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Capitalism:  
concept, idea, image

Aspects of Marx's *Capital*  
today

edited by

PETER OSBORNE

ÉRIC ALLIEZ

ERIC-JOHN RUSSELL



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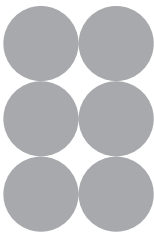
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# **INTRODUCTION**



# Capitalism: concept, idea, image

PETER OSBORNE

‘The experience of our generation’, Walter Benjamin famously wrote in a note for his Arcades project during the 1930s, ‘is that capitalism will not die a natural death.’<sup>1</sup> It is the experience of the generations reading this book that capitalism is unlikely to die any kind of death during their lifetimes, unless it is a death of all. Indeed, on the historical scale of transitions between modes of production, it is still only recently – a mere thirty years – that the first world-historically significant experiment with a non-capitalist political-economic system, in Russia and Eastern Europe, came to its dismal end; while the second was beginning to embrace an explicitly capitalistic economic form. (China began negotiations to join the World Trade Organization in 1986, although it was fifteen years before it was accepted, in 2001.) ‘Globalization’, in the specific sense of a digitally based global expansion of capital markets in the wake of the demise of ‘actually existing socialism’, giving rise to a new, financially based regime of capital accumulation – ‘supercapitalism’ (*Überkapitalismus*), we might call it – is just three decades old. That regime experienced its first major crisis in 2008, from which its recovery remains

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1. Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin, Cambridge MA and London: Belknap, Harvard University Press, 1999, [X11a,3], p.667.

slow and uneven. But while the effects of the crisis have given sustenance to the idea that capitalism must surely end, somehow, at some point within historical sight<sup>2</sup> – even, in fact, to the idea that it has already begun to end – anticipatory announcements of ‘postcapitalism’ nonetheless remain wholly wishful, based on technological grounds that ignore the social relations at the heart of the system.<sup>3</sup>

As the emergence of a new, globally financialized super-capitalist regime began to sink in on the Left towards the end of the 1990s, there was a marked revival of academic interest in Marx’s critique of political economy, turning back the tide of the previous decade’s political flight from Marxism.<sup>4</sup> While Lenin and Stalin were being relocated, as political memorabilia, to the post-Soviet culture garden, Marx’s *Capital* increasingly appeared as the one text capable of grasping the fundamental social structure and dynamics of the historical present. Indeed, as a theoretical account of the fundamental processes of the production and circulation of capital, the social relation that is constitutive of capitalist societies, *Capital* appears to be of ever-increasing relevance as the capital relation becomes ever more extensively generalized and intensively overdetermining of the rest of social life, on a global scale, driven on by the subjugation of national state forms to the reterritorializing logics of transnational capital. (Transnational forms are the internal articulation of the asymmetrically structured whole commonly referred to as ‘the global’.) The 2008 financial crisis – and the revival of previously

2. Wolfgang Streeck, *How Will Capitalism End?*, London and New York: Verso, 2016.

3. See, for example, Alex Williams and Nick Srnicek, *#ACCELERATE MANIFESTO for an Accelerationist Politics* (2013), <https://syntheticeidifice.wordpress.com/2014/03/13/accelerate-manifesto-for-an-accelerationist-politics>; Paul Mason, *Postcapitalism: A Guide to Our Future*, London: Penguin, 2016. More cautiously Streeck writes of a crisis-ridden ‘post-capitalism interregnum’ prior to the purported emergence of some ‘new order’ (*How Will Capitalism End?*, p. 46). However, quite what is ‘post-capitalist’ about this crisis-ridden situation remains unclear.

4. The UK-based journal *Historical Materialism: Research in Critical Marxist Theory* was launched in 1997. In 2003 its earlier US counterpart, *Rethinking Marxism: A Journal of Economics, Culture and Society* (launched 1988), moved to a major academic publisher.

discredited Marxist theories of crisis that it occasioned – served to reinforce the recognition of this fact.<sup>5</sup> *Capital* is once again being widely read and discussed, especially in the English language.<sup>6</sup> In fact, if there is one ideological victory that the Left in advanced capitalist societies can claim, in the decade since the financial crisis of 2008, it is the restoration in public consciousness of the concept of capitalism as a conflictual form of society, in opposition to the naturalized individualism of the generic discourse of ‘markets’, pursued to the point of auto-destruction by neoliberalized state forms (although this is perhaps more of a direct effect of the inequalities exacerbated and laid bare by the crisis than of any particular political struggle).<sup>7</sup> In the UK, the revival of Labour as a party of the Left can in large part be put down to an end to the ‘commonsensical’ acceptance of various basic inequalities, which are defended by economic liberals as ‘natural’ consequences of otherwise ‘beneficial’ markets – the displacement into xenophobic nationalism of the popular affects associated with this shift notwithstanding.

The 150th anniversary of the publication of the first volume of Marx’s *Capital*, in September 2017, thus fell at a propitious moment. Of the conferences held to celebrate it, the one from which the essays in this book derive was unusual for being organized by a Philosophy research centre;<sup>8</sup> albeit one orientated

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5. See Peter Osborne, ‘A Sudden Topicality: Marx, Nietzsche and the Politics of Crisis’, *Radical Philosophy* 160 (March/April 2010), pp. 19–26, [www.radicalphilosophyarchive.com/article/a-sudden-topicality](http://www.radicalphilosophyarchive.com/article/a-sudden-topicality).

6. One catalyst for this reading was the online posting, in 2010, of the autumn 2007 iteration of David Harvey’s lectures on *Capital* at City University New York: <http://davidharvey.org/reading-capital>. For problems associated with the overwhelmingly English-language mediation of this revival of *Capital* reading, see the discussions by Boris Buden and Keston Sutherland in Chapters 7 and 10, respectively, below.

7. The international success of Thomas Piketty’s 2013 *Le Capital au XXI Siècle* (*Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer, Cambridge MA and London: Belknap, Harvard University Press, 2014) was both symptom and further catalyst of this restoration. A methodologically conventional piece of economic history, its combination of a relentlessly statistical focus on the growth of inequality and the use of the word ‘capital’ inadvertently served to help legitimate the reintroduction of a Marxian perspective into public debates.

8. ‘Capitalism: Concept & Idea – 150 Years of Marx’s *Capital*: The Philosophy and Politics of Capital Today’, organized by the Centre for Research in Modern European

towards post-Kantian European Philosophy, rather than the mainstream ‘analytical’ variant, within which a notoriously bowdlerized reading of Marx was briefly marginally fashionable in the 1980s. This is not because we take Marx to be a ‘philosopher’ in any academic disciplinary sense, or *Capital* to be a book of ‘philosophy’, in that sense, or even that we follow the Althusserian path, ‘From *Capital* to Marx’s Philosophy’,<sup>9</sup> since that project problematically retained the illusory conceptual self-sufficiency of philosophy in the displaced form of a de-historicized ‘Theory’. Rather, it is because the continuation of the deeper history of post-Kantian European philosophy appears to us best pursued today as a *transdisciplinary practice of critique and concept construction*, at the highest levels of generality and abstraction, including critique of the prevailing intellectual division of labour, with its idealistic reification of concepts as self-sufficiently ‘philosophical’; and modes of concept construction that are attentive to their own social and historical conditions – of which Marx’s critique of political economy is exemplary, in each case.

### **Concept (capital and capitalism)**

In insisting that the study of ‘economy’ (the historical social forms of the system of needs) focus on the conditions of the accumulation of wealth as capital, rather than just upon labour or market exchange, Marx’s *Capital* transformed economic analysis from a theory about the actions of human individuals into a theory of social relations: specifically, a ‘social labour theory of value’ (see Chapter 1, below). This is a theory that conceptualizes capitalistic accumulation as exploitation, across the whole range

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Philosophy (CRMEP), Kingston University London; held at Conway Hall and the London School of Economics, 13 and 14 October 2017, with additional financial support from the Philosophy Department at the University of Paris 8, Saint-Denis.

9. This is the title of the opening part of Louis Althusser et al., *Reading Capital* (1965), written by Althusser himself. *Reading Capital: The Complete Edition*, trans. Ben Brewster and David Fernbach, London and New York: Verso, 2016, pp. 9–72.

of different kinds of particular or 'concrete' labours, through its theory of surplus value. Indeed, it was the demonstration of the independence of surplus-value from 'its specific incarnations as profit, interest, land rents, etc.' – and hence, we might say, the peculiar status of value as a *social abstraction* – that Marx himself took to be one of the two 'best things' about his work.<sup>10</sup> The other was the discovery of the 'double-nature' of labour in capitalist societies as at once 'concrete' and 'abstract', expressed as use-value and exchange-value, respectively. Étienne Balibar has suggested that these two discoveries lead to two separate conceptions of capitalism: one focused on generalized commodification, the other on different ways of exploiting labour-power.<sup>11</sup> Yet it is hard to separate them, analytically, since the concrete–abstract labour distinction underlies Marx's concept of value itself. Historically, however, a focus on one or the other has given rise to two separate tendencies in Western Marxism: one associated with Lukács and the Frankfurt School, the other with Tronti, Italian Workerism and post-Workerism. These are the 'torn halves' of an integral Marxism, one might say (borrowing an image from Adorno), to which they 'do not add up'.<sup>12</sup>

In emphasizing the historically specific social character of wage-labour as 'abstract' labour, *Capital* shifted economic analysis from the domain of moral and behavioural psychology (dating back to Adam Smith's 1759 *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*) – lively once again today in (neo-)neoclassical economics – to what appeared in the period after World War II, in disciplinary terms, as sociology. This was true even in those contexts in which the philosophical aspects of *Capital* as *A Critique of*

10. Marx, letter to Engels, 24 August 1867, in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, Volume 42: *Letters 1864–1868*, London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1987, p. 407.

11. See Étienne Balibar, 'Marx's "Two Discoveries"', trans. Cadenza Academic Translations, [www.cairn-int.info/article-E\\_AMX\\_050\\_0044--marx-s-two-discoveries.htm](http://www.cairn-int.info/article-E_AMX_050_0044--marx-s-two-discoveries.htm), from *Actuel Marx* 50 (2011/12), pp. 44–60.

12. Cf. Adorno to Benjamin, 18 March 1936, in Theodor W. Adorno and Walter Benjamin, *The Complete Correspondence, 1928–1949*, trans. Nicholas Walker, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999, p. 130.



*Political Economy* (the main subtitle of all three volumes) were explicitly acknowledged. The history of the Institute for Social Research in Frankfurt, in exile and return – from 1931 up the end of the 1960s – for example, is in large part the history of a struggle with the issue of disciplinarity in the wake of Marx’s critique of political economy, in the dual sense of disciplinarity as both intellectual and institutional form.<sup>13</sup> It is notable in this respect that one of the most explicitly philosophical readings of *Capital*, the German *Neu Marx-Lektüre*, derived from a lecture by Adorno entitled ‘Marx and the Basic Concepts of Sociological Theory’, in the summer of 1962.<sup>14</sup> And, for all its Hegelianism, that reading remains dogged, in a certain way, by the concept of ‘society’.<sup>15</sup> That there are philosophical aspects to *Capital* – in the plural – though, and that these aspects cannot be artificially separated from the rest of the book, as ‘Marx’s philosophy’, is now widely acknowledged. Indeed, the main competing critical schools of *Capital* interpretation in Europe, dating back to the early 1960s, are differentiated broadly philosophically: with the ‘French’ (Althusserian/structuralist) and the ‘Italian’ (Trontian/vitalist) ones joining the ‘German’ (Adornian/Critical Hegelian) one.<sup>16</sup> Each has developed distinctive insights into Marx’s great

13. See Peter Osborne, ‘Problematizing Disciplinarity, Transdisciplinary Problematics’, *Theory, Culture & Society*, vol. 32, nos 5–6 (September–November 2015), pp. 3–35, 18–21, <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0263276415592245>.

14. ‘Theodor W. Adorno on “Marx and the Basic Concepts of Sociological Theory” from a Seminar Transcript in the Summer Semester of 1962’, *Historical Materialism*, vol. 26, no. 1 (2018), pp. 154–64.

15. For the *Neu Marx-Lektüre* (the ‘New Reading of Marx’ – new in the 1960s, that is), see Hans-Georg Backhaus, ‘On the Dialectics of the Value-Form’ (1969), trans. Michael Eldred and Mike Roth, *Thesis Eleven* 1 (1980); and, more generally, Riccardo Bellofiore and Thommaso Redolfi Riva, ‘The *Neue Marx-Lektüre*: Putting the Critique of Political Economy back into the Critique of Society’, *Radical Philosophy* 189 (January/February 2014), pp. 24–36, [www.radicalphilosophyarchive.com/article/the-neue-marx-lecture](http://www.radicalphilosophyarchive.com/article/the-neue-marx-lecture). Along with Peter Sloterdijk’s *Critique of Cynical Reason* (1983; trans. Michael Eldred, London and New York: Verso, 1988), the *Neu Marx-Lektüre* represents one of the two main non- (and anti-) Habermasian, post-Adornian trajectories of Frankfurt Critical Theory.

16. For the difference between these ‘French’ and Italian’ readings, see Étienne Balibar, ‘A Point of Heresy in Western Marxism: Althusser’s and Tronti’s Antithetic Readings of *Capital* in the Early 1960s’, in Nick Nesbitt (ed.), *The Concept in Crisis: ‘Reading Capital’ Today*, Durham NC and London: Duke University Press, 2017, pp. 93–112. National situations are, of course, internally more complicated, as Michel Henri’s French

work and they coexist now – in often unstable or contradictory combinations – in the international English-language translational culture of ‘critical theory’.

Understanding economic value, and capital in particular, as a social relation between commodified labour-power, on the one hand, and the ownership of other means of production, on the other (rather than neoclassically, as simply a durable good that is used in the production of goods or services, including money), transforms the political understanding of capitalist societies. Historical transformations in the development of capital as a social relation (including labour-power as ‘variable’ capital) become historical transformations in the most basic and *constitutively conflictual* – antagonistic – structures of practices of capitalist societies. A conception of capitalism grounded in the Marxian concept of capital is thus quite different from any based on the notion of markets; although markets (and exchange relations more generally) are, of course, central to the expression and modes of appearance of the fundamental social relations of capital, as legally regulated forms of exchange. Today, this conception tends to include the ongoing character of those forms of ‘expropriation through dispossession’ that Marx himself relegated to the historically formative role of ‘so-called primitive or originary [*ursprünglich*] accumulation’, in the final part of *Capital, Volume 1*,<sup>17</sup> alongside renewed emphasis on the relations of violence (*Gewalt*) intrinsic to the social relations of capital itself (see Chapter 9, below), and a growing sense of the ‘re-feudalization’ of capitalism itself (see Chapter 7, below).

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phenomenological reading shows, for example. Michel Henri, *Marx: I, Une Philosophie de la réalité; II, Une Philosophie de l'économie*, Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1976; in English in an abridged form as *Marx: A Philosophy of Human Reality*, trans. Kathleen McLaughlin, Bloomington IN: Indiana University Press, 1983.

17. See Claudia von Werlhof, ‘Why Peasants and Housewives Do Not Disappear in the Capitalist World-System’, *Working Paper* No. 68, Sociology of Development Research Center, University of Bielefeld, 1985; and ‘Globalization and the Permanent Process of Primitive Accumulation: The Example of the MAI, the Multilateral Agreement on Investment’, *Journal of World Systems Research*, vol. 6, no. 3 (Fall–Winter 2000), pp. 728–47.

Marx's concept of capitalism is that of a type of society in which the capital relation is socioeconomically dominant. But what is the relation of the *structural totality of the system of capitalistic social relations* to the (total) *historical actuality of capitalist societies*? This is perhaps the main question at stake in Marx's conception of capitalism, and it has been contested anew – figured as the site of a contradiction between 'theory' and 'history', on the one hand, or 'theory' and 'politics', on the other – since the revival of theoretical debates within Marxism in Europe in the 1960s. E.P. Thompson's polemical essay 'The Poverty of Theory' (1978) formulated it, at its extreme, like this:

[T]he whole society comprises many activities and relations ... which are not the concern of Political Economy, and for which it has no terms. ... [*Capital*] is the study of the logic of capital, not of capitalism, and the social and political dimensions of the history, the wrath and the understanding of the class struggle arose from a region independent of the closed system of economic logic.<sup>18</sup>

At one level, the controversy between Thompson and Althusser (who is the more pointed object of Thompson's ire) was the latest manifestation of a philosophical antinomy between empiricism and idealism that has characterized European philosophy since the seventeenth century. In another, it pitted two aspects of Marx's *Capital* against each other, antithetically, which are, in fact, integrally dialectically connected: history and socio-economic system. The problem to which it points, though – how to grasp this relation, across the conceptual difference of capital and capitalism – remains. This is both a (theoretical) problem about thinking mediation and a (historical) problem internal to the development of capitalist societies themselves.<sup>19</sup> In

18. E.P. Thompson, 'The Poverty of Theory, or An Orrery of Errors', in *The Poverty of Theory and Other Essays*, London: Merlin Press, 1978, pp. 62, 65.

19. Thompson focused on the period of the formation of industrial capitalism, on the 'making', rather than the development, of the English working class. It is not so clear that in established capitalist societies it can be said that class struggle 'arises from a region independent of the ... system of economic logic'. Thompson's sleight of hand lies in the

the years since Thompson's polemic, the Marxist literature has addressed this problem of the capital–capitalism relation in two seemingly contradictory directions. However, while it does not strain the concept of dialectics too much to suggest that each of them carries a truth that becomes such only in its relations to the other, the political implications of the truth structured by this fundamental contradiction remain hard to glean.

In one direction, in the spirit of Karl Polanyi's 1949 *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time*, there has been an emphasis on the extra-capitalistic aspects and conditions of capitalistic societies – be they construed as 'social' (as in Polanyi), anthropological, or ontological (Negri, Chapter 4 below). The social interpretation has taken two main forms. First, there has been a new emphasis on what Marx called 'formal subsumption', as the mode of integration of pre- or non-capitalist productive practices into the process of the production of value; in distinction from the 'real subsumption' of labour to capital, through transformations within the production process itself.<sup>20</sup> This functions in two ways: (1) to explain the dynamics of the 'combined and uneven development' of recently and still only emergently capitalist societies (demographically, still the majority of the world), which retain myriad non-capitalistic practices at various levels of the social both alongside and within circuits of reproduction of capital that have come to dominate the reproduction of those societies; and (2) to posit an imaginary limit to the capitalistic character of even the most capitalist societies, as something like the limit of 'the human' as a residually autonomous social being.

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attribution of 'closure' to a dynamically open, historically developing socioeconomic system.

20. See, for example, Harry Harootunian, *Marx After Marx: History and Time in the Expansion of Capitalism*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2015, and my review, 'Marx after Marx after Marx after Marx', *Radical Philosophy* 200 (November/December 2016), pp. 47–51, [www.radicalphilosophyarchive.com/reviews/individual-reviews/marx-after-marx-after-marx-after-marx](http://www.radicalphilosophyarchive.com/reviews/individual-reviews/marx-after-marx-after-marx-after-marx).

Second, there has been a decisive shift beyond the standpoint of production of the value (adopted in the first volume of *Capital*) to that of reproduction and *social reproduction* in particular, convergent with the arguments about ‘permanent primitive accumulation’ (see Chapters 5, 6 and 8, below). Volume 2 of *Capital* is about the circuits through which capital circulates in order to reproduce itself, in an expanded form, but it pays no heed to either the ‘extra-economic’ reproduction of variable capital – that is, to the social reproduction of the labour force, including the production of new people – or the broader social conditions of the reproduction of the capitalist relations of production, referred to by Marx as the ‘superstructure’. This shift has been the result of two main impulses: (1) the theoretical interest in the social conditions of the reproduction of the relations of production shown by Althusser, summed up by him in the idea of ‘ideological state apparatuses’ (ISAs), and presented fragmentarily in the posthumously published text of 1969–72, *Sur la reproduction*;<sup>21</sup> and (2) the feminist critique of Marx’s restrictedly value-based productivism, which emphasizes the kinship relations of working-class families as the site of the production and reproduction of labour-power.<sup>22</sup> The results of these literatures are combined in Nancy Fraser’s comprehensively neo-Polanyian approach to the recent global financial crisis, rendering more complex Marx’s conception of capitalism as a socio-historical form.<sup>23</sup>

21. In English as Louis Althusser, *On the Reproduction of Capitalism: Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses*, trans. G.M. Goshgarian, London and New York: Verso, 2014. The famous ISAs essay of 1970 was extracted from this manuscript. This perspective has its source in Gramsci’s expanded conceptions of hegemony and the state.

22. See Lisa Vogel, *Marxism and the Oppression of Women: Towards a Unitary Theory*, New Brunswick NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1983; in broader anthropological terms, see Gayle Rubin, ‘The “Traffic in Women”’: Notes on the Political Economy of Sex’, in Rayna R. Reiter (ed.), *Towards an Anthropology of Women*, New York: Monthly Review Press, 1975, pp. 157–210; and, more recently, Silvia Federici, *Revolution at Point Zero: Housework, Reproduction, and Feminist Struggle*, New York: PM Press, 2012.

23. See Nancy Fraser, ‘Marketization, Social Protection Emancipation: Toward a Neo-Polanyian Conception of Capitalist Crisis’, in Craig Calhoun and Georgi Derlugian (eds), *Business as Usual: The Roots of the Global Financial Meltdown*, New York: NYU Press, 2011, pp. 137–58; Nancy Fraser, ‘A Triple Movement? Parsing the Politics of Crisis after

In the other direction, however, there has been an emphasis on the progressive historical fulfilment of capital's inherent tendency, identified by Marx, for the universalization of its social relation, and its displacement (and/or refunctionalization) of *all* other social forms.<sup>24</sup> This notion of a self-completing capitalism has various names and takes various theoretical forms: from the Tronti/Negri version of 'total subsumption' (the 'real' subsumption to capital of the social itself), via Rancière's 'absolute' capitalism (as a bureaucratic state-like form) to Balibar's 'pure' or 'absolute' capitalism,<sup>25</sup> now reconceived as a more Marxian version of 'total subsumption' (see Chapter 2, below). It is the split between history and ontology in Negri's work that allows it to point in each of these two directions at once: positing both an achieved universalization of capital and an ontologically resistant and creative non-capitalist residue. Philosophically, this positing of the total or absolute actualization of the capital relation as total or absolute capitalism marks a transition from Marx's explanatory concept of capitalism to capitalism as *idea*.

### Idea (Hegel or Plato?)

The notion of capitalism (rather than capital) as an *idea*, in one of the classical philosophical senses carried by that term from Plato to Kant, Hegel and beyond, comes in two politically diametrically

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Polanyi', *New Left Review* 81 (May–June 2013), pp. 119–32; Nancy Fraser and Rahel Jaeggi, *Capitalism: A Conversation in Critical Theory*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2018, chs 1 and 2.

One should also mention here the sociological literature on 'varieties of capitalism', often geographical nominated: so-called 'Asian' capitalism, 'East European' capitalism, 'South American' capitalism, etc. See Peter A. Hall and David Soskice (eds), *Varieties of Capitalism: The Institutional Foundations of Comparative Advantage*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001. However, this is largely about the differential economic value of inherited cultural, legal and political forms; it is piecemeal, rather than being integrated into a history of capitalism.

24. For the problematic of the capitalistic refunctionalization of pre-/non-capitalist social relations and ideological forms, see Étienne Balibar and Immanuel Wallerstein, *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities*, London and New York: Verso, 1991.

25. Étienne Balibar, 'Critique in the 21st Century: Political Economy Still, and Religion Again', *Radical Philosophy* 200 (November/December 2016), pp. 11–21, 12–13, [www.radicalphilosophyarchive.com/article/critique-in-the-21st-century](http://www.radicalphilosophyarchive.com/article/critique-in-the-21st-century).

opposed forms. On the one hand, we have what is for the Left the dystopian conception of capitalism as the self-actualization of the idea of capital – in the Hegelian sense of ‘idea’ as ‘the unity of concept and reality’: ‘everything actual *is* only in so far as it possesses the idea and expresses it’, Hegel wrote.<sup>26</sup> Philosophically, this would be a kind of absolutely Hegelian Marxian political economy, in which the alienated objectivity of the subjectivity of the value-form had achieved a socially absolutized, ideal actuality. Historical materialism as absolute idealism. It is hard to see ‘history’ recovering from that. On the other hand, we have the more Platonic right-wing projection of this dystopia as a utopia: whether it be Ayn Rand’s ‘capitalism as unknown ideal’ or Nick Land’s nihilist-accelerationist version of capitalist fundamentalism, in which capital plays the role of subject in a proto-Nietzschean liberation of self-annihilation.<sup>27</sup> Rand’s capitalist Platonism appears here as the direct ideological counterpart and opponent to Alain Badiou’s ‘idea of communism’, on the same philosophical terrain.<sup>28</sup> (‘Plato, Today!’ was the title of the course in ‘Contemporary Philosophy’ that until recently Badiou taught in Paris.)

To raise the spectre of capitalism as idea, on the 150th anniversary of *Capital, Volume 1*, is thus to raise the spectre of the current political meaning of another event that celebrated an emblematic (rooth) anniversary in the autumn of 2017: the Russian Revolution of ‘October 1917’. This is not the spectre of communism in Marx’s sense of 1845 and after, which would come to ‘haunt Europe’ from 1848 all the way up until the mid-1970s

26. *Hegel’s Science of Logic*, trans. A.V. Miller, Atlantic Highlands NJ: Humanities Press, 1989, pp. 757, 756.

27. Ayn Rand, *Capitalism: The Unknown Ideal*, New York: New American Library, 1967; ‘Ideology, Intelligence and Capital: An Interview with Nick Land’, <https://vastabrupt.com/2018/08/15/ideology-intelligence-and-capital-nick-land>. It should be remembered that Land’s accelerationism was always an anti-left project. It is close to the pure culture of death of some other ‘fundamentalisms’.

28. Alain Badiou, ‘The Idea of Communism’, in *The Communist Hypothesis* (2008), London and New York: Verso, 2010, ch. 4.

(the Portuguese Revolution of 1974–5): the spectre of communism as ‘the real movement that abolishes the present state of things’.<sup>29</sup> It is its very opposite: the spectre of communism as an idea in that *transcendent* sense familiar from Plato and ‘modernized’ (rendered subjectively universal) by Kant; as something eternal that constantly returns, identical to itself. The spectre of communism in the Badiouian sense is that of an idea because the spectre of communism in Marx’s (historically actual) sense is no longer haunting Europe. As a politically organized existence, it is no current threat. Communism has *retreated* to the realm of ideas, disconnected from the historical actuality of twenty-first-century capitalism. This is the idea of communism that has been rolled out by Žižek as a roadshow franchise.<sup>30</sup>

It is in this regard that the brief for the conference from which these essays derive spoke of ‘asking the question of the meanings of the concepts of “capital” and “capitalism” today as a *counterpoint* to the retreat of radical left politics from history to idea’. Pursuit of the emancipatory political possibilities connected to the historical actualities of the current forms of capitalist societies requires pursuit of the theoretical meanings of Marx’s concepts of capital and capitalism and their political meanings in particular.

If communism has retreated to the realm of ideas – in the pejorative sense of having become disconnected from historical actuality, in the deep, world-historically processual sense – such a separation nonetheless carries with it the production of a critical distance from that actuality; a distance that appears only more attractive as that actuality becomes, increasingly, developmentally self-transformative only in the direction of a

29. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, ‘The German Ideology’ (1845), in *Collected Works*, Volume 5: 1845–1847, London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1976, p. 49.

30. Costas Douzinas and Slavoj Žižek (eds), *The Idea of Communism*, London and New York: Verso, 2010; Slavoj Žižek (ed.), *The Idea of Communism 2: The New York Conference*, London and New York: Verso, 2013; Alex Taek-Gwang Lee and Slavoj Žižek (eds), *The Idea of Communism 3: The Seoul Conference*, London and New York: Verso, 2016.



more pure or ‘absolutely’ capitalistic society. In this context, the Badiou–Žižek flight to the metaphysically extreme outside of a competing pure ideality makes a certain logical sense. However, it makes no social or human sense at all. Since, to maintain the Kantian figure of the concept–idea opposition, while the flight to a place that is in principle ‘beyond possible experience’ may be comforting to some intellectual sensibilities, it is not a place from which *a politics*, which is a necessarily social practice, can be constructed.<sup>31</sup>

### **Image (affect and absence)**

In fact, a critical distance from actuality, produced Platonically by the metaphysical exteriority of the idea, is also produced immanently to the actual by the relationship between affect and the absence of the object within the dual structure of the image. Classically, an image is a mode of presence of an absent thing and hence a designation of that presence as in some sense ‘unreal’. This mode of presence has an affective force that belies the absence of the thing that it images, which nonetheless retains its critical distance from the real. Indeed, it can be argued that ‘the image is (has the structure of) the subject’ itself.<sup>32</sup> But what has this got to do with *Capital*? Wherein lies the significance to *Capital* of the concept of image?

The question of the image bears on our topic in two main ways. First, at the level of the poetics of Marx’s *Capital* – the extraordinary imagistic power of Marx’s writing, the dense

31. The chair in the Philosophy Department at the University of Paris–8 currently associated with the Centre for Research in Modern European Philosophy at Kingston is a Professorship in Problematizations of Real History and of Social Thought (in homage to the previous incumbent Daniel Bensaïd). It was in the spirit of that formulation that we proposed ‘capitalism and capital, the historical social relation’, as the topic for our conference and this collection.

32. See Peter Osborne, ‘The Image is the Subject: Once More on the Temporalities of Image and Act’, in *The Postconceptual Condition: Critical Essays*, London and New York: Verso, 2018, ch. 14.

integrity of his text (Chapter 10, below). Second, with respect to the development of capitalist societies and the by-now-overfamiliar predominance of images of various kinds within the social experience of commodification and money, and in the self-reflection of capitalist culture upon itself, the culture industries (Chapters 3 and 11). It is here, in each of these respects, that the history of the reception of *Capital* has often been at its most creative. On the one hand, the standard oppositions of the methodological debates about *Capital* – theory or history? economics or politics? Hegelian or Kantian? structuralist or phenomenological? – are largely dissolved, or at least more complexly refigured, in any close analysis of the singularity of the text. Like all the great books of eighteenth-, nineteenth- and twentieth-century European philosophy, *Capital* is a radically open (and also unfinished) text; open, internally, to constant reflective re-argumentation. On the other hand, this openness is exponentially intensified by the diversity of the contexts, and corresponding modes of address, into which it has been and continues to be received, in what Gayatri Spivak, following Derrida, calls *Capital*'s 'destinerrance' (Chapter 8).

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The 150th anniversary of *Capital* was the occasion for the conference that gave rise to the essays in this book, but it was not their object. This is not a book about the history of the reception of Marx's *Capital*. Nor is it a series of scholarly examinations and analyses of its text and arguments, in the sense of a commentary. Nor is it a series of introductory essays. Rather, it offers the reader a snapshot of a variety of aspects of Marx's *Capital* today: a range of reactions to its current relevance to the comprehension of the often very different capitalist societies in which we live, from a range of philosophical and political stand-points on the Marxist and post-Marxist Left.

WALL STREET HUMANS  
WITH NIGHT TOILERS

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Entire Office Staffs Ordered  
to Work Right Through  
Until Morning.

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**VALUE-FORM,  
ONTOLOGY  
& POLITICS**



# 1

## **Form analysis and critique: Marx's social labour theory of value**

ELENA LOUISA LANGE

Marx's radical break with the science of political economy consists in laying the foundation for a specific new object of investigation under the capitalist mode of production: the social form of labour. His theory is therefore not merely an 'extension' or a 'rearrangement' of the economic theory of the classics, but the invention of a completely new horizon for the critical analysis of the capitalist mode of production. Marx's self-understanding of his intervention as the *Critique of Political Economy* is where his radical revolution – indeed, his 'communist Copernican turn' – is embedded. Therefore, Marx's project cannot be understood in abstraction from his critique of the classics. It is Marx's reading of both political economists, notably Smith and Ricardo, and vulgar economists – Say, Bailey, Malthus, James Mill, McCulloch, Destutt de Tracy and others – but also socialists like Proudhon, Owen and others, that formed the condition of possibility for the theoretical development that resulted in his magnum opus, *Capital*.

Understanding the social form of labour is precisely what Marx found wanting in his predecessors:

Political economy has indeed analysed value and its magnitude, however incompletely, and has uncovered the content concealed within these forms. But it has never once asked the question why the

content has assumed that particular form, that is to say, why labour is expressed in value, and why the measurement of labour by its duration is expressed in the magnitude of the value of the product.<sup>1</sup>

[C]lassical political economy in fact nowhere distinguishes explicitly and with clear awareness between labour as it appears in the value of a product, and the same labour as it appears in the product's use-value.<sup>2</sup>

What Marx critically discerns as the specific lack in the theories of the classics is the problem of the fetishism of the bourgeois relations of production – a problem not even fathomed to exist before Marx's mature critique. The distinction between abstract and concrete labour is the crucial critical distinction to clear the path to a thoroughgoing critique of the capitalist relations of production and its inverted self-representations. By determining the social form of labour under these relations as value-producing abstract-general human labour and distinguishing it from concrete labour as manifested in the commodity's use-value, Marx also pierced the problem of form and content – the problem of fetishism.

The specificity of abstract labour as the *substance* of value for Marx consists in the fact that it always appears in a specific *form* – namely the value-forms of the commodity, money, capital, wage, profit, price, interest and rent, categories that comprise the 'science' of political economy – in which it is always systematically obfuscated. Yet, it is precisely this phenomenological state of things – that the essence or substance itself cannot appear but in an inverted, distorting and altogether spurious form – that goes unnoticed in the elaborations of classical political economy (not to speak of neoclassical theories after the demise of the Ricardian School). In other words, before Marx the science of political economy was solely concerned with the forms of value

1. Karl Marx, *Capital, Volume 1: The Process of Production of Capital*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976, p. 174.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 173.

as value's mere appearance, without giving a thought to the specific substance – the general social form of labour – that gives rise to these categories at all. Indeed, without giving any thought to an 'epistemological cleft' between the appearance and the essence of specific value forms at all, the classics had to remain on a level of abstraction that tautologically resorts to explaining form by form itself.<sup>3</sup>

The question of form in Marx, which is the topic of this essay, can only be addressed as the method of *form analysis*. Marx's method of form analysis dissolves the fetishized objective dimension of a category like 'exchange-value' or 'the commodity' as only appearing to be simple, 'given' and indeed presuppositionless. The analysis of their form shows that they can be fully grasped only as the result of a very specific social process, presupposing both the relations of (re)production and class. The beginning of Marx's analysis in *Capital* is therefore already an ideology critique in the strict sense, as a critique of the self-representations and legitimations of the sphere of simple circulation, which constitutes the only object of bourgeois economy and its science.

However, not unlike the classical and vulgar political economists Marx attacked, many present-day Marxian theorists reinitialize and repeat the tautological convolutions of Marx's predecessors. This essay will therefore argue that, under the heading of 'value-form theory', Marxian scholars of the last decades have initiated an apotheosis of 'form' while conferring a much lesser status to 'substance' or content, an intervention that is not only quite contrary to Marx's critical intention, but

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3. A longer, more detailed version of this essay will appear as the first chapter in my forthcoming monograph *Value Without Fetish: Uno Kōzō's Theory of Pure Capitalism in Light of Marx's Critique of Political Economy*, Historical Materialism series, Leiden: Brill, 2019. In it, I discuss the aporia and conceptual conflations in Smith's and Ricardo's respective value theories in detail. This allows me to show – in contrast to common understanding – that they had no labour theory of value to begin with.



regresses to the ‘fetishisms of the bourgeois relations of production’ that Marx was precisely out to deconstruct.

Marx’s critique of his predecessors, most notably Adam Smith and David Ricardo, gave rise to what I term Marx’s ‘social labour theory of value’. The social labour theory of value presents the methodological framework for the analysis of Marx’s central question: why and how all products of labour assume the *form of value* under the conditions of the capitalist mode of production, in which form of value is understood as money, capital, profit, price, interest, rent – the objects of political economy. The social labour theory of value is therefore the theoretical-methodical tool for analysing the process of constitution of the very objects of classical political economy

I will thus critically deal with recent criticisms of Marx’s method and the offered alternative assumptions, namely (1) the methodological preference of (value-) form over the substance of value as guiding principle; (2) the hypostasis of simple circulation (‘exchange’ or ‘the market’) as the foremost feature of the capital relation and the locus of value constitution; and (3) the call for the necessity of an ‘unmediated’ or ‘presuppositionless’ beginning of the exposition.

### **Misunderstanding Marx**

In his work, self-defined as the ‘new’ or ‘systematic’ dialectic, Chris Arthur, for example, insists that in the architecture of *Capital* the ‘pure forms’ of capital should be studied first – and especially ‘the value form (as the germ of capital)’ before its ‘grounding in labour’ is analysed. He claims that ‘the question of form is so crucial that the presentation starts with the form of exchange, bracketing entirely the question of the mode of production [*sic*], if any, of the objects of exchange. Arthur also

thinks that Marx was unjustified in introducing the concept of (abstract) labour prematurely:

It is notorious that Marx dives down from the phenomena of exchange value to labour as the substance of value in the first three pages of *Capital* and people rightly complain they do not find any proof there. So I argue ... that we must first study the development of the value form and only address the labour content when the dialectic of the forms itself requires us to do so.

Arthur insists that for the analysis of the capital, 'an absolute beginning without imposed conditions is needed'.<sup>4</sup> We will see how misinformed such a claim is as to the critical character of Marx's own method.

Geert Reuten sings the same tune when he claims the value-form of money as a 'constituent of value' – and therefore begs the question, because we want to know precisely why it is that money represents value, why money can indeed buy all the other commodities. Surprisingly, Reuten does not seem to find it necessary to engage with Marx's analysis. Instead, he meanders in tautological 'clarifications' (and 'proofs' of the dispensability of the concepts of 'abstract labour' and 'substance' based on word counts!) that serve rather to obscure than to illuminate the problem.<sup>5</sup> This becomes especially telling when Reuten denounces Marx's concept of the substance of value in abstract labour as a mere 'metaphor'.<sup>6</sup> Yet, at no point in the text does he state what substance is a metaphor for. At the same time, Reuten

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4. Christopher J. Arthur, 'Money and Exchange', *Capital and Class* 90 (Autumn 2006), p. 10; *The New Dialectic and Marx's 'Capital'*, Leiden: Brill, 2004, pp. 86, 12, 158. For a full analysis and critique of Arthur's *The New Dialectic and Marx's Capital*, see Elena Louisa Lange, 'The Critique of Political Economy and the "New Dialectic": Marx, Hegel, and the Problem of Christopher J. Arthur's "Homology Thesis"', *Crisis and Critique*, vol. 3, no. 3 (2016), pp. 235–72.

5. Geert Reuten, 'Money as Constituent of Value', in F. Moseley (ed.), *Marx's Theory of Money: Modern Appraisals*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005, pp. 78–92.

6. Geert Reuten, 'The Difficult Labor of a Theory of Social Value: Metaphors and Systematic Dialectics at the Beginning of Marx's *Capital*', in F. Moseley (ed.), *Marx's Method in Capital: A Reexamination*, Atlantic Highlands NJ: Humanities Press, 1993, pp. 89–113; here, pp. 89, 106, 110.

claims that the 'classics' held a 'real embodiment' of labour theory of value, of which a 'remnant' existed in Marx: 'Marx ... was enmeshed in the physical substance-embodiment metaphor inherited from Hegel (substance) and classical political economy (embodiment).'<sup>7</sup> However, either labour as the substance of value is regarded as a mere 'metaphor' or it is, indeed, 'embodied' in the commodity. But it cannot be both. It is all the more strange that Reuten concludes that Marx suffered from 'unclear', or a 'lack of clarity' as to his own abstractions, a judgment more appropriate for Reuten's own argument. Reuten therefore not only misrepresents Marx's theory and is himself, indeed, unclear about Marx's straightforward fetishism-critical method; he goes on to explain that 'value has no existence prior to the market.'<sup>8</sup> This is indeed counterfactual to Marx's own analysis, as we shall soon see.

In the same vein, the Marxist theorists of money and finance Costas Lapavistas and Itoh Makoto of the Uno School see no reason to have to refer to abstract labour at all when they try to explain how money becomes the universal equivalent of exchange.<sup>9</sup> Especially Itoh entangles himself in circularity

7. Ibid., p. 110. The unintentional humour of this assertion consists in its implication that Hegel and Smith held more or less the same theory.

8. Ibid., p. 108. Especially unclear is the *differentia specifica* for what Reuten terms 'two meanings' of 'value form': one defining 'value' as a 'form itself' (or 'genus'), the other one restricting the 'form of value' to the species (ibid., pp. 100–101). Marx was, to the contrary, very aware of the crucial distinction between value and its form(s), especially viewed against his critique of Samuel Bailey. 'The process of exchange gives to the commodity which it has converted into money not its value but its specific value-form. Confusion between these two attributes has misled some writers into maintaining that the value of gold and silver is imaginary' (Marx, *Capital, Volume 1*, p. 185). In passing, Marx here also implies that value is not something that 'exists' only in exchange, as Reuten and others do.

9. See Costas Lapavistas, 'The Emergence of Money in Commodity Exchange, or Money as Monopolist of the Ability to Buy', *Review of Political Economy*, vol. 17, no. 4 (October 2005), pp. 549–69; 'Money', in David M. Brennan et al. (ed.), *Routledge Handbook of Marxian Economics*, London and New York: Routledge, 2017, pp. 69–80; Makoto Itoh, 'A Study of Marx's Theory of Value', *Science and Society*, vol. 40, no. 3 (Fall 1976), pp. 307–40. For a critique of Lapavistas's theory of 'Money as a Monopolist of the Ability to Buy', see Elena Louisa Lange, 'Geldtheorie ohne Fetischcharakter. Zur problematischen Rezeption des ersten Kapitalbandes bei Uno Kōzō und der Uno-Schule' ['Money Theory Without Fetish Character. On the Problematic Reception of the First Volume of *Capital* in Uno Kōzō and the Uno School'], *Zeitschrift für kritische Sozialtheorie und Philosophie*, vol. 4, nos 1–2, pp. 177–208. I argue that Lapavistas presents a nominalist

and truisms when he tries to explain the money form without recourse to abstract human labour. Long before them, Uno Kōzō himself has expressed a strict preference for form over substance in explaining the value-forms, thereby directly inviting a *petitio principii*:

Labour as 'value forming substance' abstracted (*shashō*) from every form and was so to speak nothing more than something passive and abstract (*chūshōteki*). As such, we cannot make it the foundation of value form. In other words, [labour] is developed by the value form in the first place. The value form of the commodity is rather grasped through the forms that this substance itself passes through that is nothing else but the process of commodity economic development. However, the *formal determination alone* clarifies the fact of the assumption of 'the physical form in the equal objectivity of the products of labour as values' (*Capital, Volume I*, p. 164).<sup>10</sup>

Regarding the analysis of the value form, two crucial interventions Marx aimed at go completely unnoticed (or even rejected) by these authors: the necessity of presupposing the totality of the capital relation from the beginning, in which the category of the 'commodity' with which the analysis starts signifies by no means the 'simplest' but the most complex determination, a 'relation of totality',<sup>11</sup> and the function of value-form analysis as deducing the fetishistic semblance of simple circulation from the development of the commodity into money in their common ground of abstract labour. By refusing to see the critical

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theory of money with the implication that 'money is what money does' – unlike Marx, who develops the functions of money from its being the 'direct incarnation of all human labour' (Marx, *Capital, Volume 1*, p. 187), i.e. money does what money is.

10. Uno Kōzō, *Kachiron* [*Value Theory*], 1947, in *Uno Kōzō Chosakushū* [*Collected Works of Uno Kōzō*], vol. 3, Tokyo: Iwanami, 1973, pp. 361–2.

11. 'Totalitätsverhältnis'. Helmut Brentel, *Soziale Form und ökonomisches Objekt. Studien zum Gegenstands- und Methodenverständnis der Kritik der politischen Ökonomie* [*Social Form and Economic Object: Studies in the Understanding of the Object and Method of the Critique of Political Economy*], Wiesbaden: Springer, 1989, p. 264. Reuten fails to see both the specific character and function of the commodity: 'is this, the commodity, the most abstract all-embracing concept for the capitalist mode of production? I doubt it. For example, does it embrace in itself a notion of the activity of creation of useful objects in capitalist form?' Reuten, 'The Difficult Labor', p. 96. That, in fact, it does seems to escape Reuten's comprehension, which is a consequence of his failure to understand Marx's method.

intent already inherent in Marx's very first, allegedly 'innocuous' analysis – that of the commodity – the commentators mentioned above become accomplices to an ideological approach, legitimizing the mere appearance of the capital relations.

### **The forensic investigation of political economy: presupposing totality**

The reason for the ideological predicament of some approaches in value-form theory hence lies in the ignorance of the fact that already at the stage of value-form analysis the totality of capital – the 'whole system of bourgeois production'<sup>12</sup> – is presupposed: the exchange between 20 yards of linen and one coat does not denote a 'simple exchange', but the most abstract sphere of bourgeois self-presentation. Consequently, the real and by no means simple requirements which always already have to be fulfilled, so that simple circulation can appear as the paradigmatic form of capitalist intercourse, and exchange value can appear as a simple, presuppositionless economic form, do not immediately present themselves 'from an examination of the simple circulation', but 'lie behind it as economic relations enclosed in the division of labour'.<sup>13</sup> Like investigators in a criminal case, we must therefore *reconstruct* the sphere of simple circulation from what lies behind it. What is 'forgotten' in the examination of simple circulation, on the one hand, is the 'objective basis of the whole system of production', that it is not autonomous individuals who meet 'on the market' to exchange their respective goods, but a relation that 'already in itself implies compulsion over the individual', in which the individual is 'entirely determined by society; that this further presupposes a division of labour etc., in which the

12. Karl Marx, *Economic Works, 1857–1861*, in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 29, London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1987, p. 466.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 467.

individual is already posited in relations other than that of mere *exchanger*.<sup>14</sup> The presentation of simple exchange as the point of departure of the analysis of capitalist exchange relations itself conveys a critical intent in that it prepares the re-examination of the formal validity of the law of equivalent exchange in the case of capital and wage labour. It is therefore both presupposed and 'overlooked' ('obliterated'<sup>15</sup>) in the formal characteristics of simple circulation:

What is overlooked, finally, is that already the simple forms of exchange value and of money latently contain the opposition between labour and capital etc. Thus, what all this wisdom comes down to is the attempt to stick fast to the simplest economic relations, which, conceived by themselves, are pure abstractions; but these relations are, in reality, mediated by the deepest antithesis, and represent only one side, in which the full expression of the antitheses [between labour and capital] is obscured.<sup>16</sup>

Elsewhere, I have shown the methodological assumptions that Marx's critique of capital owe to Hegel's method of constituting the object through the inner relation of its parts at the level of the 'Logic of Reflection' (*Reflexionslogik*).<sup>17</sup> The totality presupposed for developing the categories from the 'poorest' (being/nothingness) to the 'richest' (the concept/the idea) is therefore constitutive of the object, a totality understood as 'overgrasping subjectivity' (*übergreifende Subjektivität*). It must therefore begin with mere semblance, with what is untrue.<sup>18</sup> This also means

14. Karl Marx, *Grundrisse*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973, p. 248.

15. Marx, *Economic Works, 1857–1861*, p. 466.

16. Marx, *Grundrisse*, p. 248. The context in which the quotation appears is the critique of Proudhon, who is attacked as a deeply 'bourgeois' thinker in believing that exchange represents a 'system of universal freedom' which has only been 'perverted by money, capital, etc.'

17. Elena Louisa Lange, 'The Critique of Political Economy and the "New Dialectic": Marx, Hegel, and the Problem of Christopher J. Arthur's "Homology Thesis"', *Crisis and Critique*, vol. 3, no. 3 (2016), pp. 235–72.

18. G.W.F. Hegel, *The Encyclopedia Logic. With the Zusätze. Part I of the Encyclopedia of Philosophical Studies with the Zusätze* (1830), Indianapolis IN: Hackett, 1991, p. 290. 'At this point, we could at once raise the question why, if that is the case, we should begin with what is untrue and why we do not straightaway begin with what is true. The answer is that the truth must, precisely as such, *validate itself* [*muss sich bewähren*], and here, within

that the independence and ‘immediate truth’ of the categories will be shown to be a wrong assumption. Being and nothingness are absolutely mediated categories that cannot even be meaningfully determined when their ‘purity’ is assumed: taken in isolation, they cannot account for their own constitution.<sup>19</sup> The same goes for the commodity and the semblance of simple circulation: we are here only confronted with a distorted version of truth. The deeply problematic truth of capital can only be elucidated as a *complete* critique of its constitutive categories, those of political economy.

It is therefore all the more strange that Marxist authors claim that Hegel started from the premiss of presuppositionlessness.<sup>20</sup> The contrary is true: like Marx’s presentation, Hegel’s development of the idea deliberately starts from a completely mediated nexus that, in the beginning, must show itself to be wrong precisely by taking the categories in isolation, without presupposition, in the manner of ‘outer reflection’. One must even concede that in the bourgeois economists, like the philosophers Hegel criticized (we must, of course, think of Kant), because their own categories were conceptualized as unrelated, they were contradictory.

We must here return to the question of form. We have already sketched the function of form analysis as the specific

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logical thinking itself, validation consists in the Concept’s showing itself to be what is mediated through and with itself, so that it shows itself to be at the same time the genuinely immediate’ (ibid., p. 134).

19. This has to do with the semantic-pragmatic surplus meaning/cleft necessary for the dialectical presentation. For more details, see Lange, ‘The Critique of Political Economy and the “New Dialectic”’.

20. The matter is complicated by the fact that there are supporters (Arthur, Reuten) and opponents (Murray) of Hegel’s alleged ‘presuppositionlessness’, but the claim itself is never doubted. Murray, for example, says: ‘Marx does not leave the circle of Hegelian systematic dialectics unbroken; he objects to the “presuppositionlessness” of Hegelian systematic dialectics and insists that science has premises, which he and Engels sketched in *The German Ideology*’ (Patrick Murray, ‘Marx’s “Truly Social” Labour Theory of Value: Part I, Abstract Labour in Marxian Value Theory’, *Historical Materialism*, vol. 1, no. 7 (2000), p. 38). But at the time of *The German Ideology* Marx has not yet developed a theory of value at all! This early work is set within a radically different methodological framework and has different objectives than Marx’s later, economy-critical work.

method that reveals the obliterated genetic construction of the conventional categories (or ‘forms’) – that is, money, capital, wage, profit, rent, and so on – in their *form*. Marx’s impetus is indeed very Hegelian: his concept of form coincides with Hegel’s concept of the concept, namely in that it resolutely rejects a mere ‘formal’ understanding of form. The concept of ‘overgrasping subjectivity’ (mediation) entails a concept of form as form-content (*Formgehalt*) which no longer stands in opposition to the content or ‘substance’ it designates. The object of investigation (the social form of labour that generates the capital relation) is given as a processual total structure of economic forms and changes of form (*Formwechsel*) whose ‘inner cord’ presents a universal common to all the individual forms, as an ‘overgrasping’ relation.<sup>21</sup> This is no easy task: because the form-determinations only exist as moments of the total nexus, Marx – and we as his readers – must position ourselves as the forensic investigators of political economy who reconstruct the nexus from its mere (and sometimes outright inverted) appearance.

