



## Sex Love and Sensuous Activity in the Work of Historical Materialism

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### Introduction

The work of *sex love* occupies a liminal space on the border of philosophy and historical materialism. This essay considers the emergence of a concept of sex love out of the debate between Hegelian idealism and philosophical materialism that develops in and around Marx's early writings and his engagement with Feuerbach. In these early philosophical and critical writings, Marx seeks to elaborate, in the progression of his early writings, a practice that moves away from philosophy and towards a discourse that would properly understand human labor and activity as the pragmatic foundation of man's being in the world. Though Marx appears to represent a break with the project of philosophy at the point at which he elaborates his eleven theses on Feuerbach, these early inquiries form the foundation of the dialectical materialism that occupies so much of his later political and social writing, and serve as the backbone for the economic theories developed in *Capital*. In order to achieve a materialism that trumped the innovations of Hegelian idealism, it was necessary that Marx (and Engels), as Plekhanov notes, address the "subjective side of man" and "know how to give a materialist explanation to all sides of human life" "if it does not wish to betray its own principle and constantly return to idealist outlooks; if it does not wish to recognize idealism as stronger in a definite sphere."<sup>1</sup> It is necessary that Marx and Engels work through materialism to an account of the seemingly immaterial and subjective experiences of man, to account for their sensuous activity. It is my assertion that one of the most remarkable instances where they do so is in the concept of *sex love*.<sup>2</sup>

In *The Holy Family*, Marx defends from the Critical Criticism crowd the notion of love.<sup>3</sup> Perhaps most interested in rejecting Feuerbachian notions of love in the defense of their own Hegelian mode of navel-gazing transcendental and misguided idealism, the Critical Critics "must first seek to dispose of *love*. Love is a passion, and nothing

is more dangerous for the calm of knowledge than passion,” Marx snarks.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, it is the fact that love is “sensually manifest” — flying in the face of the Hegelian “polemic against the evil ‘This’” — that it is “not even content with turning man into the *category* ‘Object’ for another man, it even makes out of him a *definite, real* object, this evil-individual...*external* object which does not remain internal, hidden in the brain.”<sup>5</sup> Critical Criticism’s idealist, Hegelian dialectic, which replaces material reality with the idea of it, insists on the absolutely immaterial interiority of the process of consciousness, and rebels against the idea and primacy of love because it is rooted in the inextricably material and physical realm of embodied man. The insistence of the Critical Critics on the “abstract passion” of love signals, to Marx, that “Critical Criticism is not against love alone, but against everything living, everything which is immediate, every sensuous experience, any and every *real* experience the ‘Whence’ and ‘Whither’ of which is not known beforehand.”<sup>6</sup> In this way, love for Marx is *sex love*, in that it is located in and of the body, not the ideology of love as historically produced, as Engels later delineates the ideology of love in *The Origins of Family, Private Property and the State*, and Marx describes in *Capital, Volume 1*.

Marx argues gleefully that “love is an un-Critical, un-christian materialist.”<sup>7</sup> In this, the concept of love is capable of doing the labor of materialism: loving is an activity that ratifies the real individual in the historically conditioned and practically existing world. As Feuerbach claims in *The Essence of Christianity*, “love is materialism; immaterial love is a chimaera.”<sup>8</sup> There is a tangible, sensuous reality to love, and all of the senses as “social organs” — “seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, feeling, thinking, contemplating, sensing, wanting, acting, loving — in short, all the organs of his individuality, like the organs which are directly communal in form, are in their *objective* approach or in their *approach to the object* the appropriation of that object.”<sup>9</sup> This appropriation of *human* reality, their approach to the object, is *the confirmation of human reality*.<sup>10</sup> The development and engagement of the senses, which include the “practical senses” of “(will, love, etc.)” “come into being only through the existence of *their* objects, through *humanized* nature” and are thus activities, “human relations to the world” that are materially constitutive of man’s species-being.<sup>11</sup> To love is, like Feuerbach, to “mak[e] the social relation between ‘man and man’ the basic principle” of one’s presence in the material world inasmuch as it actively posits the relationship between men.<sup>12</sup> This sensuous engagement with the world is the way in which the world is self-constituting, and manifests Feuerbach’s “true materialism and real science” by way of rejecting the abstraction of the self into the dialectical process of idealist self-positing.<sup>13</sup>

Humorously, Engels argues that “as a philosopher, he [Feuerbach] stopped halfway; the lower half of him was a materialist, the upper half idealist.”<sup>14</sup> Humor aside, it is still important to explore the multiple valences of the above claim. For one thing, it should call to mind the claim Marx makes in his Introduction to *Capital*, that “the reverse [of the Hegelian dialectic in the *Phenomenology*] is true: the ideal is nothing

but the material world reflected in the mind of man, and translated into forms of thought.”<sup>15</sup> It is crucial that the dialectic be stood on its head “in order to discover the rational kernel within the mystical shell.”<sup>16</sup> If Hegel’s dialectic has to be stood on its head to get it to reflect accurately that the material world is primary, then Feuerbach, too, needs to be stood on his head, so that his nethers are foremost — in so doing, the materialist Feuerbach that insists on the primary relevance of *sex love* would be the guiding thrust of his philosophy. Then, by meeting the world head-on (with the proper reorientation of Feuerbach’s metaphorical body), the primacy of the encounter of real man with real man would permit us to move forward with Marx and Engels in their elaboration of the work of historical materialism.

The tipping point in this transition is the seemingly secondary question of “*sex love*” as opposed to love, and what that constitutive human experience and activity brings to bear on man’s sensuous engagement with the world. When considered as an adjunct to the irreducibly central phenomenological encounter between men as social activity, sensuous activity constitutes man’s materialist underpinnings. To this end, this essay considers how an idea of *sex love* develops in the writings of Marx and Engels out of the materialist philosophical traditions typified by Spinoza and Feuerbach, and how *sex love* comes to serve as a nexus of concepts in the formation of a *praxis* of the intellectual labor of historical materialism. The second part of the essay interrogates the work of Samuel Delany and Friedrich Engels by way of reading into and through their work the concept of *sex love*, and each text’s self-reflexive employment of the activity of *sex love* in the constitution of their texts. The third, and final part, of the essay deals with the time of *sex love*: when, and how, can *sex love* emerge as a revolutionary *praxis*?

### **Toward a Genealogy of Sex Love**

Engels only married Lizzy Burns at her deathbed wish, capitulating to her bourgeois-ideological aspiration to respectability. But that he had sex with her, and with her sister, Jenny Burns, before her, seems a foregone conclusion, though it is not necessarily the labor of this essay to interrogate Engels’s sex life. As Engels’s biographer remarks on his marriage to Lizzy: “Neither his convictions nor his sentiments would allow the claim of state and church to legitimate his closest human relationship. But to give one last pleasure to Lizzy he married her on her deathbed.”<sup>17</sup> Engels, in his late work *The Origins of the Family, Private Property and the State* (1884), applies the principles of historical materialism to the study of the trinity of consolidating ideologies that govern the triumph of bourgeois ideology in the perpetuation of capitalism. Doing this work largely through the application of an anthropology to history, he argues that “When monogamous marriage first makes its appearance in history...[it] comes on the scene as a the subjugation of one sex by the other,” which, “together with slavery and private wealth...is relatively a step backward, in which prosperity and development for some is won through the misery and frustration of others.”<sup>18</sup> Further developing

the historical conditions that beget monogamous marriage, slavery, and private wealth, Engels subsumes the hierarchized structure of gender relations to the familiar economic divide between the bourgeois and the proletariat: “[monogamous marriage] clearly reveals the antagonism between the man and the woman expressed in the man’s exclusive supremacy, [and] it exhibits in miniature the same oppositions and contradictions as those in which society has been moving, without power to resolve or overcome them, ever since it split into classes at the beginning of civilization.”<sup>19</sup> The development of marriage is ideological and it emerges as a way to reinforce class distinctions; this is consistent with the thrust of historical materialism. Monogamous marriage, moreover, is predicated on the development of an ideology of love, which develops out of the historical circumstances of “knightly love” and was subsumed by the political and economic necessities of feudal marital consolidations. “Love,” then, is a feudalist hangover that has been carried forward by the bourgeoisie in its desire to mystify the relationship between man and woman, and in its worst forms “manifests itself in wars, altercations, lawsuits, domestic broils, divorces and every possible exploitation of one by another.”<sup>20</sup>

