudgery and precarity of wage-labor who come closest to living in the true “neighborhood of being” (“Letter on Humanism” 247).

Consider, for example, the following passage. “Building in the sense of the farmer’s cultivation of growing things, and of the erecting of

edifices and works and the production of tools, is already a consequence of the nature of dwelling, but it is not its ground, let alone its grounding [...] man is capable of dwelling only if he has already built, is building, and remains disposed to build, in another way" ("...Poetically Man Dwells..." 215). For Heidegger, to speak about "growing things" and "the production of tools" as integral aspects of "the production of material life itself" (Marx and Engels, *German Ideology* 42) is to "describe the mere appearance" (223) of life rather than its essence. On the contrary, he argues that "man is capable of such building only if he already builds in the sense of the poetic taking of measure" (225), by which he means taking a writerly approach that "In the familiar appearances, the poet calls the alien as that to which the invisible imparts itself in order to remain what it is – unknown" (223). To write is thus to silently revel in the unknown and unknowable – he writes that, "the hand's gestures run everywhere through language, in their most perfect purity precisely when man speaks by being silent" (*Parmenides* 16) – as the only means by which the privileged are able to escape the "cheap omniscience of everyday opinion" ("...Poetically Man Dwells..." 221). In this sense, Heidegger's language takes the materiality of labor – "building" and "growing" – and re-writes it such that if there is a contradiction between the productivity of labor and the fact that many people nonetheless remain in precarious positions because the productivity of their labor is owned and controlled by another, this is not a social problem but the consequence of a "readerly" approach that assumes that "building" and "growing" should be read as connected to material reality. In other words, he renders "building" and "growing" to be poetical acts of writing which, he argues, have been mis-interpreted by those who look at issues such as homelessness and hunger as historical problems rather than ontological ones. Such people are chided as "ontic" thinkers who miss the essentially unknowable nature of reality. Instead, in arguing for a writerly interpretation which redefines "building" and "growing" as poetical acts without material measure, Heidegger redefines "homelessness" not as a social reality, but a state of mind caused by the overwhelming banality of the language of the common people, the *demos*,

who fail to appreciate the poetical potential of language and thus hold the “unearthly power to break us of the habit of abiding in what is essential, often so definitively that we never come to abide anywhere” (*What is Called Thinking?* 129). In the name of questioning the empty existence of the contemporary, Heidegger retreats by locating the basis of everyday life in an unknowable ontology that can only be grasped, tangentially, by those fortunate enough to live in “the neighborhood where thinking resides” (12). Confronted by the capitalist reality of structural class inequality, Heidegger responds by mystically writing against “commonness” in the name of defending conceptual “gated-communities” wherein social inequalities are re-written – not as the effect of the social relations of production but as their very justification.

The influence of Heidegger’s writerly troping of the “hand” is manifest in the theories of “cognitive capitalism,” in which it is argued by *post-Operaismo* thinkers such as Antonio Negri and Paolo Virno that “capital in the digital economy targets not the surplus value created by abstract human labor, as Marx theorizes in his analysis of industrial market capitalism, but the abstract intelligence engendered by the collectivity of immaterial labor” (Kolođlugil 133). In fact, capitalism is redefined within theories of cognitive capitalism as a “linguistic” economy, “a mode of production imbued with communication, by the productive force of language, both in the directly productive sphere of commodities and in the monetary and financial sphere” (Marazzi 140). In place of exploitation of wage-labor in factories and physical workplaces directed toward the production of material commodities, cognitive capitalism is said to reside in the attempt to gain control of the “common” spaces of the “immaterial labor” involved in the “production of ideas, information, images, knowledges, code, languages, social relationships, affects, and the like” (Hardt “The Common in Communism” 348-49). To exploit the “immaterial labor” of not only those in “creative” industries like advertising and software coding, and “affective” industries like nursing and teaching, but also the consumers of social networks and the emerging “internet of things” is said to mean that “the boundaries between work time and spare time,

labour and play, become fuzzy" (Fuchs 126). It is in the theory of "immaterial labor" that, as in Heidegger, it is claimed that it is not the "hand" (labor) but the "head" (thinking) that has become the primary source of value. As Virno argues, "the actual time spent in labor and exertion has become a marginal productive factor" and, instead, "Science, information, linguistic communication, and knowledge in general – rather than labor time – are now the central pillars on which production and wealth rests" (Virno, "Notes" 267). Everything, in short, is said to be "productive" of value because it is argued that in cognitive capitalism "The subject is productive: the production of subjectivity is thus a subjectivity that produces" (Negri, "The Labor of the Multitude" 18).

