

Marx's *Capital*, Method and Revolutionary Subjectivity

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# Marx's *Capital*, Method and Revolutionary Subjectivity

*By*

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... and all science would be superfluous if the form of appearance of things directly coincided with their essence.

MARX 1991, p. 956

•••

The idea of one basis for life and another for science is from the very outset a lie.

MARX 1992b, p. 355

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Parts of Chapter 8 include material from ‘The system of machinery and determinations of revolutionary subjectivity in the *Grundrisse* and *Capital*’, in *In Marx’s Laboratory: Critical Interpretations of the Grundrisse*, edited by Riccardo Bellofiore, Guido Starosta and Peter Thomas, Leiden: Brill, 2013.

This book is dedicated to my wife Nara and my children Oliverio and Lola: without your love and affection, this book would never have seen the light of the day.

# Introduction: On the Current State of Revolutionary Theory

The topic of this book is emancipatory subjectivity. More precisely, it is a scientific inquiry into the social determinations of the revolutionary subjectivity of the working class. Given the current state of radical intellectual labour, this may sound like an outmoded, if not directly courageous but hopeless, subject of research. In effect, since some intellectuals proclaimed that the time had come to wish farewell to the working class,<sup>1</sup> critical social theory has not ceased moving away from the notion that the working class is the social subject whose revolutionary action will put the alienation inherent in the capitalist form of social life to an end. As Iñigo Carrera vividly puts it, critical social theory moved from seeing the working class as the social subject meant to abolish the capitalist mode of production to seeing the latter as having abolished the working class itself.<sup>2</sup>

Unfortunately, the search for answers to the question of the *social* determinations of revolutionary subjectivity in the work of contemporary Marxist scholars – where one would expect to find them – does not look very promising either. Certainly, there have been plenty of interesting developments within the Marxist tradition in recent times; in particular, among those working within a broadly understood ‘form analysis’ approach.<sup>3</sup> Thus, since the 1980s there have been important contributions to the investigation of the more general economic form determinations of capitalist social relations,<sup>4</sup> the state form,<sup>5</sup> the legal form,<sup>6</sup> and, more recently, a renewed interest in Marx’s dialectical method and its connection to Hegel’s.<sup>7</sup> A

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1 Gorz 1982.

2 Iñigo Carrera 2008, p. 9.

3 I refer to those currents that grasp Marx’s critique of political economy as a critical investigation of the historically specific alienated forms of social mediation of capitalist society.

4 See, among others, the essays contained in Elson 1979b; Williams 1988; Arthur and Reuten 1998; Campbell and Reuten 2002; Bellofiore and Taylor 2004; Moseley 2005; Bellofiore and Fineschi 2009; Fine and Saad Filho 2012.

5 Holloway and Picciotto 1978; Bonefeld 1993; Bonefeld and Holloway 1991; Clarke 1988, and 1991b.

6 Fine 2002; Miéville 2005; Engelskirchen 2011, chapter 5.

7 Moseley 1993; Moseley and Campbell 1997; Albritton and Simoulidis 2003; Ollman and Smith 2008; Chitty and Mclvor 2009; Jameson 2009; Mészáros 2010 and 2011; Carchedi 2011a.

large number of novel detailed commentaries on (and introductions to) Marx's *Capital* have appeared as well.<sup>8</sup>

However, not many works have actually put the problematic of revolutionary subjectivity at the centre of the critique of political economy. I do not want to imply that scientific reflection on the determinations of revolutionary subjectivity has been *completely* absent from recent Marxist theorising (although it must be said that many of the contributions to the resurgence of value form theory since the late 1970s and early 1980s, and certainly most of the discussions of the dialectical method, did fail to establish a firm link between revolutionary theory and the concrete political action of the working class).<sup>9</sup> But in the few cases where that question has been explicitly addressed, emancipatory subjectivity has usually been grasped, as Postone rightly notes, as *transcendentally* or *ontologically* rooted.<sup>10</sup> This means, in a nutshell, that the ground for emancipatory subjectivity is seen as standing *outside* the alienated forms of social mediation through which the life process of humanity asserts itself. For instance, the substance of revolutionary subjectivity is seen as residing in a generic material content – the ‘constituting power of human productive practice’ – which, in its most refined versions, constitutes the negated presupposition of capitalist forms of social mediation.<sup>11</sup> That is, the content of revolutionary subjectivity is not grasped as the ‘unity of many determinations’, but remains simple and *unmediated*, mediation pertaining at best only to *non-revolutionary* forms of working-class subjectivity. In the same vein, the exposition of the determinations of revolutionary subjectivity is not the *synthetic* result of the scientific dialectical unfolding of the movement of the social forms of capitalist society, but is represented as the product of the *analytic* reduction of those social forms to the postulated generic material content.<sup>12</sup> The scientific critique

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8 Saad-Filho 2002; Milios et al. 2002; Bidet 2007; Albritton 2007, Veraza Urtuzuástegui 2007; Fine and Saad-Filho 2010; Harvey 2010 and 2013, Heinrich 2011 and 2012; Jameson 2014.

9 As commented by Mohun, regarding value theory, in a collection of essays from those debates (1994a, p. 4).

10 Postone 1996, p. 38.

11 Cf. Bonefeld 1995.

12 This point was insightfully hinted at in the 1970s by Giacomo Marramao in his critical appraisal of the polemic between the more subjectivist positions of Korsch and the Dutch Left Communists (Pannekoek, Gorter) and the defenders of the theory of capitalist breakdown (Mattick, Grossmann) (Marramao 1975–6, pp. 152–5; 1982, pp. 139–43). As Marramao states against the ‘spiritualisation’ of revolutionary consciousness by Pannekoek: ‘Thus, the genesis of class consciousness is not *explained* in terms of the process of production and reproduction, and from within the objectivity of social relations, but is *presupposed* as

of capital thereby comes down to the invocation of the powers of an unmediated human practice in the form of a (Kantian) moral imperative.<sup>13</sup>

Eventually, the logic of this approach ends up taking the conscious reflection on the determinations of revolutionary subjectivity away from *social theory* (the critique of political economy) and into the realm of *philosophy*. Thus, in his recent investigation of revolutionary subjectivity, Holloway abandoned the approach of his earlier work on the economic and political forms of capitalist social relations of production, and conceptualises revolutionary theory through a blend of an Adornian philosophical critique of ‘identity’ and a Blochian philosophy of hope.<sup>14</sup> In another, widely debated strand of work, Hardt and Negri, even if at least offering some insights into the *social* determinations of working-class subjectivity (e.g. through their theory of ‘immaterial labour’), ultimately ground its revolutionary form through a recourse to a different philosophical combination: an *ontology* of the ‘productivity of desiring machines’ inspired by the poststructuralism of Deleuze and Guattari, and a Spinozan *political philosophy* of the ‘multitude’.<sup>15</sup>

The key to the overcoming of the limitations of all these approaches has been correctly identified by Postone in his own recent attempt to reconstruct the Marxian critique of political economy: emancipatory subjectivity must be *socially* grounded.<sup>16</sup> Hence, it is a question pertaining to dialectical *social theory* – the critique of political economy – and not to philosophy. More concretely, this means grasping emancipatory subjectivity as *immanent* in the very unfolding of the reified forms of social mediation of capitalist society. Hence, Postone rightly argues, the question that critical social theory faces is to discover emancipatory consciousness as socially constituted by the alienated *historical* dynamic of capital itself.<sup>17</sup> The problem with his approach is that in his idiosyncratic reconstruction of the Marxian critique of political economy, that historical dynamic actually *denies* the working class (*qua* working class) the determination of material bearer of revolutionary subjectivity.

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a result of an irreducible autonomy that at a certain point of development, makes the qualitative jump which breaks the quantitative uniformity of the empirical world’ (Marramao 1975–6, p. 155). Marramao’s additional point, namely, that the elements for a dialectical alternative to this subjectivism can be found in the work of Grossmann, is, however, less persuasive.

13 As pointed out by Neary 2004.

14 Holloway 2002b, and 2010.

15 Hardt and Negri 2000, 2004, and 2009.

16 Postone 1996, p. 38.

17 Postone 1996, p. 38.

This book takes up the challenge posed by Postone and aims at the development of a materialist inquiry into the social and historical determinations of revolutionary subjectivity. It also does this through a *critical reconstruction of the Marxian critique of political economy*. One, however, that yields an opposite result to that of Postone, namely, that the outcome of the historical unfolding of the dialectic of the objectified form of social mediation turned into the very alienated subject of social life (i.e. capital) is to determine, as its own *immanent* determination, the constitution of the (self-abolishing) working class as a revolutionary subject.