Emerging in counterpoint to the *idea* of love, and the contractual institution of monogamous marriage, however, is what Engels insists is the very different *activity* of “sex love.” This concept of *sex love* is informed and influenced, no doubt, by his personal experiences, as well as the cultural discourse of free love current at the time. *Sex love* takes its cues from *Eros*, the bald acknowledgement by the ancients of bodily needs and desires, but matures in the modern era into an intangible affective compound that is based in those bodily needs and desires (“Sex love...has undergone a development...during the last eight hundred years”), but seasoned with a particularity of orientation that arises out of the condition of our individuality, itself a historical product.<sup>21</sup> Thus it opposes the ideology of love in that it is embodied affect. *Sex love* “assumes the person loved returns the love” and “has a degree of intensity and duration which makes both lovers feel that non-possession and separation are a great, if not the greatest, calamity.”<sup>22</sup> The former condition of *sex love* is important in that it acknowledges that a woman, too, has an “equal footing with the man,” and is predicated on a reciprocity (that implies consent). The latter condition is an acknowledgement of the vicissitudes of passion: “the intense emotion of individual sex love varies very much in duration from one individual to another, especially among men,” Engels argues.<sup>23</sup> The deeply affective and instinctual bodily components of *sex love* deserve mention. We may not necessarily know how or why we are attracted to another body, but that the body desires it; our ability to verbalize or describe the nature of our sexual attractions is irrelevant to the *feeling* of them. Though Engels has qualms about the language of feelings and emotions, he nevertheless insists that the body has affective responses that are grounded in physiological processes.<sup>24</sup> This calls to mind the work of Spinoza, who argues that the body and its experiences of itself are all located on what Deleuze characterizes as the “plane of immanence,” in that a body

and its actions are coequally material, and the same material, at that. For Spinoza, and for Engels, the experience of affects is inextricable from the experience of the body. *Sex love* is, to put it vulgarly, engaging in the consciousness of one's physical and sexual desire for another human being by way of acting upon that desire. It is having sex with someone whom I desire, and who desires me; as such, it requires consent, reciprocity, knowledge of the self, and knowledge of the other. Spinoza's ethics are rooted in the extent to which any singularity or subject adequately (accurately) knows himself in relation to his knowledge of other human beings. To engage in *sex love*, then, is to operate at the highest level of knowledge — intuitive knowledge — and to do so with an eye to the mutual gratification and advancement of self and other is the highest form of ethics.

The time of *sex love's* expression, however, is not Engels's present. Engels frankly acknowledges that prudishness and squeamishness exist around the discourse of sex, in spite of the corollary development of adultery and prostitution with the insistence on monogamy.<sup>25</sup> *Sex love's* truest expression in the social realm, then, is removed to the communist horizon, if only because its invocation is distasteful to his Victorian contemporaries. Thus, he dreams of the future when a generation of men and women have grown up without *buying* their "love" or surrendering themselves to *be bought*, "when these people are in the world, they will care precious little what anybody today thinks they ought to do; they will *make their own practice* and their corresponding public opinion about the practice of each individual — and that will be the end of it" (italics added).<sup>26</sup> Thus, in the communist future, we will be able freely to access and to exercise our sexual attraction to others based on the principles of equality and reciprocity, as well as of the inherent recognition of us as particular individuals. This *sex love* will be constituted as an activity, a practice — a praxis, insofar as it is philosophically grounded action.

*Sex love*, because it "assumes the person loved returns the love," is essentially a life-affirming phenomenological encounter, one that Engels traces back to the materialist philosophy of Feuerbach. As Feuerbach points out in his critique of the monastic life, "Man and woman together first constitute the true man; man and woman together are the existence of the race, for their union is the source of multiplicity, the source of other men."<sup>27</sup> Though the point seems rather obvious — that man is not plausible without the sexual union of man and woman — it posits the original encounter between the "I" and the "thou" as the necessary sexual union of man and woman. To eschew this intercourse, as Christians uneasily do in their rejection of the "need of (natural) love" and the "strip[ping] off the difference of sex as a burdensome, accidental adjunct," is folly.<sup>28</sup> Though Engels argues that Feuerbach's philosophy, even in its rejection of religion as an anthropomorphic projection of man to and for himself, he nevertheless has great respect for Feuerbach's thought.<sup>29</sup> "According to Feuerbach, religion is the relation based on the affections, the relation based on the heart, between man and man, which until now has sought its truth in a fantastic

reflection of reality...now finds its truth directly and without any intermediary in the love between 'I' and 'Thou.' Thus, finally, with Feuerbach sex love becomes one of the highest forms, if not the highest form, of the practice of his religion."<sup>30</sup> This he ascribes to Feuerbach's idealism, which consists of his failure simply to "accept mutual relations based on reciprocal inclination between human beings such as *sex love*, friendship, compassion, self-sacrifice, etc., as *what they are in themselves* — without associating them with any particular religion which to him, too, belongs to the past.... The chief thing for him is not that these purely human relations exist, but that they shall be conceived of as the new, true religion" (italics added).<sup>31</sup> The insistence on "mutual relations" as "reciprocal inclination[s]" is an effort to return Feuerbach to materiality against the idealist elevation of these relations over social reality. This past — wherein is located the species's experience of these mutual relations — is the location of species-being, a core concept in early Marxist writing, and derived from Feuerbach's deployment of the term "species."<sup>32</sup>

The idea of species-being is derived by Feuerbach from Strauss, through to Marx. For Marx, species-being is a condition in which man exists naturally of, to, and for himself, and in that this existence requires the existence of others — for mutual benefit, sexual procreation, etc. — is the primitive form in which man knows himself. Species-being is the root essence of social man, and must be the foundation for any further development of a history of man. Man's awareness of himself as a member of the species is his first encounter with the idea of a common interest and investment in other man: Marx's accounts of this are largely anthropological, describing the development of communal forms of living developing out of a division of labor in prehistoric societies. As Marx notes in the *Grundrisse*, "human beings become individuals only through the process of history. He appears originally as a *species-being, clan-being, herd animal*."<sup>33</sup> We must provide for ourselves and for others in order to persist as individuals; the foundation of our individuality is rooted in our ability to parlay that individuality into a sense of commonality. "Species" is a varietal of totality, in that it imagines a collectivity that is indivisible, inescapable, and eminently material. As species is rooted in Nature, man as a species-being is that which, as an animal that lives on organic nature, uses that Nature both to produce himself (through life-sustaining sensuous activity like eating, drinking, etc.) and is, as a product of Nature, also Nature. Man consumes and produces Nature, and is inside of Nature at the same time as he comes to see Nature as an object. Marx goes on to note that man as a species-being is constituted by these activities of production and consumption. This sounds a lot like Spinoza's "radical holism," the immanence of God (or Nature) in its absolute materiality, and his theory of immanence as constituted by modalities of being and the affectivity of subjects and objects within that immanence.<sup>34</sup>

To be sure, this is a familiar reading of Spinoza, that he is ultimately a crucial theorist of materialism. Spinoza's insistence on the fact that *natura naturans* (as substance and cause) and *natura naturata* (as effect and mode) are interconnected

through a mutual immanence: on one hand, the cause remains in itself in order to produce; on the other hand, the effect or product remains in the “cause” and that there is a “univocity of attributes” and “univocity of cause” and “univocity of modality” means that in Spinoza, all is coequal in that all is expressive of one substance, Nature.<sup>35</sup> Any moment in which a singularity emerges, it does so only insofar as its modality is unique to the expression of the composition of Nature. Insofar as we, as individuals, emerge as singularities, we do so because of a confluence of Nature’s potentiality, determined in part by our mind, as determined by our affecting and being affected by other individuals and objects within that immanent totality. This radical materialism is, because of the identity equation couched in Spinoza, “God (or Nature),” considered by Feuerbach to be a radical version of pantheism that, as Bertrand Russell and others have noted, can as easily slide from a pantheism into an atheism that is nevertheless materialist.<sup>36</sup>

Spinoza’s holist materialism makes him a compelling figure in political thought, and thinkers like Negri and Macherey proceed from that foundation through the *Ethics* to his *Political Treatise* in attempt to make use of his concept of the multitude — a body of singularities that cohere around a spontaneous recognition of each other’s mutual advantage. This is done by the operations of the affects — and decidedly not by the exclusive power of Reason (the multitude is passionate, fickle) — and it signifies that there is a state of community that derives logically from Spinoza’s conception of immanence. This emergent community, so useful to contemporary thinkers of Spinoza, has been paralleled *ad nauseam* to Marx’s conception of the emergence of classes as a historical and political phenomenon. But it is just as crucial to link the multitude to his deployment of the Feuerbachian-*cum*-Marxist concept of species-being.

