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The Common without Copies, the International without Cosmopolitanism: Marx against the Romanticism of Likeness

Deborah Jenson

This paper connects a stylistic hallmark of Marx's work—a dramatic antipathy to imitation and copying—to his rejection of the epistemology of likeness or “harmony” in French romantic social Utopian thought. A space of the common without social mimesis—not just representation and imitation but competitive appropriation, likeness-based equality, social unity, cultivated resemblance, and so on—is in some ways paradoxical. But Marx upholds a vision of the common as collision, foreshadowing Althusser's notion of aleatory materialism, through a discourse of the atom. He moves from atheistic Epicurean models of abstract individuality and opposition to false universalism, to Hegelian ideas of the disaggregated atoms of political class activity, to a rejection of Buonarroti's ambition to harness self-seeking atoms in the collectivity, to a championing of real rather than ideal collisions. Acutely aware of social mirroring processes in the paradigm of the fetishism of the commodity, Marx puts the Lucretian “uproarious contest” and “hostile tension” of atoms at the core of the nonromantic sociality of the common.

Key Words: Karl Marx, Mimesis, Social Romanticism, Cosmopolitanism, Atoms, Common

Mimesis, as Marx said of capital, is a social relation of production.

—Stephen Greenblatt, *Marvelous Possessions*

The irony of the mirror runs through the work of Karl Marx. This ironization is exemplified in the trope of *francequillonnerie*, which Marx described in an 1848 letter as “a scornful expression in Flemish, meaning stupidly copying anything that is French” (Marx 1848).¹ Although *francequillonnerie* most literally signaled a

1. Marx, identified in this letter to the editor of *La Réforme* as “Vice-President of the Brussels Democratic Association,” used the term *francequillonnerie* in a complex manner. French editors of Belgian newspapers dismiss a Belgian revolution, he writes, as “merely an imitation of a *francequillonnerie* [a scornful expression in Flemish, meaning stupidly copying anything that is

resistance on the part of the exiled French in Belgium to a potential Belgian revolution, which, if ever realized, might amount to a mere copying of the French, Marx was also ironizing the ostensible “original,” the February 1848 revolution in France itself. In a reversal of Edmund Burke’s ethos of political respect for the ancestors, for Marx, “the tradition of all dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living,” precisely because of the Hegelian tendency of history to occur “the first time as tragedy, the second time as farce” (Marx 1977, 300).

The nightmarish quality of the secondhand not infrequently, for Marx, could be described through the outlandishness of imitation, compounded for rhetorical effect by the outlandishness of otherness. The wannabe Napoleonism of the Second Empire, for instance, was framed as attendant upon the drag-like relationship of the second Haitian empire to the Haitian Revolution: “Bonaparte still hid his longing to signify Napoleon, for *Soulouque* did not yet play Toussaint Louverture” (Marx 2003, 68). Marx saw not only self-parody, but pathos, in the likeness of new forms of social life to old: “It is generally the fate of completely new historical creations to be mistaken for the counterpart of older and even defunct forms of social life, to which they bear a certain likeness” (1988, 60). Even in the history of philosophy, the historian’s job was to avoid the fate of Flaubert’s tragicomic figures Bouvard and Pécuchet, by separating “essential from unessential, exposition from content; otherwise he could only copy, hardly even translate, and still less would he be entitled to comment, cross out, etc. He would be merely a copying clerk” (Marx 1975b, 1:506). Marx’s mimetophobia extended in his comments on “Freedom in General” to a definition of the “eye and the ear” as “organs which take man away from his individuality and make him the mirror and echo of the universe” (Marx 1842). To be alike, to be a vehicle of representing likeness, was to lose a certain freedom.

