

Night-Labour, Social Reproduction and Political Struggle in the ‘Working Day’ Chapter of Marx’s *Capital*

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Introduction

Scholars in diverse fields including critical theory, labour history, political theory and literary criticism have long been fascinated by Marx’s account of the working day in *Capital*’s first volume. The chapter stands out within *Capital*, in part, because it is rich with empirical material. Much of this appears in sprawling footnotes where Marx quotes extensively from documents produced by 19th century English factory inspectors and newspaper stories. Marx also leavens his formal analysis of capital’s structural dynamics with abundant quotations of boy workers, the inspectors and various public figures, even as he ventriloquises the fictional, generic voices of ‘the capitalist’ and ‘the worker.’ This tension between abstract economic theory and historiographical, empirical and journalistic writing makes the text distinctive within the pages of *Capital*. Similar effects follow from the profusion of metaphorical figures for deadly monstrosity, especially vampires, and the imagery of blood, for which the volume is renowned among readers with a literary-critical bent.

Debate persists over what exactly these and other curious features of Marx’s writing in the chapter imply for the conceptual status of the working day critique within the encompassing critique of capital formation. Indeed, for some major interpreters of Marx, the chapter is only of passing significance. In his epic re-formulation of *Capital*’s argument according to a logic of dialectical

development that focusses on wage labour and time, Moishe Postone pays scant attention to Marx's critique of the working day even though Postone's main themes are the chapter's central preoccupations. For Postone, the early industrial drive to produce absolute surplus-value by elongating work-hours represents merely a transitional step on the path to capital's discovery of strategies for generating relative surplus-value by intensifying work-processes through technological advances. Postone sees the latter as inaugurating a distinctly capitalist approach to production that ultimately offers the promise of political emancipation as technology revolutionises the relation between labour-time and material abundance.¹ He thus gives the working-day critique short shrift. In a similar vein, Louis Althusser and Étienne Balibar contend that although Marx seems to endorse a distinctly empirical approach to the analysis of capitalism's constituent forces and epochal shifts in the working-day chapter, as he does again in the later sections on primitive accumulation, in fact he is up to something quite different. In their interpretation, these temporary dalliances with empirical history in *Capital* function only as heuristic illustrations that help Marx begin to unfold a *theory* of history, which is the main point of *Capital*. Grasping Marx's intention therefore requires avoiding getting distracted by the 'Working Day' chapter's excessive interest in empirical-historical details and concentrating on Marx's elaboration of his grand theory of history as a sequence of progressive developments in the composition of value.²

Authors intrigued by Marx's acute sense for empirical subtlety and writerly expression in the chapter contend, by contrast, that precisely these features of the text make it deserving of abiding interest.³ On these readings, the urgent desire to document the metastasis of workers' labour-hours, physical health problems and social degeneracies with scrupulous exactitude is no mere detour on the road to 'real theory.' Likewise, Marx's dense review of the thrusts of parliamentary initiatives to regulate the working day, the pompous moralism of humanitarian reformers, and the deft counter-thrusts by which factory owners neutralised or navigated around new legal restrictions offers something more than a long-winded exposé of the fruitlessness of bourgeois politics. To the contrary: from this perspective, which I adopt here, sparks of theory ignite from within the concrete particularities with

which the working day chapter is studied. They can illuminate social experiences and political possibilities consigned to the shadows by more commonly espied beacons of Marxian critique.

This is especially so when we attend to Marx's aghast fascination with capital's attenuations of workers' lives in the shadows of night. When we re-read the working day chapter through the lens of night-time activity, several themes congeal. Most evidently, Marx paints the night as the scene of capital's super-exploitation of workers' wage-labour and the apotheosis of capital's drive to drain every ounce of life from workers' bodies through the production process. As I shall argue, however, examining Marx's representations of nocturnal experience in this chapter brings even more dramatically to the fore a different structural consequence of capital's modernisation: the collective mortification of the working class by savagely precluding its social reproduction in physical, mental and cultural-relational terms. The interpretive optic of night-activity also focusses our view on distinct patterns of time, space and gender that characterise capital's demolition of working-class social-reproductive capacities and relations. Close reading of provocative variances between Marx's paraphrased quotations in German of English-language sources and those documents' actual texts, which editors substituted for Marx's words beginning with the first English translation of *Capital Volume 1* in 1887, help shed light on the special significance of the nocturnal for the 'Working Day' chapter.⁴

Approached as a meditation on the privations, indignities and horrors of the night, when night-labour becomes a figure for all life-experience, this peculiar stretch of *Capital* appears as much or more distressed by the damages to workers' reproductive lives as the abuses that unleash misery in the factory. This suggests the vital importance of attending (far more than Marx does) to women's work and non-work activity under capitalist domination. This exegetical angle further underscores that not merely the quantitative length but also, and more pivotally, the qualitative substance of everyday temporal experience and freedom is at stake in the constitution of the working day.

Zeroing in on the significance of night-labour, night-time and monsters of the night thus makes it possible to envision a viable trajectory for politically opposing capital's power over the working day

that resolves a deflating ambivalence about politics in Marx's writing. As I argue in this chapter's latter sections, Marx's exhaustive review of the parliamentary combat over the early 19th century English factory laws yields mixed messages about not just how but whether legal efforts to limit daily work-hours ought to be engaged by working-class movements. I believe we can find in the 'Working Day' chapter incipient impulses to broaden the notion of what it means to battle for a 'normal working day' by attending to the needs, concerns and desires connected to social reproduction. In that widening manoeuvre lies the potential for class struggle geared toward time and free activity that can transcend the Catch-22 that so troubles Marx. This is the dilemma by which bourgeois parliamentarism, aimed at fencing off certain hours of the day for capital to exploit workers' labour-power at will, can only ever lead to 'modest' legal changes that reinforce the status quo and invite socially tolerated evasions of the law. The solution hinted at in Marx's chapter, which close examination of the theme of night labour reveals, is to mount a politics seeking nothing less than freedom for the whole living-day, with all its varied activities and placing reproductive sociality decisively in the foreground.

In this way, my re-assessment of Marx provides a new and fruitful basis for placing Marx's theory into catalytic contact with defining tendencies in today's precarious economy, emerging sources of struggle among precaritised workers. The expansion and intensification of work during the wee hours has become a hallmark characteristic of precaritised work-life in the wake of neoliberal transformations. Night-labour proliferates wildly in fields ranging from platform-based transport jobs to sex work, digital 'microwork' tasking, meatpacking and logistics. In order to demonstrate the power of the Marxian analytic that I derive from reading the 'Working Day' chapter, this chapter's final section takes a close look at working conditions and workers' experiences in the rapidly expanding field of microwork, through which individuals earn tiny wage-increments by performing minute jobs accessible via online platforms such as Amazon's Mechanical Turk. This inquiry suggests that microwork is transforming working people's personal and collective lives just as dramatically, if not more so, in terms of social-reproductive activities and capacities as in the realm of productive labour. Marx's

critique of the 'Working Day,' understood as an analysis of capital's assault on working-class social reproduction, helps bring these effects into focus.

My reading of Marx and reflections on microwork accordingly underscore the need for anti-capitalist politics today to concentrate on rescuing and re-enlivening social reproductive times, spaces and relationships. Despite daunting barriers to political action faced by precaritised workers, inventive forms of political action have taken shape among them, especially following the impetus of the Covid-19 pandemic.⁵ My analysis here is sympathetic to recent interpretations of Marx that strive to unfold his theory's potential to inform not just critiques of political economy but also organised, collective political endeavours to fight capitalism. Some of the best writings in this vein, such as those by Terrell Carver, William Clare Roberts and Bruno Leipold, have underscored Marx's involvement in working-class agitation and socialist intellectual circles as crucial historical context for the development of his theory.⁶ In different ways, Roberts and Leipold show how appreciating this context makes it possible to discern distinctly republican features of Marx's thought, which in turn can re-configure our understanding of Marx's relevance to contemporary politics and political theory. In contrast to these authors, however, I think we are more likely to find new political promise in Marx's writings by tuning our ears to the features of his power-analyses that resonate most audibly with contemporary socioeconomic conditions, such as those that prevail in the expanding labour-economy of microwork, than by attempting to disclose under-appreciated elements of political philosophy in his arguments.

Inevitably, this exercise also reveals under-developed aspects of Marx's criticism of capital's despoliation of working-class social reproduction, under the sign of night-labour. A reluctance to examine women's gendered experiences and circumstances of life and labour stands out especially in this regard. Yet in a more positive sense, we can view these gaps in Marx's theory and its ability to speak to contemporary social challenges as opportunities to put Marx in new forms of dialogue with more contemporary writings in critical theory, as I do in subsequent chapters of this book.

Night-labour and the Petrification of Working-Class Reproduction

An obvious objective in Marx's 'Working Day' chapter is to shock the reader with harsh facts about capital's voracious desire to be fed by more and more hours of workers' days. On one level, the chapter certainly does aim to expose and denounce the sheer quantities of time that capital increasingly demands from its labouring masses. References to night labour repeatedly serve this purpose. Thus, we read of wage labourers required to be at their posts from '6am to 10pm or further into the night' (356),⁷ even, incredibly, to 'work from 6am on Friday to 4pm on the following Saturday' (351), as competitive pressures stiffen in the expanding capitalist economy. Marx grimaces over employers' subversions of the limits to exploitation supposedly imposed by the factory shift system, which quickly devolves into a sham to hide workers' conscription into 'round-the-clock double shifts (369). As a metaphor for capital and the capitalist, the vampire seems to many commentators intuitively to represent the demonic insatiability of capital's desire to consume more and more of the worker's vital energy and daily time.⁸ Marx validates this line of interpretation when he writes the following lines about work at night: 'The prolongation of the working day beyond the limits of the natural day, into the night, only acts as a palliative. It only slightly quenches the vampire thirst for the living blood of labour. Capitalist production therefore drives, by its inherent nature, towards the appropriation of labour throughout the whole of the 24 hours in the day' (367).

Probing Marx's specific language about capital's war on the 'natural day,' however, reveals a more complex side to his account of night-time experience. Within the chapter, Marx first uses this phrase in the opening section, 'The Limits of the Working Day,' writing:

...the working day does have a maximum limit. It cannot be prolonged beyond a certain point. This maximum limit is conditioned by two things. First by the physical limits to labour-power. Within the 24 hours of the natural day [*natürliches Tag*] a man can only expend a certain quantity of his vital force. Similarly, a horse can work regularly for only 8 hours a day. During part of the day the vital force must rest, sleep; during another part the man has to satisfy other physical

needs, to feed, wash and clothe himself. Besides these purely physical limitations, the extension of the working day encounters moral obstacles. The worker needs time in which to satisfy his intellectual and social requirements, and the extent and the number of these requirements is conditioned by the general level of civilisation (341).

