

The Wooden Brain: Organizing Untimeliness in Marx's *Capital*

Amanda Armstrong

While Marx's *Capital* begins at a high level of conceptual abstraction, at times the opening section of the text drops into a concrete illustration, or refers to a specific historical situation. One of these better known early moments of illustration takes place in the text's opening chapter on the commodity, when Marx brings into view an oddly animated wooden table. In the midst of his introductory demonstration of the dual nature of commodities – the disjunction between their concrete utility as things that can be consumed, on the one hand, and their force as agents of abstract value, on the other hand – Marx lifts the curtain on an overturned table:

The form of wood [*Die Form des Holzes*], for instance, is altered if a table is made out of it. Nevertheless the table continues to be wood, an ordinary, sensuous thing. But as soon as it emerges as a commodity, it changes into a thing which transcends sensuousness. It not only stands with its feet on the ground, but, in relation to all other commodities, it stands on its head, and evolves out of its wooden brain grotesque ideas, far more wonderful than if it were to begin dancing on its own free will.¹

Marx attaches the following historicizing footnote to this passage:

One may recall that China and the tables began to dance when the rest of the world appeared to be standing still – *pour encourager les autres* [in order to encourage the others].²

With this crucial footnote, Marx situates the figure of the dancing table in a specific historical moment. Sometime around 1853, tables began to dance in Keighley, a West Yorkshire textile town, home to the first significant grouping of English spiritualists, whose séances featured rattling tables.³ In the same year, Marx composed an essay for

the *New York Daily Tribune* on the Taiping Rebellion, which had broken forth a couple of years earlier and would extend into the mid-1860s. In this essay, Marx wrongly predicted that the rebellion in southern China would further disrupt trade relations and spur a crisis of overproduction in the West:

At this period of the year it is usual to begin making arrangements for the new teas, whereas at present nothing is talked of but the means of protecting person and property, *all transactions being at a stand*. Under these circumstances, . . . it may be safely augured that the Chinese revolution will throw the spark into the overloaded mine of the present industrial system and cause the explosion of the long-prepared general crisis, which, spreading abroad, will be closely followed by political revolutions on the Continent.⁴

This is the sense in which, during the reactionary 1850s, when Europe “appeared to be standing still,” Marx hoped that the uprising in China might “encourage the others.” But by 1867, when he was completing his first volume of *Capital*, Marx would have known that his hopeful predictions of midcentury crisis and revolution – of economic stasis and political movement – had not come to pass. Nevertheless, at this later date, he chose to footnote a false augur, to evoke an unrealized possibility of revolution.

The figure of the wooden table, along with its accompanying footnote, helps position *Capital* historically. In referencing an unrealized revolutionary possibility from fourteen years prior, the text situates itself *afterwards*, in the midst of a moment of historical closure or failure. In pulling the curtain on a dancing table that couldn’t quite “encourage the others,” *Capital* suggests that it will be pursuing an anatomy of a capitalist system that, despite midcentury crises, had recently found new footing.⁵ But the figure of the table also indicates that Marx does not take capitalism’s apparent triumph for granted. Fourteen years later, the table still appears to rattle.⁶ *Capital* thus seems, however subtly, to hold open the possibility not only that everything could have turned out differently, but also, *a la* Walter Benjamin, that what looks like a midcentury moment of closure might yet retroactively be recast.⁷ The text sets up this ambiguous relation to its recent past by evoking a figure that seems to occupy space in two ways at once: a wooden table that “stands with its feet on the ground,” while also “stand[ing] on its head.”

The essay to follow breaks apart this unsettled table. The strange wooden table Marx brings on stage in his opening chapter is a figure into which various associations, or latent streams of thought, have been compressed.⁸ For one, as Jacques Derrida demonstrates in *Specters of Marx*, the wooden table calls to mind a history of philosophical reflection on the relations of substance and form, of matter and spirit. In philosophical discourse beginning with Aristotle, the Greek term for

wood – ὕλη [hulē] – has stood in for matter in general,⁹ making the wooden table particularly apt for philosophical illustration.¹⁰ But Marx’s wooden table carries more than simply a philosophical lineage. It also roots itself in the mid-nineteenth century, rattling like the tables of the early spiritualists, and bristling at a moment of political reaction. These and other associations that crowd around the wooden table situate *Capital* in its historical conjuncture. They also indicate something about Marx’s critical project. Marx’s allusions to spiritualism and to the Taiping rebellion suggest a melancholic relation to the recent past, characterized by an attachment to dashed hopes. Melancholia is defined by a refusal to dispense with the lost object, to “let the dead bury their dead.”¹¹ By foregrounding a rattling table – an object burdened by the recent past – Marx indicates that he is stepping beyond the conceptual parameters of the *Eighteenth Brumaire*, which had insisted that proletarian movements look solely to the poetry of the future. The table tells us that *Capital*, while certainly preoccupied with emergent social conditions, will also concern itself with temporal unevenness, anachronism, and with the problem of *organizing untimeliness* – a problem that confronted labor and capital alike after 1848. As we will see, emergent social-historical conditions of the 1850s and ’60s made questions of temporal unevenness urgent – an urgency that Marx’s *Capital* registered, even if the text did not consistently work through the implications of its evident interest in untimely things. By reading the various historical associations that assemble around the wooden table in light of Marx’s mature work as a whole, we will gain some purchase on the overdetermined problem of organizing untimeliness, and will see how this problem forced a splintering of Marx’s theoretical project.

The Times of *Capital*

Marx’s *Capital* sought to elucidate contemporaneous mutations in the social dynamics of time and labor. As Moishe Postone has shown, *Capital* organized itself around a series of dialectical reversals, one of which occurs in Chapter Fifteen’s section on The Factory. Here, Marx demonstrates how the modern factory system, which found its footing in the mid-nineteenth century, ruins any romantic view of the labor process as the scene wherein humanity consciously mediates its relations with nature, intentionally drawing together tools and raw materials. Rather, in the modern, steam-driven factory, “the automaton is itself the subject, and the workers are merely conscious organs, coordinated with the unconscious organs of the automaton, and together with the latter subordinated to the central moving force.”¹² Marx understood this reversal with respect to agency to be coordinated with a host of other mutations. Factory work apparently brought about a general diminution of workers’ skills, a lessening of workers’ interest in labor, and an increase in the dangers employees faced on the job. Rather than molding objects then, factory workers were compelled to mold their bodies to the accelerated rhythms of massive machines, which were capable of taking their lives or limbs with little forewarning. In this way, steam-

driven machinery made tangible the quantitative imperatives of capitalist relations, subordinating workers' bodies to a normative pace and scale of production – always a bit quicker and grander than before – a pace and scale that would allow those managing capital to realize adequate returns on investment, while also, “with the regularity of the seasons, issu[ing] its list of the killed and wounded in the industrial battle.”

