

Queer Futurity and Utopian Socialism in the First International*

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In 1871, Marx wrote warmly of the revolution of the Paris Commune, describing it as an attempt to ‘storm heaven’, which, ‘even if it be crushed by the wolves, swine and vile curs of the old society – is the most glorious deed of our Party since the June insurrection in Paris’.¹ Marx’s positive assessment of the impossible heroism of the communards might seem surprising in light of interpretations of his later writings which emphasise his hostility to utopianism and suggest that he adopted a greater circumspection and reformism towards the end of his life. It also raises a more general question about Marx’s understanding of politics, and in particular about how considerations of temporality and futurity inform this politics. Marx typically disclaimed attempts to predict the future (while sometimes making them nonetheless) but questions of temporality (of acting too soon or too late, for good or ill) are important to his political writings.

In this paper I examine Marx’s attitude to the temporality of politics through a recent debate in queer theory on the politics of futurity.² Edelman’s polemic *No Future* rejects futurity and politics with it because, Edelman argues, they are both bound up with a heteronormative logic

* Prepared for the 2013 meeting of the Western Political Science Association, Los Angeles.

1 Marx, ‘To Kugelmann’.

2 Although I will be employing a number of concepts drawn from queer theory, I will have little to say about attitudes towards homosexuality in the First International, or in Marx’s own writings. As Parker points out, Marx’s work with the First International did bring him and Engels into contact with the nascent homosexual rights movement, in which the modern category of the homosexual was first being developed. In their negative response to this, Marx and Engels may have achieved the dubious distinction of being among the first homophobes in a fully modern sense. However, my argument in this paper suggests that Marx’s rejection of same-sex sexual relationships does not have the theoretical consequences (productivism and anti-performativity) which Parker attributes to it (Parker, pp. 30–32).

of ‘reproductive futurism’, which sacrifices the present in the name of a future imagined in the form of a child. In response, Muñoz seeks to reclaim the possibilities of utopian imagination through an idea of ‘queer futurity’, which scrambles the linear, developmental, temporality of reproductive futurism. Through a reading of Marx’s debates with his contemporaries in the First International, and his discussion of the Paris Commune in *The Civil War in France*, I argue that Marx, like Edelman (and indeed like Muñoz), rejects a future which merely reproduces the present, but, like Muñoz, Marx does not on this ground entirely reject thinking about and imaginatively orienting ourselves towards the future. I conclude by sketching the utopian moments within Marx’s later work that become visible in the light of Muñoz’s analysis.

What’s Wrong With Utopia?

Marx’s dislike for utopianism is well known, from the scathing criticism in *The Communist Manifesto* to his later run-ins with various shades of utopian socialist activists in the First International. ‘Scientific socialism’, indeed, became a term associated with Marxism because it was posited as the antithesis of utopian socialism.³ In assessing Marx’s attitude to utopianism, however, it is worth bearing in mind that, particularly during the period of activity of the First International, Marx was as frequently concerned with combating strands of *pragmatism* as with wild utopian fantasies. Understanding Marx’s criticism of pragmatism turns out to put his criticism of utopianism in a somewhat different light, so it is with the rejection of pragmatism that I will begin.

³ Marx largely disclaimed the term, using it only in the context of criticism of utopian socialism (Marx, *First International*, p. 337). The more general connection of Marxism with scientific socialism largely derives from the three chapters of Engels’ *Anti-Dühring* which were excerpted and widely distributed under the title *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*.

Marx develops his criticism of pragmatism against a group within the International which he calls *Realpolitiker*, primarily Lasalle and his followers. Lasalle was the pre-eminent leader of the German workers' movement just prior to the formation of the International. Marx criticized him for his plan, periodically revived by his followers, to declare the working-class movement's support for Bismark, in the belief that Bismark would, in return, grant universal suffrage in Germany and throw his support behind socialism. Marx thought this plan was as ridiculous as it sounds: 'It is a pity that Lasalle was not able to play this farce through to the end! It would have condemned him and made him look ridiculous!'⁴ It is the particular type of ridiculousness involved in this plan which is theoretically important, however, because this ridiculousness imagines itself to be supremely pragmatic, and in fact derives from a particular way of understanding political realism. This is why Marx calls Lasalle a *Realpolitiker*, a term which is scathing but not merely sarcastic.⁵