A crucial element in this intellectual endeavour is the recovery of the old Marxian insight, contained in the oft-quoted passage from the Postface to the second edition of *Capital*, into the intrinsic connection between the specifically dialectical form of social science and its revolutionary content.<sup>18</sup>

In its mystified form, the dialectic became the fashion in Germany, because it seemed to transfigure and glorify what exists. In its rational form it is a scandal and an abomination to the bourgeoisie and its doctrinaire spokesmen, because it includes in its positive understanding of what exists a simultaneous recognition of its negation, its inevitable destruction; because it regards every historically developed form as being in a fluid state, in motion, and therefore grasps its transient aspect as well; and because it does not let itself be impressed by anything, being in its very essence critical and revolutionary.<sup>19</sup>

In this sense, it could be said that this book represents a *methodologically minded* development of the critique of political economy. More precisely, the book argues that the latter is but the scientific self-consciousness of the working class about its own social determinations as an alienated yet revolutionary subject. Because of this determination, itself the product of its dialectical form, social science becomes determined as *practical criticism*.

This general methodological approach to the critique of political economy adopted in this book is primarily inspired by the work of the Argentine independent scholar Juan Iñigo Carrera, to whom I feel immensely in debt for many of the ideas developed here.<sup>20</sup> As I hope to demonstrate throughout the course of the argument, this approach is highly original and provides a rigorous and

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18 A point forcefully made after Marx's death fundamentally by Lukács in *History and Class Consciousness* (1971).

19 Marx 1976g, p. 103.

20 See Iñigo Carrera 1992 and 2008.



powerful answer to many of the scientific questions that Marx scholars (especially those associated with those currents of critical Marxism that have tried to break with the Marxist-Leninist orthodoxy) have been debating at least over the last 30 years. Unfortunately, very few of Iñigo Carrera's works have been published in English.<sup>21</sup> Coupled with the fact that his research has been carried out independently, i.e. outside the formal structures of academia, Iñigo Carrera's work has remained largely unknown within English-speaking Marx scholarship. A first aim of this book, then, is to introduce this particular approach to the critique of political economy to the wider English-speaking readership. Furthermore, this book also intends to show that this approach provides not only a powerful tool for the contemporary further development of the critique of political economy, but also a very fruitful way of uncovering the methodological thread that gives unity to Marx's overall intellectual development. In particular, I have utilised the clues found in Iñigo Carrera's writings to develop a close reading of Marx's major work, namely, *Capital*.<sup>22</sup> Through this reading, I hope to prove my point about the revolutionary nature and contemporary relevance of the Marxian critique of political economy.

### Structure of the Book

To develop the argument, the book is structured into two parts. A critical reading of Marx's early writings from the perspective of his later works is carried out in the three chapters comprising the first part of the book. The reading attempts to find in both the insights and limitations of the young Marx clues towards the direction that his scientific development would take and which would culminate in the intellectual and political necessity of writing *Capital*. This critical engagement with Marx's early texts is not carried out through an exhaustive chronological assessment of each of those works, a task which in

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21 Only very recently, a couple of articles on method (Iñigo Carrera 2013 and 2014) and some of his empirical work on the specificity of capital accumulation in Argentina (Iñigo Carrera 2006) have come to light in the English-speaking world. Many of his other articles in Spanish are available now on his website: <http://www.cicpint.org/>.

22 At the time of finishing the first draft of this manuscript, there was no published detailed commentary on Marx's *Capital* by Iñigo Carrera. A commentary on the first chapter is now available. See Iñigo Carrera 2007. I have nonetheless benefited greatly from illuminating discussions over the past 17 years, throughout which I have collaborated closely with him. In addition, recordings of his course on *Capital* (in Spanish) have recently been uploaded on his website.

itself would require a whole book and which, moreover, would presumably reveal plenty of repetitions in terms of the scientific achievements contained in each text (e.g. the materiality of human productive subjectivity in both the *Paris Manuscripts* and *The German Ideology*). Rather, the book selects and concentrates on three key moments in Marx's early intellectual development which, I think, demonstrate with greater force both the achievements and limitations of the early writings in terms of the revolution in the mode of scientific knowledge that Marx was undertaking, and that would eventually crystallise in the writing of *Capital* as the most developed form of the critique of political economy, that is, of the dialectical critique of the capital form.

The first two chapters deal with two different aspects of the 1844 *Paris Manuscripts*. Chapter 1 firstly outlines some of the crucial breakthroughs contained in that text. In the first place, it points to this work as involving Marx's first *materialist* comprehension of the revolutionary subjectivity of the proletariat. And this meant the overcoming of the *philosophical* standpoint from which he had previously grasped the emancipatory mission of the working class. The chapter further argues that this transcendence of the philosophical representation of proletarian subjectivity actually springs from another fundamental achievement found in the *Paris Manuscripts*, namely, the discovery that the key to the comprehension of any historical movement lay in its referral to the development of the *materiality* of human *productive* individuality. On the other hand, I also argue in Chapter 1 that Marx's elaboration of all these theoretical breakthroughs eventually clashed with an insurmountable barrier: the *methodological insufficiencies* underlying this first attempt at a critique of political economy. I show that Marx's reliance on a Feuerbach-inspired transformative criticism, although serving him analytically to uncover alienated labour as the hidden foundation of 'economic categories', eventually leaves him unarmed to comprehend the historical dynamic of alienated labour in the qualitative specificity of its concrete forms. He thus resorts to an *extrinsic* application of a *general* dialectic formally borrowed from Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*. The unfolding of the concrete social determinations of revolutionary subjectivity could not but remain outside the reach of this early critique of political economy.

Chapter 2 undertakes closer scrutiny of two fundamental claims made in the first chapter. First, that Marx's adoption of a materialist perspective was tantamount to the transcendence of philosophy. In the second place, I argue that, especially through the confrontation with Hegel's philosophy in the third manuscript, Marx starts to show self-awareness of the inadequacy of the transformative method inherited from Feuerbach as the revolutionary form of proletarian science. Moreover, I argue that both questions are intrinsically connec-

ted. In order to do this, and unlike most commentaries, the chapter focuses not on Marx's critique of Hegel's *Phenomenology*, but rather that of the *Science of Logic*. It is argued that it is especially with the latter critique that Marx became aware of the essential character of philosophy as uncritical alienated thought and, hence, of the need to overcome philosophy *tout court*. At the same time, the chapter advances the proposition that the very same confrontation with Hegel's *Science of Logic* was crucial for Marx's first steps in the critical appropriation of the 'rational kernel' to be found in the Hegelian dialectic, namely, the discovery of the revolutionary essence of the 'reproduction of the concrete by means of thought' – i.e. dialectical cognition – as the necessary *method* of science determined as practical criticism. Whatever the role played in the *Paris Manuscripts* through its materialist inversion as the dialectic of human labour, the self-development of Spirit through alienation and its overcoming is not where that rational kernel resides. Rather, the chapter argues, already at that early stage Marx was coming to terms with the fundamental distinction between what Hegel called the 'understanding', with its characteristic externality between the ideal necessity of thought and the inner life of the object of scientific cognition, and what he called 'speculative thought', as the form of scientific cognition with the power to follow in thought the movement of negativity immanent in real forms. However, Marx did not uncritically appropriate that insight, but instead turned that distinction against Hegel himself.

Some of the essential ramifications of this early recovery of the revolutionary power of the dialectical method are explored in Chapter 3, mainly by means of a reconstruction of Marx's critique of Proudhon. The latter, I think, constitutes another key moment in Marx's intellectual development that condenses the theoretico-methodological breakthroughs he achieved during the 1840s. The first methodological aspect that crops up in Marx's critique of Proudhon is the critical distinction between dialectical *logic* and dialectical *method*. The former is what results when the dialectic is conceived of as a general formalistic methodology to be taken ready-made from Hegel's *Science of Logic* and then applied to whatever particular content we face; in the case of Proudhon, to the 'material' questions of political economy. By contrast, the dialectical method does not consist in the application of the general necessity of logic – however 'dialectical' in form – to particular objects, but simply follows in thought the *specific* necessity immanent in social forms themselves. Hence the significance of the *Poverty of Philosophy*: it contains Marx's first positive attempt to reproduce in thought the real movement of capitalist economic forms. Moreover, I try to show that this critique of Proudhon entails much more than an abstractly methodological interest; rather, the text reveals that at stake is the knowledge of the social determinations of the political action of the working class. In brief, the text

makes evident the *political* nature of the dialectical critique of political economy determined as the conscious organisation of the practical critique of the capital form.

And yet the rudimentary and germinal state of Marx's critique of political economy at that stage limited the scientific comprehension of the social determinations of revolutionary subjectivity to an equally underdeveloped stage. The political task that Marx faced thereby became clear to him: to put all these theoretico-methodological insights gained in the 1840s concretely into motion by giving the dialectical critique of political economy its fully developed shape. This, the first part of the book partially concludes, is what the writing of *Capital* was all about.

