

FREDRIC JAMESON REPRESENTING CAPITAL

A Reading of Volume One



REPRESENTING CAPITAL

REPRESENTING *CAPITAL*

A Commentary on Volume One



FREDRIC JAMESON



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Introduction

It should not be surprising that Marx remains as inexhaustible as capital itself, and that with every adaptation or mutation of the latter his texts and his thought resonate in new ways and with fresh accents—*inédits*, as the French say—rich with new meanings. In particular the mutation of a capitalism of imperialism and the monopoly stage into the latest globalized moment and structure might have been expected to turn our attention to unremarked features of his laborious explorations; and if not that newly expanded system itself, then certainly its crises and the catastrophes appropriate to this present of time, which like those of the past are both the same as what preceded them, but also different and historically unique.

These shifts were to be sure marked by a readjustment of Marx's works themselves: first, in the originality of its modernist moment, a new kind of fascination with the alienations theorized by the then recently discovered manuscripts of 1844; then, as the sixties began to develop their own consequences, a mesmerization by those 1857 notebooks called the *Grundrisse*, whose very open-endedness seemed to promise relief from the cut-and-dried schematization of “dialectical materialism” and its various handbooks.¹

¹ Gramsci famously denounced such handbooks as Bukharin's *ABC of Communism*; while in our time the *Grundrisse* have seemed to many to open up lines of flight, dialectical and non-dialectical, beyond reigning orthodoxies: see for example Antonio Negri, *Marx Beyond Marx* (Brooklyn: Autonomedia, 1991),

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But it is not clear that those handbooks imply any comparable ossification in *Capital*, Volume One itself, the only published work whose architectonic Marx himself lovingly projected and brought to completion, and for which the *Grundrisse* were preparatory notes. Against Althusser, I will claim that the theory of alienation is still very much an active, form-building impulse; while I will also argue, this time with him, that it has in *Capital* been transmuted into a wholly different non- or post-philosophical dimension. Yet is not this “Volume One” itself incomplete in a different way than the notes and speculations of the earlier, more truly unpublished texts? I will argue here that it is not, and that the layering of the posthumous volumes (falling rate of profit, ground rent, the multiple temporalities) are already laid in place here in as satisfactory a form as we are likely to need.² But I will also claim that any number of features of Marxism are absent from this more purely economic volume, and that future Marxisms can only be more effective politically by recognizing those omissions.

For as I will show, *Capital*—and from now on I omit the “Volume One”—is not a book about politics, and not even a book about labor: it is a book about unemployment, a scandalous assertion I mean to

and also, for a variety of views and studies, Karl Marx’s *Grundrisse*, ed. Marcello Musto (London: Routledge, 2008).

² This obviously controversial assertion (for me simply a working framework) is implicitly or explicitly denounced by everyone committed to the six-part plan outlined by Marx in his April 2, 1858 letter to Engels. Indeed, according to Ernest Mandel, Roman Rosdolsky, in his pathbreaking *The Making of Marx’s “Capital,”* “has isolated no less than fourteen different versions of the plan for *Capital* between September 1857 and April 1868” (*Capital*, Volume One, trans. Ben Fowkes [London: New Left Review, 1976], p. 28; all page references in the text are to this edition). The most powerful current political argument for the incompleteness of Volume One is that of Michael Lebowitz (see for example Chapter 7 in *Following Marx* [Chicago: Harvester, 2009]). I will discuss Lebowitz’s position further in the Political Conclusions, below; it is not incompatible with my reading in this book. Meanwhile, there is also a good deal of current attention to Engels’ editing of Volumes II and III; see for example Vollgraf and Jungnickel, “Marx in Marx’s Worten?” in *MEGA-Studien* 1994/2.

justify by way of close attention to its argument and the latter's stages and point-by-point development. This can be imagined as a series of interlinked problems or paradoxes, which, ostensibly solved, give rise to new and unexpected ones, of greater scope.

The process must then be imagined as a specific proto-narrative form, in which the transformation or recoding of a conceptual dilemma in a new and potentially more manageable way also results in the expansion of the object of study itself: the successive resolutions of the linked riddles or dilemmas lay in place the architecture of a whole construct or system, which is that of capital as such. It is this unique constructional process, quite unlike that of most philosophical texts and of most rhetorical arguments as well, that Marx calls the *Darstellung* of the material; I will not become involved in the debate about science (*Wissenschaft*), except to remind us of Althusser's definition of the latter as a discourse without a subject (that is to say, without doxa or opinions).³

Truth being what you agree to conclude with, as Wittgenstein puts it, the exposition of the structure and dynamics of capitalism will be complete when all those interlinked problems have been laid to rest. Topics which do not find their place in this series are generally taken to be arguments against Marx or against his conception of capitalism, although (when not pseudoproblems) they may simply be problems of a different kind, relating to quite different issues. Bourgeois economists are generally concerned to offer practical solutions to crises within the system, within the market (problems raised by inflation or stagflation, of growth or slowdowns); they wish to correct the system in one way or another, but not to theorize it as a totality, which is Marx's ambition (and that of most Marxian economists who followed him).

Such a theorization is not a philosophical project, nor does it aim to formulate this or that conception of capital; nor is Marx's argument a philosophical one, setting this or that idea of truth in play. But it may certainly be observed that the objections to Marxism are philosophical,

³ Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," in *Lenin and Philosophy* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971), p. 171.

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for they replay the empiricist objections to the deployment of frameworks like that of totality or system, which are for them imaginary entities. (And it is also true that the replies to these arguments seem to take a philosophical form in their turn, a form generally identified as dialectical.) But I claim here that *Capital* is neither a philosophical work in that sense, nor is it an economic one, in the specialized meaning projected by most academic economics departments.

I am of course also concerned that the following pages not be construed as a literary reading of the book. Nowhere has the Marxian doctrine of base and superstructure been more damaging than in Marxism itself, where the specialists of the base—the commentators on capitalism, the strategists of revolution—are encouraged to feel little more than contempt for the culture workers of the superstructures, unless the latter offer legal and juridical analyses or happen to produce this or that politically relevant Ideologiekritik. The literary approaches to *Capital*, such as they are, will have been intent on characterizing the form of the work (is it for example comic or tragic?), or on reading it as a narrative of some kind, with the various forces (capital, labor, the state) sorted out into a cast of characters or image patterns.⁴ But this is perhaps to misunderstand the direction literary theory has taken in recent years, as it has moved to confront a dilemma not unrelated to the one that has tended to discredit traditional philosophy—namely the dilemma of representation as such. It is now around the question of representation that contemporary interrogations of truth must turn, as well as those concerning totality or the Real. The problem of representation today eats away at all the established disciplines like a virus, particularly destabilizing the dimension of language, reference and expression (which used to be the domain of literary study), as well as that of thought (which used to be that of philosophy). Nor is economics exempt, which posits invisible entities like finance capital on the one hand, and points to untheorizable singularities like derivatives on the other. And as

⁴ Stanley Edgar Hyman, *The Tangled Bank*; Robert Paul Wolff, *Moneybags Must Be So Lucky*; Hayden White, *Metahistory*. The best linguistic study of Marx remains Ludovico Silva, *El Estilo de Marx* (Mexico: Siglo Ventuno, 1971).

for political theory, the traditional question—what is the state?—has mutated into something unanswerable with its postcontemporary version, where is the state?—while the former thing called power, as solid and tangible, seemingly, as a gold coin, or at least as a dollar bill, has become the airy plaything of mystics and physiologists alike. It is the problem of representation which has wrought all this destabilized confusion, and it can be said to be history itself which has deregulated it, so that if the dilemmas of representation are postmodern and historical, it can also be said that history as such has become a problem of representation.

Maybe theology could have done a better job with capitalism, consisting as it is of a free play of categories in the void and an exercise of figuration without a referent: an interplay of the dialectics of the One and the Many, of subject and object, of the circumference whose center is everywhere and the *ens causa sui*. But even theology of the Spinozan variety (notoriously atemporal) would find difficulty accommodating a totality so peculiar as capitalism, in which spatial anomalies are so paradoxically interactive with temporal ones.

As for the question of representation, I understand it in relationship to conceptualization as well as to ideology (and as a corollary of the relationship of thinking or ideology with narrative). Marx's frequent (and frequently referenced) use of the term *Darstellung* needs to be understood in this way, and not merely in a rhetorical or linguistic/literary sense. The issue of representation was returned to the philosophical agenda in modern times by Heidegger,⁵ while its political function has been widely challenged today in the crisis of parliamentary democracy (see for example Deleuze, Foucault, Gayatri Spivak). Heidegger understands "representation" more narrowly as a historical symptom of modernity and a consequence of the latter's subject/object split. The Marxist tradition—its critique of epistemology and the contemplative, its denunciation of one-dimensionality and of reification more generally—would enrich this analysis with an identification of modernity and capitalism. I myself

⁵ See for example Martin Heidegger, "Die Zeit des Weltbildes," in *Holzwege* (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1950).

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would prefer to grasp representation as an essential operation in cognitive mapping and in ideological construction (understood here in a positive sense).

I would therefore also wish to stress the relationship between representation and representability as we find it in Freud,⁶ where the unconscious construction of the dream scans the signifier for usable elements and building blocks, for the presentation/representation of desire and the drive. Freud's work thus presupposes two features: first, that any full or satisfactory representation of the drive is impossible (in that sense every form of desire is already a representation). And second, that we must always pay close attention in this process to representability, something which has to do on the one hand with the possibility in the drive of some minimal expression, even if as a mere symptom; and on the other with the material available for that expression (in Freud's case, the language and images of everyday life). Here history intervenes, for what may serve as a satisfactory vehicle for expression of some feature of desire at one moment in history may not be available at another.

But this will be more comprehensible when we shift from the arcana of the psyche and its drives to the question of capitalism as a totality. No one had ever seen that totality, nor is capitalism ever visible as such, but only in its symptoms. This means that every attempt to construct a model of capitalism—for this is now what representation means in this context—will be a mixture of success and failure: some features will be foregrounded, others neglected or even misrepresented. Every representation is partial, and I would also stress the fact that every possible representation is a combination of diverse and heterogeneous modes of construction or expression, wholly different types of articulation that cannot but, incommensurable with each other, remain a mixture of approaches that signals the multiple perspectives from which one must approach such a totality and none of which exhaust it. This very incommensurability is the reason for being of the dialectic itself, which exists to coordinate incompatible modes

⁶ Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams* (London: Hogarth, 1953), standard edn, vol. V, Chapter Six, Section D ("Considerations of Representability").

of thought without reducing them to what Marcuse so memorably called one-dimensionality. Thus, for example, social class is at one and the same time a sociological idea, a political concept, a historical conjuncture, an activist slogan, yet a definition in terms of any one of these perspectives alone is bound to be unsatisfactory.⁷ We may go so far as to claim, indeed, that this is why the very form of the definition as such is unacceptable. Social class cannot be defined, it can only be provisionally approached in a kind of parallax, which locates it in the absent center of a multiple set of incompatible approaches. How much the more so will this be when it is a question of capitalism itself as the totality of which social class is now a function?

Yet the conclusion to draw here is not that, since it is unrepresentable, capitalism is ineffable and a kind of mystery beyond language or thought; but rather that one must redouble one's efforts to express the inexpressible in this respect. Marx's book gives us the supreme example of a dialectical effort to do so, and this is why the way in which he finally did represent it is so significant and urgent for us today.

Of capitalist space we can posit a Spinozan pantheism, in which the informing power is everywhere and nowhere all at once, and yet at the same time in relentless expansion, by way of appropriation and subsumption alike. Of the temporality of the matter it is enough to observe that the machine is constantly breaking down, repairing itself not by solving its local problems but by mutation onto larger and larger scales, its past always punctually forgotten, its nested futures irrelevant up to the point of the quantum leap (so that structuralism's notion of the synchronic sometimes strikes one as a conceptual ideology expressly invented to deal with this peculiar new reality).

Two specifically dialectical problems would seem to dog any description of this complex reality as it wraps itself in a time and space it has itself projected. The first is that of technology as such, which is to say of reification: is it cause or effect, the creature of human agency or the latter's master, an extension of collective power or the latter's appropriation? We are here conceptually paralyzed by

⁷ See for example on the unavoidable multiplicity of "definitions" of class, Stanley Aronowitz, *How Class Works* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003).

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technology's nature as an object which has been produced and which survives its production in inert material form; and that paralysis finds outlet either in technological determinism or in a kind of humanist allegory. Neither outcome is conceptually or ideologically satisfying, both are recurring and plausible interpretations of Marx, and each seems incompatible with the other. Perhaps the union of opposites offers a more productive view of what in Marx is staged as an alternation: a phenomenon like capitalism is good and bad all at once and simultaneously—the most productive as well as the most destructive force we have so far encountered in human history, as the *Manifesto* puts it. We have to remind ourselves of Marx's personal delight in new technologies and inventions, in new scientific discoveries,⁸ in order to evaluate the terrible role they play in *Capital* and also to evade the ever-present temptation of nostalgia for a simpler past and for a retreat into more human pre-capitalist modes of production.

The second dilemma is that of mediation as such (and technology might have served as an illustration of that one too). Here money is the most useful exhibit, for this worthless object stands at a watershed between production and consumption, exchange value and use value, solving none of the conceptual *aporie* generated by the interference between these two poles and yet making it possible to forget them altogether in the heat of a practical and temporal act. And here too reification is part of the mix; but not in the same way as with the institutional objects of technology, the things into which stored labor has been transformed. As a thing, money seems closer to some exotic social contract: as a relationship, it is an equation each of whose sides or terms will fatally mislead us into mistaking it for a thing, and taking it as a basis for politics, as in Thomas More's abolition of it in *Utopia*. In thought, mediation is nothing but a word subject to all the most damaging anti-dialectical objections; in reality it is a mystery that blocks thinking altogether. We must handle it with the greatest caution and virtuosity.

⁸ Jacques Attali, *Karl Marx, ou l'esprit du monde* (Paris: Fayard, 2005), offers the most enlightening correlation between Marx's life chronology and the eruption of the great inventions (in art as well as in science and technology).

And now finally, History, and the identity of Identity and Difference (or was it the non-identity of those things?). Only this particular union of opposites will be capable of yielding a satisfactory answer to a question most often posed today, namely why return to Marx, and above all why return to this particular nineteenth-century text called *Capital*? If Marx's thoughts are still valid, then we would need no newer reading of the famous, now respectably classic book. If they are not, then why not invent new ones and consign all the familiar slogans of Volume One to that archival cemetery to which are consigned all sciences that once were true and are now merely obsolete?

The reason lies in the identity and difference between the stages of capitalism, each one remaining true to the latter's essence and structure (the profit motive, accumulation, expansion, exploitation of wage labor) at the same time that it marks a mutation in culture and everyday life, in social institutions and human relationships. Any creative reading of *Capital* today is a translation process, whereby a language and a conceptuality invented for the first industrial age of Victorian society is transcoded by remaining faithful to its "original" construction, and secures its contemporary representationality by virtue of a grasp of the ambitious dimensions and the structural intricacy of its initial representation. Ernest Mandel argued that as the archaic or residual elements still present in the earlier stages of capitalism were eliminated, that purer and more functional abstraction of the system built by Marx became ever more true, ever more relevant to contemporary conditions.⁹ Heightened polarization, increasing unemployment, the ever more desperate search for new investments and new markets today, would all seem to confirm this evaluation.

Killingworth, 2010

⁹ "One could even contend that, from a structural point of view, the 'concrete' capitalism of the final quarter of the twentieth century is much closer to the 'abstract' model of *Capital* than was the 'concrete' capitalism of 1867, when Marx finished correcting the proofs of Volume 1." Ernest Mandel, Introduction to *Capital*, p. 82.

Chapter I

The Play of Categories

The first three chapters of *Capital* (“Part One: Commodities and Money”¹⁰) are the most widely read and studied section of the book and also the most controversial. The concentrated dialectical language of these chapters (“flirting with Hegel,” as Marx put it) has been deplored by those who feel that it renders these chapters inaccessible to the general reader and in particular to working class people, but also that an essentially idealistic Hegelianism is incompatible with Marx’s materialism, which emerged, indeed, from the latter’s determination to free himself from it. Meanwhile, these chapters return Marxism to a philosophical framework which Marxian political economy (or rather its critique of political economy) decisively displaced from the outset. Louis Althusser, the most influential proponent of this position, recommended that this section be skipped on first reading, and also that a prudent distance be observed between the mature texts and those still essentially philosophical musings on “alienation” (the 1844 manuscripts) with which Marx’s study of political economy began. (Many years earlier, from an equally anti-dialectical, although a philosophically quite distinct standpoint, Karl Korsch had advised a similar strategy and a similar vigilance.¹¹)

¹⁰ Op. cit., Introduction, note 2.

¹¹ See Louis Althusser, “Preface to Capital Volume One,” *Lenin and Philosophy*, op. cit.; and Karl Korsch, “Introduction to Capital Volume One,” in *Three Essays on Marxism* (London: Pluto, 1971).

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A certain plausibility is lent Althusser's position by Marx's own hesitations on the subject. He rewrote a first, simpler exposition for the second edition of *Capital*, adding many of the dialectical bravura pieces to which Althusser objected; later on, for the French translation, he went back and tried to resimplify much of the same material. It may also be added that in reality the "final" text of these chapters was itself initially also a rewrite of his preceding little book or pamphlet, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (1859),¹² so that one may be justified in taking a longer look at the uncertain place of this whole section in the overall plan (without particularly wanting to offer psychological speculations as to Marx's perfectionism or his propensity to leave projects unfinished).

Meanwhile, for many, the first three chapters contain virtually all the essential propositions of *Capital* itself and this section stands as the unavoidable entryway to that work as a whole. To amputate the latter of its exposition of the theory of value is to reduce the remainder to a vulgar economics treatise, not much more elevated than the standard works of political economy it so devastatingly analyzes and criticizes. For the theory of value is something like *Capital's* hermetic dimension: it secures the existence, behind all appearances of price and market exchange, of those deeper laws which it is the vocation of Marxian theory to bring to light, and without which the "violent fluctuations" (782) as well as the irreversible expansion of capitalism, along with its emergence and dissolution, can scarcely be understood. In this sense, Marx's version of the labor theory of value dramatically solves one of the age-old mysteries of the market (how can anyone make money out of a fair exchange?).

On the other hand, it should be pointed out that the labor theory of value is not expounded in these first chapters, only appearing for the first time in Chapter 6. Part One assuredly trains us in the habit of seeking out the essences behind appearances, as Hegel might put it; yet the decisive invitation "to leave this noisy sphere" of circulation and the market ("where everything takes place on the surface and in

¹² New York: International, 1970; all references in text to this edition, marked C.

full view of everyone”), and to follow the capitalist and the worker “into the hidden abode of production” (279)—this invitation is not extended until the end of Chapter 6. Where Part One takes us proves on the contrary to be the same dead end in which the preceding work had left us, namely a theory of money which will scarcely play a role in the main body of *Capital* and whose most useful contribution to this immense analysis of capitalism will be to show that money is itself a symptom of underlying structural contradictions (that is to say, a “mediation,” a stopgap solution which does not resolve the contradictions themselves but only “provides the form within which they have room to move” [198]; we will return to this important formulation later on).

Marx has thus here moved backward rather than forward: he has taken as a point of departure the endpoint of the earlier *Critique*, its coming to rest on a theory of money, and returned to deepen and complexify, to philosophize its starting point in the commodity form, in the process emerging from this renewed immersion with the theory of value; but he has scarcely made a further beginning with the theory of capital, which only gets going in Chapter 4.

This is my rationale for returning Part One to its previous form and seeing it as a small but complete treatise in its own right, like its predecessor. Nor is it to be considered in analogy to the overture of an opera, but a smaller satellite unity of the type of Wagner’s *Rheingold* (pondered at much the same time as Marx’s chapters)—a short opening spectacle to inaugurate the tetralogy, just as in ancient Greece the satyr play concluded it. It is a solution which satisfies Althusser’s objections, to the degree to which we are now able to see it as a related yet semi-autonomous discussion in its own right, one which lays the ground and frees the terrain for the principal task to come, and as a more finished product, perhaps, a more lovingly formed and polished artifact than the *Hauptwerk* to follow (of which, to be sure, Marx was in any case proud enough).

This approach by no means abruptly dismisses the first three chapters, as Althusser sometimes seems scandalously enough to do; nor does it disdain the dialectical flourishes and figural enrichment of these pages, which rather betray some of the most interesting secrets

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of Marx's creativity. But it does allow us to ask questions about form and about autonomy which may also offer useful insights and a equally new perspective when we come to the last section of *Capital* (Part Eight, on so-called primitive accumulation). It may also prove useful when we confront the three enormous and virtually self-sufficient chapters which seem to interrupt the movement of the book like islands in the sea, namely those on "The Working Day" (Chapter 10), on "Machinery and Large-Scale Industry" (Chapter 15), and on "The General Law of Capitalist Accumulation" (Chapter 25).

One of the ways of reading *Capital*—that is, of grasping the place of its individual analyses and propositions in the construction of the whole—lies in seeing it as a series of riddles, of mysteries or paradoxes, to which at the proper moment the solution is supplied. Unsurprisingly, this solution will be a dialectical one; it will not dissipate the strangeness of the initial paradox or antinomy by way of a dry and rational unmasking, but preserve the strangeness of the problem within the new strangeness of the dialectical solution. The elaboration of these riddles is of unequal length; they overlap, they find their dénouements at unpredictable moments, in which from time to time the identity of some of the riddles with each other is unexpectedly revealed. To be sure, the riddle of riddles is capitalism itself, and how in its radical difference from all other social formations (or modes of production) it can exist in the first place.

Part One, indeed, unlike the main body of *Capital*—as we will henceforth call the text that develops from Part Two through Part Seven—contains a number of illustrative references to radically different modes of production: There are the four "forms of production" (Chapter 1) from which "the commodity vanishes" along with its theoretical problems: the Robinsonade, medieval (feudal) Europe, the peasant family, and the "association of free men" (socialism).¹³

¹³ *Capital*, op. cit., pp. 169–72. Perhaps the fourth form is the most relevant here:

Let us finally imagine, for a change, an association of free men, working with the means of production held in common, and spending their many different forms of

Later on (pp. 182ff) we have the Indian village and the Inca mode of production (what in the *Grundrisse* Marx called the Asiatic mode of production).¹⁴ These examples are usefully illuminated by the Althusserian distinction between structural domination and structural determination.¹⁵ The determination of all these social formations is

labour-power in full self-awareness as one single social labour force. All the characteristics of Robinson's labour are repeated here, but with the difference that they are social instead of individual. All Robinson's products were exclusively the result of his own personal labour and they were therefore directly objects of utility for him personally. The total product of our imagined association is a social product. One part of this product serves as fresh means of production and remains social. But another part is consumed by the members of the association as means of subsistence. This part must therefore be divided amongst them. The way this division is made will vary with the particular kind of social organization of production and the corresponding level of social development attained by the producers. We shall assume, but only for the sake of a parallel with the production of commodities, that the share of each individual producer in the means of subsistence is determined by his labour-time. Labour-time would in that case play a double part. Its apportionment in accordance with a definite social plan maintains the correct proportion between the different functions of labour and the various needs of the associations. On the other hand, labour-time also serves as a measure of the part taken by each individual in the common labour, and of his share in the part of the total product destined for individual consumption. The social relations of the individual producers, both towards their labour and the products of their labour, are here transparent in their simplicity, in production as well as distribution.

¹⁴ See references to Indian agriculture and the Incas, p. 182. This seems to be all that remains of the concept of the "Asiatic mode of production" theorized in the section of the *Grundrisse* now entitled "Formations that precede capitalism" and later explored in Marx's anthropological notebooks (Lawrence Krader, *Ethnological Notebooks of Karl Marx* [Assen: Van Gorcum, 1972]). When Engels wrote these indications up in *The Origins of the Family, Private Property and the State* (1884) after Marx's death, this troublesome concept was omitted; but it continued to have a history. The two extremes of its repudiation and wholehearted acceptance can be found in Perry Anderson, *Lineages of the Absolutist State* (London: New Left Books, 1974), pp. 462–549; and in Maurice Godelier, *Sur le mode de production asiatique*, ed. F. Tokel (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1966).

¹⁵ The most useful exposition of this Althusserian distinction is to be found in Emmanuel Terray, *Marxism and "Primitive" Societies* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1972). But see also Marx's original version:

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to be sure economic, in the sense of the type of production current in each. Yet the unifying ideology of each one—the dominant—may well be quite different: various forms of religion, or else the ethos of the polis or ancient city-state, or power relations and personal domination, as in feudalism (not to mention the now unmentionable Asiatic mode, unified by way of the God-emperor at its center). In these cases the ideological or religious dominant is distinct from its determinant in the type of production involved: only in capitalism are these two things identical, and the economic determinant is also the secular dominant (or in other words its structuration by the money form). If this seems already too mysterious we may rephrase it in terms of community or collectivity (*Gemeinschaft*): the various pre-capitalist societies, whatever their technical production, are all organized collectively: only capitalism constitutes a social formation—that is, an organized multiplicity of people—united by the absence of community, by separation and by individuality.

Meanwhile, it is true that the identity of dominant and determinant in capitalism in principle constitutes it as the first transparent society, that is to say, the first social formation in which the “secret of production” is revealed. Indeed, it is this transparency which grounds the truth claims of Marxism, a knowledge of society only being possible when commodification has become tendentially universal, that is, when wage labor has largely superceded all other forms of class relationship.¹⁶ Yet this possibility of truth in capitalism is

One thing is clear: the Middle Ages could not live on Catholicism, nor could the ancient world on politics. On the contrary, it is the manner in which they gained their livelihood which explains why in one case politics, in the other case Catholicism, played the chief part. For the rest, one needs no more than a slight acquaintance with, for example, the history of the Roman Republic, to be aware that its secret history is the history of landed property. And then there is Don Quixote, who long ago paid the penalty for wrongly imagining that knight errantry was compatible with all economic forms of society. (*Capital*, 178, n. 26)

¹⁶ *Capital*, 274, n. 4: “The capitalist epoch is therefore characterized by the fact that labour-power, in the eyes of the worker himself, takes on the form of a commodity which is his property; his labour consequently takes on the form of wage-labour. On the other hand, it is only from this moment that the commodity form of the products of labour becomes universal.” This can

immediately occulted by ideology in the narrower sense of what ideologists produce and invent to conceal that truth. Thus, for one thing, the understanding of pre-capitalist societies (indeed, the very possibility of their existence as alternatives to this one) is at once dispelled: “the pre-bourgeois forms of the social organization of production are treated by political economy in much the same way as the Fathers of the Church treated pre-Christian religions” (175); or alternately, “they believe that there once was history, but there isn’t any any more” (175n.). For another, various ideological versions of a capitalist “dominant” are elaborated in order to simulate a unity of capitalist society which is analogous to those pre-capitalist societies, or in other words which seems collective. In our time, to be sure, this dominant takes the form of the “market,” now generalized into a metaphysical principle (and a permanent feature of human nature as well); the market (reduced by Marx to “the sphere of circulation,” or simply “exchange”) is then proclaimed to be a unifying principle and some equivalent (but better and somehow more natural) form of collectivity. The whole of Part One may then be understood as a wholesale attack on the ideology of the market, or if you prefer, a fundamental critique of the concept of exchange and, indeed, of the very equation of identity as such.

We must accustom ourselves to the principle of dialectical synonymy: the process whereby a critique is waged on several levels of implication at once, so that the critique of the equation will lead on (through various mathematical developments and speculations in which Marx delighted and which are mostly not indulged here in *Capital*)¹⁷ into a critique of identity which finds its kinship in Hegel’s identity of identity and non-identity, that is, his dialectic of

be understood as the fundamental argument for Marx’s “absolute historicism” (Gramsci); meanwhile, the universal commodification of labor, the universalization of wage labor, is another way of characterizing the emergence of the world market (or globalization). The latter is not defined by multiple and extensive trade routes, but rather by the transformation of older modes of exploitation (particularly in agriculture) into wage labor, commodified labor.

¹⁷ See Karl Marx, *Mathematical Manuscripts* (London: New Park, 1983).

identity and difference (which ceaselessly turn into one another), but which then in its multiple developments far exceeds Hegel's original version; a critique of more specific economic (or political-economic) theories or ideologies of the dynamics of the exchange of goods and the equivalence of their values; not to speak of the legal "equality" of individuals "free" to sell their labor power under capitalism: the critique of the "contract," then, not to speak of equilibrium; the spuriousness of any thematization of self-consciousness as a mirror reflexion of consciousness; and finally that of the abstraction involved in equating one concrete thing or phenomenon with another. A dialectical critique or critical force-field will then variously impact all of these apparently synonymous levels of equality or equivalence—the philosophical, the political, the economic, the ideological, the productive—in the process not omitting a return to the ideological equivalence which has identified them all with one another by insisting on the specificity of production as opposed to circulation or consumption. But it is also important to stress the dialectical nature of these critical operations in the following way: the repudiation of equivalences or identities does not simply result in the affirmation of differences; for the very act by which different objects are set in equivalence with each other already presupposes difference as such. Rather, as we shall see, the very alternation between identity and difference must be destabilized in another (more dialectical) way.

Yet the very tendency to do so itself reveals yet another fundamental feature of the critical process, which is its relationship to and dependence on dualities. I am tempted to characterize this as a pre-philosophical matter, indeed, something like a pre-Socratic bedrock of the dialectic as such. I have spoken elsewhere of the kinship of the dialectic with the binary oppositions of structuralism.¹⁸ Now it is duality itself that comes into play and complicates matters, for it cannot be dealt with by way of the simple positivities of structuralist analysis. Duality must be affirmed when it has been forgotten or ideologically repressed; it must be denounced when it is deployed

¹⁸ See *Valences of the Dialectic* (London: Verso, 2009), pp. 15–19.

in all kinds of obscurantist strategies; nor can it be affirmed as a metaphysical principle (as I was just tempted into doing), for it is not eternal but rather always situation-specific and singular, and to that degree even its methodological or structural generalization and characterization as “the dialectic” is obscurantist and misleading.

Still, it is unavoidable to begin with the dualities that crowd the first pages of this text, however we find ourselves able to dispatch or defuse them later on: use value and exchange value engage us at once and will long continue to do so, despite Marx’s apparent (and explicit) bracketing of the category of use value, which will allegedly no longer enter into the analysis of capital. In this, the book apparently imitates its object of study (“the particular course taken by our analysis forces this tearing apart of the object under investigation: this corresponds also to the spirit of capitalist production” [443]): for the seller of the commodity has no interest in its use value (provided it has one, that is, provided someone else will want to buy it)—“use values must never be treated as the immediate aim of the capitalist” (254). We may thus say that use value is already presupposed at the beginning of *Capital* (and that we are already in a commodity system); in any case it has apparently been excluded from the investigation in advance.

But this appearance is misleading (as all appearances apparently are), and in fact an immense duality or binary opposition runs throughout this book from beginning to end—its fundamental or categorial starting point, about which there will always be found enough people to denounce it as a metaphysical presupposition—and that is the great opposition between Quality and Quantity, which we will from time to time find mutating into the even more suspicious one between Body and Mind or Soul. (But this is a materialist philosophy, if it is a philosophy at all, and we should therefore not be surprised to find Body or Quality turning out to be the positive term, while Quantity or Mind or Soul proves to be the negative, the sheerly idealistic one.)