Despite their criticisms of Heidegger (Negri, "The Labor of the Multitude" 20; Negri, *Negri on Negri* 79-84; Virno, *Grammar* 26), writers influenced by *post-Operaismo* thought nonetheless articulate a similar logic in which the central conflict within capitalism is redefined as a cultural struggle between the forces of homogenization and resistance. This is because, regardless of their criticisms of Heidegger, they are responding to the same class contradictions of capitalism in the same way: by turning explanatory concepts such as labor, class, and exploitation into tropes and subsequently refiguring the issue of "power" as an interminable cultural struggle between "readerly" and "writerly" interpretative forces. According to Jodi Dean, "Communicative capitalism is that economic-ideological form wherein reflexivity captures creativity and resistance so as to enrich the few as it placates and diverts the many" (*Blog Theory* 4). In other words, class conflict becomes a struggle between any meaning systems that attempt to fix linguistic creativity within a "totalizing" discourse and the singular language of the common that is inherently resistant to measure. It is through this same writerly framework that Negri argues that it is Marxism, as much as capitalism, which "locked labor power and variable capital inside relations that were objectively prefigured by the laws of the economy" ("The Labor of the Multitude" 20), while claiming in writerly fashion that linguistic play represents a form of productivity that "goes *beyond* the idea of measure itself" (21). In this

sense, the language of the multitude is defined as “a singularity that acts” and which “can in no case give rise to a moment of synthesis, of excess, of *Aufhebung* – in sum, the negation of the negation in the Hegelian manner” (18). To go “beyond measure” is essentially another word for the Nietzschean-Heideggerian-Derridean play of language that one finds across cultural theory today, which replaces social transformation with the endless renewal of tropes. Class, from this perspective, is presumed to reflect a “readerly” theory of the social, which refuses to acknowledge the singularity of the individual who exceeds all interpretations. As Maurizio Lazzarato puts it, “In the era of immaterial labour and cooperation between minds it is not possible to think social conflicts in terms of the friend/enemy dichotomy or in terms of the conflict between two classes, nor in terms of liberal (private/public) or socialist (individual/collective) traditions” (187). Marxism and capitalism are, once again, represented as equally reductive “cultural” logics that “in the past [were] capable of reducing the multiplicity of singularities to something close to the organic and unitary – a class, a mass, a set,” while a writerly theory of “anti-capitalism” supposedly begins when one embraces “the multitude” as “a disorganized, differential, and powerful multiplicity” (Negri, “The Labor of the Multitude” 22). Capitalism is defined in the end as an interpretive conflict in which “*linguistic resistance* is strong, rational, and independent from false signals if it succeeds in contesting the dominant language without in turn reproducing a totalizing language” (Marazzi 133). In other words, to resist capitalism is to celebrate cultural singularity as it escapes from the confines of social homogenization.

Heidegger’s troping of the “hand” is also highly influential in the rise of “animal studies,” which seek to challenge the extent to which “Power over the animal is the essence of the ‘I’ or the ‘person,’ the essence of the human” (Derrida, *The Animal* 93). According to this logic, the elevation of speech over writing in the philosophy of the West represents “that tool, that medium through which we humans have claimed our difference from and superiority over nonhuman animals” in order to “use those conceptual categories to exclude others (human and nonhuman others) from moral

consideration and to rationalize and justify actual violence against those we consign to the category 'animal'" (Worsham 24). As Derrida writes, "Men would be first and foremost those living creatures who have given themselves the word that enables them to speak of the animal with a single voice and to designate it as the single being that remains without a response" (*The Animal* 32). Similarly, Agamben states, "In identifying himself with language, the speaking man places his own muteness outside of himself, as already and not yet human" (*The Open* 34-35). It is on this basis that (post)humanists declare, once again, the end of the necessity of speecherly critique on the grounds that, as Kristen Seas Trader puts it,

the materiality of the world and our embodiment as finite beings exceed the limits of our concepts because they cannot easily be marked by language and thus rationally controlled. Acknowledging our physicality, then, invokes the unthinkable in the interest of refuting tendencies toward abstraction and universality that negate difference. (207)