As Marx unfolds his account of impediments to the working day's totalisation of all daily time, he thus modulates what is initially a quantitative-analytical perspective with more qualitative considerations. What is at stake becomes not the mere ability of life to persist, measured according to a calculus of bodily inputs and outputs, but also the kind of life one leads, particularly one's life as a social being. Marx then seems to mark this dialectical development of his notion of the 'natural day' several lines later, in a well-known passage where the vampire makes his first entrance:

But what is a working day? At all events, it is less than a natural day [*natürliches Lebenstag*]. How much less? The capitalist has his own view of this point of no return, the necessary limit of the working day. As a capitalist, he is only capital personified. His soul is the soul of capital. But capital has one sole driving force [*Lebenstrieb*], the drive to valorize itself, to create surplus-value, to make its constant part, the means of production, absorb the greatest possible amount of surplus labour. Capital is dead labour which, vampire-like, lives only by sucking living labour, and lives the more, the more labour it sucks (342).

Ben Fowkes's English translation, like the 1887 version,⁹ repeats the phrase 'natural day' and thereby obscures a significant textual moment: by subtly shifting the noun from *Tag* to *Lebenstag*, Marx underscores the transition from conceiving of time purely in abstract quantitative terms, according to the basic ideology that underpins and grows from the wage-relation, to understanding time in the form of a 'life-day' (or a 'day-for-living,' since *leben* is also a verb) and in accordance with an expansive, qualitatively and socially attuned sense for what 'life' (or 'living') and its temporality means.¹⁰ From the very start of the chapter, Marx thus signals that capital's re-construction of the working day cannot be grasped by simplistic quantitative thinking or in terms of a crude life/death dichotomy. Indeed, his

writing dialectically activates a critical progression of thought toward such sophistication on the part of the reader.

Within this critical context, what meanings do night-time, night work and creatures of the night assume? For Marx, night becomes a privileged signifier of capital's basic existential ('life') drive (*Lebenstrieb*) not just to exploit workers' labour-time but more specifically to extinguish all prospects for revolutionising daily time to re-make it as conscious 'life-time.' Night thus offers images, albeit photographic negatives that only become visible in the dark-rooms of social critique – and critical analysis of Marx's text – of the human vitality and sociality that capital crushes. More specifically, night comes to represent the contracted time, abolished space, petrified capacities and thwarted desire for human reproduction, in a broad and varied sense that includes refreshing the body, invigorating the mind, taking pleasure in diverse affective sensations, engaging in intimate and social relationships, and tending to shared efforts and environments. Most obviously, capital's conquest of the night destroys working-class reproduction in the sense of making human bodies decreasingly capable, physically, of functioning within the workforce required by industry. More fundamentally, and of crucial political importance: Marx's treatments of nocturnality in the 'Working Day' chapter can be read as alluding to the forfeiture of social-reproductive life in cultural and relational terms under capitalism as well as the possibility of a 'life-day' in the future that is defined by pursuits other than work. The chapter, that is, exudes a nascently post-work sensibility, when we read it with sufficient care.

Bodily rest, physical nourishment, clean air, hygienic conditions of ordinary activity: night labour [*Nachtarbeit*], for Marx, denies workers every one of these corporeal reproductive essentials. Again, it is easiest to read Marx's enumeration of these woes, replete with empirical references and heart-rending quotations, as documenting workers' bodily-functional debilitation and thereby laying an empirical foundation for politically galvanising moral condemnation, especially since most of the workers are children. Regarding working children's sleep deprivation, Marx quotes the following phrases from a news story about the lace industry:

Children of nine or ten years are dragged from their squalid beds at two, three, or four o'clock in the morning and compelled to work for a bare subsistence until ten, eleven, or twelve at night, their limbs wearing away, their frames dwindling, their faces whitening, and their humanity absolutely sinking into a stone-like torpor, utterly horrible to contemplate' (353).

A nine-year-old boy's testimony about going without sleep for two full days as he laboured in a pottery factory follows (354). Then Marx quotes two managers from a wallpaper manufacturing company: 'J. Leach's deposition: "Last winter six out of nineteen girls were away from ill-health at one time from over-work. I have to bawl at them to keep them awake." W. Duffy: "I have seen when the children could none of them keep their eyes open for the work; indeed, none of us could"' (356). Relentlessly, Marx underscores that the workers whose deplorable fates he is discussing are children. The chapter's excruciating focus on child labour partly serves as a tactic for heightening the text's affective impact and hence its ability to politicise readers, according to the dynamic of performative outrage that Claudia Leeb perceptively discerns.¹¹

At the same time, making children central to the story helps Marx make the case that the collective future is at stake, in a sense that transcends both the physical experiences of individuals and the functional ability of the industrial apparatus to produce the material means of human life. For Marx, all humanity is 'sinking' into a mass grave as capital takes command of the night. Marx drives this point home explicitly, quoting physicians who describe potters as 'a degenerated population,' with 'each successive generation' more sickly and stunted than the preceding one, prone to 'become prematurely old' and 'certainly short-lived' (355). Given the bourgeois class's material dependence for its own means of living on the production executed by workers, in turn, this general decline of working-class bodily vigour and health can only spell peril for society's elites. To be sure, the focus in this passage stays on physical capabilities and aggregate tendencies. Yet by inviting reflection on collective futurity, Marx also intimates the desirability of a more complex indictment of night-work and the socioeconomic system that has made nocturnal labour so definitive of human experience.

When Marx describes the physical environs in which factory workers labour through the nights, he both extends his catalogue of the evils that destroy working people's health, vitality and longevity and signals more clearly that what is lost cannot be fully understood through quantifiable measures of wellness. He points to the ways that night work dissolves crucial temporal and spatial contexts for the flourishing of human sociality. Describing workers' forlorn attempts to find spots where they can catch a bit of sleep on the job, Marx offers vivid and painful images of this process, as in this quotation from a factory inspector's report:

'The work of a London journeyman baker begins, as a rule, at about eleven at night. At that hour he "makes the dough"... He then lies down upon the kneading-board, which is also the covering of the trough in which the dough is "made"; and with a sack under him, and another rolled up as a pillow, he sleeps for about a couple of hours. He is then engaged in a rapid and continuous labour for about five hours...' (359-60).

The vision of the baker stretched out on his hard-wood work surface, badly cushioned by scratchy sacks, suggests the common Marxian theme of the worker's reduction to nothing more than a commodity through his own alienated and self-alienating labour. The image also graphically reinforces the working-day chapter's insistent condemnation of the physical suffering that mounts for workers as capital tightens its grip on their nocturnal hours. Yet this tableau also does something more, especially when considered in association with parallel passages nearby. In one, a nine-year-old boy mill worker reports: "Slept on the floor of the furnace, over head, with an apron under me, and a bit of a jacket over me" (369). Another describes the bleak circumstances in which a twenty-year-old milliner had met her 'deathbed':

'Mary Anne Walkley had worked uninterruptedly for 26 ½ hours, with sixty other girls, thirty in each room. The rooms provided only 1/3 of the necessary quantity of air, measured in cubic feet. At night the girls slept in pairs in the stifling holes into which a bedroom was divided by wooden partitions' (364-65).

Tersely citing raw facts and figures, echoing the clinical recitation of the baker's hour-by-hour activities, and symbolically substituting sacks, jackets and aprons for blankets and pillows, these lines hammer on the theme of the stupefying *extent* to which workers' *exploitation and mortification* increases with the spread of night work. By depicting workplaces as sites for the uncanny epiphany of activities that should be taking place at *home*, however, these passages further evoke an awareness that night work destroys the spatial, temporal and familial infrastructure for workers' existences as social beings and as people engaged in relationships of mutual care. Marx's repeated expressions of dismay at workers being forced to eat on the job add to this effect, as when he associates match factory workers' *Nachtarbeit* with 'irregular meal-times, and meals mostly taken in the workrooms themselves, pestilent with phosphorus' (356). What expires on the nocturnal work-site 'deathbed,' in other words, is not only the tormented body of the individual worker. It is also the social-relational living tissue of working-class reproduction.

Reading Marx's original texts for *Capital* with an eye toward translation issues underscores further the sense in which the chapter is crucially concerned with not only workers' hyper-exploitation but also, and more centrally, the destruction of working-class social-reproductive contexts and capacities. Above, I have quoted Fowkes's translation of the passage on the milliner. Yet consider Marx's language and italicisations in the last sentence above from the 1867 edition: '...während Sie Nachts zwei zu zwei *Ein* Bett theilten in einem Sticklöcher, worin *Ein* Schlafzimmer durch verschiedene Bretterwände abgepfurcht ist.'¹² By italicising and repeating the word 'Ein,' Marx calls attention to the massification of the working class: the extinguishing of all individual distinction and the emergence of a unified, although internally utterly alienated and abused, working-class entity, as labouring bodies are conscripted into the service of capital. The textual context, rich with classical literary metaphor, enhances this signficatory manoeuvre. Just before it, Marx twice cites the *Odyssey*. First, he ridicules the idea that human beings could withstand the gruelling labour demanded of them, writing: 'They are ordinary men, not Cyclops' (363). Then, Marx draws from the *Odyssey* an allegorical image for the homogenisation of workers' individual specificities under capitalism:

From the motley crowd of workers of all callings, ages and sexes, who throng around us more urgently than did the souls of the slain around Ulysses, on whom we see at a glance the signs of over-work, without referring to the Blue Books under their arms, let us select two more figures, whose striking contrast proves that all men are alike in the face of capital – a milliner and a blacksmith (364).

