All the Wor(l)d's a Stage: Persons and Personification in Karl Marx's *Capital*

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Overview

A recent survey of the literature on metaphor yields the following exchange:

> Dear Yahoo!: What's the difference between a simile, a metaphor, and an analogy?
>
> *Peter*
>
> *Columbus, Ohio*
>
> Dear Peter: While these three terms are related, their meanings are subtly different. To help understand the distinction, we consulted a number of sources -- *American Heritage Dictionary*, the Yahoo! Grammar, Usage, and Style category, and web search results for the three terms.
>
> The dictionary defines a "metaphor" as a figure of speech that uses one thing to mean another and makes a comparison between the two. For example, Shakespeare's line, "All the world's a stage," is a metaphor comparing the whole world to a theater stage. Metaphors can be very simple, and they can function as most any part of speech. "The spy shadowed the woman" is a verb metaphor. The spy doesn't literally cast his shadow on the woman, but he follows her so closely and quietly that he resembles her own shadow. (Yahoo.com, February 2005)

As this brief correspondence suggests, it is accepted knowledge that metaphor "uses one thing to mean another and makes a comparison between the two." It is also accepted knowledge that Shakespeare's phrase, "All the world's a stage" is a prime example of metaphor. This metaphor – if not properly speaking as a figure of speech, then as a thought-experiment – is an operative one in political science, as is suggested by the latter's frequent use of language commonly associated with the practices and discourse of theatrical representation.

This paper proposes to investigate the uses and abuses of this metaphor for critique through a reading of Marx's *Capital*, volume 1. On the one hand, Marx's references to various masks, personifications, and other *dramatis personae* of political economy both convey the structure of social relations under capital and invite a certain suspicion toward their seeming fixity. On the other hand, these terms alone are insufficient to expose the mystifications of capital, and reproduce in Marx's own text the very structures it presumably aims to displace. After all, if reminding the theatergoer that what she sees are but actors on a stage does little to dispel the impression of the characters' reality (an impression owed not to the masks alone, but to the entire process of theatrical production), so merely describing the capitalist mode of production in terms of theatrical representation only risks concealing the ways in which its characters – and the 'persons' playing them – are themselves constructed *discursively*, whether in capital or in Marx's critique thereof.

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> The statue had all the appearance of a real girl, so that it seemed to be alive, to want to move, did not modesty forbid. So cleverly did his art conceal its art. Pygmalion gazed in wonder, and in his heart there rose a passionate love for his image of a human form.
>
> Ovid, *Metamorphoses*

Marx knew that his writings might be misunderstood. He worried, in particular, that his German readers might think his description of capital specific to England, and not relevant to the future of Germany. And so he told them: *de te fabula narratur!* He also worried that his French readers, so "eager to know the connection between general principles and the immediate questions that have aroused their passions," would lack the patience necessary to understand the difficult first chapters. To them, he could offer no help, save by forewarning and forearming them as they embarked on this arduous task of reading. Marx worried, finally, that the people dealt with in his account of capital might be held responsible for relations of which they, too, were in fact the product. And so in the preface to the first edition of *Capital*, he offered the following advisory:

> To prevent possible misunderstanding, let me say this. [*Zur Vermeidung möglicher Mißverständnisse ein Wort*.] I do not by any means depict the capitalist and the landowner in rosy colours. [*Die Gestalten von Kapitalist und Grundeigentümer zeichne ich keineswegs in rosigem Licht.*] But individuals [*die Personen*] are dealt with here only in so far as they are the personification of economic categories [*soweit sie die Personifikation ökonomischer Kategorien sind*], the bearers of particular class-relations and interests [*Träger von bestimmten Klassenverhältnissen und Interessen*]. [*Aber es handelt sich hier um die Personen nur, soweit sie die Personifikation ökonomischer Kategorien sind, Träger von bestimmten Klassenverhältnissen und Interessen*. (MEW p. 16)] My standpoint, from which the development of the economic formation of society is viewed as a process of natural history, can less than any other make the individual responsible for relations whose creature he remains, socially speaking, however much he may subjectively raise himself above them. (92)[1]