Use value is therefore quality; it is the life of the body, of existential or phenomenological experience, of the consumption of physical products, but also the very texture of physical work and physical

time (“the measure of wealth,” Marx cries out in the *Grundrisse*,¹⁹ “is not ... in any way labour time but rather disposable time!” [708]). Quality is human time itself, whether in labor or in the life outside of labor; and it is this deep existential constant that justifies that Utopian strain in Marxism which anticipates the transformation of work into aesthetic activity (from Ruskin to Morris, from Marcuse to Paolo Virno’s notion of virtuosity), a tradition somewhat different from the more Hegelian delight in activity and the more orthodox celebration of work or productivity as a central human drive²⁰ (both of them to be sure distinct from yet a third, which places its Utopian emphasis on the elimination of work altogether).

This indissoluble relationship between Quality and the body will then make more vivid and sinister everything about the “fetishism of commodities” that smacks of spiritualism and of the abstractions of capitalism as such, which are now to be accounted for by Quantity, here identified, as in Hegel, with mind and “theory” as such.²¹ (To be sure, Hegel’s idealism inclines his valorization in the other direction.) Yet Marx’s materialism is not for all that any simple anti-intellectualism, nor does the categorial opposition between Quantity and Quality, fundamental to his thought in *Capital*, function as a simple dualism, as we shall see presently, but rather results in some strange new entity beyond the alternations of body and soul, a dimension quite distinct from the vulgar-Hegelian third term or “synthesis” that might have been expected.

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¹⁹ References to the *Grundrisse* are prefaced with the letter G and are given first to the English translation of Martin Nicolaus (London: New Left Books, 1973).

²⁰ The aesthetic tradition in Marx is theorized in Lukács’ essay on Schiller in *Probleme der Aesthetik* (Berlin: Luchterhand, 1969). For Ruskin and Morris, see Raymond Williams and E. P. Thompson; and see also Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*; and Paolo Virno, *A Grammar of Multitude*. On activity as an ethic, see my *Hegel Variations* (London: Verso, 2010), Chapter 6.

²¹ See *The Hegel Variations*, p. 31; as well as Hegel, *Encyclopedia Logic*, trans. William Wallace (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), p. 147: “Quantity ... is a stage of the idea.”

But we start, as always, from dualities—in these opening pages, the oscillation of those objects called commodities between use value and exchange value. (It is worth noting here the tendency of the word “value,” taken in isolation, to mean exchange value as such. It is as though the very idea of value only comes into the world when we have to choose between the two antithetical senses of use and exchange; if that alternative did not yet exist, or had ceased to do so, perhaps the very concept of value as such would disappear along with it.²²) Meanwhile, if use leads us in the direction of quality defined as human time and the existential, exchange leads us in that of the abstractions of mathematics and in particular of the equation as such.

But perhaps it is important to identify one crucial source of ambiguity here from the outset: Marx has here, in these opening pages, synonymously linked two distinct levels of figuration which can potentially, under certain circumstances, again go their separate ways: he has transformed the word “commodity” into a substantive technical term in its own right, around which a good deal of object-ness can cluster; and he has then at the same time pointed us in the direction of a mathematical process capable of taking the place of those substances and objects, of translating their inertia into the relational laws or inner dynamics of what turns out to be static in appearance only. These two sets of languages are not in Marx’s theory incompatible; indeed, they complete each other in fundamental ways. But when prolonged by later theoretical speculation, each is capable of taking on its own semi-autonomy and becoming a self-sufficient theoretical language in its own right. This is what explains the current debate (itself a prolongation of all kinds of earlier disputes within Marxism) between the partisans of the labor theory of value and those of the

²² This seemingly heretical tradition logically assumes that *Capital* will lose its relevance after the end of capitalism itself: see Lukács, “The Changing Function of Historical Materialism”; and Gramsci, “The Revolution against *Capital*.” See also, from another perspective, Jean-Paul Sartre, *Search for a Method* (New York: Random House, 1963): “As soon as there will exist for everyone a margin of real freedom beyond the production of life, Marxism [as the ‘untranscendable philosophy of our time’] will have lived out its span; a philosophy of freedom will take its place” (34).

theory of finance capital.²³ It is not my intention to offer any solution to this dispute, but only to point out that its conditions of possibility are already embedded in Marx's original figuration, and also that the debate does not emerge as such in Marx.

This said, it seems possible to read all of Part One as an immense critique of the equation as such, as a form of mathematical abstraction. For it is only on the basis of this peculiar form that the more philosophical or categorial question of Identity arises in such a way as to be fought over. This is not, then, a question of that "anti-identity theory" which has been attributed to Adorno and which might better be classified as yet another example of that nominalism which he despised and warned against: the primacy of the singular, the absolute schizophrenic consciousness of the unassimilable differences of everything that surrounds us. Marx's polemic is not one waged in the name of some philosophical conception of nominalistic temporality, an incomparable and perpetual present in which even similarities, let alone identities, cease to exist.

Rather, this polemic is waged against a conventional form of thought and language—the equation—which presupposes the possibility, indeed, the natural and inevitable existence, of this form, and thereby the plausibility of all the ideologies that issue from it. If radically distinct objects can be grasped as equivalents of one another, then the door is wide open for ideological theories of the just price (and the just wage), along with notions of the contract (between free and equal subjects), projections of an equilibrium theory (where prices somehow become "the same" as values), and finally, moving back towards philosophy again, epistemological or aesthetic conceptions of reflection, whether in self-consciousness or in art, in which that historical invention called the mirror²⁴ is called

²³ I myself think that a theory of finance capital is essential for Marxism (and Marxist politics) today, although, as it still plays only a minimal role in *Capital*, I will not discuss it further here; but see: Giovanni Arrighi, *The Long Twentieth Century* (London: Verso, 1994), Chapter 2.

²⁴ See Jurgis Baltrusaitis, *Le Miroir* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1978), to which it is appropriate to add a reference to Lacan's "mirror stage."

on to justify a whole ideological program. This critique cuts across medieval religious economics, apologias of capitalism, and Proudhonian anarchism alike (the latter's "labor certificates" were supposed to obviate that surcharge the capitalist is supposed to add to the product, thereby justifying the principle that "la propriété c'est le vol").²⁵ It would be false to attribute to Marx a kind of decisionism of value, in which the workers or the state simply decide by fiat what is equivalent to what in the economy; but surely his critical point of view on this problem presupposed a collectivity that sets its own priorities on the basis of its own needs and requirements, and not on that of mere equivalence.

At any rate, the equation eventually becomes the sign and symptom of this dilemma, and will set the terms of the riddle this and subsequent sections of *Capital* are to solve: how can one object be the equivalent of another one? And if you have solved that problem to your satisfaction, how can the capitalist possibly make a profit out of the exchange of objects of equal value? But I believe that an additional hypothesis might be justified: one that explains the often remarked prevalence of chiasmus in Marx's style ("the weapon of criticism cannot replace the criticism of weapons"). Chiasmus is in this sense a form of the equation, but one in which the reversal of terms is called upon to promote the act of identification to a new or higher level, or else to introduce temporality into a process notoriously subject to the mirage of synchronicity. What will indeed immediately emerge from Marx's first dealings with the equations of value here is that, despite its official claims and appearance, the equation as such does not work in both directions, and in that sense the two terms are not and can never really be "the same"; that, as with Hegel's reading of the syllogism, these mathematical forms designed

²⁵ This critique obviously implies a wholesale repudiation of social-democratic, as well as Utopian, and liberal/ameliorative schemes. Owen's labor certificates are, however, another matter (see *Capital*, 88, n. 1). Marx clearly had a great admiration for Owen, as did Lenin later on (see his last essay, "On Cooperation," which returns to the Utopian framework of *State and Revolution*). On Proudhon in general, see Karl Marx, *The Poverty of Philosophy* (New York: International, 1963).

to prove the even-handedness of the market in reality inscribe an irreversible temporal process. Indeed, all of *Capital*, which the reader trained in the manuals of political economy necessarily takes, despite its subtitle, to be an account of capital's structure, is haunted by temporality, which breaks through in the decisive moments at the same time that it poses the most vexing problems for Marx's *Darstellung*. For it is indeed not merely a question of laying out a structure which can only exist by functioning in time, it is also one of presenting a structure (if it can still be called that) always in the process of breaking down (and of repairing itself on a new and more expansive level). At any rate the static or synchronic function of the equals sign is already undermined by Marx's differential characterization of each term according to its position in the equation: relative versus equivalent (technical terms it is best to take as idiosyncratic names, since Marx's deployment of this antiquated philosophical terminology will often be puzzling to the modern reader—see below).

The demonstration will first be a figural one. There is initially the relish with which Marx juxtaposes the objects of equivalence in the *Critique*: “a bushel of wheat, a quire of paper, a yard of linen” (C 27); “one volume of Propertius and eight ounces of snuff” (C 28); a palace and an immense heap of tins filled with shoe-polish (C 28); “gold, iron, wheat or silk” (C 29). These are, from one perspective, forerunners of the great Whitmanesque delight in enumerations in the main body of the text (we will return to the watch and its components later on [461–2]). Yet the function of the enumerations of Part One is quite different, and foreshadows Pierre Reverdy's formula for the surrealist image, namely to juxtapose two objects as far from each other as possible (“la rencontre fortuite, sur une table de dissection, d'une machine à coudre et un parapluie”²⁶). But where the surrealist image had as its function the chaos and mystery of the world in which such objects coexist, Marx's juxtapositions are designed to palpate the matter of a world of distinct raw material and the qualities and textures of their densities and

²⁶ The words are Lautréamont's, cited by Breton in the first *Surrealist Manifesto*.

surfaces: Deleuzian smoothness and striation, unlike the visual orientation of surrealism, where such objects are destined to end up on the painted surface. Nor is surrealist agency—the unconscious—at stake here: but rather the repression or occultation of agency as such (we will see later on that the very temporality of capitalist production, along with market exchange, consists in the obliteration of the past). “From the taste of wheat it is not possible to tell who produced it, a Russian serf, a French peasant or an English capitalist” (C 28): in our time “terroir” has itself been commodified and reckoned into the exchange value of the wine or the ingredients, yet even in this relatively postmodern subsumption the labor of production is necessarily absent from the concept.

Yet that labor here orients the exploration of quality in a new and unexpected direction: the quality of the work involved as an existential or phenomenological activity. “Digging gold, mining iron, cultivating wheat and weaving silk are qualitatively different kinds of labour” (C 29): this is why their qualities must be repressed from the quantitative, or better still, why they must fall out of its frame, remain undetected on its screens of measurement. This absent persistence of the body, of the existential quality of physical work and activity, will inform the text throughout, even where—especially where—it has been officially replaced by abstract labor, simple labor (which, Marx reminds us, “English economists call unskilled labour,” [31n]), labor which can be measured by way of its time or duration. In *Capital*, this concept of simple labor as the instrument of abstraction is then further developed in a figurative manner: abstract labor becomes some “third thing” (127) which the two equivalent commodities somehow share. But this larval reification is then denied (the fabricators of metaphor always reinforce their new figural product by insisting: this is no metaphor!): “This common element cannot be a geometrical, physical, chemical or other natural property of commodities” (127). Yet in another page it will be characterized as something “congealed,” as “crystals of this social substance that is common to them” (128). The process of abstraction from things cannot itself be made to appear unless it is somehow made to be a thing in its own right. And yet this is no mere stylistic matter, no

temperamental or purely subjective fondness of the writer for tropes or figures as such (Edmund Wilson's famous "poetry of commodities"). Rather, figural reification is objective, it is out there in the world as such, a fundamental dynamic of capitalism.

We here confront a crucial point at which the dialectical logic of capitalism intersects the constructional dilemmas of Marx's theoretical and compositional enterprise; a point at which Hegel must unavoidably be invoked. For reality is not merely a combination of matter and mind, which could at best offer the alternative of a materialist approach or an idealist one. There is in this duality also a "third thing," which distinguishes itself from both these other dimensions: no longer being individual, as they (the body, the individual consciousness) necessarily remain, but rather collective, or if you prefer, social. This third thing is what can also be called objectivity, and it is not the same as the purely material: indeed, objectivity is a distinct form or category in its own right. We may recall Schopenhauer's objection to the absence of "the object" from Kant's categories (object-hood being also a form imposed on the "blooming, buzzing confusion" of some first nameless reality). Meanwhile, for Marx, there can also be a "phantom-like objectivity" of the object of exchange value, and this is not some purely subjective illusion or individual whim but rather a social fact, a social reality we neglect at our peril.

We are then here in the realm of Hegel's objective appearance, or what Marx calls the *Erscheinungsform*, the "form of appearance" of a properly capitalist reality which is in that sense neither true nor false but simply real. Yet the nature of this reality cannot be judged and appreciated (in ways that might give rise to erroneous yet perfectly comprehensible questions about truth and falsity) unless we are able to juxtapose it with other moments of social reality: for it is also historical, the *Erscheinungsform* of capitalism, the tendential dominion of the commodity form—whence the appearance, virtually at once, of other radically different historical modes of production on the seventh page of the *Critique* (C 33–4) and, somewhat later, in their full-dress hypothetical staging in Part One of *Capital* (169–72). It is worth quoting a more extended remark of Marx on this same philosophical or Hegelian matter in a different context:

For the rest, what is true of all forms of appearance and their hidden background is also true of the form of appearance "value and price of labour," or "wages," as contrasted with the essential relation manifested in it, namely the value and price of labour-power. The forms of appearance are reproduced directly and spontaneously, as current and usual modes of thought; the essential relation must first be discovered by science. Classical political economy stumbles approximately onto the true state of affairs, but without consciously formulating it. It is unable to do this as long as it stays within its bourgeois skin. (482)

This is then also the moment to complete the account of reification or commodification theory in Marx's text more generally. For it has become apparent that reification, the transformation of a potential experience into a commodity or, in other words, an object or a thing, is a figural process, however real or social it may also be. Its critical practitioners will then inevitably end up moving in a different direction than those of the theory of value, if only in the sense in which parallel lines, prolonged to infinity, end up diverging. Both are essentially thematizations: that is, they translate and transform aspects of a given analysis or a given reality into terms which structure a discussion of the consequences in their own semi-autonomous fashion, becoming at one and the same time names for methods and codes for evoking reality itself.

Marx's notion of the fetishism of commodities, in this same Part One, was already a version of reification in its own right, although its religious figuration was positioned so far from secular daily life that it remained marked as a figure, either of a witty or punctual nature or else the promise of a whole elaborate and expanded discussion of the two levels of consumption and religion (we will see in a moment in what way such figuration often tends to include a projection of other levels or disciplines within itself). Lukács' *History and Class Consciousness*, some fifty-five years later in 1923, then systematically undertook to elaborate the relevance of a concept of reification for consciousness and social phenomenology, contrasting the reification of bourgeois thinking and philosophizing (in terms of the limits beyond which the bourgeoisie drew back from any chance to glimpse the social totality and its antagonistic structure) with the alienation

of working class consciousness, which, sold as a commodity (labor power), lacked the self-protective interests which might influence or prejudice (and thereby limit) its capacity to know the whole.

This extraordinary idea of Lukács' then migrated into the aesthetic realm, where the very object character of art-works allowed Adorno to theorize their self-commodification as a homeopathic defense mechanism against the commodification of art by capitalist society in general (galleries, sales, prices, the market, etc.). Finally, in yet another dialectical twist, Guy Debord undertook to recharacterize the emergent image society of the 1950s (already a postmodernity *avant la lettre*) with his dictum that the image is the final form of commodity reification. Postmodern reification theory then generalized the diagnosis, and showed how commodification was a disease that spread to nature and the unconscious, to an outside world in the process of being exploited and "humanized" (by chemical and genetic agriculture as well as by pollution and species extinction) and a world of individual desires thoroughly colonized by advertising and consumerism. As powerful as such culture critiques are, however, it is characteristic that in them Marx's fundamental analysis of commodities—the discovery that labor power was preeminently a commodity with a price, that universal commodification meant the transformation of all kinds of pre-capitalist forms of work into wage labor—should here be abstracted from its context and projected into the outside or social world, and used to characterize philosophy, works of art, and natural and social elements. Reification theory then itself becomes reified, in the sense of being a property of objects: its thematization at one and the same time intensifies its diagnostic power and limits or specializes its referential dimension by seeming to block out that level of labor and production of which it was once an integral part.

Lukács' original theory included, I believe, the description of rationalization pioneered by his then master Max Weber, which described the categorial transformation of all activities (the Aristotelian four causes) into a stark opposition of means and ends.²⁷ It seems

²⁷ See my essay, "The Vanishing Mediator," in *Ideologies of Theory* (London: Verso, 2009).

possible that a revitalization of reification theory might be possible by way of Hegel's notion of utilitarianism, as a transformation of the world into objects of human use²⁸; and of Heidegger's analysis of activity as use-oriented (*Zuhandenheit*, lying to hand; as opposed to *Vorhandenheit*, being merely inertly there for contemplation).²⁹ But this is not the place for any further development of what is simply one figural moment among others in Marx's exposition of exchange and his critique of the equation.

A second and far more dramatic figuration of the process will then emerge as Marx begins to draw the implications of the positional distinction between the two terms of the equation, which he will call the relative and the equivalent forms:

Since a commodity cannot be related to itself as equivalent, and therefore cannot make its own physical shape into the expression of its own value, it must be related to another commodity as equivalent, and therefore must make the physical shape of another commodity into its value-form. (148)

This distinction is then even more puzzling, insofar as the true third term, the fundamental form of reification—money—has not yet appeared in Marx's exposition. But without money it would seem as though Marx's distinction between relative and equivalent were simply a matter of choice. I can decide whether I want to evaluate the coat in terms of so many lengths of linen; or I can choose to evaluate the linen in terms of so many coats; the decision would seem to depend on which object I happen to own at the moment and which object I want to acquire. Indeed, behind all such exchanges (and their presumed value equivalencies), there lies, in deep time, a primal, a prehistoric encounter between two unrelated tribes: "the exchange of commodities begins where communities have their boundaries, at their points of contact with other communities, or with members of the latter" (182). This is the sense in which a relationship between objects seems to mask a relationship between people (as stipulated in the famous definition of commodity fetishism), whereas in the

²⁸ See *The Hegel Variations*, op. cit., pp. 108ff.

²⁹ Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, Chapter 3, paragraph 15.

literal sense of Marx's argument, it is the other way round, and it is the process of exchange in itself and as such which dictates the positions of the human actors, who are already in the *Critique* the *Träger*, the bearers, of an impersonal process: "this is a social process which is carried on by individuals independently of one another, but they take part in it only as commodity-owners; they exist for one another only in so far as their commodities exist, they thus appear to be in fact the conscious representatives of the exchange process" (C 41).

Many of the political struggles over the interpretation of *Capital* turn on this seemingly philosophical or metaphysical question of the priority of system or of human beings, that is to say, a kind of Marxian caricature of the philosophical debate between determinism and free will. Clearly the emergence of a society organized around exchange value is the doing of human beings; yet all history is in this, Vico's, sense what human beings have themselves made. The dialectical discovery will have to do with their helplessness in the face of what they have made—something only to be dealt with much later on in the main body of *Capital*. But Marx is certainly not adverse to insisting on that helplessness, and on what Sartre will call the practico-inert,³⁰ the alienated power wielded by humanly produced systems against the human beings who have produced them: thus, later on, in the discussion of the emergence of exchange in history, he is capable of writing this ominous philosophico-historical proposition: "This is where barter begins and moves thence into the interior of the community, exerting a disintegrating influence upon it" (C 50). Here is Hegel's equivalence and/or alternation of subject and substance with a vengeance, replayed as an antagonistic alternation in which the reification of human activity into institutions returns with disastrous effects on the next generation of actors. This return of the concept of reification into its Hegelian origins as objectification and externalization offers perhaps a more productive deployment of the concept than its more figural forms, dissolving them and itself back into history as such.

³⁰ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, Volume I, Book I, Chapter 4 ("Collective Praxis").

At any rate, it is only on these primeval borders, in which the lack of salt drives a tribe to barter with another one and to offer its own fruits or iron ore in return, that the two terms of the equation are perfectly equivalent. But they are equivalent only in the sense in which they are utterly arbitrary, very much like the ships that unexpectedly make their way into European ports bearing spices about whose “value” no one knows anything except that they are lacked, or desired. But even here it is wrong to assert, as Proudhon famously did, that “la propriété, c’est le vol”: better to assert the theft implicit in the very act of exchange itself—but only under conditions in which the act falls outside each society into the no-man’s-land between them.

This is the point at which an equally primordial myth in Hegel suddenly surfaces, and enables one of the most astonishing figural developments in Marx’s own text: the great recognition scene; albeit not the Hegelian version, in which the future master and slave struggle for recognition, but rather that in which—as in the magical toy-shop—the inert things, now commodities, come alive, the table changing “into a thing which transcends sensuousness ... it not only stands with its feet on the ground, but, in relation to all other commodities, it stands on its head, and evolves out of its wooden brain grotesque ideas, far more wonderful than if it were to begin dancing of its own free will” (163–4). It does not yet dance however (we will see what genuine “table-turning” means in a moment); rather, now that human *Träger* have been removed and their human properties transferred to the hitherto inert commodities themselves, these last begin to examine each other, to exchange looks, and to develop precisely those human relationships to which they now have a right and which their human accomplices have now forfeited.

There follows a truly comic anagnorisis between the coat and the linen, a sinister and parodic replay of Hegel’s tragic struggle for recognition between the Master and the Slave:

In the production of the coat, human labour-power, in the shape of tailoring, has in actual fact been expended. Human labour has therefore been accumulated in the coat. From this point of view, the coat is a ‘bearer of

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value', although this property never shows through, even when the coat is at its most threadbare. In its value-relation with the linen, the coat counts only under this aspect, counts therefore as embodied value, as the body of value [*Wertkörper*]. Despite its buttoned-up appearance, the linen recognizes in it a splendid kindred soul, the soul of value. Nevertheless, the coat cannot represent value towards the linen unless value, for the latter, simultaneously assumes the form of a coat. An individual, A, for instance, cannot be 'your majesty' to another individual, B, unless majesty in B's eyes assumes the physical shape of A, and, moreover, changes facial features, hair and many other things, with every new 'father of his people'. (143)

Where the Hegelian characters struggled for feudal honor, that is, for recognition as a human being and a freedom, and thereby as my superior, to whom my subservience is due and my obedience required, here it is rather the distinct positions of equivalent and relative that are at stake. To be sure, the linen and the coat, as human products or use values, are as fully as much "the same" as the anonymous human animals at the outset of Hegel's combat ("the coat itself ... a pure use-value ... no more expresses value than does the first piece of linen we come across"[143]). Yet with Marx we have come after the fall, the positions have already been decided—we are in Marx's second stage, that of the "relative form of value"—and, while awaiting the definitive solution in the arrival of money as such, the coat has provisionally been assigned the honor of the relative form: "within its value-relation to the linen, the coat signifies more than it does outside it, just as some men count for more when inside a gold-braided uniform than they do otherwise" (143).

In Hegel, recognition still bore the stamp of contingency, if it did not already vehiculate a metaphysical meaning. The temperaments of the combatants, their physical strength as well as their innate intelligence ("the savage," Marx remarks elsewhere, "makes the whole art of warfare consist in the exercise of his personal cunning" [482]), and finally their ideologies (the samurai cult of death and honor, the Brechtian cowardice of an attachment to the body and to sheer life)—these are the contingencies that determine the outcome, the act of submission (on the other hand, Marc Bloch taught us that in

the beginnings of the feudal system a noble was simply one who possessed a horse!). Yet Hegel's "equation" might also be read as teaching a lesson in universal tolerance and equality, in the substitution of that recognition that "all men are created equal" that spelled an end to feudal hierarchy and the caste system of the old regime: or in other words, the metaphysical doctrine or ideology of the bourgeois revolution and of civil rights as such.

For Marxian materialism even this historical lesson is as it stands idealistic:

The first work which I undertook to dispel the doubts assailing me was a critical re-examination of the Hegelian philosophy of law; the introduction to this work being published in the *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher* issued in Paris in 1844. My inquiry led me to the conclusion that neither legal relations nor political forms could be comprehended whether by themselves or on the basis of a so-called general development of the human mind, but that on the contrary they originate in the material conditions of life, the totality of which Hegel, following the example of English and French thinkers of the eighteenth century, embraces within the term "civil society"; that the anatomy of this civil society, however, has to be sought in political economy. (C 20)

Even if the feudal system (or mode of production) constituted the frame within which Hegelian inequality was determined, the scene between the coat and the linen makes it clear that the framework of exchange and the universal dynamic of exchange value now determine a different kind of inequality, one equally systematic as the older kind, yet different in its effects and perpetuated by way of the market and pseudo-human object relations rather than by brute strength, weapons and ideology.

But it is now time to take stock of the quotient of figuration in this passage, about which it may at first seem that it is merely a striking way of dramatizing and conveying the peculiar relationship between relative and equivalent value, and between the play of these categories between primary and secondary ones, if not central and marginal, let alone quality versus quantity (in which in fact both objects share). I hazard the suggestion that figuration tends to emerge when the

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object of conceptuality is somehow unrepresentable in its structural ambiguity, although it seems important to note that this particular form of expression has to do with expression itself: it attempts to dramatize in what way the coat or the linen “expresses” its value as such:

The relative value-form of a commodity, the linen for example, expresses its value-existence as something wholly different from its substance and properties, as the quality of being comparable with a coat for example; this expression itself therefore indicates that it conceals a social relation. With the equivalent form the reverse is true. The equivalent form consists precisely in this, that the material commodity itself, the coat for instance, expresses value just as it is in its everyday life, and is therefore endowed with the form of value by nature itself. (149)

There is then here, in these dialectical complexities in which Marx seems for the moment to delight and to revel, a self-referentiality of the figure, in which it designates itself as the expression of expression. It is an autoreferentiality or “reflexivity” by means of which the writer signals the shifting of gears, the passage to a different kind of discourse or thinking which we may ultimately characterize as dialectical.

But in a second feature, it is important to grasp the peculiarity of the object of this discourse which is precisely relationship rather than substantiality. Thus, in fact, we have not started from an individual object, not even the commodity as the “elementary form” of the capitalist mode of production (125): or if you prefer, the individuality of the individual commodity has proved to be an illusion, masking quality and ultimately relationship as such. Neither the coat nor the linen has any great priority for us; it is their relationship to one another which is here dramatized and which will only be reduced and returned to the status of a single object when we come at length to the money form, to the more definitive reification of these shifting and seemingly interminable oppositions in the universal equivalent as such.

Meanwhile, it is only with the introduction of money that the categorial play between the One and the Many (or the infinite chain of substitutions which characterizes value wild and “in nature” as it

were) is arrested. Indeed, it may well be thought that it is the peculiarity of an object defined not as object but as relationship which calls forth the need for the peculiarities of the dialectic as such (Marx hints as much when his footnote to this passage designates Hegel's "determinations of reflexion," the chapter that opens the discussion of Essence in the *Logic*).

I believe, however, that any exploration of figuration in *Capital* needs to go in two other directions as well. The first has to do with totality, or rather with those moments in which Marx is able to become conscious of the totality of his argument, and to gaze in both directions and as it were provisionally unify the immense object whose structure he is attempting to lay out for us, namely the dynamics of the accumulation of capital. We will see this function of figuration, both jubilatory and as it were expressive, more clearly later on where, in the main body of the text, Marx's argument has attained its full scale. Here, in Part One, we merely observe such a moment within a more limited framework (as I have explained) and witness the sudden grasping and holding together, in one decisive central paradox, of the impossible riddle of the equation (how one thing can be "the same" as another) and its resolution, if not its solution, in the ultimate "crystallization" of the money form (whose unity then assembles the various "crystals" of labor).

It is worth observing the insistence of Marx on the word "form," alone destined to rescue money from its own thingification or reification; and in perfect consistency with the opposition that has already been described, where the use value is material and physical, carnal and qualitative, while exchange value is very precisely mental if not spiritual: that is to say, pure form rather than content. We must not neglect the resources of this opposition, already so rich in implications in Hegel, and still resonant in Marx in sentences like this one: "the machine does not free the worker from the work, but rather deprives the work itself of all content" (548).

But there remains a second direction or implication of figurative discourse to be evoked at this point, for what the new register permits is a glimpse of the possibility of different levels in this discourse, extra-economic levels I am tempted to say, which suddenly become

momentarily visible in what is at first merely a metaphorical attempt to convey the intricacies of the purely economic. For the figural drama of recognition is literally a political one and recognition is here the acknowledgement of hierarchy. We are in something like a modern or secular version of feudality, the kind of contemporary survival to be witnessed in the nineteenth-century courts or, better still, in the domain of the czars, where all kinds of hierarchies have been bureaucratically defined, various civil positions being equivalent to military grades for example, a whole contemporary society prosaically organized according to archaic or caste systems, modern uniforms and Western regalia continuing to transmit the ancient signals of sacred or imperial power. But Marx has worked far more intricate implications than this into his seemingly lighthearted and literary self-indulgence.

It would be wrong to think that the substitution here of a political language (uniforms, hierarchy) for an economic one (commodities) functions to clarify the unknown of economics by reference to the only too well-known domain of politics and the social. Rather, it is the other way round, and it is social power which is itself constructed and clarified, endowed with a kind of causal infrastructure, by way of the peculiarities of commodity relations. Here then the Many of a host of individual and qualitatively different goods clusters around the One of the equivalent value with open-mouthed awe and adoration. The equivalent then truly becomes “the body of value” whose contingent features change with every dynastic succession, but whose mystery and symbolic power is ratified by its position in the equation. Jean-Joseph Goux has admirably drawn out the prerequisite carefully laid in place by Marx, namely, that in order to square the circle by which one item in an infinite series is made to serve as the equivalent of the entire series (including itself in that notorious “class of which it is a member”), the henceforth sacred object must be decisively removed from circulation, as the god-king—monarch or despot—is isolated in the forbidden city.³¹ Meanwhile, the

³¹ See Jean-Joseph Goux’s classic “Numismatics” in *Economie et Symbolique* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1973).

necessary contingency of the sacralized term anticipates Kantorowicz's notion of the king's two bodies, at the same time that it conforms to Marx's account of use value and exchange value generally, namely that in order to have an exchange value, the commodity must possess a use value, but one whose content is absolutely indifferent. Only the existence of use value as such is required, so that the content of the latter functions rather like an empty sign: without use value, a thing cannot become a commodity; but anything with use value can be commodified, virtually by definition, inasmuch as use value means that other people, a public somewhere, want and/or need to acquire it.

But the *Critique* expends a good deal of dialectical anxiety on the matter of the use value of the general equivalent, which merely turns out to be—gold or silver—that it can be used as a means of exchange. In our political analogon, however, the necessary but indifferent human features of the monarch are there to enable the act of recognition as such (“the linen recognizes in it a splendid kindred soul”): a political mirror stage into which any number of theories of libidinal investment or Freudian group identification flow. The phenomenon remains as mysterious a human weakness as love or hate; Weberian charisma is a superlative example of a non-concept, invented to name a problem rather than a solution; and the Hegelian notion of monarchy as a purely positional cipher, the marker of an empty center, is about as satisfactory as anyone else's, while usefully designating the blind spot or structural omission of democratic political theory.