In Marx, man is constituted by the sensuous activity that confirms his species-being — and which, under capitalism, is alienated from him.<sup>37</sup> In Spinoza, “The human mind does not know the human body itself, nor does it know that it exists, except through ideas of affections by which the body is affected.”<sup>38</sup> The body and its presence in the world — its condition of affecting and being affected, is what constitutes the mind, insofar as the mind formulates ideas (themselves extensions of thought, which in turn is extensive of matter) of these affects, and these affects are both material, and what, in Marx’s understanding of the world, what constitutes materiality.<sup>39</sup> Sensuous activity, in that it insists on the essential experience of a human body, is no more than a reformulation of affect, and those affects, especially when they attach themselves to a particular object or require a particular type of satisfaction, as in *sex love*, are what registers the mutuality that predicates multitude.<sup>40</sup>

Feuerbach insists that the truth of feelings — in the parallelism that allies it with “power, faculty, potentiality, reality, activity” — is that they are material engagements with the world and objects. This leads to the conclusion that “Man cannot get beyond his true nature”: while he may need to invent a God, “he can never get loose from his

species, his nature.”<sup>41</sup> Man can run, but he cannot hide, from himself, because he can never practically divorce himself from those constitutive parts that perpetually establish him in the material world — feelings, powers, activities. Therefore, no matter what the activity of the mind, man is constituted by his interaction with the world. As Plekhanov concisely puts it, “Thus, Feuerbach’s humanism proved to be nothing else but Spinozism disencumbered of its theological pendant.”<sup>42</sup>

Therefore, as Spinoza argues, desire is predicated on *conatus* — striving (for self-preservation) — and the consciousness of this striving. Or, in his own terms: “When... striving is related only to the mind, it is called will; but when it is related to the mind and body together, it is called appetite....Between appetite and desire there is no difference, except that desire is generally related to men insofar as they are conscious of their appetite. So *desire* can be defined as *Appetite together with the consciousness of the appetite*.”<sup>43</sup> This desire “is man’s very essence” in that inside of it is understood “any of a man’s strivings, impulses, appetites, and volitions, which vary as the man’s constitution varies.”<sup>44</sup> Thus, the affects are constitutive of how a body knows itself in the world — in that his desires, the foundation of the affects, are reflections of his consciousness of his desire to persist in the world. These affects are radically singular and individual; though they can be classified (as they are in the *Ethics*) as formulas of the tendency toward joy or sadness, and combinations of other affects, they are ultimately individual to manner and level to which a man is conscious of himself. Though, crucially, all men affect and are affected, no matter how crude, refined, adequate, or confused these ideas may be.

Of love, Spinoza remarks in such a way as logically precedes Engels’s conception of *sex love* as a fluid, changing phenomenon: “very often it happens that while we are enjoying a thing we wanted, the body acquires from this enjoyment a new constitution, by which it is differently determined, and other images of things are aroused in it; and at the same time the mind begins to imagine other things and desire other things.”<sup>45</sup> Love, in the catalogue of affects, is a bit more complicated, in that it resolves itself into two components. The first is the basis of the affect — that “love is a joy, accompanied by the idea of an external cause.” The second, though, is intended to clear up the previous philosophical confusion of the concept of love: “the definition of those authors who define *love as a will of the lover to join himself to the thing loved* expresses a property of love, not its essence.”<sup>46</sup> Love, as such, may very well be a “practical sense,” but it does not inherently contain the tendency to action. In Spinoza, though the affects are never entirely passive, according to Marx and Engels’s framing-out of sensuous activity, this version of love is ultimately passive because it does not engage a material object (other than the “idea of an external cause”). The latter portion of the definition, wherein Spinoza clears up the misconception that love seeks to enjoin itself to the thing that is loved, is but a property of love, a variation on the activity of loving. Spinoza has a ready explanation of this. Along with ambition, gluttony, drunkenness, and greed, lust is only a “notion of love or desire” which is

defined by the object to which that love or desire is oriented.<sup>47</sup> Thus, what the prior philosophers had attributed to love is actually a cognate to lust. Lust is, unto itself, “a desire for and love of joining one body to another,” which, “whether...moderate or not...is usually called lust.”<sup>48</sup> It is the fact that lust — *sex love* in Marx and Engels — is singularly connected to the object that will satisfy that desire is what saves *sex love* from being but a passive state of being, an intellectual mode of self-reflection; it is this capability of change that constitutes *sex love* as *praxis*, and reinscribes phenomenology as a materialist enterprise.

Because *sex love*, in Spinoza’s formulation, implicates its own satisfaction, it speaks to a basic human drive. Unlike gluttony, drunkenness, and greed in this other tier of affects, all of which are defined as intrinsically “immoderate,” lust is the only one that carries with it the caveat that it can be moderate or immoderate but that, regardless, it is still reducible to lust.<sup>49</sup> Thus, for Spinoza, lust is a feeling; in as much as it is a feeling, it is a consciousness of a desire, which is an experience of striving. In Feuerbach’s formulation, *sex love* constitutes a phenomenological activity over and above love in that it is the origin of the encounter between I and Thou, and an origin that permits the registration and perpetuation of materialism as the basis of species-being. For Marx and Engels, *sex love* is a feeling of a drive, the satisfaction of which is an activity that likewise establishes man within the concrete domain of his species-being. Above all of this, however, it might be clearest to see *sex love* as a *praxis* — in the definition of that word as a “philosophical activity...exercising a direct influence on social life and developing the future in the realm of concrete activity.”<sup>50</sup> *Sex love* as a *praxis* is what permits Marx and Engels to lay it in the foundation of the realization of communism toward which the development of history points. Love, in that it is an historical effect, and not cause, is ideologically grounded, and constitutive of nothing essential for man other than the perpetuation of the system which produces it as ideology, i.e., capitalism.

In *The German Ideology*, Marx snarkily comments that “philosophy and the study of the actual world have the same relation to one another as onanism and sexual love.”<sup>51</sup> Marx is drawing a line in the sand. Disavowing philosophy is common to Marx’s works after his *Theses on Feuerbach*, the famous eleventh of which proclaims “The philosophers have only *interpreted* the world in various ways; the point, however, is to *change* it.”<sup>52</sup> This extension of Feuerbach is an affirmation of the essential materialism of his work against the contemporary allegations of his “vague and indefinite” humanism. To be sure, much of Marx’s complaint against Feuerbach is quite simply that he didn’t take into consideration the economic (and thus historical) origins of human thought and being: “As far as Feuerbach is a materialist he does not deal with history, and as far as he considers history, he is not a materialist.”<sup>53</sup> History is, of course, shorthand for the historical materialist worldview, and history is constituted, according to Marx, of “definite individuals who are productively active in a definite way [and thus] enter into these definite social and political relations” and that “the mode of production in

material life determines the general character of the social, political and spiritual processes of life. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but, on the contrary, their social existence determines their consciousness.”<sup>54</sup> Because Feuerbach did not accommodate the historical, he could not cross the “border line [beyond which] the region of the materialist explanation of history, a region discovered by Marx and Engels, begins; [beyond which] explanation indicates the causes which in the course of history determine the ‘community..., Man’s unity with Man,’ that is, the mutual relations that men enter into. This border line not only *separates* Marx from Feuerbach, but testifies to his *closeness* to the latter.”<sup>55</sup> Philosophy is mere onanism, the autoerotic satisfaction of a base sexual desire that refuses to constitute an actual, practical, and social other: the only person one encounters in masturbation is oneself. Hegel’s dialectic, in its iterations of the establishment of self-consciousness through the dialectical process of thought in the *Phenomenology* is, to borrow a derisive characterization of philosophy and theory, mere “mental masturbation.”<sup>56</sup> In this framework, *sex love* changes the world in that it establishes the other as a properly historical being, a species-being that appears in the midst of the matrix of ideology and exchange.