That the capitalist is 'capital personified' is in fact made emphatically clear throughout the book. His first appearance occurs when Marx expresses the the general formula of capital as it presents itself in the sphere of circulation, and explains that as the "conscious bearer" of the limitless movement of capital, "the possessor of money becomes a capitalist." (254/167). "His person, or rather his pocket, is the point from which the money starts, and to which it returns." The capitalist is one whose "subjective purpose" is the valorization of value, and it is "only in so far as the appropriation of ever more wealth . . . is the sole driving force behind his operations that he functions as a capitalist," that is, "*as capital personified* and endowed with consciousness and a will." (254, my emphasis)[2]

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[1] All citations, unless otherwise noted, are from Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, vol. I, trans. Ben Fowkes (New York: Vintage, 1977). The English spelling was used in the citations, but occasionally Americanized in the body of the text. The German citations are from the Hamburg 1890 edition, reprinted as *Das Kapital: Kritik der politischen Ökonomie* I, in Marx and Engels, *Werke*, vol. 23 (Berlin: Dietz, 1984).

[2] It is only insofar as the money-owner submits himself entirely to the pursuit of profit and valorization that he functions 'as a capitalist.' Which is to say that *capital* proper is fully developed only in so far as money-owners act

Marx's first mention of the capitalist, in other words, repeats what had already been suggested in the preface – that the capitalist is a capitalist only in so far as he is capital personified. In fact, at the beginning of Chapter 2, Marx had also warned us that as we "proceed to develop our investigation, we shall find, in general, that the characters who appear on the economic stage are merely personifications of economic relations; it is as the bearers of these economic relations that they come into contact with each other." (178-179)[3] [the economic masks of the persons are but the personifications of economic relations] In other words, Marx offers repeated warnings to his reader, emphasizing whenever possible the people he deals with are 'only' personifications and should not be mistaken for anything but personifications. And yet, for all these warnings, Marx was evidently unable to prevent his readers from thinking otherwise. Individuals *were* held responsible – in fact, entire *classes* of individuals were held responsible – for the oppression of the working class. Many capitalists, and many who were thought to be capitalists (I am thinking of the kulaks, for instance), did not live to tell.

Marx's warning is necessary, evidently, because the 'people' whom he deals with – the people who exist, out there in the real world, *as* capital personified, also appears in his text – as personifications – personifications of personifications, as it were, with no way for us to distinguish between the two. Which leads me to the question that animates this paper: given this ambiguity – which Marx evidently recognized, but which he was helpless to prevent, why was it necessary for Marx to 'deal' with people at all. That is to say, more precisely, why do people figure as people in an analysis that purports, after all, to be but a critique of political economy through its categories. [4]

And so I propose to inquire into why Marx resorts to these personifications – or more precisely, by asking what might be *accomplished* by the 'people' as they appear with in *Capital.* While trying hard not to lay any blame or credit at their feet, or at the feet of Marx, I will simply suggest ways in which Marx's critique of capital may hinge on operations in and of language that it cannot avow.

Let us briefly trace the principal steps in Marx's argument, with an eye to those moments when people come into play.

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as capitalists – giving capital its force, allowing it to move.

[3] *Die Personen existieren hier nur füreinander als Repräsentanten von Ware und daher als Warenbesitzer. Wir werden überhaupt im Fortgang der Entwicklung finden, daß die ökonomischen Charaktermasken der Personen nur die Personifikationen der ökonomischen Verhältnisse sind, als deren Träger sie sich gegenübertreten.* (MEW, 23, 99-100)

[4] It has been said – and I am inclined to agree – that Marx's writing is ironic. That what I am describing is not properly speaking an *ambiguity*, but something like a double-voicing; that Marx has really two audiences in mind – the one that gets it, and the one that doesn't. While there is much that is helpful in these characterizations, one should guard against the impression of a Marx deliberately imposing a certain form on his writing for 'merely' rhetorical purpose, and it should be understood that the ironic presentation of *Capital* only mirrors the ironic character of capital proper. Indeed, there is no way of distinguishing between the two, and the mere fact that a reading of *Capital* as – somehow – 'ironic' should constitute, late in the 20th century, something of a discovery, is itself understandable only in light of a further irony: namely, that the ironic turn of *Capital* was lost on so many of its readers. Indeed, therein lies arguably the proof of Capital's *ironic* character – and hence also its tragedy.