Marx's extended simile has therefore opened the carefully specified disciplinary framework and closure of this inquiry into the economic, into the capitalist dynamics of economic exchange (from which even quality or use value is excluded from the outset as an extra-economic phenomenon), and has allowed us a precise and articulated glimpse of that whole other level of social reality which is the political as such. This level does not belong here technically, despite the overweening ambitions of Marx's first plan (the seven volumes, including one on the State); and I take this first occasion to affirm a scandalous opinion, namely that *Capital* is not a political book and has very

little to do with politics. Marx was certainly himself a profoundly political being, with a keen sense of the strategy and tactics of power to which any number of his other writings will testify. But in *Capital* the word “revolution” always means a technological revolution in the introduction of new and more productive and destructive kinds of machinery. At best the occasional aside takes note of the enhanced power of political resistance which workers’ associations are likely to enable. Finally, at a crucial point to which we will return, a distant tocsin is heard tolling the expropriation of the expropriators; reminiscent of the great trumpet call whose faint echo announces the salvation of Florestan from the death cell in *Fidelio*.

Otherwise, of proletarian politics scarcely a mention (of the bourgeois variety, to be sure, a good deal more both in the accounts of the ideological closure of the political economists and in the struggle between aristocratic landowners and the new men of industrial capitalism). It is then the function of figuration to open up these new levels which cannot be accommodated by Marx’s own self-imposed structural limitations: and this is the decisive gain in content which an otherwise self-indulgent excitement with literary flourishes and figures technically enables.

Meanwhile, the political level is here itself incomplete and demands figurative expansion into yet another level which it allows us to glimpse and mentally to lay in place, namely religion as such, the fundamental issue of Marx’s younger years and those of his Left-Hegelian comrades. For the Enlightenment critique of religion—the higher criticism, the life of Jesus—will still be the form in which a provincial Germany expresses its politics in the age of the Holy Alliance (and into which England will continue to translate its Darwinian and ethical debates at the very height of its colonial and manufacturing power). But Marx has already settled his accounts with religion in the essay on the Jewish question, in which religious exclusion is demystified in terms of citizenship and political participation; while Darwin’s natural history, as we shall see later on, comes to have the meaning for him of History tout court.

Still, religion remains a curious human phenomenon, well worthy of its own attention: “The linen acquires a value-form different from

its natural form. Its existence as value is manifested in its equality with the coat, just as the sheep-like nature of the Christian is shown in his resemblance to the Lamb of God" (143). It would be pleasant, but laborious, to trace this new version of the dialectic of the One and the Many back into Feuerbach's seminal analysis of God as the projection and hypostasis of human productive power; but it is equally clear that the end term of this chapter—the figural flourish which assimilates le président de Brosses' concept of fetishism to the formal ideality of those not so physical objects called commodities—is also of a religious, if pre-theological and animist, character.³² But the wonderful footnote to all this—"one may recall that China and the tables began to dance when the rest of the world was standing still, pour encourager les autres" (164, n. 27)—the very quintessence of Marx's jubilatory figuration—adds a more somber and monitory note. Marx here equates the European spiritualist crazes of the 1860s—Ouiji boards, spirit photos, séances and the like—with the immense popular revolution on the other side of the globe, the Christian upheaval of the Taiping, the greatest revolution the world had seen up to that point, in a revolutionary regime that lasted some thirteen years, until dissolved by British gunboats. This witty construction of a "religious" base and superstructure on a global scale is also not without its relevance for the exploration of other social levels, however technically irrelevant to the study of capitalism.

The *Critique* also gives us an insight into the texture of Part One of *Capital* (Volume One) as a palimpsest, on whose successive surcharges the whole sequence of Marx's economic speculations since the 1844 manuscripts is inscribed and then effaced. This process not only accounts for the outbursts of figuration as Marx begins to touch the outer limit of what he has over and over again drafted; but also helps us to appreciate the destiny of its more purely philosophical beginnings in the theory of alienation, a theory which does not, as we shall see later on, disappear along with its abstract language from the final text, but is rather progressively materialized and realized

³² See the pathbreaking studies by William Pietz, "The Problem of the Fetish," in three parts: *Res* 9 (1985), *Res* 13 (1987), *Res* 16 (1988).

(if one can thus suggest an opposite number for the useful verb to sublimate). Indeed, *Capital* as a text thereby constitutes at least one way in which, in keeping with the theses on Feuerbach, philosophy comes to an end by realizing or actualizing itself (even though, in this instance, *Capital* does not exactly “change” it).

The *Critique* thereby offers a useful glimpse into the laboratory situation in which these transformations are effected, beginning with the passage already quoted about the “conscious representatives.” “Conscious” here means, I think, not self-conscious spokespeople for the segments of the exchange process they “represent,” but rather simply human or living correlatives of what are impersonal processes normally thought of in terms of things (the commodities). This possible misunderstanding accounts for Marx’s substitution, in *Capital*, of a terminology of “bearers” or *Träger*: a most Althusserian substitution indeed, which seems retroactively to confirm Althusser’s insistence on system rather than subject. Even the removal of the idea of political representation itself is crucial, for it tends to move the very concept of ideology in the direction of unconscious reflexes rather than that of cynical ideologists (a role reserved for the economists themselves, after the floodtide of Ricardian research and exploration³³). Still, it is worth specifying that we are here still in the exchange situation, and that the two “representations” have to do with owners and buyers, or indeed with buying and selling among the owners of different commodities, rather than as the owner of capital. Yet it is as this last that the fateful word *Träger* is introduced at the beginning of Part Two: to represent the static back-and-forth movement of exchange is indeed a rather different matter than to be borne forward on the dynamic and ever-expanding movement of capital. Here the human individual (like his linguistic personifica-

³³ Marx’s analysis of the degeneration of economics into ideology after the triumph of capitalism is to be found in his Preface to the second edition of *Capital*: “Insofar as political economy is bourgeois, i.e. insofar as it views the capitalist order as the absolute and ultimate form of social production, instead of as a historically transient stage of development, it can only remain a science while the class struggle remains latent or manifests itself only in isolated or sporadic phenomena” (96).

tion) is far more likely to be able to allow himself to be borne, to be carried forward, than in a market situation in which merchants still possess characterological traits and presence. Marx's transfer of the figural process is thus a momentous one, which can also be analyzed in terms of the emergence of a modern kind of allegory.³⁴

The contemporary theory of allegory, however, is distinguished from its traditional predecessor, not so much by the opposition between allegory and symbol which grounds the latter, as by the disappearance of the primacy of personification as such.³⁵ In older allegories it was essentially the anthropomorphic character who "represented" something, an idea or a value, whose name it wears on its back, as though to announce: "I am Greed! I am Virtue!" The depersonalizing pressure of the modern, however, dissolves these centered subjectivities in much the same way as, for Marx, the replacement of the tool by the machine transforms the worker from the master into the servant of the impersonal process. It is a reversal already well underway in this discursive practice in which capitalists are called upon to function as simple bearers of the logic and accumulative expansion of capital (just as they would themselves cease to be capitalists and be driven out of business did they cease for one moment to accumulate and to expand).

Meanwhile, in our ur-text (the *Critique*), the term "bearer," not yet deployed in this sense but rich with its own semiotic future, is oddly and prudently reserved for use value: "Use-value as an active carrier of exchange-value becomes a means of exchange" (C 42): a reversal of the old barter system which effectively excludes use value from the system altogether, except as a necessary but insufficient sign of its own existence. We are thus here already on the first page of *Capital*: at which point in the earlier work Marx does something altogether

³⁴ Here, for example, the older language of alienation unexpectedly reappears: "To become use-values commodities must be altogether alienated" (C 42). This discussion of the "emergence" of use values (in *Capital* considered the starting point) is omitted from the later (seemingly definitive) text (see below).

³⁵ As for the word "symbol," it knows a brief but suggestive mention in Marx's earlier discussion of gold, in which it is dialectically transformed into an autoreferential object: "gold and silver themselves become their own symbols" (226).

omitted from the final text, he begins to worry about what happens next, and how the commodity, itself a use value transformed into an exchange value, can ever become a use value again after its sale. It is indeed a problem (consumption) which has no place in *Capital* itself, whose object of study is on the contrary the accumulation of capital, and how the money of the sale can be transformed into that second, radically different thing which gives the new book its title.

It is therefore astonishing to find the key word of the 1844 manuscripts reappear fleetingly at this point: “alienation,” to be sure, centrally includes the legal sense of the transfer of property among its other meanings. But its primary use there always had to do with what happens to workers (the famous fourfold alienation of the worker’s means of production, his product, his activity as work and handicraft [man’s so-called species-being or essence], and finally his fellow workers).³⁶ Indeed, anyone who returns to the early manuscripts and beyond them to the published essays of the early 1840s will be astonished by the radical difference in political content: these are fiery works which denounce capitalism and vividly expound the state of the working class (newly discovered and named the “proletariat”). These “early” works, which culminate in that truly political text, the *Manifesto*, talk social revolution in a way utterly alien to the “mature” texts: and the lapse of the concept and the term “alienation” into its bland and purely legal sense of title and ownership in the latter is a signal of the transformation. For in the *Critique* it is the commodity which is alienated and not yet its worker (who will not appear in the *Critique* and only later on in *Capital*): “to become use-values commodities must be altogether alienated” (C 42); that is to say, they must be sold to someone who wants or needs them. Indeed, what trace of labor there is present here lies on the other side: “a commodity is an exchange-value insofar as a definite amount of labour-time has been expended on its production” (C 43). In this odd and unstable reconfiguration, then, buyer and seller have come to “represent” consumer and producer (or worker), and class struggle has utterly evaporated from the analysis.

³⁶ Marx, *Early Writings* (London: Penguin, 1975), pp. 324–34.

This is not a critique of Marx, but rather a demonstration of the sterility and circularity to which one is condemned when one attempts to remain within the structural confines of the market (of circulation, or of the exchange situation). Marx's own conclusion is a restatement of the great opposition between quantity and quality which in one way or another structures his economic thinking as a whole; but it is here reduced to an opposition between equality and inequality which, "thus posited, are mutually exclusive." He then concludes in what is not yet dialectical but calls for the dialectic as its solution:

The result is not simply a vicious circle of problems, where the solution of one problem presupposes the solution of the other, but a whole complex of contradictory premises, since the fulfillment of one condition depends directly on the fulfillment of its opposite. (C 44)

To paraphrase Sartre on the cogito, everything begins with the market situation, provided you manage to get out of it. Marx will not get out of it in the *Critique*, and in *Capital* will only manage to do so with the new beginning of Part Two.

As it stands then, and returning to the final text of Part One of *Capital* itself, we find ourselves confronted with three possible "solutions," three climaxes to the argument if not three separate solutions to the riddle of value, none of which really takes us in the direction in which we need to go.

The first is reification theory, or the famous "fetishism of commodities," which fulfills at least two functions here. The first, as we have already suggested, is to identify the "objective appearance" of capitalism, what one is tempted to call its existential dimension, Gramscian "common sense," or the ideological illusions of daily life. The wealth of capitalist societies "appears," Marx tells us in his opening sentence, "as 'an immense collection of commodities' " (125); but now we can put the emphasis decisively on the ambiguous philosophical verb "appears" (*erscheint*). This is indeed nothing but an appearance, the surface mirage of a market system: real value, however, turning out to

lie, not in the objects produced by capitalism but in the capital that particular production process is able to accumulate.

Meanwhile, a mysterious “retention of the image,” or perhaps we should call it the holding down of the pedal, the prolongation of the precedent harmonies—at any rate the persistence of the opposition between Quality and Quantity—means that the figural flourish in which the theoretical introduction of fetishism consists marks the commodity as decisively spiritualistic if not superstitious, as opposed to the material consumption of use value. As we have already seen, the word “form” taken over from Hegel always implies the predominance of the mental or spiritual over the body and sensation. But as has also been hinted before, Marx also seeks to destabilize this old dualism by adding a third term which is really a third reality and in no way any kind of synthesis of its former elements, body and soul, matter and mind, and so forth. This is the notion of the social, and it marks the reality of commodity fetishism (as opposed to its spiritual unreality and also to its simple physical irrelevance) as a collective and a historical one. This appearance is also real, not insofar as it is material, nor insofar as it is subjective or existential in the individual sense, but rather because it is collective and historical. It corresponds to the specific mode of production as such, and it is the emergence of this new third term which leads us beyond the maze-like intricacies of reification theory into another discussion altogether.

The second upshot of Part One will thus be the momentary appearance or reappearance, pour mémoire so to speak, of radically different social formations or modes of production of both past and future, modes in which the commodity form did not or will not hold sway, or if you prefer another kind of formulation, modes which will not have been organized around the market as such. The fourfold enumeration of such societies (169–72), the sole echo of the groundbreaking speculations of the *Grundrisse* on pre-capitalist societies (471–514), in fact falls outside the framework *Capital* has set for itself, which is the analysis of a single mode of production, the one from which all these other societies are distinguished. “Let us imagine,” says Marx; but as we shall see he will in the main body of *Capital* reach the heart of the matter—collective production—

in a different and far more tortuous way. Still, this is the crucial moment for anyone wishing to find a political lesson in *Capital* and to encounter a call for revolution in the sense of an utter transformation or replacement of the capitalist mode of production as such. This second climax is then as it were *Luft aus anderen Planeten*; it is a momentary breeze from the future (and not yet Benjamin's storm), it is a faint and garbled message from outside the system and its seemingly airtight closure.

There remains the third and official climax of both Part One and the earlier *Critique*, the logical terminus of any discussion of the market as such or exchange, and that is the theory of money. This is also very much the solution to a false problem, provided one qualifies this description by rewriting it as the real solution to a false problem. For money is the crystallization of the contradiction and not its effacement: it now renders the contradiction workable; with money we may now inhabit it and live among its dualities. Money has not solved the riddle of the equation—how different things could possibly be the same—but it has turned that conundrum into coin of the realm which will allow us to forget about it and to go about our business. Money, to be sure, will eventually raise problems of its own: theoretically, when we grapple with prices as such and try to ascertain their relationship with value; and practically, when in inflation or depression the institution of money itself enters into crisis. And meanwhile, there is the matter of credit, only briefly penciled in, mostly by Engels³⁷ in *Capital*, Volume One; and finally the whole issue of finance capital, today very much back on the agenda.³⁸

But money is as it were both the opposite and the realization of reification theory: for it is itself genuinely reified, and having become an object no longer confronts us with anything paradoxical in the reification process, which has disappeared from it. Meanwhile, it is the source of all the bad Utopian solutions to the dilemma of capitalism. From Thomas More (abolish it altogether) to Proudhon, who

³⁷ *Capital*, pp. 777–80.

³⁸ See Giovanni Arrighi, *The Long Twentieth Century* (London: Verso, 1994); and my own comments in *The Cultural Turn* (London: Verso, 1998).

envisages its control and sanitation as labor certificates, as the just price of labor-time.³⁹ These illusions are as pernicious in their anti-capitalism as the accompanying propaganda of the political economists for the system itself; and both emerge from the way in which the fact of money occults and represses the law of value from which it emerges. The obsession with money as cause and disease alike condemns us to remain within the market system as such, the sphere of circulation, as the closed horizon of our knowledge and our scientific questions and explanations. It is thus paradoxical that both Marx's major investigations of exchange find their high point in what pre-eminently blocks our view of capital, just as his descriptions of it tend to block the reading of the rest of *Capital* itself, to which we now proceed.

³⁹ See note 16, above. The emphasis on money as the root of all evil, beginning long before Thomas More's *Utopia*, knows a political revival under capitalism in all the funny-money theories from Henry George to Major Douglas (beloved of Pound): the whole point of Book One is to displace this theoretical fetishization of money with the analysis of that very different thing which is capital.

Chapter 2

The Unity of Opposites

To be sure, use value and exchange value were in some sense opposites; and quality and quantity as well. Yet neither of these oppositions was unified enough to constitute a true contradiction. The equation of market equivalence was not yet a true opposition, and thereby constituted only a false problem, one to be falsely solved by the reification of money. The real problem, the real contradiction, only emerges when the equation or the equivalence of the market meets its true opposite number. This does not happen when two qualitatively dissimilar things are affirmed in the market to be the same: but only when the commodity equals a value greater than itself. If the riddle of Part One turned on the mystery of an equivalence between two radically different qualitative things, the new conundrum, one which begins in Part Two and takes us through the entirety of *Capital*, involves the mystery of the increase of value, and the enigma of a final whole greater than the value of its individual parts. In its simplest, still misleading form, how can a profit be made out of the exchange of equal values? How can we get out of the market and the sphere of circulation into something else, something far more dynamic and expansive, something historical and not static like the bazaar or the seasonal fair, the trading post, the merchants' quarter? How can money turn into capital, and why are these two entities distinct and even opposite things?

The complexity of Part One resulted from the attempt to solve a false problem, which generated a number of false solutions at least as

true as their objective appearance. These solutions operated on the two levels of ideology and economic reality, and we will see Marx throughout address these Spinozan parallel dimensions alternately: both involve illusion, but on the one hand the illusions are elaborated by the economists who are the propagandists and spokespeople for an emergent free-trade capitalism, and on the other they perpetuate the illusory realities of subjective agency and of policy decisions on the part of legislators and regulators imagined as playing some fundamental role in capital's relentless expansion.

Part Two, however, is more straightforward and posits a real problem which it then eventually solves. The problem is this: how can the exchange of equals or equivalents produce a profit, or in other words, simplifying it even further, how money can beget more money? The suggestion is laid in place that the money which does so is no longer the same money we are familiar with in everyday life (including exchanges on the market) but rather has been transformed into something quite different, namely capital as such; while the presence in this process of a unique commodity called labor power is duly noted. And with this we have the essentials of the solution, one which to be sure poses a new problem, but this time only for the reader, namely, why *Capital* cannot stop here? Do we not now have the essence of the matter? What more is to be said that has not been said here (and in the great predecessor Ricardo)?

This question is scarcely mollified by the invitation which concludes Part Two, namely, "let us therefore . . . leave this noisy sphere [of circulation or the market] and follow [the owner of money and the owner of labor-power] into the hidden abode of production" (279); yet it does put us on the track of Marx's motivations and cause us to return in a new way to the categorical affirmations we may have missed in the preceding pages: "circulation, or the exchange of commodities, creates no value" (266). "Capital cannot . . . arise from circulation . . ." (268). "The commodity-owner can create value by his labour, but he cannot create values which can valorize themselves" (268).

The deployment of that unique commodity called labor power is evidently crucial here, yet the buying and the selling of it, indeed, the very consumption of that commodity, does not seem sufficient

to account for the emergence of that equally unique new value called capital. Exchange—that buying and selling—seems necessary but insufficient: to complete the sentence previously quoted—“capital cannot therefore arise from circulation, and it is equally impossible for it to arise apart from circulation. It must have its origin both in circulation and not in circulation” (268).

It must have its origin in circulation since labor power can only become a commodity by being bought and sold (like all other commodities, whose “exchange-value” is by definition so determined), namely, wage labor. This is why we still needed the elaborate discussion of exchange, the market, circulation, that detained us for so long in Part One. But we evidently need a different kind of discussion—of production as such—to complete the analysis, and this is why, to borrow Marx’s dialectical syntax, our new problem both is and is not solved in Part Two. Meanwhile, we must now take note of a side issue which imposes itself in passing but which will presumably move imperiously to center-stage in the sequel, namely the history of this peculiar commodity called labor power (but “for the present [that history] interests us just as little” [273] as it interests the buyer of it). Like the brief excursus on other modes of production in Part One, this reminder of history in the initial treatment of wage labor is tantalizing but evidently not yet in the mainstream of the argument, which, bypassing even the topic of wages itself, now sets in with a vengeance in the full-scale treatise on labor that opens Part Three.

This, one of the richest chapters in *Capital*, leads on to the fundamental question of the production of value as such, pointing towards its further development as productivity (not yet Marx’s term here). But it also pioneers a new thematic level, namely that of time and temporality, which had been implicit in Part One, where the irreversibility of the equation is asserted, but which now releases a flood of new figures, in particular those that describe the extinguishing of past value in present labor. With temporality and its “unrest” (*Unruhe*), a dialectic reminiscent of the Hegelian one reemerges, inevitably recalling alienation and externalization, objectification, and other features Marx already absorbed from Hegel at the time of the early manuscripts.

Meanwhile, the distinction between living labor and its raw materials in the labor process suddenly enables us to solve a crucial problem we had forgotten: not exactly how something can come of nothing, so much as rather how the whole can be worth more than the sum of its parts, or, to put it more succinctly, how the value of the product can possibly be more than the value of capital advanced. (Marx here stages a little comedy for us, in which the buyer of labor power pretends to share our perplexity—"our capitalist stares in astonishment" (297), advancing all kinds of arguments as to why he deserves to make a profit on such an exchange of equals—"am I to be allowed nothing in return for all this service?"—until "with a hearty laugh he recovers his composure": he already knew the labor theory of value, which has not yet been disclosed to the innocent reader [297–301]).

In this theory, which itself produces the problem, we renew acquaintance with our old friends use value and exchange value, yet in a new form. And we get a renewed sense of the productiveness of duality in Marx's hands, who everywhere and again and again retrieves them from the static dead-end of the binary antinomy and re-endows them with dialectical creativity. In this case it is the use value of the worker's commodity of labor power which is disengaged from its exchange value and suddenly made to produce more value than it was worth:

The past labour embodied in labour-power and the living labour it can perform, and the daily cost of maintaining labour-power and its daily expenditure in work, are two totally different things ... The value of labour-power, and the value which that labour-power valorizes in the labour-process, are two entirely different magnitudes. (300)

So now finally we do seem in definitive possession of an answer to the conundrum posed in Part Two and apparently not there satisfactorily disposed of: How M can become M' , how can money beget more money? Is this not now enough? Have we not now completed the investigation, and Marx his analysis of capital? What need detain us longer?

Filling in the details, no doubt, and identifying the components: constant and variable capital, for example, and surplus value (yes, it is here named for the first time); tying up loose ends, such as the question of the latter's calculation (a problem pompously named "the rate of surplus value"), etc. But now unexpectedly we confront a sudden explosion of new problems.

Just as the analysis has unleashed temporality upon us (which among other things means change and ultimately history itself), so the word "rate" opens a box from which mathematics—ratios, proportions, the calculus—the object of Marx's after-hours delectation⁴⁰—springs out like a hobgoblin and raises the fateful, profoundly practical and political question of the hours of work themselves. Suddenly, it is not the clanking of machines in the subterranean realms of production we hear (that will only become deafening later on in Part Four), but rather the noisy shouting of parliamentary voices and their interminable debates about the shortening of working hours. Now the great chapter on the working day (Chapter 10) is upon us; we will deal with it later on.

Yet surely Chapter 10 offers an unanswerable refutation to our claim that *Capital* was not a political book, for its climax calls for the workers "to put their heads together and as a class compel the passing of a law, an all-powerful social barrier by which they can be prevented from selling themselves and their families into slavery and death by voluntary contract with capital" (416). The next section (Part Four), however, by describing the ways in which capital can secure more surplus value even after the passing of such a law, will retroactively pronounce this politics a trade unionist strategy rather than a revolutionary one (yet in a dialectical rather than a logically exclusionary way: the two strategies are not, and yet they also are, the same).

Meanwhile, new doubt is slyly laid in place by Marx as this section concludes, and it will determine the need for yet further chapters of this now already lengthy book, which might have ended here with a powerful call for labor legislation. The puzzle is this one: labor alone

⁴⁰ See Chapter 1, note 8.

produces value, yet the capitalist seems eager to reduce the number of workers to whom he pays wages. Marx here formulates “the tendency of capital to reduce as much as possible the number of workers employed, i.e. the amount of its variable component, the part which is changed into labour-power. ... [a tendency] which stands in contradiction with its other tendency to produce the greatest possible mass of surplus-value” (420). Our long investigation is thus not nearly at its end; the story must continue.

In fact, in Part Four we reach the heart of the matter in many ways: the argument will for one thing know the first of those dual climaxes that characterize the rest of the work: positive and negative, optimistic and pessimistic, heroic and tragic. In these parallel alternations Marx’s unity of opposites finds its formal, not to say musical, expression. They can, however, also be looked at as long delayed solutions to riddles and problems hanging fire, answers that extend each other mutually, at the same time that predictably they release further questions or mutate into more complex ones.

Ultimately all these questions are variations and offshoots of the fundamental problem that has been with us from the end of Part One, namely, how is surplus value possible? Despite the apparently technical nomenclature that gives its title to this section and which makes it clear why the term “absolute” had earlier designated that rather crude and obvious method of extracting surplus value which consisted in the lengthening of working hours to their utmost, the introduction of the pendant term “relative” in fact scarcely prepares us for the complex new procedures that define a properly capitalist modernity and mark capitalism as a mode of production and of the extraction of surplus value dialectically different and distinct from any other *Produktionsweise* that has hitherto appeared in human history.

This section thus presumably reserves decisive surprises for us. Yet they are artfully embedded within a different kind of question, a seemingly inoffensive observation by the Abbé Quesnay, whose innocent query—“Why does the capitalist, whose sole concern is to produce exchange-value, continually strive to bring down the exchange-value of commodities?” (437)—unleashes a firestorm of

contradictions and leads us back to the secret of the commodity of labor power at the same time that it makes unavoidable a panoramic gaze across the palpable dysfunctionalities of the system and in particular the mechanisms likely to bring on its self-destruction.

And now, tucked away within the investigation such a problem presumably merits, we come without warning upon the philosophical center of *Capital*, the most full-throated affirmation of history and production in all of Marx and the one moment which one might be tempted to read as a metaphysics or a proposition about human nature as such. This is Marx's analysis of collectivity in the chapter soberly entitled "Cooperation."

This chapter's propositions can be interpreted in many ways. It is the moment in which the individual and individualist categories with which we have had to work ever since the opening presentation of the market and the exchange between an individual buyer and an individual seller are now swept away and replaced by (or *aufgehoben*, lifted into) those of collectivity, the only adequate ones for understanding anything concerning that "political animal" we are. The technical excuse for the discussion lies, however, in the first, rather narrow answer to the problem of how "relative surplus-value" is to be achieved, namely by multiplying the number of workers. Yet its historical justification is far more sweeping than this, for "capitalist production only really begins ... when each individual capital simultaneously employs a comparatively large number of workers" (439). Meanwhile, collectivity "begets in most industries a rivalry and a stimulation of the 'animal spirits' which heightens the efficiency of each individual worker" (443): labor psychology or some more general existential proposition (and one suspiciously redolent of the competitive ethos, at that)? But this is not a book about people but rather about a system: the true climax is thus, foreshadowed by monuments in the middle distance like the pyramids or the great hydraulic works of the Middle East, the revelation of "the creation of a new productive power, which is intrinsically a collective one" (443). This new power, ruefully exults Marx, is "a free gift to capital" (451). It is also a rebuke to the economists, above all to the neo-Smithians and Proudhon, who have been tempted to fetishize the

division of labor as a kind of absolute: collectivity takes ontological priority here; and with its discovery and development by capitalism, Marxism closes the door on all nostalgic regressions to simpler and more humane modes of production.

But we cannot linger on these positive accents, which at once turn menacing as we search for the concrete embodiments of this new productive force. Nor are they long in coming: an intermediate stage, called “manufacture,” in which human powers seem to have found a structure appropriate to their scale; and finally, a mutation (or Sartrean counter-finality), a kind of monstrous caricature of collectivity and the division of labor alike, which is the machine as such, whose visibly controlled and sober analysis calls forth Marx’s most apocalyptic imagery in spite of itself:

An organized system of machines to which motion is communicated by the transmitting mechanism from an automatic centre is the most developed form of production by machinery. Here we have, in place of the isolated machine, a mechanical monster whose body fills whole factories, and whose demonic power, at first hidden by the slow and measured motions of its gigantic members, finally bursts forth in the fast and feverish whirl of its countless working organs. (503)

Shades of the great hall of machines in Napoleon III’s Universal Exposition, where diminutive humans of all the races of the world came to gape and marvel at the enormous mechanical constructions that towered over them like the return of the engineering feats of the ancients. Properly Cyclopean are these new machines, and indeed it is an epithet Marx uses three times in two pages (506–7), with that mixture of admiration, horror and enthusiasm that characterized the “union of opposites” of his own personal and emotional dialectic. Monsters, however, they remain, this new technology of capitalism, which at once attracts all the morbid fascination which humans have classically felt for automata, robots, androids and other humanoid mirror-reflections of the species: a mechanical automaton in which “workers are merely conscious organs, co-ordinated with the unconscious organs of the automation, and together with the latter subordinate to the central moving forces” (544–5).

About this enormous chapter on machinery (the second long extrapolation to which we will return later in some detail), we have now only to observe the following: for one thing, it seems rather decisively to answer our question about “relative” surplus value, for it is the machine which preeminently secures the enlargement of the latter even within the limits imposed by a statutory working day. The second observation that demands to be made at this stage has to do with technological determinism.

To be sure, Marx calls for a history of technology, a materialist history, at several points: “a critical history of technology ...” he complains, “does not exist” (493, n. 4), whereupon he sketches in Lefebvre’s progressive-regressive method in advance of its name.⁴¹ He had already noted, in the context of historical periodization, that “the writers of history have so far paid very little attention to the development of material production” (286, n. 6). We have meanwhile already commented on the perhaps to us surprising way in which the prophet of revolution reserves this word for innovations in the production process. Here finally it seems possible that we may be tempted to take these two celebrations—collectivity and machinery—as the convex and concave of a single process (Hegel’s subject or system) in which it is the technological that stands as the concrete realization of the collective at the same time that it reverses its human meaning: far from constituting the allegory or reification of cooperation, it would seem as though it stands as the latter’s fate or doom.

I would agree that Marxism is in that sense always menaced by a slippage into technological determinism. This is as it were the other face of its opposite number, the temptation of a sublimation into Hegelian categories, of a dialectical metaphysics into which the contingencies of history and production dissolve. In that sense, it is not Hegel who is idealistic, but rather the inveterate juxtaposition of Hegel and Marx and the patient detection of Marx’s Hegelianisms which opens up the idealistic alternative. Yet it is precisely in that work—*The Poverty of Philosophy*—in which Marx paints his most savage caricature of such idealism that he issues this fundamental

⁴¹ See Sartre, *Search for a Method*, op. cit., pp. 51–2, note 8.

warning about the concept of technology: "Machinery is no more an economic category than the bullock that drags the plow. Machinery is merely a productive force. The modern workshop, which depends on the application of machinery, is a social production relation, an economic category."⁴²

But this qualification leads to an even more fundamental representational problem, and one is tempted to say that the machine constitutes the "form of appearance" of the production relation, which remains an unrepresentable entity without it (in the sense in which no relationship is an entity in the first place; in the sense in which relationship as such is unrepresentable). At the very least, it is clear that Marx's idea of production has often been displaced and stereotypically tainted by its period association with that late nineteenth-century heavy industry today itself displaced by cybernetics and information technology.