In his reading of *Capital*, Moishe Postone sees in the factory system the reconstruction of labor according to the imperatives of the abstract, exchange-value dimension of the commodity.¹³ According to this reading, the factory system realizes a new abstraction of time and labor: steam-driven labor processes internalize the quantitative imperatives characteristic of the exchange value dimension of capitalist relations, excising any variability or lag from production, while also “equaliz[ing] and reduc[ing] to one and the same level every kind of work that has to be done by the minders of the machines.”¹⁴ In such a system, the concrete, use-value dimension of labor is thinned out; labor is reduced to a common state of one-dimensionality. Even as Marx is describing the homogenization or abstraction of labor under the factory system, however, he identifies distinctions between workers that become newly salient under this system, from those of gender and age, as the wives and children of male textile workers enter the factories as “feeders” of raw materials; to those dividing “a superior class of workmen – [engineers, mechanics, joiners, &c.] – some of them scientifically educated... from the factory operative class” in general. While noting such distinctions, Marx generally avoids grappling with the trouble such cases might present to an account of labor's homogenization, suggesting that the “superior class” of labor aristocrats will remain numerically small, and that, with factory regulation, the industrial employment of women and children will be curtailed.¹⁵ But of course, we are not obligated to follow Marx in casting aside such complications, which his own text poses for us.

The case of textile feeders, in particular, hints at a significant complication to the narrative of labor's abstraction in the era of steam. As factories industrialized over the nineteenth century, they took in an ever-increasing volume of raw materials – materials managed in part by hyper-exploited “feeders.” Factories thus stimulated demand for commodities, the production and circulation of which tended to rely on less capital-intensive methods. Cotton, for example, was cultivated by enslaved or indentured workers on labor-intensive plantations, where embodied violence served as the primary means of labor discipline. Along similar lines, the early growth of railway transit in Britain resulted in a significant expansion of the horse-drawn carriage transport industry. The railways' massive increase in carrying capacity relative to existing road systems translated into an economy-wide spike in demand for connecting trips between railway stations and other sites.¹⁶ In other words, the nineteenth-century industrialization of production and distribution processes was linked inextricably to the expansion of technologies and labor processes that, from

the perspective of stage-based theories, appeared to be “out-of-date.” Industrialization involved the grafting of these seemingly anachronistic processes and technologies onto capital’s supply chains. And Marx was more than conscious of such bricolage – the third volume of *Capital* was devoted in part to analyzing the complex flows of investment into unevenly capitalized industries. Such unevenness notwithstanding, however, Marx generally saw an industry- and economy-wide tendency toward capitalization, or toward the replacement of living with dead labor. In Chapter Twenty-five of *Capital*, Marx notes that, “The working population therefore produces both the accumulation of capital and the means by which it is itself made relatively superfluous; and it does this to an extent which is always increasing.”¹⁷

While Marx thus was inclined to fold unevenness into a narrative of capitalization and abstraction, there is one moment where Marx takes seriously the possibility of de-capitalization, of consequential eddies in the history of capitalism. Marx considers the possibility that mechanization might run out of steam in *Volume 3*, toward the end of his chapter on the tendency of the rate of profit to fall, under the subheading: “Supplementary Remarks.” (These “supplementary remarks,” contained within an extended parenthesis, are situated in a remarkably marginal location within the overall project of *Capital*):

Since the development of labour productivity is far from uniform in the various branches of industry and, besides being uneven in degree, often takes place in opposite directions, it so happens that the mass of average profit (= surplus-value) is necessarily very far below the level one would expect simply from the development of productivity in the most advanced branches. And if the development of productivity in different branches of industry does not just proceed in very different proportions but often also in opposite directions, this does not arise simply from the anarchy of competition and the specific features of the bourgeois mode of production. The productivity of labour is also tied up with natural conditions, which are often less favourable as productivity rises.... We thus have a contrary movement in these different spheres: progress here, regression there. We need only consider the influence of the seasons, for example, on which the greater part of raw materials depend for their quantity, as well as the exhaustion of forests, coal and iron mines, and so on.¹⁸

What is particularly noteworthy about this passage is how it associates the unevenness and even reversibility of mechanization with the fact of production processes’ embeddedness in natural conditions.¹⁹ As forests and mines can be picked dry, the tendency toward mechanization that preoccupies Marx in *Capital* can also be exhausted. But, as Raphael Samuel has shown, mechanization’s vulnerability to natural conditions is more than simply a matter of seasonal variation or of natural

resource exhaustion; this vulnerability also follows from the recalcitrant qualities of natural materials themselves. Various production processes in mid-nineteenth century Britain, notably including furniture making, relied heavily on handicraft methods, in large part because of the resistances posed by the particular materials being fed through production processes. Due to the irregularity of wood's texture and grain, as well as the varied shapes of cut wood and the detail work required for most domestic items, hand production of furniture remained the norm throughout the nineteenth century:

Saw mills did not abolish the need for the hand-saw... nor planing-machines the plane. They could supply the rougher classes of deal, such as flooring boards, railway sleepers, and ships' timbers. But their action was too crude for many hard woods and too indiscriminate for the different lengths, breadths and thicknesses required in, say, the making of a writing desk, the framing of a roof, or the fitting of a steam-ship cabin. What such machinery did do was to provide a much broader base for handicraft activity by cheapening the raw materials of the trade.²⁰

The irregularity of wood grain, its irreducible singularity, posed a limit to the mechanization of the furniture industry in the nineteenth century. Wood's graininess helped prevent furniture making industries from being reconstructed according to the imperatives of abstract time: each item of furniture required an individual, temporally non-identical work process. The substance of this material would seem then to put a spanner in the works of Marx's implicitly stage-based approach to industrialization. If, as Moishe Postone argues, Marx attempts to show over the course of *Capital* how the "concrete" dimensions of labor processes have tended to be reconstructed along lines prescribed by the "abstract," exchange value dimension (esp. in the shift from manufacture to large-scale industry), cases such as the furniture making industry would put in question the general purchase of this account. They suggest the recalcitrance of the concrete, the frustration of abstraction, and thus the continuing salience of irregularity and untimeliness. But then, it is *Capital* itself that gestures toward the limits of abstraction, pointing us in the direction of the furniture industry in part by introducing us in its opening lines to an ostentatious wooden table. The table, to which the following section will turn, suggests a counter-current in *Capital* - a back-flow that can be understood as a sometimes submerged or under-realized aspect of Marx's historical materialism. Echoing the sensuous materialism of the 1844 *Manuscripts*, Marx's play with metaphor here suggests that, as much as he is interested in tracking the force of abstraction in an era dominated by capital, he also inclines to show how the bodies and materials upon which capital accumulation depends set limits to capitalization and its attendant abstraction of labor. Marx cannot but register in his work the recalcitrance of the concrete, the injury of abstraction.

The Wooden Brain

It is perhaps not incidental that this counter-tendency in *Capital* is signaled through the text's deployment of a figure – the wooden table – that can be characterized as a complex jumble of metaphor, metonymy, and prosopopoeia. As Marx brings the wooden table into view, metaphor turns back on itself, the form of the text becomes knotted.