Jacques Derrida, in *Specters of Marx*, addresses Marx’s attempt to expel, if not mimesis per se, spectral traces of precedents for revolutionary ideas. As Joan Brandt explains, “Derrida shows, although he never addresses this question directly, that the paradoxical logic of the spectral that Marx uncovered is like that of mimesis itself: the search for the radically new takes imitation as its point of departure while trying ultimately to erase the traces of that process” (Brandt 1997, 239). Marx sought to out-think imitative points of departure in quests for the radically new, according to Derrida, because “[a]s soon as one identifies a revolution, it begins to imitate, it enters into a death agony” (Derrida 1994, 115). Margaret Rose takes a different, biographical approach to the same renunciation of imitation in her reading of Marx’s early penchant for parody. Marx’s juvenilia, which was “typically ironic and self-reflective as well as imitative of the Romantics” (Rose 1978, 152), set the stage for a crisis of consciousness on the political (in)efficacy of parodic imitation: “the dilemma resulting from the experience of using parody as a means to imitation rather than innovation was . . . the ‘crisis’ which preceded the change to a more direct method of criticism in *The German Ideology* in 1846” (137). To these models for understanding

French . . .].” If a Belgian revolution is resisted as an imitation of a copying, the resistance to imitation is ultimately framed as antirevolutionary. Yet Marx simultaneously aligns himself against reactionary opposition to a Belgian revolution, and, through his employment of an anti-French rhetoric, with the injunction against copying what is French.

the Marxian antipathy for mimetic relationality one can add Marx's attempt to differentiate his thought from French romantic models of socialism and communism, and also his ongoing embrace of Epicurean models of atomistic atheistic individuality.

The Marxian engagement with the common is thus marked by a potentially paradoxical, yet ultimately illuminating, resistance to the notion of the like. Marx's antimimetic stance finds a certain heraldic symbolism in the rhetoric of *france-quillonnerie* because it serves to counter the harmonious mimetic principles of French romantic Utopian socialism and the epistemology of likeness on which they depend. Marx's convergences and divergences with French social romanticism reveal a conception of the common in which the multiple yields a principle of revolutionary collision rather than harmonious identity—colliding atoms rather than the politics of imitation, competitive appropriation, and egalitarian resemblance championed in French socialism. This stance foretells the choice of Louis Althusser (and Alain Badiou and Giorgio Agamben in their related work) to “banish any residual idealism from the citadel of historical materialism” (Casarino and Negri 2008, 221) in the theory of “aleatory materialism” (Althusser 2006, 260), in which it is only through the collisions and swerving of atoms, only as “the world comes into being through a series of contingent encounters—that one can speak of necessity” (Casarino and Negri 2008, 223).

Psychological Economies

Tension between the like and the common, which can appear homologous—what we have in common makes us alike, or reflects likeness—is partly intrinsic to the general problem, as Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri describe it, of the telescoping of the individual elements of the multitude into the common: “How can the material and immaterial production of the brains and bodies of the many construct a common sense and direction, or rather, how can the endeavor to bridge the distance between the formation of the multitude as subject and the constitution of a political apparatus find its prince?” (2001, 65). The relation of political singular to organic plural is also outlined as a problem of linguistic class-being in Giorgio Agamben: “It transforms singularities into members of a class, whose meaning is defined by a common property (the condition of belonging)” (1993, 9). But the Marxian resistance to the like is also different from the relation of singular to plural in the common. Although the likeness of a group and the commonality of a group both involve shared properties, likeness demands definition in relation to characteristics that are internal to the subject—what the individual is like, characteristics which in turn allow him or her to be like others—whereas what is held in common may be external to the subject, although it binds the group together. What individuals have in common is more easily related to the material historical positioning of the individual than to the internal characteristics of the individual, at least outside the context of evolution. (In the context of evolution, even external conditions held in common come to shape the characteristic identity of the subject.)