Returning to the continuities of our story, which this "Cyclopean" chapter so momentarily interrupts, we may say that it certainly seems to solve one half of our initial conundrum by showing how the value of commodities can be cheapened, and thereby with them the value of the labor power they reproduce. Less expensive consumer goods (along with free trade and cheaper grain) clearly reduce the socially necessary price of the worker's labor time; but machine production has two other unexpected and antithetical consequences which set us new problems. Indeed, at this point we can also speak about a fuller development of the dialectic as such, whose profoundly antagonistic nature we have not been able to witness until this stage. What had seemed inoffensively static in the opposition of disembodied concepts or values like good and evil—allowing a Proudhon judiciously to sort out his account of production and combine its good sides while discarding the unwanted—now takes on the savagery of the *Manifesto* which concretizes it in far more deadly forms and effects. Here, in *Capital* as well as in the *Manifesto*, progress produces genuine misery, and wealth unspeakable destitution. Nor is this development unrelated to a more persistent emergence of

⁴² *The Poverty of Philosophy*, op. cit., p. 133.

temporality as such in the chapter on machinery: a thematized presence of time and its paradoxes which will now accompany us to the very end of the book, but which merit a separate discussion (see Chapter 4 below).

For the moment it is enough to isolate two peculiarities with which this chapter leaves us: on the one hand, machinery, which according to the stereotypical ideologies of common sense and bourgeois apologia ought to replace human labor and shorten labor time, in fact increases it. This negativity of progress and productivity will then be taken up at greater length and more openly in the last of the three long chapters of *Capital* (Chapter 25, on the general law of capitalist accumulation). Here we may limit ourselves to quoting the final sentence of the current chapter: "Capitalist production, therefore, only develops the techniques and the degree of combination of the social process of production by simultaneously undermining the original sources of all wealth—the soil and the worker" (638).

The other conundrum with which we are left here is that of the production of value: we know that only the living labor of the worker produces value as such (we have been warned that it cannot be produced by circulation or the market, but only by this strange new commodity called labor power). But now machines, themselves produced by living labor power, interpose themselves between the worker and the final commodity, which in fact they produce more cheaply. Therewith a new question: what is the relationship between the machine and the production of value?

We may now expect the return of figuration with a vengeance, remembering how the earlier account of what we may call simple value (the crystals of human labor, the "congealing" of labor, in the object) was unable to do without it. And yet the lesson ought to be an uncomplicated one: machines cannot produce value, only human labor can do so: "Machinery, like every other component of constant capital, creates no new value" (509). In that case, where is the advantage? The mere production of more commodities? Yet the labor-saving machine was supposed to replace part of the manual yet living work of the laborer himself, thereby in the process presumably removing some of the value that living labor would have itself

produced. In any case it is by the increase in the collective number of workers ("cooperation") that value is multiplied. And yet—and here we return to the basic paradox with which the machine confronts us—the logical consequence of the introduction of new machinery is the laying off of the workers it replaces.

It should be noted here that already, since *The Poverty of Philosophy* in 1847, Marx had insisted on a specific political causality for technological change: not the ingenuity of the inventors, but rather labor unrest is the driving force behind the introduction of new machinery, however long the latter's technical possibility has been available. The new machine is the capitalist's answer to the strike, the demand for higher wages, the increasingly effective organization—or "combination"—of the workers. Another dialectical paradox therefore: if the progress of capital produces the ever greater misery of the workers—a lesson to be demonstrated with increasing emphasis in the rest of this book—then it must also be said that class struggle—the increasingly articulate and self-conscious resistance of the workers themselves—is itself responsible for the ever greater productivity of capitalism. It is a somber conclusion which will later on, as we shall see, be reformulated in well-nigh ontological fashion.

For the moment, however, we are referred back to another duality we had neglected in Part Three in our onrushing movement toward that first concrete form of temporality called the working day. It was the seemingly terminological distinction between constant and variable capital, in which we had hitherto seen only the intensifying rate of exploitation of the variable capital (workers) and the noisy controversy about the statutory limitation of the working day, with its accompanying polemics (the "brilliant" argument of Senior's "last hour"—see below). We had too hastily passed over Marx's seemingly finicky discussion about whether the labor stored in machinery ("preserved") is to be described as being "transferred" to the new product or "reproduced" in it (he opts for the former). Yet here the old figuration of crystals and congealed labor power is evidently insufficient: for productive human labor has taken a "two-fold" form: "the addition of new value to the material of his labor, and the preservation of their former values"—"two entirely distinct results" which suggest

“the twofold nature of his labour: it must at the same time create value through one of its properties and preserve or transfer value through another” (307). Yet the creation of new value was at the same time the consumption of labor power as such, the consumption of this peculiar commodity along with that of the commodities called raw materials. Not only does this now posit a temporal process of a more complicated nature, it also results in the intersection of two distinct lines of figuration.

Indeed, the energy of the figures associated with consumption (which effectively destroys its object, as its etymology suggests) is now harnessed to the temporal process as such: “But in the process itself, the fact that they are the products of past labour is as irrelevant as, in the case of the digestive process, the fact that bread is the product of the previous labour of the farmer, the miller and the baker ... In a successful product, the role played by past labour in mediating its useful properties has been extinguished” (289–290). Now it is not the labor power which is extinguished in its consumption, nor the raw materials either, but rather the sheer time of the process as such. It is the past of labor that is here abolished, while at the same time paradoxically investing the new figure of the resurrection from the dead (a complex of organic images related to those well-known passages that characterize capital as a vampire, sucking the blood of living labor). To be sure, resurrection no doubt entails the extinction of the past of death as well, in one of those Biblical negations of the negation in which death is itself killed off.⁴³ Yet there is here an unavoidable contradiction in tonality between the celebration of resurrection and the “extinction” of the past. I think it expresses Marx’s deep ambivalence about his immediate subject here, in a figural excitement that celebrates the productive or regenerative power of labor as such, accompanied by a sober assessment of capitalist temporality which ruthlessly extinguishes the past of the labor process in order to appropriate its present as a commodity: which forgets that qualitative past, the existential nature of the work, its origins and contexts, “the traces of labour on the product,” in

⁴³ John Donne: “And death shall be no more; Death, thou shalt die.”

favor of the quantitative present in which alone it is to be sold in pristine form and itself “consumed.” Yet this duality of productivity is of course the fundamental one, not merely of the commodity (which unites quality and quantity, use and exchange value, in peculiar ways, to the disadvantage of the former), but also of capitalism itself, whose simultaneously productive and destructive powers had already so dramatically been celebrated in the *Manifesto*.

So now, in the chapter on machinery, we are at length able to measure the immense consequences of the distinction Marx established so much earlier: “Only in large-scale industry has man succeeded in making the product of his past labour, labour which has already been objectified, perform gratuitous service on a large scale, like a force of nature” (510). Now the celebrated resurrection of the previous quotation comes before us as the resurrection of zombies, of whom it is said, in Haiti, that they are the bodies of the former masters now forced in their turn to labor tirelessly and without souls for the living. Yet in the long run this miracle—in some first stage generating appreciable new profits (572–4, 578–80)—will begin to betray its true identity as capital’s fundamental contradiction, in that famous “falling rate of profit” in which the transfer of value embodied in the machine will begin to outweigh the production of new value by the ever fewer living workers it requires (it is a process only fully worked out in *Capital*, Volume III, the posthumous volume compiled by Engels).

We have not yet done with the dialectical ambiguities of capitalist technology, which once again arouses the temptation to perceive Marx as a Luddite and to read his diagnosis as an attack on machinery as such: it is a temptation which we must resist, encouraged though it may be by the representational reifications of the passages on which we have already commented.

The next two Parts (V and VI), which attempt to reemphasize the relationality of this material, are nonetheless probably the most arid stretch of *Capital* as a whole (or rather of its first volume): what is necessary in art being, as Valéry put it, always the least interesting. It is here, indeed, that Marx’s mathematical proclivities find expression (if not free rein) and that the various ratios between absolute

and relative surplus value, the effects of the variability of wages, and finally the “different formulae for the rate of surplus-value” are computed, and the types of wages and their relationship to value rehearsed once again (the fuller discussion awaiting us in Volume III, Chapters 13–15). It is here also that Marx essays some new terminology: the concept of “productivity” in the sense of “productive labour” is touched on (it is a sore point that will never really be healed in the debates on Marxist theory, despite a more elaborate discussion in “Theories of Surplus Value,” *Capital*, Volume IV). Nobody likes to be accused of indulging in unproductive labor, or perhaps the contemporary emergence of the “service sector” seems to have rendered this particular terminology outdated and unserviceable. Meanwhile, a new term is pioneered—subsumption—which will not find its full-dress definition and rehearsal until the unpublished supplement or missing chapter of *Capital* sees the light of day in the 1960s.⁴⁴ Indeed, even nature itself makes a brief appearance here as yet another source of value quite distinct from human productivity.

But none of these hesitations and tentativities prepare us for what is about to happen next: for now, at the beginning of Part Seven, presumably the climactic, and on my reading the concluding, section of *Capital*, and after some six hundred pages of this eight-hundred-page work, suddenly and altogether unexpectedly Marx lets us in on the secret and outlines the plan for *Capital* as a whole, including the projected content of the next two volumes (709–10), along with a brief summary of everything that has been thus far achieved. In a sense, then, the announcement of the subjects of Volumes II and III (circulation and the many capitals, respectively) only confirms Jacques Attali’s rather heavy-handed assertion that Marx was reluctant to finish anything (that is, to allow a finished product to be “alienated” from him). In reality, however, and to be dialectical about it, the unexpected forecast now allows us to grasp *Capital*, Volume One as both finished and unfinished all at once. What this means in fact is that we can expect both boundaries and lines of flight

⁴⁴ *Capital*, op. cit., pp. 949–1084, “Results of the Immediate Process of Production.”

simultaneously, climaxes along with unfinished business: we can grasp the mechanism of capital as both a structure and an open-ended historical development at one and the same time—both will be subsumed under the notion of expansion as we shall see, at the same time that capitalism's structure can be compared to the proverbial Rube Goldberg machine, always on the point of breaking down, and repairing itself by adding new and Ptolomaic "axioms" (to use Deleuze's term⁴⁵) which make it ever more unwieldy and dysfunctional.

At any rate, in this final section, Part Seven, dominated by the mountainous chapter entitled "The General Law of Capitalist Accumulation," we now begin the race to the finish line and to the coda (Part Eight), in an Althusserian "process without a subject" which knows any number of explosive textual dénouements en route, of which we will here isolate three: the human age, the dialectic of accumulation, the reserve army of labor.

The initial topic, "simple reproduction," makes it clear that we are now firmly in time (if not in history), in the time of the working population, and in the temporality of the system itself—both of them subject to irreversible jolts and upheavals. Contemporary philosophy has isolated and thematized the fundamental form here—repetition—to the point at which it is theoretically omnipresent: but Marx's treatment of it is already strikingly modern. Nothing happens for a first time in capitalism, he shows us; there are no beginnings: "what at first was merely a starting point becomes, by means of nothing but the continuity of the process, by simple reproduction, the characteristic result of capitalist production, a result which is constantly renewed and perpetuated" (716). A piquant side-effect of this perpetual conversion of linear into circular temporality is designated

⁴⁵ See Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *L'Anti-oedipe* (Paris: Minuit, 1972), Chapter 3, "Sauvages, Barbares, Civilises," whose title comes from Morgan, *Ancient Society*. The idea is that a "code" includes a kind of symbolic meaning within itself, whereas the axiomatic is merely a procedural rule without symbolic content or meaning. See also Robert Blanché, *Axiomatics* (London: Routledge, 1962).

by Marx in passing, namely, that in one sense it is the worker who lends the capitalist his capital to begin with, by agreeing to defer the payment of his wages to the end of the work-week. (There is more to this than meets the eye, we will return to it.) In general, however, what we glimpse here is the way in which the whole immense rotation of capitalist reproduction, when inspected ever more closely, tends to break up into multiple reproductions of dizzying lengths and dimensions, thereby foretelling the truly inhuman complexities of Volume II. Still, there is a constant: "simple reproduction, sooner or later, and necessarily, converts all capital into accumulated capital, or capitalized surplus value" (715). What Marx does not yet tell us here is that it does so on an ever expanding scale, as we shall see. For competition means that, on the one hand, the workers must keep up to the "socially necessary" standard of labor productivity; but capitalists must also match their competitors in the increasing size and productivity of their investments: both sides meanwhile already shackled to the process, the infernal machine, the tiger whose back you cannot dismount.

It is no accident that it would be precisely at this stage that Marx's earliest philosophical conceptions of alienation return. The Hegelian version (*Entäußerung*, externalization or objectification) has been appealed to in various earlier contexts, where it was a question of money or value and of production. Here for the first time (716) it is the alienation of the worker himself that comes in for direct attention, in a situation in which not only capital and value need to be reproduced but the worker himself and his labor power: he must be reproduced, but at the same time fixed in place (the process, says Marx, "takes good care to prevent the workers ... from running away" [729]).

The worker is thus not only reproduced, he is produced in the first place: this is the shift of emphasis which will not merely lead us to the very boundaries of historical questions of origin and periodization (Part Eight, or what I have been calling the coda), but also to the great ontological paradox of Marx's work as a whole, not to speak of a peculiar new reversal in the very concept of a "law." For leaving aside the land and ecology as such (Foster has indeed shown that Marx is

not only keenly aware of the earth as a source of wealth but also as an object of exploitation and degradation⁴⁶), it becomes increasingly clear that the worker is himself the driving force of the system and the inextinguishable source of its accumulated values. The inference is that the capitalist is not and never was the “subject of history”: and a long comic excursus here on the abstinence theory of capitalist development—the Weberian or Calvinist moment, in which the emergent capitalist must restrict his own consumption and enlarge his putative capital by savings (in this in any case quite distinct from the historical form of the miser)—corresponds, like its Mandevillian opposite number—the theory that luxury and sinful overconsumption also helpfully feed the system—to distinct historical stages of the whole process. In any case, we recall that from the very beginning Marx’s allegorical sense warned us that capitalists are to be considered but *Träger* of the process and not subjects (something he never says about the proletariat), even though they are also its beneficiaries.

There is here a great ontological presentiment, akin to the great warning to Feuerbach (in the *German Ideology*) that left without production, even for a month, for a year, “civilization” and human history itself would vanish as though in a thunderclap.⁴⁷ Here (although the

⁴⁶ John Bellamy Foster, *Marx’s Ecology* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2000).

⁴⁷ Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology* (Moscow: Progress, 1964), p. 46:

And so it happens that in Manchester, for instance, Feuerbach sees only factories and machines, where a hundred years ago only spinning-wheels and weaving-loom were to be seen, or in the Campagna di Roma he finds only pasture lands and swamps, where in the time of Augustus he would have found nothing but the vineyards and villas of Roman capitalists. Feuerbach speaks in particular of the perception of natural science; he mentions secrets which are disclosed only to the eye of the physicist and chemist; but where would natural science be without industry and commerce? Even this “pure” natural science is provided with an aim, as with its material, only through trade and industry, through the sensuous activity of men. So much is this activity, this unceasing sensuous labour and creation, this production, the foundation of the whole sensuous world as it now exists that, were it interrupted only for a year, Feuerbach would not only find an enormous change in the natural world, but would very soon find that the whole world of men and his own perceptive faculty, nay his own existence, were missing.

specter of Feuerbach haunts the passage) the ontological climax is more soberly expressed: “just as man is governed, in religion, by the products of his own brain, so, in capitalist production, he is governed by the products of his own hand” (772). And Marx quotes with approbation the puzzlement of a contemporary German economist who naively remarks, “If we now return to our first inquiry, where we showed that capital itself is only a product of human labour ... it seems quite incomprehensible that man can have fallen under the domination of capital, his own product, and can be subordinated to it” (772, n. 9). Capital, Marx concludes, is “the golden chain the wage-labourer has already forged for himself” (769). The response to the paradox (it will be given in Part Eight) is less important than its implication—the Viconian-Brechtian assertion that what human beings have made they can also unmake; along with the stubborn old optimistic conviction that “mankind sets itself only such tasks as it is able to solve” (C 21), and that there are no unanswerable questions. Ontology here then at once becomes politics, despite all the bad things people have recently found to say about it.

The system, however, has its own stubborn optimism and its own reply to make: and it is the introduction of the matter of temporality that will allow it to be heard. For if reproduction not only dialectically means that there is no beginning, it also by the same token undermines itself in the process, since it also means that there is no “second time” either, that the second time is not the same as the first, nor the third, the second, and so on ad infinitum (with all the infinitesimal variations catalogued by Deleuze in *Difference and Repetition*). The solution to this paradox was already implicit in the very first disengagement of capital accumulation from sheer exchange, in the formula $M - M'$. For capital accumulation necessarily also means enlargement: Marx’s introduction of a new complication and a new nomenclature in the form of the idea of the “organic composition” of capital (762) inscribes this temporal process in the idea of the structure itself, whose ratio constantly changes under its own proportions and momentum. Composition here not only means the degree to which constant capital—the machinery—inexorably comes to outweigh variable capital, despite that analogy between the latter’s

structure and a multiplicity of workers on which he has hitherto insisted. Indeed, he will insert a counterweight to that ostensible law in this very same chapter. The fatal consequences of this developing imbalance for capital itself—the so-called falling rate of profit—will not be drawn overtly here; nonetheless at this point the temporal process is thematized in two new terms, those of concentration and centralization, which articulate what will later on be lumped together under the idea of monopoly and treated by a progressivist bourgeois economics as a rather unnatural deformation which needs from time to time to be corrected or even banned. But for Marx (and for his political successors) monopoly is not an aberration but a tendency (a “general law”) inscribed in the very genetic makeup of capitalism: concentration is an end product of the competition between the many capitals for a larger share of investment; while centralization is the amalgamation of a number of those already enlarged capitals among themselves (776–8). Both processes articulate that dynamic of inevitable expansion by which capitalism solves its immediate problems and postpones its contradictions.

It is at this point, prematurely, that Marx introduces the henceforth fundamental supplement to his discussion in the phenomenon of credit, a topic greatly expanded by Engels in the fourth edition (777–80), and demanding completion by a theory of finance capital. Thus, when Arrighi comes to theorize the history of capitalism in terms of discontinuous expansion in *The Long Twentieth Century*, he finds himself obliged to furnish it with an extraordinary new cyclical conception of the persistence of finance capital, now considered to be a fundamental historical stage at each moment of capitalism’s development.⁴⁸

Here then we have another climax, another conclusion to something: in the event, the possibility capitalism has of reproducing itself, against all odds, and through all possible crises. It is expansion that heralds imperialism and, looking forward to the world market and globalization, dooms all prospects of “socialism in one country”; expansion again that justifies the much longer time frame more

⁴⁸ See above, Chapter 1, note 29.

joyously anticipated by the *Grundrisse*, for which socialist revolution will not be on the agenda until universal commodification (the universalization of wage labor) has become the law and that ultimate limit of capitalist expansion which is the world market has finally been reached.⁴⁹ The final block to capitalist expansion is then the moment when its contradictions no longer find their ever more provisional solutions and postponements in a strategy of enlargement. This argument remains implicit in *Capital*, whatever its more overt recommendations and prophecies, yet it can also justify the ever renewed premonitions of the system itself about its own immediate futures (“après moi le déluge!”).

I am tempted to read the well-known outburst in the preceding chapter as the displaced expression of these historical feelings, now undecipherable as affect save for the energy of their expression: “Accumulate, accumulate! That is Moses and the prophets! ... Accumulation for the sake of accumulation, production for the sake of production: this was the formula in which classical economics expressed the historical mission of the bourgeoisie in the period of its domination. Not for one instant did it deceive itself over the nature of wealth’s birth-pangs. But what use is it to lament a historical necessity? If, in the eyes of classical economics, the proletariat is merely a machine for the production of surplus-value, the capitalist too is merely a machine for the transformation of this surplus-value into surplus capital” (742).

A number of mixed feelings mingle in this passage, which is for one thing a lament over the passing of the great period of bourgeois economics as such, with its lucidity: for the conquest of power by the bourgeoisie “sounded the knell of scientific bourgeois economics. It

⁴⁹ *Grundrisse*, op. cit.: “In the case of the world market the connection of the individual with all, but at the same time also the independence of this connection from the individual, have developed to such a high level that the formation of the world market already at the same time contains the conditions for going beyond it” (161). And see also pp. 227–8. The distinction Marx borrows from Hegel between a barrier and a limit is the operative one here: capitalism expands by overcoming its barriers, but the world market spells its absolute limit. (And here also see on this Lebowitz, op. cit., pp. 107–15.)

was thenceforth no longer a question whether this or that theorem was true, but whether it was useful to capital or harmful, expedient or inexpedient ..." ("Postface" to Second Edition, 97).

Meanwhile, the status of the capitalist as a mere *Träger* or bearer of the system is reaffirmed, while the role of the worker as the reified object of exploitation is subtly differentiated. Yet this very weighing of the status of human individuals over against the power of the system to transform them into allegorical tokens of its movement and tendencies betrays a deep ambivalence in the work itself. Is the emergence of the system (and then its revolutionary overthrow) the doing of impersonal forces or of collective subjects of history? Will the end of capitalism take place as the result of its dysfunctional breakdown, or by associated action? The great Biblical outcry can be identified as the very language of religious alienation; and yet it betrays a modulation into the figurative which is as always the sign that Marx's text has risen to a certain consciousness of itself, has reached a height from which for a moment it can look out across the totality of its object and of the system as a whole: the long-term memory of its argument as a whole, rather than the short-term work of its decipherment of detail and of the dynamic of capitalism's internal machinery. Here such figuration announces that we have reached one of those moments in which the text prepares to solve one of its riddles, decisively to answer one of its organizing questions.

That it is unwilling to do so unequivocally, however, is what explains the immense swerve of this final section (Part Seven). For it is crucial at this point to understand that expansion—concentration and centralization—is not what Marx means by his decisive title, "the general law of capitalist accumulation." To be sure, the dynamic of such expansion—in which, like the Red Queen, capitalism runs faster and faster to stay in one place—is a fundamental property of capitalism as a system, and in that sense this irreversible and unavoidable tendency might well be termed a law, in the sense, indeed, in which the classical economists spoke of the law of value itself (he does so himself [676]). Yet Marx speaks mostly of the latter as a "secret" and of the former (initially) as a "formula." Hegel had meanwhile mocked the concept of the laws of physics as the adding of an inside

to the outside and the generation of a mirage of the inverted world⁵⁰; nor is Marx ever oblivious to the variety of permutations and outcomes possible in what are always for him ratios and relationships, rather than physical laws. But the “eternal laws” of capitalism are the myths and fictions of its ideologists; and one of the few intemperate moments, in which Marx’s anger breaks through that self-control which normally gives his observations their tension and their power, is to be found in his impatience with the blindness of even the classical economists about wages: “such a self-destructive contradiction,” he concludes, after an enumeration of inconsistencies, “cannot be in any way even enunciated or formulated as a law” (676). Capitalism is then itself that “self-destructive contradiction”: a machine whose development is at one with its crises and breakdowns cannot know “laws” in any ordinary sense.

To be sure, its paradoxes take the form of dialectical regularities:

Therefore, since machinery in itself shortens the hours of labour, but when employed by capital it lengthens them; since in itself it lightens labour, but when employed by capital it heightens its intensity; since in itself it is a victory of man over the forces of nature but in the hands of capital it makes man the slave of those forces; since in itself it increases the wealth of the producers, but in the hands of capital it makes them into paupers, the bourgeois economist simply states that the contemplation of machinery in itself demonstrates with exactitude that all these evident contradictions are a mere semblance, present in everyday reality, but not existing in themselves, and therefore having no theoretical existence either. Thus he manages to avoid racking his brains any more, and in addition implies that his opponent is guilty of the stupidity of contending, not against the capitalist application of machinery, but against machinery itself. (568–69)

But Marx is unwilling to use the term “law” even for such dialectical unions of opposites.

This is why it is striking to find him italicizing the word when he comes to its enunciation in the climactic chapter that bears it in

⁵⁰ Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972), Chapter 3; and see also *The Hegel Variations*, op. cit., pp. 70–1.

its title: “*This is the absolute general law of capitalist accumulation*” (798)! To be sure, we know that in Marx the word “absolute” always undermines itself by foretelling a dualism whose opposite number is “relative.” And no doubt that may also be so here, and the situation of which he speaks knows outcomes which run the gamut of a whole permutation scheme.

Still, this seems categorical enough, and we must therefore take seriously the shifting of gears which displaces the dialectic from its contradictions of capitalism itself in order to train it on the relationship of capitalism to its workers and in particular to its production of a work force far in excess of its immediate requirements. We already know that the invention of labor-saving machines increases labor as such: but that is one of the many paradoxes internal to the system. Meanwhile, does capitalism produce its work force or merely presuppose it? This can now take the form of a historical question, one illicit in the framework of a structural analysis of capitalism and only to be posed outside that framework (in the quite different historical coda constituted by Part Eight). Nonetheless it brings us to the uneasy edge across which we are able to glimpse the extra-economic effects of the system in question. Do such glimpses somehow violate the plan of *Capital* as such (and risk violating that extraordinary self-discipline and affective restraint on which we have already commented)? Do they constitute moments of sentimentality in Marx, demagogic appeals to sheer feeling rather than rigorous demonstration, premonitory lapses of a Second International type from properly Marxian analyses of the system into Kantian ethical judgments on it? Such charges have often been brought, and are of a piece with the “contextualization” of Marx as a Victorian thinker, in that Dickensian background in which he comes before us as yet another philanthropist armed with scandalous revelations and testimonies of misery and inhumanity. We will come back to this question in Chapter 5, below.

What is irrefutable is that the general law enunciated here has to do with non-work: not with the production of a working proletariat (let alone its reproduction), but with a “reserve army” which includes people who will never work and who are indeed incapable of working. Here is the formulation:

The greater the social wealth, the functioning capital, the extent and energy of its growth, and therefore also the greater the absolute mass of the proletariat and the productivity of its labour, the greater is the industrial reserve army. The same causes which develop the expansive power of capital, also develop the labour-power at its disposal. The relative mass of the industrial reserve army thus increases with the potential energy of wealth. But the greater this reserve army in proportion to the active labour-army, the greater is the mass of a consolidated surplus population, whose misery is in inverse ratio to the amount of torture it has to undergo in the form of labour. The more extensive, finally, the pauperized sections of the working class and the industrial reserve army, the greater is official pauperism. *This is the absolute general law of capitalist accumulation.* Like all other laws, it is modified in its working by many circumstances, the analysis of which does not concern us here. (798)

This is the famous doctrine of immiseration, whose visible consequence is the polarization of society into the two classes of a proportionately smaller and smaller group of very wealthy capitalists on the one hand and an ever larger percentage of the population whose income approaches the official poverty line if it has not already plunged beneath it. This particular Marxian “law”—“in proportion as capital accumulates, the situation of the worker, be his payment high or low, must grow worse” (799)—was the object of much mockery during the affluent post-war 1950s and 1960s. It is today no longer a joking matter. Along with Marx’s intimations of globalization, these analyses seem to renew the actuality today of *Capital* on a world scale. In another sense they designate a stage of “subsumption” in which the extra-economic or social no longer lies outside capital and economics but has been absorbed into it: so that being unemployed or without economic function is no longer to be expelled from capital but to remain within it. Where everything has been subsumed under capitalism, there is no longer anything outside it; and the unemployed—or here the destitute, the paupers—are as it were employed by capital to be unemployed; they fulfill an economic function by way of their very non-functioning (even if they are not paid to do so).

The fatal enlargement of capitalist accumulation is now accompanied by an enlargement of the scope of this work and of its plan.

Just as pre-capitalist agriculture, the great feudal landlords and their ground rent, in bitter struggle with the new industrial capitalists and their factory workers, are now absorbed into capitalism, so the rural poor are absorbed into the misery of capitalist pauperism; and *Capital* will include their plight as well: but not as an object of pathos, rather as a historical result and structural consequence of the development of capitalism, and one which must be documented in order to convey the logic of the system in full expansion.

Two historical notes conclude this section, and with it the main body of *Capital* as such. The first is, as it were, a retrospective perspective which situates the Irish potato famine in the context of the account of capitalism that has just been given: this we can deduce from Lord Dufferin's diagnosis that "Ireland is still over-populated, and the stream of emigration flows too sluggishly. To be perfectly happy, Ireland must get rid of at least one-third of a million working men" (868).⁵¹

In a second moment, we suddenly confront the evocation of an American nemesis across the Atlantic, now the recipient of Europe's excess population, but in the future the competitor and likely successor of Britain's global hegemony. For Marx knows well, as a later discussion will testify, that the America of that frontier has now, after its Civil War, become a capitalist country like any other.

⁵¹ We know today that Sir Charles Trevelyan's decision not to relieve the Irish potato famine was based on his conviction of the truth of this principle, and therefore technically constituted genocide.

Chapter 3

History as Coda

The last pages of Part Seven thus plunge us back into history again, and contemporary history at that. Part Eight will now not only turn to historiography as such (a discourse only locally deployed in the previous sections), it will pose problems of periodization and historical causality which had been bracketed during the preceding inquiry (just as the analysis of exchange value in Part One bracketed the question of use value). Here is the strategic expression of this earlier precaution: “But that process [capitalist production] must have had a beginning of some kind. From our present standpoint it therefore seems likely that the capitalist, once upon a time, became possessed of money by some form of primitive accumulation that took place independently of the unpaid labour of other people, and that this was therefore how he was able to frequent the market as a buyer of labour-power. However this may be ...” (714). Likely, indeed! Marx’s little joke underscores the significant difference between a structural discourse and a historical one, between the dismantling of a machine, along with a demonstration of the function of its various parts, and the narrative of the coming into being of a phenomenon and its going hence. This is the justification for my otherwise outrageous proposition that we treat this final section of *Capital* as a distinct entity in its own right, and a break more momentous than the shifting of gears within a given discursive exposition, however heterogeneous it may otherwise be. The musical analogy with which we introduced our discussion of the semi-autonomy of Part One, or the *Vorspiel* of

Capital, perhaps entitles us to look on this concluding one, not as a whole satyr-play in its own right, but certainly as a kind of musical coda, in which, the main developmental business concluded, a few thematic afterthoughts design a final flourish and a wrapping up.⁵²

Still, the philosophical richness of this final section tempts us to consider it as a complete treatise in its own right—not in the sense in which it develops a single (new) conceptual argument, but rather in the antithetical one, that here any number of themes and problems cross paths. Yet, to use the language of yesteryear, they are diachronic rather than synchronic (as distinct from the main text) and thereby merit their own form of attention. This is then the moment to distinguish the issue of temporality and time (to which I will consecrate a separate discussion, below) from that of historical narrative. Temporality is synchronic, even if it includes a category marked “the past,” or another one marked “change”: as Althusser put it, each mode of production secretes its own temporality, its own system of the temporal ek-stases: that of capital will be examined later on.

But Part Eight is rather the place for that other thing most often stigmatized as a “philosophy of history”—that is to say, a narrative of the various modes of production, a history of histories, as it were, in which the fundamental historical situations succeed each other and are structurally modified, and the great illicit questions tend inevitably to arise, about the origins of history, its meaning and its “end” or goal, its fate, its telos. To be sure, we can refuse to answer these questions and can indeed conceptually discredit them, as Kant did for the matter of origins; but we cannot prevent them from arising in the first place, or rather, from arising over and over again in new forms and guises. And there will always be the suspicion that the dismissal of such questions as so many false problems is, secretly and in its own fashion, also a way of answering them.

⁵² The novel knows such codas as well, which constitute a kind of decompression chamber in which events wind down and open up the temporal perspective of a longer afterlife, the camera withdrawing to a greater distance, whether of Natasha’s later family life as a matron, or the dwindling into the distant past of Keats’ lovers—“And they are gone: aye, ages long ago ...”