The fundamental character of the *Realpolitik* Marx criticizes is its immediate location in the present, its orientation solely towards taking action under current conditions, to playing the role of 'a saviour who promised to lead [the working class] to the promised land'.⁶ However, if the focus is only on taking action immediately, the *Realpolitiker* will only consider 'the interests lying immediately before his nose as "reality"',⁷ that is, any kind of strategic focus narrows to consider only those actions that can be taken right now. The *Realpolitiker* 'want to accommodate themselves to the existing situation.... They know that the workers' newspapers and workers' movement only exist *par la grace de la police*. So they want to take circumstances

4 Marx, *First International*, p. 149.

5 Marx, *First International*, p. 149.

6 Marx, *First International*, p. 150.

7 Marx, *First International*, p. 150.

as they are and not provoke the government.’⁸ They maintain this close connection to the existing conditions, however, without giving up the desire to perform a heroic revolutionary act, ‘a direct act on behalf of the proletariat’.⁹ *Realpolitiker* thus systematically misunderstand the current situation in order to sustain their fantasies of direct intervention in to it. Hence the syllogism behind Lasalle’s plan: Bismark has all the power in Germany, we wish to introduce socialism in Germany, thus we must get Bismark to introduce socialism in Germany; this argument is correct within its own limited terms of reference, except for the fact that it is completely ludicrous.

Marx diagnoses in the *Realpolitiker* a paradox of political pragmatism: a supposed commitment to taking what action is possible in the circumstances that are given is the occasion for a completely fantastical estimation of these circumstances. Furthermore, it is this fantasy which underwrites the ‘(supposed) immediate practicability’ of the pragmatist program, and so is essential to its justification.¹⁰ *Realpolitik* must therefore insist on the possibility of its preferred policy, and indeed must insist that it is uniquely possible: it thus becomes doctrinaire or, in Marx’s terms, sectarian.¹¹ Insisting that your politics are justified by ‘the way things are’ leads to a dogmatic insistence on a particular ‘way things are’. Because ‘he allowed himself to be governed too much by the immediate circumstances of the day’, Lasalle, the pragmatic *Realpolitiker*, ‘fell into the same error as Proudhon, of not seeking the real basis for his agitation in the actual elements of the class movement, but of trying to prescribe the course of the

8 Marx, *First International*, p. 152.

9 Marx, *First International*, p. 152.

10 Marx, *First International*, p. 154.

11 Marx, *First International*, p. 155.

movement according to a certain doctrinaire recipe'.¹² The reference to Proudhon is striking, because it makes clear what was only implicit thus far: that the problem of pragmatism is exactly the same as what is wrong with utopianism.

To explain the the surprising claim that pragmatism and utopianism are wrong in just the same ways, I need to explain Marx's perhaps rather idiosyncratic view of what was wrong with utopian socialism. We could perhaps start with Marx's description in 1847 of Proudhon as 'both reactionary and utopian',¹³ because for Marx indeed the utopian and the reactionary go together: the problem is not that utopianism is too radical, but that it is not radical enough. Marx criticizes Proudhon for developing a complicated philosophical system which serves only to obfuscate the impossibility of the situation it desires, 'a bourgeoisie without a proletariat'.¹⁴ This system seeks to generalize the condition of the better-off under capitalism, the bourgeoisie, without realizing that this condition depends on the existence of the worst off. Proudhon's system, Marx argues, paints an idealized picture of the current situation and then presents this as an ideal to be strived for:

In requiring the proletariat to carry out such a system, and thereby to march straightway into the social New Jerusalem, it but requires in reality, that the proletariat should remain within the bounds of existing society, but should cast away all its hateful ideas concerning the bourgeoisie.¹⁵

Proudhon's 'utopia', that is, is simply a reproduction of the way things already are.

Marx distinguishes Proudhon's 'bourgeois socialism' from the 'critical-utopian socialism' of

¹² Marx, *First International*, p. 155.

¹³ Marx, *The Poverty of Philosophy*, p. 59.

¹⁴ Marx and Engels, p. 252.

¹⁵ Marx and Engels, p. 252.