In the above quote, the “study of the actual world,” which necessarily implicates “*chang[ing]* it,” and which we may call for shorthand “historical materialism,” the labor of which implies more than just intellectual activity. Entering into the world in order to unmask it, and describe it in its naked reality: this is akin to the consummation of our *sex love* as praxis. Historical materialism, then, is the practice by which the species-being of man is recorded against the intervention of the development of history as the force which alienates man from his participation in the species. And praxis — the application of philosophy to action — is carried out through the sensuous activity of man, and through, in the formulation of this essay, the work of *sex love*.

### **Some Works of Historical Materialism**

Samuel Delany argues in *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue* that the rehabilitative efforts of contemporary American urban politics are geared toward the systematic elimination and foreclosure of alternative modes of sexual and social engagement. Citing the efforts of Mayor Rudy Giuliani in New York City, the primary example he uses is the elimination of pornographic theaters in the Times Square en route to what he predicted would become the suburbanization of the Times Square social space — a way to render it friendly to and familiar to the visiting tourist; an anodyne space where transgressive interaction is dispersed.

Delany’s book, he explains in his Preface, is a combination of “pieces of...different texture and structure,” the first half of which is a “vernacular,” first-person account of his many sexual encounters in and around the space of the Times Square porn theaters, and the second half of which is the “expert” or academic account of what the significance of those encounters is.<sup>57</sup> But “taken as a whole, the book is an attempt

to dismantle some of those discourses, to analyze their material underpinnings, and to suggest ways they have changed over time — and thus to suggest ways you and I might further want to change them, unto continuing them at new sites and in new forms.”<sup>58</sup> The union of these two forms — the personal account and the theoretical interrogation — is the work of historical materialism. The idea is not to reflect abstractly the development of ideology (a common critique of queer theory), but rather to goad the reader through the writer into imagining new forms of social organization that will work against the ideologies and discourses described.

In order to explain the dynamics of contemporary social interactions, Delany makes recourse to a schematic of networking versus contact. In the model of networking, itself transcendent in late capitalism and a primary function of class self-definition, self-protection, and self-segregation, networking is predicated in the sequence of “identity, through familiarity, to lethargy, to fear of difference,” which, he argues, all “work to hold a class together. These are the forces that the networking situation must appeal to, requisition, exploit.”<sup>59</sup>

Though we may be tempted to hold that networking is the dialectical opposite of contact, Delany cautions us that such appearances are deceiving — that networking “tends to be professional and motive-driven,” whereas “Contact tends to be more broadly social and appears random”; furthermore, “Networking crosses class lines only in the most vigilant manner,” while “Contact regularly *crosses class lines* in those public spaces where interclass encounters are at their most frequent” (italics added).<sup>60</sup> Public spaces are crucial to this — and, one might argue, as Delany does, that such public spaces require a population density typically found only in cities.<sup>61</sup> In these spaces, bodies of every class must move in order to achieve some preordained individual end — be it the aimless end of a *flâneur*, or the goal-oriented end of a late-to-work office manager. “Contact is the conversation that starts in the line at the grocery counter with the person behind you while the clerk is changing the paper roll in the cash register”; among other things — casual sex in a quasi-public place, a question asked of a police officer or bus conductor, a wave to a jogger in a park.<sup>62</sup> Contact is the collision of the I and thou — the familiar formulation from Feuerbach that allows man to come into consciousness of himself as man: “Two human beings are needed for the generation of man — of the spiritual as well as of the physical man; the community of man with man is the first principle and criterion of truth and generality.”<sup>63</sup> So contact is characterized by those chance encounters that Delany relates in the first half of his book, the cross-class, cross-race encounters typified by the fumbblings in the darkened theater that Delany sheds light on.

Contact is also a properly historical materialist process; Delany’s book, which takes the form of a personalized ethnography of a geotemporal phenomenon, shares many affinities with Engels’s *The Conditions of the Working Classes in England in 1844*. Both, if one considers the multiple dimensions and ramifications of each text, properly argue, too (implicitly in the case of Engels and explicitly in the case of Delany), for

the location of contact in sexual practices. Contact is not, in other words, a glancing blow, but rather an activity and an engagement. Contact is, essentially, the labor that Engels is engaging in the production of *The Conditions of the Working Classes in England in 1844*; and to be fair, all of that contact is not exclusively sexual.<sup>64</sup> The relationship he had with Jenny Burns was a means to an end — the end which was composed of the ability to meet with and engage with other members of the working classes, to be allowed entry into their hovels and homes, to cull from them an experiential, firsthand account of the crushing weight of historically and capitalistically determined poverty. Steven Marcus admonishes us that “There should be nothing very disquieting about this coming together of young Engels’s passage into the hidden regions and meanings of Manchester and the developing course of his first extended sexual relation.”<sup>65</sup> Mary Burns was absolutely central to the gathering of the information that Engels then relays to his readers.<sup>66</sup> Marcus then describes the process of the gathering of the information in such terms as perfectly echoes Feuerbach’s formulation, and Marx and Engels’s adaptation of it, as sensuous activity: “Thus Engels learned how to read a city...with his eyes, ears, nose and feet. He learned to read it with his senses.”<sup>67</sup>

Engels could not have networked his way into the composition of this book. As the son of a Barmen manufacturer who owned industrial concerns in Manchester, to which he sent his bourgeois son as the supervisor of that productive labor, Engels was a staunch member of the bourgeoisie. He was never able, quite, to deny or wholly reject this class status over the course of his life, and made an uneasy peace with it throughout. His very economic status was what permitted Marx the flexibility and leeway to produce his work as the recipient of the Engels’s munificence. That Engels was the charitable benefactor for Marx serves as perhaps one of the great founding ironies of these theorists of communism; an irony that was not at all lost on either of the two, even as it was pragmatically accepted by both.

But networking — that which leverages existing class identifications and identities into the establishment of a common space predicated on shared interests — could not have led Engels through the “heaps of garbage,” “the stinking pools,” the courts in which “at the end of a covered passage, [there is] a privy without a door, so dirty that the inhabitants can pass into and out of the court only by passing through foul pools of stagnant urine and excrement.”<sup>68</sup> No, or few, other bourgeois is familiar enough with these urban spaces, aside, perhaps from the few that are directly responsible for their construction, or are paid to document these horrors for the composition of the Blue Books that Engels and Marx so often pored over.<sup>69</sup> Rather, one of the facts that Engels spitefully conveys is the fact that Manchester, as an urban space, is constructed in such a way as to permit the bourgeois subjects passage through the city without ever encountering the conditions of the working classes. “The town itself is peculiarly built, so that a person may live in it for years, and go in and out daily without coming into contact with a working-people’s quarter or even with workers, that is, so long as he confines himself to his business or his pleasure walks. This arises chiefly from

the fact, that by unconscious tacit agreement, as well as with outspoken conscious determination," the city is constructed in such a manner as to segregate working people from bourgeois citizens, and to compartmentalize the misery of the working classes outside of the view of the middle and upper classes.<sup>70</sup> No networking events are held to take the interested bourgeois on a tour of urban blight and misery; thus Engels has to engage in the practice of contact, to allow for the intentional encounter between the bourgeois and the working-class subject to emerge from a space that naturally allows their intermingling, in order to gain access to the object of study.<sup>71</sup> So the primary way to do historical materialism is to engage in praxis — activity that allows for the reciprocal establishment of the object of study and the subject who studies.