Marx here has indeed some answers for all of them, and they are contemporary answers, even if his philosophical languages are not always ours. On origins, for example, he will in effect and in his practice, if not in name and as such, offer a genealogy, distinguishing between origins and preconditions. The sample narratives offered here—such as the terrible story of the expropriation of the English peasants—are not exactly given to us as causes; but rather a setting in place of one of the preconditions required for the emergence of that new thing called capitalism, which is from this point of view something like the speculation about other species or life in outer space. Is water present? What about some of the other organic compounds we identify with life? Are enough of the necessary preconditions for life present for us to feel that we are in full possession of an adequate theory? Compared with the other historical modes of production we can document, capitalism is as strange a species as aliens in outer space, and is not exactly to be accounted for by what the doxa normally identifies as evolutionary theory.⁵³

What seems minimally clearer is that to such general (philosophical or ideological) stories, Marx prefers a different framework, which has come to be called the “transition,” or rather the problem of transitions, as it has been extrapolated from this here central one, namely the transition from feudalism to capitalism—a different way of framing the problem than what is suggested by questions about the origins of capitalism, or even its beginnings.⁵⁴ The issue of transitions allows capitalism’s “preconditions” to be laid in place separately, and without assuming that each of them corresponded to a specific

⁵³ It is worth noting the appearance of Darwin in two long footnotes of *Capital* (461, n. 6; 493, n. 4); but that his authority, although it serves famously to insert human history into natural history, is here associated with the multiplicity of other species and with Hegel’s idea of the “geistiges Tierreich,” the multiplicity of secular trades and callings, of productive talents, rather than with such evolutionary stories as “the survival of the fittest.”

⁵⁴ See on “transitions,” Etienne Balibar, *Lire le capital* (Paris: Maspero, 1968), Volume II, pp. 178–226. It is worth noting that today, with the so-called transition from socialism to capitalism, there has arisen a new sociological or historical “discipline” called transitology.

structural weakness in feudalism that might become part of a dossier on feudalism's own breakdown as a mode of production. For it is not at all clear that that breakdown—which of course itself implies that there can be a general concept of a “mode of production” and that their laws and in particular their collapses or dissolutions are in any way comparable with each other—is of the same type as the cumulative enumeration of contradictions that suggest an impending or distant collapse of capitalism itself. Indeed, it will not be necessary, for any satisfactory concept of the transition to capitalism, to posit a unified description of feudalism at all—and this for reasons of temporality which we will confront later on. At any rate it is the idea of a transitional period from which capitalism emerges that will explain our incorporation here of an earlier chapter of *Capital* to which we have as yet not paid the attention it deserves, namely Chapter 14, on manufacture. For just as it is not clear when “capitalism” begins—the incorporation of industry and machine technology is another candidate—so also it is not clear when what we can now only call “pre-capitalism” ends. The chapter on the manufacturing stage is crucial here, in all its ambiguity: for it is not at all clear either that manufacture fully deserves the characterization as capitalist, only that genuine capitalism drives it out and destroys all traces of it, just as the Cro-Magnons supplanted the Neanderthals and obliterated all memory of them.

This is the sense in which, with the problem of transition, we are still, we are more than ever, in the embarrassment of philosophies of history. For here the uncomfortable problem of periodization raises its head, and forces us to make all kinds of unavoidable statements about breaks and transformations, about “first times” and boundaries “beyond which”: statements we know we will regret later on, when someone offers a more richly documented counter-hypothesis. My position, that such propositions are representational choices which can be neither proven nor falsified, which correspond to starting points in the void, without presuppositions, or in other words that they can be false but never true, and that they can only be motivated politically but not by the “facts,” is not one which will appeal to everyone.

Finally, there is the question of the future, that is, to be blunt about it, the question of socialism as such. That capitalism is extraordinarily resourceful, and disposes of many hitherto undiscovered ways of surmounting its contradictions, Marx can be assumed, on the strength of the *Grundrisse*, never to have doubted. That it can also dissolve into its own “time of troubles” is evident from the ominous words of the *Manifesto* about that epochal struggle between two parties “which ends in the revolutionary reconstruction of society or in the mutual destruction of the contending parties.”⁵⁵ That the mutual association and self-organization of the workers can create pressure on the system and make for all kinds of changes small and large is evident from local passages in *Capital*; and that we can at least imagine “an association of free men, working with the means of production held in common, and expending their different forms of labour-power in full self-awareness as one single social labour force” (171) this whole book is there to testify. But *Capital* is not in that sense political, as I have said before; it has a different form from the *Manifesto*. Hayden White has urged the comic form on us as the narrative way of reading the “philosophies of history” of Marx and Hegel alike: and perhaps the “happy ending” is a narrative category rather than a historical one. At any rate, we will find, in this historical coda, not one but two happy endings to such a putative narrative of *Capital*—two great climaxes, which can be distinguished as the heroic and the idyllic, perhaps. At the least they offer some relief from the bleak panorama of immiseration with which the body of the text concluded (in Part Seven).

For this particular big bang—the emergence of capitalism—to take place, there must at the very least exist two distinct substances whose ultimate combination produces a new kind of molecule: “the confrontation of, and the contact between, two very different kinds of commodity owners; on the one hand, the owners of money, means of production, means of subsistence, who are eager to valorize the sum of values they have appropriated by buying the labour-power

⁵⁵ Marx and Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, in *Later Political Writings*, ed. T. Carver (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 2.

of others; on the other, free workers, the sellers of their own labour-power, and therefore the sellers of labour" (874). It will do no good to conceal the self-evident fact that this wholly satisfying account of the preconditions for our new social species in fact explains nothing and turns in a vicious circle. For we have already learned that the commodity is in that form already a product of capitalism itself, in other modes of production being a secondary, contingent and merely subordinate accident or element. So Marx here presupposes what he was supposed to explain in the first place, requiring us to go even further back in order to trace what are now two distinct lines of historical precondition, that of wealth and that of labor.

In the case of the capitalist, something of a mystery persists and will never wholly be explained away: for now Part One, which was arbitrarily excluded from our preceding account of *Capital*, reasserts its presence by a kind of action at distance and enforces a radical distinction between wealth and capital, between money and capital, which renders the transformation of the first into the second a virtually unbridgeable gap by definition, like one of Ovid's metamorphoses. The problem will be easier to grasp if we see it in terms of the actors in the process, the famous bearers or *Träger* of capital, in whom, to be sure, Marx has only a limited interest. Yet the point is that they are not the same! The possessors of wealth are not the same people as the capitalists, one group does not turn into the other, the personnel is wholly different, a new set of actors needs to be brought forward. So it is that only a few of the great merchants become masters of capital. They do not need to (at least in the beginning and "at the creation"); but then where do the others come from? It is easier to register a kind of "knight's gambit" in the emergence of the capitalist farmer (with the result that it occupies the shortest chapter in the book): for while the great feudal landlord remains equal to himself and survives to do battle with the industrial upstarts well into the beginning of the nineteenth century where the full change really does take place, the properly capitalist farmer emerges in the person of a hitherto minor character, the bailiff of the estate. Like our modern post-socialist managers, he it is who turns the activity of oversight into the status of ownership, and exploits the land henceforth in accordance with

the new “law of value.” But “the genesis of the industrial capitalist did not proceed in such a gradual way as that of the farmer” (914), at which point Marx drops this personification and gives us yet another enumeration of preconditions: “the colonies, the national debt, the modern tax system, and the system of protection” (he means the state protection of home-grown industry) (915). The peculiarities of agricultural development are in any case to be explained by the ontological problems of turning land into private property.⁵⁶

As for the capitalist, Marx is clear that he emerges from the horrendous convulsions of competition between the nascent capitalist powers of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Europe, but also that behind them there stands a moment of original sin:

The discovery of gold and silver in America, the extirpation, enslavement and entombment in mines of the indigenous population of that continent, the beginnings of the conquest and plunder of India, and the conversion of Africa into a preserve for the commercial hunting of blackskins, are all things which characterize the dawn of the era of capitalist production. These idyllic proceedings are the chief moments of primitive accumulation. Hard on their heels follows the commercial war of the European nations, which has the globe as its battlefield. It begins with the revolt of the Netherlands from Spain, assumes gigantic dimensions in England's Anti-Jacobin War, and is still going on in the shape of the Opium Wars against China, etc. (915)

Rosa Luxemburg insists far more centrally on this origin of capitalism in what it is too mild to call the expropriation of the Third World, while modern post-decolonization scholarship has been even more categorical about this precondition, and the momentous share of non-European labor in the construction of what is wrongly seen to be a European exceptionalism.⁵⁷ Yet with the extraordinarily rapid development of capitalism in China and elsewhere in the non-West

⁵⁶ See for the most comprehensive exploration of the complexities of the theory of ground rent David Harvey's admirable *Limits to Capital* (London: Verso, 2006).

⁵⁷ See Rosa Luxemburg, *The Accumulation of Capital* (London: Routledge, 2003); as well as the work of the liberation philosopher Enrique Dussel.

in our time, the debate about Europe's historical precedence has been renewed, and the preponderance of discussions of weapons and armaments points to the ideological difficulties in this line of approach. For from the outset Marx himself appealed to an extra-economic explanation, namely the violence with which gold and silver were plundered and the "natives" forced to labor. Yet our own situation reminds us, if it were necessary, that "violence" is an ideological category, which is always appealed to in political arguments: not only is it an extra-economic factor which falls outside the categories of the system (in this case virtually by definition) but it can never be a reliable historical concept. We have thus taken a road that leads nowhere else but into an impenetrable ideological thicket; and the whole notion of "primitive accumulation" proves to be a kind of myth, like original sin itself, as Marx remarks from the outset (834). We must return and follow an alternative route, that of the production of the other half of the combination, namely the working population. An additional justification for doing so may be found in the reminder that it was the worker who built capitalism in the first place.

When we examine that other precondition, which specifies the conditions under which a working population appropriate for capitalist development will be available, we discover that Marx here reaps the benefit of his entire life's work, returning in these pages (874ff) to the fundamentals of the account of alienation he had worked out in the 1844 manuscripts.⁵⁸ But this new and final version makes clearer what advantages are to be gained from altering the historical framework in which the discussion is taking place, from one of labor generally—all modes of production have depended on and presupposed the extraction of surplus value and surplus labor in one way or another—to the specific historical situation of the transition to capitalism. It should also finally be able to tell us something about the advantage of shifting from a philosophical register to that of political economy. The latter nomenclature is better than the more specialized one either of history or of economics, since its strength was to have included both (whatever criticisms Marx is able to make of its

⁵⁸ See above, Chapter 1, note 27.

then current bourgeois limitations); meanwhile, it also seems better to replace the traditional complaints about Marx's alleged Hegelianism in these early manuscripts with a more forthright description that indicts the more general abstractions of philosophy as such, including its vested interests and, as it were, its *détournement* of thought in its own specialized direction, namely the production of "concepts."

What allows Marx here to return his own abstractions to their concrete situation (or to use his own words, to "rise from the abstract to the concrete"⁵⁹) turns out unexpectedly to be figuration as such, and in particular the figure of separation pioneered back in the 1840s, and already touched on above. What the figure of externalization and the return or taking back into self is for Hegel, the trope of separation and its various cognates and synonyms is for Marx. This trope then has the advantage over the Hegelian one—not so much to forestall the stereotypical moment of "synthesis" so often attributed to the latter, as in a more general way to leave open the question of content, of any affirmative or positivistic proposition, while displaying the purely formal dynamic of the process. It is the very negativity of the term that achieves this perspective, by insisting on subtraction and distance: Marx does not have to specify what elements were present in the labor process before the onset of separation, all he has to do is enumerate the various separations themselves (separation from the means, from the product, from the energies of human activity, and from my fellow workers). In much the same way the substitution of the now stereotypical Marxian formulation—negation of the negation—for the pseudo-Hegelian triadic term "synthesis" now leaves the content of the process open for historical specification: we do not need to speculate on the new situation produced by the negation of the preceding moment, while at the same time we do not need to write the kind of historical narrative in which the gradual transformation or metamorphosis of one situation into another was thought to be the aim of the historical representation (for one thing, as Marx observes in his earliest critiques of Hegel, the reality cannot really be

⁵⁹ *Grundrisse*, op. cit., p. 101.

represented but only the metamorphosis of ideas and images within the mind itself). Yet the possibility of more local historical narratives opens up a richer genealogical field: for we can certainly try to show how working people got “separated” from their tools and their land (this will indeed be the story told in Chapter 27, under the rubric of expropriation).

But if the very figure of separation allows a new and more productive way of representing the transition insofar as it translates the life experience of laboring people, it also allows us to return to that side of the basic preconditions which concerns capital and the capitalists as well. And here also it is no longer a question of the putative amassing of fortunes which can be invested in the new ways (the myth of primitive accumulation), but rather the institutional preconditions that had to be fulfilled before the new institutions (and their “law of value”) could become dominant in this or that social formation.

This is where a return to Chapter 14 and the discussion of the manufacturing stage is helpful: for there Marx spelled out in far greater detail the dual struggle the capitalists had to wage in order to seize the space of production for themselves and to reorganize it: not only did they have to displace “the feudal lords, who were in possession of the sources of wealth,” but also “the guild-masters of handicrafts” (875). Nor was it simply a matter of displacement: for in every mode of production (even in every individual institution), we may specify a principle of self-preservation, a *conatus* very much in Spinoza’s sense: here the institutional dynamic, alongside the specific task it has come into being to fulfill, retains another one, namely to survive and to keep itself in being (a kind of institutional equivalent of the dimension of autoreferentiality or self-designation in the realm of aesthetics, or that of narcissism, perhaps, in the psychoanalytic dimension of human life). Nor is this self-preservation simply a “value” or an idle wish: it must include specific internal checks and structural safeguards against the forces strategically calculated to dis-aggregate and undermine it.⁶⁰

⁶⁰ A paradigmatic example of this principle of self-preservation of the mode of production as such is given by Pierre Clastres in *La Société contre l'état* (Paris:

Such are indeed the regulations of the guilds: “the rules of the guilds...deliberately hindered the transformation of the single master into a capitalist, by placing very strict limits on the number of apprentices and journeymen he could employ. Moreover, he could employ his journeymen only in the handicraft in which he was himself a master. The guilds zealously repelled every encroachment by merchants’ capital, the only free form of capital which confronted them” (479). Separation here thus involves very specific techniques, legal and otherwise, for neutralizing these guild traditions and regulations, so as to open the field for the historically emergent new types of capitalist production.

This is the point at which we must raise again the question of what replaced the guilds, namely manufacture, and whether it is to be seen as a first stage of capitalism or the last stage of what preceded it. Insofar as Marx has entitled one of the sub-sections of this chapter “the capitalist character of manufacture,” the answer to the question ought to be obvious. But it is not, for one very fundamental reason, namely that “the specialized worker produces no commodities” (475). The so-called specialized worker is indeed the new element that characterizes and defines manufacture; or better still, that new kind of worker is the result of what does uniquely define the manufacturing stage as such, namely its organization around the division of labor. (We must remember the context of the analysis: not only is Marx progressing toward the new phenomenon—industrial machinery—whose originality is to embody the division of labor as such within itself and to reduce workers, hitherto specialized or not, to the status of unskilled labor; but we also recall that the polemic purpose of these arguments also includes a correction of Adam Smith, for whom the distinguishing feature of capitalism was precisely the division of labor as such.)

Minuit, 1974, p. 99) in the injunction against eating animals one has oneself killed: tribal society thus protects itself against accumulation and the emergence of power (riches, “big men” and their retainers, and ultimately the state itself). The structural *conatus* and self-justification of modern institutions and their members was of course one of the central themes of Pierre Bourdieu’s work

But now we need to add Marx's qualification: "It is only the common product of the specialized workers that becomes a commodity" (475). This whole passage then validates Balibar's analysis of the so-called "transitional period" (or transitional mode of production, as he calls it), namely that in it non-capitalist structures coexist with capitalist structures or, better still, that they surcharge each other and are mutually interconnected in a unique fashion which will disappear when its capitalist functions are separated from the non- or pre-capitalist ones.⁶¹ Such is indeed the case here with manufacturing, whose workshop produces commodities as a functioning whole, the parts of which do not yet produce commodities.

Finally, as it were, the new mode bursts its "integument" and evolves new relations of production appropriate to it:

As soon as it [cooperation based on the division of labor, in other words manufacture] attains a degree of consistency and extension, it becomes the conscious, methodical and systematic form of capitalist production. The history of manufacture proper shows how the division of labour which is peculiar to it acquires the most appropriate form at first by experience, as it were behind the backs of the actors, and then, like the guild handicrafts, strives to hold fast to that form once it has been found, and here and there succeeds in keeping it for centuries. (485)

And then he adds this, which is decisive for his association of capitalism with industrial machinery: "Any alteration in this form, except in trivial matters, never results from anything but a revolution in the instruments of labour." With the hindsight of the following chapter, we may read this revolution as the reification of a human division of labor in the machine itself (whose distinction from the tool is there thoroughly specified technically).

Manufacturing is thus a prolongation of the specialized labor of the guilds, which is now reorganized within the new space of a collective workshop, itself transformed into the space of the new factory when the division of labor embodied by the workers in the older space is replaced by the machine as such. Dialectical history is

⁶¹ See above, note 54.

thus written in the discontinuous mode of successive negations, subtractions, separations and omissions: it is structural, but only to the degree to which the successive structures allow us to read the absent continuity between them which betrays the operation across them of a single force, law or tendency, and which can now be identified and named as such. (We will deal with the temporality of this process, and in particular with the progressive effacement of all traces of the older system, in the next chapter.)

It is, however, a method that Marx does not always follow consistently: the term "expropriation," for example, imprudently leads him to specify an earlier stage, in which what existed as "property" before expropriation is positively defined; the latter is "the dissolution of private property based on the labour of its owner" (927). But this is an awkward specification, given the long tradition of socialist debates on private property before and after Marx. He thus finds himself obliged to distinguish that older "private property" from the new capitalist kind: "Private property, as the antithesis to social, collective property, exists only where the means of labour and the external conditions of labour belong to private individuals" (927). Yet one might want to ask whether the property "based on the labour of its owner" was necessarily the same as this "social and collective" kind; or whether it was not simply the distinction between possession and property more appropriate when one is dealing with "property" as a legal category with a history of its own.

After the so-called Brenner debates, in which the controversy between Dobb and Sweezy about the transition was taken up again from a new perspective, it seems possible to hazard a new description of Marx's historical method here.⁶² This description is suggested by Brenner's insistence on competition as the pressure which finally forces the new capitalist mode of production into being: on the other hand, naming that force as such is a thematization (or reification) that may have unwanted consequences in its own right. I

⁶² *The Transition from Feudalism to Capitalism*, ed. R. H. Hilton (London: New Left Review, 1976); *The Brenner Debate*, ed. T. H. Aston (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

propose therefore to honor Marx's admiration for Darwin by rebaptizing Brenner's representation of historical change as the principle of "negative selection." It is a principle which is less subject to the kinds of ideological vulgarization embodied in the notion of the "survival of the fittest," for example, inasmuch as negative selection insists on the systematic shutting down of other ("evolutionary") possibilities in a more structural and combinatory way. What Brenner means by the still psychologizing concept of competition is the ruthless exposure of peasants to "reproduce themselves" or "earn their living" after their plots of land and agricultural tools have been taken away. They can no longer till their own soil, nor can they pay the lord in kind; none of the escape hatches or alternate modes of survival open to them under feudalism is any longer available, and it is this which necessarily drives them into the sole remaining option of wage labor. This type of social evolution takes place therefore not by virtue of some disembodied Hegelian essence called capitalism or the market, nor either by some psychological drive rooted in human nature, but rather by a systematic negation of everything which might have permitted an alternative to them; and this is the sense in which even Marx can still speak of its corrosive and destructive effects on pre-capitalist societies and modes of production. But this is still a figural rendering of the process—like the figure of capitalism as a virus, for example—one only historically useful when marked as such.

Yet such historiographical questions—seemingly technical problems of causality and periodization—are scarcely innocent and cannot simply be laid to rest by this or that documentation without leaving new theoretical turbulence in their wake. The most naive version of the question Marx has raised here, in this final section or coda, the question of the transition, namely "how then, in old Europe, was the expropriation of the worker from his conditions of labour brought about? In other words, how did capital and wage-labour come into existence?" (933)—this question fatally suggests another one, about the future. What is crucial in other words, in Heidegger's spirit, is not the answer to the question but rather the intensity with which it is asked and remembered; or indeed retrieved and revived again, after it has been forgotten or repressed. Even the silliest of answers from

the classical economists—that of consent or contract, reformulated by Marx as the proposition that “the mass of mankind expropriated itself in honor of the ‘accumulation of capital’ ” (934)—is appropriately alarming to the degree to which it suggests that what mankind has agreed to do, it can agree to undo.

There can be no doubt that the old tension in the Marxist political tradition between fatalism and voluntarism—between waiting for the time to be ripe and actively intervening to cause the longed-for crisis of the system—this tension is deeply inscribed in Marx’s own text where, as we have seen, the idea of system seems not only in competition with human action but often to overtake it. Marx is indeed himself already caught in the formal dilemma of the call to action which fails by succeeding: either the current situation is so successfully modeled in all its oppressive closure that no action any longer seems possible within it; or else its iron constraints and material limits are so idealistically neglected and unfocused that the mere fact of will seems to make everything possible:

Did that play of mine send out
Certain men the English shot?⁶³

There is in Marx, as we have seen, a fateful alternation between the implacable construction of a system which, henceforth autotelic, commands its own invincible and all-encompassing expansion; and the deep ontological conviction that everything is collective (or “cooperative”) human work and production, and that “the worker himself constantly produces objective wealth, in the form of capital, an alien power that dominates and exploits him” (716).

The squaring of the circle lies then in the discovery, not only that capital is an infernal machine, but also that it is a machine constantly breaking down, and repairing itself only by the laborious convulsions of expansion. We have seen some of those convulsions in capital’s own self-devouring, in the form of concentration and centralization,

⁶³ William Butler Yeats, “Man and the Echo”: Yeats is meditating on the heroic disaster of the Easter Uprising, and the role of his play *Kathleen ni Houlihan* in its incitement.

or in other words in the movement of monopoly. Now, however, we come upon a new feature of the process, far more explicitly marked as the dynamics of expansion as such, so that a retrospective hypothesis about primitive accumulation concludes with a “modern theory of colonization.”

We need to be exact in our reading of this: Marx is here not yet concluding his work on a theory of imperialism, even though the concluding discussion of the Irish in the preceding section certainly sets that in place as well, and Marx’s own account of the violence of Renaissance expansion leaves no doubt of his awareness of this process, for which the word “imperialism” is not yet in use.⁶⁴ But the “colonization” he has in mind here is the more classical tradition of sending the excess population off to found new cities in allegedly virgin lands (as Athens sent its colonists to Italy and Sicily). The irony of the distinction between this meaning of colonization and imperialism as such lies in the fact that here the insignificant indigenous population is simply wiped out, whereas in imperial expansion it is enslaved and exploited in order to produce further wealth. The colonies with which Marx has to do here (Australia, North America) are therefore today termed “settler colonies”; and they will have been justified by that production of unemployment and pauperism described in the preceding section and shown to be a necessary and inevitable consequence of capitalist development and not an accidental or thoughtless one.

Yet this is the point at which the two great foreshortened climaxes we have promised spring to life like the tolling of bells: a heroic and a comic one, each in its own way foretelling the end of the system and of the law of value, and the opening on that unforeseeable future which Marx elsewhere calls “the end of pre-history.”

The more famous of these climaxes comes upon us in the brief penultimate chapter, in which capitalism’s self-destructive

⁶⁴ Anthony Brewer, *Marxist Theories of Imperialism* (London: Routledge, 1990). The word “imperialism” emerges in the late nineteenth century to describe the rivalry of the great powers among themselves; only later, after World War I, is it transferred to colonialism and the structure of modern capitalist “empires.”

momentum (monopoly) combines with immiseration, but also with the increasingly unproductive dynamic of this once historically original form of productivity (the falling rate of profit):

The monopoly of capital becomes a fetter upon the mode of production which has flourished alongside and under it. The centralization of the means of production and the socialization of labour reach a point at which they become incompatible with their capitalist integument. This integument is burst asunder. The knell of capitalist private property sounds. The expropriators are expropriated ... This is the negation of the negation. (929)

Such is the outcome implicit in the structural analysis of capital Marx has constructed: the meager forecast on which all conceptions of socialist revolution until now have been founded, as well as the presupposition of socialism's emergence from a regime of high productivity. It has often enough been pointed out that the twentieth-century socialisms which have for better or worse nourished this Utopian vision of a future without capitalism were regimes of modernization rather than of high productivity, however successful they were in industrializing their own traditional production. We may add to this observation Marx's own qualification, in the *Grundrisse*, which has already been mentioned, namely that the kind of socialist or communist transformation he had in mind would not really be on the agenda until the world market, and universal commodification, had become visible on the horizon.⁶⁵

But it is worth reminding ourselves that most of the left movements today—whether extant or emergent—are all reactions against the immense power of capitalism's "creative destructiveness." To that degree, they are all conservative in one way or another, aiming to preserve the few enclaves still remaining from a simpler era, or to recover something of the human scale of previous eras and their collective or communal forms. (Did not Marx himself admit that under certain circumstances a direct passage from the traditional peasant commune

⁶⁵ See above, note 49.

to modern socialism might be possible?⁶⁶ But Marx, whose political genius lay in his lucid opportunism, is not necessarily a reliable guide to present-day political strategies or solutions.)

This is an all the more essential reminder to the degree to which, today, the free-market right has captured the rhetoric of innovation and “modernity,” inconsistently vaunting their market ideal as both anchored in an eternal human nature and also as the most advanced form of future productivity and innovation. The point is that Marx alone sought to combine a politics of revolt with the “poetry of the future” and applied himself to demonstrate that socialism was more modern than capitalism and more productive. To recover that futurism and that excitement is surely the fundamental task of any left “discursive struggle” today.

What has recently seemed more attractive is Marx’s other solution, his other version of the end of capitalism, and, as it were, his comic or idyllic climax, as exemplified in the sad story of a Mr. Peel, who “took with him from England to the Swan River district of Western Australia means of subsistence and of production to the amount of £50,000. This Mr. Peel even had the foresight to bring besides, 3,000 people of the working class, men, women and children. Once he arrived at his destination, ‘Mr. Peel was left without a servant to make his bed or fetch him water from the river.’ Unhappy Mr. Peel, who provided for everything except the export of English relations of production to the Swan river!” (932–3).

Others were more consequential, and it was quickly realized that “slavery is the sole natural basis of colonial wealth” (934), and that free colonists can in addition be at least figuratively enslaved and forced to work by denying them free land: “Let the government set an artificial price on the virgin soil, a price independent of supply

⁶⁶ See the famous letter to Vera Zasulich on March 8, 1881, in which Marx concedes the possibility of a direct and separate development of socialism from out of the peasant commune (the mir), provided that development is not disturbed by outside forces (obviously meaning capitalism itself). See the whole text in T. Shanin, ed., *Late Marx and the Russian Road* (New York: Monthly Review, 1983), p. 123–4.

and demand, a price that compels the immigrant to work a long time for wages before he can earn enough money to buy land and turn himself into an independent farmer" (938).

Still, the mesmerizing image of liberation haunts such visions of the frontier long after America had itself (following its Civil War) become a thoroughly capitalist environment; and this anarchist picture of people shedding their enforced tasks and dispersing into the freedom of the unexplored and the uncharted even today seems to offer relief from the oppressiveness of an omnipresent capitalism. Yet today it must be grasped as a liberation from the social order itself and from the state (henceforth inseparable from capitalist relations and their enforcement): it is a liberation which can only result from some sense of the utter dissolution of the social order—the euphoria one feels when from time to time a fascist junta collapses without bloodshed or a rigid and reactionary government suddenly and without warning falls away and gives rise to popular jubilation, before the constraints of the social order once again set in.

Chapter 4

Capital in Its Time

It has come to seem to me that the secret of Marx's temporality in *Capital*—or perhaps I should rather say the secret of capital's temporality according to Marx—is gathered and concentrated in the little verb *auslöschen*—"to extinguish." From this verb come past and future alike, along with a view of the present as production whose originality lies in its negativity rather than in any positive or affirmative content. This is the sense in which I would challenge the view that Marx's is a "productivism" or a "productivist ideology," even though it is at once clear why that should sometimes seem to be the case and how a faithfulness to Marxism should be susceptible to slippage in that direction. Yet according to my reading, the present of production does not dramatize the emergence of something, does not emphasize production as a creation even out of already existing inchoate elements, such as those that precede the creation of the world in the various religious mythologies. Nor is it even the externalization of something internal, as in Hegel's fundamental ideology of activity, to which, however, Marxism is profoundly related. Rather, it happens by way of the extinguishing of its various component parts; and if a kind of substance or product does emerge and stand there revealed as the mists of these extinctions and extinguishings fall away from it, this is only the most ephemeral achievement of stable objecthood, for "positing" immediately converts that objectal result into the raw material of some other production, to be extinguished in its turn.

It would be easy enough to document this rather apocalyptic process in Part One, where the passage from quality to quantity, from use value to exchange value, the very transformation of things into commodities, is very much a process in which “all the sensuous characteristics [of the object] are extinguished”; while at the same time “the useful character of the kinds of labour embodied in [such products] also disappears,” leaving behind “in each case but the same phantom-like objectivity” (128)—as though, compared to the materiality of the body assigned to the category of Quality, that of Quantity presides over a realm of appearances, not least among which is to be numbered the very category of objecthood itself (which standardizes all the “things” it governs at the same time that it replaces a temporality of sheer process and production with an ensemble of static objects).

However, this account is part of the bracketing of quality from the outset, nor does it lead into that substantive analysis of production we seek, but only into what may be termed the false temporality of equivalence and circulation, or the market itself, in which items allegedly identical in value are exchanged, only with the result that the whole transaction (C-M-C) lapses back into motionless stability again (here it is the act of exchange that “extinguishes” itself). The emergence of money at the end of this section does not really culminate in temporality either, but projects it into the future as a mystery still to be confronted, namely how M can become M', how money can generate more money or increase itself: the paradox being that capitalism essentially produces, not commodities, but rather capital as such.

Yet from that self-increasing will presumably emerge at least one of the secrets of time in capitalism, it being worthwhile at this point to remember Althusser's notion that each mode of production produces and secretes the temporality (and the systems of temporality) appropriate to it.⁶⁷ But this reminder needs to be accompanied by its own kind of warning: for it is not at all clear that *Capital* will yield any overall account of the temporality of capitalism “in general.” For

⁶⁷ Louis Althusser, *Lire le capital*, Volume I, op. cit., 124.

one thing, it is to be assumed that the time of any mode of production, let alone one so complex as capitalism itself, will necessarily be constituted by a superposition of several distinct kinds of temporalities, so that even describing the “time” specific to any social formation will be a conjunctural rather than a structural matter, and indeed a historical rather than an anthropological one.

But even before that point is reached—to which the *Grundrisse* even more than *Capital* tempts us, with its far stronger commitment to comparative economics—we will need to ask ourselves to what degree *Capital*, with its stark account of capitalism’s production time (to be presented in a moment), can be counted on to offer any adequate account of what we may call existential time, or the time of daily life (these not exactly coinciding with each other either). And at the other end of the spectrum, we will also want to wonder whether the micro-temporality of the various features of production will have anything to do with the larger temporalities of history itself, from cycles to the great revolutionary “transitions” themselves.