* * *

Commodities and Money

Marx begins, famously, with the commodity. In those societies where the capitalist mode of production prevails, wealth *presents* itself as the giant accumulation of commodities, its individual unit being the commodity, and the commodity is thus Marx's starting point. It is not until Marx has completed this analysis of the commodity, however, once he has identified and named the fetishism of the commodity as the defining feature of the age, that 'people' properly speaking enter into his account. "Commodities", he writes at the beginning of chapter 2, "cannot themselves go to market and perform exchanges in their own right. We must, therefore, have recourse to their guardians, who are the possessors of commodities." (178) And these guardians, in turn, must arrange their relations in such a manner that their commodities might be exchanged. They must recognize each other as representatives or *owners* of their commodities, and they must have recourse to a universal equivalent – money – through which their commodities might be put in relation.

The Transformation of Money into Capital

Once he has given an account of money's emergence as money, Marx can turn to the emergence of *capital* – i.e. he can turn to an account of the transformation of money *into* capital. Historically speaking, we know, capital first "confronts landed property in the form of money" (in the form of "monetary wealth, merchants' capital" or "usurer's capital"). In fact, up to the present day, "all new capital, in the first instance, *steps onto the stage* – i.e. the market . . . in the shape of money", and the scientific challenge is to understand by what processes money turns into capital (247, my emphasis).

Remarkably, however, Marx's demonstration unfolds less as the analysis of money's transformation into capital, than as an account of how the money-owner turns into a capitalist. As Marx puts it, once he has shown that capital cannot arise from circulation, yet cannot arise outside of it, we have "a double result":

> The transformation of money into capital has to be developed on the basis of the immanent laws of the exchange of commodities, in such a way that the starting-point is the exchange of equivalents. The money-owner, who is as yet only a capitalist in larval form, must buy his commodities at their value, sell them at their value, and yet at the end of the process withdraw more value from circulation than he threw into it at the beginning. His emergence as a butterfly must, and yet must not, take place in the sphere of circulation. These are the conditions of the problem. *Hic Rhodus, hic salta!* (268-269)

No sooner is the problem posed that it is resolved. On the next page, our friend Mr. Moneybags is lucky enough to find, "within the sphere of circulation, on the market, a commodity whose use-value possesses the peculiar property of being a source of value…" This special commodity is, of course, the "capacity for labour" or "labour-power", and like all commodities, it has a value, determined by the labor time necessary for its reproduction. Which is to say, in this particular case, its reproduction – since the

value of labor power is the value of the means required for the subsistence and reproduction of the laborer as laborer.

We know also that what use-value our friend Mr. Moneybags gets out of this commodity will manifest itself in its *consumption*, and that this process that is completed "outside the market or the sphere of circulation." And so Marx invites us, at this point, an in the company of the owner of money and the owner of labour-power, to "leave this noisy sphere" of circulation, "where everything takes place on the surface and in full view of everyone, and follow them into the hidden abode of production… "Here we shall see," Marx promises, "not only how capital produces, but how capital itself is produced. The secret of profit-making must at last be laid bare." (279-280)

We shall not, in this paper, follow Marx and his acolytes into this abode of production – though there is a lot there to see – and shall instead wait for Marx at the other end. When he exits a few hundred pages later, Marx has introduced not only the capitalist but also the working class, and has exposed the general law of capitalist accumulation. We have seen, by now, "how money is transformed into capital; how surplus-value is made through capital, and how more capital is made from surplus-value." (873) But as we have also seen, money and commodities can be transformed into capital only under certain circumstances, and these "meet together at this point: the confrontation of, and the contact between, two very different kinds of commodity owners; on the one hand, the owners of money, means of production, means of subsistence…"; "on the other hand, free workers, the sellers of their own labour-power, and therefore the sellers of labour…" (874)