Owen, Fourier, and Saint-Simon. These utopian socialists do not, like Proudhon, idealize existing society, on the contrary, 'they attack every principle of existing society', and so Marx praises their work as 'full of the most valuable material for the enlightenment of the working class'.¹⁶ However, Owen, Fourier and Saint Simon all developed their theories at a particular time, in which 'the economic situation, as they find it, does not as yet offer to them the material conditions for the emancipation of the proletariat'.¹⁷ Because of this limited historical point of view, their visions of the future are likewise limited to 'personal inventive action', the personal invention of ever more detailed 'social plans' which only have an indistinct relationship to developing social forces.¹⁸ This becomes a problem when the utopian socialists, or their followers, continue to insist on the details of these imagined utopias in a changed world which has thrown up new and more radical possibilities. In the *Communist Manifesto*, Marx's argument for this point is bound up with the narrative of progressive demystification which is one of the book's themes:

The significance of Critical-Utopian Socialism and Communism bears an inverse relation to historical development. In proportion as the modern class struggle develops and takes definite shape, this fantastic standing apart from the contest, these fantastic attacks on it, lose all practical value and all theoretical justification.¹⁹

That is, as class struggle develops, its future course also becomes more apparent, undermining the role of the utopian visionary. However, Marx abandoned this belief in the demystificatory

16 Marx and Engels, p. 255.

17 Marx and Engels, p. 254.

18 Marx and Engels, p. 254.

19 Marx and Engels, p. 255.

power of capitalism after the failure of the 1848 revolutions,²⁰ and his criticism of utopian socialism is likewise modified. In 1864, addressing the International, Marx praised Owen's cooperatives as 'great social experiments' that demonstrated the possibility of another economic organization than wage labour;²¹ but he immediately points out the limited nature of cooperatives, which can be seen in the fact that

plausible noblemen, philanthropic middle-class spouters, and even keen political economists, have all at once turned nauseously complementary to the very cooperative labour system they had vainly tried to nip in the bud by deriding it as the utopia of the dreamer, or stigmatizing it as the sacrilege of the socialist.²²

It turns out that the scale of the ambitions of the utopian socialists was not large enough, and so capitalism has caught up with their 'duodecimo editions of the New Jerusalem', and in these circumstances hanging on to these particular visions is no longer utopian, but conservative.²³ In this, the critical-utopian socialists end up in the same position as Proudhon – their visions of the future are tied too tightly to the present moment.

Marx's dismissive remark about 'not writing recipes...for the cook-shops of the future' may suggest that he rejected any speculation about the future whatsoever.²⁴ However, looking in more detail at the similarities between his criticisms of pragmatism and of utopian socialism suggests Marx's attitude to futurity was a bit more nuanced. What Marx objects to are attempts to imagine the future which are constrained by present circumstances and which fail

20 Balibar, p. 54.

21 Marx, *First International*, p. 79.

22 Marx, *First International*, p. 80.

23 Marx and Engels, p. 256.

24 Marx, *Capital*, p. 99.

to recognize this constraint; such attempts at utopian imagination pick some aspect of the present and dogmatically project this into the future (as with Proudhon's attachment to competition or Owen's to cooperatives). Such 'utopian' imagination fails to appreciate the scale and radicality of change required to bring about a communist future.²⁵ Marx's objection is to this limited form of futural imagination, not to thinking about the future *tout court*, as can be seen by the quite detailed 'manifesto' of reform proposals that Marx put forward in a report to the International's first congress. Here Marx sets out the hours of work which should be legally permitted, the structure of work and schooling for children, the role of cooperative labour and trade unions, tax policy, and the International's position on German foreign policy.²⁶

The ambition of these proposals is striking, and might lead to them being called 'utopian' in the everyday, pejorative, sense. It seems to me that Marx could have put forward two different defences against this charge, in order to differentiate his own proposals from the utopian socialism he rejected. One would be to insist on the provisional character of these proposals, that they are not fully worked-out 'recipes', but hints at a future which we cannot know in any detail. Marx's other possible defence would be in many ways the opposite of this, in which he would insist on the scientific character of his proposals and thus the greater accuracy of the predictions contained in them. Marx himself showed sympathy for both of these incompatible views at different times, and I will discuss the tension between them shortly.²⁷ The question of how Marx might have explained his attitude to futurity, however, masks the prior question of what exactly this attitude *was*. We have seen that Marx did not object to attempts to

²⁵ Marx, *First International*, p. 80.