The second part of the book aims at substantiating this last point through a methodologically minded critical reading of Volume 1 of *Capital* and the *Grundrisse*. Chapters 4 and 5 develop a very close reading of the first chapter of *Capital* in order to show how only through a sound comprehension of the dialectical method, as broadly reconstructed in the first part of the book, can the implications of Marx's presentation of the determinations of the commodity form be uncovered in all their plenitude. Particular attention is given to Marx's investigation of the commodity form as entailing both the most general form of *objectivity* and *subjectivity* of the capitalist mode of production, an issue that is spelled out in Chapter 5. On the other hand, Chapter 6 also problematises the relation between the critique of these more abstract forms of alienated social life and the uncovering of the concrete determinations of emancipatory subjectivity. The argument put forward is that the former constitutes only a first step of a laborious journey involving the reproduction in thought of the further mediations underlying the latter. Only by going through that development can the critique of political economy become determined as the self-consciousness of the social necessity of revolutionary action.

This point is reinforced in Chapter 7 through a reconstruction of the precise form in which Marx introduces the class struggle in his dialectical presentation and a discussion of various implications that follow from it. In contradistinction to many contemporary readings that tend to *ontologise* the class struggle, thereby turning it into the most general *content* of the movement of social life in its capitalist form, the chapter argues that it is a necessary *form* in which the valorisation of capital realises its determinations. The reason for this does not lie in the formalistic methodological principles of structuralism.<sup>23</sup> Rather, it is an expression of the concrete development of the historically specific ali-

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23 As alleges Bonefeld 2014.

enation inherent in the commodity form; in the form of the *total social capital*, the materialised social relation between private and independent individuals *becomes determined as the concrete subject of the movement of modern society*. This does not imply the denial of the transformative powers of human practice personified by workers. But it does imply that whatever transformative powers the political action of workers might have – *both* capital-reproducing *and* capital-transcending political action – must be an immanent determination begotten by the alienated movement of capital as subject and not external to it. And in its *simplest* determination (i.e. as an expression of the *formal subsumption* of labour to capital), the class struggle only exists as a necessary form of capital's reproduction, but not of its transcendence.

As explored in Chapter 8, the socio-historical genesis of the emancipatory subject can be found in the transformations in the *materiality* of social life brought about by the *real subsumption* of humanity to capital. As Marx shows in *Capital* and the *Grundrisse*, through the constant revolution in the material conditions of social labour, capital progressively transforms the subjectivity of the workers according to a determinate tendency: they eventually become *universal labourers*, that is, organs of a collective subject capable of consciously ruling their life process by virtue of their power scientifically to organise the production process of any system of machinery and, therefore, any form of social co-operation. This mutation of their *productive subjectivity* is the necessary prelude to the constitution of the labourers as truly social individuals through their self-abolition as wage workers and the construction of the free association of individuals. This, I argue, is the inner material *content* of social life which is expressed in the *form* of the political revolutionary subjectivity of workers.

By way of a conclusion, Chapter 9 provides a further examination of the determinations of revolutionary subjectivity beyond those explicitly developed by Marx. By drawing together and elaborating on many themes only tangentially touched upon in the previous chapters, the concluding remarks of the book explore the further qualities of the emancipatory subject: the alienated nature of its transformative action; its inner material determination as productive subject; the specific scientific form of revolutionary consciousness (i.e. dialectics); the connection between the revolutionary abolition of the capital form and the 'conquest of state power'; and, finally, the necessity for its action to be consciously self-organised.



PART 1

*Marx's Early Critique of Political Economy:  
The Discovery of the Revolutionary Subject  
and the Development of Science  
as Practical Criticism*







# The Dialectic of Alienated Labour and the Determinations of Revolutionary Subjectivity in the *Paris Manuscripts*

## Introduction

There was a debate among scholars in the 1960s and 1970s over the way in which Marx came to embrace the idea – explicitly appearing for the first time in the *Introduction to the Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right* – of the proletariat as the revolutionary subject of the abolition of the capitalist mode of production. Was it through 'empirical' contact with real proletarians? Tucker states it was not, and claims that it was through the reading of socialist and communist literature of the time.<sup>1</sup> Avineri, for his part, argues that it was through the critique of Hegel and his notion of a universal class.<sup>2</sup> Finally, McLellan thinks that it was through his immersion in a radical-socialist political and intellectual environment as he moved from Germany to Paris.<sup>3</sup>

Now, as Perkins rightly notes, what matters is not the biographical question of how Marx came to discover the proletariat, but the *meaning* of that discovery.<sup>4</sup> In this sense, regardless of the precise form in which Marx came to discover the proletariat as a revolutionary force, the crucial point to highlight is that, until 1844, the proletariat was for Marx a *philosophical category*. More concretely, it was the mediating category through which he tried to make philosophy descend from the heavenly realm of abstract thought to the real social life of concrete human beings.<sup>5</sup>

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1 Tucker 1961.

2 Avineri 1993, pp. 52–64.

3 McLellan 1973, p. 97.

4 Perkins 1993, p. 33. Apart from the works by Tucker, Avineri and McLellan cited above, classic but still good sources on the details of Marx's intellectual evolution and biography can be found in Rubel 1975 and 1980 and Oakely 1983, and 1984–5. Musto 2010a provides a more recent examination of Marx's intellectual biography up to the *Grundrisse*, incorporating the latest advances of philological research based on the MEGA project. For a commentary on the later, see Musto 2010b.

5 Perkins 1993.

Thus, even if he were attempting to transcend what he saw as the abstract character of idealist philosophy as present in both Hegel and the Young Hegelians, I think that Marx's intellectual development before the *Paris Manuscripts* was carried out within the boundaries of philosophical discourse. In particular, he was attempting to solve the whole theory-practice problematic as it appeared when seen through philosophical lenses. And this meant that, thus conceived, his endeavour was doomed to failure from the very outset. As I shall argue in the following chapter, in the *Paris Manuscripts* Marx would come to discover that it is in the very essence of philosophy (however 'materialist' or 'dialectical' in form) to remain trapped within abstract thought and, therefore, to be indifferent to the real movement of human practice. Within the limits of philosophical thought, no real mediation is possible between theory and practice, only the appearance of it. Or, seen from another angle, within philosophy the relation between theory and practice cannot but become inverted. Instead of seeing revolutionary science ('theory') as the necessary concrete form through which the transformative action of the proletariat ('practice') is consciously organised, the latter appears as the necessary form through which the universal claims of philosophy are realised. Revolution thus becomes a logical necessity of philosophy and consists in making the world become 'philosophical'.<sup>6</sup>

The perspective of the *Paris Manuscripts* is very different. In this text Marx's starting point is no longer the universal claims of philosophy. As he states when opposing political economy's recourse to a mythical primitive society of simple commodity producers: 'we shall start out from a *present-day* economic fact'.<sup>7</sup> Marx attempted to analyse this concrete economic form in its historical specificity and existing reality and, *from this point of departure*, he *then* both made sense of previous history and discovered the hidden transitions to the supersession of modern capitalist society. Hence, communism ceased to be a philosophical *ideal* in any meaningful sense of the word, notwithstanding the mediations with the real introduced, and became 'a *real* phase, necessary for the next period of historical development, in the emancipation and recovery of mankind'.<sup>8</sup> As Marx put it in an oft-quoted passage from *The German Ideology*:

Communism is for us not a *state of affairs* which is to be established, an *ideal* to which reality [will] have to adjust itself. We call communism the

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6 Marx 1992a, p. 257; O'Malley 1970, p. xxii.

7 Marx 1992b, p. 323.

8 Marx 1992b, p. 358.

*real* movement which abolishes the present state of things. The conditions of this movement result from the premises now in existence.<sup>9</sup>

The quotation cannot be clearer. Although there is a formal similarity between Marx's approach to the problem of social transformation before and after August 1844 (in terms of the finding of the future immanent in the present), there is also a subtle difference expressed in the passage from philosophy to materialist science; one, however, which cannot be neglected if we want to grasp the innovations in Marx's thought to be found in the *Paris Manuscripts*.<sup>10</sup>

The second central aspect of the *Paris Manuscripts* is a direct result of Marx's first attempt at the critical investigation of the specific nature of modern society through the critique of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*, i.e. through an analysis of bourgeois political forms. As Marx himself tells us in the short intellectual 'autobiography' found in the *Preface to the Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, the main conclusion he reached was that the key to the comprehension of the specific nature of capitalist society was not to be found in the critique of the doctrine of the state, but that the critique of modern society had to start with the critique of political economy in order to, then, continue into a critique of the state.<sup>11</sup> This was the science that was able to penetrate the 'internal physiology' of the modern world to be found in 'civil society' and, more precisely, in 'private property'.<sup>12</sup>

In light of this conclusion, in the *1844 Manuscripts* Marx turns his attention to the way in which human life is materially reproduced as the key to the understanding of society and its historical development. As Arthur points out,

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9 Marx and Engels 1976a, p. 49.

10 For a philological discussion of Marx's manuscripts and notebooks of 1844, see Musto 2009. On the *meaning* of Marx's intellectual development leading to the writing of the *Paris Manuscripts*, see Murray 1988 and Teeple 1984. The latter, in particular, raises the point of the often neglected importance in the development of Marx's ideas of his doctoral dissertation. Löwy's important book on the theory of revolution in the young Marx is also quite illuminating for the early stages of Marx's intellectual evolution (Löwy 2003). It is also especially relevant for the argument developed here insofar as Löwy specifically focuses on the question of emancipatory subjectivity, albeit from a different theoretical perspective. More recently, Leopold has critically re-examined the early Marx's relationship with prior German philosophy, particularly with Bauer's and Feuerbach's thought, covering the writings from the period stretching from March 1843 to September 1845 (Leopold 2007).