The form of wood, for instance, is altered if a table is made out of it. Nevertheless the table continues to be wood, an ordinary, sensuous thing. But as soon as it emerges as a commodity, it changes into a thing which transcends sensuousness. It not only stands with its feet on the ground, but, in relation to all other commodities, it stands on its head, and evolves out of its wooden brain grotesque ideas, far more wonderful than if it were to begin dancing on its own free will.²¹

Marx begins here by illustrating, through the table, a general principle of how, independent of commodity relations, labor can convert matter into different forms. Wood retains its substance as wood even when converted into the form of the table. (This is an allusion as well to Aristotle's *Metaphysics*.) While an illustration of a general principle, we can also read this moment in Marx's discussion of the table as a metaphor, where the coexistence of the substance of wood with its table form is metaphorically parallel to the commodity's dual existence as at once concretely useful and a bearer of abstract value. But then, through the figure of prosopopoeia, he actually draws this example more directly into the field of commodity relations, noting that "as soon as [the table] emerges as a commodity, it changes into a thing which transcends sensuousness." Marx describes the table as a being that generates grotesque ideas from its wooden brain. This fantastical, animated object is then compared with a dancing table. Marx's flights of fantasy here are properly read as prosopopoeia: he is of course not suggesting that tables, when commodities, dance and have wooden brains, but rather is depicting the table as an animated thing to say something about how commodities carry social relations and forces.

The play across different rhetorical devices here gestures toward the sundered quality of Marx's critical project. We can begin to understand this play, and ultimately the multi-sidedness of Marx's analysis, by thinking of a ladder, in which the bottom rung is the substance of wood, the second rung is the form of the table, and the third rung is the commodity form. In the passage from *Capital's* Introduction at issue here, Marx walks us up the ladder, beginning with a reflection on the relations of the first and second rungs. Initially, what is at issue is the persistence of the matter of wood even as it is converted, via labor, into different "forms" (i.e. the ship's hull, the railway sleeper, or the table). Marx then moves from this commonplace philosophical illustration up one rung of the ladder, as it were. In what is ultimately a metaphorical

operation, the table as concretely useful object takes the place of the woodenness of the wooden table, while the commodity form takes the place of the table form (rung 1 is substituted for rung 2, while rung 2 is substituted for rung 3). What Marx wants to say is that, insofar as the table is a commodity, it remains concretely useful to its individual consumers (it “stands with its feet on the ground”), even as it participates in supersensible dynamics, organized by exchange value, that are relatively indifferent to a given commodity’s concrete utility. This notion of indifference is important. Just as the table form can be thought of as relatively indifferent to the matter of which it is composed – a table is equally a table whether it is made of wood, steel, or plastic – the value form of the commodity is relatively indifferent to the particular uses enabled by a given commodity’s form. The form of value does its work regardless of which concretely useful things are being exchanged. Once Marx gets to the third rung of the ladder though, a different rhetorical operation commences. In order to illustrate the supersensible quality of value, Marx personifies the table as a being that “stands on its head, and evolves out of its wooden brain grotesque ideas.” Here Marx sets in motion a novel figural operation, defined above all by prosopopoeia. But just as he seems to be casting off into a new figural sequence, the bottom rung of his original metaphor returns: the table as commodity is depicted as possessing a *wooden* brain. Through this figure of the wooden brain, Marx short-circuits the metaphorical and conceptual grid he had wired in the immediately preceding sentences. The first rung (woodenness) leaps over the second (the table) to link up directly with the third (the supersensible commodity).

There are multiple ways to read this return of the table’s woodenness in the figure of the wooden brain, which, when considered together, get at the splintered quality of Marx’s materialism. First, in keeping with the above discussion of the barrier that wood grain posed to mechanization, we might say that Marx registers here – in an operation resonant with new materialist approaches – how commodity relations are conditioned by the particular bodies and materials that underlie such relations. Even as Marx’s metaphorical work with the figure of the table seems to involve a step-like process of supersession – perhaps suggestive of his argument for the subsumption of use to exchange, concretion to abstraction – the matter of wood sticks around, and in this way implies a kind of sensuous or concrete materiality that frustrates dynamics of abstraction in the history of capitalism. The wood of the table can be read along these lines as a kind of concreteness that dwells *below* the use value dimension of the commodity. It is a sensuous materiality that warps commodity relations, troubling any attempt at abstract theorizing about the structural dynamics of capitalism. Marx suggests this alternate register of the concrete through a sequential figural operation that ultimately doubles back on itself.

But there are other ways to read Marx’s wooden brain that suggest different sides of his materialism. Rather than seeing the return of woodenness as registering a concern with sensuous materiality, we might see this moment as revealing Marx’s

interest in spectral phenomena. According to this reading, what is significant in the reiteration of the table's woodenness is not how this move gestures toward recalcitrant materials, but rather how it marks the return of something otherwise forgotten. Like the table itself, which Marx brands with the year 1853, the table's woodenness returns unexpectedly, arriving after its time to commingle with seemingly incommensurable grey matter. In this, it is resonant with exploited living labor, which congeals in the commodity and persists as a spectral presence, animating this object of exchange. Marx's interest in thinking with spectral phenomena, and specifically with specters of labor, suggests a very different sort of materialism than that proposed by those who recently have been calling us to think again about the material qualities of things and about how these qualities impinge upon social relations.²² In his discussion of how labor congeals within the commodity, Marx's concern is rather with grasping the social *relations* of class that tend to be obscured insofar as they appear initially as *things*. In this vein, Marx's materialism requires a critical movement through particular commodities to the social relations – including especially relations of exploitation – that are realized in the production and exchange of such commodities.

To supplement this rather canonical reading of Marx's theory of the commodity, we can add a final reading of the wooden brain – a reading that emphasizes the tension between the phrase's adjective and noun. Marx's closing reference to the wooden brain can be seen in this light as surrealist *avant la lettre*. Marx juxtaposes seemingly incommensurable things – wood grain and grey matter – resulting in a composite phrase without earthly referent. The force of this juxtaposition, when read against the preceding section of this essay, lies in the “temporal” discontinuity between wood – an object of handicraft production – and the brain, which represents the cognitive apparatus captured by capital in the factory system. For Marx, the factory system is alienating in part because the knowledge required to make and maintain the automatons that animate this system exist at some remove from the workers tasked with overseeing such machines. Capital realizes itself via the factory system in part by drawing science under its aegis.²³ So, when Marx conjures a wooden brain, evoking at once handicraft and factory production, he suggests the sort of bricolage mentioned above – that is, the grafting together of labor processes and technologies associated with radically different degrees of capitalization. To realize itself as self-valorizing value, capital must set in motion production processes that appear, within a teleological frame, to be out of date, or to be lagging behind the advanced sectors of the economy.

Just as capital must orchestrate different phases and temporalities of production, Marx's mature work identifies the need for communists to assemble proletarians engaged in wildly divergent forms of labor, and thus also to organize untimeliness. As we will see in the following section, Marx understood the need to draw together workers stationed at factories, in mines, on fields, and all along capital's supply chains, and to bridge the interests of such workers with those of surplus populations,

including individuals who had been thrown by injury from the factory system. Juxtaposition thus serves as a formal model for communist praxis; the wooden brain points toward an unrealized political project – a project attentive to the explosive potentials of untimely things.