An ethos involving an idea of what the individual is like arguably can be more easily associated with liberalism, which tries to accommodate the varieties of

individualism—and especially through a protobourgeois privacy from the state—than with the Marxian politics of the common. Seyla Benhabib describes the way that the sovereignty of the space of the individual indirectly leads to valorization of likeness and to a likeness-based unity in the admittedly complex case of Hobbesian thought. Hobbes uses

the striking metaphor of sovereign authorities that are “in the state and posture of gladiators” standing guard at the “frontiers of their kingdoms.” ... Both as a container and an excluder, boundaries work to foster the impression of a circumscribed space in which likeness dwells, the likeness of natives, of an autochthonous people, or of a nationality, or of citizens with equal rights. Likeness is prized because it appears as the prime ingredient of unity. (Benhabib 1996, 32)

Within the politics of the common, the function of the individual is strongly related to the material conditions of production rather than the liberal space of individual sovereignty, conditions that in turn influence historical forms of consciousness, at which point the common and likeness may once more be difficult to distinguish. Valentin Vološinov’s 1927 critique of the petit bourgeois liberalism of psychoanalysis or “Freudianism” is a good example of the Marxian insistence on the different epistemologies involved in the consideration of likeness among individuals versus within the material historical space of the common. Vološinov rejects the psychoanalytic emphasis on “premises in individual psychology,” which he sees as dominating views of the social to the point that “no room is left for the reflection of objective socioeconomic existence with its forces and conflicts” (1987, 59). Although Vološinov is interested in the biological forces that inform social likeness, commenting that “[t]he endeavor to imitate is, as it were, the psychical surrogate for the more ancient ingestion” (47), he nevertheless insists that psychoanalysis distracts its aficionados from the ideologically and economically derived space of the common. “Psychoanalysis forces the actual mechanism of ideology formation into the narrow frame of the individual’s subjective psyche, whereas in Marxism that mechanism is objective and societal. It presupposes the interaction of individuals within a collective that is organized on economic lines. Therefore, neither physiology nor psychology can reveal the complex objective process of ideology formation” (127).

The near confluence but ultimate difference of likeness and the common is mapped around the motor of desire through which individuals, regardless of what they do or do not share in common economically and ideologically, aspire to be like each other, and especially when that imitation is competitive. Competitive or appropriative imitation is ambitious; it aims to differentiate the copying subject from the larger multitude, paradoxically enough, by equaling or surpassing the imitated model, as Sigmund Freud, in his theory of the Oedipus complex, and René Girard, in his conception of the triangular mediation of desire, and many others have argued. Girard contends that the association of mimesis with representation, from Plato onward, had targeted “types of behavior, manners, individual or collective habit, as well as words, phrases, and ways of speaking,” but that it had inappropriately minimized the primordial role of “appropriation from imitation” (1987, 8).

The desire for likeness or imitation can prove indistinguishable from counter-imitation and the self-differentiation that results from rejecting the model, as Gabriel Tarde contended in 1890 in *The Laws of Imitation*. Tarde defined a society as “a group of people who display many resemblances produced either by imitation or by *counter-imitation*” (1903, xvii), with counterimitation standing as just as effective a route to assimilation as imitation. He also identified science itself with the study of “repeated actions” (Freidheim 1976, 69), thus framing imitation not just as an object of scientific study but as a part of any scientific epistemology. Although he was drawn to dialectical models, he rarely engaged with the work of Marx on the dialectic, possibly because of Marx’s negative stance toward mimetic influence.² In *Psychologie économique* Tarde noted that he was, however, struck by a “certain ontological—or mythological—turn that Marx derived from Hegel. Capital, value, are for him beings that he animates with his passion and his life” (1902, 1:203–4; translation mine). This Marxian repression, ironization, or spectralization of personification and other forms of imitative identifications in social life has long been critiqued by theorists highlighting the economic dynamism of imitation; C. A. Ellwood, in 1911, cited Tarde in his argument that Marx underplayed “the fundamental imitative tendencies of man, [in which] examples of social activity and institutions tend to be copied almost regardless of economic conditions in society” (Ellwood 1998, 208).