There is thus one task that remains – the task to which Marx devotes the final chapters of the book – and that is to uncover the secret of so-called primitive accumulation. That is to say, to account for the actual, *historical* emergence of the conditions of capital. This process, Marx makes clear in this last section, is none other than "the historical process of divorcing the producer from the means of production." And while this process may appear 'idyllic' to the political economist, this is only "because it forms the pre-history of capital, and of the mode of production corresponding to capital." (874-875) Marx, by contrast, recognizes this process for what it is, and is willing to recount the expropriation of the agricultural population, the "bloody legislation" against those expropriated, and so forth. As Marx puts it in a now famous *personification* of capital, if money, "according Augier, 'comes into the world with a congenital blood-stain on one cheek, *capital comes dripping from head to toe, from every pore, with blood an dirt.*" (926, my emphasis).[5]

[5] Mind you, it is *capital* that drips from head to toe, not the *capitalist* – but inasmuch as the capitalist is, by Marx's own admission, capital personified, one can begin to understand – or at least forgive – those readers who walk away from this book with a gruesome image of 'the capitalist'.

The reason I mention these final chapters of *Capital* – other than for the remarkable personification of capital they offer, of course – is Marx's insistence in these final pages that that the "polari*zation* of the commodity-market" into "two classes" has to be understood as a *historical* development (and a bloody one at that) – and not, as the political economists would have it, an eternal state of affairs. By contrast, however, Marx offer no equivalent account of how these two classes – the capitalist class and the working class – come into being in Marx's own recounting and analysis of capital. This task is left for us to carry out.

* * *

Let us review, briefly, what our analysis has already told us.

'People' were first introduced, in our account at least, when Marx moved metonymically, at the beginning of chapter 2, from the commodity to its guardian – or, more precisely, from commodit*ies* to their guardians (for people are always introduced in the plural). On one level, Marx's passage from the commodities to their guardians may be seen to function ironically. Aftera all, Marx was obviously writing about people all along, and this transition serves only to underscore how absurd it is for people to invest their products with human attributes. At the same time, however, insofar as this reference to the guardians allows Marx to consider the historical emergence of *money*, it seems that Marx *does* need to 'have recourse' to the commodities' guardians (even if not for the reasons he adduces), in order to move from the discussion of the commodity form to an account of money's material emergence.

Irony would serve as a subterfuge, then, especially insofar as Marx's guardians are only the categories of juridical discourse which Marx presumably would wish to account for. Marx does acknowledges that the juridical relation has "the contract" as it form, but he suggests at the same time that it does not *matter* whether this part of a developed legal system. Marx thus minimizes the necessity of a legal system, yet at the same time acknowledges the necessity of *some* agreed-upon medium of exchange (money).[6]

Once Marx has introduced 'people' by way of the guardians of commodities – and once he has established (or posited) that these guardians recognize each other as owners of commodities, it is possible for *Marx* to then distinguish between two categories of commodity owners. He writes:

> In any case the market for commodities is frequented only by owners of commodities, and the power which these persons exercise over each other is no other than the power of their commodities. The material variety of the commodities is the material driving force behind their exchange, and it *makes buyers and sellers mutually dependent*, because none of them possesses the object of his own need, and each holds in his own hand the object of another's need. Apart from this material

[6] Commodity-owners "can only bring their commodities into relation as values, and therefore as commodities, by bringing them into an opposing relation with [some other] commodity, which serves as the universal equivalent." (180)), and that "only the action of society can turn a particular commodity into the universal equivalent" (180-181). Some intervention – the collective agency of the social process, or the divine intervention suggested by the reference to the Apocalypse – is required, much as Pygmalion – infatuated as he was with his own statue, still required of Venus turn stone into flesh in order for his love to be consummated.

> variety in their use-values, there is only one mark of distinction between commodities, the distinction between their natural form and their converted form, between commodities and money. Consequently, *the owners of commodities can be differentiated into sellers, those who own commodities, and buyers, those who own money.* (262-263, my emphasis)

It is only because Marx makes this distinction – a seemingly commonsensical (and purely conceptual) distinction – between buyers (owners of money) and sellers (owners of commodities), that he is able to move between chapters 5 and 6 from what we might call a metonymic conception of people (where people are understood in terms of what they own (i.e. commodity-owners) to a broadly functional one, where one is defined by what one *does*, i.e. whether one buys or sells, whether one is the prince of Denmark or a mere grave-digger (and this, whether or not one looks the part), with what power differential this entails.[7]

As he passes from money to capital, in short, Marx moves through a series of roles – commodity owners, buyers and sellers, money-owner and labor-seller, and eventually capitalist and worker. This suggests that in order to pass from the analysis of the commodity to an account of the emergence of money – and in order to unfold the transformation of money into capital – the intercession of 'people' is required. Indeed, much as the guardians of commodities need money in order for their commodities to exchange, so it seems that Marx *needs* the guardians in order to move from the analysis of the commodity to that of the process exchange. Likewise, once he has accounted logically and historically for the emergence of money, Marx in his analysis of the transformation of money into capital focuses in fact on the money-owner and his transformation – from capital *in spe*, in larval form, to its emergence as a butterfly.