We have just entertained three different readings of Marx's wooden brain – an image the significance of which appears only insofar as Marx's formally knotted discussion of the dancing table is read against his mature writings as a whole. Marx's reference to the grotesquerie of a wooden brain condenses a critical project that itself is splintered, like a table occupying space in multiple ways at once. In his mature writings, Marx attempts not only to reveal the social relations of class congealed in commodities or to trace the prevailing trajectories of capitalist society; he also attempts, if only fleetingly or allusively, to show how particular bodies and materials frustrate tendencies toward abstraction in the history of capital, and to suggest how temporally non-identical phenomena might be juxtaposed to produce historically effective forces, whether such forces incline toward the interests of capital or labor. In what follows, I want to draw out some of the implications of this final critical strain, showing how, in Marx's *Capital*, the problem of articulating temporally non-identical forces opens onto unresolved questions of gender relations within working class movements.

Gendering Surplus Labor

We will recall that, for Marx, the factory system carried a set of structural imperatives that reconfigured in crucial ways the prevailing conditions of labor. Within the factory system, work was degraded to a common measure, temporally standardized, and subjected to the imperatives of an ever-accelerating, and ever-more-dangerous, machinic apparatus. And, notwithstanding the factory system's persistent linkages with labor-intensive production processes, this system purportedly brought in its train ever-growing surplus labor populations, as the mechanization of production and circulation rendered living labor ever more superfluous to the process of capital accumulation. Marx went so far as to suggest that superfluity constituted a shared condition of proletarian life in the era of factory production, as workers on the job were increasingly expendable and exposed to physical injury, while those cast out of production processes formed an ever growing mass body, forced to survive through informal, criminalized, or otherwise insecure means. In his economic manuscripts of the early 1860s, Marx actually uses the same term – surplus labor – to describe these two “sides” of proletarian life, each in its own way expendable and exposed to harm.²⁴ The manuscripts of the early 1860s, in their novel use of the concept of surplus labor, anticipate the political program sketched out in “The General Law of Capitalist Accumulation,” the concluding chapter of *Capital*,²⁵ wherein Marx argues for the necessity of forms of organization able to articulate the shared interests of waged and unwaged proletarian populations:

Thus as soon as the workers learn the secret of why it happens that the more they work, the more alien wealth they produce, and that the more the productivity of their labour increases, the more does their very function as a means for the valorization of capital become precarious; as soon as they discover that the degree of intensity of the competition amongst themselves depends wholly on the pressure of the relative surplus population; as soon as, by setting up trade unions, etc., they try to organize planned co-operation between the employed and the unemployed in order to obviate or to weaken the ruinous effects of this natural law of capitalist production on their class, so soon does capital and its sycophant, political economy, cry out at the infringement of the 'eternal' and so to speak 'sacred' law of supply and demand. Every combination between employed and unemployed disturbs the 'pure' action of this law.²⁶

Marx leaves unspecified the aims of such combination, only characterizing them in the following way: "to obviate or to weaken the ruinous effects of this natural law of capitalist production on their class." As we will see, much turns on the interpretation of this ambiguous formulation, just as much turns on the degree to which we take Marx here to be *describing* a historical emergence of trade union politics defined by the "combination between employed and unemployed" populations, versus *prescribing* a class politics that was relatively absent, or at least merely in embryonic form, at the moment of his writing. In any case, we can note initially that this passage carries echoes of Marx's *Eighteenth Brumaire*, posing explicitly the question of how structurally distinct populations might be articulated politically in order to pose a threat to ruling class power. Marx suggests that such a political articulation is necessary if fractured proletarian populations are to contest the conditions of injury and immiseration that define their lives under the sway of the factory system. In this way, *Capital* can be read as proposing, and demonstrating the necessity for, a new politics of association capable of intervening in the post-1848 conjuncture in class relations. The waged industrial worker might be strategically situated in relation to capital-intensive infrastructures or relatively secure in relation to the unemployed, Marx suggests, but ultimately their position is insecure to the extent that the reserve army of the unemployed is reproduced as such, and for this reason the interests of these two sides of *surplus labor* are potentially shared. The task for communists would then be to realize forms of organization that could activate and effectively advance such shared interests.

In carving out a central role in class struggle for the unemployed, Marx seems to depart in at least one significant way from the analysis he had issued in the *Eighteenth Brumaire*.²⁷ In this earlier text on midcentury France, the political agency of unemployed or marginal urban populations was figured in a largely negative way,

through the category of the *lumpenproletariat*, the “rabble” conscripted to support Louis Napoleon’s lawful coup.²⁸ In *Capital*, however, Marx is more sympathetic to the structurally unemployed, imagining for them a central role in class struggle. Even so, at least one passing reference to the *lumpenproletariat* does appear in this later work. In presenting the most fully realized “type” of surplus labor – pauperism – Marx begins by distinguishing this type from “vagabonds, criminals, prostitutes, in short the actual *lumpenproletariat*.”²⁹ Then, in the passage that immediately follows, Marx polarizes the *lumpenproletariat* and the pauper class in part on the basis of a normative judgment of women’s sexuality. If the *lumpenproletariat* includes “prostitutes,” the pauper class notably consists of “widows”:

Third [in the list of types of pauper], the demoralized, the ragged, and those unable to work, chiefly people who succumb to their incapacity for adaptation, an incapacity which results from the division of labour; people who have lived beyond the worker’s average life-span; and the victims of industry, whose number increases with the growth of dangerous machinery, of mines, chemical works, etc., the mutilated, the sickly, the widows, etc. Pauperism is the hospital of the active labour-army and the dead weight of the industrial reserve army.³⁰

There is something anomalous in the inclusion of widows in the list of industry’s victims. Certainly, women whose husbands were killed in railway, mining, and other workplace accidents were indirect victims of industry, and were understood as such in midcentury British culture. I do not mean to suggest otherwise in noting their anomalous inclusion here. Rather, what strikes me is that the category of *the widows* is the only category in Marx’s extended discussion of pauperism seemingly not defined by a direct – if also blocked or ruptured – relation to waged employment. On one level, Marx’s somewhat curious inclusion of widows in his list of paupers can be read in terms of how such an inclusion, set against the reference to prostitutes in the list of the *lumpenproletariat*, works to establish the moral quality of the pauper class. But there is more than the moralization of a class subject at stake here. Marx’s inclusion of widows in the list quoted above can also be read as an anomalous gesture that reveals a systemic under-theorization of gender in his critical analysis of surplus labor, and of labor under capitalism more generally.