The fetishism of the commodity is perhaps the area in which Marx most clearly outlines the stakes of a psychology of likeness for the common. Commodities as “social things” are clearly mimetic productions (“productions of the human brain [that] appear as independent beings endowed with life”), that enter into “relations” both among mimetic productions as a personified field, and among humans in their relationships with mimetic productions (Marx 2007, 83). Marx introduces this field of “analogy,” however, not to integrate the drive for likeness inherent to commodified desire, but to expel the fetishistic dimensions of desire from the space of the common. This expulsion or rejection of the psychosocial logic of likeness arguably derives not simply from the problematic relationship of psychology to the economic field, since Marx does not shy away from conundrums of capital that are related to intentionality; it also derives from his competitive determination to differentiate his own theory of the common from the more likeness-based ideas of the common in French romantic Utopian socialism. Thus while it might be most intuitive to begin with Marx’s mature thought in *Capital* to establish the terms of a philosophy of the common without likeness, I will be starting instead from Marx’s self-differentiation from the ideal of likeness in French romantic Utopian socialism during the 1840s: from, in other words, the era of his own developmental avoidance of “francequillonnerie” amid the “easy come, easy go” of “bourgeois revolutions,” in which the “answer to the *coup de main* of February 1848 was the *coup de tête* of December 1851” (Marx and Engels 2006, 90). Marx’s resistance to tropes of romantic harmony and likeness within the French intellectual environment led to a key epistemological

2. Tarde’s relationship to other social models of the time is quite provocative with regard to contemporaneous alignments of areas of emerging social science with or against mimetic contagion, as Lynn McDonald shows in *The Early Origins of the Social Sciences* (1993, 295).

break defining what we associate with communism—despite the existing, earlier definitions of communism within the romantic environment.

Social Romanticism and Romantic Socialism

The spring of 1848 when Marx ironized “francequillonnerie” was the spring of the French poet Alphonse de Lamartine’s ascendance, as an icon of social romanticism, to his role as a leader of the provisional government of the Second Republic. Marx increasingly abhorred the views of this “poetic socialist” (Marx 1976, 6:404) whose work, notably the 1831 *Harmonies poétiques et religieuses*, had helped to inaugurate the concept of harmony. As Frank Paul Bowman notes, “The word *harmony* recurs frequently in Romantic writing, as the title of a poem or a collection of poems and also in socialist texts, in theology, in philosophy, even in science” (1990, 125). In these disparate fields, the notion of harmony represented “a quest for consonant relations between dissimilar entities” (125). Harmony designated a kind of fusionist epistemology, as in Louis de Turreil’s 1845 comment that “[a]ll beings emanate, absorb, and appropriate to themselves” (cited in Bowman 1990, 152).

Despite the lachrymose charity of harmonian thought, social romantic ideas of competitive appropriation have a startling pertinence to our own era, through their innovative application of the paradigm of consumption to such dissimilar things as air and time. Lamartine, the founder of the French “social party” as a deputy to the National Assembly in the early 1830s, believed that virtually all human activity could be understood economically, but he interpreted the human dynamics of consumption as a sign of the essential social, cognitive, and even biological character of the appropriative human relationship to property, with property defined as anything that could be appropriated. Lamartine therefore considered communism to be a fundamental threat to a property-based universal life principle, as Marx summarized his position:

The fact that man appropriates the elements to himself, ... is a law of nature and a precondition of life. Man appropriates the air by breathing, space by striding through it, the land by cultivating it, and even time, by perpetuating himself through his children; property is the organisation of the life principle in the universe; communism would be the death of labour and of the whole of humanity. (Marx 1976, 6:404)³

Dismissing the interest of Lamartine’s model of the consumption of air, space, and time, Marx satirized Lamartine’s take on communism as “too beautiful a dream for this bad world” (Marx 1847). He, along with Engels, could hardly get his fill of mocking Lamartine’s poetico-political principles. “The scoundrel Lamartine with his high-flown declarations was the classical hero of this epoch of betrayal of the people

3. This quote is the version provided in a contemporaneous French newspaper article that was cited by Marx in “Lamartine and Communism” in *Deutsche-Brüsseler-Zeitung* on 26 December 1847. In the work of Lamartine, a variation appears in the *Cours familier de littérature* (Lamartine 1863, 273).

disguised by poetic floridity and rhetorical tinsel,” wrote Engels in the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* of February 1849. Lamartine represented the February revolution with “its imaginary results, its delusions, its poetry, and its big words” (Engels 1978, 10:356). Marx waxed surprisingly poetic himself in his critique of the Lamartinian illusion.