In other words, if speech is equated with the reductive logic of presence, and therefore is to be dismissed on the grounds that it creates an inherently exclusionary community, then the only solution offered is the celebration of difference as an end in itself. As Derrida writes, "It would not be a matter of 'giving speech back' to animals" (48), but rather

of taking that difference into account within the whole differentiated field of experience and of a world of life forms, and of doing that without reducing this differentiated and multiple difference, in a conversely massive and homogenizing manner, to one between the human subject, on the one hand, and the nonsubject that is the animal in general, on the other. (126)

Cary Wolfe, who takes the title of his book *Before the Law: Humans and Other Animals in a Biopolitical Frame* from Heidegger's concept of *Gestell* ("enframing") from "The Question Concerning Technology," argues on these terms that the division between the human and the

nonhuman – which determines “who falls outside the frame, because they are marked by differences of race, or species, or gender, or religion, or nationality” (9) and thus live under an eternal threat of violence – is grounded in a recursive belief that it is “human being’s capacity for speech and language,” which human beings use to define this division, that in turn is said to justify it (7). Turning to Foucault’s theory of biopolitics, he states that “the distinction human/animal – as the history of slavery, colonialism, and imperialism well shows – is a discursive resource, not a zoological distinction” (10). As we have argued in our reading of Heidegger, the rendering of class divisions as a consequence of discourse, despite whatever moral outrages are raised against the consequences of global capitalism, in actuality turns them into an ontological problem beyond explanation and therefore transformation. For example, that social divisions are an effect of discourse, which is presumed to always and inherently result in inequalities of representation between the “present” and the “nonpresent” means, for Wolfe, that a writerly politics accepts that “we *must* choose, and by this definition we *cannot* choose everyone and everything at once,” which “is precisely what ensures that, *in* the future, we *will have been wrong*” (103). In other words, an “other” will always be excluded from the discourse “community” that language creates. Yet, Wolfe even further dematerializes the very concept of exclusion, which he so often marks as a fundamental act of violence, by arguing that “bodies are enfolded via biopower in struggle and resistance” and thus “there is a chance [...] for life to burst through power’s systematic operation in ways that are more and more difficult to anticipate” (32-33). The excluded become the basis for reversing the play of domination, before turning into the dominators themselves in an endlessly repeated cycle.

It is in this sense that Wolfe, like other writerly theorists, collapses all social formations into a Foucauldian discourse of “state” and “nonstate” relationships, writing “biopolitics [...] encompasses and conjoins the putatively opposed political regimes of liberal democracy, fascism, and communism” (52). Having thus erased all of the differences between all social formations, he calls for a “fundamental rethinking of

political effectivity itself [...] addressed to the new conceptualization of politicalization opened up by biopolitics – to those (that is to say, *all* of us) who are caught up in the play of biopower, whose status as ‘subjects’ or as ‘objects’ is floating, indeterminate, and always subject to strategic rescripting” (51). The idea that “all of us” are subject to the same effects of capitalism regardless of class position, as Andreas Malm and Alf Hornborg point out, “blatantly overlooks the realities of differentiated vulnerability on all scales of human society: witness Katrina in black and white neighborhoods of New Orleans, or Sandy in Haiti and Manhattan, or sea level rise in Bangladesh and the Netherlands, or practically any other impact, direct or indirect, of climate change” (66). In other words, blurring the boundaries between owners and workers with a nebulous concept of “all of us” results in little more than an empty, moralistic politics that can neither address the fundamental causes of social inequality, as these are said to reside in the inescapability of discourse and thus are eternally reproducible, nor actually require the so-called new forms of unanticipatable resistance, as these will also somehow “spontaneously” emerge from within the discursive structure itself before becoming the new tools of repression.