The class difference between Engels and Mary Burns, or between Samuel Delany and the men he fellates in darkened Times Square porn theaters, is a crucial dynamic in the way in which the object of study (the proletariat, the disenfranchised) comes to know itself as a subject (in both valences of the term: as something that is investigated or written about, and as a being-in-the-world). Though it would be obviously irresponsible to advocate sexual intercourse as the means by which we conduct materialist historiography of the working classes, what emerges in the consideration both of Delany and Engels, and of the materialist genealogy of the philosophy of Marx, is that sexual activity is affirmative and positive; that it denies the immateriality and abstraction of the false conceptual labor of philosophy and insists on the reality and presence of the human being as an individual species body.<sup>72</sup>

All of this is done through the mechanics of affective, sensuous engagement with the world in such a way that affirms the real, practical inhabitants of world as really-existing beings, and in such a way as permits the elucidation of their material lives in materialist terms. In other words, we do this work through (sex) loving — itself a sensuous activity, as Marx notes — the subject of our intellectual labor.<sup>73</sup>

That Delany has as the core of his study the detailed account of his many sexual liaisons signals a particularly postmodern adaptation of the *praxis* of *sex love*. Where Engels felt repressed by Victorian social norms around the frank discussion of sex, even as he was tapping into a cultural milieu where arguments for free expression of sexual desire were developing, Delany is not hampered by an ideological suppression of discourse. But, to reflect the transformation of social norms, he does feel balked by the interventions of the enforcement of ideology in the suppression of the very spaces in which such sexual contact occurs. The dynamics are not wholly different: Delany has access to a vocabulary and a self-expression that permits free sexualized discourse, but is nevertheless prevented from expressing that sexuality in the locations where that activity could have its most radical effects. Engels, likewise, feels that the ideology of love has come to supplant the free and frank development of a discourse of *sex love*; perhaps because that *sex love*, in its culminating location in the realization of communism, is itself such a radically transgressive activity as to challenge the fragile

ideology of love. The closing of contact zones — and the proscriptions against the frank expression of sexual desire — are both instances in which capitalism seeks to foreclose the praxis of *sex love* as an activity that supersedes the passivity required of philosophy and ideology. The work of *sex love* is not over: the onus on us is the continued insistence on the necessity of *sex love* as a self-constituting, affirmative activity.

### Postscript on Longing

It is never fully clear whether Marx and Engels ultimately intend to frame communism as the return to, or a new manifestation of, man's species-being. Though the accounts of man's projected experience of life in communism share a great many commonalities with Marx's idyllic representation of man's species-being, the temporality of both states is hazy. As Marx notes, "The *real, active* orientation of man to himself as a species-being, or his manifestation as a real species-being (i.e., as a human being), is only possible if he really brings out all his *species-powers* — something which in turn is only possible through the cooperative action of all of mankind, only as the result of history — and treats these powers as objects: and this, to begin with, is again only possible in the form of estrangement."<sup>74</sup> Species-being, for one thing, is ultimately a discursive construct. In spite of its felt truth, it arises out of the historical accounts of Marx and Engels; in as much as they draw from the knowable anthropological and historical accounts of man, their participation in discourse itself is bound by the limitations of nineteenth-century archaeology and anthropology, and likewise bound by the medium of linguistic communication. Likewise, their projection of life under communism — the prime example in this essay being the utopian projection of free *sex love* — is itself to be understood as a projection of the teleology of the revolutionarily anti-ideological work of historical materialism. All of this, when coupled with the subsequent contemporary failures to manifest communism (and which drives the ongoing post-Marxist project of thinkers like Hardt and Negri), wistfully points us back to Spinoza one last time:

Longing is a desire, or appetite, to possess something which is encouraged by the memory of that thing, and at the same time restrained by the memory of other things which exclude the existence of the thing wanted.<sup>75</sup>

This longing is intentionally wrapped up in desire, and that that desire is itself structured by the mechanics of Spinoza's accommodation of "the idea of the affect" or "the idea of the thing" is particularly bittersweet. Likewise, the Lacanian construal of desire, that it is the response to the recognition of a lack, is structured into this conception of longing, insofar as that lack is recognized as the absence of something that one once had, or that others have, and one does not. Longing can involve, ultimately, the invocation of a confused idea — and here, species-being is perhaps the

confused idea *par excellence*, in that it is ultimately unknowable in the ways in which we produce and trade knowledge — the memory of a thing. This elusive memory is the basis of our frustration which must acknowledge that the thing is, will, escape us. “Longing, therefore, is really a sadness.”<sup>76</sup>

It is with this longing that Delany composes his account of the pornographic theaters. Though the spaces of contact are not wholly lost — there is work that can and should be done about the spaces of virtual contact that are enabled by new technologies (the Internet, primarily; Craigslist, ManHunt, Grindr, etc.), we find ourselves more and more frequently ensconced in the surveillance world of late capitalism and biopolitics, where the expression of affect, the possibility of resistance, and the meaningfulness of our interventions against ideology, are co-opted or circumvented by an ever-more insidious capitalism and its tentacular ideologies.

Spinoza’s work, then, signals a way for us to return to a theory of the present — against the nostalgia of Delany, or Marx, and against the projective utopias of Marx and Engels. Though there is much to be said against Spinoza’s ambivalent multitude, that very ambivalence, the fluidity of composition, re-composition, and de-composition of multitude through the spontaneous coagulation of singularities, is a radically freeing notion that, though eschewing the teleology of Marxist thought, still permits the revolution theorized by their massive politics.<sup>77</sup> Antonio Negri, in *The Porcelain Workshop*, seeks to define the promise of this renewed commitment to materialism:

[there is] the constitution of a true *materialist teleology of singularities*... in certain kinds of historiographical analyses (Italian Workerism for example)...We should note in passing that when we speak of ‘materialist teleology’ we never imply — contrary to all the transcendental teleologies and to all metaphysics of history — a predetermined *telos*, preexisting the material conditions of historical development. Rather, we are speaking of a *telos* that is permanently redefined, reformulated, reopened, and revived by social, political, economical, and — *last but not least* — historically antagonistic determinations. It seems clear that this is the only condition in which a philosophy of history can be both absolutely materialistic and totally immanent.<sup>78</sup>

In other words, the work of a materialism that understands its own immanence is that which responds fluidly and flexibly to the conditions on the ground as they develop, a continued historiography of the present, as it were, that adequately reflects the ongoing unfolding of history. To hold up Italian Workerism as the example is to argue for the application of praxis, the investment of action with philosophy. To cast this work in the terms of the essay, we need to fuck *right now*. We need to make *sex love* now — make *sex love* that speaks to now — and make *sex love* to the very idea of “now,”

and we need to do so in a way that philosophically affirms our political commitments while also speaking to our bodily pleasures and desires. For Engels, that took the form of Mary Burns, the working-class Irish woman (a cluster of identifications that spoke forcefully to a nexus of contemporarily relevant, overlapping historical problematics). For Delany, it took a variety of forms — but with members of the same sex, performing the same gender, but with an emphasis on lower-class subjects, with bodies that display that identification. For us, it takes the form of...who? This is a call for the end of longing — longing for a body, a past, a future that is not immediately present, and a call to make love to what is in an act that posits a revolutionary praxis of the constitution of our undeniable species-being.

## Notes

1. Georgii Plekhanov, *Essays in the History Materialism*, trans. Ralph Fox (New York: Howard Fertig, 1967) 242-43.
2. Because “sex love” is a bit of an awkward phrase (no one sits around talking of sex love, though we may perhaps discuss our *desires* or *lusts*), and because “sex love” is the standard translation of the Engels term, I’ve maintained the use of it throughout, but italicized it in order to draw attention to its linguistic specificity.
3. The Critical Critics were a group of Young Hegelians who took as the foundation for their activity the abstract, idealist egoism of the Hegelian philosophical project, and applied it as a mode of interrogating social structures. Marx sees this sort of labor as unnecessarily intellectual and limiting; it can never cross into the manifestation of revolutionary social change because it never properly attends to the material world. It is, at best, a “scholastic” activity, one that rarifies material realities into subjects for contemplation, and improperly takes as its subject matter the “reality or non-reality of thought” (as in his *Theses on Feuerbach* 2 and 3).
4. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Holy Family, or Critique of Critical Critique*, trans. R. Dixon (Moscow, 1956) 31.
5. Marx and Engels, *The Holy Family* 32.
6. Marx and Engels, *The Holy Family* 34.
7. Marx and Engels, *The Holy Family* 33.
8. Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, trans. George Eliot (New York: Prometheus, 1989) 48.
9. Karl Marx, “Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844” in *Early Writings*, trans. R. Livingstone and G. Benton (New York: Penguin, 1992) 352.
10. Marx, *Early Writings* 351.
11. Marx, *Early Writings* 353, 351.
12. Marx, *Early Writings* 381. A sad moment in Engels’s critique of Feuerbach is the point at which he argues that Feuerbach essentially failed to realize his philosophical project because he lived alone. Friedrich Engels, *Ludwig Feuerbach and the Outcome of Classical German Philosophy*, ed. C. P. Dutt (New York: International Publishers, 1996) 41. The nature of this ad hominem attack is actually quite nuanced — it is both an apologia for Feuerbach’s failure to materialize into a proper materialist, and a condemnation of the activity of philosophy as an isolated, egoistic pursuit — the latter a critique that surfaces frequently in *The German Ideology*. McClellan points out that Feuerbach was “cut off from the activities of the rest of the world,” but deadpans that Feuerbach “never tired of praising his retreat to Bruckberg and the isolation and nearness to nature undoubtedly had a great effect on his philosophy.” David McLellan, *Marx Before Marxism* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1970) 87.
13. Marx, *Early Writings* 381. The desire to render abstract even material, human qualities as the senses, which Marx alleges the Critical Critics do is precisely the issue at heart in Marx’s rejection, ultimately, of Hegel: that the human, the real, appears in the *Phenomenology* as “products of abstract mind and therefore factors of the *mind, entities of thought*. The *Phenomenology* is therefore “concealed and mystifying criticism, criticism which has not attained self-clarity” whose ultimate result is “the dialectic of pure thought.” Marx, *Early Writings* 385. Of course, Marx’s critique of Hegel is more substantive than that, but the root of his rejection of Hegel, and the heart of his inversion of the Hegelian dialectic, is the rejection of the