To begin thinking through the gendering of labor under the factory system, we can return again to the wooden table – an object that, beginning at the midcentury, came to play new roles in the lives of British working class subjects. Midcentury penny periodicals presented shelving units and family tables as surfaces upon which workers should undertake new kinds of record keeping, from maintaining a family budget to marking deposits in benefit funds, savings accounts, or insurance plans.³¹ These practices of record keeping and savings were central to an idealized project

of working class moral improvement, which at once promised workers a partial escape from the insecurities of their lives while acclimating them to the abstract, machinic temporalities characteristic of their increasingly dangerous workplaces.³² Improvement also carried with it particular norms of gendered domestic life, in which women's domestic labor was emphasized at the expense both of their wage-earning role and of their responsibility to manage household budgets; while men's waged industrial labor, management of savings, and leadership in promoting their own and their family members' education were foregrounded. Men were encouraged to keep financial records on household tables, women were enjoined to prepare meals upon, and to maintain the cleanliness of, these surfaces. This presumed gender division in the use of wooden household tables indicates the stark gender differentiation of the working class, which intensified during and after the second industrial revolution, while also gesturing toward the shared material conditions upon and through which these divisions were lived.³³

While I have presented here an account of the relationship between industrialization and gender relations that aligns with the consensus view amongst social historians, *Capital* presents a rather different account of industrialization's effects upon working class gender relations – an account that we must grapple with in order to grasp what Marx meant in referring to the “combination between employed and unemployed.” On at least two occasions, Marx extrapolates from the case of the early British textile and mining industries to posit a general rule for the relation of gender and age divisions to the process of industrialization. He writes:

We have seen that the development of the capitalist mode of production, and of the productivity of labour – which is at once the cause and the effect of accumulation – enables the capitalist, with the same outlay of variable capital, to set in motion more labour by greater exploitation (extensive or intensive) of each individual labour-power. We have further seen that the capitalist buys with the same capital a greater mass of labour-power, as he progressively replaces skilled workers by less skilled, mature labour-power by immature, male by female, that of adults by that of young persons or children.³⁴

And then, later, in a similar vein:

We saw in Part IV, when analysing the production of relative surplus-value, that within the capitalist system all methods for raising the social productivity of labour are put into effect at the cost of the individual worker; that all means for the development of production undergo a dialectical inversion so that they become means of domination and exploitation of the producers; they distort the worker into a fragment of

a man, they degrade him to the level of an appendage of a machine... and drag his wife and child beneath the wheels of the Juggernaut of capital.³⁵

In each of these two passages, a specific historical situation – the early industrial period when textile factory owners and, to a lesser extent, mine owners turned to the employment of women – is converted into the raw material for a general law of capitalist development. This conceptual extrapolation requires Marx to write out of history the extent of women's remunerated employment prior to the turn to factory-based production, to gloss over the complex historical processes that hemmed in factory and mine owners' capacity to employ women and children, and to ignore those sectors where the partial turn to the employment of women did not occur (i.e. transportation, craft industries, and machine manufacturing).³⁶

Marx's somewhat baffling assertion of the purportedly law-like link between industrialization and feminization reveals, if nothing else, his presumption that labor is properly masculine. In each of the above passages, women's employment is depicted as a degradation of the presumptively masculine labor force, a symptom of capital's unchecked power. These passages give us a clue for a possible interpretation of Marx's above-discussed invocation of the political alignment of employed and unemployed groups: perhaps he was referring to the campaigns that formed over the 1830s and '40s to press for legislative and other measures to restrict the employment of women and children. Such campaigns served the economic and social interests of both waged and unwaged working class men at the expense of working class women's capacity to earn wages and in this way to contest patriarchal family relations. If we follow this line of interpretation, Marx would appear to be arguing that, insofar as women's employment tends to follow from industrialization, the widespread exclusion of women from waged employment since the midcentury must have been an effect of the political combination of employed and unemployed (adult male) workers. In other words, he would be arguing that women's merely *indirect* involvement in the surplus labor force follows from a particular moment of class struggle – a moment that, while not ultimately emancipatory, constitutes a contingent necessity for labor politics.³⁷

The historical claims here imputed to Marx do not, however, hold up to scrutiny. As feminist social historians have argued for some time, factory-based industrialization tended to reduce the employment of women, especially married and/or middle-aged women, in part because it separated production from the domestic sphere.³⁸ Moreover, the formal and informal exclusion of women and children from waged employment was not simply an effect of masculinist labor struggle (as consequential as such struggle was), but also followed from ruling class anxieties at the midcentury about the physical degradation of working class children, from inter-capitalist rivalries, and from broader gender discourses of labor and injury that made women's employment in certain roles appear inappropriate.³⁹ In many industries that were relatively less affected by labor organizing or state regulation – the early railway industry, for one –

women were nonetheless almost never hired. Industrialization was thus not typically associated with the feminization of the waged workforce, the early British textile industry notwithstanding.

Rather, industrialization, especially in its second iteration, corresponded with the systemic exclusion of women from key sectors of industry, and with the taking root of formerly middle class gender norms amongst working class populations. At the midcentury, working class women came to be judged more sharply against the ideal of the housewife, and to be reimagined as subjects responsible for managing, within the domestic sphere, the effects of industrial injury.⁴⁰ This was a moment when the social institution of marriage was being adapted in ways that would allow it to organize and to naturalize what was becoming a more gender-polarized division of productive and reproductive labor, and to “house” women who otherwise would have appeared as potentially dangerous constituents of surplus populations.⁴¹

Of course, this new dispensation of gender and work relations was not without its contradictions. Feminist agitation in late nineteenth-century Britain emphasized the demographic conditions, linked to empire and settler colonialism, that made it impossible for all women to be married, while also challenging the legally sanctioned authoritarianism of husbands.⁴² Another contradiction of this post-1848 settlement in gender relations, particularly acute within working class families, was the economic insecurity wives experienced in the event of their husbands’ workplace injury or death. Women were made primarily responsible for the reproduction of working men, both current and future, but could secure no guarantee that such labor would continue providing them with a way to subsist. From this perspective, Marx’s anomalous reference to “the widows” in his list of the pauper class can be read as a veiled, even perhaps unconscious, registration of a larger contradiction in class and gender relations – a contradiction conditioned at once by the unsafety of industrial labor and by prevailing gender divisions of labor, which elsewhere he seems to endorse. In this way, Marx’s passing reference to the immiseration of working class widows might offer a way to read against the grain his invocation of the combination of employed and unemployed populations. What if we approached this political task in relation to the unemployment and immiseration of working class widows? What forms of organization might have existed, or have been constructed, to link their interests to those of other sectors of the working class?

Initially, it is worth registering the degree to which various techniques of moral improvement and self help, alluded to above, can be understood in these terms, as efforts to address, within the frame of the marriage relation, working class women’s exposure to immiseration in the event of a husband’s workplace injury. Such techniques of improvement linked the waged industrial worker to the dispossessed widow across the divide of his death. In particular, savings, life insurance, and benefit fund schemes were promoted to wage-earning men as means to ensure at least a modicum of income to women in the event of their being widowed. Ultimately, of

course, these means proved wholly inadequate. The contradiction that resulted from women's dependence upon husbands who themselves were exposed to injury at work thus could not be managed within the frame of the marriage relation, and imposed itself on other nineteenth-century social institutions, from workhouses to trade unions. However, into the twentieth century, effective institutional responses to the crisis of working class women's insecurity remained elusive.