In particular, we must be exceedingly wary of the facile homology or structural parallelism whose consonances tend to turn each period into that idealistic or “expressive causality” against which Althusser tirelessly warned⁶⁸—the temporality of the “history of ideas” or of the great periodizations of an older historicism, whether Hegelian or Spenglerian. Still, Marx admired Fourier’s more structural idea of the “pivot” on which each mode of production turns, as on its “dominant” (506, editor’s note); and it will be enough to take the Althusserian strictures on the “existential” as a methodological caution and the warning of greater complexities to come, rather than as that absolute taboo on the phenomenology of lived experience as it functioned in his own immediately post-Sartrean situation.

So it will be more prudent to examine the accounts of production in chapters 7 and 15 (“The Labour Process” and “Machinery”) for

⁶⁸ Ibid., pp. 14. But this repudiation of models of homogeneous time (such as one finds in Spengler) does not only come in structural forms: compare for example Ernst Bloch’s notion of non-synchronous synchronicity (*Gleichzeitigkeit des Ungleichzeitigen*) in *Erbschaft dieser Zeit* (Zurich: Obrecht & Hebling, 1935).

their figuration than for any clues as to our culture-critical situation (or “alienation” in the pop-cultural sense). Just as clearly, however, these figures are explicitly designed to articulate a fundamental specificity of capitalist temporality, and in particular the extinction of a certain kind of past of the production process. The past, first of all, of the newly produced commodity itself (“the process is extinguished in the product”—287): it does not matter how it was produced, nor even how long its production took (the average of “socially necessary labour” wipes out all the variations from clumsiness to Stakhanovite efficiency).

The taste of the porridge does not tell us who grew the oats, and the process we have presented does not reveal the conditions under which it takes place, whether under the slave-owner’s brutal lash or the anxious eye of the capitalist, whether Cincinnatus undertakes it in tilling his couple of acres, or a savage, when he lays low a wild beast with a stone. (290–1)

What aesthetic theory used to describe as reification (“effacement of all the traces of production on the object”) is in fact the norm of all commodity production, which does not exclude a certain metaphysical dimension to the latter: “What on the side of the worker appeared in the form of unrest [*Unruhe*], now appears, on the side of the product, in the form of being [*Sein*], as a fixed, immobile characteristic” (287). The Hegelian overtones of *Unruhe*, which recall “the labour and the suffering of the negative,” then alert us to the possibility that this figure of the extinction of the past is in fact designed to produce a rather different figural evocation of the present. I quote the climax of this intricate development at the length it deserves:

Therefore, whenever products enter as means of production into new labour processes, they lose their character of being products and function only as objective factors contributing to living labour. A spinner treats spindles only as a means for spinning, and flax as the material he spins. Of course it is impossible to spin without material and spindles; and therefore the availability of these products is presupposed at the beginning of the spinning operation. But in the process itself, the fact that they are the products of past labour is as irrelevant as, in the case of the digestive

process, the fact that bread is the product of the previous labour of the farmer, the miller and the baker. On the contrary, it is by their imperfections that the means of production in any process bring to our attention their character of being the products of past labour. A knife which fails to cut, a piece of thread which keeps on snapping, forcibly remind us of Mr A, the cutler, or Mr B, the spinner. In a successful product, the role played by past labour in mediating its useful properties has been extinguished.

A machine which is not active in the labour process is useless. In addition, it falls prey to the destructive power of natural processes. Iron rusts; wood rots. Yarn with which we neither weave nor knit is cotton wasted. Living labour must seize on these things, awaken them from the dead, change them from merely possible into real and effective use-values. Bathed in the fire of labour, appropriated as part of its organism, and infused with vital energy for the performance of the functions appropriate to their concept and to their vocation in the process, they are indeed consumed, but to some purpose, as elements in the formation of new use-values, new products, which are capable of entering into individual consumption as means of subsistence or into a new labour process as means of production. (289–90)

Now it is more specifically the raw materials, as well as the instruments, of production that are consigned by it to the past, in a passage which anticipates the phenomenological doctrine of the relationship between consciousness and failed acts (“it is by their imperfections...”⁶⁹). We are not reminded of the cutler or the spinner as historical individuals and actors, and yet their act itself—when successful—becomes the agency of a veritable resurrection, and their labor power, as in its supreme present of time it gets transformed into labor as such, labor already underway, specific and completing itself, becomes a veritable fire, which not only “extinguishes” the previous characteristics of the raw materials (including that labor power itself), but also prepares the climax of the figure as such: for as paradoxical as it may seem for fire to extinguish (rather than to

⁶⁹ Examples can be found in Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, op. cit., Chapter 4, paragraph 69, subsection A; as well as in Sartre and above all in Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception* (the so-called “phantom member”).

be itself extinguished), it does one thing whose name and verb unite the literal and the figurative (so to speak): it *consumes*. The consumption of its ingredients by the fire of labor is also the consumption by the capitalist labor process of its own capital (constant as well as variable); and now illustrates the paradox rehearsed over and over again elsewhere (particularly in the *Grundrisse*), that production is a consumption (just as from another standpoint consumption is a production).⁷⁰

As we shall see in a moment, the notion of a resurrection from the dead has not fully been played out here, yet it would seem to have been shorn of its theological overtones by a second figure, that of fermentation (292), which takes its place. Yet that one has overtones in its own right, those of science and in particular of that organic chemistry emergent in Marx's day and by which he was so fascinated. So one cannot say that the intensity of this celebration of the mysteries and power of labor are necessarily diminished here, but merely displaced and restructured.

Yet this excitement is rerouted back into its original temporal referent by another peculiarity of the labor process, namely its analytic separation into two distinct operations which are somehow simultaneous; or at least we are tempted to say that here a unified temporality is the form of the appearance, inasmuch as "the addition of new value to the material of [the worker's] labor, and the preservation of its former value, are two distinct results: it is plain that this twofold nature of the result can be explained only by the twofold nature of his labour: it must, at the same time, create value through one of its properties and preserve or transfer value through another" (307). The distinction between preserving and transferring is important to Marx, for it underscores the way in which already produced value as it were slumbers in the raw material (itself already worked over in this or that primary process) or in the machine (itself already produced as a value by previous labor). Yet the new duality alerts us above all to a duality in the mystery already celebrated: for not only does labor

⁷⁰ Should one indeed want to see what a more "dialectical" and truly "Hegelian" version of all this would look like, see the *Grundrisse*, op. cit., pp. 296–304.

power produce new value on the one hand, it also resurrects older stored or dead value in the “means” as well as the “raw materials” on the other:

The old form of the use-value disappears, but it is taken up again in a new form of use-value. We saw, when we were considering the process of creating value, that if a use-value is effectively consumed in the production of a new use-value, the quantity of labour expended to produce the article which has been consumed forms a part of the quantity of labour necessary to produce the new use-value; this portion is therefore labour transferred from the means of production to the new product. Hence the worker preserves the values of the already consumed means of production or transfers them to the product as portions of its value, not by virtue of his additional labour as such, but by virtue of the particular useful character of that labour, by virtue of its specific productive form. Therefore, in so far as labour is productive activity directed to a particular purpose, in so far as it is spinning, weaving or forging, etc., it raises the means of production from the dead merely by entering into contact with them, infuses them with life so that they become factors of the labour process, and combines with them to form new products. (308)

This duality will in fact function to document the new distinction Marx wishes to introduce at this point, namely, that between variable and constant capital, or in other words between the investment in wages and working bodies on the one hand, and that in raw materials and instruments on the other. Here too then, the one produces the two—the resurrection performed by labor has now become a double miracle. But the form in which this duality is introduced now alerts us to yet another duality, this one to emerge from the side of variable capital itself and vital to Marx’s demonstration of the nature and existence of surplus value (on the side of constant capital the analogous duality will have to wait until the discussion of machinery in Chapter 15). For here too we confront two temporalities which exist simultaneously and cannot be distinguished phenomenologically but only analytically:

But the past labour embodied in the labour-power and the living labour it can perform, and the daily cost of maintaining labour-power and its daily expenditure in work, are two totally different things. The former determines the exchange-value of the labour-power, the latter is its use-value. The fact that half a day's labour is necessary to keep the worker alive during 24 hours does not in any way prevent him from working a whole day. Therefore the value of labour-power, and the value which that labour-power valorizes [*verwertet*] in the labour-process, are two entirely different magnitudes; and this difference was what the capitalist had in mind when he was purchasing the labour-power. (300)

This new duality within the time of the production process—I produce the new value of the commodity at the same time that I also produce the value of the commodities necessary to reproduce myself—will not only hold the key to that other mystery, which is the temporality of the accumulation of capital: the way in which, by virtue of an equation, a capital produces more than itself and increases itself in the process; it will also give rise to the Molière-like hilarities of “Senior’s last hour,” in which the distinguished economist, arguing against any fatal shortening of the working day, slips on his own banana peel and separates the “last hour” of genuine surplus production with the reproductive necessities of the hours that preceded it; thereby dividing time back into space as elegantly as M. Jourdain himself.

Yet it is characteristic of Marx, and profoundly dialectical and even Hegelian of him, to treat this ridiculous error as a truth in its own right, albeit one misappropriated by ideology:

It is also a perfectly correct method [the calculation of surplus value in terms of surplus hours], since it is in fact the first method given above, only transferred from the spatial sphere, in which the different parts of the completed product lie side by side, to the temporal sphere, in which those parts are produced in succession. But it can also be accompanied by very barbaric notions, especially in the heads of people who are as much interested, practically, in the valorization process, as they are, theoretically, in misunderstanding it. (332)

With Senior, then, we seem to have reached a comic climax in some first Marxian lesson about the deceptiveness of temporal continuities.

Still, these multiple temporalities concealed within that unitary terrain of struggle which is the individual working day mark a stage of development sharply distinguished from the later one that develops out of the introduction of machinery. (The periodization problem, raised in an earlier chapter, returns here, with the uncertainty as to which of these stages can be said to constitute the real beginning of capitalism as such.) In the first stage, which Marx will characterize as the regime of absolute surplus value, the role of time is underscored by the political struggle to decrease the working day on the one hand, and by the physical or biological limit beyond which it could on the other hand scarcely be extended. The passage from absolute to relative surplus value, however, in which the intensification of labor (increased productivity) is called upon to replace the derivation of surplus value from ever longer hours, is not defined by a change in the structure of production as such, but marked by a dialectic of scale embodied in machinery itself.

It is not past labor and its structural relationship to the present which "extinguishes" it that is different, but rather the immense quantity of that past labor now deployed. In the earlier moment, the past labor embodied in the raw materials and in tools stood in a ratio to the human labor power which was certainly exploitative, but nonetheless relatively mappable or representable, relatively thinkable in human terms: where it could be conceived as a relationship between different kinds of workers and different kinds of labors, some in the past, some in the present: the labor of workers in mines or other extractive industries, that of toolmakers, seemed to be on a scale comparable with that of the workers who in the present finish these materials and assemble the final product. In the earlier situation, tools still seemed—whether in past or present—to be the adjuncts of human labor and of the worker and his know-how. Now suddenly this relationship is reversed with machinery, and Marx explicitly defines the latter as that to which the human laborer is himself an adjunct.

At the same time the dead labor embodied in machinery suddenly swells to inhuman proportions (and is properly compared to a monster or a Cyclopean machine). It is as though the reservoir, or as Heidegger would call it, the “standing reserve” (*Gestell*),⁷¹ of past or dead labor was immensely increased and offered ever huger storage facilities for these quantities of dead hours, which the merely life-sized human machine-minder is nonetheless to bring back to life, on the pattern of the older production. The quantities of the past have been rendered invisible by the production process outlined above, and yet they now surround the worker in a proportion hitherto unthinkable.

The structure is still what Sartre will take as the figure for his dialectic of counterfinality or anti-praxis (in the *Critique*): “[The worker] necessarily impoverishes himself ... because the creative power of his labour establishes itself as the power of capital, as *an alien power* confronting him” (G 307); and yet that alien power now towers above him and dwarfs even his collective presence. And this dialectical transformation paradoxically renders the past immensely more present at the same time that it is invisible, having been effaced in the process by its own “extinguishing.” There is more of the past now (in the form of dead or stored labor) to be resurrected; and yet in this furious present of capitalist “creative destruction,” in which not only previous work but also whole cities and landscapes are transformed (Haussman, industrialization, “modernization”), yet that past—now invisible—has itself been transferred from monuments and the visible traces of labor to machines enclosed within factories (and depreciating and being replaced by ever more productive ones from moment to moment).

We must here recall the marginal comment in the *Grundrisse* by which Marx corrects his own formulations fully as much as those of

⁷¹ The word “is variously translated as ‘Enframing (Lovitt), ‘installation’ (Lacoue-Labarthe), ‘emplacement’ (Weber), and ‘con-struct’ (L. Harries)” Richard Dienst, *Still Life in Real Time: Theory after Television* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994), 113. Also see Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe*, Band 79 (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1979), the so-called Bremen lectures of 1949, especially pp. 24–45.

the economists: "It is at bottom false to say that living labour consumes capital; capital (objectified labour) consumes the living in the production process" (G 349). The formula underscores that provisional periodization we have felt able to detect in Marx's account of the shift from tools to machines (or even from manufacture to machinery) as well as from individual to collective: "Only in large-scale industry has man succeeded in making the product of his past labour, labour which has already been objectified, perform gratuitous service on a large scale, like a force of nature" (510). In fact, these appearances of periodization (which seem incoherent insofar as they do not exactly coincide, cottage industries being not altogether coterminous with the Smithian division of labor, while the feature of collectivity shifts the focus on the latter to a rather different thematic dimension) will later on be corrected by a more complex view of the Marxian periodization of capital as such.

But it may also be worthwhile to dwell another moment on the allusion to Heidegger's theory of technology (the *Gestell*). Heidegger's is for one thing a reserve of energy rather than stored labor; and to identify the former with the latter will probably be too "humanistic" for the framework of his anti-humanistic philosophy of Being. Still, the notion of storage presents an interesting intersection between the two bodies of thought (not to say, traditions) and the horrific terms of Marx's account are not inconsistent with the intractable nature of the problem of technology in Heidegger, for whom the culture of the machine inspires an ultimate pessimism ("only a god can save us now"), particularly after the failure of what he characterized as the historic originality of the national-socialist experiment as an attempted synthesis of the deep time of the national-mythological and the creativeness of Nazi technological modernity.

The point is that Heidegger's anti-modernism (by no means as original as the phenomenological explorations of *Sein und Zeit*) cannot imagine a solution to technological alienation except by way of regression: for Marx, however, and despite the misery and exploitation inseparable from the development of capitalist industry, it is precisely the high productivity introduced by machinery which allows us to posit a dialectical changing of the valences and the

emergence from capitalism of a radically different economic system (termed an “association of free producers”).

Yet the framework of *Capital* does not allow us to speculate on any temporality in some future industrial socialism or communism radically different from the one we have been outlining here, which is recapitulated in the following climactic passage:

Only the mutually independent buyer and seller face each other in commodity production. Relations between them cease on the day when the term stipulated in the contract they concluded expires. If the transaction is repeated, it is repeated as the result of a new agreement which has nothing to do with the previous one and in which it is only an accident that brings the same seller together again with the same buyer.

If, therefore, commodity production, or one of its associated processes, is to be judged according to its own economic laws, we must consider each act of exchange by itself, apart from any connection with the act of exchange preceding it and that following it. And since sales and purchases are negotiated solely between particular individuals, it is not admissible to look here for relations between whole social classes.

However long a series of periodic reproductions and preceding accumulations the capital functioning today may have passed through, it always preserves its original virginity. As long as the laws of exchange are observed in every single act of exchange—taken in isolation—the mode of appropriation can be completely revolutionized without in any way affecting the property rights which correspond to commodity production. The same rights remain in force both at the outset, when the product belongs to its producer, who, exchanging equivalent for equivalent, can enrich himself only by his own labour, and in the period of capitalism, when social wealth becomes to an ever-increasing degree the property of those who are in a position to appropriate the unpaid labour of others over and over again. (733)

What is not so clear in this final statement of the capitalist time of production—the eternal virginity of the capitalist present as opposed to the extinction of its past, accompanied by the invisible storage of past labors—is whether it can be extrapolated to the existential experience of individuals outside the immediate sphere of

production (or indeed of circulation). It is evident that a pre-industrial or agricultural mode of production will experience the temporality of the seasons differently; and perhaps even that the phenomenological time of merchant commerce (fortune) or that of handicraft (Hegelian externalization) can be imagined in a structurally quite distinct way. But nothing in *Capital* entitles us to such existential extrapolations: the existential features of Marx's account will be found elsewhere, as I will show in the next chapter.

As for history, things stand otherwise: for Marx insists over and over again on the way capital effaces the traces of its own prehistory (and of the existence of modes of production that preceded it), just as surely as it extinguishes the immediate traces of production from the object produced. There results a peculiar end of history characteristic of the bourgeois economists, who famously believe that "there once was history, but there isn't any any more" (175, n. 35). Characteristically, in virtually all theories of modernity, acknowledgement is made of the existence once upon a time of the pre-modern, and of other radically different modes of production; but with capitalism the possibility of such differences vanishes (there is no alternative, said Mrs. Thatcher famously), and having once been historical capitalism now becomes eternal. This particular incapacity to integrate a future of time into our analysis of current society accounts for the tendency of bourgeois thought to alternate between images of regression or dystopian collapse, and conceptions of progress which amount to little more than the perfecting of what is there already; it also makes for real problems in understanding the historical emergence of the system itself, as witness the dialectical plight of John Stuart Mill: "After thus proving clearly that capitalist production would still continue to exist even if it did not exist, Mill now proceeds, quite consistently, to show that it would not exist even if it did exist" (653). Meanwhile, alongside such epistemological vertigo the cultural critics of the present day have found it plausible to speculate on the psychic consequences of blocked futurity.

But Marx has his own explanation for these paradoxes, as well as the hesitations we have detected in his various tentative periodizations: they have to do with repetition, which he theorizes in an

unexpectedly contemporary way, and which must now be included in our account of the “eternal virginity” of capitalism and its perpetually extinguished pasts. Repetition is here philosophically included in the technical problem of reproduction, but it already betrays in advance all those theoretical apories of the beginnings of systems scandalously enunciated by a Lévi-Strauss (for example), when the latter tells us that, qua synchronic system, language cannot be said ever to have had a beginning in the ordinary sense of the word: it was either all there, or wholly absent, and no eighteenth-century speculations about cries and gestures, inarticulate sounds and facial expressions, will conceptually fill the gap.

So here too with capitalist production (whose systematicity Marx often names “totality”). We remember the odd temporality of initial wage labor, in which the seller of labor power is unaccountably willing to lend this valuable property to the capitalist, only to be paid back at the very end of the week: “He has therefore produced not only surplus-value, which we for the present regard as a fund to meet the private consumption of the capitalist, but also the variable capital, the fund out of which he himself is paid, before it flows back to him in the shape of wages” (712). This means that repetition—the selling of labor power week after week, its productive consumption by the capitalist in a cycle Sismondi rightly recharacterized as a spiral (727)—never knew a first time in the first place: “it is his labour of last week, or of last year, that pays for his labour-power this week or this year” (713). It is not capital but labor which is at the origin of the process; when the wages finally materialize and the act of exchange of money and labor power actually takes place, it is an “always-already,” and “this mere repetition, or continuity, imposes on the process certain new characteristics, or rather, causes the disappearance of some apparent characteristics possessed by the process in isolation” (712). Those apparent characteristics are the beginning, the first time, detectable in the labor of an isolated individual and apparent in biographical time. The system, however, the “connected whole” (711), knows no such beginning but rather reaches back to transform all these individual first times into a repetition that always preceded its individual instances. This is then the way in which the

present of capitalism as a system “extinguishes” its seemingly constitutive moments and elements in the past. This is the sense in which capitalist production is an infernal machine, an autotelic system; even though it is often exchange or the market that its critics and enemies identify in this manner (particularly in the age of globalization).

It should be noted, finally, that the moment in which *Capital* takes up this whole issue of reproduction, which proves to be the key to its paradoxical temporalities, is also the moment when the plan of *Capital* as a whole is disclosed to us (709–10), that is to say, the moment in which Marx’s synchronic *Darstellung* is unmasked and abandoned, and the immense temporalities of capitalism as a system make their momentous appearance, projecting the dizzying rhythms of circulation of Volume II, as well as the even more bewildering synchronicities of the many capitals of Volume III.

At this point we thus approach the limits of Volume One, beyond which, in the collations of the posthumous Volume II there can be glimpsed an arid space in which there spin a frightening multiplicity of cycles, of all sizes and shapes. This is the internal temporality of the capitalist machine, and it may well be wondered how any discussion of temporality in Marx could do without it, and in particular what the debate on the relationship between existential temporality and that of the system itself would look like had it been more comprehensively included.⁷²

I agree, but would simply argue that the temporality of Volume One is at least relatively autonomous. But this is the point to acknowledge the arguments of the most intelligent traditionalists, most recently of Michael Lebowitz, that the projected three- or four-

⁷² See Stavros Tombazos, *Les Catégories du temps dans le Capital* (Paris: Cahier des saisons, 1994); as well as David Harvey, *The Limits to Capital*; a more philosophical account is given by Artemy Magun, in “Marx’s Concept of Temporality,” *Rethinking Marxism* 22:1.

For a further discussion of theories of time in general, see the final chapter in my *Valences of the Dialectic* (London: Verso, 2010); I have also found suggestive Jay Lampert, *Deleuze and Guattari’s Theory of History* (London: Continuum, 2006) and Ned Lukacher, *Time-Fetishes* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998).

volume *Capital* constitutes the fundamental object of study, any reading of Volume One in isolation being misleading and subject to all kinds of interpretive mistakes. He posits the four volumes as a sequence which turns, first, on the limited perspective of production in Volume One, then on that of circulation in Volume II, with a reunification of both systems in the third volume (and I would add, possibly a study of ideology in the fourth).⁷³ This means that unless we reread Volume One in the light of the others, we are condemned to some narrower productivist view of Marx. Perhaps. But this still leaves us with two possible readings; I would prefer to insist on production rather than on productivism (in the sense of Fordism or Stakhanovism), and to see Marx as the climax of that great German philosophical tradition of the centrality of activity (*Tätigkeit*) as it reached its earlier climaxes in Goethe and Hegel.

⁷³ Michael Lebowitz, *Following Marx* (Chicago: Haymarket, 2009), Chapter 7. Lebowitz also has a powerful practical-political point to make here, however, namely that the missing volume on wage labor would have corrected the overemphasis of *Capital* Volume One on sheer system.

Chapter 5

Capital in Its Space

The secret of capital's spatiality, for Marx, is also the secret of spatiality itself, namely separation. Temporality can coincide with itself, in simultaneity: but in space, no two bodies can occupy the same position, and extension is thereby at one with separation. Yet the verb contains a welcome negativity within itself—we are gradually learning that Marx's dialectic draws its strength and originality from the eschewal of the affirmative or the positive—and it can also function actively, as when I separate an agent from his means of agency.

The resources of the term "separation" are already richly exploited in the 1844 manuscripts—the theory of alienation is explicitly articulated by way of the fourfold "separation" of the worker from tools, from object, from other workers, and from species-being as such, or in other words from that productive activity that makes the human animal human. Indeed, at this stage in the research, separation can be a spatial or a temporal concept indifferently. The alienation in question is a historical event, but it is something that also happens to space: the space of the land and the peasants, enclosure, movement from country to city, and so forth. Meanwhile, the climax of Marx's description of capital—the emergence of machinery—is also spatial insofar as it colonizes space with the new space of the factory inside which production is concentrated, and tells the story of the destiny of those tools or instruments from which the laborer was initially separated, and which have now become something like ends in themselves. The Luddites were also separated from their

production, and their protest—the assault on the new menacing industrial machinery—was as spatial as the assaults of a band of medieval warriors on a fortified castle.

It would be tedious, but instructive, to trace the fortunes of the verb “to separate” through *Capital* and indeed throughout Marx’s work as a whole⁷⁴; and even to learn something of its prehistory in the economic or philosophical literature. Yet clearly enough it has especial relevance for agriculture and the land: the separation of town and country becomes a vital index of the development of capitalism, particularly as with the latter the Roman hegemony of countryside over city is decisively reversed. At that point, the eventual transformation of land itself into a commodity and of peasants into farmworkers, along with that of the great landlords into capitalists, becomes inevitable, and the peculiarities of that enigmatic capitalist phenomenon called ground rent stand out like a sore thumb and reverse the commodity’s structure of profit as in an inverted mirror. Culturally, the dominance of the spatial confirms this eclipse of nature by the urban and finds its privileged symptom in postmodern gentrification as well as in ecological disaster (“simultaneously undermining the original sources of all wealth—the soil and the worker”—[638], as Marx puts it at the end of the chapter on machinery).

Separation has, however, its counterpart in what we may consider a positive spatial phenomenon, namely expansion, which names the fundamental dynamic of capitalism and explains its irresistible progress from the first local commodity production to the very horizon of the world market itself. Separation must therefore always be thought in conjunction with that expansive dynamic paradoxically at one with it, so that its subdivisions do not leave their objects inertly dispersed but rather recombine them in frighteningly enlarged and more powerful entities: not inert analysis of some logical or Cartesian type, therefore, but metastasis and mutation, a well-nigh science-fictional

⁷⁴ This is no mere question of figuration: in a striking and original development, Michael Lebowitz has shown how the notion of separation contains a whole practical-political strategy: see *Following Capital*, op. cit., pp. 346–8, as well as Chapter 7, below.

recombination, are the relevant figures, and the Taylorization of the labor process and the assembly line its most satisfactory historical emblems.

To be sure, since the emergence of radical geography, and with the work of David Harvey and the philosophical authority of Henri Lefebvre, spatial analysis, an awakened attention to the spatial dimensions of history, and in particular the history of capitalism, has become an essential part of our intellectual tradition. The spatiality I want to reveal at work in *Capital*, however, presents some paradoxical features. Everyone seems to be agreed in advance and virtually by definition on the stereotypical judgment whereby quality is to be more positively evaluated than quantity; it is a prejudice we have even had to ascribe to Marx himself, for whom the emergence of the commodity is described in terms of the supercession of use value by exchange value, that is to say, of quality by quantity as such. Yet the subsequent outcome of such oppositions in *Capital* may well be surprising, if not scandalous or dialectical.

For I now want to argue that, as the account unfolds, what happens is that time becomes identified with quantity and space itself with quality. How is this to be understood? The chapter on the working day may serve as initial evidence in the case, for its struggles turn on the quantity of hours and its contracts specify the amount of labor power measured out to the buyers in sheer work time. It is the working conditions which bring qualitative issues into the matter: squalor, danger, insufficient lighting, unsanitary arrangements and the pollution of air quality—all these grounds for work action may be considered to fall under the rubric of quality, rather than that quantity that comes into play in the struggle to shorten the working day.

This will be less paradoxical if we remember that here space means the body, and that Marx's materialism is less a philosophical position than a commitment to the living and working body. Thus, consumption is bodily, qualitative and concrete, but exchange is spiritual, that is to say, fetishistic, quantitative and monetary. Abstract labor is a quantity to be bought and sold, whereas concrete labor can scarcely even be covered by a general noun, so specific is each physical task,

each constellation of act and gesture, each combination of bodily habit and the materials of earth, its textures and resistances.

But this identification leads on into another paradox of *Capital*: for this Bible of the working class scarcely deals with labor at all. The existential experience of labor cannot be reproduced, and leads us in any case outside the realm of capital, which is not interested in the lived qualities of work as such, but only in its quantity and the surplus value to be extracted from it. At best we can grasp something of this qualitative variety through the variety of skilled workers a complex society needs to draw on, as in the great Whitmanesque lists and catalogues we have already previewed:

A locomotive, for instance, consists of more than 5,000 independent parts. It cannot however serve as an example of the first kind of genuine manufacture, for it is a creation of large-scale industry. But a watch can, and William Petty used it to illustrate the division of labour in manufacture. Formerly the individual creation of a craftsman from Nuremberg, the watch has been transformed into the social product of an immense number of specialized workers, such as mainspring makers, dial makers, spiral-spring makers, jewelled hole makers, ruby lever makers, hand makers, case makers, screw makers, gilders. Then there are numerous subdivisions, such as wheel makers (with a further division between brass and steel), pin makers, movement makers, *acheveurs de pignon* (who fix the wheels on the axles and polish the facets), pivot makers, *planteurs de finissage* (who put the wheels and springs in the works), *finisseurs de barillet* (who cut teeth in the wheels, make the holes of the right size, etc.), escapement makers, cylinder makers for cylinder escapements, escapement wheel makers, balance-wheel makers, makers of the *raquette* (the apparatus for regulating the watch), *planteurs d'échappement* (escapement makers proper); then *repasseurs de barillet* (who finish the box for the spring), steel polishers, wheel polishers, screw polishers, figure painters, dial enamellers (who melt the enamel on the copper), *fabricants de pendants* (who make the ring by which the case is hung), *finisseurs de charnière* (who put the brass hinges in the cover), *graveurs, ciseleurs, polis-seurs de boîte*, etc., etc., and last of all the *repasseurs*, who fit together the whole watch and hand it over in a going state. (461–2)

But we must remember that it is in the logic of capital increasingly to flatten out these skills, and to deskill, that is, increasingly and tendentially to fashion, for abstract labor, the abstract laborer—among whom may now be numbered women and children, the generally underpaid—in abundance. Skilled labor is the trace and survival of handicraft: it is already menaced by collective work (“cooperation”) and by Adam Smith’s fundamental principle of the division of labor, which might have been expected to increase the production rate of unskilled labor, until its appropriation by the machine renders even those differentiated tasks obsolete.

How then will the worker’s side of the story be told, if labor itself withdraws into the innermost and inaccessible recesses of representation as such, the virtually unnameable existential secrets of the body, which even the novel ceases to pursue in its tireless verbal colonizations of the hitherto unrepresented and unspoken dimensions of reality? In Marx, also, we find the operation of that phenomenological principle we have already had occasion to recall here, namely that what allows an act to come to consciousness is not its success (for then its traces and achievements have simply become part of the world of being as such) as rather its failure, the gesture broken in mid-air, the tool shattered, the stumble and the body’s exhaustion.

So it is that “The Working Day” (Chapter 10) is not about work at all: it is about the impossibility of work at its extremes, and about the body on the brink of exhaustion. Its deeper subject is not concrete labor but class struggle (“between equal rights, force decides” [344]): not the satisfactions (*Befriedigungen*) of the various trades, but rather the various forms of exploitation and abuse each one permits and encourages: not the linguistic articulation of factory work but rather the account of its misuse (in the official reports) and the impossibility of framing laws capable of preventing that.

The three long chapters of *Capital* (on the working day, machinery and the so-called “general law”), ostensibly devoted to labor and given over to extensive testimony about the experience of the working class under capitalism, are not merely all spatial explorations; they all mark the space of subjectivity and even of sentiment, of a potentially humanistic effusion (the associations with Dickens

have become a commonplace). The capitalists were mere allegorical figures, mere bearers, or *Träger*, of structure and of system (save for a few memorable cameos: the sycophantic Senior, the abominable Duchess of Southerland, the unhappy Mr. Peel): these can safely be abandoned to Marx's memorable practice of satire and caricature. The rest is machinery, mechanism, system, dialectical contradiction.