abstraction of the actual/real/social world into the realm of pure thought and idea. The mind can contain only the ideas of the world, and not the world itself, and the world itself is the place wherein man lives.

14. Engels, *Ludwig Feuerbach* 42.
15. Karl Marx, *Capital, Volume 1*, trans. B. Fowkes (New York: Penguin, 1990) 102.
16. Marx, *Capital* 103.
17. Gustav Mayer, *Friedrich Engels: A Biography* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1936) 226.
18. Friedrich Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, ed. Eleanor Burke Leacock (New York: International Publishers, 1985) 128-29.
19. Engels, *Origin* 131.
20. Engels, *Ludwig Feuerbach* 42.
21. Engels, *Ludwig Feuerbach* 33.
22. Engels, *Origin* 140. To be sure, many feminists have expressed concern over the practical gender politics of the deployment of free love in revolutionary politics. There are, rightly, a number of concerns — that *sex love* is a patriarchal concept, that it is rooted in male privilege and discourses of masculine power, that it is predicated on a sociohistorical lineage of patriarchy. Engels, however, does proactively address these concerns, at least in the abstract development of the idea of *sex love*, and more pragmatically (we assume, as there is scanty evidence of his relationships with the Burns sisters) in his own relationships. Engels is intent on asserting that *sex love*, in its future and ideal incarnation, will not continue to replicate the very patriarchal structures that make of sexual and marital relationships a slavery that recapitulates the enslavement of the proletariat to the capitalist classes. Engels stresses consent and mutuality in his account of *sex love*, and though we may voice valid concerns about the practice of *sex love* in the field, as it were, this essay is dealing more conceptually with *sex love* as praxis. Debates about the adequate manifestation of *sex love* in revolutionary political projects would have the same underlying structure as the reiterative qualms about “really-existing socialism” versus the philosophical-political discourse of socialism. Though, it can be argued that the 2008 film *The Baader Meinhof Complex* sensitively explores the problematic application of a praxis of *sex love* within historical circumstances of a singular revolutionary-political project.
23. Engels, *Origin* 145.
24. In this, Engels is drawing on Victorian theories of the physiological complexity and holism of the body. G. H. Lewes, for instance, insists that the affective and psychological experiences of the body have their roots in the then-unknowable biochemical circuitry of the brain, as asserted in his *Problems of Life and Mind*. That Lewes is ultimately a Spinozist is also quite relevant and productive, but matter for another essay.
25. Engels, *Origin* 138.
26. Engels, *Origin* 145. Of course Gayle Rubin’s essay “The Traffic in Women” provides a startlingly clear reading of the structural parallels between Marxist theories of capitalism and anthropological accounts of marriage contracts and exchanges, as well as the discursive collusion of Freudian accounts of masculine and feminine sexual roles and behavior. Rubin could not more clearly elaborate the ways in which discourse, as it is constituted, substantiates the subordination of women in such ways as Engels is describing above.
27. Feuerbach, *Christianity* 167.
28. Feuerbach, *Christianity* 167.

29. David McClellan points out that Engels's debt to Feuerbach is in many ways more considerable than Marx's, and that Engels was foremost a reader of Feuerbach's materialism, whereas Marx was more interested in Feuerbach as a component in a Hegelian lineage. McClellan, *Marx Before Marxism* 95. Thus, Engels is intent on upholding Feuerbach's essential materialism against his tendency to abstract those practical, social relationships from the realm of the concrete.
30. Engels, *Ludwig Feuerbach* 33.
31. Engels, *Ludwig Feuerbach* 34.
32. Feuerbach borrows the term "species" from David Friedrich Strauss's *The Life of Jesus*, itself the catalyst for the materialization of Young Hegelian thinkers in its steadfast rejection of the transcendental truth of Scripture (which was, in turn, spurred by Spinoza's skeptical readings of Scripture). "The word ["species"] had been popularized by D. F. Strauss who, in the well-known conclusion to his *Das Leben Jesu*, said; "When thought of as belonging to an individual, a God-man, the qualities and function that the teaching of the Church attributes to Christ are contradictory, but in the species they live in harmony. Humanity is the unity of both natures, finite spirit remembering its infinity." McClellan, *Marx Before Marxism* 92. Rounding out the quote, Strauss goes on to argue for a materialism that is later adapted by Feuerbach: "It is Humanity that dies, rises, and ascends to heaven, for from the negation of its phenomenal life there ever proceeds a higher spiritual life; from the suppression of its mortality as a personal, national, and terrestrial spirit, arises its union with the infinite spirit of the heavens. By faith in this Christ, especially in his death and resurrection, man is justified before God: that is, by the kindling within him of the idea of Humanity, the individual man participates in the divinely human life of the species." David Friedrich Strauss, *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined: Volume 3*, trans. George Eliot (New York: Continuum, 2005) 438. That is, this is the point of departure for Feuerbach's extension of Strauss's critique, and helps trace back the materialism that Feuerbach continues, but according to Marx's critique, cannot manage to complete.
33. Karl Marx, *Grundrisse*, trans. Martin Nicolaus (New York: Penguin, 1993) 496.
34. Both Feuerbach and Spinoza trade on what Moira Gatens characterizes as "radical holism" — insinuating that the coequal immanence that Spinoza argues for, and the insistence by Feuerbach on the absolute materiality of the world are two sides of the same coin. Feuerbach, in arguing ultimately for the productive encounter between man as the establishment of the material world for man, is borrowing a line from Spinoza, though at the cost of misunderstanding the fundamental *a priori* of Spinoza's philosophy — his procession from the assumption that the world itself is a given, and that the origin of the world need not necessarily be interrogated or understood, but merely taken as it is. Rebecca Newberger Goldstein, in a book that is otherwise problematic, gives an extended account of this *a priori* of Spinoza. Rebecca Newberger Goldstein, *Betraying Spinoza: The Renegade Jew Who Gave Us Modernity* (New York: Schocken, 2006) 52-57. Feuerbach made the late claim that Nature works and produces everywhere only in and with *connection* — a connection which is *reason* for man, for wherever he perceives connection, he finds sense, material for the thinking, 'sufficient reason', system — only from and with necessity. But also the necessity of Nature is no human, i.e., no logical, metaphysical or mathematical, in general no abstracted one; for natural beings are no creatures of thought, no logical or mathematical figures, but real, sensual individual being....Nature can generally be understood only *through herself*; she is that whose idea depends on *no other* being. Ludwig Feuerbach, *The*

*Essence of Religion*, trans. Alexander Loos (Amherst, New York: Prometheus, 2004) 55. It is this recapitulation and modification of the immanence of Spinoza's monist materialism that begets the imperative in Feuerbach to engage with the world, which in turn leads to Marx's assertion that this engagement cannot be abstract, isolated, or conceptual, but material, a fact he couches in his definition of species-being. We are not the first to think Feuerbach and Spinoza together — leaving aside Plekhanov and his materialist contemporaries, it is important to note that Marx and Engels's own contemporary, Mary Ann Evans, was the first English translator (and still the most authoritative) of Feuerbach's *The Essence of Christianity*, and the first English translator of Spinoza's *Ethics* and *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* (though they were not published until 1981). Mary Ann Evans, once she had completed the translation of Spinoza, turned to the writing of novels under the *nom de plume* George Eliot. Rosemary Ashton, in her 1980 study of Victorian philosophy, *The German Idea*, was among the first to insist on reading the intersections of these two philosophers in the work of George Eliot, a call to arms that has lately been picked up by Moira Gatens, primarily known as a feminist interpreter of Spinoza. See her article "The Art and Philosophy of George Eliot," *Philosophy and Literature* 33:1 (April 2009): 73-90.