²⁶ Marx, *First International*, pp. 87–94.

²⁷ Engels, on the other hand, preferred the latter 'scientific' justification, which thus became the orthodox Marxist position.

imaginatively project the future in all cases; what he objected to was the limited imagination which saw the future as simply an extension of the same, which turns the sincere revolutionary desire of an Owen or a Fourier into an attempt ‘to secure, in the form of the future, the order of the same’.²⁸ That is, Marx’s objection to utopian socialism is an objection to what Edelman calls ‘reproductive futurism’; at the same time, however, Marx seems to desire, and hint at the possibility of, something else: a non-reproductive futurism.

Futurism and Reproduction

‘Reproductive futurism’ is the term Edelman coins to describe, in order to reject, a fundamental logic of our modern, heteronormative, society. This logic Edelman argues, underpins every aspect of this society, but one site to which it is particularly tightly bound – importantly both for Edelman’s purposes and for mine – is politics. Reproductive futurism insists on the absolute value of the future by figuring the future in terms of the idealized child of heterosexual reproduction. That is, for reproductive futurism the future must be preserved and defended because the future is the space in which the child will arrive in order to fulfil and provide meaning to the heterosexual reproductive logic of the present. Reproductive futurism insists on the logic of a narrative wherein history unfolds as the future envisioned for a Child who must never grow up.... The Child, that is, marks the fetishistic fixation of heteronormativity, an erotically charged investment in the rigid sameness of identity that is central to the compulsory narrative of reproductive futurism.²⁹

The term ‘identity’ is doing double duty for Edelman here to denote both reproductive

²⁸ Edelman, p. 151.

²⁹ Edelman, p. 21.

futurism's logic of the future as endless reproduction of the same, and personal or group identity as the way in which this self-identical sameness is subjectivised. It is because queerness disrupts this kind of identity that queerness, for Edelman, is the category that undermines reproductive futurism: 'Where futurism always anticipates, in the image of an Imaginary past, a realization of meaning that will suture identity by closing that gap, queerness undoes the identities through which we experience ourselves as subjects.'³⁰

The disruption of identity is also the reason why, Edelman argues, queerness is necessarily and resolutely anti-political. For Edelman, all politics is identity politics and as such can only reinforce reproductive futurism: there can be no political opposition to reproductive futurism.³¹ 'Politics', Edelman writes, 'remains, at its core, conservative insofar as it works to *affirm* a structure, to *authenticate* social order, which it then intends to transmit to the future in the form of its inner child.'³² Politics as Edelman construes it is always at least implicitly teleological, in that it draws its justification from the state of affairs it intends to bring about. Politics thus sacrifices the present for the sake of the future, and its justification lies in the displacement of the parent by the child – that is, reproductive futurism. The 'ethical'³³ demand placed on queerness is to reject reproductive futurism and so to reject politics: 'We do not intend a new politics, a better society, a brighter tomorrow, since all these fantasies reproduce the past, through displacement, in the form of the future.'³⁴

In order, then, to think through how Edelman's rejection of reproductive futurism might

³⁰ Edelman, p. 24.

³¹ Edelman, p. 24.

³² Edelman, pp. 2–3.

³³ Edelman, p. 3.

³⁴ Edelman, p. 31.

help us understand Marx's attitude to futurity, it is helpful to pause at this question of politics. Marx undertook a critique of politics, but it is a critique which is not quite a rejection, but rather attempts to reconfigure the concept of politics and undermine its supposed autonomy. Can politics, so reconfigured, be disentangled from reproductive futurism? Marx undertakes this critique of politics in his early work, which leads to his identification of the separation of politics and material circumstances as a 'practical illusion'.³⁵ This connection between politics an illusion or appearance continues in the *Communist Manifesto*, in which Marx figures a potential proletarian politics as the presence of a future which is unclear or unknown. This future exists in the present in 'its blurred lineaments', as Jameson puts it.³⁶ This undermines the linear logic which Edelman sees as essential to politics, first because the future here is not fixed or determined and second, and perhaps more significantly, because the future as understood here is not something separate from the present in the name of which the present is sacrificed, but rather exists, in an uncanny or spectral form, within the present. The politics associated with such a spectral futurity, then, is not a politics of identity oriented towards the stabilization and perpetuation of a (presumed) self-sufficient subjectivity. Is Marx's politics, then, a politics oriented towards futurity which does not endorse a *reproductive* futurism? It is difficult to tell from the *Manifesto*, in part because Marx's conception of politics in the text is not clear, and also because the development of this spectral politics occurs alongside statements which appear much more determinist. Marx continues to develop his thinking on this issue, however, as I shall go on to explain. Before turning to Marx's mature work, however, it will be useful to canvas another theory of non-reproductive futurism, developed by Muñoz.