As he shifts his attention from the money-owner and the labor-owner to the capitalist and the worker – shifting between characters, Marx evidently presumes the *correspondence* or identity of the people who are thus named. The money-owner, that is, *becomes* the capitalist; the labor-owner *becomes* the worker. And as we "leave this sphere of simple circulation or the exchange of commodities" and enter the hidden abode of production,

> …a certain change takes place, or so it appears, in the physiognomy of our *dramatis personae*. He who was previously the money-owner now strides out in front as capitalist; the possessor of labour-power follows as his worker. The one smirks self-importantly and is intent on business; the other is timid and holds back, like someone who has brought his own hide to market and now has nothing else to expect but - a tanning. (280)

Marx seems to be suggesting that a change does occur as we enter the realm of production. This change, however, is only in the appearance or *physiognomy* of the *dramatis personae* (the actual people remain the same), and in the end is itself only *apparent*. The *same two people*, in other words, are found

[7] Other examples of metonymy would include defining people by the food they've ordered at the restaurant they've ordered (as in a waiter telling another that "the ham-sandwich is waiting for his check"), or identifying/reducing actors by the particular mask they wear. Equivalent examples of functional: which role one plays (according to a playbook?); whether one is the customer being waited upon or the waiter (who is *not* waiting for the check, but ringing it up).

on the two sides of the threshold – in Marx's analysis of exchange and circulation and in his analysis of production.[8] Behind these features, apparently – or behind these masks – individual actors are assumed. And yet, as was noted earlier, these characters in Marx's story are always introduced *in the plural*: there is no buyer without a seller, no money-owner without a seller of labor-power and, of course, no capitalist without a worker. Even the commodity-owner – the barest of figures in Marx's cast of characters – cannot exist without another commodity-owner, since commodities (by definition) must be exchanged. This is significant, insofar as it suggests that people invariably appear in Marx's text – and inevitably – already endowed with attributes, indeed the appear as *characters*, related to each other in a given economy.

Let us go back to the phrase with which we started, which we drew from Marx's preface: "[i]ndividuals are dealt with here only in so far as they are the personification of economic categories, the bearers of particular class-relations and interests." Or, in German, "*es handelt sich hier um die Personen nur, soweit sie die Personifikation ökonomischer Kategorien sind*." Marx's translator is quite right to translate "*die Personen*" as "individuals," but Marx's choice of words is more revealing of the problem at hand. Even the 'individuals' whom he discusses are but "persons" – "*Personen*" – who, as etymology reminds us, are *necessarily* 'masked' – that is to say, they are constituted *as persons* only in discourse.

* * *

Let us return, in closing, to the observation with which we began, namely that Marx's writings were misunderstood. One explanation for this misunderstanding – or the beginning of an explanation – is offered by Marx himself. By the time he published a second edition of Capital, Marx could see already that he had been misunderstood. In an afterword he appended to the book, he responds to one review who found fault with his excessively 'idealist' mode of presentation. He writes:

> Of course the method of presentation must differ in form from that of inquiry. The latter has to appropriate the material in detail, to analyse its different forms of development and to track down their inner connection. Only after this work has been done an the real movement be appropriately presented. If this is done successfully, if the life of the subject-matter is now reflected back in the ideas, then it may appear as if we have before us an *a priori* construction. [*Gelingt dies und spiegelt sich nun das Leben des Stoffs ideell wider, so mag es aussehn, als habe man es mit einer Konstruktion a priori zu tun*] (102)