11 Marx 1992d, pp. 425–6.

12 Teeple 1984, p. 201.

[F]or the first time he attributes fundamental ontological significance to *productive activity*. Through material production humanity comes to be what it is ... material production is the '*mediation*' in which the unity of man with nature is established.<sup>13</sup>

Marx therefore placed, for the first time, the material determinations of human society in the centre of his inquiry. The critical standpoint originally developed in the *Introduction to the Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right* thereby acquired a more concrete meaning. In that text, Marx stated that the radicality of the critique was to be measured by the extent to which it 'grasped things' as having their roots in human beings themselves.<sup>14</sup> In the *Paris Manuscripts*, this general statement about tracing all socio-historical forms to the practical activity of individuals became more specific. The key to the comprehension of any historical movement lay in its referral to the development of human *productive* subjectivity. That is, in tracing social forms to what he discovered to be specifically human about the human being.

Simply as such this emphasis on the material determinations of society is certainly not peculiar to Marx. As Clarke notes, this is a feature that one can find in Classical Political Economy and that it inherited from the Scottish Enlightenment.<sup>15</sup> Yet in opposition to the ahistorical naturalism of, for instance, Adam Smith's theory of the co-evolution of modes of subsistence, class relations and forms of property, Marx's originality lay in unearthing the historical specificity of the social forms in which human productive subjectivity developed or the historicity of what he would later call the social relations of production.<sup>16</sup> Clearly, at this stage Marx did not posit the question explicitly in these latter terms. However, as Colletti rightly points out, many of the elements constituting the mature critique are, certainly in an underdeveloped and abstract form, in this early text.<sup>17</sup> When dealing with the question of the historicity of social forms, I am already entering into the discussion of another central aspect of the *Paris Manuscripts*. For here he discovered the specificity of bourgeois relations of production in *alienated labour*.

The aim of this chapter is thus to critically investigate the breakthroughs achieved by Marx in that early text from 1844. The said discovery of the historical specificity of alienated labour and, what is the flipside of this, of the

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13 Arthur 1986, p. 5.

14 Marx 1992a, p. 251.

15 Clarke 1991a, Chapter 2; 1998, p. 13.

16 Clarke 1991a, pp. 57–8.

17 Colletti 1992, p. 56.

economic content of the communist transformation of human life, definitely constitutes one of the fundamental scientific achievements to be found in the *Manuscripts*; one, moreover, which would lay the foundations for Marx's subsequent intellectual development. In this sense, one could argue that the *Paris Manuscripts* constitute a necessary *first* step in the production of Marx's revolution in the *mode of scientific knowledge* that the radical transformation of the world demands. On the other hand, we shall also see that the *methodological insufficiencies* of that text did not allow Marx to take that revolutionary transformation of scientific knowledge into *practical criticism* to completion. And yet, as argued in the course of this book, it was precisely the self-awareness of those limitations that gave Marx the key to the path that his scientific revolution needed to undertake.

### Transformative Method and the Discovery of Alienated Labour

The first issue that emerges when engaging with Marx's analysis of alienated labour in the *Paris Manuscripts* is the risk of becoming bogged down in what by now might seem like the tedious and somewhat scholastic question of the relation between Marx's earlier works and *Capital*. This story is quite well-known. In opposition to structuralist readings of Marx, which postulate a rupture between a Hegelian-idealist young Marx and a materialist-scientific mature Marx,<sup>18</sup> 'heterodox' Marxist perspectives tend to have as their defining characteristic the view that there is continuity running through the whole of Marx's work. According to the latter, this unity within Marx's intellectual enterprise is determined by his discovery of alienation as the fundamental aspect of his critique of capitalist society. In this sense, this tradition of unorthodox Marxism stresses the importance of the Hegelian influence on Marx's thought for understanding the critical nature of his work. Hence, these authors tend to adopt as a strategy the return to both Hegel and the young Marx, in order to recover the critical force that resides in *Capital*.

Writing in the twenty-first century, it is more than fair to say that this debate has been settled both from a theoretical and textual point of view.<sup>19</sup> The existence of an inner unity underlying the different phases of Marx's intellectual project is now part of the 'ABC of Marxism'. Yet this consensus

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18 The *locus classicus* of this position within non-Soviet Marxism is Althusser 1969. The most comprehensive critical assessment of Althusser's work can still be found in an early work by Clarke 1980.

19 Marcus 1982, p. 140.

still begs two related questions. First, the precise meaning of ‘alienated labour’ in Marx’s thought. Second, the question of the difference through which that unity of Marx’s thought asserts itself.<sup>20</sup> The clarification of these questions is crucial for our purpose of tracing Marx’s discovery of the determinations of the revolutionary subjectivity of the proletariat. Or, to be more exact, the former task is synonymous with the latter. An emphasis on an abstract identity between ‘the young Marx’ and ‘the mature Marx’ leads to an obliteration of the differences that it is possible to find in the concrete development of Marx’s work and, therefore, to an external imposition of the young Marx’s analysis of alienation onto *Capital*.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, inasmuch as those differences imply a deepening of Marx’s investigations of the social determinations of alienated labour into an analysis of the particular forms that this alienation takes, of their movement – i.e. their inner connection – and of their contradictory historical development into their own annihilation, those readings risk depriving the critique of political economy of its concrete revolutionary power. The key to avoiding these shortcomings consists, as Levin suggests,<sup>22</sup> in inverting the reading strategy of most defenders of the ‘continuity thesis’. That is, instead of trying to demonstrate the presence in *Capital* of the themes developed in the *Paris Manuscripts*,<sup>23</sup> it is necessary to assess the early texts in light of the mature form in which Marx presented those very same insights. Only in this way is it possible to grasp both the merits and the *limitations* of Marx’s early critique of political economy.

In this regard, I think that the very form of Marx’s investigation (i.e. the method utilised in this first critical encounter with political economy) constitutes the main limitation to be found in the *Manuscripts*. Marx’s critical appropriation of the critical power of the dialectical method had not fully developed at this stage and he was still under the influence of Feuerbach’s transformative criticism.<sup>24</sup> In the *Manuscripts*, Marx attempted to do with political eco-

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20 Marcus 1982, p. 141. Clarke develops a useful critical assessment of the shortcomings of both orthodox and heterodox readings of Marx’s analysis of alienated labour in the *Paris Manuscripts* (Clarke 1991a, pp. 70–8). A more recent concise overview and assessment of those debates on Marx’s concept of alienation can be found in Musto 2010c. In the last 30 years, and with the controversy over the unity in Marx’s thought broadly settled, the interest of Marxists has moved away from his early discussion of alienated labour into his ‘mature’ notion of fetishism in *Capital*. See, however, Sayer 2011.

21 See, for instance, Elliot 1979; Walton 1972.

22 Levin 1997, pp. 63–4.

23 Cf. Avineri 1993.

24 See O’Malley 1970, pp. xxviii–xxxii; Avineri 1993, p. 10; Breckman 1999. Colletti, however,

nomy what he had previously done with Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* (and what Feuerbach had done with religion). That is, whereas in 1843 he applied the transformative method to the theorists of the political forms of bourgeois society, in 1844 he applied it to the scientific representations of economic forms.

Basically, Marx's transformative method involves four interrelated moments. First, the denunciation of the hypostasis whereby the forms of social objectivity are presented by theory as self-subsistent and actually determining the life of the human individual, who becomes determined as the predicate of those social institutions turned into the subjects of social life. Secondly, the refutation of the claims of those theories by referring all forms of autonomised social objectivity back to their origin in the practical life of the human being, that is, understanding the former as forms of alienated objectification of specifically human attributes, capacities and relations. Thirdly, the exposure of the contradictions that arise in theory for its naturalisation of this inversion between subject and predicate. Finally, the recognition that those theories are not simply false in the sense of offering an inaccurate characterisation of social life, but that both their conceptual inversion of subject and predicate and their internal contradictions are uncritical expressions of real inversions and contradictions existing in society.

What is important to note is that, in this approach, the motion of social forms themselves is not engaged with. Transformative criticism of capitalist society develops through the (textual) analysis of the theories of those authors who, within the limits of their bourgeois horizon, took the scientific comprehension of the former to its highest possible development. But there is no independent study of the movement of social forms themselves. Hence, the object under critique (capital or alienated labour) can only be grasped as an undifferentiated totality whose historical 'laws of motion' are not subject to investigation. In fact, as Markus suggests,<sup>25</sup> at times Marx gives the impression that the whole enterprise of offering an alternative critical presentation of the concrete forms

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warns the reader of his edition of Marx's *Early Writings* that the influence of Feuerbach should not be overstated, since the theme of the inversion between subject and predicate 'is in fact one of the most profound and ancient themes in philosophical history' (1992, pp. 23–4). Still, Colletti himself concedes that it was a contribution of Feuerbach to develop that theme in the specific context of the critique of Hegel. Moreover, what is relevant for my argument is not the intellectual lineage of the method of transformative criticism, but the fact that Marx resorted to it. Another author who casts doubt over the alleged influence of Feuerbach is Teeple (1984, pp. 47–8). But, again, he does not deny that the method of inversion of subject and predicate plays a part in Marx's critique of Hegel.