Such elusiveness was partly an effect of the temporal dynamics of injury and immiseration: women faced a loss of income in the aftermath of their husbands' accidental deaths, when the indirect connections they had maintained with their husbands' employers, unions, benefit funds, and friendly societies were newly precarious, if not severed outright. The conditions faced by a given widow were largely determined by the degree to which she could effectively assert a continuing obligation on the part of one or more of these sources, or could secure access to other sources of income from surviving family members, from a new spouse, or from waged employment.⁴³ But at least in terms of sources linked to her former husband, she was at risk of appearing undeserving, a residual obligation to be cast off in order that these institutions might maintain balanced accounts. In this sense, industrial widows were not unlike severely injured men, scorned by former employers and inhabiting, in Marx's words, "the hospital of the active labour-army." Those affected by industrial injuries appeared as revenants in the eyes of institutions oriented toward productive labor, most notably company management and state bureaucracies, but also at times workers' organizations, such as trade unions and friendly societies. From this perspective, Marx's proposal for associations between the employed and the unemployed – including terminally unemployed paupers – would also suggest the establishment of relations that could mediate discrete temporal experiences, linking those caught up (directly or indirectly) in the daily routines of waged labor to those indefinitely cast out of such routines and thus living in a kind of *afterwardsness*.⁴⁴

Capital's concluding chapter thus draws forward a form of spectrality specific to surplus labor – the *living on* of industry's victims. In doing so, the text echoes back to its introductory musings on the spectral quality of commodities – a spectrality figured forth by a strangely animated wooden table that seems to have appeared out of the recent past. The table, like the working class widow, appears as a revenant. The spectral figure of the widow stalks Marx's *Capital*, gesturing toward the living-on of industry's victims, while also implicitly raising flags over the exclusions built into Marx's political program. In the closing section to follow, I will turn finally to the wooden table's association with midcentury British spiritualism, thinking further about how Marx's engagements with questions of spectrality and temporal disjunction constitute important – if sometimes under-realized – elements of his materialist project, and about how such engagements enable a reflexive engagement in his work with the unsettledness of the conjunctures through which he lived and with the limits of his own political project.

Remnants of Past Defeats

The historicizing footnote Marx attaches to his description of a dancing wooden table invites the reader to “recall that China and the tables began to dance when the rest of the world appeared to be standing still – *pour encourager les autres* [in order to encourage the others].”⁴⁵ The footnote draws the reader back to 1853, when Marx published an overly-optimistic article about the Taiping Rebellion and when, in the industrial West Yorkshire town of Keighley, a group of former Owenites established a spiritualist circle. By the time *Capital* was published in 1867, the Taiping Rebellion had been defeated, partly as a result of British intervention in support of the Qing government. The spiritualist movement, on the other hand, had grown dramatically. While in 1867 the spiritualist movement would have appeared successful, at its origin British spiritualism was also shadowed by political defeats. By the early 1850s, Owenism had been marginalized within working class movements, in part because its critical orientation to patriarchal marriage put it at odds with working class leaders’ desire, following the 1834 Poor Law amendment, to assert the respectability of working class families.⁴⁶ The Keighley spiritualists’ early writings evince an effort to reckon with political defeat and with their distance from what had become a central stream of working class politics.

In 1855 the Keighley spiritualists began publishing a penny periodical, the *Yorkshire Spiritual Telegraph*. The periodical’s title suggests that this group understood their ritual practices to be at home in an emerging, modern world, crisscrossed by telegraph and railway lines. Perhaps they had in mind the similarity between the “rapping” of telegraph signal machines and the table rapping techniques they promoted. The early episodes of the *Telegraph* describe how the group of Keighley spiritualists learned how to converse with a number of spirits – in particular the late Scottish poet, Robbie Burns – through the mediation of a wooden table and writing implements: “We may say, indeed, that we have seen [the spirit of Robbie Burns] manifest an intelligence in moving tables, giving and solving riddles, giving advice, poetry, medical prescriptions, and a variety of other things, not only equal to, but quite superior to that of our most acute and intelligent friends.”⁴⁷ In the early articles of the *Yorkshire Spiritual Telegraph*, Robbie Burns is generally presented as respectable spirit who encourages his mediums and, by extension, *Telegraph* readers, to undertake practices characteristic of midcentury forms of moral improvement, such as temperance, the pursuit of useful knowledge, and a reserved form of religiosity.⁴⁸ But Burns also manifests an iconoclastic streak, communicating strident challenges to Christian dogma and spinning allegories of class conflict. This oppositional side of the Keighley spirit was more in keeping with the historical figure purportedly communicating, through a rattling wooden table, with this West Yorkshire grouping. Robbie Burns had been a peasant farmer and poet, whose late life coincided with the French Revolution. Persecuted for his pro-Jacobin commitments, he also retrospectively might have appeared out of step with the mainstream of midcentury working class politics for

his having had multiple, longstanding romantic affairs. The Keighley spiritualists' elevation of Burns' spirit to the status of oracle, more perspicacious than "our most acute and intelligent friends," can be understood at once as an attempt to reclaim a national figure for the Left, and as a challenge to mainstream British working class leaders' acquiescence to the broader reactionary response to the French uprisings of 1848 and to a new, marriage-centered morality.⁴⁹

The figure of Robbie Burns offered a way for a group of former Owenites to grapple with recent rightward turns in British working class culture and politics – to both find in the past some inspiration for holding out against this rightward turn and to confront the present with the unrecognized radicalism of an otherwise sanitized national past. Their resuscitation of Robbie Burns was driven by impulses similar to those manifested by Marx in his citation of these wayward Owenites' spiritualist experiments and in his reference to the then-defeated Taiping Rebellion. For Marx in 1867, as for the Keighley spiritualists in 1853, the aim was to unsettle the present and to draw from the past a sense of possible futures. As much as Marx wanted in *Capital* to anatomize an emergent order of social relations, he also sought to demonstrate how this order was haunted, not only by the specter of communism, but also by specters of pauperism, of dead labor, of capital's violent birth, and of provisionally defeated nineteenth-century rebellions. For Marx, capital's present was troubled by its unworked through pasts. The task Marx set for communists of his time was to find ways of articulating temporally non-identical formations – injured former workers and their employed neighbors, or geographically dispersed workers in industries with varying levels of productivity and forms of labor discipline – in forging a spectral communism.

Of course, there was also a certain irony in Marx's conjuring of the Keighley spiritualists. In 1853, these former Owenites melancholically refused to accept their marginalization from an increasingly patriarchal working class movement – a movement that recently had sought legislation excluding women from industrial labor. As we have seen, Marx considered such legislation a contingent necessity and a model for the sorts of alliance between waged and unwaged workers he advocated in *Capital's* concluding chapter. Given Marx's apology for the exclusion of women from waged work, we might read his allusion to the Keighley spiritualists as an act of unconscious self-criticism. Perhaps Marx conjured the ghosts of Owenites so that these specters from the recent past might indict his text for its patriarchal moments, and for how *Capital*, in its discussion of working class organization, concedes too much to what *is*, rather than holding out for what *ought* to be.