³⁵ Marx, *Early Writings*, p. 107.

³⁶ Jameson, p. 59.

Muñoz begins with a position which may seem quite close to that of Edelman, a rejection of ‘straight time’. Straight time is ‘an autonaturalizing temporality’ in which ‘the only futurity promised is that of reproductive majoritarian heterosexuality’.³⁷ While the similarity to Edelman’s rejection of reproductive futurism is clear, the difference lies in Muñoz’s criticism of straight time for offering only *one* future. For Edelman, ‘reproductive futurism’ seems to be a pleonasm, in that all futurism is reproductive, and so a rejection of reproductive futurism entails a rejection of the future *tout court*. For Muñoz, on the other hand, to reject reproductive futurism is ‘to speak for a notion of queer futurity’, to attempt to discover a different *kind* of futurity.³⁸ Furthermore, Muñoz argues that the present is not, as Edelman thinks, an alternative to reproductive futurism, but is rather deeply implicated in straight time: ‘Straight time tells us that there is no future but the here and now of our everyday life.’³⁹ Straight time is the time of an ever-reproduced present, and so ‘the present, which is almost exclusively conceived through the parameters of straight time, is a self-naturalizing endeavour.’⁴⁰ Straight time renders the present and future equally static within a time that monotonously reproduces the same.

This naturalization is also a problem with some ways of conceiving of utopia. Muñoz follows Bloch in distinguishing between abstract and concrete utopias.⁴¹ ‘Abstract’ and ‘concrete’ here do not refer to the visions of utopia proposed by the theories, indeed, the descriptions of abstract utopias may well be much more detailed and fully realized than concrete utopias. What

37 Muñoz, p. 22.

38 Muñoz, p. 22.

39 Muñoz, p. 22.

40 Muñoz, p. 28.

41 Muñoz, p. 3.

makes abstract utopias abstract is that they are developed in abstraction from the present, without any connection to tendencies or movements existing within the present. Because of this, the imaginative effort involved in constructing abstract utopias risks naturalizing the present by presenting a purely fantastical alternative, thereby creating the impression that there is no alternative to the present except for an impossible fantasy. Concrete utopias, on the other hand, are 'relational to historically situated struggles',⁴² that is, they develop out of the hopes and practices of present movements. Because they focus on the relationship of present and future, concrete utopias do not present a fully developed image of the future untethered from presently visible potentialities. 'Utopia is not prescriptive; it renders potential blueprints of a world not quite here, a horizon of possibility, not a fixed schema.'⁴³

Utopias of the sort that Muñoz wants to revalorise are images of potential futures which exist because of potentialities within the present; that is, utopian futures are indeterminate because, and in order to demonstrate that, the present is itself also indeterminate.⁴⁴ Muñoz illustrates this with the utopian imagery spun out of an everyday drink of Coke in a poem by O'Hara and a drawing by Warhol: 'Both queer culture workers,' Muñoz writes, 'are able to detect an opening and indeterminacy in what for many people is a locked-down dead commodity.'⁴⁵ This locked-down dead commodity is, more generally, the present as conceptualized by straight time, and the task of queer futurity, 'a mode of being and feeling that was then not quite there but nonetheless an opening',⁴⁶ is to break this locked-down present

42 Muñoz, p. 3.

43 Muñoz, p. 97.

44 Muñoz, p. 3.

45 Muñoz, p. 9.

46 Muñoz, p. 9.

into a more indeterminate one in which the blurred lineaments of the future can be seen. Muñoz draws on C. L. R. James's idea of the 'future in the present', in which the task of radical theorists is to view the present in such a way as to see within it 'outposts of a new society'.⁴⁷ Muñoz's queer utopianism, then, is a kind of non-reproductive futurism which allows us to clarify the relationship to futurity Marx was struggling to develop in his later political writings.