Marx's allusion to the Cyclops does more than evoke an image of the inhumanly prodigious capacity to work for which these ancient monsters were renowned. It also recalls Odysseus's dramatic and ironic declaration of his identity as 'Nobody!' in the episode from Homer, thereby further underscoring the theme that night-labour ruthlessly strips the worker of all personal distinction, which Marx then articulates explicitly by referring to the hero's descent into Hades. Even more crucially, however, this passage represents the problem of collective alienation as a phenomenon of the reproductive sphere, in the way that it fixes the spotlight on the milliners. The image of working-class people in the section on the milliners' cramped and fetid sleeping quarters offers a picture of *reproductive life* rather than *productive activity*. The iconic scene depicts individual workers dissolved into one tormented and exhausted collective body in the squalor of their futile attempts to rest and regenerate, in the beds where young women lie 'two by two' with one another rather than with husbands, behind a flimsy partition on the factory floor instead of in a bedroom at home. In this paragraph, Marx does not emphasise how the labour process regiments and deploys the proletariat as an army of production whose soldiers single-mindedly fulfil their orders under the imperious command of the factory's generals, as he does in subsequent chapters.¹³ The accent instead falls on the dynamic by which night-labour sets the scene for the working class's massification by cancelling the temporal, spatial, bodily and social-relational conditions for working people's personal and common reproduction.¹⁴

Obviously, the tableau of the sleeping milliners is also gendered feminine, notwithstanding Marx's claim that the milliner-blacksmith comparison shows how gender and sexual differences disappear in the nights of labour. This further enhances the passage's capacity to suggest a reproduction-

focussed critique of capitalism that breaches the limits of Marx's own critical imagination. The contrast with *Capital's* later military figuration of the proletariat in the factory (549) underscores the feminine gendering of the milliner scene's representation of the working class in the thrall of domination. Moreover, although an anti-feminist reading of the passage as implying the need to rescue working-class familism and re-install women in their proper places at home might seem plausible, such an interpretation seems forced in light of Marx's stirring invitation to visualise how working-class women and men, without distinction, surrender their 'life-day' to capital's rule. The problem, for Marx, is not the dissolution of gender as such. It is the wholesale destruction of the life-times and life-zones for working-class reproduction. True, Marx uses feminine imagery to signify the obliteration of working people's family homes, reiterating the historical gendering of home-life as women's special domain. Yet the gesture does not necessarily recommend the restitution of working-class womanly domesticity, which, for Marx, never actually cohered with the bourgeois ideal in any case.

Of course, the passage lacks critical investigation of women's work outside the factory. Reading the text today with the benefit of extensive and rich Marxist feminist analysis of reproductive labour in households, which I take up in the next chapter, the need for an enlarged critique of 'the working day' that encompasses such labour by women seems obvious. As Kathi Weeks puts it, critical theorists of work should 'attend adequately to the entire working day' including 'unwaged reproductive labor' to perform 'housework, consumption work, child care, and elder care.'¹⁵ Marx's chapter leaves these kinds of activity unexamined and may even obscure them inasmuch as he rhetorically constructs night work as obliterating all domestic reproductive functions.

Nevertheless, the text directs a stern and persistent gaze at the gap where the reproductive life-day should be. It also tends to effect gender's tenacious and poetic appearance even while trying to spirit it away. These textual features can and should be taken by critical theorists today as indicators that the politics of struggle around social reproduction and work done by women are urgently in need of critical development. A brief, comparative look at Roberts's argument can elucidate further what I

mean in this regard. The Marxist-feminist theoretical and practical challenge for critical theory that I have just articulated seems to elude Roberts. This is not surprising given his lack of attention to social-reproductive dynamics and his exclusive focus on exploitation through wage labour to produce commodities in the 'Working Day' chapter. Regarding the milliner who succumbs to her job's lethal conditions, Roberts concludes: 'Recognizing the concrete form of her exploitation does not require any special theoretical apparatus, but only the acknowledgment that her employer took advantage of Ms. Walkley. Recognizing that it is an instance of capitalist exploitation requires, however, that one recognize her membership in a class of exploited laborers and recognize further that it does not matter what or in what manner the members of that class produce' (Roberts 2017, 124-25). Roberts is surely right that political considerations were crucial for Marx as he wrote *Capital*, and that he did so in ways that sought 'to carry his own critical theory into the workers' socialist movement,' especially 'by giving to exploitation a new center of gravity' in the system of 'capitalist production' rather than in a specific group of exploiters (143). Yet recognising and grappling critically with the special roles of certain groups and populations of working people in producing the material, cultural and inter-relational conditions of human social life and productive capacity matters a great deal to grasping how capitalist domination works and imagining how to contest it politically. If *Capital* remains of live political interest and import today, this is not only due to insights Marx achieved whilst embroiled in the political tussles of his time, worthy though these may well be of critical re-appraisal. It is also because of the text's capacity for incubating new dynamics of critique beyond those that Marx pursued most avidly and made salient by subsequent historical conditions. Marx's disinclination to think in these directions notwithstanding, concerns about social reproduction seem to have irrepressibly asserted themselves in the 'Working Day' chapter. They call for our studious attention and imaginative fortification.

Night-labour, the temporal commons and the vampire

Marx's complex elaboration of the many aspects of social-reproductive attenuation for workers comes through even more powerfully when we notice how he handles the temporal elements of this destructive process. On the one hand, as I have emphasised, the chapter on the working day highlights capital's enclosure of working people's social-reproductive spaces and the uncanny, immeasurably sad displacement wage labour's physical domain of reproductive activities, in the broadly inclusive sense that I have sought to evoke in the previous section. Marx fortifies this line of critique still further, and intensifies the ambivalent gender-dynamics I have observed, when he twins his image of the sleeping milliners with this obverse optic in a nearby footnote: 'If a dressmaker can get a little circle of customers, such is the competition that, in her home, she must work to the death to hold it together, and this same over-work she must of necessity inflict on any who may assist her' (365). Just as reproductive life is displaced into the workplace, so likewise, wage labour and its exploitative social relations are re-located into the home and re-shape the home-space, making it serve value-creation in an additional, more direct way than the regeneration of labour-power. The lurid language in the original German adds a flourish that goes missing in the translation: 'inflict' renders the verb *heimsuchen* which can connote haunting, thus reinforcing the theme that the pallor of death, so palpable in the factory, also spreads over this parallel *topos* of night-labour.¹⁶ The term appears in a long quote from a London 'Senior physician,' whose testimony culminates with the familiar indictment of impossibly long hours and sickening corporeal conditions: 'Now at home, in one room, starving, or near to it, then engaged 15, 16, aye even 18 hours out of the 24, in an air that is scarcely tolerable, and on food which, even if it be good, cannot be digested in the absence of pure air' (365). Yet once again, Marx is making a more subtle point. By pairing and doubling the factory/home scenes, he intimates that the bodily mortification diagnosed by the doctors proceeds apace with the extinguishment of reproductive activity as a spatialised structure of social relationality and sustenance.

On the other hand, the ‘commons’ subjected to enclosure is as emphatically temporal as it is spatial, perhaps even more so. The problem, moreover, is not only that capital is extending its grasp on more – indeed, all – hours of the worker’s day but also that capital is generating a new and grimly different temporality of social existence through night work. As I have discussed, with the spread of night-work, the *Lebenstag* is supplanted by the totalising twenty-four-hour cycle of work. This process both establishes wage labour as the near-exclusive content of the worker’s activity at all times and changes the experiential form of time itself in everyday life. All time assumes a uniform structure as workers cease to experience meaningful distinctions between periods of time within any given day.

Marx’s literary device of doubling (or trebling) helps generate a sense of this temporal homogenisation. Referring to reports by a British newspaper on scandalous passenger deaths in railway accidents, Marx writes: ‘Woche für Woche bringt dasselbe Wochenblatt gleich darauf, unter den “sensational headings”: “Fearful and fatal accidents,” “Appalling tragedies” u. s. w. eine ganze Liste neuer Eisenbahnkatastrophen’ (‘Week after week, this same weekly offers a whole new list of railway catastrophes’).¹⁷ Triply repeating the word ‘week’ exposes the irony of the broadsheet’s conceit to be publishing ‘news’: such passenger deaths happen all the time. Marx then clarifies that they are the both the foreseeable result and mirror-image of railway workers’ mortification through the elongation of a ‘day’s work’ into work-through-the-night. He quotes ‘a worker on the North Staffordshire Line’:

Take as an example the following case, of the kind that happens daily [*täglich*]: last Monday, a fireman began his day’s work [*Tageswerk*] very early in the morning. He finished it after 14 hours, 50 minutes. Before he even had time to take his tea, he was called back to work. He thus had dug straight through for 29 hours, 15 minutes... The man was a new hire and asked, what was understood to be a day’s work [*Tageswerk*]. Answer: 13 hours, or 78 hours per week.¹⁸

Marx is playing with the word ‘day’ [*Tag*] here, just as he does in the passage about the *Lebenstag* that I have discussed toward the start of this chapter. He also seems to be doing this deliberately because he is paraphrasing the original English source, which editors of the English translations substituted for Marx’s

text, and taking poetic liberties as he does so. Through the stylistic move of repetition, absent in the original lines, Marx suggests that the day (and the week) have lost all internal differentiation for workers.¹⁹

This, in turn, lends the nod to the worker's abruptly cancelled tea-time a slightly different implication than it has in the English source, where it reads as a simple marker of how heavily and insistently the demands of work press upon the worker. In the context of Marx's language-plays to evoke how each moment, day or week mirrors and reiterates the next, 'no time for tea' signifies more precisely that the day's constituent time periods have ceased to retain any distinctness from one another, any qualitative character that is specially their own. It isn't just that the worker doesn't have *enough* time to refresh himself. It's also that all temporal experience is the same and all time-units have become interchangeable. This is the extra layer of meaning behind Marx's dogged counting-up of workers' insanely protracted hours of work, which he does once more in this footnote after presenting the shocking 29 hour/15 minute figure.²⁰ Beyond voicing outrage at the numbers in their own right, Marx is tacitly criticising the subordination of all time to the quantitative and thereby homogenising, meaning-evacuating logic of capital.

For Marx, night-work at once catalyses and epitomises this temporal transformation. Further rhetorical adjustments that Marx makes when translating English sources bring his preoccupation with night-time even more sharply into view. For example, a report on bakers' work-hours issued in English notes that these workers 'continue in some cases, at work, either in making or delivering the bread up to 8 p.m. on Saturday night, but more generally up to 4 or 5 o'clock, Sunday morning' (360). Marx, however, substitutes '*Sonntag Nacht*' ('Sunday night') for the last phrase.²¹ From the same report, Marx then quotes a line originally written as follows: 'Towards the end of the week...the men begin on Thursday night at 10 o'clock, and continue on with only slight intermission until late on Saturday evening' (361). Marx renders the sentence in this way: '*Gegen 'Ende' der Woche, d. h. [das heisst] am Donnerstag, beginnt hier die Arbeit um 10 Uhr in der Nacht und dauert bis tief in Sonntag Nacht hinein.*'²² His

scare-quotes around the word '*Ende*' add a dose of sarcasm to the very idea of referring to the 'end' of a work-week that never stops. Meanwhile, his doubling of '*Nacht*' further reinforces the sense not just of the work-day's extension over more hours but also, and more pointedly, its signature characteristic of oppressive and unchanging self-identity. This characteristic is epitomised and consolidated in the figure of *Nachtarbeit*: labour not just *at* night, but *of the night*, in a substantively defining sense. Elsewhere, whereas testimony from a boy pottery worker reads, in the original English, 'I worked two nights last week' (354), Marx writes: '*Ich habe in der letzte Woche zwei Nächte durchgearbeitet*,' inflecting the main verb to underscore that the boy has laboured not just at night but 'through the night.'²³ Marx thereby gestures toward the experiential quality of time's passage, beyond pointing matter-of-factly to a measurable segment of the twenty-four-hour cycle.²⁴ Such temporal experience has become entirely uniform: it is nothing but ceaseless instrumentalization by capital. Night-labour both drives this qualitative temporal shift and encapsulates symbolically the new *form* that labour in general assumes.