25 Marcus 1980, p. 82; and 1982, pp. 141–2.

of motion through which alienated social life develops is doomed from its very beginning. Especially in the first pages of the *Manuscripts*, the tone of his presentation seems to equate such a project with a complicit attitude towards these alienated forms of social life. Yet we cannot generalise this to the whole of the *Manuscripts*. As we will see, it is one of Marx's scientific results in this text to reach the conclusion that not only does such an alternative account not involve an uncritical stance towards capital, but it is also the necessary form to discover the ways in which to transcend it. Without this mediation, the scientific critique of capital remains too general and abstract and, hence, impotent to develop into conscious revolutionary action.

Hence the crucial importance of the question of the methodological limitations of the *Manuscripts*, which impinge on the rest of the exposition and, therefore, on Marx's investigation of the social determinations of the revolutionary subjectivity of the proletariat. In fact, Marx's awareness of this problem acted as a trigger for the direction that his subsequent research would take: the self-clarification regarding the adequate form of critical scientific knowledge and the positive (dialectical) exposition of the determinations of the totality of capitalist social forms. Retrospectively, one can say, paraphrasing the mature Marx, that his utilisation of Feuerbachian transformative criticism proved helpful in order to 'discover by analysis the earthly kernel of political economy' (alienated labour). However, this method proved impotent to 'develop from the actual, given relations of life the forms in which these have been apotheosized'.<sup>26</sup> In order to substantiate this claim, let us move to the concrete examination of Marx's discussion of the determinations of alienated labour.

As already noted, Marx does not take as his starting point the economic forms of capitalist society themselves, but instead engages with the *categories and (external) relations* through which political economy represents them.<sup>27</sup> Thus the first part of the first manuscript is devoted to an unoriginal exposition of the theories of political economy in their own terms, showing the antinomies that arise according to the very same 'laws of movement of private property'.<sup>28</sup> On the one hand, political economy finds in labour the 'subjective essence of private property', which is thus turned into the principle of this specifically modern science.<sup>29</sup> On the other, the autonomous movement of private property it postulates results in the degradation and misery of the worker, the

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26 Marx 1976g, p. 494.

27 Iñigo Carrera 2013, pp. 44–5.

28 Marcus 1980, p. 81.

29 Marx 1992a, p. 341.



material bearer of that principle. Even when the wealth of society is increasing, the poverty of the worker does so too, in relative if not absolute terms. Moreover, every progress in the productivity of labour is also turned against the worker: its outcome is not the creation of disposable time for her/his 'spiritual' development, but an expansion of the amount of manual work she/he performs. The introduction of machinery, through which this increase of productivity takes place, also has the effect of deskilling the capacities of the labourer.<sup>30</sup> In brief, political economy, as 'private property become conscious for itself ... modern industry as self', postulates at the same time the affirmation and denial of the human being.<sup>31</sup> As Marx himself tells us at the beginning of the section on alienated labour, it is by advancing through the concepts of political economy taken as given that he arrives at this contradiction:

We have started out from the premises of political economy. We accepted its language and its laws ... From political economy itself, using its own words, we have shown that the worker sinks to the level of a commodity, and moreover the most wretched commodity of all; that the misery of the worker is in inverse proportion to the power and volume of his production.<sup>32</sup>

Since political economy 'proceeds from the fact of private property', it just unconsciously expresses this contradiction without actually 'explaining it'.<sup>33</sup> Through the path consisting in the development of the concepts of political economy, Marx was able to discover the foundation of this contradiction in the character of productive activity under the specific capitalist form, namely, in *alienated labour*. The objectivity in which the subjective powers of the worker are realised is turned into an alien power that dominates the producer herself/himself. This, says Marx, is the reason behind the autonomous movement of private property that results in the mutilation of the worker's subjectivity:

All these consequences contained in this characteristic, that the worker is related to the *product of his labour* as to an *alien* object ... The externalization [*Entäusserung*] of the worker in his product means not only that his labour becomes an object, an *external* existence, but that it exists *out-*

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30 Marx 1992a, pp. 285–9.

31 Marx 1992a, p. 341.

32 Marx 1992a, p. 322.

33 Ibid.

*side him*, independently of him and alien to him, and begins to confront him as an autonomous power; that the life which he has bestowed on the object confronts him as hostile and alien.<sup>34</sup>

Two important remarks are in order in light of the previous quote. In the first place, as Clarke remarks, it is clear that this alienation of the worker's productive powers as attributes of the product of labour does not refer either to an ideological or psychological problem of false consciousness on the part of the labourer,<sup>35</sup> or to her/his subjective experience of indifference towards the work she/he is doing<sup>36</sup> – although this is likely to be the case as a concrete manifestation of alienated labour. Nor does it refer to the fact that the labourer has to subordinate the exercise of her/his consciousness and will in the production process to the direct authority of the capitalist who, in turn, expropriates the product of the former's labour.<sup>37</sup> The alienation of the productive activity of the labourer refers to *a real inversion between subject and object*, where the latter dominates the former. In order to make this point clear, it is important to note that, for Marx, this alienation also reaches the capitalist. The alienation inherent in the capitalist social form of human life involves, as I shall comment on below, the realisation of the human species-being itself – i.e. productive activity – in the form of an alien and impersonal power, the power of a thing. And this includes the non-labourer too. This is why Marx states at the end of the first manuscript that 'everything which appears for the worker as an *activity of alienation, of estrangement*, appears for the non-worker as a *state of alienation, of estrangement*'.<sup>38</sup> As much as the labourer, the capitalist also actualises her/his human species-being. However, she/he does so only in the form of the direct coercive control over the productive activity of the labourer in the alienated name of her/his capital. Therefore, her/his conscious life activity does not participate *directly* in the *active* transformation of the objective world. Nonetheless, in this process the capitalist does not act freely. She/he only acts as *the immediate personification of the human powers incarnated as attributes of the product of labour which dominates the producer*. Hence, she/he is alienated too, but this alienation is expressed in the capitalist as a *state* instead of as an *activity*. In other words, the realisation of the activity of the labourer under the

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34 Marx 1992a, p. 324.

35 Clarke 1991a, p. 75.

36 As in De Angelis's reading (1995).

37 Maguire 1972, p. 67; Mandel 1971.

38 Marx 1992b, p. 334.

direct 'coercion and yoke of another man'<sup>39</sup> is a concrete form of an essentially inverted mode of existence of humanity's life activity. In the words of Marx:

So through estranged labour man not only produces his relationship to the object and to the act of production as alien and hostile powers; he also produces the relationship in which other men stand to his production and product, and the relationship in which he stands to these other men.<sup>40</sup>

And this leads to the second remark: now there can be no doubt that for Marx *alienated labour* (understood as this real inversion between the producer and the product) is the defining characteristic of the specific form of labour under capitalist social relations of production.<sup>41</sup> This becomes evident in the section on rent of the first manuscript, with the analysis of feudal landed property and its necessary transition into capitalist private property. There Marx contrasts the command over the human productive power of the serf as a personal attribute of the feudal lord (and hence as the *direct* or *personal* political domination of the former by the latter), with the command over the human capacities of the free worker as an *impersonal*, *objective* attribute of the product of labour in the form of capital, which, as stated above, dominates both the producer and the non-producer:

It is inevitable that this appearance should be abolished and that landed property, which is the root of private property, should be drawn entirely into the orbit of private property and become a commodity; that the rule of the property owner should appear as the naked rule of private property, of capital, divested of all political tincture ... Finally, it is inevitable under these conditions of competition that landed property, in the form of capital, should manifest its domination both over the working class and over the property owners themselves, inasmuch as the laws of the movement of private property are either ruining them or raising them. In this way the medieval saying *nulle terre sans seigneur* gives way to the modern saying *l'argent n'a pas de maître*, which is an expression of the complete domination of dead matter over men.<sup>42</sup>

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39 Marx 1992b, p. 331.

40 Ibid.

41 A point that cannot be grasped if alienated labour is seen as an unmediated expression of the direct domination of the labourer by the capitalist in the process of production, as happens with the orthodox approach. On this issue, see Clarke 1991a, p. 75.