Conclusion

I have attempted in this essay to provide an at once historicist and figural reading of the dancing table that Marx brings on stage in his opening chapter of *Capital*. The wooden table situates *Capital* in relation to its immediate past, evoking Marx's

initially optimistic reading of the Taiping rebellion, as well as the melancholic midcentury labors of the Keighley spiritualists. The rattling table, which appears through a complex play of metaphor, also highlights key interventions and impasses of the three volume critical project that it helps introduce. The table, with its wooden brain, evokes Marx's interest in reading the social relations of class congealed in everyday commodities, but also poses questions of temporal unevenness and sensuous materiality that push to its limits the theoretical and political project of Marx's text. *Capital* is a splintered text, pulled apart by the varied strains of materialism that course through its pages: the wooden table figures forth the text's non-identity with itself.

I have thus read Marx's wooden table as a figure that enables a certain amount of critical and historical reflexivity. The table is, after all, a well-worn figure of reflexive writing. As Sara Ahmed notes, to draw a table into a text is to put on display the most directly consequential material support for the writing process itself.⁵⁰ We might think here of the wooden table at the British Museum upon which Marx is said to have written *Capital*. While conventional in this respect, Marx's reflexive putting on display of the writing table nevertheless manifests a certain deflection from the immediate materiality of the table – a deflection that tells us something about his critical practice. For one thing, the table Marx brings to view is not present for the writing process itself, but instead is branded, via a footnote, with the year 1853. Even at its moment of composition, the table is thus out of date. Not only is the table itself somewhat anachronistic, but through its allusions to spiritualism and imperial trade relations, not to mention a two-thousand-year philosophical lineage, the dancing table also opens up broader questions of temporal contradiction and unevenness, of the tensions of abstraction and concretion, of historical closure and contingency. As Derrida might say, the table indicates that the time from which it emerges is out of joint. This contradictory quality of time, particularly for those caught up in industrial circuits of labor, forms a central preoccupation of Marx's later works. Marx seeks out in such contradictions possibilities for class composition and social transformation, despite the seemingly fixed quality of midcentury class relations, and despite an ever-mounting record of historical defeats. Perhaps a certain spirit of this undertaking speaks to our present, with its own dynamics of fracture and its own specters of the recent past.

Notes

1. Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1 (London: Penguin, 1990 [1976]) 163-4.
2. Marx, *Capital* 164.
3. Logie Barrow, "Socialism in Eternity: The Ideology of Plebian Spiritualists, 1853-1913," *History Workshop*, 9 (Spring, 1980) 40.
4. Karl Marx, "Revolution in China and in Europe," *New York Daily Tribune* (June 14, 1853). Emphasis added.
5. Such a historicist reading of *Capital* parallels the reading of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807) that Rebecca Comay offers in *Mourning Sickness*. Comay argues that Hegel's early work ruminates, in a melancholic vein, upon the recent containment of the French Revolution's emancipatory potentials. Rebecca Comay, *Mourning Sickness: Hegel and the French Revolution* (Redwood City: Stanford UP, 2010).
6. Spiritualism reached a high point of its popularity in 1860s Britain. Nicola Brown and Carolyn Burdett, eds., *The Victorian Supernatural* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004). For discussions of spiritualism's subsequent influence in British culture, see: Alex Owen, *The Place of Enchantment: British Occultism and the Culture of the Modern* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004); Alex Owen, *The Darkened Room: Women, Power, and Spiritualism in Late Victorian England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989).
7. Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," *Illuminations* (New York: Schocken, 1968) 253-265.
8. Sigmund Freud, "The Dream-Work," *The Interpretation of Dreams* (Mineola, NY: Dover, 2015 [1913]). "The first thing which becomes clear to the investigator in the comparison of the dream content with the dream thoughts is that a tremendous work of condensation has taken place. The dream is reserved, paltry, and laconic when compared with the range and copiousness of the dream thoughts.... As a rule the extent of the compression which has taken place is under-estimated, owing to the fact that the dream thoughts which are brought to light are considered the complete material, while continued work of interpretation may reveal new thoughts which are concealed behind the dream. We have already mentioned that one is really never sure of having interpreted a dream completely; even if the solution seems satisfying and flawless, it still always remains possible that there is a further meaning which is manifested by the same dream. Thus the *amount of condensation* is—strictly speaking—indeterminable."
9. Henry George Liddell, Robert Scott, James Morris Whiton, *A lexicon abridged from Liddell & Scott's Greek English lexicon* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1891) 725.
10. Derrida writes that "One would have to put this table on the auction block, subject it to co-occurrence or concurrency, make it speak with so many other tables in our patrimony, so many that we have lost count of them, in philosophy, rhetoric, poetics, from Plato to Heidegger, from Kant to Ponge, and so many others. With all of them, the same ceremony: a séance of the table." Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, trans. Peggy Camuf (New York and London: Routledge, 1994) 151.
11. Karl Marx, "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte," *The Marx-Engels Reader*, Robert Tucker, ed. (New York and London: Norton, 1978) 597.
12. Marx, *Capital* 544-545.

13. Moishe Postone, *Time, Labor, and Social Domination* (Cambridge University Press) 336-349.
14. Marx, *Capital* 545.
15. Marx, *Capital* 620-631.
16. James Belich, *Replenishing the Earth: The Settler Revolution and the Rise of the Anglo-World, 1783-1939* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2009). James Vernon, *Distant Strangers: How Britain Became Modern* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2014) 32.
17. Marx, *Capital* 783.
18. Karl Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 3 (London: Penguin, 1993) 368-9.
19. Cf. John Bellamy Foster, *Marx's Ecology: Materialism and Nature* (New York: NYU Press, 2000).
20. Raphael Samuel, "Workshop of the World: Steam Power and Hand Technology in Mid-Victorian Britain," *History Workshop*, 3 (Spring, 1977) 37.
21. Marx, *Capital* 163-4.
22. On "new materialisms," see: Diana Coole and Samantha Frost, *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency, and Politics* (Durham: Duke UP, 2010); Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham: Duke UP, 2010).
23. Karl Marx, "The Chapter on Capital; Notebook VII, End of Feb, March. End of May - Beginning of June 1858," *Grundrisse*, trans. Martin Nicolaus (London: Penguin, 1993 [1973]) 699.
24. Marx, Economic Works of Karl Marx, 1861-1864, *Marx Engels Collected Works*, 34, trans. Ben Fowkes (New York: International Publishers, 1975).
25. According to this approach to the text, the section on original accumulation is more a coda than a conclusion.
26. Marx, *Capital* 793-4.
27. Karl Marx, "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte," *The Marx-Engels Reader*, Robert Tucker, ed. (New York and London: Norton, 1978) 597.
28. Even though Marx does make a reference to the lumpenproletariat in *Capital*, his positive account of the possibilities for alliance between unemployed and employed populations cuts against his overwhelmingly negative treatment of marginal urban populations in the *Eighteenth Brumaire*. In this way, a consideration of Capital's concluding chapter would put in question Laclau's critique of Marx on the basis of his incapacity to think the so-called lumpenproletariat — and generally unemployed populations — in any but negative terms. Cf. Ernesto Laclau, "Why Constructing a People is the Main Task of Radical Politics," *Critical Inquiry* 32:4 (2006) 646-680; Laclau, *On Populist Reason* (London and New York: Verso, 2005).
29. Marx, *Capital* 797.
30. Marx, *Capital* 797.
31. Anonymous, "House-Keeping Accounts", *The Family Economist*, Vol. 4 (London: Groombridge and Sons, 1851) 3-5; Anonymous, "Household Furniture", *The Family Economist*, Vol. 4 (1851) 61-2, 102-3; Francis Plimley, "Letters to Working Men, No. 2, The Benefits of Life Insurance", *The Working Man's Friend and Family Instructor*, Vol. 3 (London: Cassell, 1853) 42-3.
32. Louis James, *Fiction for the Working Man 1830-1850* (London: Oxford UP, 1963) 39-40; Penelope Ismay, "Between Providence and Risk: Odd Fellows, Benevolence and the Social Limits of Actuarial Science, 1820s-1880s, *Past and Present*, 226 (Feb. 2015); Simon Cordery, *British Friendly Societies, 1750-1914*