With this argument on the table, let us revisit Marx's repeated invocation of the figure of the vampire for which the 'Working Day' chapter is notorious. A new optic on this intriguing metaphor and its significance for Marx's message in this part of *Capital* opens up when we probe its temporal implications. Most contributors to the ample literature on Marx's vampire zero in on this demon's unquenchable thirst for blood, its voracious drive to drink the victim dry of all living and moving substance, as personifying the capitalist's (or capital's) drive toward total, lethal exploitation of the worker.²⁵ Others focus on the monstrous character of the vampire. To some, this signifies the horrifying way that 'dead labour' in the form of the machinery overpowers 'living labour' as capitalism develops.²⁶ In Roberts's republican reading of the metaphor, the vampire's monstrosity more specifically indicates Marx's moral-philosophical and political judgment that wage labour is evil because it requires the 'use contrary to nature' of essentially human capacities, which naturally should be exercised free from domination.²⁷ Few give more than a passing comment, however, to the vampire's

iconic status as a creature of the night or to the complex issues of time toward which this figure gestures.

An exception to this tendency is the exhortation from Richard Godfrey, Gavin Jack and Campbell Jones that readers attend to ‘the specifically temporal aspects of the metaphor of vampirism.’²⁸ These critics shrewdly observe that when Marx first invokes the vampire in the chapter, in the passage I quoted earlier, he then immediately underscores time’s crucial role in capital’s domination of the worker:

Capital is dead labour which, vampire-like, lives only by sucking living labour, and lives the more, the more labour it sucks. The time during which the worker works is the time during which the capitalist consumes the labour-power he has bought from him. If the worker consumes his disposable time for himself, he robs the capitalist (342).

For Godfrey et al., it is significant that the vampire comes on stage in the phase of *Capital’s* first volume where Marx is placing issues of time in the foreground by unfolding his concepts of absolute and relative surplus-value. This textual positioning, they argue, invites us to unspool the temporal intricacies of the metaphor rather than following the simple thread that reads the night-demon as figuring capital’s extractive compulsions. The authors further caution against viewing the vampire as unambiguously reinforcing the dualism between life and death, worker and capital, that the text sets forth in a way that seems obvious, but is only deceptively so.

When one takes this perspective on the vampire, several provocative features of the metaphor that typically go unremarked stand out. First, the vampire is a night-labourer, just like the workers whose plight Marx scrutinises throughout the chapter. Or rather, even more so, because the vampire can *only* work at night, whereas daylight effects the vampire’s demise. In this way, the vampire symbolises in the extreme the worker’s increasing absorption by night-work and deprivation of the light of day, which in the inverted conditions wrought by capital becomes a threat to the wage-seeker’s survival rather than living sustenance. Recognising this aspect of the metaphor immediately complicates

any simplistic dichotomous reading. The vampire signifies *both* capitalist and worker, and thus represents the way capital takes over the essence of all human participants in the schema of capitalist value-creation.²⁹ In this sense, the vampire-figure closely tracks Marx's note about the dressmaker who, forced to turn her home into a workshop to supplement her meagre income, 'inflicts' (in the mode of 'haunting,' like a spirit of the night) the same abusive treatment on her own hired hands that she receives from foremen in the factory. Vampires don't just suck the life-blood from their victims. They also bring new vampires into being with each nightly bite.

To put it another way: vampires place the issue of reproduction front and centre. This second key connotation, too, tends to be overlooked when one too hastily equates the vampiric with the extractive process of realising surplus-value through the exploitation of wage-labour. On the one hand, the vampire's unquenchable thirst registers the impossibility under capitalism of satisfying the worker's reproductive needs and the fact that no amount of night-labour can ever bring sufficient nourishment. To the contrary, the more intrepid the feeding, the more the hunger reproduces, spreads and magnifies itself. On the other hand, the vampire also represents reproduction to excess, although in the sense of re-creating violently urgent need and needy beings who as producers can only generate more need rather than material things that would satisfy need.³⁰ In this way, Marx's resort to images of vampires reinforces the thematic centrality to the 'Working Day' chapter of the destruction of workers' time, space and social-relational resources for reproductive activity, with night-labour as the primary propellant of this transformation.

Third, even as vampires privilege the nocturnal as the specific time-zone for the epiphany of capital's death-dealing visage, the vampire also points more subtly to the problem of capitalist time's general consolidation as an eternal present bereft of internal differentiation. To be sure, as Godfrey et al. point out, vampires embody a vacillation between continuous and discontinuous time insofar as their time for feeding is always cut short by the dawn's arrival even as their bloodthirst boils incessantly. Vampires are 'aware that, even if for one day, they were to lose track of time, they will surely perish at

sunrise.³¹ Yet precisely this hyper-awareness of time modulates the vampiric symbolisation of temporal flux and difference. Apart from the need for blood, another continuity signified by the vampiric is a relentless attuning to time's passage and the constant exigency of using time to maximal advantage, under conditions in which the organisation of time is utterly beyond the individual's control. Similarly, for workers, who are subject to the same 'round-the-clock pressure never to let a moment go to waste, the triumph of the night simultaneously betokens the thorough merging of night and day: the lapsing of the notion of a 'day's work,' or a week with a discernible 'end,' into a bad joke; the superseding of the 'life-day' by *Tageswerk*.

Marx takes pains in multiple passages throughout the 'Working Day' chapter to remind readers of how a *Lebenstag* could be constituted were it not for capital's predations. The foregoing analysis, I submit, throws acutely into relief Marx's naming of the concrete reproductive experiences people lose when night labour spreads its shroud over mundane temporal experience. Marx resumes this mode of address and summarises the damage when, about half-way through the chapter, he revisits the chapter's *Leitmotiv*: 'What is a working day?':

Hence it is self-evident that the worker is nothing other than labour-power for the duration of his whole life, and that therefore all his disposable time is by nature and by right labour-time, to be devoted to the self-valorization of capital. Time for education, for intellectual development, for the fulfilment of social functions, for social intercourse, for the free play of the vital forces of his body and his mind, even the rest time of Sunday (and that in a country of Sabbatarians!) – what foolishness! (375)

Marx then reiterates his indictment of capital's denial of 'the time for growth, development and healthy maintenance of the body,' but the overarching point is that night work does not just mortify the worker's flesh: it extinguishes a working-class social-reproductive world. Marx's specific mention of 'education' and 'intellectual development' here helps make that point and calls to mind a related footnote a few pages earlier. There, Marx quotes a series of bizarre statements from children who offer

miserable testimony to their mental disfigurement (“Four times four is eight; four fours are sixteen.... We have a King (told it is a Queen” (370, fn. 66)). His discussion of children’s educational stunting signals yet another collapse of temporal difference into uniformity, this time as working people’s potential life-trajectories of intellectual cultivation fold into life-long stultification, and as childhood loses any distinction from adulthood. In the footnote, Marx then shifts immediately to an extended account of children’s gruelling work-hours under the ‘night system’ (370). He thereby reinforces the interpretation I have given in which night-labour metonymically stands for the full gamut of assaults on working-class social reproduction, with steadily worsening effects over time.

Significantly, the above recitation of social-reproductive activities that are ruled out of time when ‘night-labour’ comes to define the ‘working day’ occurs at the start of the chapter’s fifth section, titled ‘The Struggle for a Normal Working Day’ (which is also the main title for the further two sections). In other words, summarising these destructive consequences is part of Marx’s pivot from logging the ill-effects of the working day’s expansion to examining political and legal battles to limit work-hours. With this reproduction-oriented critique as backdrop, how might Marx’s explorations of the intricacies of parliamentary provisions and strategic moves by key players in these political skirmishes look different? What does Marx’s account of political combat over the duration and conditions of the working day suggest about future struggles of these kinds? How might grasping the social-reproductive stakes of such struggles in temporal, spatial and gendered terms lend clarity where Marx’s recommendations and implications are murky?

Re-engaging the Struggle over the Working Day

In her compelling interpretation of the ‘Working Day’ chapter, Rosalind C. Morris argues that here Marx offers a ‘model of dialectical method’ to represent the core challenge of working-class anti-capitalist politicisation. Marx, she contends, constructs the text such that it stages the problem of

developing a universal working-class subject and its demands from out of the multiple, varied voices of concretely situated working people:

Transcribed and redacted, but retaining syntactic and grammatical blemishes, the reported speech of the children is sufficiently coarse as to chafe at the seemingly smooth discourse of the phantasmatic worker, whose voice is heard ‘arising’ on the factory floor in the opening pages. And it is in the dialectical movement between these two voicings—of ‘The Worker,’ impossibly unitary and in command of the master’s discourse, on one hand; and the workers of the factory floor, speaking in a mother tongue they do not fully possess, on the other—that ‘The Working Day’ chapter assumes its force and achieves its performative mastery.³²

In referring to the ‘phantasmatic worker,’ Morris draws attention to a passage in the first section shortly after Marx depicts capital (and the capitalist) as a vampire that ‘lives only by sucking living labour’ and consuming the worker’s ‘disposable time’ (342). Marx continues: ‘Suddenly, however, there arises the voice of the worker, which had previously been stifled in the sound and fury of the production process’ (342). Addressing the capitalist in a confident, no-nonsense tone, ‘The Worker’ expounds a lucid and economically precise demystification of the extraction of absolute surplus-value. The gist: ‘By an unlimited extension of the working day, you may in one day use up a quantity of labour-power greater than I can restore in three’ (343). The soliloquy crescendos toward a political ultimatum: ‘I therefore demand a working day of normal length’ (343). Morris is fascinated by the clash between the linguistically competent and affectively resolute speech of this imagined worker-subject and the uneven, variable, dialect-based timbres of the child-workers’ voices that are quoted throughout the chapter. Often, as we have seen (and heard), Marx does this through voluminous footnotes, the unruly durations of which generate additional dissonances with the crisp, orderly mode of speech by ‘The Worker.’ Marx’s writing, Morris argues, ‘reaches toward ethnography’ and manifests a thirst for the empirical that stands in tension with the chapter’s elaboration of an abstract analysis of political economy, in a

specific sense that is politically evocative and centred on questions of audibility.³³ The text thus invites an investigation of ‘the relationship between dialect and dialectic.’³⁴

Morris’s provocative thesis is that the chapter formulates a ‘theory of political subjectivity’ by mobilising a ‘negative dialectic’ between ‘The Worker’s’ universalistic cadences and the untidily localisable statements by real children.³⁵ Citing Adorno, she writes:

The discontinuity between the characterological figure (The Worker) and any actual workers is, in fact, signified in and by the distance between their utterances, as they appear to have been sounded in ‘The Working Day,’ as well as in their generic structure and semantic content. This imaged (and imagined) sound signifies the remainder, that which ‘indicates the untruth of identity, the fact that the concept does not exhaust the thing conceived.’³⁶

In other words, for Morris, Marx gives readers an audible experience of the persistent political necessity to mediate critically between what at any historical moment is taken to be the working class’s authentic collective self-expression and the concrete particularities of working-class people’s self-articulated lives. On this reading, the text is cannily self-critical. On the one hand, it tenaciously exposes the lack of synthesis between the transcendental sonority of working-class critical reason and the cacophony of workers’ parochial intonations. On the other hand, Marx gestures toward the indispensable political task of striving toward this ever-failing reconciliation, and of doing so by listening responsively to plural voices rather than seeking in vain to supersede them with indisputable logic and air-tight historical analysis.