42 Marx 1992b, p. 319.

So far, then, I have followed Marx's discovery of alienated labour as the concealed foundation of political economy with emphasis on the relation of the worker to the product of her/his labour as an autonomous power. However, this initial expression of alienated labour constitutes only the first of its four determinations. From this initial relation, Marx goes on to describe further developments of this alienation in the relation of the human being to her/his own productive activity (since the alien character of the product of labour cannot but be the outcome of the alien – and hence, forced – character of the productive activity itself); to her/his very species-being (since conscious productive activity is what distinguishes human life from animal life); and to other human beings (since the relation of the human individual to her/his own activity also reveals her/his relation to the activity of other human beings). In all these other forms, the content of the first determination is maintained: these relations take the form of hostile potencies which dominate the human individual. Marx's analysis of the third determination of alienated labour is particularly remarkable since, through its exposition, he presents for the first time the general determinations of human life from his materialist perspective; a conception which would remain basically unaltered throughout the rest of his works, namely, the specific determination of the human being as a *productive* subject or of human individuality as an expression and mode of development of her/his *productive subjectivity*.<sup>43</sup>

### **The Historicity of the Social Relations of Production and the Determination of Communism as the Supersession of Alienated Labour**

The importance and centrality of Marx's discovery of the specific determination of the human being in its productive subjectivity cannot be overestimated. For what is at stake in this insight *is precisely the uncovering of the material foundation from which the revolutionary powers of the proletariat must spring*. Hence, although through this discussion Marx seems to move far away from the concrete question he was trying to answer – i.e. the necessary form of the

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43 The exposition of the generic determinations of the labour process in Chapter 7 of *Capital*, Volume 1 (Marx 1976g, pp. 283–90) does not involve any substantive change in comparison with the discussion of the human species-being in the *Manuscripts*. In both cases, the main point is the same: it is the mediation of individual consumption by labour or conscious life activity that distinguishes the human form of the appropriation of nature from its animal form.

revolutionary political action of the working class – he actually never lost contact with that immediate problematic. From the methodological perspective of his mature works, one can easily make sense of the role of these reflections. In a nutshell, it seems plausible to read Marx as engaged in the ‘analytical moment’ of the research process (the movement from the ‘concrete’ to the ‘abstract’, in his later terminology). In other words, he was attempting to grasp the more abstract forms that were behind that immediate concrete form that triggered his whole intellectual endeavour, i.e. the will to social transformation of the proletariat.

Now, this general material content cannot by itself account for the social necessity of the proletariat’s revolutionary subjectivity. The relation between the latter and the former is not immediate. To put it simply, the mere fact of being the direct producers whose productive activity – the key mediator in the production of human life – is alienated does not constitute the foundation of the capacity of the workers to abolish alienated labour, that is, of their determination as a revolutionary class.<sup>44</sup> Or, better stated, I shall argue that this fact constitutes the basis for the revolutionary subjectivity of the working class *only with the mediation of the material mutations in their subjectivity* as such direct producers that the historical movement of alienated labour brings about.<sup>45</sup> In fact, the crux of the matter resides precisely in the mediations that make the radical transformation of the mode of development of human productive activity take the form of the revolutionary action of the working class. Evidently, Marx would not solve this question thoroughly in the *Paris Manuscripts*. However, this text is full of interesting insights that, retrospectively, show how Marx was moving in that direction.

The reconstruction of the exposition in the *Manuscripts* reveals that what Marx offers in this text up to this stage is a description of what he discovered as the hidden foundation of the independent movement of private property, i.e. alienated labour. However, it is clear that it is not sufficient for an investigation of the real nature of capitalist society to claim that human subjectivity is realised in this alienated form and to describe the characteristics of this mode of existence of humanity. A real explanation must include an account of *how* and *why* labour becomes alienated. Aware of this situation, Marx poses the question in the following way towards the end of the first manuscript:

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44 In this respect, see my discussion of Arthur 1986 below.

45 To put it in the ‘mature’ terminology of *Capital*, I shall show that the determination of the working class as a revolutionary subject is not an expression of the *formal* subsumption of labour to capital, but of the *real* subsumption; more concretely, of the productive subjectivity of the latter’s most developed form as large-scale industry.

We have taken the *estrangement of labour*, its *alienation*, as a fact and we have analyzed that fact. How, we now ask, does *man* come to *alienate* his labour, to estrange it? How is this estrangement founded in the nature of human development?<sup>46</sup>

It is my view that the first question leads Marx to the investigation of the specific capitalist form in which social labour is organised, i.e. the social relations of production of capitalist society. The other side of this is the discovery of the general content of the form of social relations that can overcome alienated labour. In turn, the second question leads Marx to try to find the historical reason for the existence of capitalist society (its historical mission in the genesis of communism). Obviously, the answer to these two questions must lie at the very basis of the social determinations of revolutionary subjectivity. I shall argue that in trying to answer these two questions (especially in the case of the second one), Marx's investigation starts to become blurred. The limits of an exposition, which started with the categories and laws of political economy as a given presupposition, become increasingly manifest.

Regarding the first question, it is clear that it is a necessary corollary of Marx's discussion of the determinations of the human species-being. For, although human productive powers are borne by each particular individual, the actualisation of these potentialities characterising the species – i.e. the realisation of the transformative powers of the human being – can only affirm itself through the organic unity of individual lives, through social life. Marx's discussion of scientific activity in the third manuscript amounts to nothing more than this.<sup>47</sup> It is a clear comment on the necessary social character of individual life activity or, seen the other way round, the necessity for the process of social metabolism to be realised through individual life processes.

It is above all necessary to avoid once more establishing 'society' as an abstraction over against the individual. The individual *is* the *social being*. His vital expression – even when it does not appear in the direct form of a communal expression, conceived in association with other men – is therefore an expression and confirmation of *social life*. Man's individual and species-life are not two *distinct things* ...<sup>48</sup>

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46 Marx 1992b, p. 281.

47 See Marx 1992b, p. 350.

48 Ibid.

In other words, the realisation of the human species-being (and so the development of human productive subjectivity) necessarily takes concrete form in the *social relations of production*, i.e. in the concrete historical form through which society organises the reproduction of its life. Hence, an alienated mode of existence of the human species-being can only have its foundation in the specific historical form of the social relations of production. Consequently, one would expect Marx to proceed to the exposition of the specificity of the capitalist mode of production in order to clarify the source of alienated labour. Unfortunately, this is not the path he follows. Instead, he starts to consider communism as the historical negation of capitalist society and as the supersession of alienated labour. Yet implicit in his discussion of communism lies hidden the specific nature of capitalist relations of production as its opposite. For if Marx considers communism as the becoming fully social of the human individual, it is clear that he is contrasting this unity between the individual and the social character of human activity with their separation in bourgeois society – that is, with the private character taken by social labour. Moreover, as Clarke notes,<sup>49</sup> even if this appears ambiguously in the *Paris Manuscripts*, it is discussed explicitly in the *Comments on James Mill*. In this text, Marx focused on the development of the connection between alienated labour and money. In a nutshell, he dealt with money as the concrete material incarnation of the social powers of alienated labour. And although this idea appears in the *Paris Manuscripts* as well, the importance of the *Comments* is that they present in a clearer form the connection between alienated labour and the most abstract economic forms of capital: the value form and the money form.

Why must private property finish up in money? Because as a social animal man must finish up in *exchange* and exchange – given the premise of private property being presupposed – must finish up in *value*. For the mediating movement of man engaged in exchange is not a social, human movement, it is not a *human relationship*: it is the *abstract relationship* of private property to private property, and this *abstract* relation is the *value* which acquires a real existence as value only in the form of *money*.<sup>50</sup>

In turn, this investigation leads Marx to posit in a more explicit form the question of the specificity of capitalist social relations of production. Thus, he shows very clearly that the ground of alienated labour lies in the fact that the repro-

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49 Clarke 1991a, p. 75.

50 Marx 1992c, p. 261.

duction of human life is organised through the production and exchange of commodities. In other words, he shows that labour becomes alienated because social labour takes the form of its opposite: private and independent labour. Obviously, this is the terminology of *Capital*. In this earlier text, he still uses a somewhat philosophical language and speaks of the contradictory existence of universal – ‘the community’ – and particular – ‘the human individual’. Thus Marx states:

The process of *exchange* both of human activities in the course of production and of *human products* is equal to the species-activity and the species-spirit, whose real, conscious and authentic existence consists in *social activity* and *social enjoyment*. Since the essence of man is the *true community* of man, men, by activating their own essence, produce, create this *human community*, the social being which is no abstract, universal power standing over against the solitary individual, but is the essence of every individual, his own activity, his own life, his own spirit, his own wealth. Therefore, this *true community* does not come into being as the product of reflection but it arises out of the *need* and *egoism* of individuals, i.e. it arises directly from their own activity.<sup>51</sup>

In brief, already at that time Marx discovered that the alienation of human powers as attributes of capital springs from the private form of social production or, what is the same, from the commodity form of social relations.<sup>52</sup> However, neither in the *Manuscripts* nor in the *Comments* does Marx develop this profound insight into the direction which, on its own terms, it demanded, namely, the establishing of the connection between the private character of labour and all the different alienated economic forms which political economy represented with its categories and, more importantly, their historical movement towards their own dissolution through the revolutionary action of the proletariat. Without this link, the critique was condemned to remain too abstract and external. Nevertheless, I think that Marx himself was aware of this necessity and, one may say, took it as a sort of work plan.<sup>53</sup>

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51 Marx 1992c, p. 265.