On the one hand, Marx recognized that the work of critique entailed a kind of art (as he once put to Engels, "Whatever shortcomings they may have, the advantage of my writings is that they are an artistic whole"[9]); on the other hand, he recognized the risk that one's art might be so good as to could conceal the art. Marx apparently could only resign himself to this fact (after all, his explanation comes only in the afterword, too late to prevent any misreading of his text), and chose only to assure his reader that the veracity of his conclusions would eventually make themselves known. In his words, "the fact that the

[8] [Nota: the importance of this 'blindness' may be seen in the difficulties which many Marxists have faced in coming to terms with a capitalism where workers own stock and managers are salaried.]
[9] Karl Marx to Friedrich Engels, 31 July 1865. *Complete Works* vol. 42, p.173.

movement of capitalist society is full of contradictions impresses itself most strikingly on the practical bourgeois" in times of general crisis. This crisis is "once again approaching," and "by the universality of its field of action [*Schauplatz*] and the intensity of its impact" it will "drum dialectics even into the heads of the upstarts in charge of the new Holy Prussian-German Empire." (103)

A hundred and fifty years and several crises later, dialectics has yet to be drummed into our heads, and the "life of the subject-matter" may or may not be reflected ideally as in a mirror, but we at least know better than to take Marx's *Capital* for an *a priori* construction. Indeed, the posthumous publication of Marx's preparatory manuscripts affords us some insight into Marx's method and his mode of presentation. In the remaining few pages, I shall briefly discuss one text, the so-called 1857 Introduction, in which Marx discusses the proper order of presentation of categories of political economy. The argument is seemingly twofold. First, Marx reminds us (or reminds himself, since this text was not published) that in political economy as in all science, the subject – in this case, modern bourgeois society – is already presupposed as existing, both in the mind and in reality. Secondly – and apparently following from the first point, Marx derives the proper order of presentation required for the critique of political economy.

> Just as in general when examining any historical or social science, so also in the case of the development of economic categories is it always necessary to remember that the subject, in this context contemporary bourgeois society, is presupposed both in reality and in the mind, and that therefore categories express forms of existence and conditions of existence – and sometimes merely separate aspects – of this particular society, the subject; thus the category, *even from the scientific standpoint*, by no means begins at the moment when it is discussed *as such*.
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> This has to be remembered, because it provides important criteria for the arrangement of the material.
>
> For example, nothing seems more natural than to begin with rent, i.e. with landed property, since it is associated with the earth, the source of all production and all life, and with agriculture, the first form of production in all societies that have attained a measure of stability. But nothing would be more erroneous.

Why would this be so erroneous? Because there is "in every social formation a particular branch of production which determines the position and importance of all the others, and the relations obtaining in this branch accordingly determine the relations of all other branches as well." Thus in "all forms [of society] in which landed property is the decisive factor, natural relations still predominate; in the forms in which the decisive factor is capital, social, historically evolved elements predominate. . . Capital is the economic power that dominates everything in bourgeois society." And so it must form "both the point of departure and the conclusion and it has to be expounded before landed property." Only after "analysing capital and landed property separately" must their interconnection be examined.

It would therefore be "inexpedient and wrong," Marx reasons, to "present the economic categories successively in the order in which they have played the dominant role in history." The point at issue, he reminds us and himself, "is not the role that various economic relations have played in the succession of various social formations appearing in the course of history . . . but their position within modern

bourgeois society." (page) And so Marx can conclude this section with plans for an outline: "The disposition of material has evidently to be made in such a way that (section) one comprises general abstract definitions, which therefore appertain in some measure to all social formations, but in the sense set forth earlier. Two, the categories which constitute the internal structure of bourgeois society and on which the principal classes are based . . . Three, the State as the epitome of bourgeois society." (page)[10]

If we review the basic steps of Marx's argument, we find that Marx first reminds us (or rather reminds himself) that the categories of any science are expressions of relations that exist in a given society, (relatively) independently of these categories themselves. Secondly, Marx explains that at any stage of production, these relations are structured in a particular way – i.e. one "economic power" "dominates everything" or, as Marx puts it metaphorically, it "is as though a light of a particular hue were cast upon everything, tingeing all other colours and modifying their specific features; or as if a special ether determined the specific gravity of everything found in it." Thirdly, and apparently following on these two premises, Marx deduces the proper sequence in which categories must be presentation.