The general nexus of the totality of forms is therefore simultaneously the content of this process, and in this sense *form is also content*. Any analysis that proclaims a systematic scientific approach must therefore account for the mutual ‘overturning’ (*Umschlagen*) of form into content, and content into form.<sup>22</sup> Let us see how this understanding can be made fruitful for a precise view of the critical functions of value-form analysis.

### **The functions of value-form analysis**

Generally speaking, the foremost function of the analysis of the value-form is the critique of fetishism of the bourgeois relations

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21. Karl Marx, *Das Kapital. Kritik der politischen Ökonomie*, Volume 1, Book 1: *Der Produktionsprozess des Kapitals*, Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 2008, p. 27.

22. Cf. Hegel, *The Encyclopedia Logic*, pp. 225–6.



of production. In the analysis of the value-form, Marx confronts this fetishism on different levels of abstraction: (a) in a logical-systematic *reconstruction* of the transition from the sphere of simple circulation as the abstract and ideological sphere of bourgeois production to the actual basis of that mode of production; (b) in a theory of value *constitution* through the analysis of form and content of the universal equivalent that appears as money (form) (against premonetary theories of value); (c) in the demonstration of the 'law of value' in terms of a successive detachment from the intentions, wants and personal desires of the owners of commodities as a law of '*autonomization*'. We have already covered (a) in the previous analysis of the commodity as a 'mediation of totality' in which the confrontation between capital and labour is obscured. Here, for reasons of space, our evaluation limits itself to (b).

The deduction of the value-form of money from the semblance of the simple exchange of commodities to its constitutive content in human labour in the abstract does not mean that the form of value is arbitrary, or even dispensable. To the contrary: value has its necessary form of appearance in money. In other words, in its 'palpable', material, objective and therefore fetishised form, value has no other existence than in money. Yet this does not mean that *it is* money: it must however *appear* as such.<sup>23</sup>

In Forms II–IV of value-form analysis, Marx has shown that money as the universal equivalent is the specific form in which value functions as the synthesis of the mediation of private labours in a social context. However, the relation of content or substance (human labour in the abstract) and form is not

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23. 'It is not money that renders the commodities commensurable. Quite the contrary. Because all commodities, as values, are objectified human labour, and therefore in themselves commensurable, their values can be communally measured in one and the same specific commodity, and this commodity can be converted into the common measure of their values, that is into money. Money as a measure of value is the *necessary form of appearance* of the measure of value which is immanent in commodities, namely labour time' (Marx, *Capital*, Volume 1, p. 188; emphasis added).

exhausted in a simplistic antagonism between essence and appearance. Essence must appear (in the Hegelian sense), but in a form in which its own fetishistic obliterations can still be identified as such. The analysis of the form must therefore identify the content that grounds the form *in the form itself* – against its semblance – and make it appear. This is the case when the legitimization strategies of simple circulation become entangled in self-contradictions, and this only happens when money is treated as an entity external to the exchange process: a mere means of the facilitation of exchange, as means of circulation. However, money as the palpable form of abstract labour is the *conditio sine qua non* of general social exchange, so that theories that suggest the dispensability of money in order to realize ‘equal exchange’ contradict their own premisses.<sup>24</sup>

But while the specific content is indicative of a specific form, the reverse is also true: the form must indicate a specific content. Saying that there is no such thing as value without a general equivalent implies that only in the equivalent form is the real reduction of the different labours to abstract-general human labour *always-already posited*. Value-form analysis therefore also entails a theory of the constitution of value. This is already clear in the specificity of the simple form of value ( $x$  commodity A =  $y$  commodity B) that consists in its polarity – that is, not indicating merely a reversible relation, but a mutually exclusive function – and that, as such, indicates a specific content of the equivalent form. In it, not specific concrete human labour but human labour in the abstract is the ground or content that enables *all* the specific and concrete labours to mirror themselves in it, to ‘stand in’ for it. Money therefore has the double function to represent all the commodities, but none of them specifically. As a ‘thing’, it therefore represents human labour in the abstract, all

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24. This is, of course, Marx’s main point against Proudon’s ‘People’s Bank’.

labours, but none of them specifically. This is indeed the ‘joint contribution of the whole world of commodities’.<sup>25</sup>

In this context, the proposition that Marx’s analysis ‘prematurely’ introduced a ‘posited ground’ for value in labour becomes meaningless. The requirement of the forms of value to be ‘studied first’ is equally absurd: the forms of value are not self-explanatory. A method that hypothesizes the forms of value instead of analysing them towards their obfuscated content ‘sticks fast to the simplest economic relations’.

While our previous considerations have somewhat avoided the ‘million-dollar question’ – namely whether value is constituted in production or in exchange – it should be clear by inference that value as a social totality can never be constituted in a mere *Formwechsel* of C–M–C or M–C–M. The forms of circulation and exchange are never constitutive of economic objectivity. As Brentel puts it, ‘Simple circulation is not the autonomous sphere of the economic constitution of objectivity – as such, it exists only in the ideological semblance of legitimisation of bourgeois self-interpretation.’<sup>26</sup> They are the mere illusory forms with regard to the real basis of value constitution in the real subsumption of labour under capital. We are already witness to this in the ‘Contradictions in the General Formula’ in chapters 5 and 6 of *Capital, Volume I*. The Marxian authors I have discussed above, whose impetus lies in distancing themselves from ‘traditional’ – that is, ‘embodied labour’ – theories of value have overstated their case, by resorting to formalistic theories of value that are, at best, tautological like the theories of the classics (with which they do not even engage) and, at worst, an uncanny invitation to marginalist assumptions into Marxian theory. Marx’s Social Labour Theory of Value was designed as an antidote to these views. The social form of labour whose economic form-character

25. Marx, *Capital, Volume I*, p. 159.

26. Brentel, *Soziale Form und ökonomisches Objekt*, p. 256.

has been overlooked by 'traditionalists' and their opponents alike surpasses the problematic of a mere antagonism between form and substance to open the horizon for a fundamental critique of the real semblance, the fetishism, of the capitalist self-presentation of value.

## 2

# Towards a new critique of political economy: from generalized surplus-value to total subsumption

ÉTIENNE BALIBAR

In the formula ‘a new critique of political economy’, everything is problematic.<sup>1</sup> It clearly alludes to Marx, reproducing the title or subtitle of the works in which he proposed his revolutionary theory of the capitalist mode of production. But other criticisms are thinkable, diverging at a certain point or based on antithetic assumptions. The term ‘political economy’ is being reintroduced today, with the perception that a more specialized formula such as ‘economics’, far from securing greater scientificity, in fact covers specific political interests. However, it harbours considerable enigmas, in particular with respect to the delimitation of its object. Does it refer, here, to a discourse, since we know that Marx distinguished between ‘classical political economy’, where he found some of the foundations of his own theory of capitalism, and a ‘vulgar economy’, which in fact prefigured what would become mainstream economic theory in the twentieth century? Or does it refer to the project of a political economy in general,

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1. This essay forms part of ongoing research. Another part will appear in the volume *Neoliberal Remains: Market Rules and Political Ruptures*, ed. William Callison and Zachary Manfredi, New York: Fordham University Press. Both essays arise from a seminar taught in 2017 at the University of California, Irvine, with the general title ‘Absolute Capitalism’. Although complementary, they remain autonomous and can be read separately. For the broader background, see Étienne Balibar, ‘Critique in the 21st Century: Political Economy Still, and Religion Again’, *Radical Philosophy* 200 (November/December 2016), pp. 11–21, [www.radicalphilosophyarchive.com/article/critique-in-the-21st-century](http://www.radicalphilosophyarchive.com/article/critique-in-the-21st-century).

in which case Marxism itself might become at the same time the subject and the object of criticism?

The issue can also be addressed from a different angle. The so-called 'vulgar economy' has survived the Marxian sentence of death very well, not only for reasons having to do with power relations in academia, but also because it could appear that Marxism was dismissive of central determinations of the *actual* capitalist economy – an impression that gained strength from observation of the failure of Marxist-socialist *economic policies*. But here, again, we should remember that things are more complicated than a simple partisan choice, because certain 'heterodox' currents of Marxism did actually take into account questions and categories that had been invented by post-classical economists, and it can be shown that mainstream economists are in many respects replying to Marx, and therefore use him in a dialectical manner. Hence the questions that are latent in the use of the adjective 'new'. Does the *new* critique of political economy refer to the critique of a *new* (or relatively new) 'political economy', which Marx did not know or that, because of the blindness inherent in his own lucidity, he made it difficult for Marxists to take seriously as an expression of certain structures and tendencies of capitalism? Would such a new or renewed critique consist in a continuation of the Marxian critique, addressing the continuation of the discourse of economic theory? Or would it try to invent a different critique, albeit bearing an analogy with the Marxist critique in its relationship to contemporary economic discourse? Or should it represent an altogether new kind of critique, given the fact that the modality of the Marxian critique depended on philosophical and sociological assumptions that have become part of the problem? And, finally, what would be the articulation, in this 'new' critique, of the critical dimension which addresses discourses, and the critical dimension which addresses institutions, social structures, historical tendencies?

These dilemmas are abstract, and they are not exhaustive. I will keep them in mind while I propose some elements that are suggested by current debates and conditions. I submit that the weaknesses, aporias or points of stress of Marx's own critique of political economy as a critique of capitalism are always located in the immediate vicinity of its strengths, or what we could call the 'truths' of Marxism.<sup>2</sup> They act like a shadow of those truths, which in different circumstances makes everything obscure. This explains why I shall discuss first the core category of Marx's argument in *Capital*, which connects the analysis of exploitation to the analysis of accumulation, namely the category of surplus-value. I will propose a notion of *generalized surplus-value* which is liberated from the restrictions imposed by Marx's dependency upon Smith and Ricardo, to reach a problematic of 'total subsumption', which I hope makes it possible to better understand the domination of financial capital over everyday life in the era of 'neoliberal' globalization.

### **Capital as social relation**

As we know – this is the 'common good' of the various critical readings of Marx's *Capital* in the twentieth century – the core of Marx's critique resides in introducing the 'structural' category of *social relation* instead of the fetishism of commodities and persons. 'Capital' is not a 'thing', not even a thing handled and processed by capitalists and other agents, or a 'symbolic' – therefore intrinsically social – 'thing', such as an amount of money, a deposit or a bank account that can be appropriated and invested in various manners. It is in itself a 'social relation', therefore a relationship among social agents, individuals and

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2. I am borrowing the category of *points of stress* in Marx from David Harvey, who uses it extensively in the two published volumes of his *A Companion to Marx's 'Capital'*, London: Verso, 2010 and 2013.

above all classes, in which they perform specific roles, which are complementary, but also antagonistic. This immediately shows that the category 'social relation' cannot become separated from the category of *process*. The social relation is constituted in the course of a process, made of several intertwined processes, where moments of exchange alternate with moments of consumption and production. And the process is supposed to perpetuate, more technically to reproduce, the social relation and all its conditions, material, financial, institutional. But, as Marx soon reveals, a reproduction, especially if it is an 'expanded reproduction', must be also a transformation. Capital is a process that cannot realize itself socially and historically without transforming itself, within or beyond certain structural limits.

All this becomes clear only if we specify the kind of relation – therefore the kind of 'society effect' – we are talking about, in order to endow the 'process' with its orientation and driving force. Let us say that the orientation of the process is accumulation, an objective that is always already set as a prerequisite when the process starts again, in the form of money capital seeking places and modalities of investment. And the specific nature of the relation is characterized by the fact that, however multiple they may appear at the level of society at large, social interdependencies subjected to the 'law' of accumulation ultimately rely on, or are reducible to, an antagonistic relationship of *exploitation of wage labour* within the production processes. This is of course not a simple notion, because we need to explain how a relationship of antagonism can also be a complementarity, without which it could not serve the life, the reproduction of the society as such, even at the cost of more or less dynamic contradictions. And we also need to explain how we articulate the 'immediate' forms of a social relationship, in which wage labourers confront their antagonists (the direct and indirect owners and managers of capital) with global relations at the level



of society, which are relations among classes, a general distribution of property and incomes, and a distribution of power where many social functions and differences are involved: no longer 'intersubjective' relations of exploitation and domination, but 'objective' relations of 'society' with itself, which are continuously evolving.

Using the Althusserian expression, I take this to be, in general terms, the philosophical core of Marx's *epistemological break*. The 'break' is not only a rejection of previous ideological representations of capital (which, in Marx's dialectical theory, goes along with explaining why these ideological representations are necessary, even functional in certain conditions; in other words, they are part of the social relation itself). The 'break' is a breakthrough, opening problems whose solution is not possible by just developing the premisses. The very same formulas that express the invention involve obstacles which become apparent retrospectively, in the course of the confrontation with actual historical transformations of capitalism. This is where a strategy of deconstruction becomes necessary, which identifies obstacles and difficulties at the very core of the theoretical invention, tracing their origin in the way its 'fundamental concepts' have been defined. Nothing must remain untouched, but nothing must be rejected or rectified without understanding at the same time what it explained, as well as what consequences (in particular *political* consequences) any rectification will have.

### **Epistemological obstacles in Marx**

The main epistemological obstacles in Marx, from our contemporary point of view, are located at the intersection of the two great ways of defining 'capital' in a Marxist sense, which for Marx are complementary, in fact two sides of the same model: capital is a process of exploitation relying (normally) on the

hiring of wage labour, which Marx sometimes calls in Hegelian fashion the ‘essential relation’, and capital is a process of unlimited accumulation in monetary form through the maximization of profits whose main part must be re-created (*if it can*, always of course a big problem and a potential contradiction).<sup>3</sup> These two notions are not synonymous, far from it: in a sense they refer to different ‘social relations’, or different aspects of the social mechanism, but in Marx’s view they are strictly correlative. If you have the first, you have the second, and if you have the second, you have the first. Why are there problems arising at this intersection? They arise in particular, first, from the fact that, for Marx, ‘capital’ ultimately is nothing other than capitalized labour, therefore ‘labour’ is not just one production factor among many others, as mainstream economic theory would explain; second, from the way in which Marx relates labour to the money form; and third, from the way in which he attributes ‘productivity’ to labour.<sup>4</sup>

The key concept on which Marx’s argument about exploitation and accumulation completely relies in *Capital* is ‘valorization’. However, if we return to the German text, we see that two words can be translated in this manner, corresponding to different ideas.<sup>5</sup> Of course they are articulated but the question is, how? One is *Wertbildung*, which means literally ‘formation of value’. The underlying idea is that, in every society where goods

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3. In German *das wesentliche Verhältnis*, the central category in Hegel’s *Logic of the Essence* (section 2, ‘Appearance’, ch. 3). Marx uses it literally (without naming Hegel) in *Capital*, Volume 1, ch. 19, ‘The Transformation of the Value (and Respective Price) of Labour-Power into Wages’. I discuss the two definitions of ‘capital’ as ‘formal’ and ‘substantial’ relations in Marx’s *Capital* in the entry ‘Mehrwert’, in *Historisch-Kritisches Wörterbuch des Marxismus*, ed. W.F. Haug, Berlin: InKrit, Das Argument Verlag, vol. 9, 2018. French translation in *Actuel Marx* 63 (2018), Paris: PUF: ‘L’exploitation aujourd’hui’.

4. I refer to the ‘Trinity Formula’ (Land, Labour, Capital as ‘sources’ of revenues/profits), critically discussed by Marx in *Capital*, Volume 3 (ch. 48), originating in Adam Smith and still used by mainstream economists as ‘primary factors of production’ entering ‘production functions’. Since Frank H. Knight (who used the phrase ‘Trinity Formula’ without reference to Marx in his *Ethics of Competition*, 1935), the Chicago School has introduced ‘human capital’ as a ‘fourth primary factor’.

5. See my entry ‘Mehrwert’ for a detailed discussion.

are produced in the commodity form, their exchange value must be determined by some common 'substance' of which it is the expression. Marx knows from the classical economists that this substance is labour, but he adds the precision that the labour here is an 'abstract social labour': not an observable empirical magnitude, but the implicit or 'immanent' result of the 'equalization' taking place behind the market, or in its interstices, as a result of the exchange itself. There is thus a kind of circle here, because abstract labour exists if commodities are exchanged in a proportion that more or less directly depends on the amount of abstract labour that they embody. The main difficulty, however, arises when it comes to articulating 'valorization' in this sense of *Wertbildung* with 'valorization' in its properly capitalist sense, as *Verwertung*: the 'valorization of value', as it were, in other words the addition of new value or the emergence from within the circulation process itself of additional value.<sup>6</sup> Capitalists invest money and measure value or calculate prices only because they want to maximize that 'surplus', to generate surplus-value, and in fact it is not the case that value is 'formed' on the market before values enter a process of their own increase: the reverse is true – there is valorization in the first sense (formation of value) because there is valorization in the second sense (generation of surplus-value). This means, in other words, that the market of commodities is already a *capitalist* market, and, ultimately, the 'abstract' social labour is an *exploited* social labour, in the form of wage labour. It is wage-labour, therefore capitalism, that homogenizes and 'equalizes' labour...

Other difficulties are linked to this axiomatic circle. In order to explain how the 'increment' arises, Marx must explain that the value of the means of production is already there, like a

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6. Marx's quasi-mathematical terminology, *Das Inkrement*, or the 'differential', is inspired by early-nineteenth-century expositions of the differential calculus, also interpreted 'dialectically' in Hegel's *Logic*. See D.J. Struik, 'Marx and Mathematics', *Science and Society* 12 (1948), pp. 181–96.

treasure or a stock constituted by 'past', 'materialized' labour, to which 'living' labour – that is, labour in the present – will add new value in a given proportion. Two conditions are required, which form the 'secret' of the productivity of labour: that, as 'concrete' labour, it preserves (or, rather, re-creates) the value of machinery and raw material used in the process, and that, as 'abstract' labour, it creates new value in a measurable quantity. But, in fact, none of this is determined: it makes sense only as an anticipation of the value 'realized' on the market; that is, when the product is sold and converted into money, in a completely aleatory manner. Hence a considerable aporia: namely the fact that Marx, who more than any other theorist insists on the fact that value only exists in monetary form, also has a tendency to neutralize the function of money, and return to a 'real' representation of the economic circuit, in which – contrary to capitalist logic – it is not money that commands the circulation of commodities, but commodities that relate to themselves, and express their relations in the fetishistic form of money operations.<sup>7</sup> This leads, ultimately, to the fact that Marx, in the unfinished Volume 3 of *Capital* (ch. 25), called the operations of credit, and therefore the whole financial process, a 'fictitious capital'. This is a terribly ambiguous formula, in which one may understand that capitalism really operates through the use of 'fictions' – that is, symbolic instruments with a conventional, institutional foundation – or that the 'real' capitalism, with its historical tendencies and transformation, must be explained purely in terms of labour relations (an 'organic composition' of past and present labour), by abstracting from the fact that they are subjected to the monetary constraint of 'realization'.<sup>8</sup>

7. David Harvey and others (Bellofiore, Heinrich, Milios) have rightly insisted on this. See Riccardo Bellofiore, 'A Monetary Labor Theory of Value', *Review of Radical Political Economics*, vol. 21, no. 1/2 (1989), pp. 1–25.

8. The terminology of 'fiction' is linked with Marx's double idea that, in the reciprocity of the two 'circuits' C–M–C and M–C–M, the second only expresses the first in 'inverted form'; and that the autonomization of credit is intrinsically 'speculative', opening

This is a dramatic difficulty when it comes to discussing contemporary developments of financialized capitalism, and it runs the risk of throwing us into the opposite discourse: thinking capitalism as a *pure* financial process, where credit-money and its derivatives unfold their own autonomous productivity, generate profits, without any apparent relation to a production process, or more generally to a social relation where the value becomes ‘metamorphosed’ successively in its different forms – the money form, the commodity form – a metamorphosis without which there would be no valorization in either sense. For the valorization of value to take place, value must change form. It must even, as Marx also says, permanently shift from one ‘scene’ onto another, from the scene of monetary exchanges onto the scene of productive consumption.<sup>9</sup>

A symmetric difficulty concerns labour. Starting from the idea of the ‘double character of labour’ (which explains the double aspect of valorization), there remain two ways of identifying ‘labour’ in Marx’s argument. The tension is made apparent by the very polysemic use of the category ‘productivity’ (*Produktivkraft*). On the one hand, ‘productive labour’ refers to any activity transformed into a field of investment for capital: in my previous terminology, any metamorphosis of monetary value into its polar opposite, a material or immaterial elaboration of the use value of commodities, will produce surplus-value. It generates an increment that can become capitalized or accumulated, or it is ‘productive’ in the capitalist sense of the term. On the other hand, ‘productive labour’ refers to the specific actions that are performed in the sphere of production in the material sense, which essentially include industry and agriculture. To which (as

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the possibility of crises – ideas which are widely shared by non-Marxist economists, especially Keynes.

9. This was essentially the position of Suzanne de Brunhoff in her seminal 1973 work *Marx on Money*, London: Verso, 2015, expanded in the later book *Les rapports d’argent*, Grenoble: PUG, 1979, which I am closely following here.

Marx himself suggested in *Capital, Volume 2*, when discussing the interpenetration of cycles of production and circulation in the 'rotation' of capital) you can of course add transportation, communication, and so on. But that does not change the fact that 'productive labour' is taken here in a narrow sense which limits the first, 'formally' linked to the variety of fields of investment of money capital. The reasons for this restriction are clearly political: they make it possible to identify the 'working class' or the 'proletariat' as a social product of the Industrial Revolution, which at the same time 'creates' the material wealth of modern societies, and potentially challenges the domination of capital, and therefore the continuity of capitalist accumulation.<sup>10</sup> But, I insist, this is a narrow definition of the 'sources' of valorization: it does not include every salaried activity, and above all it does not include every exploited labour, especially that exploited labour which, by definition, is not paid by wages or compensated in monetary terms, namely domestic labour, essentially performed by women, by way of the historical combination of capitalism in all our societies with patriarchy.<sup>11</sup> And finally it does not include other broad ranges of activity which are not exactly 'labour' in any direct sense, but nevertheless acquire an important function of valorization, and are 'productive' therefore from a capitalist point of view.

Rather than deducing anything from a purely conceptual argument, I will proceed here in an experimental manner, discussing examples. I will examine two such processes which, certainly, may rely on the exploitation of labour, but, more centrally,

10. The controversy on the question of 'productive' and 'unproductive' labour begins with the Physiocrats (who identify productive labour solely with agriculture), continues with Smith (who imposes a generalization to every activity that 'adds to the value of the subject upon which it is bestowed'), and leads to Marx's new definition of the 'productive class' (any worker who produces commodities under capitalist relations). Although Marx is aware that the three categories 'productive class', 'proletariat' and 'wage labourers' are analytically distinct, he nonetheless tends to identify them historically and sociologically.

11. See the feminist critiques by Mariarosa Dalla Costa, Silvia Federici, Nancy Fraser, Harriet Fraad, Frigga Haug and others. See also my article 'Exploitation' in *Political Concepts: A Critical Lexicon*, [www.politicalconcepts.org/balibar-exploitation](http://www.politicalconcepts.org/balibar-exploitation).

‘valorize’ other dimensions of human life and consumption, where surplus-value is also generated, albeit in a ‘generalized sense’. In dealing with these examples, we must keep in mind the idea that no money, therefore no capital, is valorized if it is not metamorphosed into its polar opposite, a commodity that can be consumed ‘productively’ in the capitalist sense. But we must also keep in mind that labour is not the only form of such a ‘productive consumption’ (in the terminology of the 1857 *Introduction to the Critique of Political Economy*). Therefore we must challenge something essential in Marx’s understanding of exploitation, and face all the political consequences of that rectification. However, the result I propose will not necessarily amount to an erasure of the antagonistic dimension of capitalism.

### **Surplus-health and the accumulation of bio-capital**

My first example is ‘surplus health’. I believe that the term was coined by Joe Dumit in a series of studies, concluding with his book *Drugs for Life*.<sup>12</sup> This concept is modelled on ‘surplus-value’ and ‘surplus-labour’, reversing the perspective from production to a certain consumption – a consumption that is vital since it is the individual’s capacity to survive, to live an ‘acceptable’ life in a given environment, that is at stake. This leads to introducing, in symmetry with Marxian labour-power, something like a capacity to ‘suffer’ and to take the drugs and the medical services that restore or simply produce ‘health’.<sup>13</sup> What Dumit pursues is a

12. Joseph Dumit: *Drugs for Life: How Pharmaceutical Companies Define Our Health*, Durham NC and London: Duke University Press, 2012. There are interesting convergences with the work of Melinda Cooper, which I cannot discuss here. See her *Family Values: Between Neoliberalism and the New Social Conservatism*, New York: Zone Books, 2017.

13. There are in fact two terms in Marx which designate different aspects and functions of this notion: a physical and mental labour force (*Arbeitskraft*) and a socially recognized capacity to work or to be employed professionally (*Arbeitsvermögen*). See Pierre Macherey, *Le Sujet des normes*, Paris: Éditions Amsterdam, 2014. Interestingly, the ‘workerist’ (*operaista*) tradition in Italy uses *forza-lavoro* in a manner that collapses the idea of a workforce and the idea of a political subject (class).

triple phenomenological, statistical and economic inquiry, about the changing definition of health and illness, the continuous increase in consumption of drugs per capita, and finally the correlative growth of health costs and profits of the pharmaceuticals industry.

On the one hand, you have a progressive transformation in the definition of 'illness', shifting from a pathology that is experienced by subjects as pain or handicap or disorder or disease, diagnosed by a doctor in a 'clinical' relationship to a patient, to an invisible objective condition that is measured or indicated by 'biomarkers', such as cholesterol level, whose quantitative definitions are periodically revised, more or less automatically calling for the prescription of permanent drugs (such as statins). This could be described as a form of *exploitation* of illness as a lived experience, which of course subjects may demand themselves, or cannot refuse and transform into a demand. On the other hand, you have the transition from a situation where illness is a discontinuous state (with huge differences in gravity, duration and emergency, of course) into a continuous state, where the majority of 'illnesses' are chronic conditions, and the fact that the immanent tendency, measured by statistics, is towards a situation where, with advancing age, individuals consume a maximum number of different drugs as frequently as possible for as long as possible.<sup>14</sup> Hence the ironic play on words in the title *Drugs for Life*: drugs to live, or to survive, and drugs for life, permanently. Life then becomes, for better or worse, what we can call a 'prosthetic life', which is of course a dependent life.<sup>15</sup> This is the third aspect: supply precedes demand, and in fact creates it, according to a forceful extension of the 'liberal' law of markets (Say's Law).

14. The parallel with Marx's 'relative surplus-value', combining a rise in productivity with intensification, is striking here.

15. Needless to say, every human life was always dependent on relations to others, on conditions, on techniques: it was always 'vulnerable'. But this is a new type of dependency that is at the same time more passive and controlled by forces that belong to the economic-technological complex of the pharmaceuticals industry.



Health costs are continuously growing, at least in ‘developed’ countries, for part of the population (but an important part of the population). They are distributed among public expenses and private expenses (often covered by insurance, therefore involving a form of credit), and this growth is geared to the growth of profit of the pharmaceuticals industry, which influences laboratories through the determination of ‘conditions at risk’, choosing which drugs to develop in a preferential manner, following a calculus of investments and returns.

The profits here do not come essentially, or not only, from production – that is, from valorization in the Marxian sense – although these costs have to be minimized; they come from a different kind of valorization, which directly articulates innovation with increased consumption. This is exactly ‘surplus-health’, which we may also call a generalized form of surplus-value. Kaushik Sunder Rajan adds another dimension, which illustrates a new kind of population law at the level of the global economy, and therefore a very important element in understanding the articulation of globalization and financialization.<sup>16</sup> The drugs are mainly consumed in the USA and other developed countries, and they are conceived for this market; but they are *tested* – that is, subjected to experimental trial – in India and other ‘Southern’ countries. This is not only because it is in India, where an important population of unemployed poor make a living in this manner, that pharmaceuticals industries can find ‘volunteers’ (i.e. contractual patients, who give ‘informed consent’); it is above all for scientific socio-biological reasons, because it is only in a region where an important population has not yet entered the process of chronic consumption of drugs that you find so-called ‘innocent subjects’ for trials, subjects whose organism is not already transformed, and whose physiological reactions to the

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16. Kaushik Sunder Rajan, *Pharmocracy: Value, Politics and Knowledge in Global Biomedicine*, Durham NC and London: Duke University Press, 2017.

drugs thus provide an experimental model for the understanding and adjustment of their effects. With this crucial new set of analyses, we understand that generalized surplus-value is a social relation with, at the same time, a local market function and a global system of conditions.

### **Human capital or 'labour theory of value' reversed**

'Human capital', which is my second example, works differently. As we know, this category acquired its strategic function in neoliberal economic theory as an extension of neoclassical reasoning to certain domains which were supposed to be located, by 'nature', outside the realm of economic calculus: education, marriage, law and punishment, philanthropy, and so on. Education is especially relevant for our subject. In the work of Gary Becker and others, models are devised which qualitatively correlate an analysis of the component parts of any individual's capacity to be employed at a maximally profitable rate (for him- or herself and/or for an employer who hires him/her), an equation of the costs for the 'production' of such capacities through expenses which can be either public or private (i.e. 'personal' or, most of the time, coming from the family), and which, ideally, must be minimized in comparison to a maximized return.<sup>17</sup> Hence the attempt at evaluating the 'economic' correlation between investments and returns, which justifies the idea that an economic strategy of 'rational anticipations' can be applied, where you define 'production functions' for individual capacities, define the optimal strategy that links *time* spent in formation (how many years to study and where to study), *costs*, personal

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17. My main reference is Gary S. Becker, *Human Capital: A Theoretical and Empirical Analysis, with Special Reference to Education* (1964), Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993. A useful short presentation is given in Gary S. Becker, *Human Capital and the Personal Distribution of Income: An Analytical Approach*, Ann Arbor MI: Institute of Public Administration, 1967.

or collective, and *benefits* in terms of personal earnings over a lifetime. I am not discussing here whether such models are really 'effective' or 'predictive'. But I want to insist on three aspects which I believe should be articulated.

First, it is important to know that the category 'human capital' was not invented in an individualistic perspective. It emerged, in fact, in the 1950s, within discussions and plans for the development of newly independent colonies, or 'under-developed' countries in Asia and Latin America, where it was a question of securing national independence at the economic level, through the indigenous development of educational, scientific and medical resources to improve the 'productivity' and the 'competitiveness' of the population on the world market.<sup>18</sup> The principle was linked to competition not among individuals, but among nations, and it was linked to a certain 'socialist' articulation of decolonization and development. What neoliberalism has achieved here is an appropriation and a transformation of a notion with a social content into a notion with a different social content, linked to the decline of the idea of planning and its replacement by the generalization of models of competition.

Second, one of the main objectives of Becker's theory is to provide instruments for a quantitative evaluation of the respective merits, in terms of costs and returns for individuals, of alternative strategies of education, which he calls respectively *elitist* (more investments for those who predictably will be more successful) and *egalitarian* (massive investments for institutions which are accessible to all, offering services that, according to their capacities and their ambition or obstinacy, individuals will more or less 'valorize').<sup>19</sup> This is clearly a political confrontation, and not surprisingly the result is that elitist systems are more

18. See D. Cogneau et al., 'Développement des pays du Sud', *Encyclopædia Universalis*, [www.universalis.fr/encyclopedie/developpement-economique-et-social-developpement-des-pays-du-sud](http://www.universalis.fr/encyclopedie/developpement-economique-et-social-developpement-des-pays-du-sud).

19. Becker, *Human Capital and the Personal Distribution of Income*.

efficient globally than egalitarian systems. Add to this that, again as a formal consequence of the model, the privatization of educational services, their transference from public institutions to private corporations (or to public institutions which apply the same managing strategies as private corporations), is deemed more efficient, provided you keep an 'optimal' proportion between the common education and the professional one. This seems to have a clear class intention, especially if you think that personal investments in the education of children require already existing capital. But it is immediately compounded by the fact that theorists of human capital introduce *credit* as an essential investment to broaden the range of possibilities for individuals without a patrimony, which is presented as a democratic corrective. Democracy then goes along with mass indebtedness, which is not just an ideological masquerade but an effective instrument to include a growing number of people in the process of valorization through training.

Finally, such a theory, and the accompanying tendency in our capitalist societies, has a perverse but highly intelligible relationship to the Marxian discourse about the exploitation of labour-power and the accumulation of capital. Whereas Marx explained that 'capital' ultimately could be reduced to (productive) labour or was nothing other than labour in a different form, appropriated by a different class, the theory of human capital explains that labour – more precisely 'labouring capacity' (*Arbeitsvermögen*) – can be reduced to capital or become analysed in terms of capitalist operations of credit, investment and profitability. This is, of course, what underlies the ideology of the individual as a 'self-entrepreneur', or an 'entrepreneur of oneself'. This ideology is very effective, for the same reasons that made Marx's theory of the reduction of social labour to various multiples of the same 'abstract labour' very effective: namely the fact that, if capitalism requires in permanence masses of undifferentiated forces, which

are displaced more or less brutally from one place of exploitation to another, it also certainly relies on a permanent differentiation and hierarchization of human capacities that is no longer provided by traditional disciplines or professions, but becomes organized and standardized in capitalist form.

### **Capitalist reproduction, or 'total subsumption'**

This was in fact a point of transition, in the direction of defining what I tentatively call 'absolute capitalism': a steady process of commodification, or creation of new 'fictitious commodities', without which the process of accumulation cannot be maintained, leads to an incorporation of reproduction processes (biological, intellectual or symbolic) into the valorization process which 'metamorphoses' human activities into monetary magnitudes, accompanied by the increasing function of credit and debt in correlating individual and collective dimensions of the social relation, and therefore the definition of capital itself.<sup>20</sup>

However simplified, the examples I have discussed articulate the question of valorization, both as formation of value and as addition of new value to an existing capital, with processes of accumulation, commodification, financialization that are not purely based on the exploitation of labour, or 'productive consumption' in Marx's terms, but on other uses of living capacities as well. This is not to say that they involve no exploitation or dispossession (as David Harvey rightly insists), hence no latent or open antagonism.<sup>21</sup> Much the contrary. The tendency towards unlimited accumulation remains the driving force of capitalism more than ever: this is why the realization of value has to be

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20. Other uses of the phrase 'absolute capitalism' are currently made by Ingmar Granstedt, Franco Berardi, Bertrand Ogilvie and Jacques Rancière. I will discuss these different definitions in another place.

21. David Harvey, 'The "New" Imperialism: Accumulation by Dispossession', *Socialist Register* 40 (2004), pp. 63–87.

planned in advance in every investment. And, since private capitals are as 'liquid' as possible, shifting from one sector to another in order to maximize profits or, rather, in today's financial capitalism, to maximize the shareholder's value of assets, this means that so-called 'rational anticipations' are included in the decision of banks and hedge funds to support this or that investment. Without claiming expertise in this matter, I will venture an additional hypothesis: the issue is perhaps not so much to describe a growth of markets for existing products; it is much more to push the range of the market beyond the limits of the 'production sphere' in the traditional sense, therefore to add new sources of permanent 'extra surplus-value' that can become integrated into valorization, overcoming its limitations, because capital is valorized both on the 'objective' side of labour and production, and on the 'subjective' side of consumption and use.

This is why I insist on the importance of the steady ongoing commodification process. Ultimately 'commodification' is a commodification of life, through its objects and its actions or passions. This is a process that began well before capitalism, and in any case before the Industrial Revolution; but it continues within capitalism, crossing successive thresholds. Karl Polanyi's category of 'fictitious commodities' is very precious here, provided we do not believe that there is something like a naturally given list of 'fictitious commodities'.<sup>22</sup> On the contrary, such new commodities are continuously invented: health, education, knowledge, entertainment and art, care and sentiments, and so on, which not only produce 'means' for the productive sector itself, or for the 'subsistence' of human subjects (the two sectors

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22. Polanyi's concept is explained in *The Great Transformation: Political and Economic Origins of Our Time*, Boston MA: Beacon Press, 2002. The 'fictitious commodities' there are land, labour and money (note the symmetry with the Trinity formula). Because they are supposed to resist complete commodification, they support the introduction – instead of a pure market economy – of (democratic) socialism, which, writing at the end of World War II in the context of the (Beveridgian) welfare state or social state, Polanyi deemed inevitable.

of Marx's 'schemes of reproduction'), but 'produce' the subjects themselves. However, we must also keep in mind the question that is involved in Polanyi's designation, namely whether there are obstacles that prevent commodification from becoming limitless: contradictory effects which, from inside or from outside, make it impossible for valorization through renewed commodification to proceed smoothly.

It is the combination of these objective and subjective dimensions that leads me to offer a quasi-Marxian category of 'total subsumption'. I have in mind theories of 'total alienation' that could be traced back to various authors, from Hobbes to Rousseau to Marcuse. Above all I want to continue a reflection that was inaugurated by Marx, albeit left by him in the obscurity of some unpublished texts. 'Subsumption' is an old juridical and philosophical category which means that something or someone is 'subjected' to a norm or a 'law' or a 'rule' because it is incorporated into a form or becomes informed materially by that norm, or a law or rule.<sup>23</sup> The question is of course: what is subsumed under what? I said 'something or 'someone', but the most interesting case, probably, arises when we introduce the third great ontological category, which is neither thing nor person or can encompass both: namely 'actions' or 'agency'.<sup>24</sup> This is how Marx uses it in *Capital* when he describes the transition from 'formal subsumption' to what he calls a 'real subsumption': the actions of a worker – that is, his/her productive operations, making use of instruments to shape a given matter into a usable

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23. Marx's views on 'formal' and 'real' subsumption are essentially to be found in the unpublished chapter 6 of *Capital*, 'Results of the Immediate Production Process' (translated as an appendix to *Capital, Volume 1*, by Ben Fowkes, London: Penguin 2004). In his recent PhD thesis at Kingston University, Andres Saenz de Sicilia has provided a thorough analysis of the transformations in the concept from Kant to Hegel and to Marx: [www.academia.edu/28392192/PhD\\_The\\_Problem\\_of\\_Subsumption\\_in\\_Kant\\_Hegel\\_and\\_Marx\\_2016](http://www.academia.edu/28392192/PhD_The_Problem_of_Subsumption_in_Kant_Hegel_and_Marx_2016).

24. Roman Law (following the ontology of the Stoics) uses not a dualistic but a triadic typology of beings: things, persons, actions. The third category is eliminated from the 'great dichotomy' (Bobbio) of modern (bourgeois) legal theory, which leads to inventing hybrid formulas in such domains as family and labour legislation.

object – are being transformed by capitalist manufacture and the Industrial Revolution into ‘partial operations’ of a collective process whose content and rhythm are dictated by the machinery itself, so that the worker can actually produce or ‘do’ something only in the conditions of the factory, under the ‘law’ of capitalist valorization. Not only must the worker accept the domination of the capitalist market, ‘take’ the job that is offered to him/her (or not...) by the capitalist, but there is no way he or she could operate manually or intellectually outside that technical and social form. In such a process, continuously repeated, the worker’s labour not only becomes ‘abstract labour’; it becomes dissociated into ‘partial activities’ of a process without a subject. When the formal subsumption, juridically expressed in the wage-form, has been fully ‘realized’, or transformed into ‘real subsumption’, exploitation is not just a domination; it is incorporated into the dispositions of human bodies and minds, or radically individualized. But this ‘individuation’ is also a complete loss of individuality, this time in the sense of ‘individualization’, or personal identity and autonomy. This explains why Marx expected a liberation only from another industrial revolution, which would substitute collective capacities, or collectively distributed capacities, for the current forms of individual activity.<sup>25</sup>

In the meantime, however, something else has happened, which I call ‘total subsumption’. There are indications of that sense in Marx, when he explains that capitalism always wants to have it both ways: exploiting labour not only in the production process, but also in the reproduction process, where workers and their families, social individuals considered ‘proprietors of their own person’, consume commodities only in order to ‘reproduce’ or ‘re-create’ their labour force. As I noted earlier, Marx is largely

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25. In a rare utopian development of *Capital, Volume 1*, ch. 15 (‘Machinery and Modern Industry’), Marx proposes a Faustian notion of the ‘total individual’ (or ‘fully developed individual’) as the common horizon of technological transformations (intellectualization of labour) and a socialist programme of education (section 9).



blind to the fact that in such a reproduction process, which concretely articulates the household with the conditions of the market, an additional form of unpaid domestic labour takes place; but he is not blind to the fact that market constraints or market logic will increasingly command the quality and quantity of the worker's consumption, in order to make it also profitable for capital.<sup>26</sup> Take the example of housing, or urban development, to which Engels had drawn attention very early (*The Condition of the Working Class in England*, 1845), or the mass distribution of goods. However, this is only a kind of 'formal' subsumption in the sphere of consumption. Things change radically with the new stages of commodification that I described in terms of surplus health or human capital: capitalist investment in the caring and education processes themselves.

This means two things, apparently: (1) that the anthropological barrier between work and life, production and reproduction, is erased, since reproduction is itself becoming a 'productive' realm in the capitalist sense; (2) that there is no dimension of individuality (nor, let's make it clear, intersubjectivity, vulnerability or dependency among individuals) that will remain untouched by commodification.<sup>27</sup> No form of life as agency, activity and passivity, even suffering, even dying, can be lived outside a commodity form and a value-form that is in fact a moment in the valorization process of capital. This is not a reduction of the individual's life to 'bare life', as Agamben calls it. In a sense it is just the opposite: the denaturalization of life, or the production of a 'second nature' – albeit not in any form (since

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26. What interests Marx primarily is the contradiction arising from the fact that capital needs to *expand* the market of consumption goods, while continuously *lowering* the 'value' (cost of reproduction) of the labour force.

27. Just as the capitalist commodification of production (wage-labour) seized on *activity*, capitalist commodification of reproduction seizes on *relationality*, the ontological 'vulnerability' of humans with regard to others. This may explain why this notion now comes to the fore of critical theory, in order to highlight the existence of alternative possibilities in this field, which also correspond to antithetic modes of existence.

every human culture is a 'second nature'), but in *purely capitalist form*.<sup>28</sup> This is what I call a total subsumption (after 'formal' and 'real' subsumption) because it leaves nothing outside (no reservation for 'natural' life). Or, anything that is left outside must appear as a residue, and a field for further incorporation. Or must it? That is of course the whole question, ethical as much as political: are there limits to commodification? Are there internal and external obstacles? A Lacanian might want to say: every such totalization includes an element of impossibility which belongs to the 'real'; it must be *pas tout*, or not whole. If that were the case, the heterogeneous elements, the intrinsic remainders of the total subsumption, could appear in many different forms, some apparently individualistic, such as pathologies or anarchist resistances, others common or even public. Or they may become manifest in certain difficulties in implementing the neoliberal agenda, such as the difficulty of dismantling a Medicare system once it has been legalized.

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28. I am referring here to Giorgio Agamben's series *Homo Sacer* (beginning with *Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), and Bertrand Ogilvie, *La Seconde nature du politique. Essai d'anthropologie négative*, Paris: Éditions L'Harmattan, 2012.

### 3

## From the commodity to the spectacle: Debord's Marx

ERIC-JOHN RUSSELL

Published a century after Marx's *Capital*, Guy Debord's *The Society of the Spectacle* was described upon its release as 'the *Capital* of the new generation' (*Le Nouvel Observateur*).<sup>1</sup> However, the book's content has almost never been seriously examined alongside the dialectical logic of the social forms of value systematically ordered within Marx's *Capital*. Despite Debord's description of the modern spectacle as a development of the commodity-capitalist economy, discussions on Debord's debt to Marx customarily emphasize those early writings in which Marx enunciates the critique of alienation without having yet traversed the works of classical political economy.<sup>2</sup>

And for good reason, as his archival notes can verify. A preliminary glance at *The Society of the Spectacle* elicits the impression that the 'ruthless criticism of all that exists' first enunciated by Marx in his early twenties continued to reverberate a century later.<sup>3</sup> The book resounds with both implicit and

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1. *The Society of the Spectacle* was published in November 1967, a hundred years after the first German edition of *Capital*, Volume 1, published in mid-September 1867.

2. Debord refers to classical political economy as 'the science of domination' (§41). Within the present work all selections from *The Society of the Spectacle* are taken from the English translation by Fredy Perlman and Jon Supak, first published in Detroit by Black & Red, 1970. Quotations will be followed by thesis number to indicate location.

3. Debord began writing *The Society of the Spectacle* in the autumn of 1963 (*Guy Debord Correspondance*, Volume 2: *Septembre 1960-Décembre 1964*, Paris: Librairie Arthème

explicit reference to the phenomenon of social alienation or estrangement described by Marx in the 1844 *Manuscripts*. And yet, we find, early on the following register of social alienation through which Debord situates the advent of the spectacle:

The first phase of the domination of the economy over social life brought into the definition of all human realization the obvious degradation of *being* into *having*. The present phase of total occupation of social life by the accumulated results of the economy leads to a generalized sliding of *having* into *appearing*, from which all actual 'having' must draw its immediate prestige and its ultimate function. (§17)

Here, the primacy of appearance over property draws attention not simply to the way in which Debord's theory of the spectacle acquires theoretical determinations from Marx's early writings on social alienation, but, more specifically, how these developments of the commodity economy come to occupy a certain centrality to a dialectical structure of appearances in the critique of political economy. We find a clue in a 1990 letter to Giorgio Agamben where Debord writes:

I was happy to have attempted – in 1967 and completely contrary to Althusser's sombre denial – a kind of 'salvage by transfer' of the Marxist method by adding to it a large dose of Hegel, at the same time as it reprised a critique of political economy that wanted to bear in mind the Marxist method's ascertainable developments in our poor country, as they were foreseeable from what preceded them.<sup>4</sup>

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Fayard, 2001. Translation: NOT BORED! [www.notbored.org/debord-14](http://www.notbored.org/debord-14) November1963.html.) An infamously artful drinker, Debord vowed, two years later, not to pick up a glass until the book was complete. As to whether or not he stuck with such a pledge, one can never know. As he writes in a 1965 letter to Raoul Vaneigem: 'For a month, although I find myself quite happily occupied, I have subordinated many of the charms of everyday life and errancy to the completion of the critique of the spectacle. I have absolutely stopped drinking, until the last line is written. A dignified example from Antiquity! [Dignified] to the Thermopylae, and to the Spartans... In the best case, I still have six weeks or two months more. Which weighs upon me. But the trap I've caught myself in is clever' (*Guy Debord Correspondance*, Volume 3: *Janvier 1965–Décembre 1968*, Paris: Librairie Arthème Fayard, 2003. Translation: NOT BORED! [www.notbored.org/debord-1August1966.html](http://www.notbored.org/debord-1August1966.html)).

4. *Guy Debord Correspondance*, Volume 7: *Janvier 1988–Novembre 1994*, Paris:

For Debord, the society of the spectacle consists in a peculiar form of domination developed through the autonomy of the commodity economy within the capitalist mode of production in which human activity becomes structured by objective forms of appearance mediating social relations and yet is constituted by determinate modes of real, concrete practice. With the increasing fragmentation of human experience through the division of labour and the structuring of social relations through the form of the commodity, the spectacle is for Debord the reconstitution of a unitary social life from its separated and disjointed moments *at the level of appearances*. In a word, the spectacle is a critical category of social organization specifying the multivalent aspects of the unity of capitalist society in relation to an underlying determinate structure of appearance, the conception of which derives from Hegelian thought.<sup>5</sup>

However, it remains the case that the extent to which Debord is justified in his claim that the spectacle constitutes a qualitative development of capitalism has yet to be evaluated in accordance with the categorial determinations of the capitalist mode of production. Is it true, as has sometimes been claimed, that Debord's spectacle is simply a replacement for Marx's commodity albeit under conditions of postwar prosperity? Is the difference

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Librairie Arthème Fayard, 2008. Translation: NOT BORED! [www.notbored.org/debord-6August1990.html](http://www.notbored.org/debord-6August1990.html).

5. While Debord invoked the category of spectacle as early as 1955, it is only in the 1960s and finally within *The Society of the Spectacle* that it emerges as a critical concept for a structured totality. Beginning with 'Introduction à une critique de la géographie urbaine' in 1955, which appeared in number 6 of the Belgian surrealist journal *Les Lèvres Nues*, the category is utilized by Debord generically and in a nonpartisan manner to refer to publicity theatrics and the impressions and ambiances garnered from urban excursions. As might be expected, the term 'spectator' is also employed in a more commonplace capacity to refer to the subjectivity of passive reception. However, within the 1957 article 'Rapport sur la construction des situations et sur les conditions de l'organisation et de l'action de la tendance situationniste international', the category gets the specific definition of 'non-intervention' (*Internationale Situationniste*, 1997, p. 699) in relation to which '[t]he construction of situations begins beyond the ruins of the modern spectacle' (ibid.). It thereby begins to acquire a more technical meaning as a mode 'psychological identification' (ibid.). It is within this early article – which was one of the preparatory texts for the July 1957 conference at Cosio d'Arroscia, Italy, at which the Situationist International was founded – that the spectacle emerges as 'the spectacle of the capitalist way of life' (ibid., p. 701).

between Marx's critique of political economy and Debord's analysis of spectacle simply one of emphasis? Further, how does the spectacle relate to the other prominent forms of appearance of value, such as money and, perhaps more importantly, capital?<sup>6</sup> Finally, in what sense ought, as Debord writes in a 1966 letter, '[t]he revolutionary theory of Marx ... to be corrected and completed'?<sup>7</sup>

This essay attempts to answer these questions by highlighting the central role of appearance-forms in Marx's critique of political economy. Here, it will become clear that value – the social form of wealth within capitalist society – is ontologically structured as a totality through a set of appearance-form-determinations (*Erscheinung Formbestimmungen*). As we know from Hegel, a totality cannot be given directly or immediately, and so what becomes primary is the *form* of value or, again, what Marx refers to in a number of places as *Formbestimmung*, form-determination.<sup>8</sup> Here, value as formal determination or as the self-movement of form – not itself something directly perceptible and yet obtaining concrete appearances – derives from the self-reproducing logic of the totality of social relations necessary for the production and reproduction of capital.