Contrary to the arguments of the (post)humanist left, the homogenization of contemporary life is not the result of technological change or “mis-interpretation,” but the exploitative system of wage-labor. As such, it cannot be resolved by appealing to the writerly eruption of difference, or through “creative” acts of consumption against the grain, but only through a fundamental transformation in the mode of production. Frederick Engels, in “The Part Played by Labour in the Transition from Ape to Man,” provides a speecherly theorization of language and its relation to the “hand” which explains, contra Heidegger and his disciples, why labor “is the prime basic condition for all human existence” (452), and thus why the contradictions of “dwelling” and “growing” are the effect of social relations rather than language. While Heidegger proposes that the human hand is “infinitely different from all grasping organs – paws, claws, or fangs” (*What is Called Thinking?* 16), Engels, in a prescient analysis of

evolution, does not define this “difference” in terms of difference itself – what Heidegger refers to as “different by an abyss of essence” (16) – but in terms of humanity’s capacity to transform the environment to meet its needs, especially in regard to the fact that such capacity is only fully realized in the development of society. Engels writes, although “the number and general arrangement of the bones and muscles are the same” between humans and other apes, and while other apes are able to use their hands to “build themselves nests in the trees or even construct roofs between the branches” as well as “grasp sticks to defend themselves,” the nonhuman apes’ continuing reliance on their hands to walk or climb has meant that their hands could not develop freely to the extent of the human hand (452-53). On the contrary, what he calls “*the decisive step in the transition from ape to man*” was when our evolutionary ancestors “began to lose the habit of using their hands to walk and adopt a more and more erect posture” (452). This transformation in posture and gait, he explains, meant that the hand “*had become free* and could henceforth attain ever greater dexterity” (453). Thus, he argues,

Only by labour, by adaptations to ever new operations, through the inheritance of muscles, ligaments, and over longer periods of time [...] the ever-renewed employment of this inherited finesse in new, more and more complicated operations, have given the human hand the high degree of perfection required to conjure into being the pictures of a Raphael, the statues of a Thorwaldsen, the music of a Paganini. (453-54)

Notice in this passage that Engels does not just talk about “material” forms of labor but the “immateriality” of artworks as a measure of the productivity of labor made possible by the human hand. The transition from building crude “dwellings” in the trees to creating artworks and other “immaterial” products of labor is the consequence of our capacity to transform our environment that, in turn, also transforms ourselves and enables us to generate the abstractions that writerly theorists claim cannot be understood as emerging “from a ground (*fond*) or from a fund (*fonds*)

of some kind" (Nancy 27). Art, language, and other forms of "immaterial" expression are just as much the "material" products of the "hand" (labor) as buildings, farms, or computers. The "hand" is not a sign of a sign of humanity's spiritual decay, but the material effect of labor in transforming our conditions of existence. Further, Engels connects the development in the hand directly to the development of language. Again, whereas Heidegger puts thinking before labor when he argues that the human hand is a sign of a "being who can speak, that is, think" (*What is Called Thinking?* 16), Engels writes that "men in the making arrived at the point where *they had something to say* to each other" (455) only as a result of the fact that "mastery over nature began with the development of the hand, with labour, and widened man's horizon at every new advance," which also meant that "the development of labour necessarily helped to bring the members of society closer together by increasing cases of mutual support and joint activity" (454). In other words, it is through labor's development in the production of society, and in turn society's role in the development of labor, that the necessity of speech emerged. The necessity of speech – the need to develop signs that help us to organize production and share ideas – is not what creates an artificial separation from nature, as (post)humanists claim, but precisely the result of the fact that we are a *social* species, whose existence depends on our collective ability to transform the natural world to meet our needs. As Engels argues in his speecherly account of environmental destruction, "we by no means rule over nature like a conqueror over a foreign people, like someone standing outside nature – but that we, with flesh, blood and brain, belong to nature, and exist in its midst" (461). That is to say, Engels argues that human labor represents both a product of nature and its transformation, and that it is on this basis that the current alienation between the human and the nonhuman is not an effect of a politics of "naming," but the fact that "the present mode of production is predominantly concerned only about the immediate, the most tangible result," namely, the production of private profit in which "the question of the usefulness of the article that is produced or exchanged – retreats far into the background, and the sole incentive becomes the profit

to be made on selling” (463). It is such that Engels is neither utopian nor idealist, believing that there is no solution to the contradictions of the contemporary or that such solutions require escaping from “society” into the imaginary realm of writing. On the contrary, he argues that if we are to address the contradictions of capitalism, it requires more than “regulation,” which is really another word for a different interpretation, but “a complete revolution in our hitherto existing mode of production, and simultaneously a revolution in our whole contemporary social order” (426)

