Editor's Column

To Read Together

In the prefatory dedication of his 1951 *Minima Moralia*, Theodor Adorno explains that the "immediate occasion" for the book was the fiftieth birthday of his friend and collaborator Max Horkheimer. The aphoristic fragments were written between 1944 and 1947, Adorno writes, "in a phase when, bowing to outward circumstances, we had to interrupt our work together." But their publication in book form "wishes to demonstrate gratitude and loyalty by refusing to acknowledge the interruption. It bears witness to a *dialogue intérieur*: there is not a motif in it that does not belong as much to Horkheimer as to him who found the time to formulate it" (18). It is a striking gesture, framing the book as a testament to the fact that even when the two men were separated and out of touch, the intimacy of their collaboration was nonetheless sustained at a distance, in the interior dialogue Adorno continued to hear in his head.

There is a similar lesson at the heart of *Politically Red*, the remarkable book written by Eduardo Cadava and Sara Nadal-Melsió that is the focus of a rich discussion in the Theories and Methodologies dossier in this issue. "The beauty of this collaboration," note Cadava and Nadal-Melsió in the final pages, "is that it has confirmed in rather extraordinary ways that we never read, write, think, let alone publish, alone—even when we find ourselves in forced isolation or simply imagine ourselves alone" (336). A pandemic book, an "unexpected" and "totally unplanned" volume that started out as a book review (Cadava), *Politically Red* is also, in its form as well as in the virtuosic readings of a "plural coalition" or "red common-wealth" of texts by Walter Benjamin, Rosa Luxemburg, Karl Marx, W. E. B. Du Bois, and Fredric Jameson, among others (Cadava and Nadal-Melsió 27), a provocative exploration of the modalities and stakes of collaboration in the broadest sense.

The reminder that "when we read, we never read alone" is not only a refrain in the book (see 9, 12, 38, 109, 326, 330) but also a far-reaching argument: because we read "through the medium" of other texts, reading and writing are "labors of multiplication," extending and elaborating on the thoughts and words of others (9).

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> Reading and writing are collaborative activities—they can become a means of massification, a matter of amplification, and, in the words of Walter Benjamin, a way of "setting the masses in motion." There can be no mass movement, no mobilization, without the training that comes from a deep engagement with language and its capacity to produce unforeseen and incalculable effects. (9)

If "this question of collaboration is a profoundly political question," as Nadal-Melsió has suggested in an interview about *Politically Red*, because of the way that an attentiveness to the condition of working with others instills "a sense of belonging to the logic of the coalition" (Tutt), and if the "interplay of writing and reading creates an apparatus—a network of historical relations—that intensifies and multiplies the forces of production at work within each text" (Cadava and Nadal-Melsió 10), it would be worth considering further precisely what it means to collaborate.

At times in *Politically Red*, such as when Cadava and Nadal-Melsió marvel at the vertiginous mélange of passages from sources in multiple languages that Marx cites and analyzes in his 1879–82 *Ethnological Notebooks* "in an act of reading that is at the same time an act of gathering and assembling, that is entirely collaborative" (326), collaboration can seem to be above all a matter of intertextuality: citation and interpolation. But this would seem to reduce collaboration to a figure—when we read and write, we metaphorically *work with* our sources—rather than a robust theory of coordinated or shared human labor. As Fred Moten phrases it (in discussing his own ongoing work with Stefano Harney), an understanding of collaboration must go beyond "the simple fact of intertextuality": "Recognizing that text is intertext is one thing. Seeing that a text is a social space is another. It's a deeper way of looking at it. To say that it's a social space is to say that stuff is going on: people, things, are meeting there and interacting, rubbing off one another, brushing against one another—and you enter into that social space, to try to be part of it" (Harney and Moten 108).

In other passages, Cadava and Nadal-Melsió imply that what is ultimately at stake in collaborative work is a *collective* political project. They contend that "reading and writing—like any political act—reveal themselves to be entirely collaborative and collective. We can never enact them by ourselves" (38; see also 152, 171, 211, 224). We might well ask, though, whether these two terms imply modalities of shared or conjoined labor that are synonymous or complementary or instead represent logics of coordination that should be carefully distinguished from one another. To point to only one example, the influential *Reading* Capital (originally published in two volumes in French in 1965) is described in passing in *Politically Red* as a "collaborative project" (340n29). But in fact Louis Althusser emphasizes that the papers prepared by him and the other participants (Étienne Balibar, Roger Establet, Jacques Rancière, and Pierre Macherey) for the seminars on Marx's *Capital* that Althusser convened at the École Normale Supérieure in the spring of 1965 were precisely not collaborative in the sense of having been written in tandem by more than one author. On the contrary, the seminars featured separate presentations by each of the participants followed by intensive discussion, and thus Althusser emphasizes that the essays on *Capital* gathered in the published book "are no more than the various individual protocols of this reading: each having cut the peculiar oblique path that suited him through the immense forest of this Book" (11–12). In this sense *Reading* Capital is a "collective work," as Balibar describes it in the introduction he wrote for the 2015 English translation of the complete edition (1), but not a collaborative one.