The systematic exposition of *Capital* proceeds through a structured succession of categories that unfold immediate appearances to reveal their internal dynamics and, most crucially, the *necessity* through which essential social relations obtain the appearance-forms they do. It is a mode of presentation (*Darstellung*) that examines social reality as a totality of inner connections and

6. Gilles Dauvé, aka Jean Barrot, 'Critique of the Situationist International' (1979); translated by Louis Michaelson in Stewart Home, ed., *What is Situationism? A Reader*, Edinburgh: AK Press, 1996; and 'Back to the Situationist International' (1979), *Aufheben* no. 9 (2000). See also: Perspectives, *At Dusk: The Situationist Movement in Historical Perspective*, Berkeley CA: Perspectives, 1975.

7. *Guy Debord Correspondance*, Volume 3: *Janvier 1965–Décembre 1968*. Translation: NOT BORED! [www.notbored.org/debord-26December1966a.html](http://www.notbored.org/debord-26December1966a.html).

8. The concept *Formbestimmung* first appears in Marx's doctoral dissertation, but only re-emerges in the *Grundrisse* and the first German edition of *Capital*, *Volume 1*.

determinations. Marx's *Darstellung* gives concrete conceptual unity to aggregated historical detail. It is a reconstruction that starts from the immediacies of how wealth appears within capitalist society and proceeds to unfold the mediating essence that is the retrospective ground for those forms of appearance.

It is through the logic of the forms of appearance (*Erscheinungsformen*) of value that Marx attempts to provide an answer to the problem as to why value must assume its particular forms. This is a question never posed by classical political economy and yet, as we learn from Marx, remains fundamental for explaining the mediations between, for example, profit and labour. This problem cannot be adequately answered without Hegel, specifically his *Wesenslogik* in which essence must appear as something other than itself. For Marx, this logic – through which the *mutually constitutive identity* of appearance and essence calls into question the limits of formal dualisms – is a conceptual resource for conceiving not only the necessity for surplus-value to appear as profit, but also the necessity of value to assume its particular concrete shapes, such as commodity, money and capital.<sup>9</sup>

Not only does the concept of spectacle derive from this essentially Hegelian movement of the self-development of appearance-forms inherited by Marx, but in the first instance Marx's usage contains insight already disposed towards, let us say, the spectacular. One can identify attributes of the Latin *spectaculum*, and its connection to a 'mirror image' or 'arranged display', and of *spectare* – 'to view', 'watch' or 'behold' – within the development of the forms of appearance of value.<sup>10</sup> However,

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9. See Patrick Murray, *Marx's Theory of Scientific Knowledge*. Amherst NY: Humanity Books, 1988, and 'The Secret of Capital's Self-Valorisation "Laid Bare": How Hegel Helped Marx to Overturn Ricardo's Theory of Profit', in Fred Moseley and Tony Smith, eds, *Marx's 'Capital' and Hegel's 'Logic': A Reexamination*, Leiden: Brill, 2014.

10. As Debord wrote in 1980 to a Greek translator of *The Society of the Spectacle*: 'In French, "spectacle" has the merit of being linked to the Latin *speculum* and thus to mirror, to the inverted image, to the concept of speculation, etc.' *Guy Debord Correspondance*,

this would at best only demonstrate that Debord is composing a theory of the spectacle by emphasizing certain methodological aspects of Marx's critique of political economy. This is certainly true, and the gravity with which Debord aims to formulate a critique of society within the contours set by a Hegelian dialectic emerges as Debord scrutinizes different possible titles for *The Society of the Spectacle*:

*La véritable société du spectacle*

*La dialectique de la société du spectacle*

*La dialectique de la société comme spectacle*

*La dialectique dans de la société du spectacle*

*La dialectique dans de la société comme spectacle*

*Le moment spectaculaire de la société marchande (ou sous-titre?)*

*La société comme spectacle*<sup>11</sup>

Besides the connotations involved in these working titles and their affinity with the method of Marx's critique of political economy, there are, in my view, some considerable advances made by Debord with his concept of spectacle, which I aim to elucidate here. This essay assesses the way in which Debord's society of the spectacle remains a critical category that exceeds the specific determinations of the critique of political economy while yet having its conceptual basis within them.

### **Value and its spectacular forms of appearance**

Let me begin with §10 of the first chapter of *The Society of the Spectacle* and consider some of the issues embedded there.<sup>12</sup>

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Volume 6: *Janvier 1979–Décembre 1987*, Paris: Librairie Arthème Fayard, 2006. Translation: NOT BORED! [www.notbored.org/debord-5August1980.html](http://www.notbored.org/debord-5August1980.html).

11. Within Debord's archival materials, a rummage through his notations on Henri Lefebvre's *Sociology of Marx* reveals these few additional working titles for what would eventually become *The Society of the Spectacle*.

12. This is a characterization of the spectacle that Debord will retain into the 1990s when he composed the preface to the third French edition of the book. Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, p. 8.



Considered in its own terms, the spectacle is affirmation of appearance and affirmation of all human life, namely social life, as mere appearance. But the critique which reaches the truth of the spectacle exposes it as the visible negation of life, as a negation of life which has become visible. (§10)

What does it mean for a negation to gain positive form or obtain this appearance-form? For Debord, this is the result of the autonomous movement of the commodity economy in its abstract and quantitative structuring of social relations. But fully to grasp what this means, we have to tour Marx's theory of the form of value. It is there that we will see how it is that the economy acquires this independent force of objectivity through its forms of appearance.

At the most elemental level, one recalls Marx's description of the dual character of the commodity as a 'sensuous supersensible' (*sinnlich übersinnlich*) thing whereby, in Marx's exposition, the unity of sensuous use-value and abstract exchange-value contained within the commodity unfold corresponding to concrete and abstract forms of human labour crystallized therein. Marx refers to this unity as *value*, a unity that becomes posited *for itself* when the products of labour are equalized in the exchange process; they are abstracted from their heterogeneous and concrete particularities by the reduction of the substance of their use-value to a quantum or aliquot of socially necessary abstract labour time, which is the measure of their value.

The use-values of two commodities become momentarily displaced during the exchange process. Value is thereby realized in the exchange process through the negation of use-value in which the qualitative aspects of the commodities are momentarily expelled by the quantitative equivalence of exchange.<sup>13</sup> And

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13. I am indebted to Christopher J. Arthur for this interpretation. Christopher J. Arthur, *The New Dialectic and Marx's 'Capital'*, Leiden: Brill, 2004.

yet, for Marx, this negation of use-value acquires a positive presence in the form of money and capital, each of which take possession of the materiality of production and consumption for the purpose of exchange. Within capitalism, production is production for exchange, and in this way the concreteness of the world is brought into existence by the abstract objective force of value. Here, the natural form of the commodity becomes its value-form as its form of appearance. As Marx writes:

Within the value-relation and the value expression included in it, the abstractly general counts not as a property of the concrete, sensibly real; but on the contrary the sensibly-concrete counts as the mere form of appearance or definite form of realisation of the abstractly general.<sup>14</sup>

The constant expulsion and affirmation of concrete reality constitutes the essential movement of value, a process whereby the negation of use-value during exchange in turn objectifies itself, or negates its negation, by instantiating concrete reality through its development of forms (*Gestaltungsprozess*). It is an abstract emptiness acquiring concrete constitutive power. Such is the manner in which value gives itself its own concrete reality, an autonomy of real abstractions constituting the world in its own image.<sup>15</sup>

Debord's opening chapter, 'Separation Perfected', continues within this framework. In so far as within capitalism social reality appears as an inverted world and subsists through estranged forms of abstract social unity, the spectacle is the

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14. 'The Value-Form', Appendix to the 1st German edition of *Capital, Volume 1*, 1867, in *Capital and Class 4* (Spring 1978), pp. 130–50.

15. It should be noted that the category of real abstraction derives not from Marx himself but from Alfred Sohn-Rethel, even if its conceptual content can be traced to the former's analysis of exchange abstraction and equalization. Alfred Sohn-Rethel's *Intellectual and Manual Labour: A Critique of Epistemology* (1978; trans. Martin Sohn-Rethel, Atlantic Highlands NJ: Humanities Press, 1983) examines the correlation between the social synthesis of the exchange abstraction, along with its anthropological genesis within antiquity, and the epistemological abstractions culminating in the philosophy of Kant. While there is no available evidence indicating that Debord was familiar with the work of Sohn-Rethel, that the concept of the society of the spectacle bears an unmistakable affinity to the concept of a real abstraction is undeniable.

culmination of this fetish in which the ‘unity it imposes is merely the official language of generalized separation’ (§3).<sup>16</sup> Debord aims to elucidate an autonomized social reality constituted through appearances, wherein social unity only exists in its inverted form. As such, the spectacle is not a falsified *representation* of reality, but the visual or phenomenal exposition of an already falsified reality; it is the development of value becoming visible to itself. As will become clear, the spectacle is not a distorted representation of social reality but the appearance and justification of the actual distortion or perversion of social reality itself. As Debord writes in the second chapter: ‘The spectacle is the moment when the commodity has attained the total occupation of social life. Not only is the relation to the commodity visible, but it is all one sees: the world one sees is its world’ (§42).

However, if we are to regard the spectacle as a visualization of the world of commodities, then the category of the commodity itself does not yet obtain the characteristics Debord is describing. We need instead to traverse the varied capacities and functions of money. Indeed, while the commodity features as a more prominent protagonist in *The Society of the Spectacle*, on the surface of things, I’d like to argue that it is actually different aspects of the logic of money which better elucidate the spectacle as a development of the capitalist mode of production.

### **The spectacular nature of money**

For Marx, the forms of appearance of value proceed through ‘visual inspection’ or *Augenschein*. This is Marx’s formulation

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16. In the analysis to follow, it is worth bearing in mind the affinity between the concepts of separation and abstraction. While Debord relies more heavily on the former, the Latin *abstrahere* is always a process of separation and so it might speculatively be said that an alternative title to the first chapter of *The Society of the Spectacle* – one which would have equally encompassed its content while making more explicit the form of domination constituted by the spectacle in its continuity with the value-form – would have been ‘Abstraction Perfected’.

which comes to the fore most explicitly in the first chapter of the first German edition of *Capital* and the 'Value-Form' Appendix to that edition. There, it is appearances themselves that commence the dialectic on the forms of value: 'Der Augenschein lehrt ferner'. In a sense, Marx is simply observing (*betrachtet*) their development. Among the initial passages of *Capital, Volume 1*, the *Erscheinungsformen* proceed through four basic moments – a dramaturgy between coat and linen – progressively gaining greater visual impact through a totalization of commodity values and culminating in the money-form whose fetish-riddle, as Marx writes, is 'the riddle of the commodity fetish, [but] now become visible and dazzling to our eyes'.<sup>17</sup> In other words, the money-fetish is only the commodity-fetish rendered *spectacular*.

Prior to this, Marx's exposition has traversed the simple form of relative value for which the being of value only 'comes to light' (*kommt dagegen zum Vorschein*) as a relation between two commodities, whereby their equal relation posits, on one side, 'the body of another commodity, sensibly different from it [and] becomes the mirror [*Spiegel*] of its own existence as value [*Wertsein*]'. Here, value 'reveals itself' (*offenbart sich*), or receives sensual expression (*erhält sinnlichen Ausdruck*), in the relation between commodities; that is, one commodity's use-value becomes the form of appearance (*Erscheinungsform*) or the objective reflection of the value of another commodity.

Second, Marx proceeds to the equivalent form of value, which unlike future editions already broaches the discussion of the fetish character of commodities whose mystical form elicits the famous optical metaphor in which subjective impressions are explicable 'not as a subjective stimulation of the optic nerve itself, but as the objective form of a thing outside the eye'. The equivalent form is, as Marx states, a 'reflection determination' of

17. *Capital, Volume 1*, in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 35, London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1996, p. 103, translation amended.

the use-value of other commodities. In his example, linen 'sees itself' as equivalent to the coat. There is a reciprocal and mirroring relation of opposites in the relative and equivalent forms of value.

Third, Marx proceeds to the developed form of relative value in which the form of value becomes an *environment* of commodities. Here we find the proliferation of many simple relative value expressions. The accidental character of the equation of two commodities immediately falls away to reveal an 'indefinite, constantly extendable series of its relative value-expressions [and] the linen relates itself to all possible commodity-bodies as mere form of appearance of the labour which is contained in itself'. Within this emergent world of commodities, the body of each becomes a mirror (*Spiegel*) for a universal equivalent.

Finally, Marx follows this series of developments into a situation in which the totality of values can now attain the appearance of exchange-values or what he calls the universal relative form of value. In this process, one commodity as a specific equivalent within the world or environment of relative forms of value remains. Marx is now tracing the developing money-form of value out of the equivalent form's position within the universal relative form of value. Here emerges the universal (*allgemeine*) equivalent, the universal and yet individuated materialization of abstract human labour whose use-value is precisely its universal form of value as a universal equivalent. All commodities thereby 'mirror' or 'reflect' themselves in one and the same commodity as quantities of value.

Within this development, what appears as Marx's frequent use of visual similes cannot simply be regarded as a stylistic peculiarity. For instance, there is a determinate reflective structure between two commodities in the relative form of value; in turn, the equivalent form reflects within itself the relative use-value of all other commodities; the universal equivalent is the visible

incarnation or 'reflection determination' (*Reflexionbestimmung*) of the totality of commodities in which the body and use-value of each become mirrors (*Spiegel*) for the universal equivalent.<sup>18</sup>

It is, however, within the form of money that the *spectacular* nature of the value-form finds its most potent expression. Indeed, money emerges as a great visual embodiment and display of all that has preceded it. It can, in my view, be argued that money within the capitalist mode of production is *spectacular* in nature. There are three aspects to Marx's theory of money that, in my view, coalesce under the concept of spectacle, or, rather, three important elements inherited from the money-form of value that come to constitute the spectacle: (1) money as the objective visualization of value; (2) money as an omnipotent purchasing power and therewith in a monopoly on use-value; (3) money as *Gemeinwesen*, which, as we'll see, is always already capital. But let me now briskly traverse these three aspects before discussing the relation between spectacle and capital.

### **Money as the visualization of value**

The money-form necessarily follows from the exchange relation in so far as the exchange-value of commodities needs to acquire an objective existence. In fact, money emerges as the externalized community of commodities, the appearance of their unity given an independent existence. As a necessary and observable form of appearance of the total social labour within capitalism, money is the mirror in which the value of all commodities finds determinate reflection. Because every commodity receives its

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18. Within the first German edition of *Capital, Volume 1*, Marx makes clear that his usage of categories of reflection derives from what Hegel terms *Reflexionbestimmung* in his *Wesenslogik*. Marx offers the following analogy: 'There is something special about such reflection-determinations. This man is, for example, only King, because other men behave towards him like subjects. They believe, however, that they are subjects because he is King.' Karl Marx, 'The Commodity' [first chapter of the first German edition of *Capital*], trans. Albert Dragstedt, 1976, [www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1867-c1/commodity.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1867-c1/commodity.htm); translation amended).

status in relation to all others, money appears, in Marx's exposition, as the actualization of commodity homogeneity and commensurability, the visual embodiment of the relation between all commodities. As Marx writes, through the money-form, value remains 'everywhere visible'; it is 'the social resumé of the world of commodities'.<sup>19</sup>

It is within money that value obtains its most visible incarnation. Important to emphasize here is that money is not, strictly speaking, the representation of the value of commodities, but an exposition of their relation as values. It is the presented actuality of the unity of value. As Marx writes,

It is as if alongside and external to lions, tigers, rabbits, and all other actual animals, which form when grouped together the various kinds, species, subspecies, families etc. of the animal kingdom, there existed also in addition *the animal*, the individual incarnation of the entire animal kingdom. Such a particular which contains within itself all really present species of the same entity is a *universal* (like *animal, god*, etc.).<sup>20</sup>

Money is the necessary presentation of value for itself, not as a representation of value but its visual presence.<sup>21</sup> This further entails the way in which Marx is not conceiving a nominalist theory of money, or money as a mere symbol of value. Money is not a stand-in or reference for commodity values, but the totality of their relations given an independent form. If anything, money

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19. Karl Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 29, London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1987, p. 337; *Capital, Volume 1*, p. 79.

20. Marx, 'The Commodity'.

21. Christopher J. Arthur, 'Value and Money', in Fred Moseley, ed., *Marx's Theory of Money: Modern Appraisals*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005; Hans-Georg Backhaus, *Dialektik der Wertform: Untersuchungen zur Marxschen Ökonomiekritik*, Freiburg: Caira, 1997; Ricardo Bellofiore, 'From Marx to Minsky: The Universal Equivalent, Finance to Production and the Deepening of the Real Subsumption of Labor under Capital in Money Manager Capitalism', in Heiner Ganßmann, ed., *New Approaches to Monetary Theory: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, London: Routledge, 2012, pp. 191–211; Michael Heinrich, *Die Wissenschaft vom Wert*, Münster: Westfälisches Dampfboot, 1995; Christian Lotz, *The Capitalist Schema: Time, Money and the Culture of Abstraction*, Lanham MD: Lexington Books, 2014; Helmut Reichelt, *Neue Marx Lektüre – Zur Kritik sozialwissenschaftlicher Logik*, Hamburg: VSA, 2008.

liberates itself as a form of representation and in turn transforms everything around it into its representative. As Marx writes, in money 'everything is turned around, and all actual products ... become the representation of money'.<sup>22</sup>

Through this aspect of money, which doesn't conceal the real material content of economic relations but instead makes them phenomenologically actual, it becomes clear in what sense the spectacle cannot be conceived as a manipulation or distorted representation of the world – that is, a conspiratorial or intentional effort to mystify the world, or merely the technological capacity to disseminate images. Nor does the category refer to any semiological aspect of the commodity economy. Instead, like the monetary instantiation of value, the spectacle is a social relation rendered into a materially objective force: 'a *Weltanschauung* which has become actual, materially translated. It is a world vision which has become objectified' (§5). It is a category that elucidates the abstract form of domination constituted by the *Erscheinungsformen* of value and its development into an objective phenomenal form.

### **Money as the monopoly on use-value**

I move on now to a second aspect of money that is inherited by the spectacle. The value of money in the first instance is money's purchasing power: that is, what money can command. As a universal equivalent, it can potentially purchase anything, even that which does not appear on the market. Further, while all commodities might not be products of labour, all are capable of acquiring a price-form.<sup>23</sup> As such, money is a universality that

22. Karl Marx, *Economic Manuscripts of 1857–58*, in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 28, London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1986, p. 126.

23. As Marx elaborates: 'The price form, however, is not only compatible with the possibility of a quantitative incongruity between magnitude of value and price, i.e., between the former and its expression in money, but it may also conceal a qualitative inconsistency, so much so, that, although money is nothing but the value form of



renders in principle everything in the universe exchangeable with everything else. Its use-value is precisely its capacity to exchange the totality of use-values. Money is 'an appropriate expression of equivalence in the infinite variety of use-values'. Money is 'the essence of all the use values'. It is for this reason that Marx describes money as the 'absolute commodity' or 'the ubiquitous [*allgegenwärtige*] commodity'.<sup>24</sup> As already anticipated in the 'Power of Money' section of the *1844 Manuscripts*, money is *the* means of purchase, that which gives access to all objects and the only true need.<sup>25</sup> Here, money as a means of purchase grants it its mystifying and omnipotent power; it is the medium under which all needs are potentially met. In fact, money emerges as the only true objective need governing the rest.

Within the second chapter of *The Society of the Spectacle*, Debord begins to address the relationship between the spectacle and use-value or social need. Between §§46 and 47, Debord brings his diagnosis closer to the form-determinations of value. Here, the relation of exchange-value and use-value are constituted through a relation of subsumption, wherein use appears as *internal* to exchange, a development most clearly illustrated in Marx's identified 'four peculiarities' or 'inversions' of the equivalent form of value. As Debord writes, 'mobilizing all human use and establishing a monopoly over its satisfaction, exchange value has ended up *directing use*' (§46). Subordinated to exchange, use becomes inseparably appended to the production

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commodities, price ceases altogether to express value. Objects that in themselves are no commodities, such as conscience, honour, &c, are capable of being offered for sale by their holders, and of thus acquiring, through their price, the form of commodities. Hence an object may have a price without having value.' *Capital, Volume 1*, p. 112.

24. Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, p. 281; *Economic Manuscripts of 1857–58*, p. 200; *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, p. 374; *Economic Manuscripts of 1857–58*, p. 164.

25. 'By possessing the *property* of buying everything, by possessing the property of appropriating all objects, *money* is thus the *object* of eminent possession. The universality of its *property* is the omnipotence of its being. It is therefore regarded as an omnipotent being. Money is the *procurer* between man's need and the object, between his life and his means of life.' Karl Marx, 'The Power of Money', in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 3, London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1975, p. 323.

of exchange-value – that is, to an utterly abstract and quantitative criterion. The spectacle here subjects concrete human needs to its own standard, as a form of appearance wherein the abstract assumes the shape of the concrete.

So here the spectacle follows again an aspect of money in so far as it is by no means an idealist optical illusion, but the determinate reflection of the relations among all other commodities, the ontologically objective actuality of relationality that gives structure and meaning to all empirical existence. It is in this way that Debord can characterize, in a 1969 letter, the spectacle as ‘a *moment* in the development of the world of the commodity’.<sup>26</sup> This moment is the Gestalt of money which renders a world of commodities possible. The visible material world is in fact the determinate reflection, or spectacular image, of general equivalence which structures that world’s concrete and differentiated heterogeneity. This framework elicits a situation in which reflection becomes reality itself and the matter and use-values reflected as ephemeral appearance. As Marx writes, money is ‘the external, common medium and faculty for turning an image into reality and reality into a mere image’.<sup>27</sup>

Within this framework, Debord identifies a ‘*tendency of use value to fall*’ (§47), appropriating Marx’s own formulation of the rate of profit and referring to a loss of the autonomy of use from exchange. As Debord writes, ‘use in its most impoverished form (food and lodging) today exists only to the extent that it is imprisoned in the illusory wealth of increased survival. The real consumer becomes a consumer of illusions. The commodity is

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26. Guy Debord *Correspondance*, Volume 4: *Janvier 1969–Décembre 1972*, Paris: Librairie Arthème Fayard, 2004. Translation: NOT BORED! [www.notbored.org/debord-6August1990.html](http://www.notbored.org/debord-6August1990.html).

27. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 3, p. 325. In the words of Engels, money is a ‘magic potion that can transform itself at will into anything desirable and desired’, and all other forms of wealth are ‘mere semblances compared with this incarnation of wealth as such’. Frederick Engels, *Origins of the Family, Private Property, and the State* (1884), in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 26, London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1990, p. 266.

this *factually real* illusion, and the spectacle is its general manifestation' (§47, emphasis added)

Debord's second chapter builds from the exchange relation not just the spectacle as the prevailing model of social life, but that through the analysis of use-value as internal to exchange-value the spectacle serves also as the total justification or legitimation of the existing system and ensures the permanent presence of that justification. In this way, the spectacle is both the embodiment of existing social meaning and its verification. As Debord writes:

In the inverted reality of the spectacle, use value (which was implicitly contained in exchange value) must now be explicitly proclaimed precisely because its factual reality is eroded by the overdeveloped commodity economy and because counterfeit life requires a pseudo-justification. (§48)

So in this chapter we find that the spectacle refers to a pseudo-autonomy of use as it is emphatically lauded in order to justify the reigning domination of the commodity. As Debord will later write in the third chapter, 'The satisfaction which no longer comes from the use of abundant commodities is now sought in the recognition of their value as commodities: the use of commodities becomes sufficient unto itself' (§67). Here again we find as a model the money-form whose use-value is its power of exchangeability. The spectacle asserts itself where the shadow of use has reappeared in its inverted form: the economy appears as an objective reality which mediates between need and satisfaction.<sup>28</sup> However, this is, to borrow a phrase from Adorno,

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28. Additionally, within this 'fraud of satisfaction' (§70), the constitution of human needs within the movement of value cannot be contrasted with any opposing 'natural' or 'authentic' needs and desires. It is rather the case that social existence, in its real subsumption within the self-producing development of the commodity-form, becomes recalibrated as mediated moments within the autonomous economy. The pseudo-need imposed by modern consumption clearly cannot be opposed by any genuine need or desire which is not itself shaped by society and its history. The abundant commodity stands for the total breach in the organic development of social needs. Its mechanical accumulation liberates unlimited artificiality, in the face of which living desire is helpless.

the socially necessary semblance of an epoch wherein need and its satisfaction are merely the determinate and subordinated moments which mediate an economy developing *for itself* outside of anyone's control. Through this framework it becomes clear that the spectacle entails the commensurable identification with the predominant images of social need constituted in and through the money structure.<sup>29</sup> In this way, while reiterating the trifling distinction between '*superficial needs and deep needs*', the spectacle erects a model of social satisfaction integral to its domination. It is from this perspective that '[s]pectators do not find what they desire; they desire what they find'.<sup>30</sup>

This analysis, in my view, comprises an advance beyond Marx with regard to the way in which the category of the spectacle elicits a sustained critique of use-value and need satisfaction, thereby sidelining what Hafner has called the tendency of 'use-value fetishism' (*Gebrauchswertfetischismus*).<sup>31</sup> From that perspective, one finds descriptions for the decay or degradation of use-value by exchange extrinsically eroded by market forces,

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The cumulative power of independent artificiality sows everywhere the falsification of social life' (§68). Further explication on the distinction between 'superficial' and 'genuine' needs as a tenet of class society can be found in Adorno's 'Thesen über Bedürfnis (1942), in *Adorno Soziologische Schriften II*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag.

29. Debord identifies the advent of the spectacle proper with the period after the 'second industrial revolution', which ran from the late nineteenth century until World War I, the historical moment in which 'alienated consumption becomes for the masses a duty supplementary to alienated production' (§42). At this point, roughly from the beginning of the 1920s and accelerating after World War II, the economy must no longer disregard the manner in which its working class satisfies its needs. Focused efforts on cultivating the *consuming* aspect of the proletariat, rather than simply ignoring it, inaugurated a deeper integration of the proletariat into the accumulation process. For Debord, the historical specificity of the modern spectacle unfolding in accordance with the development of the autonomy of the commodity can thereby be witnessed through a greater absorption of labour into the circulation sphere, an effort devoted strictly to the realization of surplus value, rather than to its creation. As Debord writes, 'as soon as the production of commodities reaches a level of abundance which requires a surplus of collaboration from the worker' (§43), consumption in general becomes, as the proletariat gains greater access to the total commodity, a dialectical determination of capitalist production, or, said another way, the real subsumption of use in – and the abstractions of – commodity exchange.

30. Guy Debord, *Complete Cinematic Works: Scripts, Stills and Document* (1978), trans. and ed. Ken Knabb. Edinburgh: AK Press, 2003, p. 114.

31. Kornelia Hafner, 'Gebrauchswertfetischismus', in Diethard Behrens, ed., *Gesellschaft und Erkenntnis: zur materialistischen Erkenntnis- und Ökonomiekritik*, Freiburg: Çaira-Verlag, 1993, pp. 59–88.

a theme frequently found within Critical Theory but one which emerges as prominent in the work of Helmut Reinicke, Wolfgang Pohrt, Stefan Breuer and even Hans-Jürgen Krahl.<sup>32</sup>

As the complement to money, the spectacle detaches the use-value of money as the medium of circulation, itself the necessary universal equivalent of all commodities, and establishes a pseudo-autonomy of *use in general* as a category for society as a whole. If money is the realization of exchange-value's negation of use, then the spectacle is the return of use, now draped in a counterfeit independence. The spectacle is the appearance of value as use in its sovereignty while unrelentingly still draining the world of its detail. It is thereby as both the objective visualization of value and its monopoly on use that Debord can describe the spectacle as 'the money which one *only looks at*, because in the spectacle the totality of use is already exchanged for the totality of abstract representation' (§49).

### Money as *Gemeinwesen*

There is one other aspect of money that helps us understand the relation between spectacle and capital. For Marx, since the money-form of value is the concrete actualization of general equivalence, society appears as unified and as a whole within money. In money, one sees both, in the words of Anitra Nelson, 'the universality of the estrangement of individuals from themselves and from others' and 'the universality and generality of all their relations and abilities.'<sup>33</sup> However, for Debord and within

32. Helmut Reinicke, *Revolte im bürgerlichen Erbe: Gebrauchswert und Mikrologie*, Gießen: Achenbach, 1975; Wolfgang Pohrt, *Zur Theorie des Gebrauchswerts oder über die Vergänglichkeit der historischen Voraussetzungen, unter denen das Kapital Gebrauchswert setzt*, Frankfurt am Main: Syndikat, 1976; Stefan Breuer, *Die Krise der Revolutionstheorie. Negative Vergesellschaftung und Arbeitsmetaphysik bei Herbert Marcuse*, Frankfurt am Main: Syndikat, 1977; Hans-Jürgen Krahl, 'Bemerkungen zur Akkumulation und Krisentendenz des Kapitals', in *Konstitution und Klassenkampf*, Frankfurt am Main: Neue Kritik, 1971, pp. 82–97.

33. Anitra Nelson, *Marx's Concept of Money: The God of Commodities*, London and New York: Routledge, 1999, p. 70.

the spectacle, society is capable of appearing unified everywhere, not just in the money-form but 'where the totality of the commodity world appears as a whole, as a general equivalence for what the entire society can be and can do' (§49). How this relates to capital requires a look at money's function as a unified *Gemeinwesen*.

In the *Grundrisse*, Marx discusses, among the functions of money, its third determination from which it is distinct as both a measure of value and a means of circulation. Here money appears as an end-in-itself, 'money as money' or as 'the *universal material representative of wealth*' (*universeller materieller Repräsentant des Reichtums*).<sup>34</sup> Marx describes this third determination as the unity of the previous functions of money and which, as an *end-in-itself*, cannot be confined to the sphere of circulation. This third determination is already latent capital, albeit only by preserving its fluid becoming and by withdrawing and re-entering the sphere of circulation. In a word, for exchange-value to become truly autonomous as money it needs to develop into capital; that is, it must exit and re-enter circulation and aspire to imperishability. Money that is made autonomous and results from circulation as exchange value but that re-enters circulation and perpetuates and valorizes itself is capital. That is, only in capital has money lost its rigidity and become a process. And, of course, the specific exchange through which money becomes capital and not simply a commodity is in the purchasing of labour-power, the use-value that money purchases in order to become capital through the immediate unity of the labour process and the valorization process.

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34. Marx, *Economic Manuscripts of 1857–58*, p. 151. Within the *Grundrisse*, the *Contribution to a Critique of Political Economy* and *Capital, Volume 1*, Marx discusses this concept of 'money as money' in terms of three predominant sub-determinations: (1) hoard; (2) means of debt repayment; (3) means of payment in international trade, i.e. world money.

Here, within the transition to capital, money is no longer simply independent exchange-value but the autonomy of exchange-value as 'self-positing' (*selbstsetzende*): 'money must be spent for productive consumption, that is it must be engaged in reproducing exchange-value.'<sup>35</sup> Within M-C-M', money is 'exchange-value-for-itself' (*Der Tauschwert als sich selbstsetzende Bewegung*). Money as capital is independent of circulation and activates production with the purchase of labour-power. Capital must exist in both production and circulation, as both commodity and money.

In its becoming capital, money becomes the community or *the* social bond. 'It is itself the *community*, and cannot tolerate any other standing above it. But this implies the full development of exchange value, hence of a social organisation corresponding to it.' As Marx continues, money is 'the *real community*, in so far as it is the general material of existence for all, and also the communal product of all'.<sup>36</sup> It is in this way that capital becomes society, a development which includes the real subsumption of the labour process by the valorization process. The form-determination of value strives to make itself a unified totality.<sup>37</sup> We can trace this aspiration first through *Capital, Volume 1*, in which Marx defines capital as value-in-process, then through circulating capital as the identity of variable and constant capital within *Capital, Volume 2*, and finally, within both *Capital, Volume 3*, and the *Grundrisse*, capital is defined as the unity of the

35. Marx, *Economic Manuscripts of 1857-58*, p. 113.

36. *Ibid.*, pp. 155 and 158. Here again we find money as the monopoly of use-value, as that which 'satisfies every need, in that it can be exchanged for the object of every need [and is] quite indifferent to every particularity' (*ibid.*, 153). Money possesses every natural particularity of commodities. Money, as general wealth, is therefore the totality of need which 'can embody the possibility of all pleasures.' (*ibid.*, 155); it is 'the god among commodities' representing 'the celestial [*himmlische*] existence of commodities, while they represent [*darstellen*] its earthy [*irdische*] existence' (*ibid.*, p. 154).

37. Camatte writes: '[s]o capital exercises an absolute domination over society, and tends to become society ... The opposition is no longer between capital and previous modes of production, but between a fraction of capital and capital itself, the presupposition of the production and circulation processes.' Jacques Camatte, *This World We Must Leave and Other Essays*, Brooklyn NY: Autonomedia, 1995, p. 123.

production and circulation processes. In a word, capital becomes the form of value that constitutes itself as society. We are now able to directly engage the relation between capital and the *society* of the spectacle.

### Capital as spectacle

The spectacle cannot be reduced to the commodity because the commodity does not by itself yield the objective autonomy of exchange-value. This only occurs through the advent of the money-form. And yet the spectacle cannot be reduced to money since it is not a phenomenon confined to the sphere of circulation. Money only exits circulation as capital (money-capital). So, is the spectacle synonymous with capital or, more specifically, with value-in-process? I would argue that it is not, and not simply for the way in which Debord identifies some pre-capitalist tendencies of the spectacle, themes which unfortunately I cannot go into here.<sup>38</sup>

I have indicated that the spectacle incorporates, from the commodity, exchangeability as the dominant mode of social synthesis.<sup>39</sup> More important, however, are the tripartite aspects of money outlined above: (1) as the visual objectification and actuality of inverted social relations; (2) as the essence of all use-values; (3) as the unified social whole or the unity of appearance-forms – that is, as capital. However, the purview of *The Society of the Spectacle* traverses an array of social phenomena not directly reducible to the category of capital. These broadly include the

38. It is worth noting that alongside these developments Debord also sketches the historical origins of the spectacle within both religious projection and the phenomenon of specialization, both of which have at their foundation a social division of labour requisite for the production and exchange of commodities. The emergence of a specialized segment of priests within society, and the religious fetishism wielded therewith, can be explicable, at least partially, in terms of a social division of labour and a class configuration.

39. It is for this that it can accurately be said that 'the concept of spectacle assumes the methodological importance which the category of commodity has for Marx'. Perspectives, *At Dusk: The Situationist Movement in Historical Perspective*, p. 38.



spectacular appearance of seemingly opposed political factions, the spectacular image of individuality as advertised celebrity personalities (chapter 3), the spectacular representation of the proletariat in various organizational forms (chapter 4), the spectacular appearance time structured by commodity production and circulation (chapters 5–6), the spectacular composition of the urban environment (chapter 7), the spectacular presentation of cultural products and discourses (chapter 8) and the spectacular rendering of ideology (chapter 9). These are only a few of the aspects of social life that the multivalent category of spectacle is meant to critically examine, none of which can be easily reduced to the category of capital.

One of Debord's most explicit connections between capital and the spectacle comes at the end of the first chapter. There he writes: 'The spectacle is *capital* to such a degree of accumulation that it becomes image' (*Le spectacle est le capital à un tel degré d'accumulation qu'il devient image*) (§34). How are we to understand such a formulation? After all, from the perspective of value as the unity of the forms of appearance, capital is already 'image', understood here as *Erscheinung*. A solution to this cryptic thesis can be found, in my view, by recalling the aforementioned discussion of the money-form of value. That is, just as money was the becoming visible of commodity relations in their totality, the spectacle is for Debord the becoming visible of capital as a totality, but not simply as the monetization of capital since this would be a redundant formulation. Capital is already the movement of money.<sup>40</sup> Instead, the spectacle as the becoming visible

40. The final thesis of the opening chapter of *The Society of the Spectacle* has frequently confounded interpreters regarding whether it is the commodity or capital-form of value that has greater import for Debord's theory of the spectacle. See Gilles Dauvé, aka Jean Barrot, 'Critique of the Situationist International' (1979), trans. Louis Michaelson, in Home, ed., *What is Situationism? A Reader*; and 'Back to the Situationist International'. However, to cite just one example of Debord's sensitivity regarding the subtleties of the categories of the critique of political economy, the following polemical remarks waged against Raoul Vaneigem following the dissolution of the SI are indicative: 'We come across another gem further on when he discovers that "what weighs upon us is no longer capital, but the logic of the commodity". He knows full well that Marx did

of capital is the becoming visible of the unity of appearances – that is, the mode of appearance of society unified under capital. However, do not let the term ‘visibility’ suggest that the spectacle is a concept primarily concerned with literally visual imagery or is reducible to an environment oversaturated with advertisements or consumerism. Visibility here refers back to the riddle of the money-fetish – to the inverted world become, in Marx’s words, ‘dazzling to our eyes’. In this way, the spectacle remains a category that critically elucidates the abstract form of domination constituted by the exchange relations of the capitalist mode of production and yet carries this structure well beyond solely ‘economic’ relations. As Debord writes: ‘Capital is no longer the invisible center determining the mode of production.’ Under the spectacle, ‘[s]ociety in its length and breadth becomes capital’s faithful portrait’ (§50).

The notion that human beings are deprived of any substance not imported by the form-determination of value, and therewith structured by appearances, derives from Marx’s critique of political economy. However, from the perspective of the concept of spectacle, the totalizing implications of this general movement of appearance were not theoretically carried through. Central here is the manner in which the full autonomy of appearance-forms only arises with the emergence of fictitious or interest-bearing capital in which capital returns to the form in which it first arose as money and begets more money seemingly as a result only of itself or the increase in value directly from circulation. Here, the production process effectively disappears, and for Marx it is the culmination of the form-determinations in which everything is reduced to circulation.<sup>41</sup> However, it remains the case for Marx

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not wait for him to demonstrate that capital was merely “the logic of the commodity”; even so, he reckoned naively on his phrase *having a modern sound to it.* *Situationist International*, 2003, p. 127.

41. ‘In interest-bearing capital, therefore, this automatic fetish, self-expanding value, money generating money, is brought out in its pure form and in this form it no longer bears the birthmarks of its origin.’ Marx, *Capital, Volume 3*, in Karl Marx and Frederick

that this ‘completion of fetish capital’<sup>42</sup> nevertheless is intrinsically related and dependent upon relations of production. It can therefore be said that Marx, in his analysis of capital, renders explicit the necessity of the relations between appearance-forms and essential social relations.

However, the manner in which forms of appearance detach themselves and come to reconstitute real concrete social relations indexes their triumph as social reality and therewith solicits the demand to examine how the autonomy and movement of appearances might come to pervade all aspects of social life. It is here that the category of the spectacle is of service. The major distinction to be made between the development of value in its particular forms of appearance and the spectacle is that, unlike the fetish-character of value, there is no masquerade operative in its mystification. The spectacle has a sole demand: that social reality appear in all of its transparency.

Recall that the spectacle adopts the mandate of exchange-value: everything is possible because everything is equivalent. As the negation of life and of concrete reality that has become visible qua appearance, the spectacle follows the objective form-determinations of value by asserting a positive presence as the determinate negation of use-value. For this, the spectacle makes visible a world that is at once both present and absent. The spectacle, as that which is beheld, refers to the identity of the non-identical of exchange value not merely as operative, but as disclosed. It is the commodity social form ‘shown for *what it is*’ (§37), a display of alienation in its utmost clarity. As Debord writes, ‘[n]ot only is the relation to the commodity visible but it is all one sees: the world one sees is its world’ (§42).

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Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 37, London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1998, p. 389, translation amended.

42. As Marx writes: ‘Here the fetish form of capital and the representation [*Vorstellung*] of fetish capital are complete. In M–M’ we have the meaningless [*begriffslose*] form of capital, the perversion [*Verkehrung*] and materialisation of production relations in their highest degree’. *Ibid.*, p. 390, translation amended.

As a structure of disclosure constitutive of its object, the spectacle is a luminosity unfolding upon the terrain of the false. Within the spectacle, social activity is made to appear, and in doing so is embedded with a meaning that contains both the image and the goal of social development under commodity society. Through the spectacle, the portrait of capital becomes all of society, for which '[a]t the moment of *economic* abundance, the concentrated result of social labor becomes visible and subjugates all reality to appearance, which is now its product' (§50). In the words of Jacques Camatte: 'The spectacle has to show humans what they are, or what they must be', in which the human being becomes 'no more than a ritual of capital'.<sup>43</sup> Here, capital becomes 'the mirror of all representations', divorced from any dependency on its transsubstantiations and reproducing itself, in part, through the form determinations of its forms of appearance.<sup>44</sup> Capital becomes spectacle to the extent that, as a social reality, only the forms of appearance persist. For both Camatte and Debord, this movement of capital – as self-valorizing value or as a self-developing form of appearance without substance

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43. Camatte, *This World We Must Leave and Other Essays*, pp. 170, 108–9. Camatte is an important resource for illustrating the way in which objective forms of appearance come to dominate social relations within capitalist society. While there was no direct correspondence between Debord and Camatte, their respective analyses comprise a similar picture. Camatte came out of the political tradition of Italian left communism, strongly influenced by early Italian Communist Party member Amadeo Bordiga, and argued that capital had anthropomorphized itself as a material community. Camatte, who has barely received any attention from the anglophone world, never claimed any affinity with Socialisme ou Barbarie or the Situationist International because they were formal organizations and, in his eyes, held to outdated council communist programmes. Debord, for his part, left no evidence of any contact with Camatte. In a passage that could have appeared within *The Society of the Spectacle*, Camatte writes: 'Capital has become absolute representation: everything men do is reflected in it; it can be the spectacle of the world in that it reflects, returns to all beings their various movements integrated into its life process.' Jacques Camatte, *Capital and Community* (1976), trans. David Brown, New York: First Prism Key Press, 2011, pp. 339–40. The affinity with Debord is unmistakable. In another passage, which in all likelihood is a direct appropriation of §17 of *The Society of the Spectacle*, Camatte writes: 'They are stripped of their activity, which is restored to them in the form of representations; the movement of alienation no longer bears on the being or the having, but on appearing: their life is organized for them, and thus they increasingly tend to perceive of themselves as being thrown into non-life.' Camatte, *Capital and Community*, p. 252.

44. Camatte, *Capital and Community*, p. 251.

– proceeds to an anthropomorphization, which both capitalizes human beings and humanizes capital.

Reichelt reminds us that Marx's various formulations about the phantasmic cannot be mere rhetoric, but refer to features of reality, wherein '[r]eality is inversion, is appearance, in which reason, in its inverted forms of existence, subsists contradictorily through – estranged – forms of social unity'.<sup>45</sup> Correspondingly, Debord's concept of the spectacle follows such an analysis and amounts, in my view, to the most developed form of this unification within twentieth-century Marxism. The spectacle is the appearance of social unity in which separate spheres of social life, although dependent on capitalist production, have reached an accord that synthetically organizes each of its moments into a totality. For this, Debord aims to fully outline the contours of what Adorno called that 'diabolical image of harmony'.<sup>46</sup> Important to recall here is the way in which the spectacle is less a critical theory of appearances than it is a theory of the *unity* or organization of appearance-forms. A justification for one of its moments is a justification for its entirety. It is the name for the reigning identity of production and consumption, of work and leisure, of culture and commodity, of state and economy, of ideology and the material environment. It renders commensurate not only the distinctions between production and consumption, monopoly and competition, use-value and exchange-value but also class distinctions, leaving in their wake personifications, representations, appearances or images of its own movement. Such a mode of social organization, which, as Debord writes in a 1966 letter, 'monopolizes all human communication', entails also the organization of human perception, defining *what* is

45. Helmut Reichelt, 'Social Reality as Appearance: Some Notes on Marx's Conception of Reality', in Werner Bonefeld and Kosmas Psychopedis, eds, *Human Dignity: Social Autonomy and the Critique of Capitalism*, Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005, p. 34.

46. Theodor W. Adorno, 'Reflections on Class Theory', in *Can One Live after Auschwitz? A Philosophical Reader*, Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 2003, p. 96.

to be seen with *how* it is apprehended.<sup>47</sup> The spectacle is the phenomenological terrain of value, a 'monopoly of appearance' (§12) which, as Debord writes, 'naturally finds vision to be the privileged human sense which the sense of touch was for other epochs' (§18).<sup>48</sup> The spectacle thereby 'says nothing more than 'that which appears is good, that which is good appears' (§12).

## Conclusion

The key to grasping the relations between Marx's critique of political economy and Debord's theory of the spectacle is in the study of the structure of the forms of appearance of value. As such, already in the first three chapters of *Capital, Volume 1*, we find the elementary forms of the spectacle. However, for Marx, the form of appearance 'makes the actual relation invisible, and, indeed, shows the direct opposite of that relation'.<sup>49</sup> This is in stark contrast to the way in which the spectacle operates by exposure. This is why the fetish-character of money is so important: the mystification acquires an objective and autonomous form, unlike the commodity-fetish for which social relations remain concealed behind the social relations of things. Even if having its basis within them, it remains the case that

47. *Guy Debord Correspondance*, Volume 3: *Janvier 1965-Décembre 1968*.

48. Debord's emphasis on vision should be situated in relation to the following passage in Marx's 1844 *Manuscripts*, in which the history of human sensibility is made actual in and through the objectivity of alienated human practice: 'Only through the objectively unfolded richness of man's essential being is the richness of subjective *human* sensibility (a musical ear, an eye for beauty of form – in short, *senses* capable of human gratification, senses affirming themselves as essential powers of *man*) either cultivated or brought into being. For not only the five senses but also the so-called mental senses, the practical senses (will, love, etc.), in a word, *human* sense, the human nature of the senses, comes to be by virtue of *its* object, by virtue of *humanised* nature. The *forming* of the five senses is a labour of the entire history of the world down to the present. The *sense* caught up in crude practical need has only a *restricted* sense.... For the starving man, it is not the human form of food that exists, but only its abstract existence as food. It could just as well be there in its crudest form, and it would be impossible to say wherein this feeding activity differs from that of *animals*. The care-burdened, poverty-stricken man has no *sense* for the finest play; the dealer in minerals sees only the commercial value but not the beauty and the specific character of the mineral: he has no mineralogical sense.' Marx, 'The Power of Money', pp. 301–2.

49. Marx, *Capital, Volume 1*, p. 540.

the category of spectacle exceeds the specific determinations of value, a broader model of social organization for which the structure of appearing outpaces that which appears; or, more specifically, it gives particular appearances inner coherence as moments of a totality.

The spectacle is a category which elevates Marx's forms of appearance as a polyscopic and omnipresent element of social reality. As Henri Lefebvre put it, 'there is more to *Capital* than political economy.'<sup>50</sup> In this way, the category of the spectacle attempts to provide a theoretical reconstruction of social reality as an organic whole which is constituted in and through the autonomy of the forms of appearance of value. The spectacle ought, then, not to be measured by an attained quantitative degree of capitalist accumulation, but by the degree to which the total result of a society based on capital accumulation obtains objectivity at the level of ruling appearance-forms as the dominant social structure.

The spectacle is an aspect of capital that is not reducible to the phenomenon of exploitation. It elicits a form of impoverishment that has expanded proletarian wretchedness more capaciously into a *nouveau prolétariat*,<sup>51</sup> one beyond classical relations of exploitation and deteriorating working conditions, instead grasping the poverty inherent within capitalist affluence. It is in this way that the emergence of the critique of spectacle acquires poignant historical determinacy through the peculiarities of postwar prosperity. Here, revolutionary class struggle would find orientation no longer simply in the emancipation from want, but from the dissatisfaction implicit within the dominant images of satisfaction and social meaning. The *nouvelle pauvreté*<sup>52</sup> exceeds

50. Henri Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life*, vol. 1 (1947), trans. John Moore, London: Verso, 1991, p. 80.

51. Internationale Situationniste, *Internationale situationniste: Édition augmentée*, Paris: Librairie Arthème Fayard, 1997, p. 253.

52. *Ibid.*, p. 256.

material poverty and instead proliferates within the amelioration granted by postwar prosperity. As Debord proclaims in his 1961 film *Critique de la séparation*, ‘The point is not to recognize that some people live more or less poorly than others, but that we all live in ways that are out of our control.’<sup>53</sup>

As a critical concept, the spectacle elucidates and gives unifying structure to diverse phenomena within contemporary capitalism under a logic, derived from the structure of exchange, for which ‘appearances of a socially organized appearance’ (§10) have acquired ‘enormous positivity’ (§12). It is in the spectacular realm of appearance that the inner content of objectivity is manifest. That is, the spectacle is the *total commodity* of society – the total result of social objectification and its visible vindication. In this way, the spectacle is more suitably construed as the phenomenological terrain of value as a totality, or perhaps simply as the phenomenality of value: the self-movement of appearance-forms which, to echo the dynamic of Hegel’s *Phenomenology*, draws into itself both subject and substance.

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53. Debord, *Complete Cinematic Works*, p. 31.



## 4

# Marxian ontology, today

ANTONIO NEGRI

Let us go straight to the heart of the matter, and propose that we read Marxian ontology from the standpoint of workers' struggles, the resistance of the multitude, and the insurgencies of the proletariat. From this angle, ontology means planting your feet on the ground. We could endlessly discuss, as philosophers do, what 'ontology' means – echoing the Thesis on Feuerbach, we will instead repeat that until now philosophers have thought about ontology as an idea of being but that today one must construct the ontology of revolutionary praxis. What, then, is this ontology we are laying claim to, and which draws its meaning and orientation from struggles? It is *the ontology of workers' history*, namely of that being which is constructed – always and continuously – by the labouring human being, by 'living labour', by the multitudinous subjectivation that produces and reproduces the world of life through cooperation. This is the framework in which Marxian ontology operates. It describes the world, recognizing on the one hand the productive forces of labour and on the other the forms and relations of production. And, from within this relationship between forces and relations, it both recognizes and denounces a stupid and unjust order organized on the basis of exploitation in the domain of production and hierarchy

in the experience and exercise of power. Marxian ontology is constituted by and ceaselessly renewed by class struggle, by the material antagonism that distributes the consistencies of real being. Through these entanglements and clashes there emerges a landscape made up of productions of subjectivity and figures of emancipation that match the material forces that express them. Antagonism and class struggle are therefore not powers that inscribe themselves on a surface whose foundation is static: they are powers and movements of 'everything that is' and they mark it on a surface that is also a dynamic and subjectivizing foundation – they are expressive powers of desiring multitudes. Without this Machiavellian and Spinozist image, it is impossible to understand Marxian ontology, or to grasp how class struggle can happen and unfold. From our point of view, then, Marxian ontology is a theory of class struggle founded on the subjectivation of 'living labour' – a constituent ontology rather than a dialectical ontology, albeit an 'inverted' one. Inversion or reversal alone rarely produces effects that go beyond the unmasking of the ideology of the class adversary; and that dialectic, refusing as it does a subjectivizing horizon of conflict and a constituent figure of the project of transition, advances a Ricardian objectivism in the theory of production and a transcendental/transhistorical viewpoint on valorization. I remain wedded to that aspect of Marx's ontological approach that was incisively underscored, in the wake of Lukács, by Hans-Jürgen Krahl.