- (Palgrave, 2003); Geoffrey Crossick, *An Artisan Elite in Victorian Society: Kentish London, 1840-1880* (London: Routledge, 2016 [1978]).
33. Anonymous, "House-Keeping Accounts", *The Family Economist*, Vol. 4 (London: Groombridge and Sons, 1851) 3-5. On the remaking of gender relations in British working class communities at the midcentury, see: Anna Clark, *The Struggle for the Breeches: Gender and the Making of the British Working Class* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); Wally Seccombe, *Weathering the Storm: Working-Class Families from the Industrial Revolution to the Fertility Decline* (London: Verso, 1993); Sonya Rose, *Limited Livelihoods: Gender and Class in Nineteenth-Century England* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992); Mary Poovey, *Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988); Eric Hobsbawm, *Industry and Empire* (New York: The New Press, 1999 [1968]) 96-8. On the intimate violence perpetrated by men against women that accompanied the reconstruction of working class domestic norms, see: Nancy Tomes, "A 'Torrent of Abuse': Crimes of Violence between Working-Class Men and Women in London, 1840-1875", *Journal of Social History*, Vol. 11, No. 3 (Spring, 1978) 328-345.
 34. Marx, *Capital* 788.
 35. Marx, *Capital* 799.
 36. See: Clark, *The Struggle for the Breeches*; Robert Gray, *The Factory Question and Industrial England* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996).
 37. This reading suggests that Marx's implicit reflections in *Capital* concerning restrictions on women's employment depart from his and Engels' dialectical critique of bourgeois family morality in the *Manifesto*. There are, however, traces of this dialectical critique in *Capital*, as for instance in Marx's insistence that: "However terrible and disgusting the dissolution of the old family ties within the capitalist system may appear, large-scale industry, by assigning an important part in socially organized processes of production, outside the sphere of the domestic economy, to women, young persons and children of both sexes, does nevertheless create a new economic foundation for a higher form of the family and of relations between the sexes.... It is also obvious that the fact that the collective working group is composed of individuals of both sexes and all ages must under the appropriate conditions turn into a source of humane development, although in its spontaneously developed, brutal, capitalist form, the system works in the opposite direction, and becomes a pestiferous source of corruption and slavery, since here the worker exists for the process of production, and not the process of production for the worker" (620-1). As much as this passage would seem to contain a thread, however thin, of feminist sense, Marx follows this passage with an argument for the necessity of the "generalization of the Factory Acts, for transforming them from exceptional laws relating to mechanical spinning and weaving — those first creations of machinery — into the general law for all social production" (a necessity that he suggests imposed itself upon state and capital, given the powers of [adult male] working class organization and the distortions introduced by the initial partiality of these acts). Thus, as much as Marx appears to want to hold onto a vision of gender equality in a future communist organization of social production, he also embraces the "necessity" of gender (and age) restrictions of employment under capitalism, as part of a larger dynamic of industrial regulation (See: 620-631).
 38. For an early articulation of this position, see: Joan W. Scott and Louise A. Tilly, "Women's Work and

- the Family in Nineteenth-Century Europe,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 17:1 (Jan., 1975) 36-64.
39. Gray, *The Factory Question and Industrial England*; Wally Seccombe, “Patriarchy Stabilized” 53-76.
 40. In Marx’s brief allusions to gendered reproductive labor, we can see traces of this midcentury conception of working class women’s responsibility for managing the injuries of their husbands. In Chapter Six of *Capital*, Marx frames the lower limit of subsistence in terms of the line separating the “normal quality” of labor power from its “crippled state” [verkümmertes Form]. Marx, *Capital* (1990 [1976]), pp. 274-7. On the modeling of gendered reproductive labor on the work of nursing, see: Amanda Armstrong, *Infrastructures of Injury*, Diss (University of California, Berkeley, 2015).
 41. For a source demonstrating the midcentury bourgeois fear of working class women involved in sexual and economic exchanges with multiple men at once, see: Anon, “Moral and Physical Evils in Connection with Railway Works,” *Manchester Guardian*, Saturday, March 7, 1846.
 42. See, for example: Josephine Butler, ed., *Woman’s Work and Woman’s Culture: A Series of Essays* (London: Macmillan, 1869); Jane Rendall, “Recovering Lost Political Cultures: British Feminisms, 1860-1900,” *Women’s Emancipation Movements in the Nineteenth Century: A European Perspective*, ed. Sylvia Paletschek (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2005) 33-52.
 43. Cf. Seccombe, *Weathering the Storm*.
 44. Marx’s work on industrial injury might offer a point of entry for thinking together psychoanalytic and historical materialist categories. We will recall that Freud’s theories of trauma were constructed in part out of reflections on the wartime phenomenon of shell shock, and that his early research was influenced by work on *railway spine*. And, as I hope to show, Marx’s engagement with the phenomenon of industrial injury can be linked to his broader interest in spectral phenomena, thus drawing the key Marxian categories of commodity, capital, labor, and value into relation with the structurally injurious, traumatic qualities of modern life.
 45. Marx, *Capital* 164.
 46. Clark, *The Struggle for the Breeches*; Barbara Taylor, *Eve and the New Jerusalem* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard UP, 1993 [1984]).
 47. *Yorkshire Spiritualist Telegraph*, Vol 1 (1855) 4.
 48. *Yorkshire Spiritualist Telegraph*, Vol 1 (1855) 4, 16. See also: Logie Barrow, “Socialism in Eternity: The Ideology of Plebian Spiritualists, 1853-1913,” *History Workshop*, 9 (Spring, 1980) 37-69.
 49. For the response, within British working class movements, to the June days of 1848, see Engels, *Condition of the Working Class in England*, “Preface to the English Edition” (Moscow: Institute of Marxism-Leninism, 1969 [1887, 1845]). “The French Revolution of 1848 saved the English middle-class. The Socialistic pronouncements of the victorious French workmen frightened the small middle-class of England and disorganised the narrower, but more matter-of-fact movement of the English working-class. At the very moment when Chartism was bound to assert itself in its full strength, it collapsed internally before even it collapsed externally on the 10th of April, 1848. The action of the working-class was thrust into the background. The capitalist class triumphed along the whole line.”
 50. Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham: Duke UP, 2006) 25-65, 164-8.