35. Gilles Deleuze, *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*, trans. Robert Hurley (San Francisco: City Lights, 1988) 92-93.
36. But that this radical pantheism is important to Feuerbach's philosophy, Plekhanov notes. "Feuerbach stands close to Spinoza, whose philosophy he was already setting forth with great sympathy at the time his own breakaway from idealism was taking shape, that is, when he was writing his history of modern philosophy. In 1843 he made the subtle observation...that pantheism is a theological materialism, a negation of theology but as yet on a theological standpoint. This confusion of materialism and theology constituted Spinoza's inconsistency, which, however, did not prevent him from providing a 'correct — at least for the time — philosophical expression for the materialist trend of modern times'. That was why Feuerbach called Spinoza 'the Moses of modern free-thinkers and materialists.'" "Fundamental Problems of Marxism"; <http://www.marxists.org/archive/plekhanov/1907/fundamental-problems.htm>.
37. Moira Gatens, in a roundtable discussion of "Spinoza and Philosophers Today," remarks that what makes Spinoza's philosophy so attractive to Marxists is that "his account of human society is both historical and naturalistic, he offers a critique of religion and the role of the imagination which became the models for Marxist theories of ideology, and he saw that *homo homini Deus est* (man is God to man)." <http://www.eurozine.com/articles/2009-11-30-spinoza-en.html>.
38. Benedict de Spinoza, *Ethics*, trans. Edwin Curley (New York: Penguin, 1996) (Part II, prop. 19). See Benedict Spinoza, *Spinoza: Complete Works*, trans. Samuel Shirley (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 2002) 289.
39. In the same roundtable [in note 12], Teodor Munz speculates: "In my opinion, the prominence of Spinoza as an inspiration for many Marxist authors rested in their view of him as a materialist. If Spinoza divinized nature (and nature is material, according to materialism), then Spinoza was a materialist according to their view. (It was also helpful that Marx and Engels had a high regard for Spinoza, even though they did not take him to be a materialist.) It was Plekhanov who first made Spinoza a champion of Marxist materialism. He even thought of Marx and Engels as Spinozist materialists."
40. Feuerbach's elaboration of the feelings is prone to what Engels condemns as his "literary, sometimes even highflown, style" (*Ludwig Feuerbach* 18) to the point where, as in Engels's criticism of his passages of love, they are "totally unreadable today" (*Ludwig Feuerbach* 36). There is nothing altogether coherent about

Feuerbach's understanding of feelings, except that he sees them as the senses ascendant, in that they are not governed by the intellect, and that they are naturally felt as a result of a stimulus (presumably as one would be unable not to smell rotting garbage or see what was in front of one's eyes, provided they were open). Feuerbach sets up a critical passage in which he takes feeling to be an example of this projective activity, whereby man imagines that "God is pure, unlimited free Feeling." (*Christianity* 10). This leads to the didactically suppositious conclusion that if God is feeling, then God is nothing more than the reflection of man to himself in a form appearing to be outside of himself, because in such a case, the man who imagines God as feeling makes the mistake of imagining that feeling is "thy own inward power, but at the same time a power distinct from thee, and independent of thee; it is in thee, above thee" (Feuerbach, *Christianity* 11). In other words, in such a case, God appears to be both inside oneself and outside of oneself in such a manner as can't be sustained or supported. In that this constitutes a critique of religion, it suffices, acting as adjunct to Feuerbach's larger claim about the nature of religion. Marx has this to say of political organization in "On the Jewish Question": "Only when the real, individual man resumes the abstract citizen and as an individual human being has become a *species-being* in his empirical life, in his individual work and his individual relationships, only when man has recognized and organized his *forces propres* as *social* powers so that social force is no longer separated from him in the form of *political* force, only then will human emancipation be completed" (*Early Writings* 234).

41. Feuerbach, *Christianity* 11.
42. Georgii Plekhanov, "Fundamental Problems of Marxism." <http://www.marxists.org/archive/plekhanov/1907/fundamental-problems.htm>.
43. Spinoza, *Ethics* (Part III, prop. 9). See Spinoza, *Complete Works* 284.
44. Spinoza, *Ethics* (Part III, def. I). See Spinoza, *Complete Works* 311.
45. Spinoza, *Ethics* (Part III, prop. 59). See Spinoza, *Complete Works* 310-11.
46. Spinoza, *Ethics* (Part III, def. VI). See Spinoza, *Complete Works* 312.
47. Spinoza, *Ethics* (Part III, prop. 56). See Spinoza, *Complete Works* 307.
48. Spinoza, *Ethics* (Part III, def. XLVIII). See Spinoza, *Complete Works* 318.
49. Ambition is the only other term that requires explanation: "ambition is a desire by which all the affects are encouraged and strengthened...so this affect can hardly be overcome." (Spinoza, *Ethics* (Part III, def. XLIV). See Spinoza, *Complete Works* 318) Ambition, then, curiously is only an amplifier affect.
50. August Cieszkowski, cited in David McLellan. *Marx Before Marxism*, (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1970) 10.
51. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology*, (Amherst, New York: Prometheus, 1998) 253-254.
52. This break is most famously asserted in Althusser and Balibar's *Reading Capital*, which argues that that which precedes 1845 is to be fundamentally distinguished from what came after. To be sure, this reading has been influential, and to a great extent, accommodates much of the disappearance of terminology after 1845 — chief among the gradual disappearance of "species being" in Marx's writing. Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology* 574. As Plekhanov argues, it is not that the *Theses on Feuerbach* signaled for Marx a complete departure from or rejection of Feuerbach's philosophy. For all of the concerns Marx had with the limitations of Feuerbach's thought, and the willful distortions done to his thought by subsequent Young Hegelians — all amply and snarkily recorded in *The German Ideology* — Marx's work constitutes a revision and continuation of the groundwork laid down by Feuerbach (and Strauss, for that matter).

Plekhanov points to *The Holy Family* “as having made several important steps in the further development of Feuerbach’s philosophy.” This runs counter to McClellan’s claim that “In the first part of *The German Ideology* Feuerbach’s ideas are submitted to a thorough-going criticism, thus marking the end of his influence on Marx” (*Marx Before Marxism* 113), even if *The German Ideology* succeeded *The Holy Family*. This sort of a claim — that there is a bald and complete intellectual schism between two thinkers, is rarely accepted these days. It simplifies the impact that one philosopher has on another by insisting that the progression of Marx’s thought is perfectly linear and coherent, and that there is a teleological progression toward the realization of a particular idea or theory. It is precisely this sort of reading of Marx that Althusser and Balibar reject in *Reading Capital*, on the grounds that it subjects a whole life’s work to the culmination of a philosophy that a thinker may not have, and practically speaking, could not have had entirely in mind at the outset of his philosophy career.