I find Morris’s critique convincing, but it is worth drawing attention to a pervasive ambivalence in the text about how to pursue this mighty political task of constructing anti-capitalist collective subjectivity by grappling with internal multiplicities and differences within the working class. The text seems to vacillate on whether the most hotly engaged political struggle of the moment – over the length of the working day – offers a viable venue for taking up this endeavour. This ambivalence gains expression through the palpable friction between Marx’s dogged insistence on exposing bourgeois

politics and policy-making as mere tools of capitalist domination, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the magnetism that fine details about legislative and policy processes, buttressed by yet further testimonies about night labour, exert for him.

A strong current of thought in the chapter's latter sections emphasises the futility and even counter-productive quality of the political 'struggle for a normal working day.' At key points, to be sure, Marx affirms the idea that contesting the limits of work-hours has been historically essential to working-class contestation of social domination. He writes, for instance: 'The establishment of a normal working day is the result of centuries of struggle between the capitalist and the worker' (382). Whether workers primarily have sought to lengthen their hours of labour, as in pre-modern times, or to shorten the working day, as has become urgent under capital's rule, a drive to answer the momentous question, 'What is a working day?' has consistently stimulated workers' uprisings. Yet the chapter primarily aims at revealing the dysfunctionality of humanitarian policy inventions and the hypocrisy of their advocates. By contrast, Marx devotes comparatively little effort to examining the development of shorter-hours movements among workers and scouring them for features from which future working-class struggles could learn. The point seems mostly to demonstrate the pointlessness of investing working-class political energies in bourgeois-liberal policy solutions. As Morris notes, 'The Worker's' de-coding and denunciation of the capitalist's value-extracting machinations leads to a statement that is meant to ring hollow: "I demand a normal working day because, like every other seller, I demand the value of my commodity" (343).³⁷ This passage in the opening section operates symmetrically with the chapter's final lines:

For 'protection' against the serpent of their agonies, the workers have to put their heads together and, as a class, compel the passing of a law, an all-powerful social barrier by which they can be prevented from selling themselves and their families into slavery and death by voluntary contract with capital. In the place of the pompous catalogue of the 'inalienable rights of man' there steps

the modest Magna Carta of the legally limited working day, which at last makes clear ‘when the time which the worker sells is ended, and when his own begins.’ *Quantum mutatus ab illo!* (416)

As I have argued, Marx’s basic objective in the chapter has been to show how night-labour renders this clear division of time impossible in both quantitative and qualitative senses. Ridiculing the ‘legally limited working day’ as a ‘modest Magna Carta’ and mocking bourgeois law’s pretence of imposing a ‘social barrier’ with any power, Marx scarcely needs the dripping sarcasm of his very last sentence (‘What a great change from that time!’ taken from the *Aeneid*) to drive the message home.

Marx develops this theme throughout the chapter’s latter stages in further ways that amplify its resonance. Far from effectively cordoning off discrete hours as non-exploitable time, he notes, legal measures to limit the working day have caused confusions between night and day to proliferate within the pages of bourgeois law-books. Such reforms followed a period in which capital had pursued its exploitative designs voraciously, quickly rendering existing statutes obsolete:

‘...there followed, with the birth of large-scale industry in the last third of the eighteenth century, an avalanche of violent and unmeasured encroachments. Every boundary set by morality and nature, age and sex, day and night, was broken down. Even the ideas of day and night, which in the old statutes were of peasant simplicity, became so confused that an English judge, as late as 1860, needed the penetration of an interpreter of the Talmud to explain ‘judicially’ what was day and what was night. Capital was celebrating its orgies’ (390).

Note Marx’s observation that in 1860, long after the series of Factory Acts initiated in 1833 had come into force, the muddling of night and day in the law persisted. This suggests that for Marx, politicising the working day and subjecting it to juridical disposition merely equipped the state with novel tools to ensure the life-day’s permanent eclipse by night-labour rather than clarifying the boundaries between day and night.

Marx’s retrospective of these Acts’ legislative histories emphasises that waging political struggles for ‘a normal working day’ has generally made things worse, in law and factory alike. The ‘system of

relays' regularised through the 1833 Act, for example, were supposed to restrict children to only one of two seven- or eight-hour shifts per day. Yet they prompted factory bosses to introduce an evasive practise 'by which the work-horses were not changed at fixed stations, but were always re-harnessed at different stations' (392). The Factory Acts of 1844 and 1847 reined in these abuses with respect to children and women but thereby incentivised owners to fire such workers, increase night-work for adult men and eliminate workmen's meal breaks (394-98). Subsequently, Marx continues, capitalists exploited loopholes in the regulations governing children's employment whilst packing courts that heard cases against manufacturers with business owners. One result was heightened 'overwork' among all workers, regardless of age or sex. Another was the fragmentation of time in workers' everyday activity, in ways that ominously pre-figure key temporal tendencies of 21st-century precarity:³⁸

During the 15 hours of the factory day, capital dragged in the worker now for 30 minutes, now for an hour, and then pushed him out again, to drag him into the factory and thrust him out afresh, hounding him hither and thither, in scattered shreds of time, without ever letting go until the full 10 hours of work was done. As on the stage, the same persons had to appear in turn in the different scenes of the different acts. And just as an actor is committed to the stage throughout the whole course of the play, so the workers were committed to the factory for the whole 15 hours, without reckoning the time taken in coming and going.... [The manufacturers] paid 10 hours wages for 12 or 15 hours' disposition over the workers' labour-power. This was the heart of the matter, this was the manufacturers' edition of the ten hours law!' (403-4)

Legislative attempts to limit the working day in the 1830s-40s, Marx thus argues, not only failed at their task. They also inspired owners and managers to concoct all manner of means to make their hold on workers' time more extensive and intensive: stretching over longer hours and manipulating ever-more minute increments of temporal experience. The state thus operated hand-in-glove with capital in effecting the quantitative and qualitative mutations of time in everyday work-life that I have outlined earlier in this chapter. When Marx compares workers to stage actors, furthermore, he is not simply

trucking in metaphor for literary impact in a banal sense. Rather, he is once again evoking the social, communal and sensory substance of reproductive life-activity that is drained from workers' daily time when the *Lebenstag* is overtaken by *Nachtarbeit*.

As Marx stresses the futility of legally codifying restrictions on the working day that capital always finds ways to circumvent, he likewise displays reticence about working-class organising within the 'struggle for a normal working day' that comprises the titular theme of the chapter's final sections. This intensifies the textual dynamic that casts reformist political advocacy as a blind alley insofar as such activities, as Marx depicts them here, seem to afford workers negligible opportunities for agency. For instance, Marx notes that in the early 19th century, 'the concessions wrung from industry by the working class remained purely nominal' (390); he does not elaborate on the organisational means or appeals through which 'the working class' sought to act, and the line suggests that workers' collective efforts were insignificant. Recounting working-class involvement in controversies over the Corn Laws and the Ten Hours' Bill, Marx figures workers as the dupes of Tory manipulators (393). By contrast, he writes, 'the manufacturers did not succeed in getting the workers to speak as they wished' when the former schemed to rally workers to repeal the 1847 Factory Act on specious grounds (396-97), but it is unclear how workers were able to withstand the bosses' pressures. In a rare departure from the pattern, Marx reports that workers launched a 'counter-stroke' against manufacturers' efforts to nullify the 1847 Act when they 'protested in Lancashire and Yorkshire in threatening meetings' (405). This moment, however, occurs as an exception that validates the rule. Marx thus mainly constitutes the 'struggle for a normal working day' as combat between humanitarian reformers, on the one hand, and manufacturers and political elites, on the other hand. The implication that engaging in this conflict would be a waste of workers' efforts is strengthened still further by Marx's inclusion of abundant quotations from these actors but almost none from individual workers, in stark contrast to the chapter's earlier sections. Instead, workers express themselves as undifferentiated collectives: as majority opinion

in a survey (397), ‘protestors’ in the North (405), signers of an 1866 ‘Resolution of the Working Men of Dunkirk’ in New York State (414-15).

Yet despite Marx’s copious warning-signs that it would be futile for workers to participate in bourgeois political wranglings over the working day, the latter portion of the ‘Working Day’ chapter also features a counter-current suggesting that such involvement could help advance radical struggle on a broader scale. This countervailing flow consists of meaningful silences as well as conspicuous excesses in the text. Considered in historical context, the absence of workers as players and speakers in Marx’s account of the parliamentary tussles over working-hours reforms could be seen as marking the importance of political strategy rather than signalling that workers should disengage from such conflicts. Marx hoped to publish the book in Prussian territory, and downplaying workers’ activism may have been a tactic to avoid raising the ire of Prussian censors.³⁹ Another remarkable silence concerns Marx’s reference to the Dunkirk resolution. Marx himself drafted this document, so he is actually citing his own work as an activist, as Fowkes notes, although Marx does not indicate this in his original German text, nor does the first English translation point this out. Quoting the Dunkirk resolution, a testimony to his own personal investment in working-class advocacy and organising to limit the working day by law, Marx tacitly but tellingly affirms the value of taking up this fight. From this perspective, in turn, the textual excess performed by the factory inspectors’ reports, along with the meticulous recounting of statutory advances and capitalist parries, seem like more than numbingly reiterated demonstrations of the legal struggle’s pointlessness. Instead, they invite the reader to take seriously the course of struggle in the parliamentary realm as a genuine asset to the greater cause of working-class revolution.