At this juncture we can pose two questions. First, what is the ontological fabric of class struggle such as we can describe it today? Second, did Marxian ontology – as present in his historical writings, the *Grundrisse* and *Capital* – prefigure these later developments?

If we choose to insist on the centrality of class struggle to any definition of the ontology of the present we must underscore the transformations undergone by the structure of capitalism from

the mid-nineteenth century to now. The concepts of labour and exploitation, and consequently the very nature of capital, have in fact experienced a significant mutation.

The first moment in our consideration of the present ontology of capital will thus be the analysis of the transformation of living labour and the clarification of how its productivity has been intensified in the growing cooperation that characterizes the mode of production. If labour-power manifests itself in *Capital* as 'living labour' that augments its own productivity within simple and/or expanded cooperation, and then in the organization of manufacture and large-scale industry; and if the capitalist organization of labour reinforces cooperation, increasingly defining its character until it subsumes it as social activity; then, when we enter the 'cognitive' phase of capitalist development, that of the General Intellect, social and cooperative labour is no doubt enormously enhanced, immersed as it is in a world of communication networks and digital connections that crisscross industrial assets and agricultural systems along with each and every economic form. Capital is valorized by cooperative flows in which muscles, languages, affects, codes and images are subsumed into the material process of production. And it is the neoliberal counter-revolution which – in the wake of the *trente glorieuses* of post-World War II workers' struggles and the defeat of the 1970s – has brought us to this pass. Over this half-century, the spheres of capitalist production and society have been radically transformed by the extension of the primary sites of production from the factory to society. Automation has played the pivotal role in this transformation – not only from a political point of view (destroying the power of the working class and expelling workers from factories in the dominant parts of the planet) but also from a technical one (by intensifying the rhythms of production). In order to recover profitability, which could no longer be extracted from the factories, capital

has put the social terrain to work, and the mode of production has become ever more closely entangled with forms of life. While industrial automation meant the production of ever more material goods, outside the robotized factories we now see the growth of ever more complex integrated productive services, linking together heavy technologies and fundamental sciences with industrial and human services. In a second phase, information becomes more important than automation – it is in fact information that distributes throughout society a transformation in the technical composition of living-labour that was previously fashioned within the factory.

Second, our attention will turn to the concept of exploitation, insisting on the change it has undergone as it turns into an extractive function of social valorization.

We have described how the capitalist counter-offensive targeted the accumulation of resistances and revolts that took place over the 1960s and 1970s. Now it is possible for us also to recognize the passage to the society of the General Intellect in terms of an increasing economic role for social production, which leads to a new phase in the relation between capital and labour – from Fordism to post-Fordism. While in the Fordist period, capitalist production was structured by disciplinary regimes and accumulation was centrally directed by profits generated from the planned cooperation of industrial labour, in post-Fordism – at a time when productive knowledge and the social capacities of cooperation are ever more widely diffused throughout the whole society – capital exploits the emergent forms of labour-power in a new fashion, by extracting social wealth produced in common and, in a way, by subsuming the entire social field. The new centrality of *extraction* thereby transforms the nature of *exploitation*. In particular, the quantities of surplus-labour and surplus-value, defined in keeping with a temporal analytic, take on a new quality, meaning that exploitation must now be analysed according to different criteria.

The Marxian concept of exploitation – focused on the different ‘times’ of the working day of the individual labourer – seems very distant now. When Marx pedagogically explains that in a regime of waged labour workers receive the wealth produced during the initial hours of the working day and the capitalist expropriates the value produced in the remaining hours, he establishes an intimate relation between exploitation and the organization of production. Today instead these realities diverge and the distance between the two grows ever larger: finance abstractly considers productive subjects as a mass and extracts value at a distance, while productive subjectivities enjoy an ever-greater capacity to cooperate and to plan cooperation autonomously. Capitalist entrepreneurs no longer organize labour; nor do they forge new combinations and generate productive forms of cooperation, as Schumpeter had once theorized. They are now consumed by financial activities and their attention is drawn to stock exchanges, dividends and market fluctuations.

This takes us to a third moment, in which we must consider the transformation of capital into a financial-extractive force. When finance emerges as a crucial component of the capitalist mode of production in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, it constitutes a powerful supplement to industrial capital, helping to define the latter’s dominant role in the economy and over the whole social formation. Finance offered instruments of abstraction and centralization that eased the passage from manufacture to the commanding role of large corporations and their monopolies, while it was also employed as a weapon in the arsenal of imperialist projects. As the twentieth century wore on, however, this relation was inverted, to the extent that today finance dominates industry, setting some of the fundamental conditions for production and exploitation. Within the rule of finance and its ever more complex instruments, capital accumulates above all through the capture and extraction of a value that appears as something found,

a natural gift, *terra nullius*. Financial capital extracts value from the common, whether we are dealing with material values hidden in the earth or those germinating within society. Now, it is clear that the transition to the commanding role of financial capital can be explained by the formation of global markets and the decline of national industrial economies, marked by the recurrence of crises and the deepening of speculative operations, but its centre of gravity, which concerns the very definition of finance, must be referred back to the mode of production, in the sense that finance functions as an apparatus of capture of social and natural values and of extraction of the common. Extraction follows in the tracks of the common. By contrast with industry, extraction develops on the basis of forms of wealth that in great part *pre-exist* capital investment. While the automobile is produced in the factory, oil and coal exist in the earth – though of course extraction is itself a process of production, refining and distribution. The distinction becomes clearer if we turn to social intelligence, social relations and the territories of sociality. While in the factory workers cooperate on the basis of frameworks and disciplines dictated by the capitalist, here in society value is produced through social cooperation that is not directly organized by capital. Social cooperation is in this respect relatively autonomous. This all goes to underscore once again how much the capital relation has been destabilized – in the face of the relative autonomy of cooperation finance appears as an extractive industry.

The totalization of the world of work, the absorption of production into reproduction, the financial sublimation of value within the framework of the real subsumption of productive society into capital – this was famously the definitive theoretical conquest of the Frankfurt School. Whence, however – on the basis of what we've argued up to this point – the need to move 'beyond'.

To define this beyond means advancing on three terrains that we have begun to explore and disclosing their 'subjective' facets.

First, the terrain of work. This is where the cooperative association of labour-power redefines the concept of working class, revealing it as a multitudinous ensemble of labouring (working-class) singularities, as a multiplicity of immaterial (and/or material) powers. In cooperative associations, these singular powers virtually configure a plural recomposition of the labouring class – a recomposition that is crisscrossed by flows of subjectivation. We call this new figure of class ‘multitude’.

Second, with regard to the conception of exploitation. To go beyond the alienation or reification of labour means making room for the effects of subjectivation in the relation between variable and fixed capital. Where exploitation targets the cognitive, social and cooperative components of living labour there is a rupture in the dialectic of capture and appropriation of labour-value by capital. And alienated labour, appearing as the second nature of labour-power, is able in its turn to break the order of exploitation – at a second level of the latter’s operations. But we will return to this development later.

Third, the new nature of capital and of its extractive mechanism is answered ontologically by the social dynamic of the *common*. Once the relations of discipline and control that characterize mass-work have broken down and its measure of value has collapsed, extractive expropriation is countered by the dimension of the common. At this point we can draw a preliminary conclusion. In varying forms and degrees, social production has become ever more central both in the activity of production (employing social and scientific knowledges, cooperative frameworks or relations of care) and in the product (which conversely incorporates shared social components). Within the horizon of capital, as we’ve noted, these products appear as gifts, manna from heaven. But we must keep in mind that the very features of social production that constitute the key to the extraction and accumulation of wealth by finance also constitute

the seeds and foundation of the social existence of revolt. Both sides of this ambivalence or tension between exploitation and resistance are contained in the increasingly abstract nature of social production. We are all familiar with Marx's analysis of abstract labour as the key to understanding capitalist exchange-value. In many respects, the abstract nature of labour and the value it produces increase dramatically within social production. When workers interiorize knowledge, for instance, and develop it socially within cooperation, their labour and the value they produce are ever more abstract. But the greater abstraction of the process of production and valorization – as it is implemented in languages, codes, the immaterial articulations of collective life, cooperation, affective elements, and so on – also offers an extraordinary potential of resistance and autonomy from capital. The abstraction that we are acknowledging here corresponds directly to the common, which, as we have said, tends to be both the foundation and the result of contemporary production. And the common, too, comes to be qualified here in a twofold sense – namely as the substance of capitalist extraction and the potential basis of autonomy and resistance.

Following Marx's arguments, we can conceive this dual character by developing it in terms of a three-level logical process – from abstraction to social production, and from social production to subjectivity. First, abstraction. The economic relation between capital and labour, writes Marx, 'develops more purely and adequately in proportion as labour loses all the characteristics of art; as its particular skill becomes something more and more abstract and irrelevant, and as it becomes more and more a *purely abstract activity*.<sup>1</sup>

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1. Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy (Rough Draft)*, trans. Martin Nicolas, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books/London: New Left Review, 1973, p. 297.



But Marx does not have a nostalgic view of this loss of ‘art’ on the part of the craftsman in the performances of his trade. The loss of a trade or an art is also a gain. ‘Labour is not this or another labour’, Marx has earlier pointed out, ‘but *labour pure and simple*, abstract labour, absolutely indifferent to any particular determination but capable of all determinations.’<sup>2</sup> The abstraction of labour is not empty but entirely full – it is full, in particular, with the social character of production.

The progressive general capacities of labour – this is the second move – presuppose the social, which is to say common, nature of production. Individual, specific labour is externally qualified as social labour; ‘it is mediated by the social conditions of production within which the individual is active’. The increasing abstraction of productive processes thus rests on networks of social relations, on the social conditions that make production possible. It stands, in other words, on the foundation of the common, which includes the shared knowledges, cultural forms and circuits of cooperation that constitute our collective existence.

Marx’s third move consists in putting this social basis in motion from the standpoint of subjectivity. Against the totality of capital stands a labour that is equally total and abstract. The fact that labour is abstract and social harbours a potential of subjectivation, albeit one that is often not realized.

This reference to abstract totality (along with the ‘theory of the social individual’ developed in the *Grundrisse*) does not allow us to mobilize a homogeneous and unified subjectivity capable of action. But the social nature of production implies a field of differences wherein subjectivities cooperate and enter into conflict in something like a (volatile but effective) composition. The common starts to appear when, within production, myriad heterogeneous subjectivities begin to enter into association. It

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2. *Ibid.*, p. 296, translation amended.

is this emergence in the form of differences (in divergence) that constitutes a line of subjective antagonism.

From an ontological perspective, the concept of capital is given as a figure and product of class struggle. This means that the concept incorporates a relation that involves, in and against capital, the continual recomposition of development; capitalist command (constant capital) and the resistance of subjects put to work (variable capital, living labour) present themselves as asymmetrical and intransitive powers engaged in a continuous conflict. What we witness here is a true dialectic, a dialectic shorn of *Aufhebung*, a dialectic that knows no teleology and that is kept constantly open by class struggle.

Allow me a brief pause here, an intermezzo of sorts. I think it is important at this juncture to recall the thought of Gramsci. In Gramsci we find a concept of capital that is always open to class struggle. Gramsci's Machiavelli is not a rhetorical device aimed at translating the Leninist party into Italian, nor an analogical fiction intended to actualize a new proletarian Risorgimento. For decades these metaphors were inculcated into the militants of the Italian Communist Party, thus debasing the image of Gramsci, together with that of the revolutionary process of the working class. On the contrary, it is by recovering the Machiavellian image, the one which sees the political as split in two, which looks upon it from below and from above as the entanglement of antagonistic forces – it is in this light that the concept of capital must be politically defined. 'The revolution against *Capital*', the Bolshevik revolution against Karl Marx that Gramsci affirmed in 1918 in *Il Grido del Popolo*, was a slogan targeted at the positivist interpretation of Marxism and its reformist use by the Italian Socialist Party, against the ideology of *lorianesimo* (after the ideas of Achille Loria), namely against the superstition of economism – but it is also and above all the revelation of the 'rebellious content' of the economic fabric, of capital as that within which

class struggle unfolds. Twenty years later, in ‘Americanism and Fordism’, the reading of the concept of capital as a frame wrested away and reconstructed by class struggle will corroborate the intuition first voiced in *Il Grido del Popolo*. It is perhaps unnecessary to highlight here that the ontology of Marx’s historical writings corresponds entirely to this Machiavellian and Gramscian definition of capital.

We now need to answer the second question that was posed at the outset. Namely whether the ontology of *Capital* prefigured these developments of Marxian theory. The reply cannot but be a positive one. It is obvious from what we have been saying up till now that Marxian ontology presents itself as an ontology of the power of labour, with no break between the early *Manuscripts* and the final articles on Wagner. Particular importance needs to be accorded here to the *Grundrisse*, because they are not just preparatory notebooks for *Capital* but the text in which Marx’s philosophical and economic writings find their highest synthesis, while they also weave the historical writings into their fabric. An ontology of power and not just production, a Spinozist and not just a materialist ontology. It suffices here to refer you to the final chapter on ‘metaphysics and production’ of Franck Fischbach’s book *La production des hommes. Marx avec Spinoza*.<sup>3</sup>

The other central and enduring element of Marxian thought – an element strongly emphasized by Western Marxism, from Lukács to the Frankfurt School – is Marx’s insight into the increasing superimposition of production and reproduction. Little by little, reproductive processes are included in productive ones. Against classical economics, for which reproduction is a consequence and effect of production, and essentially of consumption, Marxian ontology opens onto the inclusion of reproduction into production – as well as the repetition of the antagonism between

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3. (*The Production of Human Beings: Marx with Spinoza*) Vrin: Paris, 2014.

the two. It is from this point of view that we can discern the biopolitical point of view within Marxian ontology.

The third element that needs to be taken into account, in the continuity of Marxian thought, in its ontology, is the constructive and constituent anthropological dimension that invests the capital relation and is specified in the question of technics. This problem has never been as central to any Marxian reading as it is today, when it evokes the political theme of subversion in the age of the General Intellect. It is not enough to underscore that in Marx this theme is clearly foregrounded in the *Grundrisse*; it must be recovered as a revolutionary theme in a society where intelligence at work constitutes the centre of the productive process. Here the theme of the liberation of humans from labour, on the basis of the transformation of labour, emerges with tremendous force. The theme 'appropriation of fixed capital' by 'living labour' enjoys a central place in Marxian ontology, along with the productivity of antagonism and the overturning of the alienated condition into a productive 'second nature'. The appropriation of fixed capital by living labour – this theme is not a metaphor, it is alive in the pages of *Capital*. Marx in fact begins by showing how the mere placement of the worker before (the command over) the means of production modifies not just his productive capacity, but his figure, his nature, his ontology. From this point of view the Marxian narrative of the passage from 'manufacture' to 'large-scale' industry is a *locus classicus*. In manufacture, the division of labour is still governed by a 'subjective' principle – meaning that the worker has appropriated the productive process after the productive process was adapted to the worker; while instead in large-scale industry the division of labour is 'objective', since the subjective/craft use of the machine is eliminated and machinery constitutes itself against man; the machine comes forward as the worker's competitor and antagonist, even reducing him to the status of working animal. And yet in Marx there is also a different

insight. He recognizes that the worker and the instrument of labour are also configured as a hybrid construction and that the conditions of the productive process largely constitute the worker's conditions of life, his 'form of life'. The concept of productivity of labour implies a very close and dynamic connection between variable and fixed capital, while theoretical discoveries, as Marx suggests, are incorporated into the productive process through the experience of the worker.

In a moment we will conclude our argument by touching on how Marx himself intuits, in *Capital*, the appropriation of fixed capital by the producer. But now let us highlight how Marx's analysis in *Capital* remains subtended by the arguments of the *Grundrisse*, namely by the theorization of the General Intellect as the matter and subject of the productive process. That discovery led him to show the extent to which cognitive matter was central to production and how the very concept of fixed capital was transformed by it. When Marx proclaims that fixed capital, which in *Capital* is usually understood as a complex of machines, has become 'man himself', he foreshadows the development of capital in our time. Though fixed capital is the product of labour and nothing but labour appropriated by capital; though the accumulation of scientific activity and the productivity of what Marx calls the 'social intellect' are incorporated into machines under the control of capital; and though, lastly, capital freely appropriates all of this – at a certain point of capitalist development living labour begins to exercise the power of inverting this relation. Living labour begins to show its primacy over capital and the capitalist management of social production, even when it cannot necessarily stand outside that process. In other words, when it becomes an ever-amplifier social power, living labour operates as an increasingly independent activity, outside the disciplinary structures commanded by capital – not only as labour-power but also, in a more general way, as vital activity. On the one hand, past

human activity and intelligence are accumulated, crystallized as fixed capital, but on the other, inverting the flow, living human beings are capable of reabsorbing capital into themselves and their social life. Fixed capital is 'man himself' in both senses.

Here the appropriation of fixed capital is no longer a metaphor but becomes a *dispositif* that class struggle can take up and that makes itself felt as a political programme. Capital is no longer, in this case, a relation that objectively includes the producer, forcibly imposing its domination upon him; rather, the capitalist relation now includes a final contradiction – that of a producer, of a class of producers, which has, be it partially or totally, but in any instance effectively, dispossessed capital of the means of production, asserting itself as a hegemonic subject. The analogy with the emergence of the third estate within the structures of the *ancien régime* is carried out by Marx in the historicization of the capital relation, and it obviously presents itself in an explosive, revolutionary way.

To conclude, Marxian ontology displays at least two aspects. The first is represented by the development of labour-power in its radical productive capacity, in its full and bodily abstraction, which determines the evolution of capital and imposes upon it a progressive character; this is an ontology that takes the figure of a *deposit* of dead labour, a common that is fixed, stratified, organized as existing wealth and the command over it. But this ontology has a second face, the one represented by living labour, class struggle, a continuous drive to break capitalist development, which takes the guise of *virtuality* and the power of liberation from work. This relation implies two opposing teleologies: the one that corresponds to the ontology/deposit of dead labour and the one that corresponds to the ontology/power of class struggle. The common presents itself in two forms: as deposit and telos, as deposit of dead labour and as telos of living labour.



I have resolved to make a film



of 'Das Kapital'  
based on the text by K. Marx.

**CAPITALISM,  
FEMINISM &  
SOCIAL REPRODUCTION**





# 5

## From the production of value to the valuing of reproduction

TITHI BHATTACHARYA

*Capital*, of course, is about the working class and hence about labour.<sup>1</sup> This claim only appears controversial because, barring a few passages and the famous chapter on the working day, *Capital*, as a text, is predominantly concerned with abstract labour or the value-form of labour. Since it is *Capital* that best teaches us that the value-form violates and extinguishes all sensuous properties of human labour, Marx's central concern in *Capital* appears to be tracing the procedures of that extinguishment rather than establishing the subjective, conscious aspects of human labour.

This particular reading of *Capital*, as a text organized solely around the form-determination of wage labour, has led some Marxists to make a further analytical leap about the 'indifference' of capitalism as a mode of production. For instance, Ellen Meiksins Wood, a prominent advocate of this view, has argued that

Sexual and racial equality ... are not in principle incompatible with capitalism. The disappearance of class inequalities, on the other hand, is by definition incompatible with capitalism. At the same time, although class exploitation is constitutive of capitalism as

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1. I am grateful to Aaron Jaffe for suggesting my title.

sexual or racial inequalities are not, capitalism subjects all social relations to its requirements.<sup>2</sup>

In this reading of Marx, capitalism as a system is reconstructed as the first and only exploitative system that does not require the production and sustenance of extra-economic inequalities. The existence of such inequalities is seen as contingent rather than exigent to the system whose reproduction can be assured through the wage-form, or through the extraction of surplus value between economically unequal but juridically equal subjects.

Social Reproduction Theory, a conceptual apparatus primarily developed from *Capital* by Marxist feminists, this essay argues, offers a better reading of Marx's method than the hypothesis of capitalist indifference. I make this argument in three separate but related ways. First, at a general level, by critically assessing the status of labour in *Capital*; second, through a more specific argument about capitalism's systemic unity, which urges us to develop theoretical frameworks capable of reproducing in thought the social relations that capitalism engenders and sustains; and, finally, through an empirical argument about how labour-power is differentially produced in different sections of the working class.

Let me preface my argument with some brief remarks about Social Reproduction Theory (SRT) and its theoretical contours. Fundamentally, SRT theorizes labour-power and the practices that enable its reproduction within capitalist social relations. Situated within, and following from, the conceptual architecture of *Capital*, SRT proposes (a) that the labour expended in the production of commodities (at the point of production) and the labour expended for the 'production' of people or workers who produce such commodities are part of the same capitalist totality and intrinsically relational; and relatedly (b) that the

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2. Ellen Meiksins Wood, *Democracy Against Capitalism: Renewing Historical Materialism*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995, p. 259.

working-class family is the primary, but not the only, site for the reproduction of labour-power or the reproduction of the working class as a whole.

SRT identifies two key features regarding labour-power and its coagulation into capitalist wage labour. First, capital's *contradictory* need with regards to labour-power. On the one hand, capital needs a steady, predictable circuit for the reproduction of labour-power, since it is the source of capital's profit and hence its own reproduction. But labour-power is reproduced by human beings, not machines, hence how it is reproduced, to what extent its capacities are developed, may not align with capital's needs. Thus all sites and processes for the reproduction of labour-power are, ultimately, arenas of contestation between labour and capital: the former constantly tending towards a greater 'share of civilization' to develop and further human capacities, while the latter straining to reduce such a share and mould labour-power and such capacities to create and maintain the productive worker that capital needs.

### ***Capital*, SRT and the value-form**

If SRT is, at its core, concerned with the gendered, racialized reproduction of labour-power, and *Capital*, as text, is fundamentally concerned with how surplus-value is produced and with what consequences, in what ways are the two related? Positions such as Wood's above try to demonstrate that capitalist social relations as they unfold historically ought to be theoretically separated out from the abstract or logical architecture of capitalism. This particular derivation from *Capital* and the approach to capitalism it involves are, in my view, at odds with both Marx's methodology and the project of *Capital*.

*Capital* is indubitably about the value-form of labour, and we can certainly find passages in Marx which might support

the argument that economic categories ought to be considered distinctly from their historic unfolding.<sup>3</sup> However, we cannot lose sight of the fact that what distinguishes Marx's method from non-Marxist ones (say Ricardo's concept of fixed essences) is that Marx rejects a separation between reality and its apprehension in thought. Instead, his methodology establishes a dialectical unity between them, operating simultaneously at both logical and historical levels. To be clear, Marx is not proposing a simple unity between theory and reality in a naturalistic way, but shows how theoretical categories derive from historic developments. This does not mean that such categories are reflective of immediate appearances; indeed, they may be their mirror opposites. Rather, Marx's method discloses a constant upward, spiral movement between theory and reality (or appearance and essence), becoming more complex at each successive level of determination.

The relationship between 'theory' and 'history/reality' is often cast as a relationship between abstract categories and concrete histories. So far, we have argued that there is a relationship between the two, but Marx goes much further than simple relationality. Bertell Ollman provides perhaps the most perspicuous analysis of Marx's method of abstraction, and for our purposes it is worth following his argument in its entirety.

An abstract category, commonly understood, is a static one, an unmoving part separated from a dynamic whole which can reveal to the analyst key features of the whole, the latter being impossible to study in its totality. Marx uses several such abstractions – 'money', 'commodity' – to understand the history and nature of capitalism. Unlike bourgeois approaches to

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3. 'It would therefore be infeasible and wrong to let the economic categories follow one another in the same sequence as that in which they were historically decisive. Their sequence is determined, rather, by their relation to one another in modern bourgeois society, which is precisely the opposite of that which seems to be their natural order or which corresponds to historical development.' Karl Marx, *Grundrisse*, trans. Martin Nicolaus, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1993, p. 107.

abstraction, Marx's methodology refuses all static forms. Hence, Ollman argues, Marx sets out 'to abstract things, in his words, "as they really are and happen", *making how they happen part of what they are*. Hence, capital (or labour, money, etc.) is not only how capital appears and functions, but also how it develops; or rather, how it develops, its real history, is also part of what it is.<sup>4</sup> In *The German Ideology*, Marx and Engels mock Bruno Bauer for attempting to prove an antithetical relationship between 'nature' and 'history', as if these 'were two separate "things"'.<sup>5</sup> In contrast, a Marxist theoretical abstraction encloses both a history of its becoming while disclosing its possible future. For instance, within the abstract category 'capital' we find its past – 'primitive accumulation' – as well as forecasts of its future: constant expansion through surplus-value extraction, the accumulation drive necessarily creating a world market, and so on. Ollman thus rightly concludes:

This 'history' of capital is part of capital, contained within the abstraction that Marx makes of capital, and part of what he wants to convey with its covering concept. All of Marx's main abstractions – labour, value, commodity, money, etc. – incorporate process, becoming, history in just this way.<sup>6</sup>

While we may find these categories, in whole or in part, in other epochs of history – that is, in other modes of production – they either remain unrealized in their function or play entirely different roles from their current incarnation. When they combine in the capitalist mode of production they do so simultaneously saturated with their past, while establishing new relationships within themselves. The history of precapitalist practices thus cannot be severed from explanatory categories of capitalism.

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4. Bertell Ollman, *Dance of the Dialectic: Steps in Marx's Method*, Urbana and Chicago IL: University of Illinois Press, 2003, p. 65; emphasis added.

5. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 5, London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1976, p. 39.

6. Ollman, *Dance of the Dialectic*, p. 66.

Let us now revisit Ellen Wood's claim that (a) extraction of surplus value is the primary concern for capital and hence (b) the 'how' of that process, whether through racialized, gendered or ableist means, is external to capital's central pursuit. We have already established, following Ollman, that even abstract categories in Marx carry historical lineages and futural allusions. In a sense this should be enough to reject Wood's claim of capitalist indifference. But there is actually a case to be made for indifference as regards capitalist forms, just not, however, in the way Wood conceives of it.

Let us take the category 'labour' as it appears in Marx. It is banally true that human beings have always laboured in a diversity of historical epochs and social formations. But labour as a simple category that Marx uses to build the theoretical infrastructure of capitalism, 'when ... economically conceived in this simplicity', becomes 'as modern a category as ... the relations which create this simple abstraction'. Under capitalism labour-as-such, not a specific kind of labour, becomes the basis for the creation of wealth. To conceive of labour in this, its most simple form, was an analytical leap taken by classical political economy. 'It was a tremendous advance on the part of Adam Smith', writes Marx, 'to throw aside every limiting specification of wealth-creating activity – not only manufacturing, or commercial or agricultural labour, but one as well as the others, labour in general.' And how did classical political economy arrive at this generalized form of labour? Not simply by seeing that labouring was an ahistorical category common to all epochs, but because labour, under capitalism, had become, for the first time, 'labour in general'. The *theoretical conception* of this general or simple form for labour was only possible in the *historical actuality* of a 'very developed totality of real kinds of labour, of which no single one ... [was] any longer predominant'. Abstraction arose from the many determinations of the concrete while the concrete could

only be conceived of as such through the simple abstraction. The 'most general abstractions', Marx reminds us, 'arise only in the midst of the richest possible concrete development, where one thing appears as common to many, to all. Then it ceases to be thinkable in a particular form alone.'<sup>7</sup>

It is because indifference is expressed in the historical form that it can be grasped as such in the theoretical form. It is because individuals in capitalist society can fluidly move from one form of labour to another that labour has become 'the means of creating wealth in general, and has ceased to be organically linked with particular individuals in any specific form'. Hence, far from there being an 'abstract capitalism' indifferent to historical forms and a 'historical capitalism' marked by concrete social relations, Marx's methodology urges critical thought to unite theory and reality in transformatively radical ways.<sup>8</sup>

This methodology, I submit, urges us to see *Capital* as an exercise in charting the fate of labour under capitalism, including the historical forms it assumes within the system. Accordingly, Marx posits abstract labour very carefully as one aspect of his labour theory of value. Subjective forms of concrete labour, the analytical twin of abstract labour and social labour through which the value form is organized, are all understood as different aspects of labour operating as a unity. Most importantly, *Capital* is about why and how abstract labour dominates over the other aspects and submits them to the law of value. If the other aspects of

7. Marx, *Grundrisse*, pp. 37–8.

8. In her essay 'Remarks on Gender', Cinzia Arruzza makes the case for theory and history in the following way: 'as soon as we accept ... [a] distinction between the logical structure of capital and its historical dimensions, we can then accept the idea that the extraction of surplus-value takes place within the framework of relations between formally free and equal individuals without presupposing differences in juridical and political status. But we can do this only at a very high level of abstraction – that is to say, at the level of the logical structure. From the point of view of concrete history, things change radically.' While agreeing fully with the overall thrust of this rich essay I differ with her slightly on the distinction she makes between a 'high level of abstraction' and 'the point of view of concrete history'. I think her own method, which scaffolds the essay, is closer to Ollman's view than this particular formulation allows us to see. Cinzia Arruzza, 'Remarks on Gender', *Viewpoint Magazine*, 2 September 2014.



labour appear as muted shadows of abstract labour, then, it is not because Marx is 'reporting' on reality in any simple way. These other categories in *Capital* have a much more significant role to play in the totality of Marx's argument – they signal the limits to capitalism's ability to reduce workers to simply being potential sources of surplus value.

Let us look more closely at the relationship between abstract and concrete labour and their respective roles in capitalism. As we indicated above, a system organized on the basis of abstract labour can only appear when different forms of concrete labour, performed by historically situated people, are forced into a relationship of equivalence via the market, production for which take place solely for profit rather than for human need. Two concurrent processes constitute the totality of capitalism, the system reproducing itself through the production of commodities and rubbing against but nested within it, human beings reproducing their lives. Reproduction of life-making practices and the reproduction of value must be simultaneous and continuous.

Two preconditions attend to such a system: one, that people are forcibly torn from the means of production such that access to their subsistence or life-making is only available through the mechanism of the market; two, that the system is able to ensure its continued reproduction by reproducing the social relations that scaffold the market and the extraction of surplus-value. In other words, capitalist social relations must continually reproduce the worker's dependence on capital. 'The advance of capitalist production', Marx writes, 'develops a working class which by education, tradition and habit looks upon the requirements of that mode of production as self-evident natural laws. The organization of the capitalist process of production, once it is fully developed, breaks down all resistance.'<sup>9</sup>

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9. Karl Marx, *Capital, Volume 1*, Chicago: Charles H. Kerr, 1909, p. 809.

Dominance of abstract over concrete labour, of value over use-value, creates the conditions for and necessitates the 'production' of a worker compliant to capital's every whim.

If this were the whole story of *Capital*, then celebrations of its 150th birthday would be held at Wall Street. So how, if at all, is resistance a part of the story? If Marxist theory requires all parts of a social totality to be connected through internal relations, how can resistance to capital be shown to be immanent to the reproduction of capital? This is where SRT, deploying *Capital's* methodology but building upon its silences, effects a categorial transformation of the concept of labour-power as the analytical causeway between capitalist reproduction and anti-capitalist resistance.

### **Labour-power**

Even the most creative reading of the concept of labour-power in *Capital* shows that the text presupposes the existence of what is being reproduced. Discussion of labour-power begins not from where or how it has been societally produced but from the ways in which, in its commodity form, it sustains the production of surplus-value. Differently put, the conceptualization of labour-power in the text is limited to the form in which it is useful to capital. SRT troubles this capital-oriented view of labour-power and performs, in theory, a reverse movement, away from the site of commodity production to the site of reproduction of labour-power. Labour-power is nominated variously in *Capital* as the unique, special or peculiar commodity, because it is presented as the only commodity 'whose use-value possesses the peculiar property of being a source of value'.<sup>10</sup> SRT reveals that there is another aspect to labour power's peculiarity. It is a commodity that is not produced capitalistically – that is, within the direct

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10. Ibid., p. 186.

ambit of the capital–wage labour relation. Instead, as Lise Vogel has shown, it is produced and reproduced in a ‘kin-based site’, the ‘working class family’.<sup>11</sup>

Vogel’s critical insight is significant in three crucial respects. One, because it expresses the dialectical unity of the historical and logical form of capital. Labour-power, SRT shows, can only become available to capital through distinct but reliable sets of gendered, racialized social relations which create their own institutional forms of sustenance (e.g. the monogamous, heteronormative family form).<sup>12</sup> Older historical forms may be recast, new forms may be created and mobilized, but it is only through concrete social relations, and sensuous human labour, that labour-power is produced and made available to capital. This is not a functional argument about capital creating the ideal family form or gender regime to correspond neatly to the compulsions of its own reproduction. Rather, while capital does not exert direct influence on the production of labour-power and thus allows for relative autonomy of forms and practices, capitalist reproduction imposes conditions upon the social forms possible in which labour-power may be reproduced. Second, being attentive to labour-power not as it appears to capital but as it is produced and reproduced, SRT introduces, or rather restores, to capitalist totality a sphere of social relations where life-making activities proliferate. Capital’s goal is to increase surplus-value in the sphere of production; the worker’s goal is to enhance her quality of life, or a qualitative enrichment of her labour-power and her selfhood, through the satisfaction of her needs. SRT reminds us of the power of these life-making activities by workers, for they seek to impose brakes on the process of accumulation, as capital is forced to pay for them through wages and social benefits.

11. Lise Vogel, *Marxism and the Oppression of Women: Toward A Unitary Theory*, New Brunswick NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1983, pp. 151, 170.

12. I use gender and race as two of the most visible forms of labour-shaping relations. Age, ability, location, ethnicity and other factors play similar roles.

Finally, there is a clear strategic component to SRT. Life-making social practices by workers are not simple congeries of activities to satisfy needs. They have the potential to carry an anti-capitalist charge. Struggles to enhance or expand such practices will always reveal the balance of class forces. This is not to claim that any or all struggles by workers to improve their living conditions are anti-systemic struggles. Recent contestations over the welfare state, played out globally, reveal the dark obverse of emancipatory politics. In several countries, especially in the global North, social benefits of the welfare state, dwindling due to neoliberal cuts, are being dangled before the working class by authoritarian, populist parties as rights to be defended against migrants, racial minorities and national 'others'. As a processual theory, SRT is helpful in this context for we are reminded of the adaptability of capitalist social relations and their systemic ability to reshape its past political concessions – in this case, welfare benefits for workers – into political forms that benefit accumulation: here, the way racism within the working class functions to undermine class-wide solidarity and hence potential for resistance. Struggles that are about enhancing the sphere of life-making for workers can thus reveal, often implicitly but sometimes explicitly, the upper limits to what the working class can claim in its goal of self-enhancement and liberation. They thus carry the potential of teaching the worker-in-struggle the most important political lesson about capitalism: that while the wage-form exists, life-making activities can never be free of the drive for accumulation, and that real emancipation of life and labour is only possible with the abolishment of the wage-form and hence of capitalism.

### **Production of difference**

If SRT establishes the non-capitalistic production of labour-power and its reproduction through gendered and racialized

social relations, it also raises more troubling questions about the procedures of its reproduction. The production of value and the extraction of surplus-value, as demonstrated in *Capital*, have certain tendencies and countertendencies that seek equalization throughout the system. But the hallmark of capitalism is surely its deep social inequality both between the capitalist class and workers and within the classes themselves. The production and extraction of surplus-value of course unpacks the secret of inequality between capital and labour, but what explains the sustenance of inequality among workers?

Traditional Marxist accounts of racism within the working class, for example, locate the production and reproduction of race in labour-market competition. The argument goes: workers compete with each other as individual sellers of labour-power on the market and historically dominant sections of the class compete with the more vulnerable over jobs, pensions and social benefits. Writing on why a section of the American working class voted for Reagan in 1980, Robert and Johanna Brenner elaborated on this thesis thus:

It appears possible for the stronger sections of the working class to defend their positions by organizing on the basis of already existing ties against weaker, less-organized sections. They can take advantage of their positions as Americans over and against foreigners, as whites over and against blacks, as men over and against women, as employed over and against unemployed, etc.<sup>13</sup>

While agreeing with the broad outlines of this account, I think SRT urges us to push the question of differentiation further and pitch it not just at the level of the labour market, which expresses the price of labour-power, but at the level of production of the value of labour-power.

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<sup>13</sup> Robert Brenner and Johanna Brenner, 'Reagan, the Right and the Working Class', *Against the Current*, O.S., vol. 1, no. 2 (Winter 1981), p. 30.

The value of labour-power as a commodity, like all commodities under capitalism, is determined by the value of the means of subsistence deployed in its reproduction. But Marx reminds us that for this peculiar commodity labour-power, in ‘contradistinction ... to the case of other commodities’, there enters a ‘historical and moral element’ in the determination of its value. This is because while there might be a lower limit to what a labouring body needs to reproduce itself to be ready for new day of work, there can be no fixed upper limit to the worker’s necessary needs, as needs themselves are dynamic, historically produced and shaped by the gains made by the working class through struggle. The number and extent of the worker’s ‘necessary wants’, Marx confirms, thus ‘are themselves the product of historical development, and depend therefore to a great extent on the degree of civilisation of a country, more particularly on the conditions under which, and consequently on the habits and degree of comfort in which, the class of free labourers has been formed’.<sup>14</sup>

If necessary wants, which determine the value of labour-power, are historical and dynamic, it follows, then, that different sections of the working class, produced at different moments of history, will have different standards of necessary wants. The Irish worker, in direct contrast with her English counterpart, embodied, for Marx, this production of difference, for the Irish worker was at that ‘level of wage labour’ that accepted ‘the most animal minimum of needs and subsistence’ in her exchange with capital.<sup>15</sup> This version of productive difference, then, situates difference in the very operation of labour-power’s reproduction, which means that labour-power, *pace* Robert and Johanna Brenner, has already been differentially (re)produced even before it reaches the field of labour-market competition. Indeed, even the access or entry into the labour market cannot

14. Marx, *Capital*, Volume 1, p. 190

15. Marx, *Grundrisse*, p. 285.

be a presupposition as such access/entry varies across different sections of the class precisely due to differential (re)production.

Attention to socially reproductive activities reveals the specific social processes through which certain workers, embodying certain qualities of labour-power, arrive at the doorstep of capital more vulnerable and degraded than others. Ruthlessly depressed levels of 'necessary wants' for Latino workers in the USA is one example of brutally differentiated processes of social reproduction between migrant workers and their citizen counterparts. The median space per person in a Latino household in the USA is 350 square feet, 80 square feet less than that of the average non-migrant family living below the poverty line.<sup>16</sup> In a similar vein, a recent study revealed the growing wage gap between black and white workers. For our purposes, it is instructive to note the puzzlement of the researchers of this study when faced with the 'growing unexplained portion of the divergence in earnings for blacks relative to whites'. According to the report, this could be owing to 'hard-to-measure factors' including discrimination, read racism, or difference in the quality of public schools.<sup>17</sup> The 'equalization' of value that capital achieves within a bounded community/nation-state, is achieved through differentiated norms across differentiated elements of reproduction, (re)producing some sections of the working class as more abject than others.

Access to housing, police violence, substandard schools and healthcare are obvious ingredients that determine the level of necessary wants for a section of the working class and thereby determine, and lower, the value of their labour-power. But the lowering of value for one section of workers always has

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16. US census data quoted in Susan Ferguson and David McNally 'Precarious Migrants: Gender, Race and the Social Reproduction of a Global Working Class', *Socialist Register* 2015, vol. 51, pp. 1-23.

17. [www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2017-09-05/black-workers-wage-gap-has-widened-for-hard-to-explain-reasons](http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2017-09-05/black-workers-wage-gap-has-widened-for-hard-to-explain-reasons).

conditioning impulses for all sections, for lower wages for some workers can allow capital to rationalize and lower wages for all workers. Degraded social reproduction of racialized workers thus can help establish a regime of cheapened wages for all.

In conclusion, it is useful to circle back to the morphology of labour-power since the argument offered in *Capital* and the significance of SRT are fused within it. While it is true that capitalism tries to produce the working class it needs, *Capital* shows workers' struggle against the wage form to be a necessary part of the internal dynamics of the system and its reproduction. The worker will always tend towards the development of her own needs through life-making activities, while capital will continually tend towards limiting such activities to increase its share of surplus value and hence 'civilization'. Collective organizing on the basis of solidarity remains the only way the working class can win in this unequally resourced battle against capital.

The warning we receive from SRT, however, is that multi-racial working-class unity will not arise spontaneously through either left-wing propaganda or voluntarism, for differentiation of the working class is produced and sustained at cellular levels of the system. Vicious border policies and gendered and racialized labour regimes are some of the ways in which neoliberalism seeks to globally reproduce the working class in combined but deeply unequal ways. Against this warning, the aspiration we receive from SRT is equally important. As a unitary theory revealing the relationship between point of production of commodities and the spaces of reproduction of labour-power, SRT imbues every struggle for enhanced social reproduction with anti-capitalist possibilities. A working-class movement that will be able to give form to such possibilities cannot simply retrace older cultures of solidarity; it will have actively to forge new ones. Such a movement must champion with equal vigour working-class struggles based in communities – around water,



housing or police violence – alongside workplace struggles. It will have to learn to unify universal demands (healthcare) with race and gender specific ones (reproductive health, affirmative action).

If *Capital* remains one of the most savage critiques of capitalism as a system, SRT can perhaps be thought of as animating that critique with embodied voices of workers in struggle.

## 6

# Social reproduction and racialized surplus populations

SARA R. FARRIS

In this essay I draw on my recent book on the exploitation of feminist themes by right-wing nationalist parties within Islamophobic and anti-immigration campaigns, or what I call ‘femonationalism’.<sup>1</sup> In the last ten years or so right-wing nationalist parties across the Western world have increasingly demonized Muslim, migrant and racialized males more generally for being misogynist, and have depicted Muslim women in particular as ‘victims to be rescued’. It is obvious how hypocritical and opportunistic this move is, considering the very poor record these parties have when it comes to women’s rights.

The mobilization of gender-equality themes by right-wing parties within Islamophobic and racist campaigns has been analysed by many scholars, mostly addressing the political implications of such manoeuvres. I am thinking here of Jasbir Puar’s notion of homonationalism and Eric Fassin’s use of the concept of sexual democracy to describe the centrality of themes of sexuality for contemporary anti-Islam campaigns.<sup>2</sup> However, as a

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1. Sara R. Farris, *In the Name of Women’s Rights: The Rise of Femonationalism*, Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2017.

2. Jasbir Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages. Homonationalism in Queer Times*, Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2007; Eric Fassin, ‘Sexual Democracy and the New Racialization of Europe’, *Journal of Civil Society*, vol. 8, no. 3 (2012), pp. 285–8.

Marxist feminist, I am interested to see whether we can identify a political-economic logic behind these ideas that Muslim and non-Western migrant women (Muslim and non-Muslim alike) need rescue. In particular, I have wanted to explore whether the sudden stigmatization of Muslim and non-Western migrant men in the name of women's rights has also something to do with the position of Muslim and migrant women in the economic arena, particularly within what is called social reproduction.

Here, then, I will explain in what ways I think social-reproduction feminism is central for understanding the reasons contemporary nationalist/racist formations seem to apply a double standard to racialized men and women. According to such a double standard, non-Western men (Muslim and non-Muslim alike) are oppressors of women, but also job stealers, whereas non-Western women are usually depicted as victims of their misogynist and backward cultures, to be saved and emancipated. But they are hardly depicted as those taking jobs from 'native' workers. Why is this the case? To understand this gendered and racialized double standard in terms of the way in which it foregrounds the economic threat when it comes to non-Western men, while entirely omitting the economic realm when it comes to women, I have recourse to Marx's concept of reserve army of labour.

The essay is divided into two parts. In the first part I briefly summarize Marx's theory of the reserve army of labour, or surplus population, and see if and how it can help us to understand the position of migrant labour in the contemporary European economy. In the second part I discuss in what ways a combined reading of social-reproduction feminism and the Marxian theory of surplus populations can enable us to answer the questions raised at the outset. Is there an economic logic behind the femonationalist ideological formation? And in what ways can social-reproduction feminism help us to decode why

nationalists' racist narratives address racialized men as oppressors and women as victims to be rescued?

### **On Marx's theory of the reserve army of labour**

In Marx's analysis, (a) the increase in the magnitude of social capital (that is, the ensemble of individual capitals), (b) the enlargement of the scale of production, and (c) the growth of the productivity of an increasing number of workers brought about by capital accumulation, create a situation in which the greater 'attraction of labourers by capital is accompanied by their greater repulsion'.<sup>3</sup> These three interrelated processes, for Marx, set the conditions according to which the labouring population gives rise, 'along with the accumulation of capital produced by it, [also to] the means by which it itself is made relatively superfluous, is turned into a relative surplus population; and it does this to an always increasing extent'). Marx describes this as a law of population, which is peculiar to the capitalist mode of production just as other modes of production have their own corresponding population laws. The paradox of the creation of the surplus labouring population under the capitalist mode of production is that while it is 'a necessary product of accumulation', this surplus population is also the lever of such accumulation; namely, it is that which 'forms a disposable industrial reserve army, that belongs to capital quite as absolutely as if the latter had bred it at its own cost'.<sup>4</sup>) The discussion on the creation of the reserve army of labour is strictly related to Marx's analysis of the organic composition of capital and the tendency of capitalist accumulation to encourage the increase 'of its constant, at the expense of its variable constituent'.<sup>5</sup>

3. Karl Marx, *Capital, Volume 1*, in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 35, London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1976, p. 625.

4. *Ibid.*, pp. 625–6.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 323.

In other words, the creation of a pool of unemployed and underemployed is due to capital's need to increase the mass and value of the means of production (i.e. machines), at the cost of the decrease of the mass and value of living labour (i.e. wages and workers). Indeed, a crucial element in the reduction of wages and workers, or variable capital, is technical development and mechanization, which alongside other factors leads to the expulsion of a number of labourers from the productive process, and therefore to the creation of a surplus of workers who are no longer needed. This notwithstanding, Marx saw an inescapable limit to mechanization, for labour-power is the main source of surplus-value, and therefore is that component of the labour process that cannot be entirely replaced by machines. This is one of the reasons why, in order to guarantee and increase capital's accumulation, the history of capitalism has seen the development of a number of strategies all aimed at decreasing the mass and value of variable capital, but also at limiting the pitfalls of complete mechanization. Some of these strategies have been: (a) relocation of production in areas with cheap labour, instead of investments in costly technological innovation to maintain productive sites in areas with 'pricey' labour power; and (b) resorting to the supply of cheap labour usually provided by migrant workers, particularly in the case of non-relocatable productive sectors (construction and the service industry, for instance), thereby giving rise to forms of competition between 'native' and 'non-native' workers for the jobs available. For this set of reasons, already in Marx's time migrants and racialized minorities occupied a special place within the capitalist reproduction of surplus labouring populations, a situation that enabled capitalists to maintain wage discipline and to inhibit working-class solidarity by means of the application of a logic of divide and rule.

### **Social-reproduction feminism and migrant/racialized women**

The Marxian notion of the reserve army of labour, together with those theories that highlight the operations of the state in helping to produce and reproduce the reserve armies of labour, is an essential tool for describing the conditions of migrant and racialized labour in the present conjuncture.<sup>6</sup> In particular it enables us to decipher both the economic and the political process of the construction of migrant and racialized workers as a new global class of dispossessed. This notwithstanding, we should note that migrant and racialized women in contemporary Western Europe are neither presented nor perceived in the same way as men. Moreover, the role these women play within the contemporary capitalist economy, as a fraction of labour segregated in a newly commodified sector such as care and domestic work, is arguably also different. How can we explain this gender double standard?

Women comprise slightly less than half of all international migrants worldwide.<sup>7</sup> In Europe, for instance, estimates reveal that women make up slightly more than half of the migrant stock in the EU27. A large number of migrant but also racialized women (who are not necessarily migrant as in the case of many Muslim women or second-generation immigrant women) who actively participate in the Western labour market are employed in one single branch of the economy, namely the care and domestic or socially reproductive sector. The increasing participation of 'native' women in the 'productive' economy since the 1980s, the decline of the birth rate and the increasing number of elderly people, coupled with the erosion, insufficiency or simply non-existence of public or affordable care services, has resulted

6. See, for instance, Jon May, Jane Wills, Yara Datta, Evans Kavita, Joanna Herbert and Cathy McIlwaine, 'Keeping London Working: Global Cities, the British State and London's New Migrant Division of Labour', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 32 (2007), pp. 151–67.

7. United Nations, *International Migration Report*, 2017, [www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/publications/migrationreport/docs/MigrationReport2017\\_Highlights.pdf](http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/publications/migrationreport/docs/MigrationReport2017_Highlights.pdf); accessed 20 February 2018.

in the marketization of so-called ‘reproductive’ labour, which is now done mainly by migrant and racialized women. The demand for labour in this sector has grown so much over the past twenty years that it is now regarded as the main reason for the feminization of international migration).<sup>8</sup>

In order to understand the ‘exception’ constituted by migrant and racialized women in contemporary Europe as a workforce and segment of the population that seems to be spared from accusations of economic and social – as well as cultural – threat, and even victimized and offered rescue, I suggest that we need to look more closely at the reorganization of social reproduction. What distinguishes the care and domestic sector, or socially reproductive sector, where migrant and racialized women are mostly employed, from other sectors that employ mostly migrant and racialized men?

First, as many scholars have emphasized, ‘affectivity’ is a fundamental – albeit not exclusive – component of ‘socially reproductive’ labour. This is important because the ‘affective’ component of social reproduction poses core difficulties for attempts to mechanize and automate it. As Silvia Federici argues,

Unlike commodity production, the reproduction of human beings is to a great extent irreducible to mechanization, being the satisfaction of complex needs, in which physical and affective elements are inextricably combined, requiring a high degree of human interaction and a most labor-intensive process.<sup>9</sup>

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8. See Rachel Salazar Parreñass, *Servants of Globalization: Women, Migration and Domestic Work*, Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 2001; James A. Tyner, *Made in the Philippines: Gendered Discourses and the Making of Migrants*, London and New York: Routledge, 2004; Nana Oishi, *Women in Motion: Globalization, State Policies and Labor Migration in Asia*, Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 2005; Maurice Schiff, Andrew R. Morrison and Mirja Sjoebloom, *The International Migration of Women*, New York: World Bank Publications and Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007; Jennifer Rubin, Michael S. Rendall, Lila Rabinovich, Flavia Tsang, Constantijn van Oranje-Nassau and Barbara Janta, *Migrant Women in the European Labour Force: Current Situation and Future Prospects*, European Commission, Directorate General for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunity, RAND Europe, 2008; International Labour Office, *Domestic Workers Across the World: Global and Regional Statistics and the Extent of Legal Protection*, Geneva: International Labour Office, 2013.