Lamartine was the imaginary picture which the bourgeois republic had of itself, the exuberant, fantastic, visionary conception which it had formed of itself, the dream of its own splendour. It is quite remarkable what one can imagine! As Aeolus unleashed all the winds from his bag, so Lamartine set free all spirits of the air, all the phrases of the bourgeois republic, and he blew them towards the east and the west, empty words of the fraternity of all nations, of the impending emancipation of all the nations by France and of France’s sacrifice for all the nations. (Marx 1978, 7:480)

The “tender philanthropical tunes” (Marx 1849) of the soft-soaping Aeolian windbag were so frequently cited that Lamartine became virtually a Marxian rhetorical figure for a problematic conception of the common, and remained so, still savored in 1885 by Engels as “the eloquent Lamartine, the Foreign Minister who was so readily moved to tears” (Engels 1885). Although Marx theoretically distrusted Lamartine because of his bourgeois identifications, Richard Sennett claims that Lamartine’s ability to mobilize a cult of personality around his poetic eloquence was a threatening rival to the power of class struggle: “Marx made an appalling error in dismissing the ‘poetry and fine phrases’ of this revolutionary moment [1848] as irrelevant to the ‘real struggle,’ because it was poetry and fine phrases which defeated the class struggle” (1992, 230).

Certainly within Marx’s writings, the treatment of Lamartine is indicative of a larger tendency to associate the romantic with the illusory, as in his 1843 letter to Arnold Ruge, in which “illusion” is presented as a synonym for “romantic belief” (Marx 1975a, 1:396). He linked romanticism with an obfuscatory, poetic defense of property, asserting that “[t]he landowner lays stress on the noble lineage of his property, on feudal souvenirs or reminiscences, the poetry of recollection, on his romantic disposition, on his political importance, etc.” (Marx 2008, 66) and referring to “the landowner’s romantic illusions—his alleged social importance and the identity of his interest with the interest of society” (64). The romantic liberal fallacy, in which every man’s private domain is his castle, extended for Marx to the contemporary medievalist vogue for the architecture of feudal oppression: “Romantic castles were the workshops” (67) of “baseness, cruelty, degradation, prostitution, infamy, anarchy, and rebellion” (67).

Even in cases in which romantic harmonian or social mimetic paradigms did not lead to an implicit or explicit defense of property, as in Pierre-Joseph Proudhon’s famous 1840 notion of property as theft, they shared an underlying engagement with the imitative and appropriative dynamics of the common. In France, the movement of “social romanticism” was, as I have argued in *Trauma and Its Representations: The Social Life of Mimesis in Post-Revolutionary France*, a moment of departure from purely aesthetic conceptions of mimesis or representation, in favor of the extension of artistic concepts of likeness to contiguous political and social domains involving similitude, such as equality (Jenson 2001). French romanticism valorized likeness as

instrumental in the social and political fields, not least through the contagious effect of literary representation on the self-representation of communities. It privileged Utopian socialist modalities and tropes of likeness including similitude, unity, emulation or competitive imitation, passionate attraction, and analogy. In this, French romanticism anticipated some of the current anthropologically inspired definitions of mimesis by scholars including Gunther Gebauer and Christoph Wulf, who explore Walter Benjamin's concept of nonsensuous similarity in terms of the subject's necessary social and developmental mimetic internalization of an "outside." For them, the

human being is not bound and restricted by instinct to a single environment. Its nonspecialized impulse structure is directed toward the external world and crystallizes itself only in interaction with the world, through the images, sounds, smells, and touch sensations of its perception. The external world penetrates into the internal one and establishes itself there, causing wishes and needs to take shape in the process. They blend irretrievably with phenomena coming in from the outside. (Gebauer and Wulf 1995, 275)