Nevertheless, the tension between this textual dynamic and Marx’s hard edge of cynicism about reforming the working day persists unresolved as the chapter winds down, and the latter tendency is the more forceful and explicit of the two. Something is still gravely missing from parliamentary processes; a danger looms there of something worse than an unwise allocation of workers’ political resources of time and energy. Obviously, for Marx, the central point was for workers not to confuse reform with

revolution: not to be content with weak and ephemeral constraints on capital's exploitative powers but rather to abolish capitalism and build a new society conducive to real human freedom, above all through the socialisation and democratic control of production. Yet if we read the 'Working Day' chapter's latter sections in light of the prior sections' critique of capital as imperiling social reproduction, we gain an enriched sense of what such freedom entails along with a clearer understanding of how the battle for shorter hours can be a dangerous detour. Shimmering in the gap between the text's bending toward and recoiling from legally entangled political action lies the prospect of a workers' fight for free time, both within and beyond the turf of parliamentary manoeuvre, that would thematise what is qualitatively at stake in combatting the nocturnalisation of workers' lives. Marx's critique of labours and losses of the night implies that so long as contestants remain stuck on the number of waged labouring hours that the capitalist can control rather than what workers want to do with their waged, unwaged-working and non-working time, that fight will not yet have been joined. The first part of the chapter points the way toward declaring and launching this fight, and thereby avoiding a self-defeating politics: parliamentary tussles need not be so counter-productive when contestants resist getting hung up on numbers games and use the limited opportunities provided by the bourgeois public sphere to voice demands for a whole new form of life-day. The path forward, in the chambers and in the streets, leads directly into the ecologies of working-class social reproduction that capital has marked for extinction under the vampiric sign of night-labour.

A critical phenomenology of night-labour for wages and the non-waged nocturnal elements of the *Lebenstag*-under-duress thereby becomes vital to politicising these social-reproductive time-spaces. This much is logically implied by my reading of the 'Working Day' chapter as shining a spotlight on the receding of workers' reproductive relations, capacities and sense-experiences, and as illuminating how labour in night-time's shadows both catalyses and symbolically encapsulates these transformations. Among these transformations that criss-cross the productive and reproductive realms, women's social-reproductive activities and their concatenations with wage labour merit special emphasis. Marx's text

prods our thinking in this direction, too. The critical lines of thought generated by the contemplation of night work, furthermore, concern not only working-class labour and politics in Marx's era but also the quest for freedom as night-time labour expands anew in today's economy.

Night work and social reproduction in the world of digital labour

What might it entail, to conduct a critical phenomenology of current labours of the night in ways inspired by this reading of Marx? What problems would one consider and what questions would one pose about contemporary night work and night workers? The array of occupations in which night work features prominently has vastly expanded with the general growth of socioeconomic precarisation. Along with night-shift workers who process meat in continuously operating packinghouses, sew clothes in *maquiladoras*, assemble mobile phones and perform innumerable other manufacturing jobs, there are night workers in warehouses, transport operations and shipping facilities who keep global supply chains constantly in motion. There are the night-time domestic workers who tend to the physical needs of the young, old and in-between in more affluent people's homes and in larger care facilities for those with more meagre means. There is the mounting population of platform-based 'microworkers,' especially in the global south but increasingly in rich countries like the UK as well, who labour at all, and odd, hours to train artificial intelligence systems, earning a few cents for each tiny online task and often not getting paid at all. There are the nocturnal workforces of food delivery riders, Uber drivers, sex workers – and the list goes on. If we treat *Nachtarbeit* as both effecting and metonymically signifying working-class social-reproductive catastrophe in terms suggested by Marx, what would we want to know about the experiences of all these souls of the night who 'throng around us'?

As an example of how we might proceed according to this Marxian analytic, I will bring this chapter to a close by considering the circumstances of microworkers from a perspective informed by the foregoing analysis. My own recent collaborative research on microwork in the UK included a survey

and follow-up interviews aimed at finding out why microworkers do this sort of work and what their experiences of it are like along with basic information about these workers' demographics and earnings.⁴⁰ As a study of capital's effort to vanquish working people's social-reproductive capacities and contexts, Marx's 'Working Day' chapter makes multiple aspects of our empirical findings flash with neon intensity, when one contemplates the text alongside our data.

The vast majority of UK microworkers say they engage in microwork because they can fit it so effortlessly into transient moments and spaces of everyday life, notably night-time hours, despite very low and sketchy remuneration. One only needs a mobile device to connect to platforms like Clickworker and Amazon Mechanical Turk that pay 'taskers' to perform tiny, disconnected bits of work. Thus, the work can be done just about anywhere and anytime one has the chance to whip out the phone. Fewer than 10 percent of our survey respondents reported doing microwork during normal business hours, and night is an attractive time for microwork because better jobs are available and there are fewer conflicts with daytime activities.⁴¹ The wages, to be sure, are poor and highly uncertain. Two-thirds of these workers earn less than £4 per hour from microwork and nearly all earn below the minimum wage. Workers also report spending lengthy stretches of time scouring platforms for tasks as well as being abruptly 'screened out' from some jobs in the midst of doing them, with no pay for time already spent doing the work. Yet rather than expressing resentment at being exploited and unfairly treated, most UK microworkers feel quite content with their experiences of microwork, including their meagre and unreliable earnings. Why does microwork have such draw, given its manifest disadvantages? How can Marx's critique of the working day, viewed as a commentary on social reproduction, help us understand microwork's impact on workers' lives beyond devoting more time to paid work and accommodating to labour exploitation?

When one considers our interviewees' comments with Marx in mind, what jumps out is that microwork not only supplements other forms of income-earning activity, which it does for about 80 percent of UK microworkers: in addition, microwork intrepidly insinuates itself into workers'

reproductive times and spaces and turns them to capital's advantage. It sheaths reproductive activities in a membrane of wage-seeking and wage-earning work, unobtrusively or even comfortably nestles alongside them, latches on to them, or replaces them. Microworkers say they do short bouts of microwork while eating, watching sport, exercising outside, doing household tasks, riding public transport, having trouble sleeping, or when the baby takes a nap. In the spirit of Marx's empirics in the 'Working Day' chapter, here are a few choice interview quotations that speak to this theme:

'It's easily accessible. I can do it any time as well... like I could do one at like midnight, or sometimes like two in the morning' (Participant 12).

'So it's more to do with... not boredom. But like it's there. It's something for me to do when I've got a free moment, rather than like, I need to earn this much money to pay for this' (Participant 16).

'Football, you know, when you're watching that, you can do two things at once' (Participant 4).

'It's not work. It's like, picking up the phone and going on Facebook for me? Yeah. Just don't consider it as work. It's just a hobby' (Participant 6).

'It's normally the evening, so. Like, I'll quite often be at my computer, like planning lessons or sorting stuff out. And it is when I fancy a break, I'll just click on the website, see if there's anything to do' (Participant 17).

'When I'm having a hard time, you know, drifting off to sleep, it really is where that sort of fits around your lifestyle' (Participant 7).

‘It's actually quite a good stress reliever. ... I can sort of log on, you know, there's nothing on Netflix, nothing on YouTube ... I'll log on to the system, I'll see what's on there’ (Participant 7).

These statements suggest a style of work and a palette of work experiences that differ starkly from those of the bakers and milliners whose sad fates Marx decries. Nor are most UK microworkers people who must work themselves to death because dire poverty leaves them no other choice, although impoverishment is certainly a characteristic of microworkers in global-south countries, such as India or Kenya, where it has become prevalent, particularly among refugees and slum-dwellers.⁴² Microworkers in the UK mostly earn low incomes, with over half earning less than £17,000 annually and over one-quarter making less than £6,000 per year. Only twenty percent of UK microworkers, however, rely solely on microwork for their income. These jobs thus mainly help people in the UK ‘get by’ and gain a slim margin of extra income for some modest ‘shopping,’ an occasional ‘treat’ or a beer at the pub. What precisely is the problem, then, especially if microworkers mostly do not mind these kinds of work and even find them diverting? Could it even be said that microwork offers reproductive benefits, as a ‘hobby’ or ‘stress relief,’ that mitigate the exploitation of workers’ time and energy?

Marx offers a conceptual framework for pinpointing what is wrong with this picture, counter-intuitive though the juxtaposition of today’s UK microworkers and 19th century factory hands appears. The issue is the creeping grip of wage-earning on ever more facets of reproductive life and its relentless mortification of social-reproductive activities, abilities and relationships. To begin with: to be sure, physical ill health does not register among these microworkers in the shocking ways that the London physicians discern among English workers in Marx’s day. The spectre of advancing unwellness begins to show itself, however, when microworkers speak of staying awake at night to search for more favourable tasks or micro-tasking when sleep is elusive, and when more than a quarter of survey respondents say they do microwork because a disability or health problem prevents them from holding other kinds of jobs. With the advent of microwork, capital, having become well-accustomed to causing illness among

working people, has found new ways to extract value from the activities of sick people rather than shunting them aside into the population of unproductive humans.⁴³ The psycho-physical pathologies promoted by microwork may not be as extreme as those for Marx's pottery shop boys. Yet consider UK microworkers' nocturnal and after-hours pursuits of paid tasks that are too miniscule even to qualify as 'gigs,' or what many suggest is a compulsive tendency to add microwork to just about any daily activity. These behaviours feed upon and exacerbate the general culture of anxiety and stress about never having enough work, especially among these workers who skate so close to the edge of want.

Beyond corporeal and emotional debilitation, it is the vanishing of variety, richness and relationality in social-reproductive experience, or the preclusion of a *Lebensstag*, to which Marx most keenly sensitises us when we ponder what may be askew about microwork in the UK. It is the consolidation of all life-time and living spaces as instrumental to capital's expansion. If the dressmaker must set up shop 'in her home' to survive and the baker makes up his bed on the kneading board, the microworker converts into a work-site any still or mobile space at all, whether in the bedroom, kitchen or chair by the television and whether at home, at a place of paid employment or on the way there. In this respect, microwork lends unprecedented spatial saturation to the autonomist notion of the 'social factory,' although as we have seen, Marx had already foreseen the dwindling distinctions between productive and reproductive spaces a century earlier. As in Marx's account, furthermore, women turn out to be bellwethers of this social transformation. A majority of our survey respondents were women, and women were an even stronger majority of UK microworkers who engaged in fewer than 15 hours of such labour each week: that is, of those who threaded brief stints of microwork into the cloth of their everyday lives rather than treating this work as a dedicated activity, or a 'job.'