Marx's Utopia

Marx rejects what he calls utopian socialism because it posits, as a future, a repetition of the present which is also supposed to redeem the present. That is, Marx rejects what Edelman calls reproductive futurism, and what Muñoz calls straight time. But what role does an alternative understanding of the future hold in Marx's understanding of political activity? The best place in his work to turn to to see this is his discussion of the Paris Commune in *The Civil War in France*. In his presentation, the Commune functions as something like a concrete utopia, an image of the ways in which a present movement is moving beyond the present. We can see this in the way Marx describes the Commune as denaturalising the present, that is, throwing the present into a state of contingency. After the Commune took power in Paris, Marx writes, 'Europe seemed, for a moment, to doubt whether its recent sensational performances of state and war had any reality in them, or whether they were the dreams of a long bygone past.'⁴⁸ This dreamlike present is deprived of certainty and is thus deprived of its appearance of assured reproduction from a past into a future which are both the same. That is to say, part of what

⁴⁷ Muñoz, p. 55.

⁴⁸ Marx, *First International*, p. 201.

makes the Commune function as a political intervention is the way it *produces* this temporal disordering: from the point of view of the commune, the present seems to have always already been contingent and open to radical political interventions and innovations. The Commune creates its utopianism immediately and immanently, rather than projecting it in the form of blueprints which are as distant as they are dogmatic.⁴⁹

This attempt to denaturalise the present in order to open up a potential future also involves redrawing the relationship of present to past. While the Commune consigns the bourgeois present to an atavistic past, it brings a proletarian present back to fearsome presence:

‘The men of order’, the reactionists of Paris, trembled at the victory of 18 March. To them it was the signal of popular retribution at last arriving. The ghosts of the victims assassinated at their hands from the days of June 1848 down to 22 January 1871, arose before their faces.⁵⁰

Marx refers elsewhere to this re-actualisation of the past as ‘working class martyrology’.⁵¹

Muñoz likewise refers to the ‘queer utopian memory’ which mourns the people and lifeworlds lost to AIDS by holding the memory of pre-AIDS gay culture as an opening to future possibilities, ‘casting a picture of *what can and perhaps will be*’.⁵² What is being rejected here is

49 Marx expresses this immanence in a ringingly rhetorical passage: ‘The real women of Paris showed again at the surface – heroic, noble and devoted, like the women of antiquity. Working, thinking, fighting, bleeding Paris – almost forgetful, in its incubation of a new society, of the cannibals at its gates – radiant in the enthusiasm of its historic initiative!’ (Marx, *First International*, p. 220). The use of the term ‘incubation’ here does suggest a reproductive metaphor, made all the more heteronormative by its appearance in a discussion specifically of the role of women in the Commune (although, as ‘incubation’ refers strictly to the reproduction of birds and germs, the naturalising force of the metaphor is perhaps blunted). This is of course not the only occasion on which Marx figures the future in reproductive terms – consider the ‘birthmarks of the old society’ in the ‘Critique of the Gotha Programme’ (Marx, *First International*, p. 346) – and he evidently had no particular objection to such metaphors; but neither does he use them systematically.

50 Marx, *First International*, p. 202.

51 Marx, *First International*, p. 107.

52 Muñoz, p. 35.

straight time, or as Benjamin calls it 'homogeneous, empty time'.⁵³ In place of this straight time the Commune, for Marx, marks the beginning of the construction of a new temporality which, like the utopian aesthetic work Muñoz discusses, allows for the construction of a new future within the present.

The Paris Commune was a concrete utopia in a more literal sense than Bloch used the term: it was a political form which, through its concrete existence and practical activity, created the scrambled, non-linear temporality manifested by utopias. The Commune does more than this, however. The Commune projects a future in a particular form through its generalization of the commune form: 'The Paris Commune was, of course, to serve as a model to all the great industrial centres of France.... The commune was to be the political form of even the smallest country hamlet.'⁵⁴ Is there not something utopian about the expansive repetition involved in this plan, an echo of Fourier's calculations of the precise number and arrangement of phalansteries that would be distributed across any given territory? Here we see a form of futurism which is, as it were, hidden in plain sight in Marx's later writings, a futurity in which heterosexual reproduction is replaced by an expansion of machinic repetition. In this, the communist movement turns out to have something in common with the figure which Edelman opposes to reproductive futurism, the *sinthomosexual*.