It is important to recognize these are really separate arguments. Marx *remembers* that "the subject" of any historical or social science is always "presupposed both in reality and in the mind"; because he remembers that, he knows to present the categories in the order that they are articulated in the society under consideration. But while Marx may be right to present the categories as they are arranged in bourgeois society – does this prevent his reader from forgetting that the categories are specific to a particular object/society? One apparently tends o forget that the subject is presupposed (otherwise, why the reminder?). But is the cure adequate to the ill? Does Marx's advice to himself or to the reader/writer of political economy really address the problem of this forgetting?

This passage offers a kind of reading protocol for political economy – one which demands that one bear in mind that the subject always exists outside discourse. When we use or when we encounter a category or word, it is understood – or rather, it *should* be understood – that this category expresses relations in a given society and only in that society. But the fact that a reminder is necessary suggests that it is not so obvious. And though the classical political economists presumably knows full well that their

[10] It may be worth mentioning that it is in analysing this passage and the metaphors it contains that, in his effort to name the concept of structural causality that Marx allegedly produced but failed to name, Louis Althusser proposes a metaphor of his own. Althusser notes the metaphoric language by which Marx describes the "general illumination which bathes all the other colors and modifies their particularity. It is a particular ether which determines the specific gravity of every bring which has materialized within it"(*Grundrisse* 106) He writes: "We find an objective system governed in its most concrete determinations by the laws of its *erection* (*montage*) and *machinery*, the specifications of its concept. Now we can recall that highly symptomatic term "*Darstellung*," compare it with this "machinery" and take it literally, as the very existence of this machinery in its effects: the mode of existence of the stage direction (*mise-en-scène*) of the theater which is simultaneously its own stage, its own script, its own actors, the theater whose spectators can, on occasion, be spectators only because they are first of all forced to be its actors, caught by the constraints of a script and parts whose authors they cannot be, since it is in essence *an authorless theater*." (RC 193/LC 411)

categories apply only to a particular society (that exists relatively independent of these categories), they apparently present their findings in such a way that their readers think these are eternal categories (and they themselves, sometimes, fall into this mistake).

Likewise Marx, in the preface to *Capital*, asks us only to *remember*, as we read his text, that the social relations under discussion exist prior to independently of their designation as such. In this preface, Marx admits that he "paints" the capitalist and the landlord in a certain fashion – and it is the impression left by this 'painting' that worries him. As we have seen, this is with good reason: Marx's clarification is required, presumably, because *his own designation* of the capitalist or 'the landlord' as such risks contributing to people's tendency to point the finger. Marx's designation of the bourgeois, the capitalist – even the proletariat – contribute to constituting these characters and relations, and no amount of warnings that they do not *really* exist as such, or in quite the way that we think, will keep them from seeming as if they did. Marx's "word" is thus insufficient to spare the individual capitalist or landlord from the reader's opprobrium.

Marx's reminder is as insufficient as it is necessary, in the end, for he insists on 'locating' – if not the real, then the *illusion* of the real – in a historically specific organization of production, rather than in our existence in language. Marx is thus unable to acknowledge the ways in which personifications are constituted, as personifications, through their naming in his very text. And while the theatrical metaphors are suggestive – alerting us to the ways in which the way things are not as they might appear seem, they betray an attachment to an opposition of essence and appearance that remains undeconstructed. As a corollary, characters in Marx's own text acquire the semblance of a presence or voice of their own, as Marx's writings inevitably *do* cast 'the capitalist' and 'workers' in distinct roles. While the overall text may be characterized by a certain plurivocity, the 'capitalist' ultimately is heard (or imagined to be) speaking in one voice – just as 'the proletariat' is promised one voice and in the end, despite it all, the staged character of capital disappears behind the staged character of Marx's *Capital* – as the figures of the capitalist or the proletariat take on the appearance of the real.

And so, in conclusion, let me propose that we amend the Shakespearean phrase, and "hold the world as but the wor(l)d: a stage, where every man must play a part."[11] This motto, half-Shakespearean, half-Derridean, takes some of the poetry out of the original formulation, but perhaps it can serve as an invitation to restore what is poetic about the world, to appreciate and render its myriad figurative, discursive and representative forms, with due attention to the ruses and dissimulations these might entail.

[11] See William Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*, Act I, Scene i.