Meanwhile, the vampiric temporality of the working day attains a new intensity among microworkers. Watchfulness for any moment when work or work-searching can happen becomes not only gauge-able by the tiniest increments of time but also even more immersive by virtue of its innocuousness and the perpetual availability of tasks. Hence, one UK microworker kept repeating how

he used microwork to make his ‘dead time,’ a phrase he articulated no fewer than four times, more ‘productive’ and ‘useful.’ Doing this, he reported, was just as enjoyable as ‘scrolling on my phone’ or ‘watching YouTube videos.’ Evidently online social media had helped ‘deaden’ his daily time-flows. This participant added that whereas there was always a ‘natural endpoint’ to completing an online marketing survey (another common microwork activity), ‘if I’m on TikTok or something, you can just scroll for hours on there.’ Of course, as Jodi Dean and others argue, social-media activity itself already offers ‘free labour’ to capital in the form of ‘contributions’ that become commodifiable Big Data.⁴⁴ In this sense, choosing microwork over TikTok, as interchangeable and equally mildly enjoyable forms of work-cum-diversion, neatly expresses the qualitative homogenisation of daily time, the doubling of identical daily activities, that is such a powerful theme in Marx. Along similar lines, labour analyst Phil Jones writes of the ‘gamification’ of wage labour that happens when microwork platforms shape work-processes according to models adapted from game apps.⁴⁵ Often, microworkers don’t even earn wages for their work but rather accumulate points which can then be exchanged for corporate gift cards.⁴⁶ Microworking can be seen as ‘gaming’ in the sense of gambling, too, with its attendant *frisson* of risk and reward. One interviewee matter-of-factly described microwork as ‘speculative’ because ‘you don’t know you’re going to get it’ (that is, any payoff for what you venture). She had invented the cheerful and pragmatic metaphor of a ‘work-bucket’ to reassure herself that as long as she could ‘put as many jobs in ... I could always reach in and get something out.’ The vampire’s nocturnal bite, as gothic writings and films frequently remind us, is not just painful but pleasurable. It also reduces desire to a singular nonstop craving even while amplifying it beyond all bounds.

Other comments by our interviewees evoke a sense of how wage-earning not only occupies all life-spaces but also desiccates the relationships on which human reproduction in the broadest sense depends. For instance:

‘I think it makes me feel good, it makes me feel like I’m contributing towards something. You also feel and I know, frankly, seems bizarre. But I also feel like I’m like, part of a big team, which feels really, it feels really random to say, but like, when you look at the tasks that you’re doing, it’s not lost on me that I think, oh, you know, someone across the country or be doing this as well’ (Participant 2).

‘I’ve got nothing better to do, and it’s going to give me that extra pound or two. Why not? You know, after all, I pay for my broadband for every month, I might as well get my money’s worth’ (Participant 11).

In lieu of actually taking part in some kind of cooperative activity, whether cultural, economic or political, microwork substitutes the nebulous fantasy of being ‘part of a big team.’ To revert to Marx’s text: the worker certainly fulfils a ‘social function,’ by contributing to a tech firm’s optimisation of its products and profits, but forgoes any substantive ‘social intercourse.’ The ultimate effect is to root the individual more firmly in her self-isolation, as though the Covid-19 quarantines, which led many of the people in our study either to start microworking or to increase their hours, had become permanent. Yet what the phenomenon of microwork further suggests is that long before the pandemic, the situation of having ‘nothing better to do’ with un-waged time other than try to earn more money had become endemic, even for people not in the clutches of extreme need. The circular logic of ‘getting your money’s worth’ for your broadband fees by doing broadband-enabled microwork aptly expresses the self-referential quality of this social condition.

Words that are just as jarring to hear, if we let Marx’s critique of the ‘Working Day’ attune our ears to them, come from UK microworkers who said they found microwork satisfying because of its intellectually stimulating aspects. One elaborated:

‘The jobs can present within themselves an intellectual challenge at whatever level, you know, so they're not, they're not all dumb jobs... They can often consist of observation, or you need to compare and make decisions about things, or you may have to put in a commentary’ (Participant 16).

‘And I find [surveys] especially fascinating to hear other people's points of views on products or services. And it makes me think, or encourages me to think about, I did one recently on the wearing of glasses, and lenses. And I learned quite a lot about sort of how they branded [them] and the marketing side of things. And it just it was just an interesting process. So yeah, obviously, I do it for interest reasons, it's really cool’ (Participant 16).

‘Even with my project management work, I still have to keep reading, I still have to keep learning, I still have to attend workshop sessions, just to keep making sure that I am on par with what is expected for my work. So I think it's the same thing’ (Participant 17).

One need not gainsay the satisfaction these participants report from doing microwork to see something awry here. The kinds of judgments that microworkers are usually called on to make and the forms of mental training they say they enjoy either are overtly instrumental to business, as when considering branding devices, or involve distinguishing between surface-level appearances in ways that AI systems need to incorporate in their information-processing protocols. Indeed, when microworkers describe the modes of brain-activity in which microwork pleasurably or usefully engages them, their comments evoke a sense of machine-learning. They emphasise being able to take in, digest and respond to informational cues more quickly and efficiently or amassing larger and more varied sets of factual knowledge. Spending time on these endeavours differs sharply from taking ‘[t]ime for education, for intellectual development...for the free play of the vital forces of [one's] body and [one's] mind,’ in the ways that Marx had in view. Marx refers to the cultivation of critical consciousness as a vital feature of

social-reproductive life that exercises and develops creative human capacities to re-make the world differently and cooperatively. Microwork appears to channel the restlessness of mind that could motivate such critical-collective activation toward less demanding and more socially harmless pursuits. It adds ‘time for education’ to the pale, vaguely sweet and monotextured smoothie into which it blends time for work, play, rest and other people.

It would seem to go without saying that ‘time for political action’ should be added to this list of microwork’s temporal deprivations and consolidations. Yet let us ask: what would the conditions for politicising and organising microworkers be? What might my reading of Marx’s conflicted account of the legislative battles over the Factory Acts suggest about possible directions for such a struggle in our time? On first glance, the idea of organizing microworkers seems entirely chimerical. As Jones discusses, the platforms typically block microworkers even from knowing who their fellow labourers are much less communicating with them.⁴⁷ Vast expanses of social and geographical space and jagged disjunctions of time further dissociate the workers from one another. Moreover, if workers are personally invested in the notion that microwork *isn’t really work*, the very basis of collective action would seem to be missing. Nor did the microworkers we interviewed sound more than slightly annoyed about being paid so little and so inconsistently, if they objected to it at all, and many did not. Some explicitly defended what they saw as the companies’ need to manage their outlays prudently in order to earn profits. Others pragmatically advised the need to be ‘resilient’ when their pay was shorted. Of the survey respondents, nearly 60 percent reported being satisfied with their microwork experiences and another 26 percent were ‘neither satisfied nor dissatisfied.’ Such happy or indifferent subjects seem unpromising target-audiences for agitators and organizers.

From another perspective, however, the emergence of novel forms of labour and domination with the growth of microwork underscores a challenge that the Left and workers’ movements have been facing for a long time. Post-Fordism and neoliberalism have so extensively eroded or outright removed the conditions for workplace-based organizing that it has become indispensable to find venues

for generating solidarity in the vast array of other social domains where working people feel capital's domination, even if it feels light-touch. This is also precisely what the un-knotting of Marx's ambivalence about shorter work-hours advocacy in *Capital* suggests, as I have argued: re-orienting the strategic gaze of the Left from production toward reproduction and to the now-prolific work/life activities that partake of both categories. Creative modes and structures of organization are likewise vital to develop. Like day labourers, domestic workers, delivery riders, sex workers and innumerable others in the burgeoning informal economy of precarious work, microworkers have no stable physical workplace where they gather and which a conventional union could organise. Alternative labour organisations, such as the worker centres in the US's National Day Labor Organizing Network, or precarious workers' unions with members from many diverse occupations, like the Independent Workers' Union of Great Britain, hold the best prospects for such innovation amid these circumstances. As we have seen, Marx offers little guidance on how to build solidarity through workers' organizing, in the 'Working Day' chapter and more generally. To pursue these questions, it will help to turn to a different text that is more preoccupied by them. I do that in a later chapter by taking up Rancière's examination of a motley, not-very-proletarian assortment of French workers and their cultural and political ventures in the long hours of 'proletarian nights.'

New political possibilities also take shape when political actors shift the focus from defensively quantifying permissibly exploitable work-time to lodging audacious demands for a *Lebenszeit* that is replete with qualitative variety and richness. Microwork's easy adaptability to any stretch of 'dead time' that pops up in the course of everyday living, no matter how fleeting, should be taken as a sure sign that today's campaigns for shorter hours and four-day weeks are ill-suited to play central roles in a larger new Left strategy, as motivational and beneficial as such reforms certainly can be. They need to be complemented by, and should themselves include, activations of worker militancy that seek to reinvigorate social-reproductive time, space, resources and relationality by expressly articulating the abundant, assorted qualities of life that workers want and need. In proceeding thusly, furthermore,

women's social experiences and circumstances require organizers' avid attention. As I contend in my analysis of Marx above, as a properly historical sensibility regarding gender and social-reproductive work advises, and as the fact that the majority of UK microworkers are women underscores, women's leadership and participation is a *sine qua non* for the success of any effort to mould the new political force that I am outlining here.⁴⁸ Theorizing and planning action along these lines necessarily takes us, again, beyond Marx. Hence, my interest in this book's next chapter in Marxist feminists' fuller elaboration of social reproduction's contradictory relations with capitalism and in the growing field of night-time childcare work where these contradictions, along with the political possibilities that attend them, are emerging vividly today.

¹ Moishe Postone, *Time, Labor, and Social Domination: A Reinterpretation of Marx's Critical Theory* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 283-84.

² Althusser and Balibar go so far as to declare that 'history as such is not an object of Marx's critique.' [CHECK QUOTE] Louis Althusser and Étienne Balibar, *Reading 'Capital,'* trans. Ben Robert Brewster (London: Verso, 1979).

³ Mark Neocleous, 'The Political Economy of the Dead: Marx's Vampires,' *History of Political Thought* 24.4 (2003): 668-684; Richard Godfrey, Gavin Jack and Campbell Jones, 'Sucking, Bleeding, Breaking: On the Dialectics of Vampirism, Capital, and Time,' *Culture and Organization* 10.1 (2004): 25-36; Claire Reddeman, 'Vampires, Foetuses and Ventriloquism: Metaphor as a Representational Strategy in *Capital Volume 1*,' *Socialism and Democracy* 29:2 (2015): 25-40; Rosalind C. Morris, 'Dialect and Dialectic in "The Working Day" of Marx's *Capital*,' *boundary 2* 43.1 (2016): 219-48; Claudia Leeb, 'Rebelling Against Suffering in Capitalism,' *Contemporary Political Theory* 17.3 (2018): 263-82). Critical interpretation of the literary-metaphorical aspects of the chapter, of course, can support an Althusserian reading of Marx, for instance by seeing the vampire as representing capital's 'immanent and totalizing character' rather than a villainous class-agent; see Matthew MacLellan, 'Marx's Vampires: An Althusserian Critique,' *Rethinking Marxism* 25.4 (2013): 549-65.