Although Marx initially had been favorably disposed to the thought of the Saint-Simonians and other French socialists, his ultimate renunciation of romanticism, and his scorn for the French romantics, had a determining influence on his conception of the community. Harmonian thought in French romanticism valorized analogical thinking in fields as varied as mathematics and theology, which were merged in the abbé Lacuria's *The Harmonies of the Divine Being Expressed in Numbers*, and economics, as in Frédéric Bastiat's 1850 *Economic Harmonies*. Marx uncharitably dismissed the economic harmonies of Bastiat as the musings of the "dwarf economist" (Marx 2007, 94); he argued against Proudhon's insistence on the primary role of competition in the economic field; he was wary of what Engels would later call the "social poetry" of the Saint-Simonians, and to a lesser degree, of Charles Fourier's plan to establish a new cottage industry of analogy production as well as his founding of communal living institutions based on principles of passionate attraction, such as the phalanstère.

Proudhon's 1846 *The Philosophy of Poverty* had proposed, as Marx saw it, that competition, and competitive emulation (following Fourier), were "a necessity of the human soul" (Marx and Engels 1908, 211). In 1847 Marx reconfigured Proudhon's title in the neat parodic anagram *The Poverty of Philosophy*—the perfect model of critical counterimitation. Competitive emulation was a principle Engels already had warned against in the *Outlines of a Critique of Political Economy*: "Subjective competition—the contest of capital against capital, labor against labor, etc.—will under these conditions be reduced to the spirit of emulation grounded in human nature" (Engels 1844, 54).

One might contend that Proudhon was privileging a fetishism of the common itself, rather than the commodity, in his discussion of mimetic competition. Proudhon was fascinated, like Lamartine, by what could possibly lead people to compete for the common elements: "The sun, the air, and the sea are *common*: pleasure taken in these objects represents the highest possible degree of communism" (Proudhon 1867, 2:262).⁴ This location of communism within enjoyment of the commonality of the

4. All translations from Proudhon are mine.

elements led Proudhon to describe community as indefinable: that which shines on one, after all, cannot describe one. After noting that only “immense distance, impenetrable depths, and perpetual instability” could possibly have made these common elements “subject to being appropriated,” he concluded that “property is whatever can be defined” whereas “community is what eludes definition” (2:262). If a resource is truly common to all, in other words, its identity cannot be circumscribed by the members of its community, who are simply the universal boundlessness of its presence and availability. What, he asked, after establishing this indefinability of community, “could the point of departure of communism” be (2:262)?

The common in Proudhon to a certain degree resembles the common in Marx, to the extent that it has little truck with false universalism. Those who share in the common do not thereby share a universal identity. To the contrary, they simply share a role as phenomenological witnesses of common elements; they may participate in competitive trends in their uses.

Proudhon, after the publishing skirmish with Marx on the philosophy of poverty and the poverty of philosophy, would return to problems of appropriation in several areas. In *De la justice dans la révolution et dans l'église*, he invoked a chiasmic relationship between pleasure, appropriation, and community: “All pleasure in effect involves an appropriation, and all appropriation involves a community” (1858, 204). Unlike Lamartine, who saw this omnipresent appropriative human activity as presupposing property, Proudhon was intent on preventing the reduction of mimetic appropriation to property. In his book on the problem of perpetual copyright, *Les Majorats littéraires*, first published in 1862, he blasted the legislative movement to appropriate the contents of the mind, the movement of ideas, as property. Although he agreed with contemporaries like Frédéric Passy that human beings are active, willful, intelligent, and fatally oriented toward appropriation, he utterly disagreed that appropriation was therefore sovereign, or that it could serve as a naturalization of intellectual property laws. Instead, he ironically defended the rights of “counterfeiters, imitators, copiers, quoters [*citeurs*], and commentators” to vie with “the supposedly original authors” in the economy of thought, in a literary marketplace without property holders (1868, 98).

Why, then, was Marx so insistently ironic with regard to Proudhon and so many other French romantic socialists? One way to account for Marx’s wholesale critique of likeness and social appropriation as the ground of the common relates to his distrust of the transformation of the “real collision” of historical material conditions into romantic harmony.