I am dwelling on the question of defining collaboration not only because it is so central to the political stakes of *Politically Red* but also because in reading Cadava and Nadal-Melsió I am reminded that Marx's own work can be read as an extended meditation on precisely the same issue. In chapter 13 of the first volume of *Capital*, Marx argues that the historical expansion and control of "co-operation" played a key role in the development of capitalism. Indeed, cooperation for Marx "constitutes the starting point of capitalist production" (439). Enabled by rationalization and industrialization, Marx observes, the coordinated division of labor in turn enabled an expansion of productive power:

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> Just as the offensive power of a squadron of cavalry, or the defensive power of an infantry regiment, is essentially different from the sum of the offensive or defensive powers of the individual soldiers taken separately, so the sum total of the mechanical forces exerted by isolated workers differs from the social force that is developed when many hands co-operate in the same undivided operation, such as raising a heavy weight, turning a winch or getting an obstacle out of the way . . . . Not only do we have here an increase in the productive power of the individual, by means of co-operation, but the creation of a new productive power, which is intrinsically a collective one. (443)

Although Marx depicts cooperation as a mechanism integral to the expansion and entrenchment of capitalism, David Harvey—among other influential readers of *Capital*— has pointed out that Marx "casts neither cooperation nor division of labor in an inherently negative light. He views them as potentially creative, beneficial and gratifying for the laborer" (172). Marx aims to demonstrate to the worker that "the social productive power of labour, or the productive power of social labour" (Marx 447) has been "seized on by capital to its own particular advantage and thereby turned into something negative for the laborer" (Harvey 172). The task, then, is to reclaim the power of cooperation: "When the worker co-operates in a planned way with others, he strips off the fetters of his individuality, and develops the capabilities of his species" (Marx 447).

The thrilling possibility explored by Cadava and Nadal-Melsió in *Politically Red* is that collaborative scholarship—reading and writing together—can be understood as a crucial arena in which cooperation is redefined and reclaimed through intellectual praxis. From this angle, the book hovers in proximity to an extensive body of work on coauthorship and collaboration in literature and the arts.[1] What would it mean to think scholarly collaboration along the lines explored and modeled in *Politically Red* in relation to the recent argument by the legal and political theorist Bernard Harcourt for the expansion of "coöperism," defined as an effort to "*concentrate* forms of cooperation so that the more beneficial forms aggregate and build on one another" (23), in all spheres of cultural, social, and political life? The question at the heart of *Politically Red* might not be the one famously posed by Althusser in his contribution to *Reading* Capital—"[W]hat is it to read?" (13)—but instead a reformulation that would force us to consider the politics of collaboration: What is it to read and write together?

You can read *to* someone else; you can read *alongside* someone else, sitting next to each other on the same couch; you can read *in dialogue with* someone else, perusing the same work and then coming together to discuss it; you can read *in the wake of* someone else, checking out a text they recommended or described—but what does it mean to read *with* someone else? Can you read with someone the same way you can play music or basketball with someone? In other words, can reading be taken up in a shared perceptual field, in a cohabited space of engagement with a text?

One of the paradoxes of the dazzling reading Cadava and Nadal-Melsió offer in the opening pages of *Politically Red* of the doodled heads on a page of one of the draft manuscripts that Marx and Engels composed in a feverish intensity between November 1845 and June 1846 is that the very authority of their interpretation makes it clear just how difficult it is to read a coauthored text with an eye to collaboration.[2]

It is worth noting, first of all, that Cadava and Nadal-Melsió turn to a page of the holograph draft for evidence of "the process of Marx and Engels's collaborative production" (10), suggesting thereby that the traces of a collaborative writing process are more likely to be discerned in manuscripts, through certain telltale features (handwriting, marginalia, ink color, editorial marks) that normally do not survive the transition into print. Cadava and Nadal-Melsió describe the suggestive juxtaposition of scribbled handwritten text on the left-hand side of the manuscript page and the "mass" of doodled heads on the right-hand side as comprising "a living archive of a collaborative process" (17), although they go on to explain that the page may not actually capture a record of the way Marx and Engels composed it: "If the frontispiece is a living archive of a collaborative process and its conditions of possibility, the drafts, crossings-out, additions, and superimpositions make