Here, however, in these three longer chapters, people and bodies begin to reappear, and yet it is important to register the fact that they are not summoned forth by Marx's own language; they appear only through lengthy quotations from the factory inspectors, they are mediated by the voices of others.⁷⁵ So many precautions against personal expression, against passion, whether in indignation or in pity and sympathy, although such disciplined neutrality will certainly arouse these feelings in the reader. As for speculation about Marx's own emotional economy, it would no doubt be necessary to factor in the *jouissance* in abstract dialectics on the one hand (itself rather controlled and repressed when we move from those notes called the *Grundrisse* to the final formulations of *Capital*), the equally controlled aggressivity of the satiric portraits, as well as the sparsity of the swift and punctual climaxes we have already indicated in the text.

Marx's own belated comment on these horrifying disclosures is, indeed, characteristically neutral:

In the chapters on the "Working Day" and "Machinery" the reader has seen the circumstances under which the British working class created an "intoxicating augmentation of wealth and power" for the possessing classes. There we were chiefly concerned with the worker while he was exercising his *social function*. But for a full elucidation of the law of accumulation, his condition outside the workshop must also be looked at, his condition as to food and accommodation. The limits of this book compel us to concern ourselves chiefly with the worst paid part of the industrial proletariat and the agricultural labourers, who together form the majority of the working class. (807)

⁷⁵ See Eglantine Colon, "Marx's Voices," forthcoming.

For one thing, as we have seen, the first two aforementioned chapters do not necessarily deal with work as such (it is true that he says “circumstances” and “social function”). Production, if you like, rather than reproduction. Still, there is slippage between all these categories: a long digression on bread and baking (“The Working Day,” 358–61) necessarily passes over into “accommodation” (sleeping during the night of production) and finally into the food itself, as it is adulterated by the non-“full-priced” baker, now not as the product of this production as rather the nourishment of the workers themselves (Marx here partly quotes an official report):

“The work of a London journeyman baker begins, as a rule, at about eleven at night. At that hour he ‘makes the dough’—a laborious process, which lasts from half an hour to three quarters of an hour, according to the size of the batch or the labour bestowed upon it. He then lies down upon the kneading-board, which is also the covering of the trough in which the dough is ‘made’; and with a sack under him, and another rolled up as a pillow, he sleeps for about a couple of hours. He is then engaged in a rapid and continuous labour for about five hours—throwing out the dough, ‘scaling it off’, moulding it, putting it into the oven, preparing and baking rolls and fancy bread, taking the batch bread out of the oven, and up into the shop, etc., etc. The temperature of a bakehouse ranges from about 75 to upwards of 90 degrees, and in the smaller bakehouses approximates usually to the higher rather than to the lower degree of heat. When the business of making the bread, rolls, etc., is over, that of its distribution begins, and a considerable proportion of the journeymen in the trade, after working hard in the manner described during the night, are upon their legs for many hours during the day, carrying baskets, or wheeling hand-carts, and sometimes again in the bakehouse, leaving off work at various hours between 1 and 6 p.m. according to the season of the year ...” (359–60)

Englishmen, with their good command of the Bible, knew well enough that man, unless by elective grace a capitalist, or a landlord, or the holder of a sinecure, is destined to eat his bread in the sweat of his brow, but they did not know that he had to eat daily in his bread a certain quantity of human perspiration mixed with the discharge of abscesses, cobwebs, dead cockroaches and putrid German yeast, not to mention alum, sand and other agreeable mineral ingredients. (359)

The heat of such “accommodations” will not be absent from the later accounts (along with its opposite, the bitter cold of unheated rooms and houses): but it is above all sleep which will attract our attention over and over again, particularly in a situation in which so little of life outside working hours remains but sleeping. We have forgotten the sensationalism of railway accidents in these early years of industrial development, most of them caused by overwork and lack of sleep (363). Significantly, night itself falls prey to capital’s “petty pilferings of minutes’, ‘snatching a few minutes’, or, in the technical language of the workers, ‘nibbling and cribbling at mealtimes’ ” (352); and with temporal categories so also those of age and gender, about which Marx is fully as moralizing as his English inspectors: “Every boundary set by morality and nature, age and sex, day and night, was broken down” (390). In the brickfields, “ ‘the men, boys and girls all sleep in the cottage, which contains generally two, exceptionally three rooms, all on the ground floor and badly ventilated. These people are so exhausted after the day’s hard work, that neither the rules of health, of cleanliness, or of decency are in the least observed’ ” (593).

Finally, sleep’s elder brother is scarcely to be distinguished from the noxious effects of these indoor conditions: Marx offers a diptych of the accelerated consumption of the life force and its suffocation. On the one hand a blacksmith: “He can strike so many blows per day, walk so many steps, breathe so many breaths, produce so much work, and live an average, say, of fifty years; he is made to strike so many more blows, to walk so many more steps, to breathe so many more breaths per day, and to increase altogether a fourth of his life. He meets the effort; the result is, that producing for a limited time a fourth more work, he dies at 37 for 50” (366–7). So much for time; now for the space of “a highly respectable dressmaking establishment,” whose girls worked

thirty in each room. The rooms provided only 1/3 of the necessary quantity of air, measured in cubic feet. At night the girls slept in pairs in the stifling holes into which a bedroom was divided by wooden partitions ... Mary Anne Walkley fell ill on Friday and died on Sunday, without, to the

astonishment of Mme. Elise, having finished off the bit of finery she was working on. The doctor ... made his deposition to the coroner's jury in plain language: "Mary Anne Walkley died from long hours of work in an overcrowded work-room, and a too small and badly ventilated bedroom." (364–5)

At this point, we may assume that we have passed out of the realm of production altogether, without ever reaching that of reproduction.

The latter includes a good deal more than food and lodging. Space is in it replicated on many levels: from housing to individual rooms, from the housing shortage to the cities themselves which the workers are building, from the urban landscape to the agricultural one, from the increasing distances required to walk to work to emigration to the colonies, and (rather surprisingly) not excluding that other easily overlooked (spiritual rather than physical) essential of reproduction which is education.

Marx cites with approval Robert Owen (the only one of the "Utopian socialists," along with Fourier, to escape the censures of *The Communist Manifesto*) and in particular the fact that Owen "not only made the factory system in practice the sole foundation of his experiments, but also declared that system to be theoretically the point of departure for the social revolution" (635, n. 46). Above and beyond Marx's support for "the establishment of technical and agricultural schools ... and the foundation of 'écoles d'enseignement professionnel' in which the children of the workers receive a certain amount of instruction in technology and in the practical handling of the various implements of labour" (618–19), there are indications that we find at this point in Marx the elements of a whole theory of cultural revolution, a potential theory which can easily be overlooked if we take the various discussions of education as little more than the classical Dickensian denunciation of child labor.⁷⁶ On the contrary, it is worth considering the possibility that for Marx the factory of the future, Utopian production space beyond capitalism, is to be considered the very space of the production and construction of the subject as well, and the fundamental place of education in all its aspects:

⁷⁶ See my chapter on "Cultural Revolution" in *Valences of the Dialectic*, op. cit.

As Robert Owen has shown us in detail, the germ of the education of the future is present in the factory system; this education will, in the case of every child over a given age, combine productive labour with instruction and gymnastics, not only as one of the methods of adding to the efficiency of production, but as the only method of producing fully developed human beings. (614)

This is truly a changing of the valences of the social system: not only is the terrifying space of imprisonment of industrial wage labor transformed into the crystal palace of human development, but that very division of labor which made industrial workers into cripples and monsters now returns them to the expansive perspectives of “cooperation” and of Marx’s early collective “humanism.” This is a Utopian reversal that perhaps allows us to reinterpret the otherwise rather somber phenomenon of Lenin’s and Gramsci’s enthusiasm for Taylorism, whose valences unfortunately failed to change under Stalin,⁷⁷ at the same time that it documents the continuing presence of Marx’s fantasy of multisided human development and activity and of some all-around Fourieresque butterfly temperament or attention deficit syndrome, as witness the legendary

French worker [who] wrote as follows on his return from San Francisco: ‘I could never have believed that I was capable of working at all the trades I practiced in California. I was firmly convinced that I was fit for nothing but the printing of books. ... Once I was in the midst of this world of adventurers, who change their jobs as often as their shirts, then, upon my faith, I did as the others. As mining did not pay well enough, I left it for the city, and there I became in succession a typographer, a slater, a plumber, etc. As a result of this discovery that I am fit for any sort of work, I feel less of a mollusc and more of a man.’ (628, n. 31)

Two images of development: this one, the Utopian expansion of the subject’s potentialities, in a well-nigh spatial metamorphosis, a

⁷⁷ J. G. Scoville, “The Taylorization of Vladimir Ilich Lenin,” *Industrial Relations*, October 2001, 40: 4; and V. G. Devinatz, “Lenin as Scientific Manager,” *Industrial Relations*, July 2003, 42: 3.

changing of the valences on capitalism's own voracious imperial expansion and dynamism; the other the collective Utopia of the educational factory, the reappropriation of the division of labor in the service of a whole new kind of division of labor.

Still, there remains the question of education in capitalism itself, and in particular of capitalism's working children: in what sense can that be said to be spatial, even in the sense in which the children are confined, made to sleep in the work space or else walk excessive distances to it? This feature will in fact be part of a different lesson Marx has for us, namely the futility of what we might today call social democracy and reformism, in this instance the heroic efforts of those very factory inspectors whose reports furnish a testimony beyond anything the realisms or naturalisms are able to convey. The result is unfortunately that "as soon as capitalism is subjected to state control, even at a handful of points on the periphery of society, it seeks compensation all the more unrestrainedly at all other points" (621)—Marx's other conclusion being that such legislation hastens capitalist concentration, the demise of competitive small business, and the ultimate maturing of those contradictions which bring the system to its breaking point:

If the general extension of factory legislation to all trades for the purpose of protecting the working class both in mind and body has become inevitable, on the other hand, as we have already pointed out, that extension hastens on the general conversion of numerous isolated small industries into a few combined industries carried on upon a large scale; it therefore accelerates the concentration of capital and the exclusive predominance of the factory system. It destroys both the ancient and the transitional forms behind which the dominion of capital is still partially hidden, and replaces them with a dominion which is direct and unconcealed. But by doing this it also generalizes the direct struggle against its rule. While in each individual workshop it enforces uniformity, regularity, order and economy, the result of the immense impetus given to technical improvement by the limitation and regulation of the working day is to increase the anarchy and the proneness to catastrophe of capitalist production as a whole, the intensity of labour, and the competition of machinery with the worker. By the destruction of small-scale and domestic industries it

destroys the last resorts of the “redundant population,” thereby removing what was previously a safety-valve for the whole social mechanism. By maturing the material conditions and the social combination of the process of production, it matures the contradictions and antagonisms of the capitalist form of that process, and thereby ripens both the elements for forming a new society and the forces tending towards the overthrow of the old one. (635)

The factory inspectors at any rate seek to assure at least a minimum of hours of learning and instruction for the otherwise thoroughly exploited and overworked child laborers, whose ignorance cannot be exaggerated:

The level of education of these “labour-powers” must naturally be such as appears in the following dialogues with one of the Commissioners: Jeremiah Haynes, age 12—“Four times four is eight; four fours are sixteen. A king is him that has all the money and gold. We have a King (told it is a Queen), they call her the Princess Alexandra. Told that she married the Queen’s son. The Queen’s son is the Princess Alexandra. A Princess is a man.” William Turner, age 12—“Don’t live in England. Think it *is* a country, but didn’t know before.” John Morris, age 14—“Have heard say that God made the world, and that all the people was drowned but one; heard say that one was a little bird.” William Smith, age 15—“God made man, man made woman.” Edward Taylor, age 15—“Do not know of London.” Henry Matthewman; age 17—“Had been to chapel, but missed a good many times lately. One name that they preached about was Jesus Christ, but I cannot say any others, and I cannot tell anything about him. He was not killed, but died like other people. He was not the same as other people in some ways, because he was religious in some ways, and others isn’t” ... “The devil is a good person. I don’t know where he lives.” “Christ was a wicked man.” “This girl spelt God as dog, and did not know the name of the queen.” (370, n. 66)

But neither can the ignorance of their “schoolmasters” be underestimated:

it happened not infrequently that the certificates of attendance at school were signed by the schoolmaster or schoolmistress with a cross, as they themselves were unable to write. "On one occasion, on visiting a place called a school, from which certificates of school attendance had issued, I was so struck with the ignorance of the master, that I said to him: 'Pray, sir, can you read?' His reply was 'Aye, summat!' and as a justification of his right to grant certificates, he added: 'At any rate, I am before my scholars.'" (523)

Nor is this lack of provision for qualified teachers even the principal problem of such legislation, for both time and space are utterly filled, not only without the leisure for schooling but without the room to do it in:

For this the legislature is alone to blame, by having passed a delusive law, which, while it would seem to provide that the children employed in factories shall be *educated*, contains no enactment by which that professed end can be secured. It provides nothing more than that the children shall on certain days of the week, and for a certain number of hours (three) in each day, be inclosed within the four walls of a place called a school, and that the employer of the child shall receive weekly a certificate to that effect signed by a person designated by the subscriber as a schoolmaster or schoolmistress. (523)

In a second school I found the schoolroom 15 feet long, and 10 feet wide, and counted in this space 75 children, who were gabbling something unintelligible. (524)

It is worth concluding this review with a longer account of the working child's experience more generally:

"It is impossible", says the report, "for any mind to realize the amount of work described in the following passages as being performed by boys of from 9 to 12 years of age ... without coming irresistibly to the conclusion that such abuses of the power of parents and of employers can no longer be allowed to exist.

"The practice of boys working at all by day and night turns either in the usual course of things, or at pressing times, seems inevitably to open

the door to their not infrequently working unduly long hours. These hours are, indeed, in some cases, not only cruelly, but even incredibly long for children. Amongst a number of boys it will, of course, not infrequently happen that one or more are from some cause absent. When this happens, their place is made up by one or more boys, who work in the other turn. That this is a well-understood system is plain ... from the answer of the manager of some large rolling-mills, who, when I asked him how the place of the boys absent from their turn was made up, 'I daresay, sir, you know that as well as I do,' and admitted the fact.

"At a rolling-mill where the proper hours were from 6 a.m. to 5.30 p.m., a boy worked about four nights every week till 8.30 p.m. at least ... and this for six months. Another, at 9 years old, sometimes made three 12-hour shifts running, and, when 10, has made two days and two nights running." A third, "now 10 ... worked from 6 a.m. till 12 p.m. three nights, and till 9 p.m. the other nights". "Another, now 13 ... worked from 6 p.m. till 12 noon next day, for a week together, and sometimes for three shifts together, e.g., from Monday morning till Tuesday night." "Another, now 12, has worked in an iron foundry at Staveley from 6 a.m. till 12 p.m. for a fortnight on end; could not do it any more." "George Allinsworth, age 9, came here as cellar-boy last Friday; 'next morning we had to begin at 3, so I stopped here all night. Live five miles off. Slept on the floor of the furnace, over head, with an apron under me, and a bit of a jacket over me. The two other days I have been here at 6 a.m. Ay! it *is* hot in here. Before I came here I was nearly a year at the same work at some works in the country. Began there, too, at 3 on Saturday morning—always did, but was very gain (near) home, and could sleep at home. Other days I began at 6 in the morning, and gi'en over at 6 or 7 in the evening,' " etc. (369–70)

It is worth adding that the "causes of absence" of the boys referred to in this passage includes the obligatory hours supposedly devoted to education (along with the legal limits of working hours imposed on certain age groups). The ingenious solutions British capitalists were able to devise to circumvent this legislation are comparable only to the evasion of modernizing legislation in the Danubian principalities, which sought to substitute wage labor for the feudal *corvée*: "with deep insight into political economy, the working day is not taken

in its ordinary sense, but as the working day necessary to the production of an average daily product; and that average daily product is determined in such a sly manner that even a Cyclops would be unable to finish the job within 24 hours" (347).

We have, following Marx's invitation, been examining the interior of the capitalist workplace, and accumulating testimony on both production and reproduction alike. But it is also worth stepping outside, to gaze on the landscape the system has produced for itself. The ecological features of his indictment have already been touched on.⁷⁸ But we should also remember that, despite the scholarly interest so often aroused by Marx's vampire imagery, the most frequent comparison with wage labor is drawn from slavery and secondarily from imprisonment (the two, to be sure, often coinciding). Diodorus Siculus's report on the Roman gold mines virtually opens the series (and follows naturally enough on the lengthy analysis of the precious metals which has preceded it); this is meant presumably to illustrate the humane advantages of wage labor over slavery (with the one exception of antiquity's abuse of its unfortunate overseers: "In ancient Rome ... the villicus, as the overseer of the agricultural slaves, received 'more meagre fare than working slaves, because his work was lighter' " [Mommsen—275, n. 6]). Yet *Capital* concludes, as we have seen, by slyly advising a return to slavery in the settler colonies, where the "laws of capitalist development" are as yet insufficiently implanted.

The spaces of slavery, such as these mines from which the body of the slave only reemerges into the light of day at death,⁷⁹ form a

⁷⁸ See also Foster, *Marx's Ecology*, op. cit.

⁷⁹ "The slave-owner buys his worker in the same way as he buys his horse. If he loses his slave, he loses a piece of capital, which he must replace by fresh expenditure on the slave-market. But take note of this: 'The rice-grounds of Georgia, or the swamps of Mississippi, may be fatally injurious to the human constitution; but the waste of human life which the cultivation of these districts necessitates, is not so great that it cannot be repaired from the teeming preserves of Virginia and Kentucky. Considerations of economy, moreover, which, under a natural system, afford some security for humane treatment by identifying the master's interest with the slaves's preservation, when once trading in slaves is

curiously dialectical contrast to the effects of capitalism in its own countrysides, in which relentless clearings and the wholesale demolition of peasant huts engender vast desolations reserved for cash crops or for cattle, if not deer and foxes. (The poorhouse or workhouse [823–4] may be said to offer some halfway point between slavery and extinction.)

Still, it should be recalled that a whole new industrial landscape is coming into being by virtue of the labor of these new working populations. Not only are the factories themselves (along with their “Cyclopean machines”) built by the people who will inhabit and man them, but also “the construction of canals, docks, tunnels, bridges, etc.” (573), irrespective of the likelihood they “can only bear fruit in the distant future.” That distant future is however our own, and innumerable are the stories of great cities (from Brasilia to Chandigarh, and not excluding the development of already existing urban centers like São Paulo) which then exclude the ever increasing population of those who built them from their centers, thereby surrounding themselves with a ring of working-class slums or bidonvilles for the unemployed.⁸⁰ What will later on be called gentrification is then the urban equivalent of the agricultural evictions and

practised, become reasons for racking to the uttermost the toil of the slave; for, when his place can at once be supplied from foreign preserves, the duration of his life becomes a matter of less moment than its productiveness while it lasts. It is accordingly a maxim of slave management, in slave-importing countries, that the most effective economy is that which takes out of the human chattel in the shortest space of time the utmost amount of exertion it is capable of putting forth. It is in tropical culture, where annual profits often equal the whole capital of plantations, that negro life is most recklessly sacrificed. It is the agriculture of the West Indies, which has been for centuries prolific of fabulous wealth, that has engulfed millions of the African race. It is in Cuba, at this day, whose revenues are reckoned by the millions, and whose planters are princes, that we see in the servile class, the coarsest fare, the most exhausting and unremitting toil, and even the absolute destruction of a portion of its numbers every year” (377).

⁸⁰ See James Holston, *The Modernist City* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989).

clearings (837–42): even working-class quarters of traditional cities being themselves cleared and reconstructed for wealthier tenants, driving the former laboring occupants beyond the city limits or into outright homelessness. Here too Marx's dialectic of the unity of prosperity and misery anticipates the far more apocalyptic dilemmas of the world city under globalization.

It is in keeping with the latest form of this dialectic—the exposition of that “general law” whereby industrial productivity generates overwork and unemployment simultaneously—that we make a final tour of these ultimate spaces of capitalism, in which we confront a form of “naked life” far more deeply rooted in the economic system itself than Agamben's hopeless inhabitants of the concentration camps.⁸¹ Here is, for example, one testimony about the hopelessness of the agricultural worker:

As to any further reduction of his income, he may say, *nihil habeo nihil curo* [“I have nothing and I do not care about anything”]. He has no fears for the future, because he has now only the spare supply to keep him. He has reached the zero from which are dated the calculations of the farmer. Come what will, he has no share either in prosperity or adversity. (834)

Spatial form is predicated on the promise of a primal scene, in which the ultimately unrepresentable is approached as at some outer limit. Of these ultimately unrepresentable phenomena—labor, fatigue, the utter absorption of human time, the perpetual exclusion from a space that is never mine (that is literally alienated)—none is quite so unrepresentable as hunger itself, divested of all its cultural forms, and reduced to nameless inanimation and debility. How finally to see

⁸¹ Agamben's pseudo-biological concept in *Homo Sacer* proves in reality, like those of Foucault, to draw on categories of domination (as it would have been difficult for it to do otherwise, given his example of the concentration camps). This is why the destitution of unemployment is the more fundamental and concrete form, from which such later conceptualizations derive: what is concrete is the social, the mode of production, the humanly produced and historical; metaphysical conceptions such as those involving nature or death are ideological derivations of that more basic reality.

hunger as such and not merely the bodies through which its effects express themselves? Marx's spatial form—transmitted through his witnesses and the voices of those others who testify in dispassionate horror or pity—consists in the patient exploration of spaces, of the search for this ultimate reality of the unrepresentable, a search which more and more minute moves from statistics and regions to towns, streets, houses, rooms, and finally that last glimpse of the nothingness in the back room, blinding, unbearable, from which we must avert our eyes:

The next door at which we knocked was opened by a middle-aged woman, who, without saying a word, led us into a little back parlour, in which sat all her family, silent and fixedly staring at a rapidly dying fire. Such desolation, such hopelessness was about these people and their little room, as I should not care to witness again. 'Nothing have they done, sir,' said the woman, pointing to her boys, 'for six and twenty weeks; and all our money gone—all the twenty pounds that me and father saved when times were better, thinking it would yield a little to keep us when we got past work. Look at it,' she said, almost fiercely, bringing out a bank book with all its well-kept entries of money paid in, and money taken out, so that we could see how the little fortune had begun with the first five shilling deposit, and had grown by little and little to be twenty pounds, and how it had melted down again till the sum in hand got from pounds to shillings, and the last entry made the book as worthless as a blank sheet. This family received relief from the workhouse, and it furnished them with just one scanty meal per day ... Our next visit was to an iron labourer's wife, whose husband had worked in the yards. We found her ill from want of food, lying on a mattress in her clothes, and just covered with a strip of carpet, for all the bedding had been pawned. Two wretched children were tending her, themselves looking as much in need of nursing as their mother. Nineteen weeks of enforced idleness had brought them to this pass, and while the mother told the history of that bitter past, she moaned as if all her faith in a future that should atone for it were dead ... On getting outside a young fellow came running after us, and asked us to step inside his house and see if anything could be done for him. A young wife, two pretty children, a cluster of pawn-tickets, and a bare room were all he had to show. (824–5)

Chapter 6

Capital and the Dialectic

Our reading has identified the “absolute general law of capital” as the centerpiece of Marx’s representation, or, better still, his construction, of this system (the two climaxes we have identified are moments of closure, rather than moments of totality). With this “law,” which posits the identity of productivity and misery, we are at a point from which the rest of the system becomes visible, that is, precisely as a totality. (The various points of figuration—secondary to this central formulation—have also proved to function, not decoratively, but rather as moments in which something of the larger system comes into view.)

The unity of negative and positive which is so arresting and shocking in this central moment of Volume One is certainly dialectical in the most commonly accepted sense of the word: each side of the formulation unavoidably disclosing its other face, the human suffering at one with technological productivity, the impressive scientific and technological progress emerging from the waste of lives (historically incomparable with the poverty of so-called underdeveloped countries).

Our purpose here has not been to defend the “truth” of *Capital* from its anti-Marxist enemies (whose arguments against the validity of the labor theory of value, the transformation of value into prices, and the falling rate of profit are all framed in terms of this “reflection” theory of truth): *Capital*, rather, stands or falls as the representation of a system. But our analysis seems more seriously undermined

by those internal Marxian critiques of the dialectic, which seek to rewrite it into a different kind of book altogether. Thus, the so-called “analytical Marxism” school (now abandoned by its henceforth post-Marxist founders)⁸² was intent on translating traditional or dialectical Marxism into a perspective that satisfied two fundamental principles: the first, under the unlikely banner of microeconomics, posits the existential requirement that whatever is attributed to the system or totality of capital have its equivalent or foundation in individual experience. This is tantamount to effacing the Hegelian dialectic of essence and appearance (of which Marx observed that if they coincided in real life, “science would be unnecessary”⁸³). This particular argument (which can also be used against psychoanalysis and Freud’s doctrine of the Unconscious) has, intentionally or not, the result of abolishing the distinction between value and prices, central to much of the work of *Capital*.⁸⁴

The second principle of this approach decisively abandons Hegelian logic for a return to the old Aristotelian or common-sense logic of the principle of non-contradiction: this is to say that its rewriting of Marxism is not just incidentally non-dialectical but aims centrally at the abandonment of the dialectic as such, which it considers to be inseparable from Hegel. This aim, to rid Marx of Hegel and of the dialectic as such, was shared, for different reasons, by both Korsch

⁸² The fundamental names are G. A. Cohen, Jon Elster and John Roemer; their Marxist critics are numerous, but see for example Michael Lebowitz, *op. cit.*; and Daniel Bensaid, *Marx for Our Times* (London: Verso, 2002). The external organization of such works “analytically” into propositions and arguments is no more a proof of non-ideological objectivity than the organization of Spinoza’s ethics into axioms. G. A. Cohen’s magisterial *Karl Marx’s Theory of History*, for example (Princeton, 1978), turns out to be a reading of *Capital* as an attack on consumerism, a political move that might have been a great deal more effective had it been fought out dialectically rather than “analytically.”

⁸³ *Capital*, Volume III (London: Penguin, 1981), 956.

⁸⁴ Oddly, this emphasis on “methodological individualism” seems to lack the existential concerns which motivated Sartre’s lifelong attempt to reconcile Marxism and phenomenology (and which so richly endowed Marxism with new points of departure).

and Althusser, the former in the name of his historicist method of “specification,”⁸⁵ the latter in the name of materialism as such (albeit a “structural” and later, aleatory, kind). In these cases, the results were also rather different: Korsch ultimately abandoned orthodox Marxism for council communism and a kind of anarchism, while Althusser remained within the Party, criticizing from within an orthodoxy which he associated with Stalinism and systematically identified as a kind of Hegelian idealism. Korsch’s method of “specification,” however, retains much of what we might still recognize as dialectics under the guise of historicism; while Althusser attempted to rewrite the substance of the old dialectic of base and superstructure in the form of structural conjunctures and institutional apparatuses.

The form the “analytic” cleansing of the dialectic from Marx himself might take, however, can easily be imagined in the case of the “absolute general law,” which Aristotelian logic can rewrite as a technological progress which results in the loss of jobs.⁸⁶ This is non-contradictory with a vengeance, and leads to social-democratic conclusions of the most familiar sort, namely welfare, the creation of new kinds of jobs, and other Keynesian remedies: all of which leave capitalism intact as a system precisely because they fail to identify

⁸⁵ See Karl Korsch, *Karl Marx* (New York: Russell and Russell, 1963), Chapters 2 and 3.

⁸⁶ We might well find instructive here Marx’s own remarks about the sanitizing (or laundering) of contradiction from the problem of technology:

And this is the point relied on by our economic apologists! The contradictions and antagonisms inseparable from the capitalist application of machinery do not exist, they say, because they do not arise out of machinery as such, but out of its capitalist application! Therefore, since machinery in itself shortens the hours of labour, but when employed by capital it lengthens them; since in itself it lightens labour, but when employed by capital it heightens its intensity; since in itself it is a victory of man over the forces of nature, but in the hands of capital it makes man the slave of those forces; since in itself it increases the wealth of the producers, but in the hands of capital it makes them into paupers, the bourgeois economist simply states that the contemplation of machinery in itself demonstrates with exactitude that all these evident contradictions are a mere semblance, present in everyday reality, but not existing in themselves, and therefore having no theoretical existence either. (568–9)

it as a system. The shock of the dialectical formulation was meant to underscore the fatal unity of capitalism as a mode of production whose expansion cannot be arrested at will by social-democratic reform, continuing to produce, along with its accumulation of new value, an ever enlarging reserve army of the unemployed, now on a global scale. The profit motive (itself already a central and indispensable ideology of the system) is now enlarged and enriched by the ideology of “downsizing” according to which banks and investments reward institutions able to generate ever further unemployment in the name of “efficiency.” But these developments are not aberrations, they are historically logical and inevitable extensions of capitalism as such; and Marx’s “absolute general law” was meant to underscore that dynamic and not merely to deplore it as an excessive or avoidable strategy of this or that national business culture.

What is missing, then, from this revision, and indeed excision, of the dialectic from *Capital* is the central role of negativity and contradiction. Adorno offered the most eloquent philosophical denunciation of the positivization of society that followed on this gradual expulsion of the negative and the “critical” from its practices, intellectual and economic alike; while the elaborate refutations by Deleuze (and in another way Derrida) of negation in the name of difference can scarcely be read as the defense of such universal positivization, but rather as its critique from a different philosophical standpoint and in a different code, for which negativity has itself become a positive entity.

Marx’s own practice of the dialectic here is no longer based on a programmatic defense of Hegelian negativity as a philosophical slogan. Indeed, it may be argued that, in Marx, philosophy—that is to say, philosophical abstraction—abolishes itself by realizing itself, as he recommended in a famous “thesis on Feuerbach.” We may illustrate this process by taking a different position on the well-known alienation debate, one which avoids the Althusserian repudiation of its allegedly Hegelian idealism at the same time that it eschews the humanism of the Marxist defenders of the early manuscripts. What we have found in our reading here, indeed, is the way in which the concept of alienation—in its most Hegelian form, as the way

in which I alienate my own production by producing it as separate from myself in the first place, so that it comes before me as a properly alien object and force—is very much built into the very structure of *Capital*, where as we have seen the working class forges its own “golden chains,” lends capital its own wages in advance, and advances the accumulation of surplus value by its own surplus labor, not even omitting to encourage the invention and introduction of new technology as capitalism’s response to its own resistance. Here we find the very form and action of alienation with a vengeance, only with the philosophical label omitted; and in this sense it would be preferable to see this operation less as the abolition of philosophy than as its fulfillment in a new way. This is what Marx meant when, in his famous slogan, he recommended that we rise from the abstract to the concrete (G 101). Traditional philosophy was indeed the conquest of the abstract as such, the emergence of universal concepts from the “blooming buzzing confusion” of *pensée sauvage*, the disengagement of the Platonic Ideas from their material incarnation at the moment of the invention of philosophy in ancient Greece. The Marxian concrete is not then some third term or Hegelian “returning back into itself” of the abstract, but rather the supersession of those disciplinary differentiations that characterize modernity as such, and the discovery of totality as universal interrelationship: in this instance the discovery that the very abstraction called alienation (*Entfremdung*, *Entäusserung*) is itself a sign and symptom of the dynamics of alienation at work in reality itself and in the totalization of society by capitalism as an emergent system.