52 Private property, the general juridical form of this alienation, is always conceived of by Marx as the consequence of private (hence, alienated) labour.

53 Towards the end of the first manuscript, he states: ‘Just as we have arrived at the concept of *private property* through an *analysis* of the concept of *estranged, alienated labour*, so with the help of these two factors it is possible to evolve all economic *categories*, and in



On the other hand, this discovery of the specificity of capitalist social relations made Marx turn his attention to the form of the social life process that negates the alienation immanent in capitalist social forms, i.e. communism. With his discussion of communism as the 'positive supersession of private property', Marx was making an important step forward in the concretisation of the nature of the determinations of the complete human emancipation that he had previously counterposed to the merely political emancipation demanded by the Young Hegelians. In particular, in the *Manuscripts* the content of the supersession of modern society is no longer posited simply in terms of its political forms (true democracy as the abolition of the separation between state and civil society, or *citoyen* and bourgeois), but becomes, in its simplest determination, essentially material/productive (communism or the conscious universal co-operation between the associated producers).

What is, then, according to Marx, the material content of the communist transformation of social life? In the *Manuscripts*, Marx presents his views on the specific determinations of communist social forms after the critical account of the content of communism by previous socialist thinkers. His first statement in this regard is the following:

*Communism* is the *positive* supersession of *private property* as *human self-estrangement*, and hence the true *appropriation* of the *human* essence through and for man; it is the complete restoration of man to himself as a *social*, i.e. human, being, a restoration which has become conscious and which takes place within the entire wealth of previous periods of development ... it is the *genuine* resolution of the conflict between man and nature, and between man and man, the true resolution of the conflict between existence and being, between objectification and self-affirmation, between freedom and necessity, between the individual and the species. It is the solution to the riddle of history and it knows itself to be the solution.<sup>54</sup>

Briefly put, Marx is implying that the production of communism involves the supersession of alienated labour and the full realisation of the human species-being.<sup>55</sup> This is quite a strong statement, so it deserves close scrutiny. Let us

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each of these categories, e.g., trade, competition, capital, money, we shall identify only a *particular* and *developed* expression of these basic constituents' (Marx 1992b, p. 333).

54 Marx 1992b, p. 348.

55 Passages like the one just quoted, when read outside the context of Marx's overall work,

then try to disentangle the meaning of Marx's dense quotation. I have already mentioned that Marx saw the specifically human form of the natural life process in the fact that human beings regulate their process of metabolism through consciousness. That is, they appropriate the objective powers of the environment through the organisation of the externalisation of their own objective, socially developed forces by means of thought, thus giving their life process the form of productive activity, of a labour process. Through this process of appropriation of the objective world, human beings expand their own product-

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could give the impression that he sees the human essence as a generic content (an abstractly free and creative human subjectivity) that is realised in defective appearances until showing itself immediately as such under communism. The use of phrases like 'restoration of man' can certainly lead to such a reading. Marx's immediate identification of the human individual as a free being (see Marx 1992b, p. 328) – simply by virtue of having conscious life activity – could also be misleading (as accurately noted by Ollman 1971, p. 112). But it is clear from Marx's overall argument that human productive subjectivity (i.e. the human species-being) only exists and develops (and, therefore, is produced and reproduced) *in and through* its historically determined social forms, there being absolutely no exteriority between them. 'Really' free subjectivity is not an abstract human essence that 'returns to itself' after ridding itself of the limitations imposed by 'inhuman' social forms, but a concrete form that the *materiality* of human individuality acquires in the course of its historical process of development when becoming *fully* conscious. Indeed, under those circumstances the human individual embodies the potentiality consciously to affirm her/his *historically achieved* material powers of the species in their plenitude, i.e. universally. On the other hand, it is self-evident (but a triviality) that the concrete form of freedom acquired by human life in history must be a potentiality intrinsic to its species-determination, in the same way that it is a real material potentiality of the caterpillar to become a butterfly. The recognition of this does not amount to any sort of abstract, ahistorical 'essentialism'. On the other hand, however, this does not make human freedom the content or substance striving for realisation in the course of history. The latter, essentially Hegelian, view is precisely the approach ridiculed by Marx and Engels in their critique of the Young Hegelians in *The German Ideology* (see especially their critique of Stirner in Marx and Engels 1976a, p. 254). And yet, as we shall see in the second part of the book, one could argue that it is precisely that view that, implicitly or explicitly, underlies most contemporary Marxist approaches to the determinations of revolutionary subjectivity, seen as the expression of the affirmation of an abstractly free humanity ridding itself of capitalist forms of social mediation, the opposite of its capital-determined, alienated form of existence. See Clarke for a critique of those approaches in relation to the *Paris Manuscripts* (1991a, pp. 64–6). In terms of readings of *Capital*, the Marxist-Humanist current associated with Dunayevskaya is particularly expressive of this 'materialist' appropriation of the Hegelian dialectic of freedom as the substance of human history and, hence, of revolutionary subjectivity (see Dunayevskaya 1988 and 1989, Chapters 1 and 2; see also the excellent critique of this aspect of Dunayevskaya's thought by Paul Mattick 1958).

ive powers and, therefore, their capacity to regulate the metabolic 'dialogue with nature' by means of conscious activity. Hence, Marx's reference to the 'strife between existence and essence' can only mean that, before the advent of communism, the development of that human potentiality to act consciously and universally upon nature takes the concrete form of its own negation. In pre-capitalist social forms, this negation is the result of the restriction of the manifestation of human life within particularistic boundaries. Modern capitalist society develops and mobilises the universality of human powers, but only to negate their immediate manifestation as such, through their inversion as powers borne by the product of labour. As the negation of this negation, communism involves giving both 'subjective and objective nature' a 'form adequate to the *human* being'.<sup>56</sup> Hence a first determination of communism must be the development of productive subjectivity in a form adequate to the display of the universality of its 'mastery over natural forces, of his own nature as well of those of so-called "Nature";<sup>57</sup> i.e. as directly taking the form of the universal 'self-confirmation' of human productive powers in and through the subjectivity of each human individual.

On the other hand, we have seen that, according to Marx, the affirmation of human productive powers and, therefore, the development of productive consciousness, can only assert itself through the integration of the individual processes of metabolism into a process of social metabolism, that is, through social productive co-operation. In other words, the human being is, by its very nature, a *social* being. This means that the development of that potential universality of productive subjectivity can only take concrete form through the universality of social relations. Again, 'private property' develops this universal sociability but only in the form of estrangement, that is, as universal relations of atomisation and separation between human beings. Communism, as the determinate negation of the rule of private property, can only mean the positing of this universal sociability as a direct, conscious determination of social existence.

The fact that in the third manuscript Marx takes stock with Hegel's reduction of human (productive) subjectivity to knowing self-consciousness and, in particular, with the abstraction 'absolute knowing' as the *speculative* identity of thought and being, should not blind us to the centrality of consciousness to the social transformation which brings about the communist constitution of social life. If 'it is true that thought and being are *distinct*, but at the same

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56 Marx 1992b, p. 391.

57 Marx 1993, p. 488.

time they are in unity with one other';<sup>58</sup> this can only imply that the form of human subjectivity that results from the immediate positing of the human individual as a social being must involve the complete awareness of this necessarily social character of individual life. In a passage where Marx anticipates his well-known dictum that social existence determines social consciousness, he states:

As *species-consciousness* man confirms his real *social life* and merely repeats in thought his actual existence; conversely, *species-being* confirms itself in *species-consciousness* and exists for itself in its universality, as a thinking being.<sup>59</sup>

It is crucial to bear in mind Marx's emphasis on the human individual's consciousness of its own social determinations as a fundamental condition for the communist form of productive association. This is the reason why Marx states that not only is communism the solution to the riddle of history, but it also '*knows* itself to be this solution'. As a consequence of this, it is clear that the revolutionary subjectivity that produces the communist society must be the bearer of a consciousness that is fully aware of the socio-historical necessity of its action. *Revolutionary action is such for being a fully conscious action*. For the communist 'thinking consciousness',

The entire movement of history is therefore both the *actual* act of creation of communism – the birth of its empirical existence – and ... the *comprehended* and *known* movement of its *becoming*.<sup>60</sup>

In brief, Marx now clearly sees that the transcendence of this inverted social existence has its content in the transformation of the economic forms of society (although this obviously involves the transformation of the whole of social life). Thus he discovers the material content of the proletarian revolution and, therefore, of the form of social life that supersedes capital, i.e. communism, as the conscious, directly social productive association of individuals.

This leads us to the second question that follows from the determination of communism as the conscious realisation of the social being of the human individual. For it should be clear by now that the communist constitution of

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58 Marx 1992b, p. 351.