9. Silvia Federici, ‘The Reproduction of Labor-Power in the Global Economy: Marxist

Second, the need for proximity between the producer and consumer of socially reproductive labour such as care and domestic work, the impossibility of suspending it, as well as the fact that such work must be consumed immediately after, or during, its production, make the interruption and 'the physical relocation of production away from the site of final consumption (as in commodity production) (practically) impossible'.<sup>10</sup>

One of the consequences of socially reproductive labour's resistance to mechanization and relocation is not only that this work has been re-privatized, redistributed onto the shoulders of migrant women, or partly commercialized, but also that it is one of those sectors where Marx's analysis of the reserve army of labour needs amending. As already indicated, the discussion of the creation of a surplus-labouring population, or reserve army, is strictly related to Marx's analysis of the organic composition of capital and the tendency of capitalist accumulation to encourage the increase of the mass and value of the means of production at the cost of the mass and value of living labour employed in the production process. A crucial element for the reduction of variable capital is indeed technical development and automation, as well as relocation, which, alongside other factors, leads to the expulsion of a number of workers from the productive process and therefore to the creation of the reserve army. However, the resistance of social reproductive labour to mechanization and relocation means that only a small amount of this labour can be replaced by technical development. Mostly, it has to be performed by living labour, whether commodified through the recruitment of care/domestic workers in private households or through the growth of commercial services (fast food, laundry

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Theory and the Unfinished Feminist Revolution', in *Revolution at Point Zero: Housework, Reproduction, and Feminist Struggle*, New York: PM Press, 2012.

10. Nicola Yeates, 'Global Care Chains', *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 6 (2004), pp. 369–91.



and so forth), or performed 'for free' by members of the family/household.

As a result, the demand for care/domestic work in private households – particularly in a situation in which reproductive tasks are increasingly privatized within households, outsourced and commodified, and in light of societal and demographic changes such as the ageing of the population and the growing participation of women in paid work – is destined to grow dramatically in the coming years. It is thus not by chance that recent studies on the impact of the global economic crisis on migrant workers in many Western European countries shows that the sectors where migrant women are more concentrated (namely social reproduction) 'have not been affected by the crisis'; indeed these sectors have 'even expanded in its context'.<sup>11</sup> As previously noted, the ageing of the population and the increasing participation of 'native' women in the labour market in the last twenty years, which was followed by neither a growth of public care services nor by changes in the gendered division of labour within the household, has certainly been one of the reasons for the growing demand of female private carers and houseworkers, and a powerful impetus for the feminization of contemporary migration flows. Yet, 'it is not simply the *lack* of public provision that shapes the demand for childcare [and elderly care], but the *very nature of state support that is available*'.<sup>12</sup> In the last fifteen years, across Europe, forms of cash provision or tax credit have been introduced in order to assist families, encouraging the development of the 'commodification of care'

11. Office of Economic and Cultural Development, *International Migration Outlook*, Paris: OECD Publishing, 2012; Sara R. Farris, 'Migrants' Regular Army of Labour: Gender Dimensions of the Impact of the Global Economic Crisis on Migrant Labour in Western Europe', *The Sociological Review* 63 (2015), pp. 121–43; Maria Karamessini and Jill Rubery, eds, *Women and Austerity: The Economic Crisis and the Future for Gender Equality*, London: Routledge, 2013.

12. Fiona Williams and Anna Gavanas, 'The Intersection of Child Care Regimes and Migration Regimes: A Three-Country Study', in Helma Lutz, ed., *Migration and Domestic Work: A European Perspective on a Global Theme*, Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008, p. 14.

and domestic services, which are generally sought privately in the market, where migrant and racialized women provide the lion's share of supply.

The growing demand for care and domestic workers in Europe, which has been nurtured by the set of societal and demographic phenomena I have described, is a very important factor in explaining why female migrant and racialized labour does not receive the same treatment as its male counterpart. Evidence for this can be found in the different ways in which current campaigns and policies against illegal migration impact upon men and women. The Italian case is particularly emblematic. In 2009 the Italian government granted an amnesty only for illegal migrants working as carers and domestic workers (*badanti*), who are mostly women, since that was considered the only sector where the demand for labour could not meet the national supply. On this occasion, Roberto Maroni of the Northern League (then minister of the interior) declared: 'There cannot be a regularization for those who entered illegally, for those who rape a woman or rob a villa, but certainly we will take into account all those situations that have a strong social impact, as in the case of migrant care-givers.'<sup>13</sup> Thus, right-wing anti-immigration parties such as the Northern League are willing to turn a blind eye to undocumented migrants when they are women working in the care and domestic sector. The Northern League is also one of the parties deploying the femonationalist ideology described at the beginning of this paper.

Furthermore, one should note that integration policies across Europe are increasingly requiring migrant women to accept jobs in the social-reproductive sector in order to be granted the right to remain in the country. Paradoxically, these integration policies depart from the assumption that migrant women (particularly

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13. Interview available at [www.repubblica.it/2008/05/sezioni/cronaca/sicurezza-politica4/bossi-spagna/bossi-spagna.html](http://www.repubblica.it/2008/05/sezioni/cronaca/sicurezza-politica4/bossi-spagna/bossi-spagna.html); accessed 20 February 2018.

Muslim) need to be emancipated, yet these same policies channel them towards jobs such as childcare, elderly care and housekeeping which have been historically considered as the gender activities marking women's lack of emancipation.

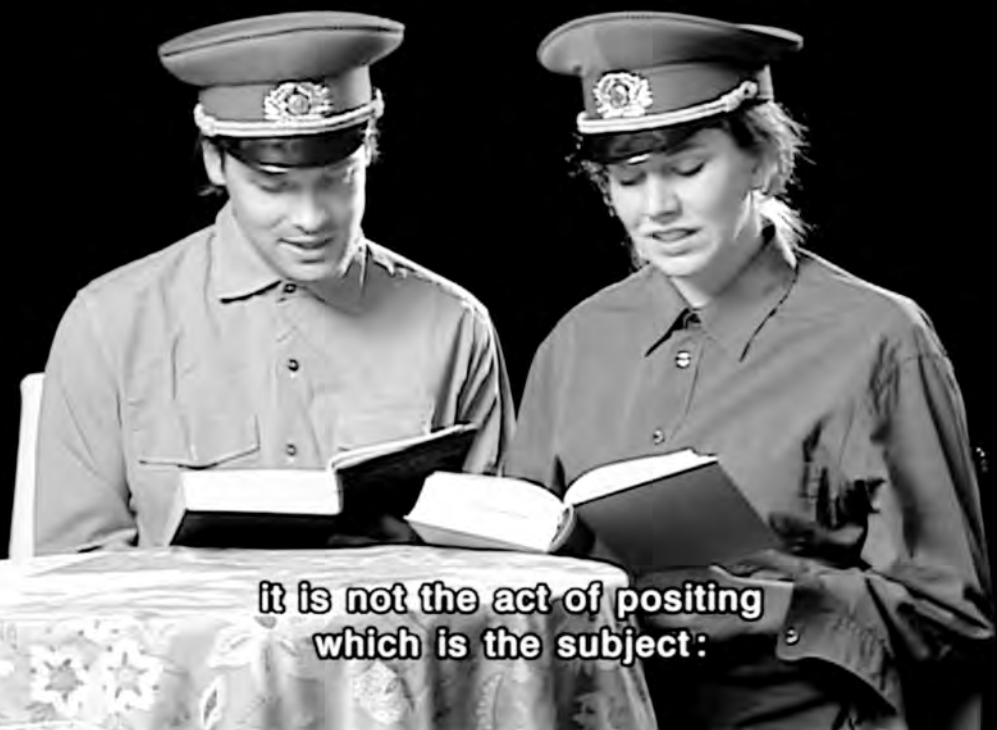
As already mentioned, one of the consequences deriving from the peculiarities of commodified socially reproductive work performed by migrant and racialized women is that female migrant labour does not lend itself to be analysed through the Marxian category of the reserve army of labour in quite the same ways as male and racialized migrant labour in other sectors of the economy. The female migrant and racialized workforce employed in the care and domestic sector in Western Europe nowadays amounts not to a 'reserve army' that is depicted (and perceived) as an economic threat to native-born workers, constantly exposed to unemployment and used in order to maintain wage discipline. Rather, it amounts to a 'regular' army of labour. Instead of being competitors with native women in the market of low-skilled jobs, migrant women employed as care and domestic workers have both allowed a number of native-born women to work outside the household and created entirely new professional figures, such as that of the paid personal carer (*badante*), which in Italy, for instance, had not previously existed. Rather than inspiring campaigns for their exclusion from the labour market and from welfare benefits, or from Western Europe altogether, non-Western migrant and racialized women undergo exceptional processes of regularization (as in the Italian example) and even receive offers of 'salvation' from their allegedly backward cultures.

The emphasis on non-Western migrant women overall as individuals to be helped in their integration and emancipation process, including through job offers, is thus possible because they, unlike male migrant and racialized workers, currently occupy a strategic role in the socially reproductive sector of

childcare, elderly care and cleaning. Rather than ‘job stealers’ and ‘cultural and social threats’ – designations regularly used for migrant men – Muslim and non-Western migrant women seem to be those who allow Western Europeans to work in the public sphere by providing the care that neoliberal restructuring has commodified.

In conclusion, I would like thus to suggest that the double standard applied to migrant and racialized women in the public imaginary, as individuals in need of special attention, and even ‘rescue’, operates as an ideological tool that is strictly connected to their key role (present or future) in the *reproduction of the material conditions of social reproduction*. What I call femonationalism, or the appropriation of feminist themes by nationalists in racist campaigns, should thus be understood as part and parcel of the specifically neoliberal reorganization of welfare, labour and state immigration policies that have occurred in the context of the global financial crisis and, more generally, the Western European crisis of social reproduction. The very possibility that right-wing nationalists can exploit emancipatory ideals of gender equality within xenophobic politics springs in large part from the specifically neoliberal reconfiguration of the Western European economy in the past thirty years.

As I hope this essay has shown, a combined reading of social-reproduction theories and the Marxian theory of surplus populations is crucial for understanding the intertwining of racial and gendered oppression with class exploitation, as well as their equally cogent centrality to capitalist reproduction.



**it is not the act of positing  
which is the subject:**



**it is the subjectivity  
of objective powers,**

**FREEDOM,  
DEMOCRACY  
& WAR**



# 7

## **It is getting darker around the central sun of freedom: *Capital*, translation and the re-feudalization of capitalism**

BORIS BUDEN

As in the universe each planet, while turning on its own axis, moves around the sun, so in the system of freedom each of its worlds, while turning on its own axis, revolves around the central sun of freedom.

Karl Marx, 'Debates on Freedom of the Press',  
*Supplement to the Rheinsische Zeitung*, 1842

At the end of his introduction to the edition of the *Communist Manifesto* published by Penguin Classics in 2011, Marshall Berman tells a story he heard from the eminent theorist of international relations Hans Morgenthau, who emigrated from Nazi Germany in 1937. Morgenthau's father, who was at the beginning of the twentieth century a doctor in a working-class neighbourhood in the city of Coburg in Bavaria, was often asked by his patients – mostly miners who were dying of tuberculosis and whom he couldn't help – to bring them the *Manifesto*. Their last request was to be buried with Marx and Engels's famous book – instead of the Bible.

A grave is not the best place for a book to survive. But it is, beyond doubt, a good starting point for research into manifold forms of its afterlife. This is why we would do well to imagine Karl Marx's *Das Kapital* in its original shape, in German, the language in which it was originally written, together with its



ideal readers, the German-speaking working class, being buried together in a grave. In this picture, a return to the original is possible only as an act of commemoration. One takes any round number of years and creates a memory event. Yet even the megalomania of today's powerful memory culture has its limits. Not all that is historically dead can be culturally kept alive. This is one more reason to approach Karl Marx's *Das Kapital* from the perspective of its historical death. So, instead of commemorating its former life, let us turn our attention to the often contradictory historical and linguistic conjunctures in which it has found its afterlife.

### **Freedom as a freedom from Marx**

Almost a century after Hans Morgenthau's father helped his dying patients to take Marx and Engels's books with them to the grave, new people were celebrating getting finally rid of their writings. Speaking in the same text of the situation in Central and Eastern Europe shortly after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, Berman writes: '[A]t the end of the twentieth century, there were plenty of ex-citizens of Communist police states who felt that life without Marx was liberation.'<sup>1</sup>

This, however, shall not surprise us if we remember that Marx's writings, together with other texts belonging to the corpus of so-called Marxist-Leninist literature, were in these places for decades canonized as dogma and, as such, ideologically supportive of the local dictatorial regimes. Berman calls it a disaster – a disaster for Karl Marx's texts and their true readers. This is why those readers also embraced the fall of historical communism as liberation. It was only in a life without Marx that his texts could be read freely again.

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1. Marshall Berman, 'Tearing Away the Veils: The *Communist Manifesto*', [www.dissentmagazine.org/online\\_articles/tearing-away-the-veils-the-communist-manifesto](http://www.dissentmagazine.org/online_articles/tearing-away-the-veils-the-communist-manifesto).

The question is, however, who are these true readers of Marx? Berman leaves no doubt: 'Intellectuals all over the world have welcomed this end-of-the century crash as a fortunate fall.'<sup>2</sup> If Berman is right, it was precisely the historical defeat of Marx's ideas that has saved them for posterity. Moreover, it seems that only after the history and the people who were making it had abandoned Marx's concepts and trashed his arguments could these reappear in their original theoretical innocence, as if miraculously purified of the dirt of historical praxis. The transformation resembles some sort of post-historical sublimation of Marxism, in which the whole realm of history retroactively appears as a foreign, hostile land for Karl Marx's original ideas, a quasi-dialectical moment of their alienation from which they have now recovered, restoring themselves in their genuine ahistorical authenticity. Finally, how are we to think of Berman's 'intellectuals all over the world'? Are they really Marx's genuine readers? Was he not rather writing for a different audience, those 'workers of the world' whom he and Engels addressed explicitly at the end of the *Manifesto*?

In fact, Berman makes no significant distinction between them. Already in *All That Is Solid Melts into Air* he quoted Marx's words from the *Manifesto* on the historical achievement of the modern bourgeoisie, which 'has stripped of its halo every occupation hitherto honoured and looked up to in reverent awe. It has converted the doctor, the lawyer, the priest, the poet, the man of science, into its paid wage-labourers.'<sup>3</sup> As far as capitalism puts both intellectuals and workers into the same wage-relation, they also share a common class and historical position. This is why Berman can see in today's intellectuals of the world

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2. Ibid.

3. Marshal Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity*, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1988, p. 115. He uses the same quotation in 'Tearing Away the Veils: The *Communist Manifesto*', explicitly identifying intellectuals with workers.

the rightful heirs to the emancipatory legacy of the historical workers' movements, those proletarians who once had nothing to lose but their chains.

However, there is something the intellectuals of the world still have to lose: the freedom that Berman has implicitly ascribed to their social role and that makes it possible for them to detach themselves from historical praxis and encounter 'directly' the authentic world of Marx's ideas. But this type of freedom does not look like something new. Indeed, it unavoidably evokes an old idea of public reason, or more precisely Immanuel Kant's concept of the freedom to make public use of one's reason, as opposed to its private use.<sup>4</sup> In fact, it is today in direct contradiction to the commonsensical differentiation of public and private. For Kant, those who, for instance, work in what we call the public sector are restricted in their use of reason by the mechanism for which they work – that is, by the will of the government. So they cannot argue freely, because they must obey. However, if they regard themselves at the same time as members of the whole community, or of a society of world citizens, and in the role of scholars address the general public, they will nevertheless be able to use their reason freely – that is, publicly.

This might explain why Berman and all genuine readers of Karl Marx have welcomed 'a life without Marx' brought about by the crash of 1989. In Kant's sense, it liberated Marx's writings from their private use – by, for instance, those apparatchiks of an official Marxism, also known as Marxologues, who were not able to read Marx and discuss his ideas freely because they had to obey their totalitarian masters, the Party and the state. In other words, the post-1989 liberation of Marx's writings might be understood as a sort of reappropriation by public reason. It has

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4. See Immanuel Kant, 'An Answer to the Question: "What is Enlightenment?"', in *Kant: Political Writings*, trans. H.B. Nisbet, ed. H.S. Reiss, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991, pp. 54–61.

liberated Marx as author, who is now finally free – to address, as a scholar (*Gelehrte*), ‘the intellectuals of the world’, or, in Kant’s parlance, the society of world citizens (*Weltbürgergesellschaft*).

Let us put aside the question of whether Karl Marx was ever a scholar. How can we identify the figure of the world intellectual? Is it a member of the cognitive elite of today’s society of world citizens? One who actually belongs to this intellectual community? If it is a cosmopolitan community, is it also a universal one? And, after all, which language does this elite speak? Will it read Karl Marx’s works in the language in which they were originally written?

It is not difficult to recognize in Berman’s notion of ‘the intellectuals of the world’ an older intellectual figure, which, in fact, still echoes in Kant’s notion of *Weltbürgergesellschaft* – the so-called ‘republic of letters’: an international community of scholars of which Kant, for instance, was a typical member. It emerged at the time of the Renaissance, and as a new historical form of intellectual exchange it prepared and finally made possible the Age of Enlightenment.<sup>5</sup>

As is well known, the original language of the Republic of Letters was Latin. It was actually called *Respublica Literaria* or *Respublica Literarum*. Later in the seventeenth century it switched mostly to French. Finally, Kant wrote his works in German, following the example of the brightest minds of the Renaissance who abandoned Latin for their respective vernaculars, early prototypes of a new figure of the scholar: a bourgeois vernacular intellectual. Such was Marx too. He wrote his works in German in a time when the old Republic of Letters had already developed into something qualitatively different – both in a social and in a political sense – namely, what Habermas later termed ‘the bourgeois public sphere’ (*der bürgerlichen Öffentlichkeit*). Thus was

5. See Dirk van Miert, ‘What Was the Republic of Letters? A brief Introduction to a Long History (1417–2008)’, *Groniek* 204 (February/March 2016), pp. 269–86.

the old Latin Republic of Letters subsequently nationalized, or, more precisely, territorialized within the borders of a new political institution of a modern world and emerging capitalism, the bourgeois nation-state, in which the old vernaculars were finally tamed and disciplined (German Romantics would say *gebildet*, meaning educated and civilized) into national languages.

Marx lived in London but he wrote *Das Kapital* in German. If he lived today in Berlin, he would, for sure, write his main work in English – so that Berman’s ‘intellectuals of the world’ could understand him.

### Through the veil of translation

We take it for granted that most if not all relevant discussions on Marx’s *Capital* and the topics raised by the book take place today in English. As far as these discussions refer to the text itself, they rely on a translation, not on the original text in German. This circumstance, however, has been naturalized today to the point that it goes completely unnoticed. We think and talk about Marx in English as though he thought and wrote about our world in the same language. But he did not. And this can sometimes become an issue.

It was German Marxist Wolfgang Fritz Haug who recently spoke out about the trouble with the English translations of *Das Kapital*.<sup>6</sup> As an example he took one of today’s most influential commentaries on Marx’s major work, David Harvey’s *Companion to Marx’s Capital*.<sup>7</sup> Haug, who himself published a similar commentary,<sup>8</sup> argues, in short, that Harvey’s interpretation

6. Wolfgang Fritz Haug, ‘On the Need for a New English Translation of Marx’s *Capital*’, *Socialism and Democracy*, vol. 31, no. 1 (March 2017), pp. 60–86.

7. David Harvey, *A Companion to Marx’s Capital*, London and New York: Verso, 2010.

8. *Vorlesungen zur Einführung ins ‘Kapital’* (*Introductory Lectures on ‘Capital’*) was first published in 1974. In fact, Haug and Harvey were not only born in the same year, 1935, but also both began to give courses on Marx’s *Capital* in the same year, 1971, not only for students but also for unionized workers.

of Marx's text lacks accuracy and leads to misunderstanding of some of the most important concepts of Marx's theory. The reason: Harvey does not read German. In other words, Harvey's *Companion* does not follow Marx's own text but rather an English version of it handed down by Ben Fowkes – his English translation of the first volume of *Das Kapital*, which first appeared in 1976. The shifts of meaning that have arisen from this translation have, according to Haug, at certain points significantly influenced Harvey's interpretation of Marx's *Capital* and subsequently erected 'an epistemological barrier' for today's international left, constantly undermining their revived efforts to deepen the analysis of contemporary capitalism through rereadings of Marx's classical texts.<sup>9</sup>

One of the most striking examples of such shifts of meaning Haug detects is Fowkes often ignoring Marx's differentiation between the German adjectives *stofflich*, *dinglich*, *sachlich* and *materiell*.<sup>10</sup> Fowkes renders them all as 'material', which results in a series of misinterpretations that are, according to Haug, 'fatal for materialist thought'.<sup>11</sup> The consequence is, as he concludes, that the international left today gets 'a Marx bereft of his materialism, and an historical materialism without historical materiality'.<sup>12</sup>

This applies concretely to Harvey's interpretation of *Capital*. Here, as Haug shows, Fowkes's translation of Marx's expression *dinglich* as 'material' leads Harvey to conclude – reasoning by way of opposition – that 'unreified' (*unverdinglichte*) social relations are for Marx objective but nevertheless 'immaterial'. So, he argues, one cannot sensuously apprehend them; in Harvey's own words, 'you cannot actually see, touch or feel social relations directly'.<sup>13</sup>

9. Haug, 'On the Need', p. 63.

10. *Stofflich* means 'stuff-like' and is for Marx the antonym of the socio-historical form-determination; *dinglich* might be approximately translated as 'thing-like' and Marx opposes it to the relational and processual; *sachlich* also means 'thing-like', but Marx uses it as the antonym of 'personal'; and *materiell* translates as 'material'. *Ibid.*, pp. 75–6.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 75.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 63.

13. *Ibid.*, pp. 63, 76. The quotation from Harvey's *Companion*: *ibid.*, p. 33. Haug, on the

This has further consequences for Harvey's understanding of Marx's concept of commodity fetishism. Here, Fowkes translates Marx's well-known designation of commodities as *sinnlich übersinnliche oder gesellschaftliche Dinge*<sup>14</sup> as 'sensuous things which are at the same time supra-sensible or social'. While Marx's original notion more accurately translated as 'sensuous-supra-sensuous or social' keeps both 'sensuous' and 'supra-sensuous' together. Despite – or, to put it more precisely, because of – the contradiction in meaning, Fowkes separates them and so facilitates Harvey's understanding of Marx's concept of the social as something supra-sensible; that is, something immaterial, yet still in a way objective.

When this gets applied concretely to the concept of commodity fetishism – Marx's explanation of how a social relation between humans themselves assumes in a commodity the fantastic form of a relation between things – it becomes in Harvey's interpretation 'an absence of an immediate producers–consumers relation that is effected by the market exchange of things'.<sup>15</sup> To illustrate the meaning of the fetish character of commodity form, he uses the example of a person who goes into a supermarket to buy a head of lettuce. To do this, one has to put down a certain sum of money. The material relation between the money and the lettuce expresses in fact a social relation because the price is socially determined. And here Harvey concludes: 'Hidden within this market exchange of things is a relation between you, the consumer, and the direct producers – those who laboured to produce the lettuce.'<sup>16</sup>

So, as Haug states, Harvey reduces the concept of commodity fetishism to a lack of knowledge about the relations between consumers and producers. This ends in Harvey establishing a

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contrary, argues that social relations, however, can be empirically and also sensuously observed; *ibid.*, p. 76.

14. Karl Marx, *Das Kapital. Kritik der politischen Ökonomie Buch I, Der Produktionsprozess des Kapitals*, in *Marx–Engels–Werke* (MEW), vol. 23, Berlin/GDR: Dietz, 1979, p. 86.

15. Haug, 'On the Need', p. 80.

16. *Ibid.* Harvey, *A Companion*, p. 39.

causal relation between globalization and fetishism: '[I]n highly complicated systems of exchange it is *impossible* to know anything about the labour or the labourers, which is why fetishism is inevitable in the world market.'<sup>17</sup>

For Haug, however, the fetishism that is intrinsic to the world of commodities, of money and of capital has nothing to do with the difference between the national market and the world market. It has nothing to do with the 'subjective ignorance' of the consumers 'about that labour or the labourers' either. Moreover, a relation of consumption is for Haug not at all at the core of Marx's concept of commodity fetishism. Rather, it is about a relation among producers, a relation of production. In fetishism, the ability of the products as commodities to make themselves autonomous expresses itself in relation to those who have produced them. Commodity fetishism is about the powerlessness of the producers vis-à-vis the life of their own products.

One does not have fully to agree with Wolfgang Fritz Haug when it comes to the extent and gravity of misinterpretations that are generated by the shifts in meaning that almost unavoidably take place when a text is translated into another language. He probably exaggerates when he argues that some of these shifts, as in the case of Ben Fowkes's English translation of Marx's *Das Kapital*, are 'fatal for materialist thought' and will prevent the international left today from revisiting Karl Marx's genuine materialism. It may even be that the shortcomings of this translation's contribution to our contemporary interpretation of Marx's thought is on a much smaller scale than alleged by Haug. But the German Marxist definitely has a point. Even more so when it comes to his general assessment of the linguistic preconditions of current Marxist debates, as well as the warnings he makes in this regard.

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17. Harvey, *A Companion*, pp. 39–40.



What has essentially reframed the way we read Marx and discuss his ideas today is the emergence of English as the global lingua franca. It is the language of transnational high-tech capitalism as much as of international Marxism. This, according to Haug, 'puts a heavy responsibility on Anglophone Marxist scholars, since their version of Marxian texts have acquired a referential priority for most students from all over the world'.<sup>18</sup> It is for this reason that Haug expects them to pay more attention to the English translations of Marx's texts with which they work so as to neutralize the shifts in meaning that have arisen from them. When it comes to *Das Kapital*, for Haug there is no doubt that a new English translation of Marx's major work is needed, one that would satisfy the criteria of a critical edition. If this does not happen, even Marx's thoughts in their original language, German, will not be spared distortions in meaning. This is precisely what happened in the German translation of David Harvey's *Companion*. It has transmitted into German Harvey's analysis based on Fowkes's English translations and mixed it with original quotations from Marx. The result, as Haug writes, 'borders on linguistic money-laundering'.<sup>19</sup> This is a further level of complication: the linguistic alienations of Marx's thought that took place in the English translations of *Das Kapital* have now been reimported, resulting in the linguistic alienation of Marx's thoughts in his own native language.

### **A Marxist who cannot speak English is no Marxist**

There is a certain resentment that can be clearly felt in Haug's critique of English translations of *Das Kapital*. At stake is, however, much more than the personal disappointment of a German Marxist whose own commentaries on Marx's work – based on and written in the original language of the book

18. Haug, 'On the Need', p. 60.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 62.

– have been pushed aside, even within his own language, by the interpretations of an international author who does not even understand German. Rather it is *the resentment of the language itself* that speaks out of Haug's critique, not his personal injury. German, once the language of the highest literary and cultural values of modern philosophy, and thanks to Marx's writings the language par excellence of the critique of capitalism, is today only a shadow of its former glory.

The historical erosion that has affected not only German but many national languages today has its name: re-vernacularization. At stake is a retrograde process in which a distinctive and fully formed national and cultural language falls back into the condition of a vernacular from which it had raised itself since the sixteenth century. Concretely, in its European environment as well as within its own territory, German has been increasingly pushed back from higher discourses of science, politics and business and forced to retreat onto the level of everyday life and less important discourses. 'German is today a disappearing, little language (like Breton or Occitan), because its speakers don't attach any importance to the preservation of German in higher discourses', one German philosopher of language comments bitterly on the degeneration of his mother tongue.<sup>20</sup> Of course, there is no doubt about what has pushed German 'into cultural insignificance'<sup>21</sup> today. It is another, more powerful language, English as the new lingua franca of the globalizing world. As a result, in Europe and elsewhere, we are witnessing today the emergence of a new cultural and linguistic condition that might be described as a sort of 'a neo-medieval diglossia – high: English/low: other languages'.<sup>22</sup> This new/old linguistic condition might be also defined in terms of Pierre

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20. Jürgen Trabant, *Globalesisch oder was? Ein Plädoyer für Europas Sprachen*, Munich: Verlag C.H. Beck, 2014, p. 92.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 192.

22. *Ibid.*

Bourdieu's understanding of linguistic competence as capital.<sup>23</sup> While English speakers possess ever-growing transnational linguistic capital, the speakers of German, or of some other once powerful national languages, like French for instance, are nowadays increasingly losing it. In Bourdieu's sense one might say that a new form of linguistically generated class division emerges today on a global scale.

Some see this development as a historical loss, a further decline in linguistic and cultural diversity. Others welcome the transformation as a progressive move towards a global linguistic harmony. Both, however, seem to agree that this development is irreversible. The old forms of linguistic practice that still shape the picture of the global world as a cluster of nation-states and their respective cultures and languages are crumbling before our eyes. One can, of course, endlessly speculate about still unforeseeable cultural, cognitive, economic and political consequences of this development, but it is clear already that there are more and more things that can no longer be said in the old national languages because certain discourses are available only in English. There is no doubt that this is also the case with contemporary Marxism.

So, what Berman calls 'life without Marx' is in fact a life without Marx in German and in many of the historical translations of his works that were once made from German. It is a life without Marx who addresses a national public sphere, the readers on all its strata, in their own language, from the heroic figure of the bourgeois intellectual to the members of a national working class. They are those who have been, according to Berman, liberated from Marx by the collapse of historical

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23. See, for instance, Jürgen Gerhards, *From Babel to Brussels: European Integration and the Importance of Transnational Linguistic Capital*, trans. Maureen Metzger, Berlin Studies on the Sociology of Europe (BSSE), no. 28, Berlin: Freie Universität Berlin, 2012; [www.ssoar.info/ssoar/bitstream/handle/document/38916/ssoar-2012-gerhards-From\\_Babel\\_to\\_Brussels\\_European.pdf?sequence=1](http://www.ssoar.info/ssoar/bitstream/handle/document/38916/ssoar-2012-gerhards-From_Babel_to_Brussels_European.pdf?sequence=1); accessed March 2018.

communism. For all of them Marx is now dumb. He speaks a language they do not understand.<sup>24</sup>

On the other side, there are Marshall Berman's 'intellectuals of the world', for whom a 'life without Marx' has paradoxically brought him back. It is for them, his only genuine addressees today, that Marx was liberated, so that they can freely read his writings and discuss his ideas; as far as they speak English, of course – which they actually do, for it is obviously their own language, the mother tongue of today's international community of scholars. Shortly after the fall of historical communism, which made possible the global expansion not only of capitalism but also of contemporary art, an artist from Croatia, Mladen Stilinović, made his famous comment on the new linguistic condition brought about by the historical transformation: 'An artist who cannot speak English is no artist.' This applies equally to Karl Marx and his ideas after 1989: a Marxist who cannot speak English is no Marxist.

Wolfgang Fritz Haug is fully aware of this. Although he shows how the inability to read Marx's writings in the original language generates misinterpretations and misunderstandings, he does not expect future Marxists to learn German. He knows very well that *Das Kapital* in its original language is already dead. All we can do is make and canonize the best possible English translation of the book, following the example set by the translations of the greatest works of classical philosophy: 'It might well be that Marx, for the generations to come, will play a role similar to that of Aristotle, since both laid the groundwork for a new civilizational paradigm.'<sup>25</sup>

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24. This circumstance implies a curious correlation between English-language skills and an affinity for Marxist ideas. The more people in a community who are in command of English, the more potential Marxists there are among them. The chance that Karl Marx's *Capital* will be read in the Netherlands, where 87.6 per cent of the population speak English, is much higher than in Bulgaria where this number drops to 15.4 per cent. *Ibid.*, p. 17.

25. Haug, 'On the Need', p. 61.

The comparison to Aristotle is quite telling. It is in fact completely in line with Berman's vision of a post-1989 liberation of Marx, which implies a sort of post-historical sublimation of his thoughts, their ascension from the contingency of historical praxis into a world of eternal cognitive values. But is it in line with these thoughts themselves, with their intentional adherence to this same historical praxis? One who wants a critique of capitalism to be canonized as a civilizational paradigm has, in fact, already admitted the defeat of that critique.

Nevertheless, it makes sense to imagine future generations of Marxist scholars reading and discussing Marx's writings in their ultimate English translations, a sort of critical English edition of his magnum opus made by a team of the best linguistic experts as well as other specialists in philosophy, economy and history. The picture truly evokes the famous 'recovery of Aristotle': the Latin translations of his works made from Greek or Arabic during the Middle Ages. If Aristotle was in fact finally canonized – and at the same time rediscovered – only through the translations of his works into Latin, why should this not be possible for Marx? It might well be that only a canonization of his works in their English translations will recover and preserve them for posterity. The idea sounds quite plausible, but before we enthusiastically welcome it as a definitive solution to the problem of saving and reviving the Marxist critique of capitalism for the generations to come we should ask ourselves one more question: how has it come about that we today, a century and a half after the first publication of *Das Kapital*, look into the future of its ideas from a perspective that is in fact centuries older than the book itself? Could it be that our visions for the twenty-first century rely on an intellectual and sociolinguistic paradigm from the Middle Ages?

Indeed. The German critic of the re-vernacularization of his language already mentioned explicitly argues that this new

sociolinguistic and cultural condition in which we live today 'resembles the Europe of the Middle Ages' and that it clearly has a 'neo-medieval' character. If this is really the case, then we cannot ignore the question that the brightest minds of the Middle Ages asked themselves: are the vernaculars spoken outside of their Latin- or Arabic-speaking community of scholars really of no use? Is it possible to think of the sublime ideas of philosophy or to write poetry in the languages of hoi polloi?

We know their answer, which is a good reason to repeat their question – looking back into 150 years of the dramatic life of Marx's *Das Kapital*: is there anything worth remembering from the dozens of its translations into the once proud national languages that, in the meantime, history has rendered vernaculars again?<sup>26</sup> Should we really leave to oblivion all the afterlives the book found in these languages, its so many difficult and often painful rebirths in all the various translations? Is there really nothing we can learn from the different linguistic and cultural versions of the book, from the ingenious solutions or, often, embarrassing failures of its translators and the fatal misinterpretations as well as heuristic insights these translations once generated?

Let us take just one example, the Serbo-Croatian translation of *Das Kapital*. It was accomplished at the beginning of the 1930s in jail by a team of imprisoned communists, led by a Jewish painter and art critic sentenced to twenty years for membership of the illegal Communist Party. His main assistant in the common work on the translation was a young member of the terrorist organization 'Red Justice', sentenced for his participation in the assassination of the minister of the interior. Some ten years later the translators, or at least those of them who survived

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26. In the first hundred years of its existence the book was translated into forty-three languages. See 'Der Weg des "Kapitals" – 220 Ausgaben in 43 Sprachen', in *Karl Marx. Das Kapital 1867–1967*, Special Issue 2, Frankfurt am Main: Verlag Marxistische Blätter, 1967, pp. 86–8.

the local white terror, Stalin's purges and the Spanish Civil War, were in the Bosnian mountains, commanding a partisan army with whom they soon won the war – to make use of their Marx translations in living social praxis: in failed collectivization and successful industrialization; in the name of Stalin and the Comintern, as well as against them; to suppress bourgeois culture but also to promote modern art and architecture; to build a welfare society based on workers' self-management and at the same time to reintroduce a market economy and integrate it into the financial and political institutions of the emerging transnational capitalism; to arm the people and to promote world peace; to tame national movements as well as to support anticolonial struggles.

This story together with many similar ones, hiding a huge historical experience once generated by various translations of Marx's writings, seems to have sunk today into the new vernacular darkness.<sup>27</sup> While it is true that life without Marx, as it has emerged after 1989, has in fact brought back his writings to his readers, it has at the same time deprived them of a wide variety of lives that Marx's writings had once found in the multitude of their translations across the world. At the end, one seems to be left with a single option: to support the international community of Marxist scholars in their search for a perfect English translation of Marx and Engels's works. This, too, is a consequence of the historical turn of 1989.

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27. The fact that work on new translations of *Das Kapital* in other languages has continued – or rather resumed – does not contradict this diagnosis. However philologically improved and historically updated, they share the fate of their languages and the cultures of their respective societies being inexorably swallowed by an even more widespread vernacular darkness. There was recently (2013) a new – the third – translation of *Das Kapital* published in Slovenian, a language spoken by fewer than 2 million people. Yet, at the same time, what is known worldwide as the 'Slovenian School' of philosophy and cultural theory, including Marxism, does not imply the use of the Slovenian language. The works of its authors are exclusively written in English. And, as far as they refer to Marx, they necessarily rely on English translations of his writings.

### **The free and equal individual: a transitional monodrama**

What actually happened in 1989? It seems that there is today almost no disagreement about it: a democratic revolution that, following the ideals of the greatest emancipatory events of world history, liberated East European masses from the yoke of communist totalitarianism. In short, it was all about freedom. After 1989 people who had been previously subjected to various forms of repression, above all by an alienated one-party state and its ideology, were finally free – to speak out in the public sphere, to form political parties and choose their representatives in free elections, to exercise their religious beliefs, to pursue their economic interests or to move wherever they want to. If we are to believe Berman, after 1989 even Karl Marx went through a double liberation: a life freed from Marx has recovered Marx freed for the intellectuals of the world.

There are, however, other interpretations of this historical event, told in the languages and histories that have meanwhile descended into an ever-deepening vernacular oblivion, some of which especially highlight the role the intellectuals played in this event. Looking retrospectively at how the so-called democratic revolution in the former communist East actually unfolded, we may broadly differentiate three stages in which the historical change was brought about.<sup>28</sup>

The first democratic breakthrough was achieved on the level of what in orthodox Marxism was called the superstructure. The awakening democratic forces, or, to use a typical and until recently widely used metaphor of Western propaganda, ‘the freedom-loving people’, successfully occupied the sphere of consciousness. In this struggle, fought mostly in the field of culture, intellectuals assumed the leading role. It was their ideas

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<sup>28</sup>. Rastko Močnik, *Spisi o suvremenom kapitalizmu [Essays on Contemporary Capitalism]*, trans. Srećko Pulig, Zagreb: Arkzin 2010, p. 263.



and values that won hegemony over civil society in opposition to and often in open confrontation with the official ideology of the one-party state. However, without having first secured the dominant position in the sphere of civil society, the democratic forces would never have been able to carry on the struggle to the second stage, the seizure of political power, which is generally mistaken for the event itself. Indeed, the dramatic pictures of the popular uprising, of crowds tearing down the Berlin Wall, jingling keys on Wenceslas Square in Prague or storming the Central Committee building in Bucharest, evoked memories of the genuine revolutions of the past that once changed the world's history. Spectacular or not, this was, nevertheless, the moment when the democratic forces, still inspired and often led by prominent intellectuals, appropriated the state and occupied the political sphere of their societies. And while the whole world was still celebrating the final victory of freedom, the new political elite turned the state into its political instrument and immediately used it to change property and production relations. This was the third and final stage of the historical turn of 1989 – the restoration of capitalism.

This third phase, which had in fact the historical form of the primitive accumulation of capital – concretely the privatization of the means of production – implied and was facilitated by a massive use of violence, both structural and open. This is generally excluded from the grand narrative of the democratic revolution; not only because it reveals the ugly side of the glorious historical event. There is one more reason why this story remains untold and why in 1989 and its aftermath everybody was talking about democracy yet hardly anyone mentioned capitalism.

At stake is an ideological construct that has totalized the whole event: the abstract figure of the so-called free and equal individual. It originally belonged to the political sphere of bourgeois, capitalist society, yet in the former system of actually

existing socialism this figure was banned from the political life of the state. Nevertheless, it reappeared in a place where it essentially does not belong as such, in the sphere of civil society. Recalling the young Marx's critique of the limits of bourgeois political emancipation, inspired by Hegel and epitomized in the concept of the bourgeois *Homo duplex*, one might say that in the struggle for freedom under the conditions of the one-party system the abstract political figure of *citoyen* moved over to the realm of its non-political doppelgänger, the *bourgeois*. Here, on the stage of civil society, behind the backs of the party-state, the abstract political figure of *citoyen* performed a sort of monodrama, disguised in the costume of a living flesh-and-blood person. It was best personified in the image of an anti-communist dissident heroically fighting for human rights. Finally, when in 1989 the masses in Wenceslas Square chanted to Václav Havel, one of the most prominent of all the Eastern bloc dissidents: *Havel na hrad* – 'Havel to the Castle', which was traditionally the seat of state power – the drama was over. In the figure of a recovered bourgeois *Homo duplex* political freedom was finally re-established. Havel, now a statesman, went to the Castle, while Havel, a playwright, a husband, a fan of Velvet Underground, stayed in downtown Prague, among his fellow citizens in the theatres, beer gardens and intellectual salons of the city. Neither, it seemed, had anything to do with the restoration of capitalism. One talked of a 'transition to democracy' instead.

But the historical monodrama of the free and equal individual's victorious struggle against communist dictatorship has produced yet another ideological effect. It has made us forget the *immanent* opposition to the communist regimes in Eastern Europe. At stake is a left critique of what its proponents mostly called 'Stalinism'. Regardless of whether they challenged the dogmas of official Marxism-Leninism or clashed with the party over the repressive practice of their implementation, they never

crossed the floor to the other side. The left critics of historical communism were never anti-communists. Rather, they remained at all times within the horizon opened up by the emancipatory promise of Marx's critique of capitalism, sharing its highlights, shortcomings and contradictions, and taking active part in the theoretical disputes and dramatic political conflicts that accompanied the communist movement from its very beginning – for which they often paid dearly. Nevertheless, their critique was truly immanent in the sense that it appeared, time and again, at all levels of the system and all stages of its development without having ever established a unified frontline against the communist cause as such. This also applied to the bourgeois concept of political freedom, or more concretely to individual freedoms and rights. Consistently committed to the progressive legacy of the bourgeois revolutions, the left critics of state socialism defended them often as vehemently as the anti-communist opposition. This was especially the case when it came to freedom of expression, in whose defence the left frequently called in the support of Marx himself, particularly his early writings on the freedom of the press.

In one of these texts the young Marx speaks of freedom through the metaphor of the solar system: 'each of its worlds, while turning on its own axis, revolves only around the central sun of freedom'.<sup>29</sup> Following this metaphor, we might say that the left critics of the communist regimes in Eastern Europe were well aware of where the light of political freedom historically comes from – from the figure of the free and equal individual born in the bourgeois revolution – but they never turned

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29. 'die Zentralsonne der Freiheit'; in Karl Marx, 'Die Verhandlungen des 6. Rheinischen Landtags rheinischen Landtags. Erster Artikel. Debatten über Pressfreiheit und Publikation der Landständischen Verhandlungen', in Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Werke*, vol. 1, Berlin/GDR: Dietz Verlag, 1978, pp. 69–70. Translated as 'Proceedings of the Sixth Rhine Province Assembly. First Article. Debates on Freedom of the Press and Publication of the Proceedings of the Assembly of the Estates', in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 1, Lawrence & Wishart, e-book, pp. 173–4.

themselves into followers of the sun cult. Rather, they focused on the solar system of freedom as a whole. In fact, many of the left critics of Marxist orthodoxy and its repressive praxis still read Marx in German, which is why they knew nothing of what we call today 'civil society'. Instead, they discussed and dealt with a different concept, the one that Marx borrowed from Hegel and that reads in the German original *bürgerliche Gesellschaft*, which the better English translations call 'bourgeois society'.<sup>30</sup> This is what is actually meant by Marx's solar system of freedom and its various worlds each turning on its own particular axis of freedom: freedom of trade, of property, of conscience, of the press, and so on. Together they inform this historically new sphere of society that emerged with capitalism and the bourgeois class, a sphere where individuals are torn apart by competing private interests and class inequalities that are generated by the relations of production; divided by their isolated family lives and the different roles they play; separated by their various religious beliefs and the various civil associations they form, and so on. While all these worlds revolve around the abstract figure of the free individual, there are no equal individuals and there is no unity among them within the system itself. However, this is possible in another sphere, that of the state. Here was another figure at home, a purely political being, both free and equal to all others, yet existing only as a mere abstraction totally alienated from the real life of bourgeois society.

A historical sublation of this alienation, whose economic roots Marx thoroughly analysed in *Capital* – and not a recovery of bourgeois political freedoms – was the real challenge for the Marxist left. It never turned its back on the solar system of bourgeois freedom but rather insisted on the expansion of political emancipation into the worlds revolving around its

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30. Though often it is rather translated as 'civil society', as in the above-mentioned text.

centre, above all into the world of production relations.<sup>31</sup> The left critics of state socialism wanted each of these worlds to emanate the same light as the sun itself. In other words, they wanted both abstract figures of the bourgeois political system – *citoyen* and *bourgeois* – to collapse into a free and equal individual of flesh and blood who, liberated equally from exploitation in the sphere of production and from the alienated state, takes responsibility in working collectives as much as it makes decisions in public affairs – in short, who is present throughout the whole sphere of what was once called bourgeois society. This, however, turned out to be just another leftist utopia. Yet the right seems to have been more successful in a similar effort.

### **Human, all too human**

As is well known, the historical erosion and final breakdown of the communist regimes in Eastern Europe coincided with the neoliberal transformation of modern capitalism. In this process the abstract figure of the free individual seems also to have played a significant role. As Rastko Močnik argues, the crucial step in the epochal breakthrough made by neoliberalism was precisely ‘exporting’ this figure from the political sphere of the state, where it originally belonged, into the very core of civil society.<sup>32</sup> This, however, has not been done, as dreamt of and tried by the communist left, to expand political freedom and equality into the entire realm of bourgeois society, including, *nota bene*, the sphere of production, but rather to impose the relations of capitalist domination upon a space of social life that was traditionally of no interest to the classical bourgeois state. This is why it was spared from its direct control and domination:

31. This was precisely the case with the Yugoslav self-management project.

32. Here I follow the arguments developed by Rastko Močnik in the essay ‘Utopizam s onu stranu utopizma’ [‘Utopianism Beyond Utopianism’], in *Spisi o suvremenom kapitalizmu*, pp. 260–84.

the space of different lifestyles, world-views, religious beliefs, uses of leisure time, fashion, status, family relations, and so on. It is in this way that the entire sphere of civil society became the ideological apparatus of the capitalist state. This is one of the crucial facts that, as Močnik writes, determines the contemporary epoch: 'Relations deriving from the rule of capital invade a sphere which, according to the ideal model of capitalism, should be "free from" i.e. "indifferent to" it.'<sup>33</sup>

However, the problem is that such an ideal model has never been realized in historical praxis. On the one hand, so-called pre-capitalist or non-capitalist forms of production and exploitation have never been an element foreign to the capitalist mode of production, but rather its functional component, which capitalism incorporates and exploits for the production of value. This is especially true in the case of the accumulation of capital, which Rosa Luxemburg explicitly defines as 'a kind of metabolism between capitalist economy and those pre-capitalist methods of production'.<sup>34</sup> On the other hand, and closely connected to this, the relations of exploitation in capitalism cannot be established and reproduced exclusively through economic means. That is to say, the capitalist mode of production structurally relies on the support of ideological apparatuses, such as the legal system and its institutions like ownership rights, or, as mentioned before, the legal figure of the free and equal individual. Using Althusser's parlance, Močnik sums it up in the thesis that, in capitalism, the ideological dominant never fully coincides with the economic determinant.

This also applies to the commodity form. While it clearly differentiates the capitalist mode of production from previous ones, it appears in historical reality never as the sole form but

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33. *Ibid.*, p. 265.

34. Rosa Luxemburg, *The Accumulation of Capital*, trans. Agnes Schwarzschild, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 2003, p. 416.

merely as a dominant one – that is, always intertwined with other pre- or non-capitalist modes of production. In fact, Marx and Engels believed in the progressive role of the capitalist mode of production, a capitalism that will erase all previous forms of individual and social life, best expressed in the famous lines from the *Communist Manifesto*:

All fixed, fast-frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and men at last are forced to face ... the real conditions of their lives and their relations with their fellow men.<sup>35</sup>

This vision has been proved wrong. In fact, individuals in capitalism can never face the reality in which they live, and social relations in which they are involved, in their immediacy. It is the fetishistic character of commodity production that prevents this from happening, or, more precisely, makes these individuals experience their mutual relations as relations between things. At stake is the mystery of the commodity form that Marx reveals in the closing section of *Capital's* first chapter on the commodity: the fact that the commodity reflects the social characteristics of human labour as objective characteristics of the products of labour – as properties of these things – or, in Marx's own words, 'a definite social relation between men, that assumes, in their eyes, the fantastic form of a relation between things'.<sup>36</sup>

The problem is, however, that this fetishistic relation – that is, the reification of social relations in the commodity form – although predominant in capitalism, has never been able to totalize the entire heterogeneous field of historical praxis.<sup>37</sup>

35. I take this *Manifesto* quote from Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts into Air*, p. 21. The translation is more accurate, since Berman himself slightly altered the standard translation made by Samuel Moore in 1888.

36. Karl Marx, *Capital, Volume 1*, in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 35, New York: International Publishers, 1996, p. 83.

37. At least, no more than the class structure of the capitalist mode of production

Thereby it is not just a matter of other pre- or non-capitalist modes of production and the different forms of social relations they imply, but also of the already mentioned displacement of the political fiction of the abstract individual into the originally non-political spheres; that is, the circumstance that under the conditions of neoliberal transformation the abstract figure of a free and equal individual turns into an ideological apparatus of the capitalist state.

Močnik explains it in terms of a certain reversal of Marx's formula of commodity fetishism, which, instead of resulting in reification (that is, in the fetishism of things), leads to a sort of humanization of the reified social order with its hierarchies and power relations as they are institutionalized in legal systems. Rewriting Marx, he argues that 'the social relation of subordination and domination assumes, in the eyes of those involved, the fantastic form of a relation between free and equal individuals.'<sup>38</sup>

This results in a sort of retro-effect. The social relations of contemporary capitalism are perceived, as in pre-capitalist social formations, as relations of personal dependence, subordination and domination; the social causes of these relations appear masked in the phantasies of personal values, personal excellence or deficiency, personal merits or faults, and so on. Social tensions that necessarily arise from these same relations are ultimately experienced as interpersonal conflicts. In short, Močnik writes, 'The class struggle assumes in the eyes of those involved the fantastic form of personal intrigues.'<sup>39</sup> The more these individuals perceive their social position in terms of their personal biography, or the success or failure of their 'career',

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– that is, the class struggle as its historical essence – has been able to produce the effect of social totality. At stake is, of course, Marx's concept of the proletariat as the class of all classes that, in its mere existence, immediately expresses the truth of every class society, and that, in subverting itself in the proletarian revolution, sublates class society as such. See Močnik, *Spisi o suvremenom*, pp. 266–7.