Each stage in humanity’s history has been marked by our ability to go beyond the limits of our “ontology.” As Engels writes, “By the combined functioning of hand, speech organs, and brain, not only in each individual but also in society, men became capable of executing more and more complicated operations, and were able to set themselves, and achieve higher and higher aims” (458). The elevation of the “brain” over the “hand,” “thinking” over “working,” “writing” over “speech” in contemporary culture are an ideological refraction in which “men became accustomed to explain their actions as arising out of thought instead of their needs (which in any case are reflected and perceived in the mind)” because, as a result of the class division of the means of production, “the mind that planned the labor was able [...] to have the labour that had been planned carried out by other hands than its own” (459). In other words, the labor of the “head” and the “hand” are only understood to be separate under private property relations, and under capitalism this separation takes a particularly distinct form. As Marx explains, “the labour process unites the labour of the hand with that of the head” and that it is only within a society divided by class, in which the products of labor are turned against the workers who produce them, that “they part company and even become deadly foes” (*Capital* I: 509). The writerly rejection of “labor” in favor of “thinking” reflects the material reality in which the productive forces of humanity are divided between a minority that own and control the means of production and the majority who have nothing but the precarious sale of their labor power to survive. It is because we continue to live in a society in which

some have nothing but time to "think" because others do the "labor" necessary to meet their needs that Heidegger's influence remains so strong.

V.

As we have argued, the dominant (post)humanist left is guided today by a politics of "dissemination" – the writerly logic in which any mode of critique that connects the "inside" of language to the social "outside" of productive relations is rejected as a "*critical barbarity*" (Latour, "Why Has Critique Run out of Steam" 240) that has elevated the "human" over the "nonhuman" in Western thought since Aristotle's influential declaration that "no animal has speech except a human being" (*Politics* 4). In place of the "closure" and "mastery" of the speakerly, the writerly politics of dissemination are said to open the space for "a different relation between writing, in the metaphysical sense of the word, and its 'outside' (historical, political, economical, sexual, etc.)" (Derrida, *Dissemination* 42) that "does constitute itself into a program, but it is a program that cannot be formalized" (52). In this context, according to Foucault, the transition from speech to writing as the dominant framework of left cultural theory reflects an acceptance of the very impossibility of social revolution in favor of the recording of "the singularity of events outside any monotonous finality" ("Nietzsche, Genealogy, History" 76). He writes, "in the nineteenth century we spoke, we wrote to finally free ourselves in a real world where we would have the leisure to remain silent," but "in the twentieth century, we write [...] for the experience of writing and to evaluate a freedom that no longer exists other than in words" (*Language, Madness, and Desire* 27).

Retreating from the difficulties of reality into the "pleasure of the text" (Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*), the (post)humanist left has sought refuge from the contradictions of capitalism in the Nietzschean claim that the foundations of social life are established through "legislation of language" ("On Truth and Lie" 115), which depends upon the elimination of "what is individual and actual" in favor of "the equation of unequal things" (117). The celebration of Nietzschean interpretation

within writerly theory is premised upon the translation of the material history of class relations into an interminable inscription and re-inscription of difference through language. Language, it is argued, is the space of an “endlessly repeated play of dominations” (Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History” 85) in which, on the one hand, in “every society various techniques are developed intended to *fix* the floating chain of signifieds in such a way as to counter the terror of uncertain signs” and, on the other, such techniques are met with the un-representable resistance of the “‘floating chain’ of signifieds” (Barthes, *Image Music Text* 39). The reduction of all social relations to language results in the false consciousness that there is nothing that can be done to counter the social “violence” of fixed signifiers. Concluding that “there is no outside-text” (Derrida, *Of Grammatology* 158) such as class to explain why “any current curse word can become a word of praise, any current truth must inevitably sound to many other people as the greatest lie” (Volosinov 23), speakerly critique is abandoned in favor of finding moments of “joy” when, during the act of interpretation, the writerly reader pairs a signifier with an unexpected signified.