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it at times impossible to identify the origin of the text in a determinate fashion" (17). The text on the left is in Engels's handwriting, but so are the doodles on the right—interspersed with more cursory annotations and individual terms in Marx's handwriting: "Der Mensch," "Der Einzige," "Das Individuum" ("Man," "The ego," "The individual"; on this mix, see also Johnson 152; Carver and Blank 35)—and, Cadava and Nadal-Melsió write, "because they most likely would have been drawn over the course of days, weeks, or even months—we can be sure he did not do them all in one sitting—what we see in them is the slow emergence of a mass through the movement of his pen" (11), extending or disturbing or departing from the temporality of the composition of the text on the left. Engels's doodle is a sort of "fugitive labor," they suggest; it is "itself a mode of thinking, but one that comes in the form of distraction—in the form of what unfolds in relation to an indeterminate end, even if it follows patterns of repetition, reproduction, and transformation. The doodle corresponds to a moment in which writing is suspended" (16).

If this draft manuscript is emblematic of collaboration, it suggests if anything that collaborative process evades the archive. If we can conclude anything about the dynamics of what it means to read and write together from this example, collaboration involves not a coordinated procedure or protocol but instead the constant, unpredictable evasion or defiance of a single standard method of collaboration. There are, in Moten's words, "all these time lags and rhythmic irregularities that come into play—a sort of involuntary sync of patience" (Moten et al.).

Put differently, there is no one way of working together, even for a single pair of coauthors, even in the course of a single project: collaboration can only be a dialogue in what Roland Barthes calls "heterorhythmy" (9), an overlay of discrepant rhythms of analysis and conceptualization and composition, each rhythm itself "a flexible, free, mobile rhythm; a transitory, fleeting form, but a form nonetheless" (35). (These instances of "idiorrhythmy" are not to be confused with something we might be tempted to call personal style, since they can be internally heterogenous and mutable: in the frontispiece of *Politically Red*, it is Engels's doodling that suspends Engels's writing.)

In fact, we never read or write quite together: instead, one person reads a little bit ahead of the other; or one skims to the next paragraph while the other pauses to ruminate over a particular phrase; or one thinks of a term or a reference that hadn't occurred to the other. Crucially, in collaboration there is never not a division of labor. One person speaks, the other listens. One takes notes, the other elaborates them into prose. One person looks up a citation, while the other drafts an interpretation of a passage.[3]

This unevenness is apparent in the ways Cadava and Nadal-Melsió have described their own writing process in various public presentations and interviews. Although they both emphasize that the work was "respectful" and "balanced"—"both of us had an equal voice in how things happened and how it would unfold," in Cadava's words—they also characterize it as unavoidably, even productively, heterogeneous. Once they agreed to write together, everything was based on "conversation," they both recall (Cadava; Nadal-Melsió; Tutt), at first for hours over the phone as they discussed readings, which led them to more sources and archives, and then eventually in person as the isolation of the pandemic receded. Cadava would take notes on their oral conversations, "and then we would each start writing," he explains, using the notes as a basis for drafting separate sections. "She would send me things, I would expand them, I would send them back, she would cut them. And then we would read everything out loud" (Tutt). "Eduardo would read out loud to me and I would edit," Nadal-Melsió recalls. "Then I would read ahead, looking for figures for thought" that they might want to explore as they continued their exchanges: Du Bois's second comet, Benjamin's militant boxes, Marx's barge (Nadal-Melsió).

There are all sorts of vivid figures for the rippling divergence native to collaboration, the ways it mobilizes an enabling division of labor and inspiration. Duke Ellington declared that his fellow composer and arranger Billy Strayhorn "was not, as he was often referred to by many, my alter ego" but instead "all the eyes in the back of my head" (qtd. in Barg 18). Gilles Deleuze told one interviewer that his longtime writing partner Félix Guattari was the one

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who "had true flashes, while I was a kind of lightning conductor, I hid in the ground. Whatever I grounded would leap up again, transformed, and Felix would pick it up again, etc., and thus we kept going ahead" (qtd. in Dosse 11–12).