At this point, at which alienation is discovered to be a form rather than an idea or concept, we are already in a dialectical rather than an empiricist-Aristotelian world; and in this new world, in which “the labor and suffering of the negative” (Hegel) is everywhere, we no longer need that particular concept either. What remains is the fundamental notion of contradiction itself, about which we must affirm that it is identical with the unity of opposites, opposites which no longer need to be identified with and labeled as positive and negative, inasmuch as the dialectic means a perpetual changing of places between them and a perpetual transformation of one into the other.

To be even more technical about it for a moment, this means that the famous “identity of identity and non-identity” is also the same as the “non-identity of identity and non-identity”; at which point I fear that philosophy really is at an end in its older sense, and in which it also becomes impossible to “decide” whether capitalism is positive or negative, good or evil, inasmuch as, according to the *Manifesto*, it is both at one and the same time.

Good and bad are part of our common-sense everyday common language, and as we shall see later the dialectic cannot propose to abolish it in the name of something new and Utopian (even though it shares the Nietzschean project of transcending this particular binary opposition—along with all the others). So we are left with the opposition, which we can emphasize as we prefer. Why Marx should emphasize the destructive properties of capitalism is obvious enough; but it may not be so evident why, save for his interest in technological progress and innovation, he would want us ever to emphasize its positive side. Yet that particular emphasis—which we have today apparently lost sight of—is also what constitutes Marxism’s commitment to the future and to historical development as such. From this perspective, we need to be vigilant about the denunciation of capitalism from a moralizing point of view, and the temptation to regress to a simpler past and to conserve what is still on a human scale in this immense and superhuman development of the system. At any rate, the choice between a “good” description of capitalism (as constant revolutionizing and innovation) and a bad one (as exploitation and domination) is in fact a political choice and not a logical or scientific one: a choice that must be made in function of the current situation, and whether people can be politically energized by the negative—anger—or the positive—hope.

But such optionality would seem to drain the opposition of positive and negative of all its content, and to place the burden of interpretation back on the situation itself (as it is, in its turn, interpreted). Indeed, I think this is generally what obtains in dialectical thinking, where even what I have called the very centerpiece of the dialectic, namely the “idea” of contradiction, is to be grasped formally rather than as any specific content. I must here reemphasize

my identification of contradiction with the famous unity of opposites of which so much has been made here. This is apparently to lead the dialectic back to its fundamental mechanism or most elementary parts, namely those of the binary opposition (whose frailty we have already observed above in one of its most powerful forms, namely the ethical binary). Indeed, I have suggested elsewhere that the moment of structuralism sparked a revival of dialectical thinking owing to its own (originally linguistic) emphasis on binary oppositions (even though we may have learned the dialectic from those by accident and misunderstanding rather than any deeper affinity between the two systems).⁸⁷

At any rate, we have already seen some of these oppositions at work, beginning with that of quality and quantity on the very first page of *Capital*, where this particular abstract opposition took the form of use value and exchange value; only later disclosing itself to be an opposition between matter and mind, the physical body of concrete labor, the mental or spiritual properties of the commodity, and moving on to space and time, absolute and relative, and so on and so forth. Neglected in this list is a fundamental one, to which contemporary philosophy has insistently returned us, namely the opposition between identity and difference.

And here I would insert a hypothesis about the very origins of the dialectic itself. For I believe that the dialectic came into being to handle a strange and unparalleled historical situation, namely one in which everything is different and yet remains the same: in which the discovery (or invention) of history reveals the enormous structural disparities, not only between *anciens* and *modernes*, but between all the different historical modes of production! And yet in another sense, they are all the same thing, namely modes of production. By the same token, history reveals the immense variety of groups which exercise dominion over other groups—castes, feudal orders, clans, families, hordes and, finally, unique to our mode of production, social classes; and yet in another sense they are all social classes, all somehow the same, a ruling class extracting its surplus value from

⁸⁷ See *Valences*, op. cit., pp. 17–19.

a laboring class. The dialectic is then a mode of thinking able to combine the singular and the general in a unique way, or better still, to shift gears from the one to the other and back again, to *identify* them in such a way that they remain different.

If so, how could it escape this fate itself? How could the dialectic ever expect to change its shape and form ceaselessly without somehow at one and the same time remaining equal to itself and falling beneath a single abstract category, which it then in a next immediate moment rejects?

This may also be the moment to say something about the idea of system, as it is also associated with structuralism; and have we not throughout used this structuralist term as a kind of synonym for the more Hegelian (and thus by definition incommensurable) term of totality? To be sure the term “system” is also freightened with positivist and Parsonian, systems-theoretical connotations, yet I use it here (it is not particularly frequent in Marx) in order to underscore the mechanical and implacable momentum of capitalist accumulation as such. Attention to figuration may continue to be helpful here, for Marx’s practice of system is quite different spatially from the Hegelian one, where a consciousness or an idea “returns into itself,” thereby reaching a higher stage of self-consciousness, a more intense thematization. In Marx, on the other hand, the dynamic of separation sets in motion a dialectic of the inside and the outside: in order to discover profit we must “step outside the sphere of circulation”; consumption takes place “outside” production or circulation; and so forth. This figure then dramatizes the expansive nature of capitalism which draws its outside within itself and enlarges its own sphere of activity to envelop the former outside within its now all-encompassing dynamic (imperialism is only the most striking exemplification of this process). Thus in a prophetic moment, Marx observes the dynamic of the working class family, whose impoverishment must be replaced by “substitutes” from the outside, which then open up a larger field for the production of new (and cheaper) commodities (432, 518, n. 39). In this system then, social reproduction itself becomes a vehicle for the enlargement of commodity production. Where Hegelian *Entäußerung* externalized the product only to

enrich itself by way of its reappropriation (and return into itself), the Marxian system posits an increasing separation which necessitates its own enlargement.

At any rate, even if reification is inherent in language as such, an omnipresent and inescapable danger with which the very naming process threatens the most ephemeral and situation-specific entities, we do not need to draw the more extreme consequences of absolute unrepresentability or the inevitable self-contradictions implicit in any positive formulation or proposition, as is the case with some versions of deconstruction. Reification can be interrupted, if only in a punctual fashion that cannot last or produce any permanently transparent discourse (the dialectic cannot become a Utopian lingua franca). For one thing, figuration, as we have seen, is capable of arresting the effects of nomination and reappropriating them for a new moment of dialectical awareness. For another, the very structure of binary oppositions which would seem to condemn thought to a perpetual repetition of stereotypical dualisms contains mechanisms which can be turned against its own traditional ideological dynamic to short-circuit it and produce a more complex and historical awareness in its place.

Even in Hegel we can sense a dawning apprehension of the reification inherent in what we have called the named concept: The objection to the cut-and-dried tripartite formula (thesis, antithesis, synthesis), with which Hegel himself occasionally popularizes or vulgarizes his philosophical "system," is instructively undercut by Hegel's addition of a fourth term in the greater *Logic*, which now replaces "synthesis" with another old friend, "the negation of the negation."⁸⁸ The latter, officially inscribed in their dialectical philosophy by Engels and then Stalin, and attracting about as much opprobrium as "base and superstructure," is in reality a formal and future-oriented move, which, unlike the regressive idea of a "synthesis" or return to the original qualities, leaves the nature of the latter open.

⁸⁸ See G. W. F. Hegel, *Science of Logic* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1969), p. 836. In fact, the tripartite stereotype originates in Hegel's metaphysical generalization of the *logic* of the syllogism.

Indeed, what our formalistic approach suggests is that the poles or concepts of negative and positive are themselves by no means so fixed as we first thought, and meanwhile that even the content of the individual oppositions is subject to flux, insofar as they can be transformed into each other (quality also being “the same” as body, as concrete labor, as time, etc.). There is thus in that sense a vertical union of opposites (identification of the various oppositions with each other) fully as much as the simple, horizontal form in which difference turns into identity and vice versa.

This is why I would prefer to discuss the dialectic in terms of its shapes rather than its content. Even contradiction itself is not exempt from such flux, insofar as it can give rise to a mediation—we have seen how money functions as a kind of reification of the problem of value rather than its solution—and also as a possibility of circulation, as when Marx, comparing contradiction to the elliptical movement of the heavenly bodies, suggests a view of contradiction as movement and circulation rather than the reification of money: “The commodity... provides the form within which [the contradictions] have room to move” (198). But perhaps even this is only another opposition: reification vs. mutability; and so on: the possibilities of such synonymy and their metamorphoses is not infinite.

Still, we need to go a little further in characterizing Marx’s dialectic in this book, for it must repeatedly be stressed that *Capital* is not dialectical philosophy, but rather, if the term conveys the difference, dialectical theory, perhaps even, adapting Korsch, dialectical “specification.” What I mean by this is that named philosophical concepts such as alienation or even contradiction play no overt role here as such; the words appear rarely if at all; the abstractions to which the concepts correspond are not developed as such and in their own language. In that sense, only Hegel’s is a dialectical philosophy, where all that happens; perhaps indeed the first and last one (save for his own followers). In Marx, those abstractions and those concepts have gone underground, they are still active and they still give form to the developments in which they are somehow materialized, but they are no longer present in their own name. Marx’s text, to use another current word, may be seen as a practice of dialectical immanence.

But along with that retreat from philosophy (which realizes it at the same time that it abolishes its autonomy), something else is happening which is more difficult to express, and which implies that the "dialectic" is not a philosophical concept in that sense. For it is a peculiar fact that in order for a thought, a sentence, an analysis, to be dialectical, we have to think of it as such. The dialectic is in that sense a kind of self-consciousness of what is already second-degree thinking (philosophizing, abstracting): no dialectic without realizing that we are practicing the dialectic; no spontaneous and unself-conscious dialectical thinking as such (even though it is the return to that to which the "analytic Marxists" invited us). Dialectical thinking can never become common sense thinking (or ideology), as Aristotelian or Kantian thinking did. It would, however, be incorrect to say that we must grasp our thought as an *example* of the dialectic: but this incorrect formulation puts us on the right track, inasmuch as there can be an example, a particular, only in the presence of a universal or a generality of some kind. All dialectical thinking is, however, singular; the dialectic is not a universal or a generality of that kind, of which there might be examples. Each dialectical moment is unique and ungeneralizable, and this is why we are able to describe what is dialectical only in terms of its various shapes (unity of opposites, contradictions, etc.) and not in terms of abstract concepts. Meanwhile, as Korsch understood, this specificity or singularity, this non-abstractable and ungeneralizable, unique but concrete thought is therefore to be characterized in another way, namely that it is historical. It is only history which is unique but meaningful in this dialectical way; capitalism is not a concept but a historical phenomenon (with its twin faces of structure and event); *Capital* is itself a unique historical event, and this constitutes its dialectic.

Chapter 7

Political Conclusions

The alert reader will perhaps have already understood that I myself conclude that Volume One has no political conclusions. But when it is a question of a book that has for over a century and all over the world been considered the Bible of the working classes, by a writer who was also the author of one of the fundamental and classical texts of political theory in the West (*The Communist Manifesto*), this becomes a paradox that demands explanation.

The explanation will first require some clarification of what political means, and that seems to me to demand an initial distinction between political theory and politics tout court—as the latter is stored up in handbooks for political activism, for political practice, strategy and tactics, such as we find in Machiavelli, Clausewitz, Sorel or Lenin. Political theory itself is, however, always in one way or another constitutional theory; it always necessarily turns on the framing of a constitution, and inevitably finds its ancestors or founding fathers in Aristotle and Polybius, whose descendency passes through the Florentine Renaissance (Machiavelli again!) and on to the American eighteenth century, where its creativity is exhausted. A constitution is always a counterrevolutionary construction designed to foreclose change, whether from the right (coups, “tyranny”) or from the left (mob “violence,” revolution). It is based on this or that theory of representation (it being understood that, as I explained for conceptual representation in the Introduction, political representation is as such also always impossible). Even here, however, a certain distinction

between theory and practice may be identified in that moment of freedom, of the lifting of the Law, between “constituting power” and “constituted power,” on which Negri has written so luminously.⁸⁹

Political theory, then, takes as its essential object of study and invention the framing of constitutions as such; and therein lies another, deeper reason for its irrelevance today. For as C. B. MacPherson has taught us, there comes a fateful and revealing moment in Locke’s foundational thought when the conceptuality of political theory is decisively disabled, and that is the moment of the appearance of money.⁹⁰ The intervention of this foreign body into a system of abstractions that are formally unable to accommodate it or to theorize it means that political theory—constitutional theory—is no longer able to function autonomously; and the name for that moment is “private property”—a reality utterly recalcitrant to constitutional construction.

Readers of this book will know, however, that the mere notion of money is not quite adequate to describe this fundamental stumbling block for political theory: for the constitutional theorists who trace their lineage back to Aristotle have always known something about the rich and the poor, however awkwardly they conceptualized the problem and dealt with it abstractly. But the very fact that all the great political and constitutional theorists worked within pre-capitalist or still essentially agrarian conditions suggests that Locke’s problem must be redefined, and that the role money played in his own local thinking must be transferred to a rather more complex version of that phenomenon, namely capital as such. With the emergence of capital then, a host of the traditional categories of constitutional thinking become unserviceable, among them citizenship and representation; while the very idea of democracy as such—always a pseudo-concept and for most of its historical existence in any case a term of opprobrium—becomes a misleading illusion. The state is no longer an

⁸⁹ Antonio Negri, “Constituent Republic,” in Hardt and Virno, *Radical Thought in Italy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).

⁹⁰ C. B. MacPherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962), pp. 233–6.

autonomous entity, to be theorized by its own intellectual and specialized discipline, but has become so infiltrated by capital that any autonomous economic theory is impossible as well; and nowhere is this symbiosis so evident as in our own time, where moralizing (and traditional) terms like corruption and faction have become amusing period pieces.

Yet if political theory as such has become extinct in capitalism, surely there has also been a long history of political invention under socialism, however inapplicable Stalin's famous constitution remained. To be sure, Marxist theories of the state and of the juridical system have mostly consisted in the critique of their capitalist forms and practices; while the admission of a dearth of political theories and theories of justice within Marxism seems tantamount to agreement with all those anti-Marxist denunciations that became so shrill after the Khrushchev speech and the revelations of Stalin's responsibility for the purges and the gulag. I think, however, that the absence of a political dimension from Marxism—its radical disjunction of “economics” (to use that word in a very loose and general way) from politics—is one of its great and original strengths. At any rate, Volume One gives little encouragement to those seeking a vision of some more perfect political system in it, let alone traces of its theorization: indeed, it does not even vouchsafe the outlines of a picture of any future socialism in economic terms.

As far as politics in the tactical or strategic sense are concerned, only a few scattered and occasional remarks give us comfort. There is, of course, the famous Utopian vision of an “association of free producers” in Part One which implies more about Marx's conception of the uses of Utopia in the construction of his representation than it tells us about any possible calls to concrete action; and its language is still significantly indistinguishable from that of anarchism. The call for workers' “combinations” is the general political common sense of this early period of labor organizing; the strange case of the Blue Books and of bourgeois factory inspections remains to be evaluated (Marx himself suggests that they were used by the land-owning faction against their industrial adversaries in parliament). Of the two great “climaxes” of *Capital*, the comic one—dissolution of the

state and of society in general—is clearly anarchist in its spirit; while the “expropriation of the expropriators” is a hidden chiasmus which prophesies the revolutionary break without telling us much about either means or ends as such.

Of *Capital* itself, we must say that it consists in the representation of a peculiar machine whose evolution is (dialectically) at one with its breakdown, its expansion at one with its malfunction, its growth with its collapse. The secret of this unique historical dynamic is to be found in the famous “falling rate of profit,” which can today, in full globalization, also be understood in terms of the world market and the ultimate limits it spells for that necessary expansion (by way of which capitalism has always “solved” its crises). But this demonstration is framed in terms of system rather than of human agency; it is therefore not political, in the sense of human action, and would seem better calculated to encourage illusions of inevitability than to energize programs for action.

Indeed, Karl Korsch suggested long ago that Marxism possessed in effect two fundamental languages, which could alternate with one another, be substituted for one another or translated into each other. These two languages or codes are class struggle and capital accumulation (or the law of value).

The “objective” description of the historical process as a development of the productive forces and the “subjective” description of history as class struggle are two independent forms of Marxian thought, equally original and not derived from one another ... they are to be applied singly or together, according to the conditions of each given position ...⁹¹

That the code of value can be “transcoded” into that of class struggle is only intermittently visible in *Capital*: in the analysis of the commodity, for example, or in those moments in which Marx reminds the workers that they have themselves forged their own “golden chains,” that they have themselves produced capital and all its accumulations. The Utopia of the “free producers” also suggests as much, with its

⁹¹ Karl Korsch, *Karl Marx*, op. cit., pp. 228–9.

implication that a different mode of production would be transparent, not only the result of a collective choice of priorities, but also in the way in which those priorities would be available for collective inspection, and the functioning of some properly socialist production machine visible for whoever cares to examine (or criticize) it.

Still, the general proposition of this political, or perhaps rather apolitical or even anti-political, conclusion remains scandalous when we have to do with a thinker like Marx, who was also a political genius, and who (like Lenin) “thought politically” all the time and always had a keen eye for the political possibilities of any given situation or conjuncture, in that also very much like Lenin himself. But this is to say that both were preeminently and in the very best sense of the word opportunists: and that both, in keeping with Machiavelli’s teaching and example, were capable of the most astonishing turns and reversals, and placing the value of the concrete analysis of the situation or conjuncture higher than faithfulness to any preconceived principles. This means that any number of practical political agendas have been derived from their work, or at least from Marx’s own.⁹² For just as it is well known that Marxism was not a creation of Marx but rather, after his death, of Engels, and that this system, which wished to be a theory and a practice, a philosophy and a politics, was itself inflected in any number of ways, from the Second International all the way down to all the extraparliamentary left movements and the various anarchisms of the present day—so also it seems fair to grasp “Marxism” as an ideology as well as a “science” (or better still, a *Wissenschaft*, and I would even say a theory), and to see the various Marxisms I have alluded to as so many ideologies and political practices which are to be distinguished from that “scientific” analysis embodied in *Capital*. (But as not everyone will be

⁹² Stanley Moore’s old book *Three Tactics in Marx* (1963) was a suggestive lesson, not merely in Marx’s own adaptability in this respect, but also in the multiple resources available in his complex and wide-ranging work to a variety of political perspectives—in that case to social democracy, communism and Maoism, respectively. But Moore took into account Marx’s extensive political writings and commentaries throughout his life; we have here only taken into consideration *Capital*, Volume One (and the texts that prepared it).

attracted by this archaic language—more offensive in its implication for “science” than in its more comprehensive vision of ideology as a “philosophy of praxis”—I willingly abandon that particular formulation while retaining the distinction itself.)

It was not my intention here to demoralize political readers of *Capital* nor in any way to argue against political practice as such. Indeed, I foresee at least two practical-political results that the reading of *Capital* I have just offered may produce, despite the fact that results are always (perhaps even by definition) unforeseeable.

Still, whoever speaks of the political effects of writing is talking about rhetoric (or propaganda), whether we have to do with the fictional and the literary or the scientific and the non-fictional: all texts have political effects, and the question is whether they can be judged or predicted, adjusted or focused, in advance.

Korsch’s dualism has some interesting consequences for overtly political writing, consequences which are themselves dialectical. First of all, this dualism suggests that political writing can place an emphasis on the system or one on agency: in other words, it can construct a picture of a system so total that it is overpowering, and that the individuals caught up in it have little power to do anything. Or on the other hand, it can stress agency, and at that point agents and actors appear who are somehow stronger than the most inhuman system and have the possibility of overcoming it in positive and useful ways.

The first is a literature which necessarily depicts victims and the oppressed by virtue of its very form: this kind of form then is calculated to arouse pity for the victims and indignation at the system itself. The second is calculated to depict heroism and to arouse admiration, to energize the reader and constitute a call for action. It is easy to see the reciprocal weaknesses of both these rhetorical and formal strategies: the last, the emphasis on agency, is liable to produce a dangerous voluntarism in which the subjects concerned lose any sense of the massive power of the system and are prepared to fling themselves into hopeless struggles and inevitable martyrdom. As for the consequences of the first strategy, the emphasis on the overwhelming power of the system as such, it should be clear that it encourages

fatalism—if not the illusion of inevitability associated with the Second International’s conviction of the imminent collapse of capitalism—then the passive cynicism of the lack of alternatives and the hopelessness and powerlessness of the subjects of such a system, for whom no action is possible or even conceivable. We know this particular reaction better, since it is largely our own today.

Korsch’s view was that each of these “codes” reflected the historical conjuncture itself: so that Marx’s own activism came to the fore in the revolutionary years around 1848 (*The Communist Manifesto*) and again, in the years of the decline of the Second Empire and the approach of the Paris Commune. Fatalism, however, the emphasis on the economic system and its implacable logic, became the watchword of the years of geological immobility and stagnation, when politics had seemed on the point of extinction, and all that remained was to analyze the seemingly permanent and unchangeable system itself (despite the fact that the very nature of the system, superficially, was change, in the sense of the expansion of capital, new fortunes, new buildings and cities, a flourishing corruption everywhere called progress). Those were the years in which Marx slowly constructed his Cyclopean model of capital itself.

My own feeling today is somewhat different, as befits our knowledge of the system: for in fact, there is a sense that both perspectives are correct and that globalization has brought about a situation in which the system has never been more massive and properly superhuman, invulnerable to any conceivable form of individual resistance; and yet in which at one and the same time from Seattle on—not forgetting the Zapatistas, let alone the guerrilla insurgencies that have everywhere seemed to cripple the armed forces of empire—much unexpected movement and vulnerability seems daily to unsettle a system already in the throes of a unique financial crisis. In other words, it is not at all clear that we are in a situation of massive systemic stability, without any possibility of agency or action. But the multiplicity of such actions—local or regional as with the Zapatistas; religious as with the various Islamic movements; anarchist, as with the mass demonstrations in Seattle and elsewhere—and in the absence of any form of the old party system which seems to have

been completely discredited by the collapse of the socialist countries, this very multiplicity suggests a multiplicity of viewpoints on the system as such and thereby a general confusion as to what it really is and what form resistance to it should take. Indeed, the very concept of “resistance” suggests a generally reactive stance, and one which lacks any active strategic goal at all, let alone one generally shared among these movements.

This is the situation in which it has seemed useful to offer a reading of *Capital* that insists on its implacable demonstration of the systemic nature of capitalism itself—which is to say, which reinstates the advantages of a totalizing analysis of this system (using totality and system here interchangeably). We have, to be sure, been strenuously encouraged to think in terms of open and closed systems, which are then necessarily to be evaluated as good and bad systems: thus capitalism is an open, and therefore good system, that of the market; communism is a closed system, with all the bureaucratic qualifications such closure entails. The paradoxical, we may even say dialectical, originality of Marx’s analysis is that in *Capital*, “system” is characterized as a unity of opposites, and it is the open system of capitalism which proves to be closed. In other words, what is open about capitalism is its dynamic of expansion (of accumulation, of appropriation, of imperialism). But this dynamic is also a doom and a necessity: the system cannot not expand; if it remains stable, it stagnates and dies; it must continue to absorb everything in its path, to interiorize everything that was hitherto exterior to it. Thus, by a chiasmus that has become dialectical, everything bad about the qualification of the closed has been transferred to the open, without the opposite necessarily also being true. Capitalism is thus what is sometimes called an infernal machine, a perpetuum mobile or unnatural miracle, whose strengths turn out to be what is most intolerable about it.

This is the point at which to assess the political value of such a construction. In a period like our own, in the absence of alternatives, the reaction of even the critics of the system to its crisis and its injustice is simply to repair it and hopefully thereby to reform it. The lesson that capitalism is a total system, however, is designed to demonstrate

that it cannot be reformed, and that its repairs, originally intended to prolong its existence, necessarily end up strengthening and enlarging it. This is then an argument against what used to be called social democracy, which today, far more openly than ever before in its past history, asserts the possibility of reforming capitalism; or rather, in a kind of negative demonstration, acquiesces in the conviction that no other system is possible and that therefore all that remains is the piecemeal diminution of its injustices and inequalities.

But it is precisely the power and the constructional achievement of *Capital* to show that the “injustices and inequalities” are structurally at one with this total system as such, and that they can never be reformed. In a system in which the economic and the political have merged, tactics such as those of government regulation are mere verbal constructions and ideological rhetoric, since by definition their function and purpose is to help the system itself function better. The argument for regulation is an argument for more efficient control of the economic system itself, in order to forestall or prevent its collapse. As Stanley Aronowitz put it long ago, the vocation of social democracy is, as opposed to various factional parties, to keep the total interests of capitalism at heart and to maintain its overall functioning.

Such would be, then, one of the benefits of a reading of *Capital* as a total system. As for the other practical-political conclusion that this book might be expected to have, it has to do with the new situation of globalization in which *Capital*, Volume One also has its unexpected word to say.

I have indeed sketched out a reading of *Capital* organized around what Marx calls its “absolute general law” which is the unity of capitalist production and unemployment. The expansion of capitalism in its new phase of globalization significantly intensifies this process and makes the relevance of *Capital*, read in this way, both inescapable and full of new and original lessons that were not visible in older crisis situations. For we have become accustomed to the familiar rhythms of boom and bust, that is to say, of a recurrence from which the system always recovers in a new way, stronger and more unforeseeably prosperous than ever before; but the approach of the world market (of

which surely globalization is at the least the foreshadowing), as well as the absence of a new world war which might have destroyed the accumulation of capital and its plant and inventory and made some new reconstruction possible—these things along with capitalism’s transformation into a financial system mean that we are in a historically different situation than what obtained in 1919 or 1945:

We might begin by remembering that the miracle years of the previous golden age (roughly 1950–1973) depended not only on a world war and an enormous uptick in state spending, but also on an historically unprecedented transfer of population from agriculture to industry. Agricultural populations proved to be a potent weapon in the quest for “modernization”, since they provided a source of cheap labour for a new wave of industrialisation. In 1950, 23 percent of the German workforce was employed in agriculture, in France 31, in Italy 44 and in Japan 49 percent—by 2000, all had agricultural populations of under 5 percent. In the 19th and early 20th centuries, capital dealt with mass unemployment, when it occurred, by expelling urban proletarians back to the land, as well as by exporting them to colonies. By eliminating the peasantry in the traditional core at the same time as it came up against the limits of colonial expansion, capital eliminated its own traditional mechanisms of recovery.⁹³

These historical reminders explain why the phenomenon of unemployment today is a different and far more ominous symptom of systemic crisis than in previous depressions, and they also account for the way in which, in any contemporary reading, the structural unemployment in Marx’s conception of the “reserve army of capitalism,” once a secondary feature of this system, moves to the very forefront of its analysis today.

Unemployment has often been grasped as the ideological other face of a whole political program based on the call for “full employment”; and while I think this slogan might be good and invigorating for us in the current conjuncture—particularly since it is unrealizable

⁹³ Aaron Benanav, “Misery and Debt: On the Logic and History of Surplus Populations and Surplus Capital,” *Endnotes* 2, p. 21. I have been encouraged in this reading by the emphasis Benanav places on unemployment in his own work.

within the system and therefore calculated to dramatize everything non-functional about its structure—I believe that it is not necessary to invoke this political and ideological strategy when insisting on the fundamental structural centrality of unemployment in the text of *Capital* itself. Marx does not there call for the correction of this terrible situation by a policy of full employment; rather, he shows that unemployment is structurally inseparable from the dynamic of accumulation and expansion which constitutes the very nature of capitalism as such.

But I believe that the centrality of unemployment for the reading of *Capital* we propose here is politically significant and historically relevant in another way, which has to do with globalization as such. It suggests that those massive populations around the world who have, as it were, “dropped out of history,” who have been deliberately excluded from the modernizing projects of First World capitalism and written off as hopeless or terminal cases, the subjects of so-called “failed states” (a new and self-serving pseudo-concept) or of ecological disaster or of old-fashioned survivals of allegedly immemorial, archaic “ethnic hatreds,” the victims of famine whether man-made or natural—all these populations at best confined in camps of various kinds, and ministered to by various NGOs and other sources of international philanthropy—our reading suggests that these populations, surely the vessels of a new kind of global and historical misery, will look rather different when considered in terms of the category of unemployment.

For there is another opposition which comes into play with the use of Marxian categories—as it were another axis of opposition to be ranged alongside or coordinated with the one we have attributed to Korsch, namely fatalism and voluntarism—and that is the equally charged and significant one which Althusser has diagnosed as a tension between the categories of domination and of exploitation.⁹⁴ Unlike the dual codes of Korsch’s opposition, these categories,

⁹⁴ The position is most fully outlined in Althusser, *Sur la reproduction* (Paris: PUF, 1995), a hitherto unpublished seminar which I believe to be the fullest and most satisfying statement of Althusser’s position and life work.

which also clearly project codes of their own into which the same content can be indifferently and alternatively translated, are unevenly weighted in Marx's own system. I here follow Althusser's position, which grasps the structure of the mode of production as one fundamentally organized by "the relations of production," or in other words by the structure of exploitation: domination is therefore not only the "secondary" result of this structure but also the mode of its reproduction rather than of its production.

The antithetical position is occupied, not by any of the varieties of Marxism as such, but rather by the latter's relative and first cousin, anarchism; both are "people of the book," acknowledging *Capital* as their fundamental text; but anarchism places primary emphasis on domination, that is to say, on versions and forms of power as such (rather than what we could for shorthand call economics), and everyone knows the seduction exerted by this many-faceted word today, in politics and theory alike. I believe that the Marxist position evaluates this emphasis as an essentially moral or ethical one, which leads to punctual revolts and acts of resistance rather than to the transformation of the mode of production as such; and this argument is reinforced by the positive program implied by the various ideologies of power, which could alternately be expressed in terms of freedom, or more politically, of democracy, in general of a non-parliamentary, radical or direct type. But as the radical disjunction between politics and economics I have proposed here suggests, the outcome of an emphasis on exploitation is a socialist program, while that of an emphasis on domination is a democratic one, a program and a language only too easily and often coopted by the capitalist state.

This is not the place to argue all this further, but only to resituate the thought experiment proposed at the end of *Valences of the Dialectic*,⁹⁵ namely the productive possibility of a change in theory and in practice that accompanies the rethinking of all such lost populations of the world in terms of exploitation rather than domination. For it seems unassailable that virtually all the descriptions of the situation of these populations—and their insistence on the horror of that

⁹⁵ See *Valences of the Dialectic*, op. cit., pp. 565–82.

situation is very welcome indeed—tend eventually, by the very force of such concepts, to slip into accounts of domination (particularly since we are not accustomed to thinking of unemployment as a category of exploitation), even where the analysis has begun as an economic one and posits imperialism rather than some other type of cause. “Imperialism” is indeed a useful conceptual space in which to demonstrate the way in which an economic category can so easily modulate into a concept of power or domination (and it is clear that the word “exploitation” is itself scarcely immune from such slippage either).

This is why the Marxian analysis of globalization, to which the very dynamic of *Capital* outlined here entitles us, allows a welcome recoding of these multiple situations of misery and enforced idleness, of populations helplessly in prey to the incursions of warlords and charitable agencies alike, of naked life in all the metaphysical senses in which the sheer biological temporality of existences without activity and without production can be interpreted. To think of all of this in terms of a kind of global unemployment rather than of this or that tragic pathos is, I believe, to be recommitted to the invention of a new kind of transformatory politics on a global scale.

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