As such, the mark of “radicality” among the (post)humanist left is no longer taken to be the struggle for the international collectivity of workers against exploitation articulated by Marx’s speakerly theory; instead, the cultural celebration of the singularity of difference without totality, which under capitalism means freedom of the market, has become the limit of possibility for social change. The logic of the writerly turns communism into a speculative philosophy in which “thought can never attain a vantage point outside experience and grasp it as a single object that can then be captured in speech” and is therefore “always melancholic because its task, in principle, cannot succeed” (Verene xi). Consider, for instance, Jean-Luc Nancy’s proposal for what he calls “literary communism,” which is an anti-social politics that “resists any definition or program” (81). In *The Inoperative Community*, Nancy dismisses the idea of “community” and “communism” as “a closure because it assigns to community a *common being*” (xxxviii). Nancy, like other writerly theorists, finds the

"commonality" of labor to be too reductive and limiting to serve as the basis of collectivity. "Community," he declares "cannot arise from the domain of *work*" (31). Following Heidegger's right-wing lead, Nancy responds from the left to the fact that under capitalism "the external character of labour for the worker appears in the fact that it is not his own, but someone else's, that it does not belong to him, that in it he belongs, not to himself, but to another" (Marx, *Economic Manuscripts* 274) by claiming that it is Marxism, as much if not more than capitalism, that is the problem for the left today. Marxism, he argues, is essentially a failed language game because it defines human beings "as producers (one might even add: human beings *defined* at all), and fundamentally as the producers of their own essence in the form of their labor and their work" (2). The problem is once again defined in writerly terms as one of interpretation rather than reality. To "define" human beings is to reduce them through a readerly interpretation which remains "closed" to the endless alternatives which are "neither extracted, nor produced, nor derived" (27). Instead, Nancy claims that we must "recognize in the thought of community a theoretical excess (or more precisely, an excess in relation to the theoretical) that would oblige us to adopt another *praxis* of discourse and community" (25-26). What emerges is a theory of language for the élites, in which speech represents the "fixing" of meaning that "reduces" people to labor, while writing becomes "the unworking of work that is social, economical, technical, and institutional" (31).

Just as Heidegger, Derrida, and Foucault reject the concept of "society" as a readerly imposition on the "free-play" of the singular, for Nancy "community" is a sign not for what could exist, but what should in fact never exist – an "impossible" community that operates "before or beyond the work, withdraws from the work, and which, no longer having to do either with production or with completion, encounters interruption, fragmentation, suspension" (31). Of course, this kind of "freedom" – one that exists "beyond work" and is able to "interpret" ("consume") freely without regulation – is precisely the kind of freedom that capitalism provides to those who own the means of production. The ruling class is

always “free” not to have to worry about “production” and can focus on the formation of identities that result from “neither a production nor a self-positioning” (27) because it is the labor of others who provide the materials to meet their needs, whereas those who have to sell their labor power are never free to simply “withdraw from work” because without wage-labor they have no other means of survival. As Marx explains in one of his speeches comprising *Wage-Labour and Capital*, “the worker, whose only source of income is the sale of his labour-power, cannot leave *the whole class of buyers, i.e., the capitalist class*, unless he gives up his own existence” (20). Nancy’s theory of community is not so much “inoperative” as it just describes the already existing social relations of capitalism. It puts into a more poetic and therefore obscurantist language the world in which, as Engels writes, “poverty often dwells in hidden alleys close to the palaces of the rich; but, in general, a separate territory has been assigned to it, where, removed from the sight of the happier classes, it may struggle along as it can” (*The Condition of the Working Class* 331). That is to say, Nancy’s definition of the social as the space in which “different pieces touch each other without fusing together” (76) is not as creatively interpretative as he would have readers believe. It is little more than a dematerialized language of the existing capitalist relations that turns the property relations of capitalism into an infinitely rewritable effect of discourse that can neither be challenged nor rejected.

Similarly, the (post)Marxist theories of Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau take as their starting point the idea that “any discourse is constituted as an attempt to dominate the field of discursivity, to arrest the flow of differences, to construct a centre” (*Hegemony* 112). Thus, they too echo writerly theorists from Nietzsche to Nancy in their argument that “‘society’ is not a valid object of discourse” because “there is no single underlying principle fixing – and hence constituting – the whole field of differences” (111). Further, as Mouffe makes clear in her book with the Secretary for Policy and Strategy and Campaigning for Podemos Íñigo Errejón, (*Podemos: In the Name of the People*), the (post)humanist left’s political strategy is decidedly based upon writerly theories of language she