The Atomistic Common

Marx had been preoccupied by the notion of collisions since his 1841 doctoral thesis on Epicurean philosophy and the declination of atoms. Was Democritus right in his theory that the “vortex resulting from the repulsion and collision of the atoms” was “the substance of necessity,” and that the repulsion revealed “only the material side, the fragmentation, the change, and not the ideal side, according to which all relation to something else is negated”? (Marx 1841). Marx’s attraction to Epicurean

thought was clearly a movement away from the potential tyrannies of religious epistemologies; in the thesis he cites Lucretius's praise of Epicurus as the voice who lifted humanity back up when it lay "crushed to the earth under the dead weight of religion whose grim features loomed menacingly upon mortals."

In the *Notebooks on Epicurean Philosophy*, he noted Lucretius's view of the relation among atoms as an uproarious and hostile contest, a vision he seems to evoke fondly: "The formation of combinations of atoms, their repulsion and attraction, is a noisy affair. An uproarious contest, a hostile tension, constitutes the workshop and the smithy of the world" (Marx 1975b). In his *Notes for a Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, Marx also specifically connected disaggregated social atoms with political class activity: "These multitudes, or this aggregate not only *appears* but everywhere really is an aggregate dispersed into its atoms; and when it appears in its political-class activity, it must appear as this atomistic thing" (Marx 1843).

It is in Marx and Engels's 1844 *Holy Family* that we learn that, in Marx's work on Epicurean thought and Hegel's philosophy of right, an implicit rejection of Philippe Buonarroti's idea of the aggregated atoms of communism was also at stake. The Italian Utopian socialist Buonarroti, whose career in France included a plot with Babeuf under the Directory and the founding of the Masonic group "The Sublime Perfect Masters," and who influenced French socialist revolutionaries such as Auguste Blanqui, had theorized that communism necessarily bound together the selfish atoms of society. Marx and Engels associate communism in France with Buonarroti's project of a "new world order" in France after the July Revolution of 1830, in which the "pure egoism of the nation," complemented by "recognition of a supreme being," would "hold together the individual self-seeking atoms" (Marx and Engels 1845–6). French communism is thus linked to nationalist, deistic reinforcements of the ego of the "general state system," in relationship to which atoms must be bound together. Marx and Engels counter:

Speaking exactly and in a prosaic sense, the members of civil society are not *atoms*. The *specific property* of the atom is that it has no properties and is therefore not connected with beings outside it by any relationship determined by its own *natural necessity*. The atom has *no needs*, it is *self-sufficient*, the world outside it is an absolute *vacuum*, ie., is contentless, senseless, meaningless, just because the atom has *all fullness* in itself.

By contrast, members of civil society cannot be purely atomistic, since they are "egoistic human beings"—they may "inflate" themselves into self-sufficient beings, but "each of his senses compels him to believe in the existence of the world and of individuals outside him, and even his *profane* stomach reminds him every day that the world *outside* him is not empty, but is what really *fills*" (Marx and Engels 1845–6). Atomistic epistemology is necessary to protect revolutionary collectivities from the use of religious symbolism to harness aggregates of individuals to a state ego. On the other hand, anyone who believes himself to be an atom unto himself is deluded that he is not in a relationship of natural necessity to beings outside him, like a stomach to the world that fills it.

The terms of this aporia were reintroduced in 1845–6 in Marx and Engels’s critique of the anarchist Max Stirner’s conception of the sovereignty of the individual in *The German Ideology*.

“Another example,” namely, a more general example of the canonisation of the world, is the transformation of real collisions, i.e., collisions between individuals and their actual conditions of life, into ideal collisions, i.e., into collisions between these individuals and the ideas which they form or get into their heads. This trick, too, is extremely simple. As Saint Sancho earlier made the thoughts of individuals into something existing independently, so here he separates the ideal reflection of real collisions from these collisions and turns this reflection into something existing independently. The real contradictions in which the Individual finds himself are transformed into contradictions of the individual with his idea or, as Saint Sancho also expresses it more simply, into contradictions with the idea *as such*, with the holy. Thus he manages to transform the real collision, the prototype of its ideal copy, into the consequence of this ideological pretence. Thus he arrives at the result that it is not a question of the practical abolition of the practical collision, but only of *renouncing the idea of this collision*, a renunciation which he, as a good moralist, insistently urges people to carry out. (Marx and Engels 1845–6)