53. Though as Mayer points out, “It is therefore always difficult to distinguish between the work of Marx and that of Engels, and at this period it is supremely difficult. Most of the *Ideology* was written down by Engels and amended and supplemented by Marx” (*Friedrich Engels* 70). Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology* 47.
54. Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology* 41. Karl Marx, *Critique of Political Economy*, cited in Plekhanov, *Essays* 203.
55. Plekhanov, *Essays* 203.
56. There is a connection here to be made with the residue of the dialectic as pointed out by Slavoj Žižek in *The Parallax View*, because, of course, in masturbation, there is always an excess produced, vis-à-vis our philosophical *jouissance*. Though this reading is an essay unto itself, a sketch could be as follows: Žižek’s critique of the dialectic is akin to Marx’s description of philosophy as onanism, but whereas Marx critiques philosophy as having no object but itself, Žižek argues for its value because despite its inward turn, it does manage to produce an excess in its activity — the ejaculate of philosophy, as it were, the remainder that the dialectic generates — where historical materialism, in having a sexual partner, presumably/biomechanically, generates no excess, or at least generates no excess that is not absorbed.
57. Samuel Delany, *Times Square Red Times Square Blue* (New York: NYU Press, 2001) xvi.
58. Delany, *Times Square Red* xvii.
59. Delany, *Times Square Red* 140.
60. Delany, *Times Square Red* 129. The appearance of chance and randomness is necessary to the operation of the logic of “contact.” The very system of networking is highly regimented, policed, and surveilled; networking requires some level of identified intelligibility as entrée to the space of networking. Contact requires the space for the contingent and accidental encounter: spaces that permit contact to occur do so without an ability to regulate how or when such contact occurs.
61. Delany, *Times Square Red* 153-64. Cities are incredibly important to the work of historical materialism. The streets of nineteenth-century Manchester, for example, were incredibly productive of these *contacts*. One must only consider the Preface to Elizabeth Gaskell’s first novel *Mary Barton*, where she cites being “elbowed” by “care-worn men, who looked as if doomed to struggle through their lives in strange alternations between work and want; tossed to and fro by circumstances, apparently in even a greater degree than other men,” which spurred her to the sympathy with which she composed her novel of the working classes. Pulled in large part from these public encounters, she sought to represent “the state of feeling among too many of the factory-people in Manchester” and “to give some utterance to the agony

which, from time to time, convulses this dumb people.” And as Steven Marcus notes of Frederick Engels, “he gained...intimacy by taking to the streets, at all hours of the day and night, on weekends and on holidays. He took to that network or web of pathways along which a city moves and that constitutes its principal means for observing and understanding it” (*Manchester* 98). Moreover, “Long before Ruskin declared that one has to read a building, Engels had demonstrated that one had to read a city — that a city could indeed be read” (*Manchester* 176). Marcus is foregrounding Manchester as a text, and as a space in which contact occurs — and that this city of Manchester was incredibly generative of the cross-class encounters that fuel both aesthetic representations (he cites Gaskell, Dickens, Carlyle) and historical materialist works (primarily Engels’s).

62. Delany, *Times Square Red* 123.
63. Ludwig Feuerbach, *Principles of the Philosophy of the Future*, trans. Martin Vogel (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1986) 59.
64. Though, as Peter Hitchcock astutely notes, there is very little, if any, directly represented speech in Engels’s book, in spite of his stated intention to convey the “chats” he had with the working classes. Peter Hitchcock, “Slumming” in *Passing: Identity and Interpretation in Sexuality, Race and Religion*, eds. Maria Sanchez and Laura Schlossberg (New York: NYU Press, 2001) 170-71.
65. Steven Marcus, *Engels, Manchester and the Working Class* (New York: Random House, 1974) 99.
66. Marcus, culling information only sketched out by Mayer’s biography, states confidently that, despite the dearth of recorded sources, “Engels did not take the plunge [into the working class quarters of Manchester] alone. He was accompanied on his expeditions into the inner recesses of the city by Mary Burns, and it was she who introduced him into certain working-class circles and into the domestic lives of the Manchester proletariat” (*Manchester* 98-99).
67. Marcus, *Manchester* 99.
68. Friedrich Engels, *The Condition of the Working Classes in England*, ed. David McClellan (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003) 40, 61.
69. Even as, as Marcus puts it, both Marx and Engels engaged in the processing of Blue Books and information into more political rhetoric. “Part of the genius of the great Victorian critics as a ‘school’ or group — including novelists preeminently among them — has to do with their ability to scan such material [Blue Books, newspapers, etc.] with an eye to picking out of it bits and moments of a special kind....As writers they were performing one of their quintessential functions: they were taking dead writing and transforming it back into living writing. Or we can say that they were transforming information into a present history whose structure they were simultaneously inventing” (*Manchester* 108).
70. Engels, *Working Classes* 57-58.
71. At least not until the disaster tourism of the postmodern era, like the Katrina tours that emerged in New Orleans in the wake of the (strategic?) obliteration of black, working-class neighborhoods in the Lower Ninth Ward, as noted by Naomi Klein and numerous others.
72. Proof of this sort of authorization is present in the photography of Jacob Holdt. I first encountered an exhibition of Holdt’s work in the Louisiana Museum of Contemporary Art outside of Copenhagen, Denmark, and stumbled into the exhibit of his photos there. Proclaiming themselves to be (per his website, “Racism shock therapy”), they were largely photographs of poor, black, disenfranchised subjects taken over several decades in pockets of the American South. They were displayed with narratives

written by Holdt himself as explanations of how and when the photographs were taken. I was struck by the fact that many of the subjects — primarily the women — were described as sexual partners of Holdt's. While Holdt is certainly conducting what he imagines to be a documentary project of historical materialism, the promiscuous engagement with the praxis of *sex love* in the composition of his oeuvre seems irresponsible, though the reader is welcome to comb through the copious amount of information Holdt has compiled and distributed about himself on his website to judge for herself: <http://www.american-pictures.com/english/index.html>. There are obvious questions of ethics in the application of *sex love* as praxis that emerge when *sex love* itself materializes in coordination with the work of historical materialism, and Holdt is but one case study of the problematic. Another potential case study would be to work through a close reading of James Agee and Walker Evans's *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, itself a complicated work of historical materialism. Agee's narration very carefully elaborates the complex intersection of left politics, sympathy for the poor (the agrarian poor), and sexual desire. Arguably, the text is less vexing than Holdt's if only because it so frankly acknowledges sexual desire as a problematic, whereas in Holdt, that desire is completely submerged in what reads as a bald assumption of patriarchal and bourgeois sexual privilege. Marcus explains this by way of an elusive invocation of Freudian psychology: "the erotic, the social, and the intellectual passions regularly reinforce one another, or mingle in common interanimation; or, put in another, the social and intellectual passions can acquire additional forces, derived and displaced from their original erotic matrix" (*Manchester* 99). While the former part of the quote could certainly be a nuanced Spinozist reading of the sensuous activity that Marx comes to adapt from Feuerbach, the latter pushes the quote into the realm of psychoanalytical terminology, revealing the Freudian underpinnings of Marcus's larger argumentative structure, as Peter Hitchcock also remarks upon ("Slumming" 172).

73. Intellectual labor, insofar as it is immaterial, is a vexing problem in Marx's thought. Though he may be inclined to deride the action of thought, in as much as it produces abstractions vis-à-vis idealism (Hegel) as sham labor, it seems equally important that the activity of thought, inasmuch as it produces historical materialism, is labor. Of course Michael Hardt's postmodern interpretation of the labor of scholars and creatives as affective labor reinscribes the notion of "labor" into thinking and writing; such affective labor is, for him, the basis of the development of a revolutionary multitude that inherits the mantle of the revolutionary proletariat class. The reference here is to Michael Hardt's lucid account in "Affective Labor," *boundary 2* 26:2 (Summer 1999): 89-100. See *Empire*, *Multitude*, and *Commonwealth* for his and Negri's unspooling defense of affect and affective labor. See also Cesare Casarino's interrogation of Negri's understanding of Spinoza in "It's a Powerful Life: A Conversation on Contemporary Philosophy," *Cultural Critique* 57 (2004): 151-83.
74. Karl Marx, "Critique of Hegel's Philosophy in General." <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/manuscripts/hegel.htm>.
75. Spinoza, *Ethics* (Part III, def. XXXII). See Spinoza, *Complete Works* 316.
76. Spinoza, *Ethics* (Part III, def. XXXII). See Spinoza, *Complete Works* 316.
77. This is neither the time nor the place for a more thorough exploration of the politics of Spinoza's multitude, though there are ever-increasing loci in academic work that posit particularized trajectories for the organization of it.
78. Antonio Negri, *The Porcelain Workshop: For a New Grammar of Politics*, trans. Noura Wedell (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2008) 41.