and Laclau drew upon in their theory of "radical democracy," or the notion that social conflicts "cannot be viewed simply as the expression of capitalist exploitation" (20) and therefore should not "be interpreted in terms of class" (16). She states, "there were theoretical tools [Foucault, Lacan, and Derrida] that allowed us to question essentialism, and to produce a notion of the social as a discursive space, the product of contingent political articulations that weren't at all necessary, and could have always been something else" (17). In the writerly guise of being "open" to "the dimension of UNDECIDABILITY and contingency that permeates all order" (19), she and Errejón come to the conclusion that "the common good doesn't exist because there can be no such thing as 'the' common good" (41) and that, because of "a radical negativity, which can never be overcome [...] society is thus always divided" (52). What could be more comforting to the ruling class than a "speculative" political movement that, in the name of a "left" resistance to the existing, founds its entire program on teaching working people that to fight for the idea of equality or a "common good" is to attempt to linguistically fix what is a forever undecidable and divided reality?

It is on the same terms of challenging a reductive politics of "naming" that even the proponents of the "ontological turn" against the textualism of Derrida *et. al.* argue, "we must speculate once more on causation while forbidding its reduction to efficient causation" because "forms do not touch one another directly, but somehow melt, fuse, and decompress in a shared common space from which all are partly absent" (Harman, "On Vicarious Causation" 190). Like others in the writerly tradition they claim to reject, to speculate on reality means accepting there is no commonality, no relationship outside of the immanence of a temporary network of interactions, which could explain the social as a totality. On these terms, the speecherly praxis of critique has remained verboten because of a presupposition that it is nothing but an attempt to fix the plurality of "life" through reductive linguistic categorization that ignores the way in which the meaning of all objects remain "inexhaustible no matter how many analyses I perform" (Harman 208). Karen Barad declares, for instance, that

“critique is over-rated, over-emphasized, and over-utilized” (“Interview” 49) because, she argues, it ignores the way in which “the entanglement of matter and meaning calls into question this set of dualisms that places nature on one side and culture on the other” (“Interview” 50), while Manuel DeLanda writes more directly against Marx’s speakerly critique that “the political economy of Marx is entirely *a priori*” and “anthropocentric” (“Interview” 41), and that “it is our duty as Leftists to cut the umbilical cord chaining us to Marx” (41). In other words, in response to the brutal reduction of all elements of social life under capitalism to the wage-relation, the dominant (post)humanities continues preaching the (prosperity) gospel of *différance*: a “‘productive,’ conflictual movement which cannot be preceded by any identity, any unity, or any original simplicity; which cannot be ‘relieved’ [*relève*], resolved, or appeased by any philosophical dialectic; and which disorganizes ‘historically,’ ‘practically,’ ‘textually,’ the opposition or the difference (the static distinction) between opposing terms” (Derrida, *Dissemination* 6-7). Turning the fight against class society into a speculative guessing game, the struggle for a better world is said to no longer be against a totality that can be named “capitalism,” but against the very act of naming that homogenizes the plurality of immanent differences between all beings – human and nonhuman – by fixing the ceaseless playfulness of life, “decid[ing], often through exclusion and violence, the linguistic conditions of survivable subjects” (Butler, *Excitable Speech* 5).

What the writerly theories of society teach working people is that insofar as all social contradictions are the effect of discourse, there is no alternative to the eternal reversals of power and resistance except the temporary reprieve of escape into the folds and slippages of new linguistic turns. That is to say, writerly politics are an antisocial politics of the ruling class, which reproduce the capitalist ideology that the current relations of production are only “restricting” to those who refuse to embrace the entrepreneurial logic of learning to “re-brand” oneself through continual reinterpretation. The role of the speakerly is to explain the material structures producing the everyday, because neither difference nor identity

are self-evident but highly mediated by class and commodity culture. "Explanation," Ebert and Zavarzadeh write in their analysis of the role of journalists as "public educators," "needs to unpack the differences to understand the commonality of labor relations among all who sell their labor to capital. Explanation enables a shared understanding of root realities; it opens the possibility of solidarity among differences" ("Class, Media and the U.S. Election").

The essays that follow are sustained analyses of the speakerly logic in Marx's speeches. They show the speakerly makes theoretical thinking – thinking that connects language to material life and conceptualizes both in relation to the social totality – part of the everyday and thus, we argue, turns the working class into revolutionary citizen-philosophers in the struggle for socialist transformation.