The *sinthomosexual* (a pun on the Lacanian concept of the *sinthome*, or symptom) is Edelman's term for the figure onto which reproductive futurism projects the fundamental instability of its reliance on an imagined future child, and the form in which it abjects this instability. The *sinthomosexual* is the fantasy of the homosexual who heteronormativity

⁵³ Benjamin, p. 261; Edelman, p. 31.

⁵⁴ Marx, *First International*, p. 210.

imagines as a threat to its own existence.⁵⁵ The burden of Edelman's argument, and the burden he argues is placed on queers, is to accept this role of figuring the destruction of reproductive futurism, and in doing so to actually destroy it:

This, I suggest is the ethical burden to which queerness must accede in a social order intent on misrecognizing its own investment in morbidity, fetishization, and repetition: to inhabit the place of meaninglessness associated with the *sinthome*.⁵⁶

Where reproductive futurism avoids dealing with its own investment in the repetition of the same by fantasising about a child who will finally fulfil the promise of this repetition, the *sinthomosexual* insists on a repetition without goal or end. We see this in Edelman's two literary examples of the *sinthomosexual*, Ebenezer Scrooge and Silas Marner. Scrooge is figured as a *sinthomosexual* through his attachment to 'the sins of the counting house',⁵⁷ that is, the infertile increase of money in capitalist exchange, contrasted with the fertile increase represented in the child, specifically Tiny Tim. What marks Silas Marner as a *sinthomosexual* is the mechanistic action of the loom, 'a machine for producing sameness',⁵⁸ and, like Scrooge's coins, a key element of 19th century capitalism.

It is in this connection between the *sinthomosexual* and capitalism that Edelman helps us understand Marx's conception of futurity. Edelman's examples are not *sinthomosexuals* inasmuch as they are *capitalists*, so much as because they are, or personify, capital; they are 'bearers', as Marx puts it, of the ceaseless compulsion to expand which is the defining feature of

⁵⁵ Edelman, p. 39.

⁵⁶ Edelman, p. 47.

⁵⁷ Edelman, p. 42.

⁵⁸ Edelman, p. 56.

capital.⁵⁹ And it is in capital's remorseless machinic expansion that, for Marx, the future lies. It is capital's productivity which ultimately dooms it, because the more capital produces, the more it has to produce in order to continue expanding, and this need for accumulation increases faster than capital's ability to satisfy it.⁶⁰ Furthermore, in the course of this ceaseless production, capital produces the potential for a better future organisation. In the abstraction of labour produced by the subordination of workers to machines, which renders the worker suitable for any employment, we can see the blurred form of a future abstraction of labour which would produce a fully developed individual who would be *capable* of any kind of activity. Marx explains this through the testimony of a French worker's rather utopian-sounding journey to San Francisco:

I never could have believed that I was capable of working at all the trades I practised in California. I was firmly convinced that I was fit for nothing but the printing of books.... Once I was in the midst of this world of adventurers, who change their jobs as often as their shirts, then, upon my faith, I did as the others. As mining did not pay well enough, I left it for the city, and there I became in succession a typographer, a slater, a plumber, etc. As a result of this discovery that I am fit for any sort of work, I feel less of a mollusc and more of a man.⁶¹

The repetition of the sinthomosexual and the expansive circuit of capital are, perhaps, repetitions that are not reproductive, subversive repetitions of the kind identified by Butler.⁶²

These repetitions produce a destabilizing surplus. Muñoz connects this idea to Bloch, in whose

59 Marx, *Capital*, p. 254.

60 Marx, *Capital*, chap. 25.

61 Marx, *Capital*, p. 618.

62 Butler, pp. 40–2.

work

surplus becomes that thing in the aesthetic that exceeds the functionalism of capitalist flows. This supplementary value, which is at times manifest as aesthetic excess and at other times as a sort of deviance from conventional forms, conveys other modes of being that do not conform to capitalist maps of the world.⁶³

Reading Marx's work through Edelman and Muñoz suggests that these other modes of being can be glimpsed within the workings of capital itself, and that Marx, in his engagement with the First International, may have been squinting and straining to see them.

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