38. *Ibid.*, p. 272.

39. *Ibid.*



and experience their relations to their fellow men and women through competition struggles and mutual exclusions, the more they blindly support and reproduce the structure of capitalist domination.

This is, according to Močnik, the mechanism behind the processes that we perceive today, in their existential immediacy, as a re-feudalization of social relations. It comes to light in the entire sphere of civil society, where any element of the individual lifeworld, from lifestyle or entertainment to family relations – elements that were originally of no interest to the state – now might turn into an ideological apparatus of the capitalist state, having huge impact on the political life of society. This is the case, for instance, with the phenomena of religious fundamentalism, ethnic nationalism and various excesses of identity politics. It shows itself also in the new governmental technologies: in the concept of corporate ethics, for instance, with its mythology of success and loyalty, omnipresent in today's corporations and large bureaucratic institutions in the fields of economy, finance and governance, where, as Močnik writes, a new *noblesse de robe*, the contemporary pendant to the famous second estate of the *Ancien Régime*, is in charge.<sup>40</sup>

### **In this picture of the future...**

The Middle Ages may have not been as dark as the common narrative suggests, but today's neoliberal capitalism is about to give them another chance. A quick glimpse of how the ongoing process of re-feudalization might change the world is given to us in a quotation taken from the introduction, written by Leon Trotsky in 1937, to Jack London's famous dystopian novel *The Iron Heel*:

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40. Ibid., p. 274.

In this picture of the future there remains not a trace of democracy and peaceful progress. Over the mass of the deprived rise the castes of labour aristocracy, of praetorian army, of an all-penetrating police, with the financial oligarchy at the top. In reading it one does not believe his own eyes: it is precisely the picture of fascism, of its economy, of its governmental technique, its political psychology!<sup>41</sup>

Is this the world in which posterity will commemorate the second centenary of Karl Marx's *Capital*? Read in its perfect, ultimately canonized English translation only by a tiny Marxist fraction of the digital Republic of Letters, a new global community of scholars dominated by an even thinner aristocracy, the knights and barons of academic excellence who claim the possession of knowledge, as well as the privileges and influence it brings, as their inherited right, and whose social status is based on the labour of a growing army of cognitive serfs? And where shall these scholars discuss Karl Marx's critique of capitalism? In the castles and forts of the future knowledge societies, the elite global universities, still accessible only to a transnational caste of 'the successful'; in these old baroque institutions, which have survived until today not because they have so smartly adapted to the ever-changing world of new communications technologies, global trade and finance, and rapid growth of neoliberal economies, but rather because the social relations in this new world increasingly resemble those fixed and fast-frozen social formations of the pre-revolutionary absolutism in which these institutions were born.<sup>42</sup> Finally, whom will they be addressing – the English-speaking global civil society of Anthony Giddens's 'clever people', who eagerly wait for the elite Marxist pundits to explain to them the mystery of commodity fetishism, the limits

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41. See [www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1937/xx/ironheel.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1937/xx/ironheel.htm); accessed March 2018.

42. Slovenian sociologist Jože Vogrinc, in Močnik, 'Utopizam s onu stranu utopizma', p. 273.

of capital accumulation, and why capitalism still cannot survive its contradictions?

There is an impression that the circle of those who still read and discuss Karl Marx's *Capital* is growing today, sometimes expanding into unexpected directions.<sup>43</sup> But this impression is deceptive. In fact, the overall social, historical and cultural ground on which this new interest in Marx occurs is increasingly narrowing. It is shrinking together with the light of the central sun of freedom, the figure of the free and equal individual that has been for the last two centuries illuminating the worlds revolving around it. The more the sun cools down, ever-larger parts of its system are swallowed by the new vernacular darkness. And while here, around the dimming light of an old, tired and ever-weaker freedom, *Capital* is well preserved, lovingly taken care of and seriously discussed and studied – as is right and proper for such a valuable and long-canonized piece of the world's cultural heritage – there in the darkness people don't give a damn about the book. Rather, they get buried again with their holy Bibles, Qurans or Torahs, with their reconsecrated national myths, or the masterpieces of post-truth trash. But if it is true that they have abandoned Marx, it is even more true that Marx has abandoned them. He no longer talks to them in their new vernaculars – the languages of the decaying post-translational societies that have become slow to catch up with the acceleration of technological development, global trade, finance and politics; that increasingly lose the capacity to convey the complexity of the contemporary world and to critically reflect upon its contradictions, dangers and chances; that have scrapped the ideas of enlightenment – which once raised them into the spheres of

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43. 'John Cassidy, the *New Yorker* magazine's financial correspondent, told us in 1997 that Wall Street itself was full of study groups going through Marx's writings, trying to grasp and synthesize many of the ideas that are central to his work: "globalization, inequality, political corruption, modernization, impoverishment, technological progress ... the enervating nature of modern existence..." He was "the next great thinker" on the Street.' Berman, 'Tearing Away the Veils'.

secular universality, natural and human sciences, culture, the rule of law and political freedoms – to replace them with the neo-medieval ‘values’ of servitude, ignorance and superstition; that have sunk into their own ahistorical temporalities, without any relation to a common history, the languages of those who were liberated from Marx only to be left behind by global capitalism. They have accumulated an enormous capacity for political mobilization, but it is today increasingly activated for the interests of domination and exploitation. It is from this ever broadening and deepening vernacular darkness that contemporary capitalism draws today the ideological energy for its ongoing reproduction. At stake is a metabolism between the neoliberal economy and neo-medieval social relations, a kind of ideological accumulation of the capitalism of our age.

Once, the greatest minds of the Late Middle Ages, like Dante, Galileo and Descartes abandoned Latin, the lingua franca of learned Europe, and turned to the vernaculars of hoi polloi, in which the modern era found its expression. Later, even freedom learned to speak in the languages of the sans-culottes and proletarians, in which also Marx’s *Capital* was written and in which it has subsequently been translated. Perhaps the time has come to do it once again – to recover freedom from the heart of the neo-vernacular darkness.

# 8

## **Capital's destinerrance as event and task**

GAYATRI CHAKRAVORTY SPIVAK

—Mute in the face of the killing fields in the world

Destinerrance, according to Derrida, dislodges 'tout ceux qui par quelques télécommunications prétendent se destiner' – translated as 'all that – by some telecommunication – claims to destine itself'.<sup>1</sup> It is both a wandering away and a regular description of how a text reaches its implied reader. This is destinerrance as event. This, in other words, is how it is. As I speak to you in what is known as the English language, it is common sense that I cannot know how each one of you is understanding this. The implied reader of *Capital, Volume I* was the working class as a collective. Even in its own day this was subject to *destinerrance* in the Northwest European context. The historical proof is the change after the Weimar Republic, and ultimately ourselves at this conference. Endlessly talking variations on the talk, while the target-walk is walked by research and development, R&D and affectively reconstituted finance

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1. Jacques Derrida, *La Carte Postale: de Socrate à Freud et au-delà*, Paris: Flammarion, 1980, p. 7; *The Post Card: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond*, trans. Alan Bass, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987, p. 3. In this paper I have accommodated three recipients: in London a meeting on 'The Philosophy and Politics of *Capital Today*', in Berlin a conference on 'The Art and Politics of Marxist Feminism', and in Yunnan, a conference on 'An Imperative to Re-imagine the Silk Road'.

capital, helped by a corporatized education. The best students are inside a hopelessly privatized dissertation machine where the idea of knowledge remains knowledge about knowledge. Activism is fundraising and otherwise occasional and national, taken to be the irreducible 'local'. This is where destinerrance as a task has to be situated.

I propose that today the implied reader of *Das Kapital* must be shifted to the citizen. This is, literally and practically, an absurd declaration. This proposal – that the implied reader of *Das Kapital* is the citizen – ignores many questions. In what language will the citizen read the text? From what niche will s/he read it? With what distant-learning subject-summarizing instructions will s/he follow the text? Will s/he have come to *Capital* because s/he has swallowed whole the global capitalist hoax of full connectivity? Without the desire or ability to confront these perilous questions today, 'global thought' has become an intellectually defunct but well-subsidized industry, thriving on a class-caste system of nationalities. Under these circumstances, beset by these questions we say that the proposal that the implied reader of *Das Kapital* must be shifted to the citizen is itself of course, and indefinitely, subject to destinerrance. The other face of the citizenship coin is migrancy. I cannot dwell here on the making useful of *Das Kapital* in this most crucial and diversified of contemporary global problems, migrancy.

W.E.B. Du Bois had already proposed the accommodation of the question of citizenship as besieged by the colour line into the question, by implication, of the implied readership of *Das Kapital*, in suggesting that the approximately 200,000 fugitive slaves joining the Union army at the time of the American Civil War shifted the war into a war against slavery, rather than a war for the appropriate functioning of capitalism, calling this movement a general strike. Nahum Chandler has suggested that such gestures transform our general constitution of the question of

being and knowing.<sup>2</sup> Read that book to modify your programme. And then read Hortense Spillers to meditate gender.<sup>3</sup>

The possibility of citizenship, as we grasp its immediate ideological sense and nuance, still carries a Platonic smell, lingering in the word 'city' – except, to my knowledge (which is limited here), in Chinese, Arabic and Turkish – to designate belonging to a nation-state. Most of us have stopped living in city states for rather a long time. And Plato's material is not even really about municipal government, but about varieties of political behaviour, which pre-comprehends a certain rearing – rather than training, for many of Plato's varieties of political behaviour spring out of mothers misleading sons.

We are still on the track of the implied reader of *Capital* today, globally, being the citizen of the nation-state. The conflict is between a largely hyperreal global governance and a citizenship committed to the Greek word 'democracy'. To the competitive tradition of international Islam – as it came to the place of the competition (Byzantium) – the Platonic does not dictate anything. The Greeks are too close, simply the first Europeanized millet, living outside the limits of the city. There is a theory that Istanbul simply means inside the city:

Istanbul is the modern name of Byzantium, a corruption of Constantinople – Constantinopolis – as most people think, but its more interesting derivation is the appellation, Istinpolin, a name the occupants of the city heard Byzantine Greeks use, which in reality was a Greek phrase (*eis tēn polin*) which meant 'in the city.'<sup>4</sup> Through

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2. Nahum Chandler, *X: The Problem of the Negro as a Problem for Thought*, New York: Fordham University Press, 2014. 'Official figures say that there were in all 186,017 Negro troops, of whom 123,156 were still in service, July 16, 1865; and that the losses during the war were 68,178. They took part in 198 battles and skirmishes. Without doubt, including servants, laborers and spies, between three and four hundred thousand Negroes helped as regular soldiers or laborers in winning the Civil War.' W.E.B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America*, New York: Atheneum, 1992, p. 112.

3. Dagmawi Woubshet, 'Introduction for Hortense Spillers', *Callaloo*, vol. 35, no. 4 (Fall 2012), pp. 925–8 gives the reader unacquainted with Spillers's work an idea of where to begin.

4. B.E., 'Istanbul', *Encyclopædia Britannica*, vol. 22, 15th edn, Chicago: Encyclopædia Britannica, 1995, p. 148.

a series of speech permutations over a span of centuries, this name became 'Istanbul', just a civic interiority, a Medina (also a city called 'city'), Medina forever Arabic, Istanbul forever inside from the Greek outsiders, as is India.<sup>5</sup>

And in Ottoman and modern Turkish, belonging to a geography is indicated by a word that can simply mean belonging to the patria – 'The notion of modern citizenship (*vatandaşlık*) gradually surfaced. Holding a property was the main parameter to have right to vote.<sup>6</sup> No metaphor of the *polis* in that word.

We must remember the importance of the existence of words that can be mobilized according to the politics/poetry of the moment. During the so-called Second Constitution, which supposedly brought modernity into Ottoman space, it is well known that Abdul Hamid,

as he modernised the physical and social infrastructure of the state – increasing the provision of railway, telegraph, postal and quarantine services, and building schools, barracks and government offices – ... tried to secure the support of his Muslim subjects by imbuing them with a spirit of loyalty to the Padishah (sultan) and caliph of all Muslims, the Ottoman equivalent of 'God, King and Country' invoked by his fellow-monarchs in Europe. Abdulhamid's prudent, modernising conservatism, supported by a large network of spies, kept the state more or less at peace and more or less intact for some twenty years. But it did so at the cost of stifling the initiative of the young Muslims whom his schools were training.<sup>7</sup>

In Voltaire's *Candide*, Ottoman Turkey is the preferred place of wise retirement, whereas Westphalia is a place of rape and murder. The history of the defeat of the Ottoman Empire in the face of European intervention and a superficial secularism received insufficient closure. The second call for allegiance to

5. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Readings*, Kolkata: Seagull, 2013, pp. 13–14. For Ottoman Greeks as an outside Europeanized millet, see also Resat Kasaba, ed., *The Cambridge History of Turkey*, New York: Cambridge University Press, Vol. 4, p. 160.

6. Indirect personal communication from Ali Yaycioglu, 10 April 2018.

7. *The Cambridge History of Turkey*, p. 151.



the Khalifa was launched by a section of Indian Muslims. It is possible to suggest that this call, manoeuvred, was at least partially responsible for the divided face of independent India. This is the context within which the new Khilafat – undoing the European nation-state map-making that accompanied the end of the Ottoman Empire – has to be placed. It is not the question of winning or losing by killing larger or smaller numbers of people. It is a question of a long-standing desire for an alternative internationality, gone bad, beyond repair, so that we cannot think of *Capital, Volume 1* – or Marxist feminism – wandering there, as event or task. That Osmanli desire never quite disappeared – not the least because the transition to modernity still kept the words to support that desire intact, and it can certainly be seen in the teens of the twenty-first century in the denial of democracy by Erdoğan. To designate belonging to a nation-state, the possibility of citizenship as we understand it, then, is no longer there in the history of the new Khilafat, although the Kurdish army – many women leading – keeps some possibility open in this year of 2018. Plato tabulates ways of being citizenly, motivated often by bad competitive motherly projection. In globality, those ways of being are accessible above a race/class/gender line, unevenly.

The constitution represented a novelty in a state with shallow traditions of the rule of law. Its chances of placing limitations on executive power were in any case slim. The real restraints on imperial power during the nineteenth century had come from the bureaucracy. And it was Abdulhamid II's succession quashing the independence of the Sublime Porte that led to the centralisation of power in the court and inadvertently paved the way for the revolutionary rise of a new and more dangerous rival for power – the military.<sup>8</sup>

We have not come to the end of that line. It is 'the military' in the abstract that is the element of what we are calling the new

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8. Ibid.

Khilafat. In the broadest possible sense, this military belongs to the various powerful nation-states that have complex relations among themselves – and also to the Khilafat – the hollow structure that pretends to be a nation-state, even if only in the minds of those who would rather find an alternative to the map they inherited. The geopolitics within which this changeful ‘military’ operates is also anchorless. The idea of citizenship, in Syria or the chimerical Khilafat, is also an empty form backed by no social contract or its possibility. Gendering is used in different ways within this structureless dynamics.

The possibility of citizenship as we understand it variously is no longer there in the history of the new Khilafat. Talking about Marx’s *Capital* on its 150th birthday, which keeps itself confined to niche marketing by intellectuals, substituting citizen for worker, will not be able to set this text free, so that the enormous problem of migration – Euro-fetishized into colonialism – can be seen today within that larger historical problem, the history of the various desires for the various Khilafats. Again, this is an immense topic that I will not be able to do justice to here. I mention it to get out of the prisonhouse of benevolent Europe. We are caught in a bureaucratically quantified series of egalitarian summits/festivals/conferences preaching to the choir, supported by corporate funding and corporate universities giving up on the responsibility of critical teaching; we are organic to the ideology that lets capitalist globalization survive. In response to this, a long-time ‘activist’ from Croatia suggested that we should get as much money as possible from the corporate sector – presumably to proliferate huge global conferences on resistance. Confusion between money and capital. Further, between capital and capitalism. Here one proceeds from Marx’s mockery in the *Grundrisse* of those who think socialism can make good use of capital to his later take in *Capital*, where he establishes the centrifugal figure of labour as the pivotal questioning point of

his critique, and implies the use of consensual capital for social justice. We can follow the line through the chapter in *Capital, Volume 1* on so-called primitive accumulation to the chapter in *Volume 3* where this intervention with capital effaces the difference between all modes of production. Many committed readers of Marx feel that *Volume 3* is both continuous with and transgressive of *Capital, Volumes 1 and 2*.

One of the most famous 'transgressive' passages in *Capital, Volume 3* is the invocation of the realm of freedom. It reflects Marx's robust unexamined humanism. Marx's efforts to undo this as he composes a phenomenology of capital is the major subject of his own (perhaps perceived) task of *setting Hegel destinerrant*.

An important way station is the discovery of a *Zwieschlächtigkeit* or centrifugality in labour-power, the judicious use of which by the agent of production, namely the collectivity of workers (as citizens?), would bring about, presumably, the kind of structure of governance that would support the realm of freedom described in our transgressive passage. This calls for an understanding of a *Zwieschlächtigkeit*, a centrifugality between private self-interest and public responsibility in the social, that Marx's occasional class-based shrewdness surmised, but never theorized. Indeed the *Zwieschlächtigkeit* between the *Geist* as the philosophical over against *Bewusstsein* as private, or even 'philosopherly', remained vaguely related to ideology as the truth/false consciousness opposition. Does this matter in the practical art of politics? Hegel made it clear that the phenomenology went forward not with *Bewusstsein* but with *Geist*, although the emergence of the former was instrumental in the emergence of the latter. He repeatedly pointed at the overturning contrast between the individual consciousness (falsely self-conscious of itself as agent) and the *Allgemein*, the proper acting space for *Geist*. Consciousness lodged in the *Allgemein* makes sublation or *Aufhebung* possible through *Rede* or general speech.

Lacan calls Hegel metonymic of psychoanalysis. In the obsessively over-repeated warnings not to confuse *Bewusstsein's* self-confidence with the structural development of truth in *Geist*, it is possible to see the imaginary/symbolic play of the distancing between interpretation and its principle being staged. This provides the empty space, which, in his humanist language, Marx can call the realm of freedom. This is the transgressive moment that we can occupy, we ourselves, to introduce the incalculable, the supplement always considered dangerous by mechanical Marxists. Imaginative training for the ungeneralizable singular, persistent preparation for the ethical reflex. The absence of which, in general education, brought the first set of revolutions to heel. The passage invites careful reading.

Marx, interested only in the economic sphere at that point, compliments capital, in this well-known passage:

It is one of the civilizing [*zivilisatorisch*] sides of capital that it extorts this surplus labour in a manner and in conditions that are more advantageous to the development of productive powers, of social relations and to the creation of elements for a higher renewal than was the case under the earlier forms of slavery; serfdom, etc.<sup>9</sup>

It is important that he is not speaking of capitalism here. In this passage Marx is looking forward to the socialist use of capital. I'm thinking especially of phrases such as *gesellschaftliche Verhältnisse*, where the adjective can almost be socialist, and the noun is the more philosophical *Verhältnis*, suggesting a philosophically correct structural position, rather than the more colloquial *Beziehung*, which means relationship. And of *eine höhere Neubildung* we can say that it is close to the Hegelian *Aufhebung*, or sublation.

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9. Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Volume 3*, trans. David Fernbach, New York: Penguin, 1981, p. 958; translation modified. *Capital* is hereafter cited in the main text as C, with volume and page numbers following.

This is what *capital* does. And the *capitalist* disappears from the passage. This is where our globally diversified effort can teach and practise Marxism by persistently dehumanizing greed as the *primum mobile*, the dangerous supplement, one-on-one yet collective, destinerrance.

In the next movement of this rich paragraph, Marx once again generalizes, bringing all modes of production together, bringing *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* together, a contrast supported in Morgan's anthropology, Marx's main source. (In Morgan, the evolutionary theory goes from the Iroquois, a tribe he joined by invitation, to industrial society, of which he is critical. He was a senator and a railroad worker. Marx and Engels valued the diversity of his experience. The dialectical understanding of social formations was introduced by Ferdinand Tönnies. It is not surprising that he found in Karl Marx one of the authorities for this analysis.<sup>10</sup>)

Here is the loss of the proper name of modes of production as a subjunctive goal. In the original German it is a list of conditions that would make socialism possible. Marx points at capital's rationalizing capability. Exchangeability begins in nature. Before capital, nature ruled the human like a blind power, and socialized capital – associated producers – controls this originary exchangeability – *Stoffwechsel*, usually 'metabolism', translates literally into 'exchange of material' – with nature, communally, in a rational way. Here is the passage:

Freedom, in this sphere, can consist only in this, that socialized man, the associated producers, govern their metabolism with nature in a rational way, bringing it under their communal [*gemeinschaftlich*] control instead of being in bondage to it [*beherrscht zu werden*] as a blind power... But this always remains a realm of necessity. Beyond it begins the development of human powers as an

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10. Lewis H. Morgan, *Ancient Society*, London: Macmillan, 1877; Ferdinand Tönnies, *Community and Civil Society*, ed. Jose Harris, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.

end in itself, the true realm of freedom, though it can only flourish with this realm of necessity as its basis. (C3, pp. 958–9)

Shades of the master–slave dialectic are clear here. In the good realm of necessity after the emergence of capital, nature is not a blind master but something rationally controlled. (The section located between *Geist* and the master–slave dialectic is Reason.) For the master–slave dialectic to function consciousness, *Bewusstsein*, had had to emerge in Hegel, after voiding the place of *sinnliche Gewissheit*, sense certainty, and then itself being de-classified in preference to a spatio-structural intuition of *Geist*.<sup>11</sup> In the various *Capitals*, I am suggesting, Marx does not go there and thus he opens a space for destinerrance as task, not only for social justice, but planetary justice – making the rational control of exchange with nature more than merely rational. In this passage, for example, Marx suggests that in the entire world all modes of production together are the realm of necessity which supports human development for its own sake. In the passage quoted above, Marx is considering freedom within the realm of necessity, *in diesem Gebiet*. The real realm of freedom is beyond social engineering.

But we are getting ahead of ourselves. Let us continue reading. Here is the passage restricted to the realm of necessity, describing social engineering to build a basis for the realm of freedom. First, Marx takes the small peasant, the least likely candidate, as proof of the illusion that capitalism is the norm. Then he shows us how easy it is to disprove this illusion by painting that effortless picture of a socialist state. ‘Because a form of production that does not correspond to the capitalist mode of production, the self-employed small peasant can be subsumed under its forms of revenue’, and up to a certain point this is not incorrect. ‘The illusion that capitalist structural relationships are

11. G.W.F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. Terry Pinkard, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018, pp. 60–108, 132–252.

the natural structural relationships of any mode of production is further reinforced.' Again, in the USA, in New York City, small business might as well be complete communism. 'If, however, one reduces wages to their general basis', writes Marx,

that is that portion of the product of his labour which goes into the worker's own individual consumption, if one frees this share from its capitalist limit and expands it to the scale of consumption that is allowed, on the one hand, by the existing social productivity, that is the social productive power of his own labour as effectively social, and on the other hand claimed by the full development of individuality. If one further reduces surplus labour and surplus product to the degree claimed by the given conditions of production, on the one hand to form an insurance and reserve fund, on the other hand for the constant expansion of reproduction, in the degree determined by social need. If finally, one includes in both one, the necessary labour, and two, the surplus labour, the amount of labour that those capable of work must always perform for those members of society not yet capable or no longer capable of working. That is, if one strips both wages and surplus value of their specifically capitalist character, nothing of these forms remains then, but simply those general grounds of the forms that are common, *gemeinschaftlich*, to all social, *gesellschaftlich*, modes of production. (C3, pp. 1015-16; translation modified)

Unfortunately, this can without destination translate into the kind of globalization hoax that is perpetrated because everybody forgets the theft of surplus value. Capital is only socially productive. And we buy it.

Hal Draper has suggested that the early Marx understood dictatorship in terms of left democracy.<sup>12</sup> I have not checked his meticulous documentation. It does seem, however, that if Marx came to distrust the state because of the potentially globalizing power of capital, against which only an International would suffice, it is the inhabiting contradiction within democracy (and therefore within gendered/classed citizenship in Britain,

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12. Hal Draper, *Karl Marx's Theory of Revolution*, Volume 2: *The Politics of Social Classes*, New York: Monthly Review Press, 1978.

his chosen refuge – as within every so-called democracy) that he ignored in ignoring the conflict within the use of the word ‘social’. The contradiction within democracy is a contradiction between liberty (ipseity as autonomy) and equality (alterity as others who do not resemble me). The conflict within the word ‘social’ is between quantified labour-power, on the one hand, and the collectivity of agents who will use the abstract average labour-power to generate a surplus that would be used as described in the transgressive passage above, to make *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* come together, on the other. The latter requires citizenly behaviour, as in Plato. It is that preparation that Marx leaves aside, and Gramsci recognizes as ‘gnoseological’.<sup>13</sup>

The point was, of course, to generate a *Zwieschlächtigkeit* within the ‘social’, precisely between something like the ‘public’ (quantified labour) and something like the ‘private’ (desire for social justice), to revise Hegel’s achieved justice and to open it to permanent revolution. Marx could not think it through in theory. Marx’s change in 1844, when at 26 he opened Hegel and the *Wealth of Nations*, from national economy to political economy, from nation-state to an international perspective – because capital was international – is well-known. He was preparing to write the phenomenology of capital without focusing only on *Geist*.

Yet, Moishe Postone, recently dead, said in his last interview, that when Marx moved to Britain he became a Victorian.<sup>14</sup> It is also true that in the important Postface to the second edition of *Capital, Volume 1* Marx wrote that because Britain was the best example of advanced capitalism, it was the appropriate place from which to produce a critique – in the classical German philosophical sense – of capital as such; whereas anything

13. See Gayatri C. Spivak, ‘Global Marx?’, in Robert Garnett et al., eds, *Economics, Knowledge, and Class: Marxism without Guarantees*, London: Routledge, 2017, p. 268.

14. Moishe Postone, interview by Anej Korsika, Chicago, 2011, <https://anejkorsika.wordpress.com/2015/02/26/interview-with-moishe-postone-critique-and-dogmatism>.



produced at that point in Germany would be a mishmash (CI, pp. 95–6). Marxism has not recovered from this ongoing focus on the nation-state despite its declared interest in the international or the global. Because of this unacknowledged yet necessary focus on the nation-state (the globe is not a world), the destinerrant subject of Marxism today is the citizen in the robust sense of the word, resistant to unexamined nationalism.

The European Union, a collection of debtor states and creditor states, with Germany as an uneasy head, should not be mistaken for a necessary German preoccupation with the ‘local’. As Xavier Sala-i-Martin, co-inventor of the global competitiveness index, repeats when he speaks to the ministries of finance in Rwanda and/or in Canada – although he is advising both ministries to find new places for economic growth – he is not saying the same thing.<sup>15</sup> We on the left need to remember that the ‘local’ of the German state is not the same as the ‘local’ of the huge war camps where women are stored willy-nilly today, subject to the rape culture and bribe culture most of the world takes as normal. To remember that is ‘the art’ of politics – because it requires imagination. We cannot congratulate ourselves on local victories, state-based – whatever the state – and think of it as the only model of Marxist feminism.

Marxist feminism or feminist Marxism aspires to achieve socio-political, economic and juridico-legal equality for women; not a mean feat. If, however, we accept that gendering precedes even our becoming-proper to ourselves and provides the first semiotic for creating a social formation, we can consider the possibility that feminism must persistently interrupt Marxism, supplementing the neglected *Zwieschlächtigkeit* of the social into the labyrinthine and open-ended pathways of sexuality. Because this bold move is neglected, it is still possible, at the end of Moishe

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15. Private conversation.

Postone's interview, to produce a recommended reading list for Marxism consisting of four white men. To replace Postone's criticism of the Victorian Marx, we must consider Marx's final exchange with a woman, Vera Zasulich, where, after many anguished drafts, Marx introduces the final response, which basically says, in response to Zasulich's question, 'How do we establish capitalism-based Marxism in peasant-commune-based Asian Russia?', 'I don't know. You must work it out yourself.' Too much at that point for the European imagination.<sup>16</sup>

It is in this context – the context of any possible 'art and politics' of a Europe-based Marxist-feminism – that we have to consider Lenin's establishment of the Comintern in 1919. In George Padmore's invaluable words: when 'the expected revolution in Western European countries – Germany, Austria, Hungary, Poland – failed to materialize', Lenin turned not only towards 'the illiterate workers and uncultured mujiks of Czarist Russia ... [but also towards] the even more backward workers and peasants of feudal China', and also of course the progressive bourgeoisie of the colonies.<sup>17</sup> If we take Padmore's idealistic words seriously, we will have to confront the ungeneralizable question of subaltern sex-gender and its relationship to citizenship – a destinerrance even more absurd than the general question of citizenship itself. Work here must be language-based and textural; earning the right to be global and structural. Frigga Haug's theory of European 'memory-work' is an interesting idea here, though necessarily general.<sup>18</sup> If we take the realistic fact of the brief mustering of forces of the anti-colonial 'progressive bourgeoisie' of the various contemporary colonies, we are looking at a completely separate, more class-continuous scenario.<sup>19</sup> In the

16. Karl Marx to Vera Zasulich, 8 March 1881, in Teodor Shanin, ed., *Late Marx and the Russian Road*, New York: Monthly Review Press, 1983, pp. 99–126.

17. George Padmore, *Pan-Africanism or Communism?*, London: D. Dobson, 1956, p. 293.

18. Frigga Haug, *Beyond Female Masochism: Memory-Work and Politics*, London: Verso, 1992.

19. This passage from Jawaharlal Nehru's *Discovery of India*, written in Ahmedabad

context of Britain and Germany, we must also not forget that the Comintern was dismissed because, in 1943, Stalin needed to keep alive the alliance with the UK and the USA.

And indeed Rosa Luxemburg's words to Lenin, not in the nationalism debate, but from prison in 1918 – that he should not ignore the peasant communal nature of larger Russia – must also be heard again and remembered.<sup>20</sup> In the second meeting of the Comintern, the Bengali communist M.N. Roy gave the important generalization: for Europe, industrial capitalism; for the rest of the world, agricultural capitalism. Lenin and Bukharin loved this. Mao strategically had to continue to speak about the proletarian revolution. The next year, Lenin is dead. Stalin hates M.N. Roy, who removes himself to establish the Communist Party in Mexico. If Marxist feminism ignores this history, it is not going to be able to establish anything like a generalizable movement.

Du Bois demonstrates to us that racism is a universally available ideology to take care of the self-determination of capital.<sup>21</sup> My interest in the destinerrance of *Capital, Volume 1* as related to the art and politics of Marxist feminism is not identity-based racism or reverse racism, but rather the global nature of capital, which now must repeatedly spectralize the rural in order to keep focused on areas of advanced capitalism as producing the best local endeavours in the name of a networked society. To refuse anything but local successes is not to be Marxist. I shall therefore close with some words I spoke in China on 15 April 2018, which attempted to inhabit a generalized Chinese subject, rather than the US or Indian nationalist subject, too competitive with China

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prison between 1942 and 1945, gives us a sense of the importance of Lenin's rethinking: 'In Central Asia, even today four legendary figures of great conquerors are remembered – Sikander (Alexander), Sultan Mahmud, Chenghiz Khan and Timur. To these four must be added now a fifth, another type of person, not a warrior, but a conqueror in a different realm, round whose name legend has already gathered – Lenin' (New Delhi: Penguin, 2004, p. 247).

20. Rosa Luxemburg, *The Russian Revolution, and Leninism or Marxism?*, trans. Bertram Wolfe, Ann Arbor MI: University of Michigan Press, 1961, p. 45.

21. This is the general argument of Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America*.

to do so. Can a strictly European version of Marxist feminism imagine such a broad base, rather than taking a concern with the underclass migrant and a fetishization of colonialism as the last word?

### **Imperatives to reimagine the Silk Road<sup>22</sup>**

The Silk Road is one of the long-standing cultural mindsets that have been animated by today's possibility of a networked world, to reimagine the new connectivity. An imperative is an urgent command, generally brought about by external circumstances; here the change to a global situation. Strictly speaking, we know that there was no one Silk Road. Indeed, the phrase was coined by a German historian.<sup>23</sup> But today it is a great unifying idea, invoking in the imagination one of the greatest unifying trade enterprises undertaken by what we now call China. My connection to this part of the world is based in the fact that my city of birth, Calcutta, and the ancient city of Kunming have been trading partners since the fourteenth century CE, and that too can be situated within this imagined great narrative.

One of the magnificences attached to the original Silk Road enterprise was the great difficulty of actual physical movement through sometimes seemingly insurmountable terrain. Today the imperative to reimagine that unifying idea comes from the fact that those physical difficulties have been dwarfed through the scientific achievements of global travel as well as networking and accessibility promoted by digitality, yet complicated

22. Cf. Gayatri C. Spivak, 'Imperative to Re-imagine the Planet', in *An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization*, Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2013, pp. 335–50. This is the text of a talk to Stiftung Dialogik in Zurich, twenty-one years ago, as they were restructuring to move from rescuing Jews who had managed to escape from Hitler's concentration camps during the Second World War, to providing asylum for refugees from Rwanda, Somalia, Turkey and the like.

23. 'Seidenstraße or 'silk road' was coined by Ferdinand von Richthofen, as cited in Tamara Chin, 'The Invention of the Silk Road, 1877', *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 40. no. 1 (2013), pp. 194–219. I am grateful to Charles Armstrong for providing this reference.

by geopolitical violence. These generate the new imperative to reimagine the Silk Road.

Nearly 200 years ago, Karl Marx wrote these unforgettable words about the proletarian revolution, which China fulfilled in the last century:

Bourgeois revolutions, such as those of the eighteenth century, storm quickly from success to success. They outdo each other in dramatic effects; men and things seem set in sparkling diamonds and each day's spirit is ecstatic. But they are short-lived; they soon reach their apogee, and society has to undergo a long period of regret until it has learned to assimilate soberly the results of its period of storm and stress. Proletarian revolutions, however, such as those of the nineteenth century, constantly engage in self-criticism, and in repeated interruptions of their own course. They return to what has apparently already been accomplished in order to begin the task again; with merciless thoroughness they mock the inadequate, weak and wretched aspects of their first attempts; they seem to throw their opponent to the ground only to see him draw new strength from the earth and rise again before them, more colossal than ever; they shrink back again and again before the indeterminate immensity of their own goals, until the situation is created in which any retreat is impossible, and the conditions themselves cry out: *Hic Rhodus, hic salta!* Here is the rose, dance here!<sup>24</sup>

What Marx describes here is an imperative brought about by external circumstances. In globality, we confront such an imperative today for the unifying imaginary of the Silk Road, brought about by digital and geopolitical circumstances, in order to start questioning what, in the name of development, the nature of that diversified and multifocal response to the imperatives would be. This can be a long-standing project, undertaken with the spirit of globality, with a deep language-learning that can bring the world's wealth of languages in line with Yunnan's wealth of languages. A new and already established destination for the

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24. Karl Marx, 'The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte', trans. Ben Fowkes, in *Surveys from Exile*, London: Allen Lane, 1973, p. 150.

Silk Road today is Continental Africa. This is where the word 'imagination' is important. As we know, just before the passage that I have quoted from Marx, Marx says that the contemporary revolution will take its contents from the poetry of the future:

The social revolution of the nineteenth century can only create its poetry from the future, not from the past. It cannot begin its own work until it has sloughed off all its superstitious regard for the past. Earlier revolutions have needed world-historical reminiscences to deaden their awareness of their own content. In order to arrive at its own content the revolution of the nineteenth century must let the dead bury their dead.<sup>25</sup>

Marx could only imagine the imperatives of a globality where capital would move with *Gedankenschnelle* – the speed of thought – if and when it could or would be able to. In the twenty-first century, capital moves much faster than mere thought can. And in extensive globality old ideas have come to command development. Hence an imperative to reimagine the past, rather than bury it, has emerged. I am asking European Marxist feminists to reimagine the Comintern beyond its European decolonizing past, with a memory-working feminism worked in. The poetry of the future. Marx uses the broad Greek-origin word *poesie* rather than the common German word *Dichtung*, much used by intellectuals of his time, to relate it to truth. Marx had a doctorate in Greek philosophy and he knew his Aristotle, although he also acknowledged that Aristotle could not have produced the labour theory of value. But Aristotle did suggest that *poesie* was a better method of knowing history and prefiguring the future than historiography itself. I believe Marx's use of the Greek word *poesie*, rather than the common German word *Dichtung*, directs us to that possibility. Poetry as a method, not merely a metaphor.

As China's great allegorical Confucian tradition knows well, poetry is related to the very possibility of imaginative

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25. Marx, 'The Eighteenth Brumaire', p. 149.

interpretation. The imagination is neither rational nor irrational and holds rationality in its embrace. It keeps openings intact beyond the mistakes that we make with mere reasonableness, because we are human. In this sense, we who work in literature, philosophy and the qualitative social sciences come forward with the message that offers collaborative rather than corrective assistance to what mere knowledge management, as provided by the new digital, can perform. The digital is as powerful and dangerous as a wild horse. The imagination slow-trains the rider, to think the old in a new way so that the new can also be thought in an old way without baseless golden-ageism, a mere glorification rather than a reimagining of the past. Here I speak as an Asian. I speak for both the great traditions of the Chinese and the Indian. We have joined together in the past and I hope, intellectually, we can again. (How one throws off this tradition-talk into its supplementation by sex-gender is an immense problem that brings us to the brink of absurdity.<sup>26</sup>)

In the same spirit, I would say in Germany that it is necessary, indeed an imperative today, to imagine Marxist feminism as it begins constantly to disguise itself or to provide a disguise for global colonialism. These are strong words, deeply felt, in order to consider the role of ourselves as we move from the European state to globality in the name of a critique of the Anthropocene, echoing Haug's conviction: employability is not the criterion of dignity. I am strongly supportive of Frigga Haug's four-point programme that in the age of automation, rather than create more jobs, existing jobs should be for fewer hours and equal pay. When I'm in China, speaking in halting Chinese to feminist workers in various areas, I am always disheartened to see that the workers

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26. Dai Jinhua's *Cinema and Desire: Feminist Marxism and Cultural Politics in the Work of Dai Jinhua* (ed. Jing Wang and Tani E. Barlow, London: Verso, 2002) is a site from which we can begin to scope this out. A problem commensurate with our academic capacities: how do we read a film such as *Woman, Demon, Human* (《人鬼情, *Rén guǐ qíng?* 'literally [what is the] bond [between] person [and] ghost?') My thanks to Zhang Zhen for helping with the translation.

are social scientists and that the work is often narrowly focused on income production. This is where Frigga and I are at one.<sup>27</sup> Employability is not the only criterion that moves Marxist feminism forward. As I have suggested, class-continuous moves into the global South are not going to correct anything if we want to go back to 1844, rather than 1818, and decide to move from national economy to political economy, rather than merely remember a nativity. Ultimately, that would be a declaration of family values, than which there is nothing less Marxist feminist.

*Capital, Volume 1*, destinerrant as event, generalizes, for example, London, Berlin, Kunming. The task is to generalize the subaltern into citizenship, not only of these cities, but of all named nation-states; and regulate capital to alter the global generalities. Gender, part larger than the whole, thrusts the event of destinerrance into the incalculable, making the revolution of mind and world a permanent task.

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27. Frigga Haug, 'The 'Four-in-One Perspective': A Manifesto for a More Just Life', *Socialism and Democracy*, vol. 23, no. 1 (2009), pp. 119–23. But I cannot agree with the goal of 'capacity building' that Haug shares with international civil society. My work for the last thirty years, mostly unsuccessful, has been in the training of the poorest children and the richest adults in the intuitions of the contradiction driving democracy, for they will vote: the contradiction between liberty (ipseity as autonomy) and equality (alterity as others who do not resemble me). That leads to the citizen-as-subject of *Capital, Volume 1* that has been the absurd task of destinerrance in this text.



# 9

## Subjectivation and war: Marx and Foucault

ÉRIC ALLIEZ & MAURIZIO LAZZARATO

Today, we reread *Capital* under the theoretical conjuncture of the most heretical readings. These send us back and forth between the second and third volumes of *Capital*, the *Grundrisse* and the missing chapter that only became available in the 1960s. More importantly, we reread *Capital* after the ‘impossible revolution of 1968’ (impossible in its largely Marxist–Leninist grammar) and the neoliberal counter-revolution that followed, under the command of finance capital, in the context of a financial globalization that intensifies all the processes of capitalist reproduction in such a way as to demote what was once dubbed ‘late capitalism’ to the ‘later stages’ of an ‘early capitalism’.<sup>1</sup> All of us may also experience *Capital, Volume 1* as a ‘strange’ and ‘unique’ *locus solus*: namely, as the unique and exclusive trajectory that *reterritorializes* the reader of *Capital, Volume 1* from the dialectical exposition of the autotelic machinery of capital to the ‘matter of fact’ that capitalism is a concept in so far as it is a historical complex on a world scale – capitalism as a world concept. Consequently, ‘that process must have had a beginning of some kind’<sup>2</sup> – otherwise

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1. Peter Osborne, *How to Read Marx*, London: Granta Books, 2005, p. 2.

2. Karl Marx, *Capital, Volume 1*, trans. Ben Fowkes, Introduction by Ernest Mandel, Harmondsworth and New York: Penguin Books, 1990, ch. 23, p. 714.

money could not have turned into capital in the 'never-ending circle' of an illusory liberal soft power supported by the intertwined concepts of 'exchange' and 'contract', as the basis of the market qua equivalence, equality, equilibrium theory, just price, and so on. If the critique of political economy shows precisely that 'capital is the golden chain the wage labourer has already forged for himself',<sup>3</sup> the particular course taken by the analysis has to force the 'tearing apart of the object under investigation', and 'this', Marx insists, 'corresponds also to the *spirit* of capitalist production'.<sup>4</sup>

### **Force (*Gewalt*) is itself an economic power**

In this very same spirit it is asserted that capitalist production not only produces commodity and surplus-value, but also continuously reproduces the social relations of production themselves. The worker is not only reproduced, but is produced in the first place, in a stage of real subsumption, including the 'reserve army', this population 'whose misery is in inverse ratio to the amount of torture it has to undergo in the form of labour'.<sup>5</sup> And the latter increases with the potential energy of wealth and precipitates the 'absolute general law of capitalist accumulation', according to which 'the situation of the worker, be his payment high or low, must grow worse'.<sup>6</sup> Well, then, if progress produces genuine misery and wealth destitution, if machinery is the capitalist answer to the strike and better wages, and increases absolute and relative exploitation, extensive and intensive domination, the whole of *Capital, Volume 1* on the commodity-form and its 'flirtation with Hegel' is somehow historically and violently drawn into the last part on 'primitive accumulation',

3. *Ibid.*, ch. 25, p. 769.

4. *Ibid.*, ch. 13, p. 443.

5. *Ibid.*, ch. 25, p. 798.

6. *Ibid.*, ch. 25, p. 799.

concluding with 'The Modern Theory of Colonization'. To cut a long story short, one hundred years after Rosa Luxemburg's reading of *Capital*, we have paid the price of learning that, in the centre as well as on the periphery, 'so-called' primitive accumulation is in fact the continued creation of capitalism itself: behind the extreme mathematical sophistication of finance and financial globalization, there is always the 'brood of bankocrats, financiers, *rentiers*, brokers, stock-jobbers, etc.'<sup>7</sup> described by Marx in the most 'primitive' context as the truth of the world market.

It is not by chance, then, that Marx finally presents here, in what Jameson still insists on regarding as a 'kind of musical coda' ('History as Coda'),<sup>8</sup> the properly capitalist systematic combination, one that includes 'the colonies, the national debt [associated with the international credit system and joint-stock companies], the modern tax system, and the system of protection [of home-grown industries]'. 'These methods', Marx writes, 'depend in part on brute force, for instance the colonial system. But they all employ the power of the state, the concentrated and organized force of society.... Force [*Gewalt*] is itself an economic power.'<sup>9</sup> Nor was it by chance that Foucault would find in the proceedings of *Capital, Volume 1* the very principle of a double colonization: the internal colonization of Europe and the external colonization of America mutually reinforcing, and together defining, the world economy, with the 'sort of boomerang effect colonial practice can have on the juridico-political structures of the West'.<sup>10</sup> Yet we also understand that if the genealogy of the techniques of discipline and biopower is to be traced back to the 'launch' of primitive accumulation, then by the same token the history, functioning and successive biopolitical transformations

7. *Ibid.*, ch. 31, p. 920.

8. Fredric Jameson, *Representing Capital: A Commentary on Volume One*, London: Verso, 2011, ch. 3, 'History as Coda', p. 74.

9. Marx, *Capital, Volume 1*, ch. 31, pp. 915–16.

10. Michel Foucault, 'Society Must Be Defended': *Lectures at the Collège de France 1975–1976*, New York: Picador, 1997, Lecture of 4 February 1976, p. 103.

of these power apparatuses (*dispositifs*) cannot be separated from war in all of its forms – military and colonial wars, wars of class(es), race(s) and sex(es) – because, in large part, it was war that created them. In the different modalities they take on from the end of the seventeenth century, these apparatuses (*dispositifs*) are the privileged way to express the continuation of war by other means and to make war appear as an analyser of power relationships.

This logic is at play in Foucault's 1976 lecture series, when he does not reverse Clausewitz's formula (as it is all too often said) but postulates on the contrary that it was Clausewitz who reversed 'a principle that existed long before ... a sort of thesis that had been in circulation since the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and which was both diffuse and specific'.<sup>11</sup> If this led Foucault to study the appearance and diffusion of a discourse that for the first time conceived of politics as the continuation of war, in doing so he would end up mobilizing *against Marx* something that Marx had located at the centre of his *Communist Manifesto*: namely, the idea of an irreconcilable antagonism – that is, class struggle – as a 'more or less veiled civil war, raging within existing society', an antagonism Marx would then reintroduce at the heart of *Capital, Volume 1*, chapter 10, in the factory, 'between [formally] equal rights [as regards the dimensions of the working day], force [*Gewalt*] decides'.<sup>12</sup> If this confirms that 'Force [*Gewalt*] is itself an economic power', since it determines the division between surplus-value and wages as 'independent variables which set limits to one another'<sup>13</sup> (this is the very place, by the way, where Negri 'learned to do politics'<sup>14</sup>), and if it shows that, with its semantic extension in German that

11. Ibid., Lecture of 21 January 1976, p. 48.

12. Marx, *Capital, Volume 1*, ch. 10, p. 344.

13. Karl Marx, *Capital: Volume 3*, trans. David Fernbach, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991, Part V, ch. 22, p. 486.

14. Antonio Negri, 'Why Marx?' (2013), in *Marx and Foucault*, trans. Ed Emery, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2017, p. 21.

articulates 'violence' and 'power' with the commission of violence by an institution (*potestas*) which is invariably the state, then *Gewalt* may circulate in a rather uncontrollable way between politics and economics. *Gewalt* is above all the element of a dialectical negativity that expresses, ultimately, the reversal of domination into revolution, and the acceleration of the course of history, as history of the universal emancipation undertaken by the 'only revolutionary class'. The industrial proletariat is in itself the historical subject of the tendency towards the socialization of production and the constitution of a 'collective worker', a tendency considered as necessary as a *Naturprozess*, in *Capital, Volume 1*, chapter 32, 'The Historical Tendency of Capitalist Accumulation'.<sup>15</sup>

Now, we'll all agree on this point: there is no natural war. That's why we can only confirm (to better divert) this observation from Balibar: Marxism could not construct a *concept* of war, but it is certainly a *problem*,<sup>16</sup> since the point of departure for rethinking the entire history of capitalism – even in its most contemporary forms – is the close, constitutive, ontological relationship between the most deterritorialized form of capital (money) and the most deterritorialized form of sovereignty (war). And it is precisely because the reversibility of war and economy is at the very basis of capitalism, that 'wars' (and not *the* war, which is always the perspective of the state) are the foundation of internal and external order, the organizing principle of society under capitalism. Conversely, wars – not only wars of class, but also military, civil, sex and race wars – are integrated so constitutively in its analysis that *Das Kapital* ought to be rewritten on the basis of its last section in order to account for their dynamic in its most real functioning. At all of the major turning points

15. Marx, *Capital, Volume 1*, ch. 32, p. 929: 'capitalist production begets, with the inexorability of a natural process, its own negation'.

16. Etienne Balibar, 'Marxism and War', *Radical Philosophy* 160 (March/April 2010), p. 9, [www.radicalphilosophyarchive.com/article/marxism-and-war](http://www.radicalphilosophyarchive.com/article/marxism-and-war).

in capitalism, we do not find Schumpeter's 'creative destruction', carried out by entrepreneurial innovation, but always the enterprise of a mutant multiplicity of military and civil wars.

With financial capitalism, what imposes itself is the contemporaneity of 'primitive accumulation', of dispossession and exploitation acting under cover of 'trade' (*le doux commerce*<sup>17</sup>) with the most modern productive/destructive processes. The true war machine of capital is financialization, of which 'industrial' capital is only a component, now completely restructured and subordinate to the demands of (so-called) 'fictive' capital. Leaving aside the political question raised by the hegemony of financial capital, in other words, the impossibility of distinguishing between accumulation by exploitation and 'accumulation by dispossession' (David Harvey) is equivalent to the inability to acknowledge the constitutive war of/in the economy.<sup>18</sup>

It is definitively no longer a question of a reversal of the formula 'politics as the continuation of war by other means', but of an interweaving of war in politics and politics in war adopted by the movements of capital in its permanent confrontations with a whole variety of struggles. Politics is no longer, as in Clausewitz, the politics of the state, but a politics of the financialized economy interwoven with the multiplicity of wars that drive and hold together the active war of destruction with wars of class, race, sex and wars of subjectivity that provide the global 'environment' of all the others. Are we not living in the time of the subjectivation of civil wars?