⁴ For the 1887 translation, Eleanor Marx painstakingly retrieved the English-language sources from which Marx had translated selected lines into German, over many months that she spent at the British Museum Reading Room where her father had famously conducted research and written much of *Capital*. She then 'fitted in properly' the quotations from 'the English originals' in place of Marx's translations of those texts, as Engels approvingly wrote to his collaborator Laura Lafargue in 1886 (*Karl Marx, Capital: A Critical Analysis of Capitalist Production, London 1887: Karl Marx – Friedrich Engels Gesamtausgabe* (MEGA II.9 Apparat) (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1990), 714. The MEGA editors likewise take a favourable view of

Eleanor's efforts: 'This was above all necessary because a translation back to English of already-translated text would have led to great inaccuracies' (717). As I show, however, Eleanor's herculean labours, their value in some respects notwithstanding, can obscure facets of Marx's writing that point to crucial sub-textual currents of meaning in the 'Working Day' chapter.

⁵ See Paul Apostolidis, *The Fight for Time: Migrant Day Laborers and the Politics of Precarity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019).

⁶ Terrell Carver, *The Postmodern Marx* (State College, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999); William Clare Roberts, *Marx's Inferno: The Political Theory of Capital* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017); Bruno Leipold, 'The Meaning of Class Struggle: Marx and the 1848 June Days,' *History of Political Thought* 42.3 (2021): 464-99. Carver and Roberts also provocatively draw attention to the theoretical work being done by literary components of Marx's texts.

⁷ Except where otherwise noted, page citations in my main text refer to Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Volume One*, trans. Ben Fowkes (New York: Vintage, 1977), 356, given the ready availability and familiarity of this recent translation to contemporary readers of English. I provide my own translation of passages in German in Marx's original manuscript when there is a significant textual variance with implications for how to interpret the chapter's argument and principal themes. Such variances usually although not exclusively concern Marx's translations of original English sources into German.

⁸ Neocleous 2003; Jason J. Morissette, 'Marxferatu: The Vampire Metaphor as a Tool for Teaching Marx's Critique of Capitalism,' *P.S.: Political Science and Politics* 46.3 (2013): 637-42; Roberts, 2017, 129-31.

⁹ The 1887 translation is also that which is used by Robert C. Tucker in his widely read text *The Marx-Engels Reader* (Second Edition (New York: W. W. Norton, 1978)).

¹⁰ I am grateful to Terrell Carver for pointing out this possible double-inflection of Marx's term *Lebenstag*.

¹¹ Leeb 2018.

¹² MEGA II.5, 198.

¹³ Marx develops this characterisation of modern production, for instance, in the chapter on 'Co-operation' (Fowkes, 439-54) and in Section IV of the chapter on 'Machinery and Large-Scale Industry' (Fowkes, 544-53).

¹⁴ In his commentary on this vignette from the 'Working Day' chapter, William Clare Roberts stresses the de-individualisation of working-class experience and the 'impersonal' character of the form of domination to which workers are subjected, as I do here. Yet Roberts keeps the focus entirely on the action of 'impersonal domination' through the exploitative process of wage labour. He writes: 'Mary Anne Walkley did not suffer *capitalist* exploitation in her own individuality, but only qua laborer. . . . Mary Anne Walkley suffered and died from the particular circumstances that attended her particular labors, but she suffered *capitalist* exploitation, if at all, only insofar as she was a member of a class of laborers,

producing all manner of things in all manner of circumstances, many of which are not nearly as injurious as those in which she worked' (Roberts 2017, 124). I have no quarrel with this claim, but Roberts makes no mention of Marx's evocation of working-class reproductive life in the passage. He is thus missing a central aspect of Marx's argument in the chapter.

¹⁵ Weeks 2011, 162.

¹⁶ MEGA II.5, 198, fn. 89.

¹⁷ MEGA II.5, 197. Compare Fowkes's translation: 'Every week this same paper brings a whole list of fresh railway catastrophes under the sensational headings...' (363, fn. 55). Like the 1887 translation, the English version omits the repetition in Marx's text and thereby obscures the temporal collapse signified by his stylistic choice.

¹⁸ MEGA II.5, 197.

¹⁹ Compare the original English quotation, which lacks the suggestive power of Marx's poetic deployment of repetition in his distinctive paraphrasing of the source: 'The following is an example which is of very frequent occurrence: One fireman commenced work on the Monday morning at a very early hour. When he had finished what is called a day's work, he had been on duty 14 hours 50 minutes. Before he had time to get his tea, he was again called on for duty... the next time he finished he had been on duty 14 hours 25 minutes, making a total of 29 hours 15 minutes without intermission.... He applied to the time-keeper...and inquired what they considered a day's work, and was told 13 hours for a goods man (i.e. 78 hours)' (364, fn. 55).

²⁰ 'The rest of his work-week was made up as follows: Wednesday, 15 hours; Thursday 15 hours, 35 minutes; Friday 14 ½ hours; Saturday 14 hours, 10 minutes; all together for the Week 88 hours, 40 minutes' (MEGA II.5, 197).

²¹ MEGA II.5, 195.

²² MEGA II.5, 195.

²³ MEGA II.5, 190.

²⁴ Marx repeats the formulation with reference to workers in the coal industry (368).

²⁵ Neocleous 2003; Morissette 2013; Reddeman 2015. MacLellan (2013) astutely warns against an 'overly literal' reading of the vampire metaphor as signifying bourgeois exploitative practises. Rather, he argues, we must recognise how the metaphor connotes not only the 'capitalist,' as the worker's human antagonist, but more generally 'capital,' as a social-relational entity that envelops workers and capitalists alike in the circuitry of value-creation.

²⁶ Neocleous 2003. MacLellan's reading of the metaphor also offers a critical perspective on the assumption that Marx is proposing a simple binary between the living and the dead, whether as such or in terms of Roberts's associated dichotomy between 'natural' and 'unnatural' uses of labouring capacity.

²⁷ Roberts 2017, 136-38.

²⁸ Godfrey et al. 2004, 27.

²⁹ On this point, see MacClellan: ‘...instead of interpreting Marx’s vampire metaphor as merely dramatizing (and ontologically amplifying) the antagonism between capital and labor, the metaphor, especially the version that appears in the *Grundrisse* and *Capital*, can be read as standing in for a more profound and dialectically complex Marxian concept: namely, the very notion of value or, more specifically, surplus-value, whose character demands that we grasp both capital and labor in terms of a unity of opposites rather than two purely heterogeneous antagonists’ (2013, 561).

³⁰ See Lynda L. Hinkle’s reflection on the vampire as symbolising an eternal infant who lives only through the act of suckling (*MP: An Online Feminist Journal*, July 2008, 19).

³¹ Godfrey et al. 2004, 30.

³² Morris 2016, 220.

³³ Morris 2016, 220.

³⁴ Morris 2016, 221.

³⁵ Morris 2016, 223, 237.

³⁶ Morris 2016, 237-38.

³⁷ Again, it is worth staying alert to Marx’s yen for doubling terms as a means of evoking theoretical meaning through writerly style. In the prior enunciation of this demand that I have quoted above, The Worker declares: ‘I therefore demand a working day of normal length,’ but the words for ‘demand’ (*verlange*) and ‘length’ (*Länge*) are cognates (343; MEGA II.5, 180). This signals the fruitless circularity of a politics aimed at securing a fair wage for a day’s work by placing bourgeois-legal restrictions on the meaning of a ‘day,’ which capitalist practises ruthlessly negate in everyday experiences of labour.)

³⁸ See Apostolidis 2019.

³⁹ My thanks to Terrell Carver for informing me of these circumstances faced by Marx as he was writing *Capital*.

⁴⁰ Autonomy, a London-based think-tank on the future of work and freedom, partnered in this research and published the report, to which I contributed along with the following students at the London School of Economics and Political Science, who conducted and analysed interviews: Tori Anderson, Obaida Chowdhury, Adrian Matak, Skye Oyama, Dimitra Prekka, Niamh Taylor, Charlie To and Will Toye. See James Muldoon and Phil Jones, “‘Rise and Grind’: Microwork and Hustle Culture in the UK,’ May 2022 (<https://autonomy.work/category/reports/>). All quantitative measures of general trends among microworkers provided in this section of the chapter refer to results from the survey that informs this report.

⁴¹ Phil Jones, *Work Without the Worker: Labour in the Age of Platform Capitalism* (London: Verso, 2012), 48.

⁴² Jones, *Work Without the Worker*, 12-16.

⁴³ Although most UK microworkers are aged 25-44, with those aged 25-34 making up nearly one-third of the total population, one interview participant also made a point of saying how microwork gave him something stimulating to do in retirement. Individuals over 65 are a very small minority of UK microworkers but this participant's comments suggested yet another (as yet under-utilised) way that microwork enables capital to extract value from groups external to the standard working population, like the infirm, the disabled and refugees.

⁴⁴ Jodi Dean, "Communicative Capitalism and Class Struggle." *spheres: Journal for Digital Cultures* 1 (2014): 1-16; see also Tiziana Terranova, 'Free Labor,' in *Digital Labor: The Internet as Playground and Factory*, ed. Trebor Scholz (New York: Routledge, 2013), pp 33-57; Christian Marazzi, *The Violence of Financial Capitalism*, trans. Kristina Lebedeva and Jason Francis Mc Gimsey (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2011).

⁴⁵ Jones, *Work Without the Worker*, 45-46

⁴⁶ Jones, *Work Without the Worker*, 53.

⁴⁷ Jones, *Work Without the Worker*, 70-72. In his brief review of the few, scattered organizing efforts to date among microworkers, including a 2011 campaign by Amazon Mechanical Turk workers to write letters to Jeff Bezos demanding higher wages and better working conditions, Jones characterises these endeavours as 'Sisyphean' because the companies can so easily quash them, although he adds that 'at the very least they raise to consciousness a common collective struggle' (86-87). Our field research found that workers do 'use forums and Reddit threads to discuss platform problems, bad requesters, as well as hints and tips around task completion' (Muldoon and Jones, 'Rise and Grind,' 2022).

⁴⁸ Our interviews offered a sense of the complex ways that gender affects microwork experiences for women. On the one hand, women's ordinarily greater responsibilities for reproductive labour in households make microwork especially attractive because it can be done at home or on the go and fits so easily in time-gaps between household duties such as cleaning or caring for children. On the other hand, women's personal dedication to their families seems to encourage the common attitude among all our interviewees of seeing microwork as incidental to their daily lives in comparison to truly important things and thus viewing the subtle forms of domination it involves as trivial.