The point is that it is precisely this unevenness in contribution, this idiorrhythmic discrepancy, that makes a collaborative text a "social space." Labor in collaboration is not transcended or superseded—it does not quite coalesce into an amorphous phantasm of the "mass." It is more accurate to say that what happens in collaboration is an unceasing, ever-expanding proliferation of the division of labor.

This intensification of internal differentiation does not tend to leave traces but is, more often than not, dissolved into the text as it is produced. But it is perhaps precisely the illegibility of collaboration that makes such a text an engine of a "red commonwealth," a resource that "intensifies and multiplies the forces of production at work within each text" (Cadava and Nadal-Melsió 10). The treachery of the division of labor under capitalism, according to Marx and Engels, is that it fixes every individual into "a particular, exclusive sphere of activity, which is forced upon him and from which he cannot escape."[4] The very opacity of a collaboratively authored text—in which it is no longer discernable who did what—dislodges the "fixation of social activity" of the coauthors (Marx and Engels 160). In a small way, in a corner of the sphere of cultural production, collaborative writing creates a "social" space in which "the transformation of labour into self-activity corresponds to the transformation of the earlier limited intercourse into the intercourse of individuals as such" (192).

In envisioning the potential of communism, Marx notably does not recycle terms such as "co-operation" to describe the stage where the proletariat will attain "control and conscious mastery" of the productive force of the social character of labor. He tends to describe it instead as an "association of free men" or a society of "associated producers" (Marx 171). We might ask, then, what is it to associate? In 2012, the musician Vijay Iyer recorded a backstage conversation with an esteemed elder, Muhal Richard Abrams. The conversation between the two pianists covers a wide terrain, but one exchange is particularly telling. Iyer starts to ask Abrams a question about his role as one of the founders of the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians in Chicago in 1965. Iyer is hardly able to begin his sentence ("So, you know, this was a collective of African American musicians—") before Abrams interrupts to correct him:

> MRA: An association.
> VI: [Pauses] An association—
> MRA: *Not* a collective.
> VI: Oh, OK.
> MRA: An *association*.
> VI: Well, what's the distinction there?
> MRA: [Dryly] Well, the two words are different. You can analyze those words and there's a distinction there. [A pause, then with more warmth] But, to give you what I mean, an *association* is, like, *respect for the other individual*. It's not a collective in the sense of what a collective would be.
>
> (Iyer 183)

Abrams expands on his point a few minutes later: "Respect for the individual because we were expressing that in terms of *life itself*, you see? You respect the ditchdigger, you respect the great musician, you respect the hairdresser, you respect the swami. You respect people, you know what I mean? You respect the rabbi. You respect *people*, whoever they are. You respect the fact that they *have a right to choose*."

Brent Hayes Edwards

Notes

1. In terms of literary scholarship, one place to start would be the 2001 Theories and Methodologies section in *PMLA* devoted to collaboration and concepts of authorship (Ede and Lunsford; Laird: Carringer), which surveyed pioneering work in the area (by, e.g., Stillinger; Masten; Koestenbaum) and sketched issues for further discussion. Some of the more recent scholarship on the poetics and politics of collaboration includes John-Steiner; Crawford; Stone and Thompson.

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2. Although these fragments were later combined and have been published in various editorial iterations under the title *The German Ideology*, recent scholarship has demonstrated that they were not in fact envisioned by Marx and Engels as a single coherent book project in the first place (see Johnson; Carver and Blank).

3. In one of my own first experiences of coauthorship, my friend Alys Weinbaum and I agonized over each and every phrase of an article, switching places in an ungainly but effective back-and-forth where one of us would sit at the computer keyboard transcribing what the other dictated. But the power dynamics shifted, because in practice the work of transcription entailed not simply typing up the prose given in dictation but also making adjustments and revisions on the fly—in other words, it was the first opportunity for an editorial pass. (The real struggle in our working relationship was who controlled the bowl of M&Ms.) See Weinbaum and Edwards.

4. This well-known passage is worth rereading in full: "For as soon as the distribution of labour comes into being, each man has a particular, exclusive sphere of activity, which is forced upon him and from which he cannot escape. He is a hunter, a fisherman, a shepherd, or a critical critic, and must remain so if he does not want to lose his means of livelihood; while in communist society, where nobody has one exclusive sphere of activity but each can become accomplished in any branch he wishes, society regulates the general production and thus makes it possible for me to do one thing today and another tomorrow, to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticize after dinner, just as I have a mind, without ever becoming hunter, fisherman, shepherd or critic" (160).

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