In "The Spectral Silence of *différance*, the Speech of Object-Oriented Exploitation," Jennifer Cotter argues that Marx's speeches in *Wage-Labour and Capital* produce concepts that break the silence on the relations of exploitation behind "exchange-value" and teach workers to see through the "language of the market" that obscures over the social causes of their exploitation in class relations. The dominant (post)humanities, however, teaches methods of analysis that render exploitation "unspeakable" and translate the language of the market into a new metaphysics by asserting that all "values" are underwritten by an originary "*différance*" (Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*) or an ontology of irreducible things-in-themselves (Graham Harman, "The Road to Objects"). To intervene in the way the (post)humanities dismantles class-consciousness, it is particularly urgent to return to Marx's speeches owing to the way they speak to the development of workers as collective agents of social transformation who understand that capitalism is not a law of nature but a socially and historically produced and therefore *collectively transformable* mode of production.

Amrohini Sahay's paper, "Speaking Internationalism: Class Difference in the Writerly Cosmopolitics" offers a critical reading of Marx's "First Address to the International Working Men's Association" in relation to the institutionalization of what Roland Barthes calls the

“writerly” in the cosmopolitical writings of Derrida and Latour. The writerly, Sahay argues, has worked to cancel the inside-outside binary, which (like all binaries) is not discursive but the cultural expression of a (material) two-tier economy, reducing the analysis of the relation of capital to labor to a Deleuzian immanent “intensity.” The immanent displaces the two-sided international class struggle – red internationalism – with cosmopolitanism as a post-class “ethics” – a deconstructive attentiveness to aporias of representation, or, more recently, a Latourian actor-network “irreductionism” that is a re-new-ing of the Deleuzian immanent for cognitive capitalism.

Bret Benjamin’s essay, “‘That single, unconscionable freedom’: Reflections on Marx’s ‘Speech on the Question of Free Trade’” places Marx’s 1848 “Speech on the Question of Free Trade” within the broader corpus of Marx’s writing. Benjamin argues, first, that the speech critiques bourgeois self-interest and celebrates worker acumen, fostering a proletarian standpoint of critique. Further, he reads the speech in line with Marx’s historical writings as an account of the transition to a fully-realized industrial capitalism, distinct from a prior period of monopoly protectionism. Third, he contends that the emerging category, *relative surplus value*, makes visible capital’s tendency to both absorb and displace labor. Finally, Benjamin argues that the speech posits a worker’s internationalism by viewing the plight of English workers in relation to the deprivations of weavers in India and slaves in the West Indies. The platitudes of free trade, then, mask the agonies of an ever-solidifying world market increasingly determined by the contradictions of the value-form.

In “Emissaries of the Outside-Within,” Robert Faivre and Julie Torrant read Marx’s 1872 address at The Hague not only for its explicit political statement but for how the speech’s explanation and confirmation of the International’s decisions enact a historical materialist theory of language. Marx’s critique of the mimetic (“readerly”) theory of language provides a dialectical account from outside the bourgeois logic of the market and thus also produces the conceptual resources necessary to

critique contemporary anti-mimetic ("writerly") theories – from textualism to new materialism – which give the market logic of individualism an "ethical" update. In the speech, Marx develops an analytics of class solidarity that enables transformation because it grasps workers as the emissaries of the future: representatives of what has become materially possible given the development of the productive forces of labor but is blocked by the existing capitalist relations of production based on exploitation.

Because of the crisis of global capitalism there is renewed public interest in Marx, Marxism, and Communism as workers around the world are beginning to fight back. In "Speaking of Communism: How Badiou Subtracts Class from Marx's Speeches on the Paris Commune to Produce a New (Infantile) Communism," Stephen Tumino argues that what will be of particular importance in the contemporary encounter with the intellectual and political legacy of Marx today is to engage with the speecherly theory of communism put forward in Marx's speeches on the Paris Commune of 1871. Through a sustained analysis of them he explains how Marx's critique of the infantile communism of the anarchists implicates the writerly communism dominant on the North Atlantic left today, as in the writings of the "new communists" (e.g., Badiou, Negri and Zizek) who subtract class from communism so as to affirm an egalitarian idea of the "common."

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Kimberly DeFazio and Rob Wilkie, "Introduction: Talking Revolution"

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