In the next section, we show that the irreducibility of social warfare to a class struggle that dialectically pacifies it is a condition for the analysis of political power as war. We will develop this movement within and against Foucault: governmentality does not replace war. Governmentality organizes, governs and

17. I.e. 'the peaceful commerce' in the English translation of ch. 31.

18. David Harvey, *The New Imperialism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003, p. 164.

controls the reversibility of wars and power. This is a reversibility that lends new significance to the difference in nature Foucault proposes between relationships of power (disciplinary, security and governmentality relationships) and strategic confrontations.<sup>19</sup>

### **To really escape from Hegel...**

In the first volume of *Capital*, Marx defines capital as a contradictory social relation. Contradiction implies that antagonism is included in or immanent to the relation, but also designates the effacing of the 'difference' between the two terms of the relation in the labour of the negative and the teleology which, in Marxism, follows from it. The working class and capital are opposed in virtue of their very relation, their belonging to a common world that is in dispute within this relation. The working class and capital are installed on the same plane and constrained to assume a common measure, labour, which is the basis of their struggle as they dispute its identity or non-identity: living labour versus dead labour. The principle that operates this antagonistic homogenization is that of the dialectic. Hence the contradiction is haunted by the annulling of the language of alterity in the negation of the negation that brings forth history as the internal product of a dynamic – a contradictory dynamic – that tends toward its own reversal. Is not capital *in itself* a 'self-destructive contradiction'?<sup>20</sup>

Here we appropriate, however schematically, an insight that brings us face to face with *la pensée 68* as a whole, for it is in '68 that the non-dialectical character of the conflict, the 'unsublatable' nature of its differences, is affirmed as the crucible of all

19. Cf. Michel Foucault, 'The Subject and Power' (1982), in *Essential Works of Foucault (1954–1984)*, vol. 3, ed. James D. Faubion, London: Penguin Books, 2002, p. 346.

20. Marx, *Capital, Volume 1*, ch. 19, p. 676.

new historical forms/forces. At the beginning of the 1970s, indeed, it was the break with dialectics that led to the emergence of that which it had forestalled: the question of war and of the strategic confrontation between adversaries.

*It is 1971.* In a volume published in homage to Jean Hyppolite, Michel Foucault turns to Nietzsche in his first attempt to thematize war as a cipher for the social relation. In order to do so, he defines domination not as a relation but, on the contrary, as a 'non-relation', a distribution of forces – the dominant and the dominated – staged in a 'non-place [*non-lieu*]'.<sup>21</sup> The 'non-relation' is a pure distance, a gulf between forces. The fact that domination is at once a non-relation and a 'drama ... staged in [a] non-place' means that the dominant and the dominated do not belong to the same world, to the same space. It is dialectics that reduces the absolute difference and heterogeneity of domination to a conflict between homogeneous instances. Now, what Foucault will call later 'governmentality' is precisely the device by which a non-relation as relation between adversaries is reduced to a 'pacified' antagonism between governor and governed, through the imposition 'of rules, obligations, and rights'. The universe of rules permits the game of domination to be continually replayed: the rule is not the manifestation of a shared world, but a 'meticulously repeated ... violence'.<sup>22</sup>

Extending this critique of the dialectic of capital (a critique of the dialectical conception of capital by the very concept of capitalism in its concrete abstraction), we can see that capital is not only an exploitative social relation, but also, and indissolubly, a strategic relation of war. Capital acts on both planes at once, shifting from one to the other. Contrary to what Foucault

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21. Michel Foucault, 'Nietzsche, Genealogy, History' (1971), in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow, London: Penguin Books, 1984, p. 85.

22. *Ibid.*



tells us, the establishing of governmentality does not do away with war, but continues it by other means. Any definition of conflict and of the process of subjectivation it implies must set out from the strategic articulation of capital, which unfolds as both 'relation' *and* 'non-relation', as both governmentality *and* war.

War, or the strategy of confrontation between adversaries, can become a relation of power between governors and governed because relatively stable mechanisms (*dispositifs*, rules, laws) enable institutions to steer the behaviours of the governed with sufficient certainty and predictability. But, as Foucault argues in 'The Subject and Power', every power relationship between governors and governed is liable to give rise to new strategic confrontations, and thus to transform the governed into adversaries, setting in motion a potential reversal of the situation. This is what happened at the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s: the politico-military victory of the USA following the Second World War made it possible to establish new power relationships within which a new generation of conflicts would develop, setting the scene for new strategic confrontations: the strange revolution of 1968. We must therefore carefully distinguish the conflicts, freedoms and subjectivities implied by power relationships (governmentality) from those implied by strategic confrontations. The 'conflicts', 'subjectivities' and 'freedoms' are not the same in the two cases.

The power relationships between governors and governed imply 'freedom' for both terms of the relation. The vanquished can only be transformed into the governed if one recognizes in them a 'freedom', a possibility of 'resisting' (Foucault) or a possibility of 'flight' (Deleuze and Guattari), which in reality is incorporated into the governmental mode of functioning. Conflict, freedom and subjectivity within governmentality are defined by the limits of the 'within-against': the governed are

'free' either because they enjoy a fabricated freedom encouraged and incited by those in power (that of 'free labour', of the 'free consumer', the 'free voter'), or because they see themselves as 'free' in and for the war against liberal 'liberties'. The first is a conceded and negotiated freedom; the second is a hard-won freedom.

The capitalism of the New Deal and, in its wake, the Cold War created new freedoms ('freedom of labour, freedom of consumption, political freedom') above and beyond those of classical liberalism, in order to exit from the economic war (following the 1929 crash), from the political war with communism, and from the war between imperialisms. With the Cold War as a new technology of control of the world economy, these new freedoms would be generalized (in the countries of the North) thanks to the politico-military victory over the communist revolution. This also explains why most of the planet remained under the yoke of neocolonial policies carried out by those same countries that 'created new freedoms'. The transition to governmentality did not really take place in a (post)colonial situation. The colonizers and the colonized remained enemies; they never participated in the 'same world', even when the 'blacks dreamed of being white', as Fanon says. It is these 'details' that Foucault forgets when he analyses (neo)liberalism.<sup>23</sup> And the same goes for Tronti's operatism.

The conflicts proper to governmentality and its 'freedom' are not enough to define the autonomy and independence of political movements. They constitute necessary, but not sufficient, conditions, because autonomy and independence presuppose a rupture and a subjectivation, a 'subjective rupture' (*coupure subjective*) that will allow the 'governed' to exit from the framework of governmentality and its 'freedoms' which guarantee the smooth

23. See Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France 1978–1979*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008.

functioning of liberal-capitalist society. To exit governmentality means at once to produce a subjective 'mutation' and to enter the dynamics of the confrontation between adversaries, where another type of 'freedom' begins to emerge. Once the injunction to be 'governed', to be 'the governed', is lifted, what surges forth from the rupture is a freedom and a subjectivity that affirms itself as 'outside-and-against' capitalist freedoms. The 'non-relation' is no longer passively suffered, but acted and insisted upon by the dominated. The critical point is, as always, the passage from freedoms and subjectivations 'within-against' governmentality to freedoms 'outside-and-against' capitalism, those implied in strategic confrontations. In the passage between these two conflicts, between these two freedoms and these two subjectivations, it is the revolutionary rupture that is at work. It is here that the war machine, and an autonomous and independent subjectivity, is constituted – or fails to be constituted.

The movements of the 1960s fully assumed the rupture and discontinuity between these two modalities of conflict, subjectivity, and freedom. 1968 sounded the death knell for the Leninist machine and, more generally, for a way of understanding the subject and activism anchored in the Marxist tradition. The new movements were constituted upon entirely different temporalities than those of the classic workers' movement, involving other processes of subjectivation and other modes of organization. And here lies the importance of the feminist movement, which interrogates in unprecedented fashion the question of the subject, that of time, and that of the relation between the two – but without yet creating the coordinates of a new war machine.

In the early 1970s Carla Lonzi set out the rupture with the Leninist and, more generally, Marxist war machine very clearly, in a twofold manner. She declared that the subject is at once not given, since it is 'unexpected', and that the temporality of

the feminist movement is not that of the future, but that of the 'present'. With her concept of the 'unexpected subject' (*soggetto imprevisto*), Lonzi had in her sights the working class qua subjectivation expected, known and recognized in advance. For Marxism, in accordance with Hegel, the revolutionary process consists in the passage from the 'in itself' to the 'for itself', from unreflective immediacy to existence both subjective (consciousness) and objective (its real existence in the world). Instead, Lonzi writes in *Sputiamo su Hegel (Let's Spit on Hegel)*, 'Not being trapped within the master-slave dialectic, we ... introduce into the world the Unexpected Subject.'<sup>24</sup>

The Marxist revolution introduces a discontinuity with 'power', but maintains the continuity of the 'subject' of the revolution. The working class already expresses a productive cooperation that is in itself 'revolutionary', whose only failing is that it is exploited and limited by the power of capital. Once liberated from these constraints, it could realize all of the promise it harbours. The revolution is apprehended as a realization of possibilities that are already contained in production, work and cooperation. These possibilities are 'tendencies' that revolutionary acceleration will allow to be *realized*. But the movements of the 1960s had an entirely different experience, since they arrived after two world wars forming one *total* world war, when this illusion of revolutionary production (of production as revolutionary in itself), the illusion of the already-in-act 'worker' subject, and that of science and technics as progressive forces, had been belied by the identity of production and destruction, of labour and war, of science and nuclear death. Acceleration has passed and is *passed* – rendered *passé* – by total war, whose perspective capital adopts, with the 'real

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24. Carla Lonzi, 'Sputiamo su Hegel' (1970), in *Sputiamo su Hegel: La donna clitoridea e la donna vaginale e altri scritti*, Milan: Scritti di Rivolta Femminile, 1974; Edizione Economica, 2013, p. 47.

subsumption' of society and of its 'productive forces' at the price of an unlimited war. So much so that production, labour and subjectivity no longer harbour any image of the future, any promise of emancipation in the mirror of the revolution. They must be subjected to radical mutations. The process of the realization of (possible) tendencies remains, still, a realization of history subtended by a more or less veiled teleology. The reality of labour, of cooperation and of production trace and anticipate the future. And if the temporality of the revolution is that of the future, it is the future that is *past*.<sup>25</sup>

If, on the contrary, the subject is 'unexpected' (*imprévu*), its construction is carried out on the basis of the present and not that of a time to come. The future remains a promise which cannot be experienced, whereas the present is the temporality of rupture, the here and now which opens up the process of the active destruction of stereotypes of subjectivation – for Lonzi, in particular, 'feminine' subjectivity. 'Presente, non futuro', it reads in a manifesto of Rivolta Femminile.<sup>26</sup> The present is the moment of the emergence of an unknown, unexpected sensibility that bears within itself the potential for new forms of existence impossible to conceive before they actually come forth, which 'introduce discontinuity into our very being', as Foucault writes in 'Nietzsche, Genealogy, History'.<sup>27</sup> There is no teleology, but only the reality of struggles, of confrontations and strategies that determine the passage to being, in a 'processual creativity', as Guattari says.<sup>28</sup> In which case, putting 'politics before being', with Deleuze and Guattari,<sup>29</sup> would mean putting strategy before

25. See Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*, trans. Keith Tribe, Cambridge MA and London: MIT Press, 1985.

26. See *È Già Politica*, ed. Marta Lonzi, Anna Jaquinta, Carla Lonzi, Milan: Scritti di Rivolta Femminile, 1977. See also the very end of *Sputiamo su Hegel*, with its strong Benjaminian resonance: 'There are no goals, there is the present of our here and now. We are the world's dark past, we are giving shape to the present' (p. 48).

27. Foucault, 'Nietzsche, Genealogy, History', p. 88.

28. Félix Guattari, *Chaosmosis: An Ethico-Aesthetic Paradigm*, Bloomington-Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1995, p. 13.

29. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, New York: Continuum,

ontology. For this rupture with history, with the subject, with the promises (always yet to be realized) of labour, production, science and technology, does away with neither power relations nor war.

But after '68, the 'movement' – or movements – proved incapable of facing up to the total social war that they themselves had helped instigate. And, in its turn, capital, faced with the strange revolution of '68, would in the 1970s launch an equally strange world financial 'counter-revolution' that adapted the intensity of war and civil war to the force of what it was confronting on a global scale: a first alter-globalization movement placed under the sign of the political re-emergence of class, race, sex and subjectivity wars, which the 'working class' could no longer subordinate to its 'objective interests' or to its specific forms of organization (parties and unions). The subjectivities of the strange revolution of '68 revealed themselves incapable of thinking and organizing war machines that could hold together the break with both capitalism and socialism, and the confrontation with the strategic offensives and power relationships that capital was in the process of reconfiguring under the rubric of neoliberalism. Emancipation and autonomy must be affirmed politically and safeguarded against the initiative of an enemy that always acts on the twofold plane of relation (governor/governed) and non-relation (war). In short, the movements of '68 found themselves in an impasse which we are far from having escaped: when they directly confronted the war of capital, they adopted Marxist–Leninist modes of organization; and when they instead explored modes of subjectivation, bypassing the dialectical operation of contradiction, they abandoned the question of the construction of a new revolutionary war machine reconfigured for what Nietzsche called 'effective'

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2004: *'before Being there is politics'* (p. 203).

history (*wirkliche Historie*). The same weakness is to be found on the theoretical level.

Unlike Marxism, *la pensée 68* was able to grasp the new relation between time and subjectivity, which it thought in terms of the 'event'. But the ethico-aesthetic turn of subjective 'conversion' in Foucault, of the 'production of subjectivity' in Guattari, and of 'emancipation' in Rancière, were radically severed from the question of the 'political revolution' and the construction of an anti-capitalist war machine which, not having war as its object (according to Deleuze and Guattari's famous proposition exemplifying the conversion of the power of division into a power of connection), would be unable of thinking afresh and engaging with the question of strategic confrontations. Without the war against capital and a new thinking of antagonism, the relation to self, the production of subjectivity and emancipation become 'recuperable' by capitalism's industry of 'self-transformation', which ensures a ready supply of 'human capital'.

On the fiftieth anniversary of '68, we are still at the same impasse. Subjective mutation and political revolution, self-relation, production of subjectivity and self-transformation, on the one hand, and strategic confrontation, on the other hand, must be held together in a relation of forces that can then be reversed. The event as 'the reversal of a relationship of forces' – this was the post-Marxist definition of the 'event' proposed by Foucault in 1971.<sup>30</sup> For we are also celebrating the 150th anniversary of the publication of the first volume of *Capital* and its 'flirtation with Hegel' (as Marx put it). Let us conclude by recalling Foucault's 'diagnosis', in his inaugural lecture at the Collège de France, in the tutelary shadow of Hyppolite: 'To really escape from Hegel assumes an appreciation of exactly what it

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30. Michel Foucault, 'Nietzsche, Genealogy, History', p. 88.

costs to detach yourself from him.<sup>31</sup> This is something that, for our part, we have tried to think and to problematize in *Wars* [after Foucault] and *Capital* [after Marx, and after Deleuze and Guattari's never-renounced Marxism].<sup>32</sup>

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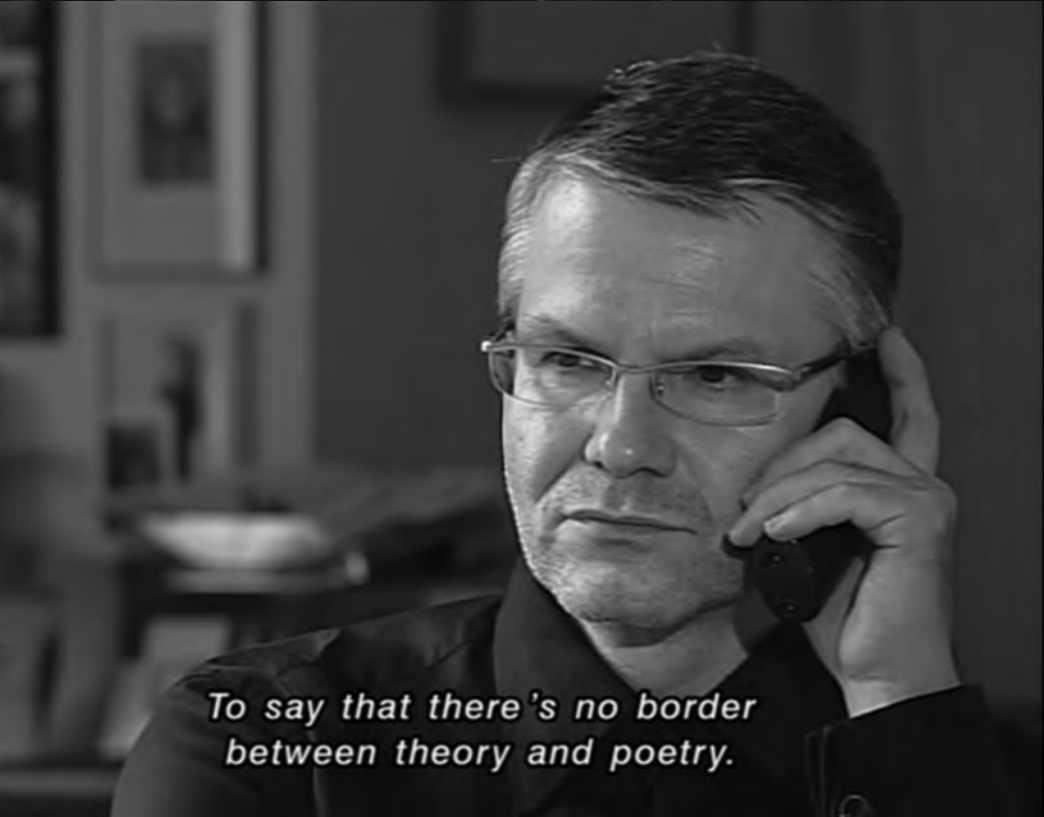
31. Michel Foucault, 'The Order of Discourse', trans. I. McLeod, in Robert Young, ed., *Untying the Text: A Post-Structuralist Reader*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981, p. 74.

32. Eric Alliez and Maurizio Lazzarato, *Wars and Capital*, Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2018.





But dramatists need that.



*To say that there's no border  
between theory and poetry.*

**POETICS OF  
*CAPITAL/CAPITAL***



# 10

## The poetics of *Capital*

KESTON SUTHERLAND

A year before the first English edition of *Capital* was published under his supervision in 1886, Engels issued a brief polemic against the pretensions of anyone reckless enough to think that this great work could be translated into English by a mere amateur man of letters. The target of the polemic is Henry Mayers Hyndman, identified in the essay by his pseudonym John Broadhouse. After reading the French translation of *Capital* in 1880, Hyndman had published in 1881 a short book, *England for All*, two chapters of which were so thoroughly plagiarized from Marx's work that they in effect represented piratical abridgements of it. Hyndman had ventured to translate Marx.<sup>1</sup> Engels's response, titled 'How Not to Translate Marx', is brutal and

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1. A note at the end of the 'Preface' of *England for All* reads: 'For the ideas and much of the matter contained in Chapters II and III, I am indebted to the work of a great thinker and original writer, which will, I trust, shortly be made accessible to the majority of my countrymen.' H.M. Hyndman, *England for All*, London: Gilbert & Rivington, 1881, p. vi. Marx was incensed by the plagiarism and by Hyndman's mealy-mouthed justification for not identifying him as the author of the critique that he had pilfered. Francis Wheen, in *Karl Marx* (London: Fourth Estate, 1999, p. 372), comments: 'Why could Hyndman not acknowledge *Capital* and its author by name? His lame explanation was that the English had "a horror of socialism" and a "dread of being taught by a foreigner".' For the history of this episode, see Chuschichi Tsuzuki, *H.M. Hyndman and British Socialism*, ed. Henry Pelling, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961, pp. 32–4, 41–4; see also Gareth Stedman Jones, *Karl Marx: Greatness and Illusion*, London: Allen Lane, 2016, p. 550.

unsparing in its assessment of Hyndman's bungled, conservative, devitalizing and mushily approximate prose:

Marx is one of the most vigorous and concise writers of the age. To render him adequately, a man must be a master, not only of German, but of English too. Mr. Broadhouse, however, though evidently a man of respectable journalistic accomplishments, commands but that limited range of English used by and for conventional literary respectability. Here he moves with ease; but this sort of English is not a language into which 'Das Kapital' can ever be translated. Powerful German requires powerful English to render it; the best resources of the language have to be drawn upon; new-coined German terms require the coining of corresponding new terms in English. But as soon as Mr. Broadhouse is faced by such a difficulty, not only his resources fail him, but also his courage. The slightest extension of his limited stock-in-trade, the slightest innovation upon the conventional English of everyday literature frightens him, and rather than risk such a heresy, he renders the difficult German word by a more or less indefinite term which does not grate upon his ear but obscures the meaning of the author; or, worse still, he translates it, as it recurs, by a whole series of different terms, forgetting that a technical term has to be rendered always by one and the same equivalent.<sup>2</sup>

The powerful language of *Capital* could only grate upon so delicate a device as Hyndman's ear, whose sensitivity to verbal dissonance and other kinds of loud noise justified recourse to a more mellifluous, essentially more commodious, idiom, where 'more or less indefinite' equivalents of Marx's words sound nicer than literal, definite equivalents. So it can be for the sake of harmony that in *England for All* Hyndman writes that 'Capital is the produce of past labour devoted to present production. Capital is in fact the saving of past labour, for the special purpose of increasing the future store.'<sup>3</sup> What do these very words do for the ear, what world do they signify, how delicate are they with

2. 'How Not to Translate Marx', in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 26, London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1990, p. 336.

3. Hyndman, *England for All*, p. 65.

the auditory canals that are the destination of their concepts? The process of the *devotion* of what is *saved* sounds notably less perforating to the Christian ear than Marx's emphatic, brutal, disfigurative description of the pumping out and sucking empty of what is dead. Capital, says Marx, is an *Auspumper*, literally a pumper-out, that performs the *Aussaugung* of the worker, literally the sucking out, or sucking hollow, of a 'stunted, short-lived and rapidly replaced human being'.<sup>4</sup> Not, then, the saving of what was devoted, but a hideous dredging into vacuousness. Hyndman might reasonably object that, after all, the idea is the same, that what matters is not the particular words or syntax selected to represent the categories, but only that the logic of categories be properly understood. After all, he too is in perfectly good faith in urging on his readers to fight capitalism. He may differ from Marx in his sincere belief that for 'every Englishman' the aim should be to bring about the 'coming mobilization, political and social, without troublous dangerous conflict'; but this difference over tactics can have no bearing on the fundamental logic of the critique of capital or the definition of its basic categories.<sup>5</sup> 'You, then,' writes the English more or less indefinite equivalent of a revolutionary, now addressing English workers directly, 'who produce the wealth in every country, consider where you stand; you, men who have seen your homes broken up, your health destroyed, and have beheld your wives and children fade away under the tyranny of capitalism, stop and think.'<sup>6</sup> The exhortation is a direct paraphrase of the single most furiously condemnatory and comprehensively disgusted passage in *Capital*,

4. Karl Marx, *Das Kapital*, MEGA, vol. 6, Berlin: Dietz, 1987, pp. 309, 245; Karl Marx, *Capital*, Volume 1, trans. Ben Fowkes, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990, p. 380. These explicitly horrific visions are toned down in the standard English translation by Ben Fowkes: *Auspumper* becomes the more abstract 'extractor' and *Aussaugung* becomes 'draining away', a process that might occur without any intent or violence. Marx, *Capital*, Volume 1, pp. 425, 348.

5. Hyndman to Marx, 25 February 1880, cited in Tsuzuki, *H.M. Hyndman and British Socialism*, pp. 33–4.

6. Hyndman, *England for All*, p. 63.

the great bombardment of a paragraph where Marx catalogues the disasters of capital for working people and says that the wives and children of male workers are ‘dragged beneath the wheels of the juggernaut’.<sup>7</sup> Marx assaults his reader with the image of beloved limbs ripped up and darling heads crushed flat. Hyndman softens the mental lighting so that these same beloved bodies instead more agreeably just ‘fade away’, ephemeral as an enchanted fairy in a forest dim by Keats. ‘Stop and think’, says Hyndman, and ‘take heed’. The workers who in Marx are crushed, sucked out, laid waste, desertified, elasticated, tortured and distorted into human specks, stumps and fractions, are by Hyndman regenerated in the language of literary respectability as lyric poets, ‘who now rejoice in the gleam of a transient prosperity, only to be cast into deeper despair on the next stagnation’.<sup>8</sup>

‘This sort of English is not a language into which “Das Kapital” can ever be translated’, writes Engels: not the particular sequence of images or the general climate of representation, merely – not only what might peremptorily be called its ‘aesthetics’ – but the critique itself, the logic of categories and all, cannot be made to exist in English unless its translator finds the ‘courage’ to ‘innovate upon the conventional English of everyday literature’. As for readers afflicted with a case of Hyndman’s ear, the point is precisely that these people should be hurt by the critique. Their comfort is the obscuring of the meaning of *Capital*, its subjectivation as anaesthetized logical thinking. Not just Marx’s verbal skill but the work of the critique itself is effectually obscured by the easy breathing of these readers, the safety of their ears from violence, and their every painless step through the logic of categories. The language in which Hyndman (in Engels’s phrase) ‘moves with ease’ is in effect the anti-poetic

7. Marx, *Capital, Volume 1*, p. 799.

8. Hyndman, *England for All*, p. 64.

preservation of that complacency and a barrier against the truth of *Capital*. Cured of its specific poetry, the truth of *Capital* is dissipated in anaesthetized logical thinking.

Engels could not really mean this if he did not think that *Capital* has a poetics, or if he thought that the poetics of *Capital* could safely be treated as nothing but the *excesses* of Marx's materialism, just a kind of getting carried away with figuration. In his 'Comments on James Mill', Marx describes the form of credit that the goodly rich man extends to the honest poor man who has given proof of his industriousness and is therefore worthy of philanthropic encouragement: 'This kind of credit belongs to the romantic, sentimental part of political economy, to its aberrations, excesses, *exceptions*, not to the rule.'<sup>9</sup> The poetics of *Capital* is not its 'sentimental part', but its *troublous* instigation; it is not excess to 'the rule' of the logic of categories and value forms to say that capital sucks the worker empty, but the resounding truth of that rule. The truth that Engels spells out in his polemic is that the poetics of *Capital* goes far deeper than whatever images, figurations or verbal decorations of thought anyone who is content with the 'limited range of English used by and for conventional literary respectability' might agree to call 'poetic'. *Capital* is poetic throughout and fundamentally. Its truth is not only logical and historical but at the same time and inexorably also poetic; and 'critique', in Marx's sense, is not, like so-called 'political economy', an essentially unruffled process of exposition only superficially studded with images and illustrations that do nothing but simply help make sense of the real work done with logical categories. Critique in Marx's sense is the opposite of Hyndman's 'moving with ease'. It is an obstructed movement; that is, both an unsettling and setting in turbulent and agitated motion not merely of fixed or stalled ideas but of the whole

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9. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 3, London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1975, p. 215.



experience of thinking and ultimately of the whole experience of being alive, a running up against and slamming into impassable contradictions and getting stuck in hateful corners of cognitively intractable paradox, and also a kind of moving by being obstructed, a working out of life in thought and in logic where the movement of the concept is identical to its paralysis, for the simple and infinitely incomprehensible reason that the world hasn't changed yet and we are still stuck in the capital-relation, where thinking by itself is intrinsic to paralysis.<sup>10</sup>

'Communism is for us not a *state of affairs* which is to established, an *ideal* to which reality will have to adjust itself', Marx and Engels wrote in *The German Ideology*. 'We call communism the *real* movement which abolishes the present state of things.' Critique by itself is not yet this '*real* movement'; neither is it the fake movement or going nowhere of 'speculative-idealistic, i.e. fantastic' philosophy and its 'theoretical bubble-blowing'; critique is the obstructed movement that is the logical sound of the present state of things not being abolished.<sup>11</sup> Capital itself, according to Marx, 'can only be grasped as a movement'. The poetics of *Capital* is the obstructed movement of thought that cannot by magic or fiat simply be realized into life, but must exert all its pressure of dissonance and every power of conception against the block of the present state of things, to grasp the catastrophically *unobstructed* movement of capital, the 'unceasing movement of profit-making'.<sup>12</sup>

Engels said that political economy is 'science' conceived and developed by men who '*could not afford* to see the truth'.<sup>13</sup> Truth

10. '[Beckett] feels, he said, "like someone on his knees, his head against a wall, more like a cliff, with someone saying "go on"'. Later he said, 'The wall will have to move a little, that's all.' 'Lawrence E. Harvey on Beckett, 1961-2', in *Beckett Remembering Remembering Beckett*, ed. James Knowlson and Elizabeth Knowlson, London: Bloomsbury, 2006, p. 137.

11. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 5, London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1976, pp. 49, 52, 56.

12. Karl Marx, *Capital, Volume 2*, trans. David Fernbach, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1992, p. 185; Marx, *Capital, Volume 1*, p. 254.

13. Frederick Engels, *Outlines of a Critique of Political Economy*, in *Marx and Engels*

in *Capital's* critique of political economy comes at a cost that is more than simply financial, and more than just a crisis of ethical conscience. The truth of *Capital* makes life harder to live. Reading the critique and grasping its truth and its necessity mean being turned against the world. It is a critique of reality that confirms in logic the feeling that reality is fundamentally inimical to life, and that gives massively pressurized substance to that feeling, not just by articulating it in the logic of categories, but by tangling up that logic with another logic, harder to read but nonetheless unmistakably present to anyone who was ever actually fucked up by reading the book. The logic of categories is everywhere tangled up with the logic of passion. I borrow this phrase from the French psychoanalyst André Green, who briefly describes it as the logic of 'oneness, duality, trinity, conjunctions, disjunctions, fusion, separations, etc.'<sup>14</sup> The manifest proximity of this logic and its only semi-categorical categories to the logic of Hegel and the concept is not merely coincidental, but a kind of constitutive blurring and wavering. Marx says in *Capital* that surplus-labour and necessary-labour cannot be distinguished during the working day because they *verschwimmen in einander*: literally, they blur into each other as objects of sight or colours do in perception when the eyes are swimming.<sup>15</sup> The two logics

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Collected Works, vol. 3, p. 436.

14. André Green, 'Psychoanalysis and Ordinary Modes of Thought', *On Private Madness*, London: Karnac, 2005, p. 28. Green has described the common project of psychoanalysis and Hegel's philosophy in 'Hegel and Freud: Elements for an Improbable Comparison', in *The Work of the Negative*, London: Free Association Books, 1999, 26–49.

15. 'Mehrarbeit und nothwendige Arbeit verschwimmen in einander.' *Das Kapital*, MEGA, vol. 6, p. 243. As ever with Marx's writing, it matters for our understanding not only of the style but of the substance of the argument where else in literature this phrase could be found and what particular associations Marx may have expected it would prompt in the ear of his reader. *Verschwimmen* would have been familiar to literate German readers as a choice item of poetic diction from the idiom of German Romantic poetry and prose. *Deutsches Wörterbuch von Jacob Grimm und Wilhelm Grimm* cites examples of usage from Friedrich Rückert, Jean Paul, Schiller and Goethe. Marx's satirical innuendo is that capital renders the brain incapable of distinguishing work done for oneself from work done for the capitalist in much the same way that the spiritual fatigue of the Romantic poet produces an obnubilation in the perceptual apparatus of that more refined labourer on the human heart. A fair English equivalent for *verschwimmen in einander* would be 'intermingle' or 'interfuse', words that bear the stamp of Wordsworth.

in *Capital* are 'intermingled' like this. The analysis of the value-forms blurs into visions of nightmarish voided destiny, in which the individual worker is 'nothing but' a perfectly inhuman abstraction, 'labour-power', 'for the whole of his life'. The analysis of the 'separation' of workers from each other that Marx says is intrinsic in the capitalist process of production blurs into an infernal fantasia of 'dot-like' human specks adrift in alien infinity. In the drafts of the *Grundrisse*, capital is experimentally described using a variety of predicates, including 'stored-up', 'past', 'objectified', 'materialized', 'accumulated' and 'defined' labour.<sup>16</sup> The free variation of predicates is the record of Marx's uncertainty regarding how to name not only this form of value but the whole fact of its domination, in the fullest sense: what associations should be clustered about it, how should it make anyone feel, to what end must it be named. Antonio Negri describes the *Grundrisse* as 'an essentially open work' and the time of its composition as 'a moment of total happiness' for Marx as a writer, when 'the categories are not flattened out, the imagination does not stagnate'.<sup>17</sup> *Capital* is the result of this speculative opening up and experimental free variation of categorical predicates, the critical terminus of the itinerant imagination. Henceforth there is only one predicate: capital is 'dead' labour once and for all. The logic of passion poetically crushes flat the categories whose convex and freely interchangeable character in the *Grundrisse* Negri calls 'happiness'. The pleasurable experimenting with a variety of ways of representing the problem ends here, with this dead end.

What might be called 'oneness' in the logic of passion is not the same as 'unity' in the *Science of Logic*, a work Hegel says he

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Fowkes mutes the specifically Romantic resonance with the more prosaic 'mingles together'. Marx, *Capital, Volume 1*, p. 346.

16. Karl Marx, *Grundrisse*, trans. Martin Nicolaus, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973, pp. 85, 86, 134, 143.

17. Antonio Negri, *Marx Beyond Marx: Lessons on the Grundrisse*, trans. Harry Cleaver, Michael Ryan and Maurizio Viano, ed. Jim Fleming, New York: Autonomedia, 1991, p. 12.

composed in the hope of keeping alive ‘the dispassionate calm of a knowledge dedicated to thought alone’. Hegel’s unity, ‘an *unrest* of simultaneous *incompatibles, a movement*’, is actual for thought: it is an experience of the thinking subject.<sup>18</sup> Oneness, however, is completely denied the worker in *Capital*. Oneness in the logic of passion is the future communing in the actually lived fulfilment of individual potentials that in the present state of things is not felt, not known and not enjoyed, and whose blocked intimation must nevertheless somehow be made to resound in the obstructed movement of critique towards what critique by itself categorically cannot reach. Marx’s word for this state of existence is *Trennung*, which Fowkes translates as ‘separation’. The worker is separated: from other workers, from the product of his labour, from his future development, ultimately from life itself. His only contact with other workers is at the point of exchange. Marx says that workers ‘do not come into social contact with each other until they exchange their products’, that they ‘exist for one another merely as representatives of commodities’, and that they are ‘related to each other in their social process of production in a purely atomistic way’.<sup>19</sup> How can any of this possibly be true, when in reality workers have always socialized outside of working hours as friends, lovers and enemies, and have formed innumerable groups and enjoyed innumerable activities together?

In his first published book, *The Difference Between Fichte’s and Schelling’s System of Philosophy*, Hegel writes: ‘totality at the highest pitch of living energy is only possible through its own re-establishment out of the deepest fission.’ The antithesis in the English here obscures Hegel’s explicit pairing of extremes: ‘in der höchsten Lebendigkeit ... aus der höchsten Trennung’ is not ‘highest’ and ‘deepest’ but, literally, ‘the highest or uttermost

18. G.W.F. Hegel, *The Science of Logic*, trans. and ed. George Di Giovanni, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015, pp. 22, 67.

19. *Capital, Volume 1*, pp. 165, 178–9, 187.

livingness' and 'the highest or uttermost separation'.<sup>20</sup> The extremes of livingness and separation really exist, for Hegel, but their reality cannot simply be noticed or assumed. The reality of these extremes must be conceived ardently, or else not really known at all. Marx makes a similar demand on the power of conception with his definition of *Trennung*, the extreme of separation, in *Capital*, where life in the form of 'labour-power' is boxed up in a set of logical restrictions that in effect amount to the transcendental impossibility of social contact between workers outside or beyond the transaction of exchange. Workers are the commodity 'labour-power' and like other commodities they are realized at the point of exchange. Whatever else they might also be or do is not expressible in forms of value and therefore has no meaning within 'the capital-relation' and might as well not exist.

Oneness in the logic of passion is the extreme of *Trennung* 'not merely contradicted, or held in the unrest of the movement of propositional incompatibility, but wiped out in the future. Only the complete destruction of wage-labour and capital could ever do this; right now, every blocked advance towards that end must be made to resound in concepts as the specific pain of cancelled intimation and separation going nowhere. Separation must be articulated in categories in such a way that it can only be conceived in the logic of passion as obscene impossibility and pain. You never touch another human being but you only ever intersect as labour-power at the instant of exchange; or, if you do touch, life at that moment is without meaning in the only logic that matters. Neither is this banishment from the touch of others reducible to a question of desire or of some other capacity of the subject that is strictly speaking disposable from

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20. G.W.F. Hegel, *The Difference Between Fichte's and Schelling's System of Philosophy*, trans. H.S. Harris and Walter Cerf, Albany NY: SUNY Press, 1977, p. 91; G.W.F. Hegel, *Werke*, 2, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1986, pp. 21-2.

the logic of the critique or supplementary to it. It is the tangling up and blurring of these ways of saying what you are, each one never fully resolvable without loss of truth into the logic of the other, that generates the extreme passion of the critique which is its poetics. 'Passion is the essential power of the human being energetically bent on its object.'<sup>21</sup>

Trying to grasp everything that *Capital* means for being alive is itself already a resistance to being crushed: cognitive, imaginative, poetic, fantastical, desiring, anxious resistance. It means being subject to new kinds of pain and new loud noises, and it means figuring out how to take that pain for the truth and the knowledge that it really is. The structure of domination that the logic of categories makes explicit really hurts. Making explicit in this case means making more intolerable, more unbearable, more absolute: things don't get easier once they are explained; they get paralysing. Adorno wrote that it is a condition of all truth to make suffering eloquent, and *Capital* too has been deeply conditioned by this essentially poetic imperative.<sup>22</sup> The logical explicitation that makes life unbearable is essential to the work that *Capital* still has to do, its living task in the world that we will all die in. Readers of Marx who want actually to live the life that Marx dreamed will be possible, who want a world of 'free individuality based on the universal development of individuals' instead of compulsory stultification, mass poverty and the systematic conversion of productive activity into boredom and torture, cannot avoid or hedge about with the dusty abstractions and supererogatory theoretical refinements of the salaried thinker, the pure horror of the reality that this critique drills into the head. The condition of hearing its truth is first of all this command, everywhere intrinsic to Marx's thought: do not

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21. Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 3, p. 337.

22. Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E.B. Ashton, New York: Continuum, 2005, pp. 17–18.

obscure the violence and the horror of reality. The truth of *Capital* hurts and reading it needs to hurt too.

This is profoundly a question about poetics. Marx writes that ‘capitalist production has seized the power of the people at the very root of life.’<sup>23</sup> *Capital* makes the paralysis of that seized power and the strangulation of that root resound in logically volatile concepts. The logic of categories is an explicit logic that specifies the material, social limits at which ‘free individuality based on the universal development of individuals’ is blocked and made impossible under the domination of capital. We understand why individuals are not free and why they cannot develop when we grasp the meaning of categories like ‘labour-power’, ‘surplus value’, ‘the wage form’, ‘subsistence’. Intermingled with this explicit logic, violently blurring in and out of it, cutting into it, is the logic of passion, an inexplicit logic, poetic and deranged, the logic of the ‘dotlike’ life, fucked up and distorted, adrift in the infinity of valorization that is a grotesque parody of the human subject’s own still putatively natural capacity for ‘universal development’.<sup>24</sup> This second logic is not for specifying the social and material blocks on development, but for making the truth of blocked and paralysed life resound. The passion of this logic is an intense mix of pain and optimism. It really hurts to follow the exposition from category to category and comprehend the blocks on the universal development of life, to let that knowledge actually sink in and pronounce its true inexorability. It is the pain of never living, yet forever straining to live, the life of universal development that (to lift a phrase from Hegel) ‘simply must *be*, and must not remain a task’, but that (as *Capital* makes unbearably clear) simply *is* not, and is the perpetually urgent task

23. *Capital, Volume 1*, p. 380; translation revised. Fowkes has ‘capitalist production has seized the vital forces of the people at their very roots.’ The original is ‘die kapitalistische Produktion ... die Volkskraft an der Lebenswurzel ergriffen hat.’ Marx, *MEGA*, vol. 6, p. 272.

24. On being adrift as a speck in infinity, see Keston Sutherland, ‘Infinite Exhaustion’, *Brittle Land*, ed. Rachel O’Reilly, Amsterdam: Roma, 2016.

right now, as always.<sup>25</sup> But the pain of this logic is at the same time its optimism. The pain of living with *Capital* always points beyond itself towards an explosion of the block, the repulsion of present impossibility and the radical enlargement of life. That repulsion of impossibility must actually be experienced. Marx writes in the *Grundrisse* that ‘if we did not find concealed in society as it is the material conditions of production and the corresponding relations of exchange prerequisite for a classless society, then all attempts to explode it would be quixotic [*wären alle Sprengversuche Donquichoterie*].’<sup>26</sup> What is it like, what experience is it, how does it sound to us, when, through the power of critique, we do actually find these concealed conditions?

‘Capitalist production has seized the power of the people at the very root of life.’ The poetics of the critique of capital has to be as hyperactive as that seizure: it has to go as deep, reach as far, stretch to everything, detect in every paralysis of the subject its potential explosion, tune into every signal of the catastrophe, and find a way to make the very logic of categories itself resound with the pain of devastated life laid waste in a wilderness of infinite violence. This reaching far into everything and finding everywhere the carnage of crushed life and binding logic up with madness and paradox to pinpoint the potential for eruption out of the world as capital has made it is the poetics of *Capital*, its resounding with paralysed thought and obstructed life and the future necessity of their explosion. Resounding: ‘It is now entirely possible’, writes Marx in the *Grundrisse*, ‘that consonance

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25. G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977, p. 368. On ‘pain’ cf. Hegel’s *Philosophy of Mind*, trans. William Wallace, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988, pp. 15–16: ‘What belongs to external Nature is destroyed by contradiction; if, for example, gold were given a different specific gravity from what it has, it would cease to be gold. But mind has power to preserve itself in contradiction, and, therefore, in pain; power over evil, as well as over misfortune.’ The power of mind not only to preserve itself but to grow more deeply attached to the world and to the revolutionary project of overthrowing capitalist relations *in pain* is a poetic power.

26. Marx, *Grundrisse*, pp. 159, 77.



may be reached only by passing through the most extreme dissonance.<sup>27</sup>

'Every new aspect of a science involves a revolution in the technical terms of that science', writes Engels in the 'Preface' to the English edition of *Capital* of 1886.<sup>28</sup> Marx had performed this revolution, and the tendency of Hyndman's softening of painful and dissonant critical thought into 'the conventional English of everyday literature' was essentially counterrevolutionary, trading euphemisms in hell. But worse even than this hideous amelioration of individual words, according to Engels, was the freedom with which it had been exercised. This freedom of expression all but amounts to a counterrevolutionary methodology, an anti-poetics. Faced with a compound noun or a grating neologism, in *Das Kapital*, whose latent or premonitory conceptual power needs ingeniously specifying and amplifying, Hyndman 'translates it, as it recurs, by a whole series of different terms, forgetting that a technical term has to be rendered always by one and the same equivalent'. For Engels this was outright treachery, a cover-up of the critique and the neutralization of its poetic power to specify the definite unbearableness of the life that the logic of categories exists to magnify. And yet the only translations that we now have of *Capital* in English, including the one that Engels himself oversaw, are not faithful to this principle that he says is paramount.

Many latent or potential concepts in *Das Kapital* are at best only flickeringly detectable in the English text. Where Marx repeats the same word (often a neologism he invented specifically to capture the twisted truth of an idea or fucked up fact that ordinary speech had simply not yet tried to deal with and that the language of conventional literary respectability had bent over backwards to obscure and trivialize), so that through repetition

27. *Ibid.*, p. 148.

28. Marx, *Capital*, Volume 1, p. 111.

the word would begin to acquire what would at least look like, or promise, a definite conceptual profile, his English translators have tended to paraphrase the word in a variety of ways at different points of their versions. They have in effect not only occluded the latent, potential or already definite conceptual profile of the individual word, but at the same time have annulled the specific power of the word to hurt and unpicked or softened the binding of the logic whose strangulation of life it helps to articulate. For example, Marx's neologism *Wertgegenständlichkeit*, literally 'value-objectivity', is paraphrased by Ben Fowkes in the standard Penguin edition first as 'the objectivity of commodities as values', then as 'objective character as values', then as 'objectivity as a value', then as 'objectivity of the products of labour as values'. The paraphrases may mean roughly the same thing, but they are not evidently the repetition of a single concept or the tightening of a single bind; they are not the hammering home or droning in the ear of that very neologism in all its grossness as both a technical term and the parody of a technical term at once; neither are they overtly tangled up in lateral lexical rigging of the kind that Marx threw over the heads of his German readers, to catch them in inexorable nets of association, when for example in the space of a single page of the chapter on 'The Commodity' he floods the logic of categories with a torrent of overtly genetically related neologisms to make the already grated Hyndman's ear ring until it spins: *Wertgegenständlichkeit* brings *Wertding*, *Wertspiegel*, *Wertkörper*, *Wertausdruck*, *Wertform* and *Wertgröße* tumbling after it in its wake. The power of these grotesque words caught in the obstructed act of being incompletely or parodically conceptualized to proliferate new lexical fields in a pastiche of logical complexity is part of the essential movement of the poetics of *Capital*. The mad dilation of the concept not only – as if by a kind of viral eruption – articulates a spontaneous, semi-parodic logic of categories, so that the

'value-expression' of the 'value-thing' can suddenly be read in its reflection in the 'value-mirror'; the same dilation is asphyxiating, hateful, crazy, like being drowned in balloon animals while trying to knit your way out of a blizzard. This, too, is the truth about 'value-objectivity', not just its style of presentation or its rhetoric. *Wertgegenständlichkeit* is the inexorable logical regime of the object without object relations, or, in other words, the thing you are, gaping at itself in the value-mirror and shouting its angry value-expressions in the contorted postures of an abstract value-expressionist. To exist in the capital-relation is to exist value-objectively as a value-thing with a value-body represented in value-expression gaping into the value-mirror, or not at all.

If we take seriously not only Engels's apparently deadly serious demand that technical terms in *Capital* must 'be rendered always by one and the same equivalent' and his conviction that only 'powerful English', 'the best resources of the language' and 'new-coined terms in English' will do, but also the unavoidable implication that *Capital* is both critique and poetics at once, and that the power of the poetics is the power of the critique deadlocked in the tangle of inseparable but irresolvable logics, then it surely becomes absolutely imperative to the future effect and destiny of Marx's great work, its task in life, to get its poetics right. This has to mean: to make its whole logical power resound, both the logic of categories and the logic of passion, to get its energies of conception and disfiguration ramped up to the furthest extreme of dissonance, to make its explication of the unbearable and infinite indignity of life under capital actually feel acutely unbearable, right now and at every moment, whatever it takes and in whatever language not only gets the categories to make sense but also pressurizes the experience of making sense of them enough for their social, psychic and individual truth to erupt out of their bare content of brutal logical consistency.

# 11

## The reflux of money: outlaw accumulation and territorialization in *Breaking Bad*

JOHN KRANIAUSKAS

No le han podido agarrar  
Le temen más que la muerte  
No más de oírlo mentar  
casi les pega diabetes.

‘El jefe de la sierra’, Los Tucanes de Tijuana

How are the current historical actualities of a finance-driven global capitalism lived, imagined and represented in the social experiences of everyday life in its US core? What happens in the hinterlands of this increasingly kenotic heartland of Western capital that is at once porous and rigidified? And how do the new forms of cultural-industrial production – the narrative poetics of contemporary ‘post-television television’, for example – represent this capitalist present to its consumer-subjects? What stories of the parasitic self-development of capital and its fantasies do they tell? And what do they show that they cannot themselves know?

Vince Gilligan’s TV/DVD series *Breaking Bad* (AMC, 2008–13), the story of chemistry teacher Walter White’s self-refashioning as a drug kingpin (his name, ‘Walt’, suggests its character

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as national allegory), pushes a black hole through both the domesticity of family and household – the main biopolitical site of social reproduction – and the future that White attempts to salvage for it.<sup>1</sup> *Breaking Bad* thus tracks a ‘line of flight’ gone bad, a recurrent theme – much to their political despair – in Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s (1980) *A Thousand Plateaus*, as ‘war machines’ are either captured by state formations or escape all subjective or political moorings. Walter White’s bid for freedom risks, in their words, ‘abandoning [its] creative potentialities and turning into a line of death, being turned into a line of destruction pure and simple’.<sup>2</sup>

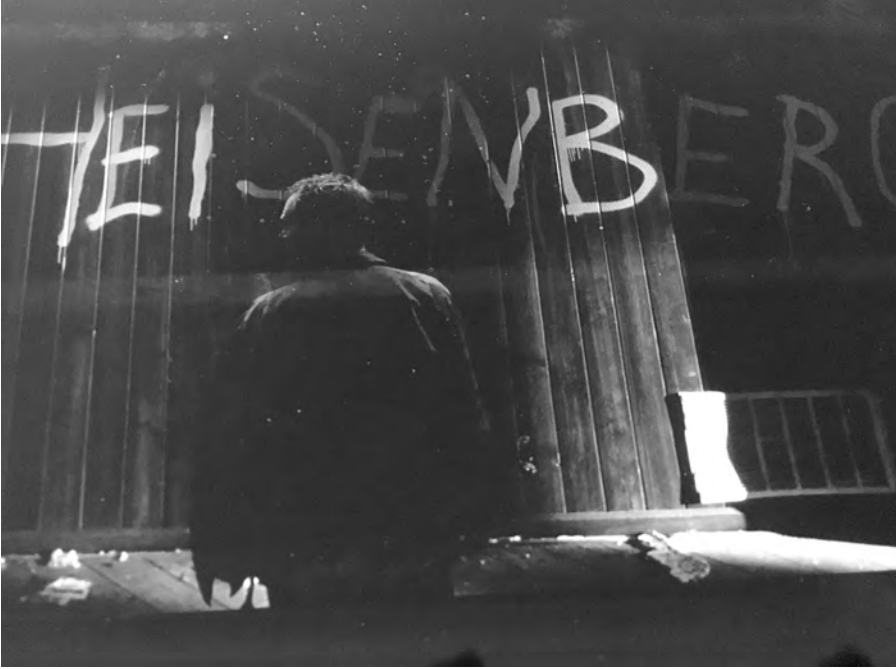
Moreover, as the image opposite of White’s house in ruins (figure 1) suggests, the black hole in this family narrative also involves a momentary ‘catastrophe’ of the TV image itself. This is a shot of a living room which is no longer a living room. It is presented to the viewer with an exploratory depth of field, only to be simultaneously robbed of the *mise en scène* and internal montage that might fill it – ‘giving it room’, creating the illusion of three-dimensionality and habitation – as it is blackened and graffitied over with Walt White’s other, outlaw name: Heisenberg.<sup>3</sup> From one point of view this destruction of the home constitutes a warning against drugs and crime: a moralistic demand for ‘sobriety’.<sup>4</sup> From another, however, which I will

1. *Breaking Bad* evokes the poet Walt Whitman, author of *Leaves of Grass* (1855), a work that configured the USA as a nation. And it is through Whitman and his work that Walter White’s criminal identity is eventually discovered by Hank, his cop brother-in-law, thereby underlining the dramatic importance of the family, and its symbolic order, for the series. In this way, the family, the nation and the state all come into view as mediated by the law, and its transgression.

2. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi, London: Athlone Press, 1988, pp. 506, 508. It is against the background of the figure of the white face (of the White-man) that Deleuze and Guattari begin to unpack their account of black holes, which then begin to haunt the politics of their own text.

3. See André Bazin, ‘The Evolution of the Language of Cinema’, in *What is Cinema?*, trans. Hugh Gray, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1967, pp. 23–40.

4. See Herman Herlinghaus, *Narcoepics: A Global Aesthetics of Sobriety*, London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2013.



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explore here, it also suggests the historical and ideological limits of *Breaking Bad* as a history of narco-accumulation, which this black hole dramatically registers – defining its narrative arc – but which it nevertheless cannot quite reflect.

### **First time as... farce**

Episode 1 of Season 1 of *Breaking Bad* begins with a composite image of a pair of discarded trousers, flying through the air, against a background of wide-open blue sky, desert landscape and approaching police sirens. This immediately evokes three classic film-industry genres – comedy, the Western and crime – a cinematic mix that comes to define the series as a whole. It begins as comic farce, in a neo-Western milieu (figure 2). Who is this crazed middle-aged man in his underwear emerging into view brandishing a gun, scurrying around his camper van – doubling as a mobile narco-factory – whilst video-recording his last words for his wife and son on his mobile phone and clumsily building a small monument to mark his passing, and entry into New Mexican history, as the cops approach but then drive by



on their way elsewhere? We are about to find out. For *Breaking Bad*, a work of crime fiction, has of course another beginning. Looping back in time after the opening credits, we find out that the history it tells was in fact, first of all, a tragic one. And despite the repeated moments of farce throughout, it will remain so over its five seasons, sixty-two episodes and approximately fifty hours of 'complex television'. *Breaking Bad*'s opening farce – we do not know as yet that it is criminal farce – is, in other words, explained by tragedy: on his fiftieth birthday Walter White is given a death sentence; diagnosed with lung cancer, he has only two years to live. And he needs money.

Such looping back from a story that begins *in medias res* provides the show with its temporal and narrative structure, which it repeats episodically as it permanently catches up with or recovers itself – Walt's future (death) having collapsed into his present bringing it to a kind of stuttering halt. Taking the disjuncture between 'story' (*histoire*) and 'emplotment' (*discours*) constitutive of detective or crime fiction as its point of departure, so as to experiment with narrative form – privileging plot construction over the chronology of the story it shows and tells,

and producing a looping narrative of *development through recovery* (first time as farce, second time as tragedy) – *Breaking Bad*'s dramatic composition figures an extended crisis in Walt's existential time.<sup>5</sup> Walt will not recover. In this respect, the filmic procedures of *mise en scène* (including time-lapse photography) and montage, are themselves ferociously looped into narrative and serial time, speeded up, slowed down and, as we will see, pulled into shape by the destructive logics of narco-accumulation: an infinite quilt-like 'patchwork' accumulation – Walt's line of flight – which is, however, captured and over-coded to produce its narco-capitalist black-hole effect.<sup>6</sup>

*Breaking Bad* thus performs 'crisis' (its title tells us so), registering the significance of the idea in many of its historical meanings: economic, political and medical. Walt was once a widely recognized intellectual, employed at the nearby Science Research Center at Los Alamos, New Mexico – the home of the nuclear bomb – where he contributed to group research in crystallography leading to the award of a Nobel Prize. Now, however, middle-aged, he has 'fallen' into mediocrity having refused – apparently for unfulfilled romantic reasons – to join his former research-centre colleagues in the founding of successful tech company Grey Matters (it even seems to have been his idea). He will subsequently take his revenge upon them by using their wealth to hide and save his criminally accumulated own.

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5. For a structural account of detective fiction, see Tzvetan Todorov, 'The Typology of Detective Fiction', in *The Poetics of Prose*, trans. Richard Howard, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1977, pp. 42–52; and Fredric Jameson, 'Totality as Conspiracy', *The Geopolitical Aesthetic: Cinema and the Space of the World System*, Bloomington IN: Indiana University Press and London: British Film Institute, 1992, pp. 9–84. For 'complexity', see Jason Mittell, *Complex TV: The Poetics of Contemporary Storytelling*, New York and London: New York University Press, 2015.

6. The programme stretches out Walt's remaining two years of life over a five-year real time of TV shows (its seasons). The accumulation is patchwork 'in conformity with migration, whose degree of affinity with nomadism it shares, is not only named after trajectories, but "represents" trajectories, becomes inseparable from speed or movement in an open space'. The quilt-like patchwork has no centre and is thus de-contained; it 'recapitulates' smooth into striated space and striated into smooth space. It connects, say Deleuze and Guattari, through 'processes of frequency and accumulation'. *A Thousand Plateaus*, pp. 476–7, 485.



He is, moreover, permanently humiliated by those closest to him as he tries to make ends meet as a high-school chemistry teacher and part-time car-wash assistant. When a criminal opportunity presents itself, he seizes it immediately. Walter White goes 'bad'. With little medical insurance to pay for his treatment (the story begins before the passing of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act in 2010, better known as Obamacare) and without the economic resources to ensure the future of his family, he makes a crucial decision, temporarily resolving his crisis, but leaving its terminal diagnosis intact: he turns to crime.<sup>7</sup>

It soon becomes very apparent that Walt's decision is also fuelled by rage and *ressentiment* as his personal and professional failures are constantly reawakened at work and at home. We find out early in the first episode, as the narrative returns to explain Walt's farcical actions, that his students disrespect him at work, whilst his brother-in-law Hank (the local Drugs Enforcement Agency worker who will eventually pursue him and die in the process) has usurped his place in the symbolic order, in his son's eyes at home. So Walt decides to take back what remains of his life by investing his considerable but underused immaterial labour, his human capital (his knowledge) into the illegal production and distribution of narcotics ('bad' medicine) with his ex-student Jesse. In doing so, he becomes a virtuoso manufacturer of crystal methamphetamine, a narco-myth widely known in both Mexicos, new and old, by his alias 'Heisenberg' – his signature product reflecting in miniature the blue sky that envelopes the text's movement images and action.<sup>8</sup> This myth will eventually be Walt and his family's literal undoing: as we

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7. 'I don't have the greatest insurance' says Walt to the medics taking him to hospital after collapsing in the car wash, insisting they might as well just drop him off in the street. For 'crisis', see Reinhart Koselleck, 'Crisis', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, vol. 67, no. 2 (April 2006), pp. 357–400.

8. For the idea of the sky as 'encompasser' of movement images, as in the films of John Ford, see Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam, London: Athlone Press, 1986, p. 151.

have seen, returning home towards the end of the series (and his life), Walt discovers that it has become an abandoned burned-out ruin, its walls spray-painted with his outlaw name. It is as if it now belonged to some completely 'other' spatial arrangement, a narco-territory that has violently made itself present, at home, as a black hole, in his home.

In *Breaking Bad*, the investment in futures guaranteed by capital as it becomes 'fictitious', banking capital – Walt's need for an alternative 'private' bank in which to deposit his cash is played out throughout the series and it is eventually what he forces his ex-colleagues at Grey Matters to provide – recoils back on the present as its absolute destruction: narco-accumulation's gravitational pull absorbs Walt, drawing in both his son Walter Jr and his wife Skylar too. Once a short-story writer, Skylar eventually deploys her 'fictitious' talents as a criminal accountant.

As the dates of its broadcast suggest, *Breaking Bad* is framed by the recent experience of the crisis of finance capital – through the institutions of housing and insurance – configuring and dramatizing what we might today call a kind of bio-capitalist crisis (a crisis of social reproduction), intensified by the politics of austerity that followed to shore up the global banking system. The financial crisis of 2008, on the one hand, and the political transition from the Bush to the Obama government in the USA that same year, on the other, are textually internalized and reconfigured as filmic material, and narrated, as austerity bites, as a reproductive biopolitical crisis of medical insurance.

David Simon's *The Wire* shadowed the Bush era and the post-9/11 war against drugs in an emerging war against terror in the Northern post-industrial city of Baltimore. Gilligan's *Breaking Bad* follows, sharing its beginning with the Obama administration, whilst tracking the same war in new contexts in the Southern near-border city of Albuquerque, New Mexico, where another kind of territory emerges. In this sense, the election of Trump in

2016 (construction, entertainment and neo-extractivist capital) has, in its declared anti-Obama stance, made much of *Breaking Bad* contemporary again – as, of course, has its spin-off series *Better Call Saul* (Netflix, 2015–). However, *Breaking Bad* is not a work of social realist long-form TV narrative. It eschews *The Wire*'s polydiegetic ambition to incorporate more and more of the social into its multi-stranded purview, through expansion, reaching its representational limits with finance. Rather, beginning with the experience of contemporary forms of bio-finance capital, it concentrates its attention, and the TV viewers' gaze, first, on the story of Walt's tragic farce; second, like so much US TV and literary production (including crime fiction), on attempting to shore up the family as a founding institution – and failing; and third, on the specific New Mexican border milieu. As the crisis takes hold, Walt turns away from the juridical order to become an outlaw. In *Breaking Bad*, the *Bildung* of recent immaterial labour is deployed against the traditions and institutions of education and formation (*Bildung*) – with their narratives of 'progress' and 'virtue' – (which is what has made it so exciting for so many), to configure a problematic hero whose new (re)search takes him off the rails.<sup>9</sup>

## Laundering

What *Breaking Bad* does share with *The Wire*, however, is an insistent and intense focus on the political economy of illegal drugs commerce, as well as on the processes of its manufacture (here, of methamphetamine). Walt's background in crystallography is crucial to his signature product, which his competitors

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9. In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari refer to the post-industrial capitalist subsumption of labour as 'machinic enslavement' – including TV as a key technology. I also evoke here Georg Lukács's *Theory of the Novel*, especially as it is integrated into Fredric Jameson's own neo-historicist account of realism in *The Antinomies of Realism*, London and New York: Verso, 2013.

– principally ‘Gus’ Fring, under the corporate umbrella of a German multinational and a generic ‘Mexican’ cartel, finally allied with a murderous neo-Nazi gang which Walt dispatches just before he dies – desperately want to get their hands on and control, whilst eliminating ‘Heisenberg’. The key economic logics here have been set out abstractly by Marx in *Capital*, and redescribed more recently by Giovanni Arrighi in his long pre-history of the hegemonic shifts in the world economy during the 1990s in *The Long Twentieth Century* (the rise of the capitalist East), in two simple formulae:  $M-C-M'$  (the ‘general formula for capital’) and what Marx calls its ‘abridged’ form,  $M-M'$ .<sup>10</sup> What these describe are distinct moments of the expanded reproduction of capital – that is, of accumulation – here, constitutively backed by a proto-statist violence that gives narco-accumulation the social form of permanent ‘so-called primitive accumulation’.<sup>11</sup> In  $M-C-M'$  commodities – narcotics, for example – are made, bought ( $M-C$ ) and sold ( $C-M'$ ) illegally for profit. Crucial to Marx’s account of commodity exchange is that he locates the origins of money as capital here, in the valorization process – that is, in the ‘reflux of money’ as it is mediated by ‘sale’ (the ‘exchange value’ of methamphetamine).<sup>12</sup> At least in the first instance. For this accumulative logic, in Arrighi’s development of Marx’s insight, is also accompanied by its important abridged – that is, financialized – form,  $M-M'$ , in which profits violently realized on the sale of narcotics ( $M$ ), like a magic interest-bearing ‘automatic fetish’, make more money ( $M'$ ), through the well-known process of banking and investment in ‘clean’ enterprise. This is the role

10. See Karl Marx, *Capital, Volume 1: A Critique of Political Economy*, trans. Ben Fowkes, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1976, pp. 247–80; and Giovanni Arrighi, *The Long Twentieth Century: Money, Power and the Origins of Our Times*, London and New York: Verso, 1994.

11. See in particular, Marx, *Capital, Volume 1*, pp. 873–940. ‘Capital comes dripping from head to toe, from every pore, with blood and dirt’, writes Marx (p. 926). Indeed, Arrighi insists that ‘destruction’ always accompanies production and the  $M-C-M'$  and  $M-M'$  cycle.

12. Karl Marx, *Capital, Volume 1*, pp. 250–51.

Walt eventually forces onto his old colleagues: they become his own 'fictitious' proxy bank, storing the money accumulated for his wife and son under pain of death – despite the destruction of the family – as the insurance he did not have. As with money, in circulation – for example, as credit – the temporality of fictitious capital (accumulation) is future-orientated.<sup>13</sup> And Walt is particularly orientated towards the future he will, however, not have: his money-capital is to outlive him – as, indeed, it will outlive us all. If *The Wire* focuses on the competitive tensions between the mercantile and financialized forms of accumulation (the general formula and the abridged formula), *Breaking Bad* focuses on the experience of them both (as well as on drugs production); arguably in a way that suggests a post-Arrighian world of finance capital.<sup>14</sup>

Of course, *Breaking Bad* does not have to concern itself with an analysis of the abstract minutia of capitalist accumulation, although that may help in understanding it. Rather, as I have suggested, it tells the story of Walter White's *experience* of the 'biopolitical' dimension of the financial crisis of 2008. From this perspective, however, the series does incorporate financialization – and the experience of money more generally – into its criminal narrative (Walt's story), and the visual metaphors that fashion its 'real'. Crucial in this regard is the theme of laundering, which dramatizes the processes involved in financial abridgement,

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13. Ibid., p. 257. In this chapter Marx is referring to accumulation within 'the sphere of circulation' – labour remaining in the 'background': 'surplus-value cannot arise from circulation, and therefore ... for it to be formed something must take place in the background which is not visible in circulation itself' (p. 268). This 'background', the realm of drugs production (and labour) is constantly foregrounded in *Breaking Bad* – as is the labour involved in narcotics distribution, 'sale' and thus the 'reflux of money'. In this sense, Arrighi would seem to privilege 'mercantile' capital in his account. For Marx's development of these ideas of interest-bearing capital as 'automatic fetish' and 'fictitious' capital, see *Capital, Volume 3*, trans. David Fernbach, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991, pp. 515–24, 594–606: 'In this way, all connection with the actual process of capital's valorization is lost, right down to the last trace, confirming the notion that capital is automatically valorized by its own powers' (p. 597). See also David Harvey, *The Limits to Capital*, London and New York: Verso, 2006: 'If this credit money is loaned out as capital, then it becomes *fictitious capital*' (p. 267).

14. For this aspect of *The Wire*, see John Kraniak, 'Elasticity of Demand: Reflections on *The Wire*', *Radical Philosophy* 154 (March/April 2009), pp. 25–34; [www.radicalphilosophyarchive.com/article/elasticity-of-demand](http://www.radicalphilosophyarchive.com/article/elasticity-of-demand).

creative accounting and banking, in which Walt's wife Skylar's 'fictitious' accounting skills eventually play an important part. It does so via the conflict between two dimensions of Walt's criminal life: his paradoxical desire for freedom and autonomy in the production of his own specific brand of methamphetamine, on the one hand, and his need for banking and/or financial (investment) services both to realize and to manage his illegally accumulated wealth, on the other. The hard work of laundering foregrounds the activity of abridgement that defines financialization as the erasure of the moment of commodity exchange (in  $M-C-M'$ ), as it mediates accumulation, so that the circuit's all-important criminal middle term, the outlawed commodity itself, is 'washed' clean – including of the violence involved in securing its 'sale'.<sup>15</sup> Laundering thus becomes a key trope that organizes *Breaking Bad's* narrative: first, when the production of Walt's blue crystal meth, in its industrial phase, is hidden in a factory below Gus Fring's industrial laundromat; and next, when Walt looks to free himself from subordination to Fring (whom he will eventually assassinate). We subsequently witness how he unsuccessfully attempts to 'clean' his ill-gotten gains through the car wash he used to work in and has now purchased for this very purpose – before he forces his ex-colleagues to become his bankers.

Walt's critical – and criminal – decision involves 'freeing' his intellectual labour from exploitation and its humiliating subsumption (he cannot exercise his thought) to the federal state's reproductive logics of *Bildung*. However, as in Adorno's critique of Kant's abstract notion of 'free will' in *Negative Dialectics*, the more he struggles for autonomy, the more he finds himself dependent on and subsumed to the 'invisible hand' of the illegal market and commodification. So much so, in fact, that he is

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15. But which then returns, for example in Ridley Scott's *The Counsellor* (2013), scripted by Cormac McCarthy, in London's financial district, to lethal effect in the fetishistic form of a 'narco-bolito'.



at times shown to be literally confronted by the object money (profits realized), over-coded by its financial ‘fetishistic’ axiomatic, ‘automatically’ to become capital (M–M’), miraculously become subject. In the face of this money-capital fetish, Walt himself becomes another ‘thing’, objectified, both cynically and murderously (he knows that he is doing wrong), into what Adorno refers to as a social logic of fetishistic ‘thingness’ (see figure 3).<sup>16</sup> This ‘thingness’ constitutes another face of the drama of financialization as it unfolds in *Breaking Bad*: how is Walt to bank his illegal profits? It also resonates visually throughout the compositional procedures of the series, including as the black hole of his home, to foreground Walt’s real tragic and increasingly farcical heteronomy.

This is especially the case cinematographically, in the ways in which point-of-view shots (*sujet à objet*) are at times suddenly inverted, or evacuated of subjectivity altogether, such that characters – especially Walt – are looked at from the point

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16. Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E.B. Ashton, London: Routledge, 1990, pp. 211–99 (on ‘freedom’: in which Kant is shown to be blind to the social content of his own proposition) and pp. 183–94 (on the difference between ‘object’ and ‘thing’).



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of view of things, at which point the story told in *Breaking Bad* seems to become itself organized and focalized through them. Viewers are often, for example, presented with shots of Walt from the perspective of the money he is putting into a bag – which, because it resists liquidity, he carries like a burden throughout the final seasons of the series – suggesting its role as a quasi-transcendental third-person narrator orchestrating the film text as a whole.<sup>17</sup> There are shots, too, of Walt and Jesse from inside the tank into which they are pouring their blue chemical mix in Fring’s metamphetamine factory.<sup>18</sup>

Most absurd are the shots and scenes that are focused through and around a pink teddy bear’s false eye that lands in Walt’s swimming pool after an airplane explodes in mid-air – a disaster for which he is indirectly to blame (figure 4) – suggesting his guilt.

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17. For narrative ‘orchestration’, see Mikhail M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogical Imagination: Four Essays*, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, Austin TX and London: University of Texas Press, 1981.

18. There are distinct phases in the regime of methamphetamine production or ‘cooking’ in *Breaking Bad*: artisanal (in a mobile camper van), industrial or Fordist (in Fring’s factory where both Walt and Jesse are dwarfed by both Fring’s organization and the machinery), and flexible or post-Fordist (in which production switches between houses as they are vacated during fumigation: the beginning of Walt’s brief alliance with a neo-Nazi gang of fumigators).





The false eye then ‘travels’, peering out at Walt from under his bed (figure 5), ending up in the hands of the two narco-sicarios looking to kill Heisenberg. Finally, in a scene towards *Breaking Bad*’s denouement, the camera looks through a table and map of the border zone in such a way as to imprint the territory of their theatre of operations onto the faces and bodies of Walt, Jesse and the treacherous Lydia – whom Walt later poisons with ricin, which, along with the money and the false eye also circulates as another of Walt’s chemical productions (figure 6). Such camera work and *mise en scène* suggest a possible shift in the deployment of the Lacanian concept of the ‘suture’ in film analysis, conventionally used to refer to the ways in which the viewer’s gaze is ‘stitched’ into film narrative as a (stand-in) subject – into the impossible place, that is, of an intradiegetic interlocutor, occupied by the camera, in order to create the illusion of identification. In *Breaking Bad*’s narrative of financialization and laundering, such an illusion of subjecthood is radically transformed. For here the viewer is invited to occupy – or is stitched into as a stand-in – the impossible and illusory place of the ‘thing’ which, fetishistically, now becomes a ‘subject’ that confronts and subordinates the



subject-become-thing. This is the drama of the ‘reflux of money’ on which Walt eventually chokes.<sup>19</sup>

According to Arrighi, ‘the two epochs or phases’ – M–C–M’ and M–M’ together – ‘constitute a full systemic cycle of accumulation’.<sup>20</sup> Arrighi uses this construction to periodize his history of the development of capitalism, passing through successive imperial hegemons (Spain, the Netherlands, Great Britain, the USA...), particularly the passage from one to another, in which the moment of financialization oversees the transition. In this account, following Fernand Braudel’s own state-centred history of capitalism, financialization represent the ‘autumn’ of a particular epoch, and the fall of a particular hegemon (his alternative to the term ‘empire’) as it is replaced by another, at which point the cycle of production, destruction and accumulation begins again in another place.<sup>21</sup> Such a cyclical logic might

19. *Breaking Bad*’s dramatization of the autonomization of finance (as well as a possible prefiguration of the disappearance of ‘cash’ money) might be its main critical advance on *The Wire*. For the filmic concept of ‘suture’, see Stephen Heath, *Questions of Cinema*, London: Macmillan, 1981, pp. 76–112.

20. Arrighi, *The Long Twentieth Century*, p. 6.

21. Arrighi quotes Braudel in *The Long Twentieth Century* as follows: “[Every] capitalist development of this order seems, by reaching the stage of financial expansion, to have in some sense announced its maturity: it [is] a sign of autumn” (p. 6).

be applied to the competition between first Colombian and then Mexican drug cartels. However, in *Breaking Bad* – as well as in such films as *The Counsellor* (Ridley Scott, 2013) and *Sicario* (Denis Villeneuve, 2015) – in which the actual difficulty of laundering is thematized, we may be presented with another situation, in which finance no longer represents just an ‘autumn’, but rather all seasons: winter, summer and spring too. It becomes dramatically and violently autonomous, to subsume all other forms and define a cycle of its own. What we would then have in *Breaking Bad* is something like the narco-underbelly of a new ‘empire’ of financialized capital, characterized throughout in all its phases – cultivation, chains of commodity exchange and distribution, as well as the moment of finance upon which the realization of laundered surpluses depend – by cycles of production, destruction and accumulation. Violence and spectacle, production and destruction on an increasingly globalized scale, are constitutive of the outlaw narco-logic of accumulation in which Walt-as-Heisenberg briefly participates, as they are of its territorializing a ‘whole way of life’: the narco-culture of narco-accumulation. This narco-culture of everyday life is the public secret revealed in Roberto Bolaño’s novel *2666*, centred on the killing of women workers in Ciudad Juárez.<sup>22</sup>

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22. This includes the destruction of their own productive forces, making a spectacle of the violence of a supposed ‘surplus population’, whilst putting it to work symbolically in what Jairus Banaji calls a ‘regime of production’. For the commodity spectacle of damaged and tortured bodies, see Sayak Valencia’s *Gore Capitalism*, trans. John Pluecker, South Pasadena/Cambridge and London: Semiotext(e)/MIT Press, 2018. For a narco-cartel’s exploitation of beauty queens, see Gerardo Naranjo’s film *Miss Bala* (2011). For globalization and the spectacle of violence, see Don Winslow’s thrillers *The Power of the Dog* (2001) and, especially, *The Cartel* (2015), as well as Roberto Saviano’s *Zero, Zero, Zero* (2013) – an account of the globalization of the drugs trade centred on 1980s Mexican cartels. For Bolaño’s *2666* see my ‘A Monument to the Unknown Worker: Roberto Bolaño’s *2666*’, *Radical Philosophy*, 200, Nov/Dec, 2016, p. 37–46 – [www.radicalphilosophyarchive.com/article/a-monument-to-the-unknown-worker](http://www.radicalphilosophyarchive.com/article/a-monument-to-the-unknown-worker) – a companion piece to this essay. And for ‘regime of production’, see the essays contained in Jairus Banaji, *Theory as History: Essays on Modes of Production and Exploitation*, Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2011.



### Territory and 'apache refusal'

La fama de Heisenberg ya llegó hasta Michoacán ... ese material azul ya se hizo internacional. Ahora ya si le quedó bien a Nuevo México el nombre ... hablan de un tal Heisenberg que ahora controla el mercado ... el cartel es de respeto nadie se ha escapado ese compa ya está muerto no más no le han avisado.

'Negro y Azul: The Ballad of Heisenberg', Los Cuates de Sinaloa

As Arrighi's periodizing history of hegemony suggests, the logics of the accumulation of capital also include a territorializing dimension: geopolitical arrangements that bring the state and its apparatus – the law and the military – into play to secure production, trade and finance via various historical forms of colonialism, imperialism and neocolonialism. This – territory – is where his work finds echoes in Deleuze and Guattari's rhizomatics of war machines, assemblages, state capture and the refrain, set out in *A Thousand Plateaus*. As we have seen above, *Breaking Bad* narrativizes accumulation, via Walt's experience of the 'reflux of money' and laundering. It also registers the question of territory, but it does not internalize it reflexively into its narrative space. Land- and sky-scape, however dramatic



and symbolic, for example as ‘encompassers of the West’, remain mere ‘settings’ in which actions only take place. The black hole in Walt’s ruined home symptomatizes this lack – or hole – in the text, which uncannily looks out at the viewer. It registers Walt’s tragic existential crisis, as well as his farcical bid for freedom, subsumed to the ‘thingifying’ effect of the outlaw narco-economy of money and laundering. The latter, however, has a territorial dimension, which increasingly insists and comes into view – although merely indexically – but which *Breaking Bad* cannot quite reflect as narrative experience. In this sense, the black hole in the text remains an enigmatic horizon, demanding interpretation: what does the series know and show, and what does it not know but show? I propose to refer to the spectral presence of this ‘other’ territory, and its geopolitical history as it pulls Walt into its lethally over-coded space, as ‘Apache refusal’ (figures 7 & 8).

Although the production and sale of illegal drugs have produced huge wealth for a relatively small number of Mexican cartel bosses (a narco-bourgeoisie), it is also a mass phenomenon, a form of illegal popular capitalism of small producers and sellers, as well as of a large ‘mule’ precariat-proletariat, a

baroque economy gone 'bad', so to speak.<sup>23</sup> In this sense, it might be considered an example of what Verónica Gago describes, biopolitically, as the *conatus* of baroque economies – the affective affirmation of a strategy of life and survival – along the lines of Bolívar Echeverría's work on the cultural history of a popular baroque 'ethos' that emerged in seventeenth-century Latin America in the context of colonial appropriation and commodification and its 'civilizing' mission to *remake* Catholic Europe in Latin America via the capture and conversion of native peoples in 'reductions' and reservations. Gago extends and adapts this analysis to the contemporary, neoliberalized informal economies of the region. Unlike the community markets analysed by Gago, however, which are located in quite delimited territories – on the outskirts of La Paz and Buenos Aires (one could find their equivalents in the *tianquis* of Mexico) – the narco-economy may be defined by its relative nomadism and mobility, producing a 'way of life' (and death), a cultural formation, not as it is 'lived authentically on the spot, in places', but rather along the historical lines of a 'coming and going' of the illegal commodity, across the Mexico–US border that is constitutive of its territory of accumulation.<sup>24</sup>

Of course, the narco-culture of narco-accumulation includes towns and cities – or, rather, bits of towns and cities (as headquarters and recruitment centres), even rural *haciendas* (estates), as well as bits of states turned or reprivatized by corruption – but these are all subordinated to the strategic, elastic vectors of narco-accumulation and their territorializing effects, along with

23. It is important to note that the cartels probably earn more money from other activities – such as extortion, protection, migration and people trafficking – than they do from drugs trafficking itself.

24. See Verónica Gago, *La razón neoliberal: economías barrocas y pragmática popular*, Buenos Aires: Tinta Limón and Traficantes de Sueños, 2015; Bolívar Echeverría, *La modernidad de lo barroco*, Mexico City: Ediciones Era, 2000 (Echeverría and Gago's perspective involves a community-centred and culturalist reading of the use value – for example, labour and cooperation – of all exchange value). For cultures 'on the move', see Tim Ingold, *Lines: A Brief History*, London and New York: Routledge, pp. 2–3.

the violent inter-cartel competition this involves: a competition for the routes and other pathways, including cross-border tunnels, along which the merchandise is moved. As Deleuze and Guattari suggest, such movement occurs not along developmental lines, but transversally, *from the middle and through the middle*, establishing a 'logic of the AND': a quilt-like patchwork accumulation. The outlaw 'nomadic', capitalized.<sup>25</sup>

What is a territory, especially such a violent one, an elastic transnational narco-territory that is mobile and strategic, mediated at one end by the land and commodity production (M-C-M' in the all-important middle), as well as by media technology, so fundamental to its military operations, as well as by finance (M-M'), at the other? A territory that now includes a virtual dimension too? And how is it imagined and inhabited? According to Deleuze and Guattari, territory is the result of an act of 'territorialization' that – minimally – connects actions, milieus and rhythms. ('Action occurs in a milieu, whereas rhythm is located between two milieus.<sup>26</sup>) This is the space-time of what they refer to as the *ritornello* or refrain: acts of assemblage or an assembly of acts that 'knit space and time together' to assume 'form as an ethology of affects in accordance with the concrete ways we inhabit a milieu and transform it into territory'.<sup>27</sup> It is also a way of thinking about how cultural formation works as subject formation or affective interpellation. Inhabitation, they suggest, and they open their discussion referring to the human infant (they go on to refer to birdsong), is intimately connected with modulated sound (the refrain) that simultaneously opens and enfolds in a milieu-in-the-making, subjectivizing, and eventually producing what they call a *nomos*, which 'as a customary, unwritten law is inseparable from a distribution of space,

25. Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, pp. 25, 477. See also note 6 above.

26. *Ibid.*, pp. 313–14.

27. Anne Sauvagnargues, *Artmachines: Deleuze, Guattari, Simondon*, trans. Suzanne Verderber, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016, pp. 136, 133.

a distribution in space'. This is precisely the kind of bandit territory – with its 'bandit' codes, laws and traditions – referred to here: the narco-culture of narco-territory. This is a territorialization that 'leaps', marking 'the movement from a pre-existing milieu to territory' (for example, narco-territory), crossing 'state' with 'war machine' and vice versa.<sup>28</sup>

As well as laundering money through financial institutions, the drugs cartels also wash their money through industrial forms of capital (construction for example), as well as entertainment capital: bars, nightclubs, brothels and the like (for which see Bolaño's 2666). Spectacle, of all kinds, as I have noted, including the spectacle of exemplary founding and maintaining violence, is fundamental in this regard. Most important for narco-culture as an enfolding and inhabited formation, however, are the culture industries, especially popular music. From this perspective, the narco-ballad or *corrido* arguably provides narco-accumulation with its jaunty, repetitive, territorializing refrain, whose rhythms return over and over again, opening up and closing down pathways, within a soundscape that remakes the traditional octosyllabic verse-form in its image, whilst providing listeners in an ever-growing informalized economy with stories of outlaw possibilities, mixed with love and betrayal. The *corrido* has become a hegemonic cultural form, not only narco-accumulation's refrain – enfolding, subjectivizing and, indeed, 'resonating' like a state – but also its archive, narrating a living tradition, projecting 'individual existence into the weft of a collective narrative', to use Balibar's words, affectively making and remaking 'a people' of sorts.<sup>29</sup> Narco-territory, however,

28. Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 312; Anne Sauvagnargues, *Artmachines*, p. 131.

29. In contrast to primitive societies, Deleuze and Guattari write, 'state societies behave as apparatuses of resonance', 'the organization of resonance': the 'State, therefore, is a resonance chamber for private as well as public powers' (*A Thousand Plateaus*, pp. 211, 536 n6). For the narco-*corrido*, see Elijah Wald, *Narcocorrido: A Journey into the Music of Drugs, Guns and Guerrillas*, New York: HarperCollins ebooks, 2002. For the narco-culture of everyday life and death, see Roberto Bolaño, 2666, trans. Natasha



unlike that of Balibar's important reflections, is not contained by the nation-state and its limits as a juridico-political form. Rather, it is a transnational cross-border hinterland whose *raison d'être* is precisely the illegal crossing of borders: the territory of a narco-accumulation that captures the overlapping transversal routes of migrant labour and illegal distribution and exchange. As in the film *Sicario*, the latter fold back on and subsume the former: cross-border migrant tunnels that have been poached by the cartels are in their turn re-functionalized by CIA black-ops.

In this regard, the lyrics from a verse of 'Negro y Azul: The Ballad of Heisenberg', with which I have begun this section, maps this mobile bandit territory, the border hinterland, quite precisely. Its performance in the style of a music video makes up the pre-credits prefacing Season 2 episode 7, giving the episode its name: 'Black and Blue'. Addressing the now 'international' Heisenberg myth – which has him dressed in black – as well as his blue product, the *corrido* enfolds them into a narco-territory that extends from the Mexican state of Michoacán (the 'home' of the Familia Michoacana Cartel) to the US state that includes Albuquerque – Walter White's (and Heisenberg's) base, in New Mexico – whose name, the song insists humorously, since it is part of the same spatial fix, now 'fits it just right'. As in Deleuze and Guattari's account of the refrain, the rhythm of 'Negro y Azul' assembles two milieus, fragments of nations, into one territory. Finally, the name of the group that sings the ballad,

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Wimmer, New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2008 (especially Part 3). For spectacle, see Valencia, *Gore Capitalism*, and for 'founding' and 'maintaining' violence – as well as their combination in the police – see Walter Benjamin, 'Critique of Violence', in *One-Way Street and Other Writings*, trans. Edmund Jephcott and Kingsley Shorter, London: New Left Books, 1979, pp. 132–54. On imagining a people, see Étienne Balibar, 'The Nation Form: History and Ideology', in Étienne Balibar and Immanuel Wallerstein, *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities*, London and New York: Verso, 1991, pp. 86–106. Other forms lean on the *corrido* for their artistic materials. This is especially the case for the Mexican 'narco-novel', Yuri Herrera's *Kingdom Cons* (2004) for example, which is set in a kind of medieval narco-fairyland. Narrated by a *corrido* composer who becomes a member of the 'King's court', his function is to provide the King with an archive that narrates him into history.

'The Friends from Sinaloa', evokes Mexico's most well known and powerful cartel, the Sinaloa Cartel (whose boss is the infamous – now prisoner-celebrity – *el chapo Guzmán*).<sup>30</sup> The last part of the verse – a repeated chorus – insists that the Cartel demands 'respect' (that is, submission to the logics of narco-accumulation it manages) and that, in fact, Heisenberg is 'already dead, it's just that no one has told him' yet. The irony here, of course, as the viewers know, is that in fact he has been told, when diagnosed with cancer; and that it is this knowledge that has motivated and empowered him; so much so in fact that he feels he can challenge (disrespect) the Cartel. This is the lethal 'other' territory, a narco-*nomos*, into which Walt falls as crisis hits, projecting a black hole into his life as he is captured by it.

Returning to Walter White's existential crisis, his farce and his tragedy: Walt wants to make history, but does so – of course – in circumstances not of his own choosing. It so happens that in the beginning of *Breaking Bad* he is in fact scurrying about on a New Mexican reservation, native Indian land.<sup>31</sup> As I have hinted above, *Breaking Bad* registers this presence: Indian people appear on screen giving Walt a helping hand; another works as a cleaner in his school, for example. But this presence – full of history – appears to be only registered indexically, as if part of the landscape in which the story unfolds. This quasi-indexical presence, however, demands to be addressed. Although unreflected narratively, it is here on Indian land where, before he briefly becomes a globalized semi-industrial producer (with the help of Fring's *Pollos Hermanos*), he 'cooks', making product with his ex-student Jesse in their camper van. Indeed, he will repeatedly return there, to use the land and its smooth, diagonal pathways that cut across the striated routes of the US and Mexican states,

30. The epigraph at the beginning of this essay is a verse from another *corrido* whose title also refers to Guzmán: 'The Boss of the Mountains'.

31. Due to contemporary forms of neo-extactivism, the right of native Indians to their land is being violated again, under Trump.

old infrastructure now re-functionalized. Finally, before he forces his old, wealthy friends to become his private bank (and, as we have seen, give what remains of his wealth a future), he goes back there to bury the cash-money he has accumulated (having escaped Fring's control he can no longer launder it). At which point, with the killing of Hank, the neo-Nazi gang, Walt's enforcer Mike, and finally, with Walt's own death, *Breaking Bad* begins to reach its end. Indian land thus frames and subtends *Breaking Bad*'s narrative, as well as the narco-territory it maps, to constitute the subaltern limits of its text, on the one hand, and the history of the black hole in Walt's home that narco-accumulation symptomatizes but does not quite exhaust, on the other. For this territory has a history, one that reaches back into the past (the past of 'Apache refusal'), when native Indian war machines, including (but not only) Apaches, struggled against encroaching empires and nation-states, resisting the destruction of their societies. As in Mario Tronti's notion of 'worker refusal' – whose threat spurs on capitalist development through technology (so as to rid itself of capital's dependence on living labour) – Apache refusal is also constitutive here of the processes of nation-building in both Mexico and the USA, which it nevertheless resists.<sup>32</sup>

In a recent history of the state of Chihuahua, in Northern Mexico, Luis Aboites Aguilar describes a territory whose vectors of communication and commerce run not from South to North, like the modern railway system (which today narcos raid for 'mules' – labour – to carry drugs across the US border), but, in his words, 'West-to-East, from the highlands to the lowlands ... in which relations of exchange between the peoples of Chihuahua, Indians and non-Indians stand out ... the Western Sierra Madre is a geographic corridor that has been in use from

32. Mario Tronti, 'The Strategy of Refusal', *Italy: Autonomia, Post-Political Politics, Semiotexte*, vol. 3, no. 3 (August 2004), pp. 28–35.

prehistoric times to our present.’ Aboites Aguilar goes on to note that a later postcolonial

war against the nomads took place in a territory very different from that of the previous century [the colonial period – JK]. Towards 1830 [that is, after Mexican independence – JK] ... a numerous though dispersed population from the US began to move into the lands of many Indian groups, both nomadic and sedentary... These began to emigrate South [and after 1848, across the new Mexico–US border instituted by the Treaty of Guadalupe – JK]... [M]any of the war-making groups [such as the Apaches and Comanches – JK] discovered in this US expansion a market for the products they had robbed in Mexico. In other words, the Apaches – and the Comanches, new protagonists in this violent scenario – *obtained horses, alcohol and weapons in exchange for the heads of cattle obtained in their attacks on Mexican ranches and haciendas.*<sup>33</sup>

I would like to highlight two points here: Aboites Aguilar refers specifically to the beginnings of a second, long period of Apache Wars – led by the wealthy landowning Terrazas family of Chihuahua – that lasted well into the 1880s in the region and that ended in the defeat of the Apaches and Comanches across most of Northern Mexico. Second, he underlines at the same time a relation of cross-border exchange that might be considered almost structural, endowing the territory I have been tracing here with a persistence over a time – a historical effect of ‘refusal’ – that reaches both back into the past and

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33. Luis Aboites Aguilar, *Chihuahua: historia breve*, Mexico City: El Colegio de México and Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2011, p. 117 (my translation and italics). Victor Hugo Rascón Banda, author of the classic narco-novel *Contrabando*, writes about the presence of the Apache in Santa Rosa de Lima de Uruáchic, Chihuahua: ‘Those of us who when young lived in the Northeast of Chihuahua could feel the presence of the Apaches on seeing the infinite green plains surrounded by the blue mountains, where they told us barbarians hid after their attacks on caravans or lone-riders travelling from one mine to another in Chihuahua ... to Paso del Norte, Tucson, Albuquerque or Our Lady of Los Angeles... The Apache nation was extinguished by the riflemen of Joaquín Terrazas so that he could, they say in Chihuahua, build himself a railway, the railway that at the beginning of the twentieth century went from the South to the North up to the new frontier... Not in vain was the phrase coined that we still use today to describe the danger, the anxiety, the fear: “We’re in Apache territory!”’ ‘Prologue’ to Manuel Rojas’s *Apaches ... fantasmas de la Sierra Madre*, Chihuahua: Instituto Chihuahuense de la Cultura, 2008, pp. 2, 4; my translation.

forwards into the future, but that also shifts and mutates in a more or less continuous transcultural process of transformation or over-coding as a combination of formal subsumption and re-functionalization.

The history of the territory of Apache refusal is thus the history of its over-coding and capture, but also, to an extent, its resistance to them such that, however subsumed, the spectral moment of the *non-identity* of what Deleuze and Guattari call 'war machine' and 'state capture' remains present.<sup>34</sup> An example: according to the historian Friedrich Katz, the anthropologist Daniel Nugent and the cultural critic Jorge Aguilar Mora, the long wars against the Apache and Comanche transformed the peasant-soldiers of Northern Mexico (who had originally been given land to defend on the frontier in the colonial *presidio* system) as they acquired the knowledge of their enemies (including the knowledge of their 'comings and goings' along the transversal routes through their territory) and, in the words of Aguilar Mora 'became Indian'. In this account, although militarily defeated, a war machine was captured and incorporated into what was to become the bandit forces of Pancho Villa's army during the Mexican Revolution. This was an army that occasionally 'freed' itself, to become outlaw again and raid across the Mexican-US border, and that itself had eventually to be defeated

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34. Deleuze and Guattari derive their notion of 'war machine' from the work on primitive societies by Pierre Clastres. He defines these as societies without and against the state. Primitive war – the nomadic war machine – thus becomes a strategy, associated mainly with the Apaches, for inhibiting the emergence of both inequality and a state-like centre of authority, each connected to the other. Geronimo, who might be considered the great representative of 'Apache refusal', was a warrior who would not give up the war against the Mexicans. He was abandoned by his tribe, however, because his persistence threatened the creation and consolidation of a specifically warrior class, and thus of a state of unequals. Deleuze and Guattari are critical of Clastres's definition of primitive societies, suggesting that they were not immune to state formation (as indeed Clastres himself suggests); it was a matter, rather, of 'degree' – the specific moment when a war machine and primitive society turned, and became a state. Despair at black holes is one of the results. See Pierre Clastres, *Society Against the State*, trans. Robert Hurley, New York: Zone Books, 1989, especially pp. 189–218. There is thus a war-machinic dimension to narco-accumulation, but it has been over-coded and subsumed by a proto-state pursuing a violent logic of permanent primitive accumulation, sometimes in alliance with and sometimes against the Mexican state, but mainly both at once.

by the new post-Revolutionary Mexican state, which conceived of *villismo* as its barbarous 'other'.<sup>35</sup>

In summary, then, the historical sequence of state capture and the reterritorialization of Apache territory includes: colonial and postcolonial conquest and racist containment (in reservations, for example), and the private appropriation of native lands and – particularly in the mountains of Chihuahua – the extension, industrialization and early-globalization of silver-mining. As the routes of Indian territories were abandoned as the economy shifted – that is, as they were *hinterlanded* – they were also reoccupied and their pathways re-functionalized in bandit cross-border overcodings (as with *villismo*). This is the outlaw territory – originally the creation of Apache refusal – that is both subordinated and re-created once more by narco-accumulation as a proto-state form qua 'model of realization' (or capitalist valorization) with its own repressive and ideological apparatuses. In *Breaking Bad*, it provides Walt with the 'land' – the territory – on which he 'cooks', a place where he can pursue his desire for wealth and his bid for freedom. Then it passes through his house, ruining it.

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35. There are other examples during this period: the cross-border alliance of the anarchist Flores Magón brothers and the 'Wobblies', the International Workers of the World, for example. For *villismo*, see Friedrich Katz, *The Life and Times of Pancho Villa*, Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 1998; Daniel Nugent, *Spent Cartridges of Revolution: An Anthropological History of Maniquipa, Chihuahua*, Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1993; and Jorge Aguilar Mora, *Una muerte sencilla, justa, eterna: cultura y guerra durante la Revolución Mexicana*, Mexico City: Ediciones Era, 1990.

## Contributors

**ÉRIC ALLIEZ** is a Professor of Philosophy at the University of Paris–8 and the Centre for Research in Modern European Philosophy (CRMEP), Kingston University London. His publications in English include *Wars and Capital* (with Maurizio Lazzarato, 2018); *Undoing the Image: Of Contemporary Art* (5 vols, 2018–); *The Brain-Eye: New Histories of Modern Painting* (2017); *Spheres of Action: Art and Politics* (ed. with Peter Osborne, 2013); *The Guattari Effect* (ed., with Andrew Goffey, 2011); *The Signature of the World: What is Deleuze and Guattari's Philosophy?* (2004).

**ÉTIENNE BALIBAR** graduated from the Sorbonne in Paris and later received his PhD from the University of Nijmegen (Netherlands). He is now Emeritus Professor of Philosophy at the University of Paris–Nanterre, and Anniversary Chair of Contemporary European Philosophy in the Centre for Research in Modern European Philosophy (CRMEP) at Kingston University London. His most recent books in English translation are *Identity and Difference: John Locke and the Invention of Consciousness* (2013); *Violence and Civility* (2015); *Citizen Subject: Foundations for Philosophical Anthropology* (2017); *Secularism and Cosmopolitanism* (2018).

**TITHI BHATTACHARYA** is a Professor of History and Director of Global Studies at Purdue University. She is the author of *Sentinels of Culture: Class, Education, and the Colonial Intellectual in Bengal* (2005) and the editor of *Social Reproduction Theory: Remapping Class, Recentring Oppression* (2017). Her new book, *Feminism for the 99 per cent: A Manifesto*, co-authored with Cinzia Arruzza and Nancy Fraser, is forthcoming from Verso.

**BORIS BUDEN** is a writer, cultural critic and translator. He received his PhD in cultural theory from Humboldt University in Berlin. In the 1990s he was editor of the magazine *Arkzin* in Zagreb. His essays and articles cover topics across philosophy, politics, culture and art criticism. Buden is translator of

some of the most important works of Sigmund Freud into Croatian. Among his recent books are *Zone des Übergangs* (2009), *Findet Europa* (2015), *Transition to Nowhere* (2018). Buden is a permanent fellow at the European Institute of Progressive Cultural Policies, Vienna. He lives and works in Berlin.

**SARA R. FARRIS** is a Senior Lecturer in the Sociology Department at Goldsmiths, University of London. Her work to date has focused on the orientalist underpinnings of sociological theory, which she explored in her first monograph on Max Weber's sociology of religion, and on theories of gender, race and social reproduction, particularly as they apply to the analysis of migrant women in Western Europe. Her latest book is *In the Name of Women's Rights: The Rise of Femonationalism* (2017).

**JOHN KRANIAUSKAS** is Professor of Latin American Studies at Birkbeck, University of London. His recent publications include *Políticas culturales: acumulación, desarrollo y crítica cultural* (2015) and *Capitalism and its Discontents: Power and Accumulation in Latin-American Culture* (2017). His current research is on the narco-culture of narco-accumulation, its capital logics and its territories.

**ELENA LOUISA LANGE** is Senior Research Fellow and Lecturer in Japanese Studies, University of Zurich. She received her PhD in 2011. Currently she is working on her *Habilitationschrift*, a critical work on Uno Kōzō's theory of 'pure capitalism' in the light of Marx's critique of political economy. She has co-edited two volumes on modern Japanese philosophy (*Begriff und Bild der modernen japanischen Philosophie*, 2014; *Concepts of Philosophy in Asia and the Islamic World*, 2018) and published articles, chapters and introductions on Marx's method in *Capital*, value theory and money, and the so-called 'Industry 4.0'.

**MAURIZIO LAZZARATO** is an independent sociologist and philosopher who lives and works in Paris, having left Italy in the late 1970s to escape political persecution. His works translated into English include: *Signs and Machines: Capitalism and the Production of Subjectivity* (2014); *Marcel Duchamp and the Refusal of Work* (2015); *Governing by Debt* (2016); *Wars and Capital* (with Eric Alliez, 2018). *Videophilosophy: The Perception of Time in Post-Fordism* is forthcoming from Columbia University Press.

**ANTONIO NEGRI** is an Italian philosopher and political activist. His many books include: *Marx and Foucault: Essays*, Volume 1 (2017); *Time for Revolution* (2003); *Insurgencies: Constituent Power and the Modern State* (1993; trans. 1999); *Marx Beyond Marx: Lessons on the Grundrisse* (1991); *The Politics of Subversion: A Manifesto for the Twenty-First Century* (1989, 2005); *The Savage Anomaly: The Power of Spinoza's Metaphysics and Politics* (1981, trans. 1991) and – with Michael Hardt – the trilogy *Empire* (2001), *Multitude* (2005) and *Commonwealth* (2011), and its successor, *Assembly* (2017).



**PETER OSBORNE** is Professor of Modern European Philosophy and Director of the Centre for Research in Modern European Philosophy (CRMEP), Kingston University London. He has held visiting chairs in the Department of Philosophy at the University of Paris–8 (2014), the Royal Institute of Art, Stockholm (2015) and Yale University School of Art (2017). From 1983 until 2016 he was an editor of the British journal *Radical Philosophy*. His books include *The Politics of Time: Modernity and Avant-Garde* (1995, 2011); *Philosophy in Cultural Theory* (2000); *Marx* (2005); *Anywhere or Not at All: Philosophy of Contemporary Art* (2013); *The Postconceptual Condition* (2018).

**ERIC-JOHN RUSSELL** is a doctoral candidate in the Centre for Research in Modern European Philosophy (CRMEP) in London. His dissertation examines the ways in which Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* and *Science of Logic* each make their appearance within Guy Debord's *The Society of the Spectacle*.

**GAYATRI CHAKRAVORTY SPIVAK** is a University Professor and founding member of the Institute for Comparative Literature and Society at Columbia University, New York. Her many books include: *Nationalism and the Imagination* (2015); *An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization* (2013); *Other Asias* (2008); *Death of a Discipline* (2003); *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (1999); *Outside in the Teaching Machine* (1993); *In Other Worlds* (1987).

**KESTON SUTHERLAND** is the author of *Whither Russia*, *The Odes to TL61P*, *The Stats on Infinity*, *Stress Position*, *Hot White Andy* and other poems, and of *Stupefaction*. He is Professor of Poetics at the University of Sussex.

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<b>Étienne</b>	<b>Balibar</b>
<b>Tithi</b>	<b>Bhattacharya</b>
<b>Boris</b>	<b>Buden</b>
<b>Sara R.</b>	<b>Farris</b>
<b>John</b>	<b>Kraniauskas</b>
<b>Elena Louisa</b>	<b>Lange</b>
<b>Maurizio</b>	<b>Lazzarato</b>
<b>Antonio</b>	<b>Negri</b>
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