One can read in this parody that the atoms, allegorical of the multitude of proletarians, who are in “real collisions” with regard to other individuals and their conditions of life, risk being conflated in any subject-based paradigm into “mere contradictions and collisions of the individual with one or the other of his ideas”—or, on the other hand, with a mimetically harmonian social collectivity. Foreshadowing Althusser’s paradigm of aleatory materialism, if the real collision is reduced to the prototype of its ideal copy—a harmonious facsimile—then one could renounce the idea of the collision and therefore avert it. But Marx was intent on working with the fact that atoms collide and swerve, and that dialectics of the political and of revolution depend on these antimimetic, contingent encounters. Likeness, analogy, emulation, attraction, harmony were all inadequate paradigms to enable collision rather than union in a common place. They furthermore risked functioning as mock forces of union since it would be difficult for the source of the cognitive embrace—the harmonian subject—to distinguish between his own ideas and the multitude of individuals outside his subjective field. The real collision was the disharmony that appeared precisely where Utopian socialists had announced the imminence of harmony: “All over the world, the harmony of economic laws appears as disharmony” (Marx 1973, 886).

Similarly, the idealized plural polis of cosmopolitanism, and its intention to avoid collision and achieve Kantian “perpetual peace,” was suspect for Marx. While Marx and Engels acknowledged the “cosmopolitan” dissolution of national economic cultures in modernity, and even the yielding of “national and local literature” into “world literature,” they did so without sanctioning the implicit pluralism of a cosmic political identification as a legitimate instantiation of the communist international. Marx viewed cosmopolitanism as a kind of trick played by international money on the identity of the commodity owner, who finds himself newly minted as a cosmopolitan

through his possession of circulating commodities and his relations to other commodity owners: “As money develops into international money, so the commodity-owner becomes a cosmopolitan. The cosmopolitan relations of men to one another originally comprise only their relations as commodity-owners. Commodities as such are indifferent to all religious, political, national and linguistic barriers” (Marx 1859). Engels cited Ludwig Börne’s perception of cosmopolitanism as effete in its nonapplicability to the world of *mains d’oeuvre* (working hands); he wrote of “the shame of cosmopolitanism, which merely had impotent, more pious wishes” (Engels 1841). Engels also noted Börne’s critique of cosmopolitanism with “the words of the Cid: *Lengua sin manos, como osas fablar?* (Tongues without hands, how dare you speak?).”

The place where Marx most directly engages with an epistemology of likeness such as that which underpinned French Utopian socialism is in his view of the commodity economy and the social processes and forces that undergird it. On the one hand, he reprovingly describes the delusions of fetishism as the “social relation between men that assumes, in their eyes, the fantastic form of a relation between things” (2007, 83). On the other hand, this “misty” or religious analogical projection of the social by men onto commodities also works in the obverse sense to explain the role of mirroring in the relations of men among men: “In a sort of way, it is with man as with commodities. Since he comes into the world neither with a looking glass in hand, nor as a Fichtian philosopher, to whom ‘I am I’ is sufficient, man first sees and recognizes himself in other men. Peter only establishes his own identity by first comparing himself with Paul as a being of like kind” (61 n.1).

If commodity processes are on some level expressive of cognitive and psychological recognition of commonality among people, one might expect that likeness would be featured as a crucial ground of the common in Marxian thought as it would be later in the nineteenth century for Tarde, whose sociology attempted to “measure” the social power “of the profound need to imitate” (Tarde 1904, 73; translation mine), a need that is itself “transmitted through imitation” (210; translation mine). Instead, Marxian thought, evolving in resistance to economic harmonies and their potentially theological underwriting, prescribes a space of the common without copies. In this space of the common without copies, the international is not cosmopolitan, and poets of romantic likeness are banished. Man recognizes himself in other men, not through the mirroring of minds but in the collision that will restore, rather than take away, “every atom of freedom” (Marx 2007, 462) from the laboring multitudes.

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