59 Marx 1992b, pp. 350–1.

60 Marx 1992b, p. 348.

social life involves a transformation of the forms of human subjectivity and, therefore, of the forms of human consciousness. Now the question arises as to the specific character of this revolutionary consciousness that becomes aware of the social necessity of its action. Is it just an immediate consciousness, which can discover the determinations of its social being through *mere* intuition or feeling? Or is it a mediated form of consciousness? And in this latter case, is it a scientific consciousness or a philosophical one? I shall give a more complete answer to this question during the course of this book. But from what has already been anticipated above regarding Marx's critique of philosophy as a developed expression of the alienated consciousness, it seems fair to narrow the question down to the dichotomy between seeing revolutionary consciousness as an expression of immediate intuition or as a scientifically mediated form of subjectivity. The following passage, I think, speaks quite eloquently in favour of the latter:

But natural science has intervened in and transformed human life all the more *practically* through the industry and has prepared the conditions for human emancipation, however much its immediate effect was to complete the process of dehumanization. Industry is the *real* historical relationship of nature, and hence of natural science, to man ... Natural science ... has already become – though in an estranged form – the basis of actual human life. The idea of *one* basis for life and another for *science* is from the very outset a lie.<sup>61</sup>

As Marx states very clearly, the scientific transformation of human life already happening under the rule of 'private property' constitutes the necessary preparation of the material basis for human emancipation. It is clear then that the consciousness that arises out of this new form of 'industry' in order to emancipate it from its alienated mode of existence must be a scientific one, since there 'cannot be a different basis for life and science'. This is why Marx is very explicit in recognising the progressive role of private property in the historical development of human productive subjectivity. Moreover, it is on these grounds that he criticises those crude, romantic versions of communism that, in light of the inhuman consequences of the alienated form of existence of the scientific appropriation of the powers of nature, want to negate 'the entire world of culture and civilisation', and to return to 'the *unnatural* simplicity of the *poor*, unrefined man who has no needs and who has not even reached the

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61 Marx 1992b, p. 355.

stage of private property, let alone gone beyond it'.<sup>62</sup> Needless to say, this has nothing to do with a positivistic technocratic utopia, built on the basis of the existing forms of natural-scientific consciousness. Quite to the contrary, Marx is very emphatic that the emancipation of humanity does not simply involve the de-subordination of natural science to the requirements of the alienated movement of private property, but also *the transformation of the very nature of scientific consciousness itself*. This new form of science, on the basis of which the revolutionary subjectivity will be able to achieve the communist transformation of society, Marx refers to as the 'human natural science, or the natural science of man,' or, simply, 'true human science'. In Marx's view, it will comprise the totality of what in its alienated form of existence appears as the different objects of distinct forms of science (the natural and the social), on the one hand; and as a purely theoretical activity, on the other, 'since true practice is the condition of a real and positive theory'.<sup>63</sup> Its basic principle, discovered in its general form by Feuerbach, consists in putting at the centre of the inquiry 'the social relation of "man to man"'.<sup>64</sup> Yet, as I shall argue, this basic principle as such would prove insufficient to give the revolutionary science its adequate form.<sup>65</sup>

### **The Determinations of the Revolutionary Subjectivity of the Proletariat and the Limits of the *Paris Manuscripts***

In the previous section, I left a question unanswered, namely, Marx's explanation of the necessity of alienation in human historical development. In other words, the issue at stake is the grounding of capital's historical *raison d'être* and, therefore, of its overcoming. Having shown how, for Marx, the realisation of the human species-being can only be the product of historical development, it is clear that he is not suggesting that it is a contingent and extrinsic tragedy imposed onto an otherwise eternally free human essence and that it is a matter of recovering a pure subjectivity oppressed by private property. The alienated existence of human subjectivity must play a determinate role in its develop-

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62 Marx 1992b, p. 346.

63 Marx 1992b, p. 364.

64 Marx 1992b, p. 381.

65 More concretely, following one of the key contributions of Iñigo Carrera (2014), I shall argue that the transformation at stake of the nature of science concerns its very form, i.e. its method. A 'true human science' can develop such a revolutionary content only by virtue of its *dialectical* form.

ment. Moreover, it is precisely the fulfilment of this role that has to constitute the necessary condition for its historical supersession. This is what links the future and the present so that the former is not just a utopian project but finds the conditions for its emergence immanent in the historical movement of bourgeois society. In this sense, for Marx freedom can only be the result of a 'self-superseding movement', which 'will in reality undergo a very difficult and protracted process' of social transformation.<sup>66</sup> In turn, this theme is immediately linked with the question of the determinations of the revolutionary subjectivity of the proletariat. For if the working class is the historical subject whose revolutionary action is to achieve the abolition of alienated labour, this can only mean that those conditions which private property engenders in the course of its development, and which generate the necessity of its own dissolution as a form of existence of human subjectivity, are necessarily activated through the political action of the former.

I would like to argue that it is especially in this aspect of Marx's early critique that its abstract character is most strongly felt and the course of his exposition becomes increasingly blurred. As we shall see, in the *Manuscripts* Marx was unable to develop the mediations that connect the revolutionary transformation of the forms of social life required by the further development of the materiality of the human species-being with the political action of the workers.

Yet this does not mean that no evolution obtains with respect to Marx's previous formulation, which posed the question in terms of the realisation of philosophy. An expression of the novel insights developed can be read in Marx's critique of other socialist thinkers:

But the antithesis between *propertylessness* and *property* is still an indifferent antithesis, not grasped in its *active connection*, its *inner* relation, not yet grasped as a *contradiction*, as long as it is not understood as the antithesis between *labour* and *capital*.<sup>67</sup>

This passage can be taken as a kind of self-criticism of his previous views on social transformation. For the antithesis between lack of property and property is what he posited in the *Introduction to the Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right* as the ground for the revolutionary subjectivity of the proletariat. Since he showed that private property is only the juridical

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66 Marx 1992b, p. 365.

67 Marx 1992b, p. 345.

expression of alienated labour, it is clear that the overcoming of alienation can only spring from the abolition of the latter. Without the annihilation of the alienated character of productive activity, the juridical elimination of private property can only lead to another form of the reproduction of alienated labour, one in which

[t]he community is simply a community of *labour* and equality of *wages*, which are paid out by the communal capital, the *community* as the universal capitalist. Both sides of the relation are raised to an *imaginary* universality – *labour* as the category in which everyone is placed, and *capital* as the acknowledged universality and power of the community.<sup>68</sup>

On the other hand, by posing the question in terms of alienated labour, he eliminates the externality between the revolutionary subjectivity of the proletariat and capitalist social forms that characterised his previous formulation. That is, from an abstract negation of capital, revolution becomes its determinate negation. Whereas before he conceived of the proletariat as being excluded from the general social relation of modern society (private property) and founded his revolutionary role precisely in this social existence alienated from society (propertylessness), he now sees the worker as *within* the general social relation of bourgeois society (alienated labour or capital). So much so that in the second manuscript Marx shows that the inversion between subject and object is so real to the point of directly turning the conscious existence of the worker into a mode of existence of capital.

The worker is the subjective manifestation of the fact that capital is man completely lost to himself, just as capital is the objective manifestation of the fact that labour is man lost to himself. But the *worker* has the misfortune to be a *living* capital ...<sup>69</sup>

Instead of deriving the proletariat's revolutionary being from the universal exclusion from the specific, alienated social relations governing modern society (and therefore from some sort of pure subjectivity uninfected by private property), he came to derive it from the proletariat being the concentrated, active incarnation of the former. Hence, the externality between labour and capital is eliminated and they are now seen in their necessary, albeit contradictory,

68 Marx 1992b, pp. 346–7.

69 Marx 1992b, p. 335.



unity. It is this contradictory character, deriving from the fact that human productive subjectivity develops its powers as an attribute of its product that gives alienated labour its dynamic, self-moving character that drives it into its own dissolution. And Marx makes explicitly clear that the revolutionary movement can only derive its transformative powers from the historical movement of this alienated social existence.

It is easy to see how necessary it is for the whole revolutionary movement to find both its empirical and its theoretical basis in the movement of *private property* or, to be more exact, of the economy.<sup>70</sup>

Simply put, what this means is that the consciousness of the workers is a concrete form of the alienated consciousness. And this holds for both the forms of working class subjectivity that reproduce the movement of alienation and that which develops the historical powers necessary to abolish it, that is, *revolutionary consciousness*.

This crucial point is correctly highlighted by Mészáros's detailed study on the *Paris Manuscripts* when he states that the revolutionary consciousness is not a free, non-alienated consciousness, but a 'consciousness of being alienated'.<sup>71</sup> However, this insight is not argued on the grounds of the development of the concrete determinations of the alienated consciousness that make it become conscious of its own alienation. The reason he gives is purely formal and comes down to the fact that if the movement of the alienated consciousness did not produce the awareness of its own social existence, the conscious transformative action aiming at its transcendence would be impossible. Thus he states:

Were society an 'inert totality of alienation', nothing could possibly be done about it. Nor could there be any problem of alienation, or awareness of it, for if consciousness were the consciousness of this 'inert totality' it would be one with alienation ... not a consciousness that reveals and opposes – in however abstract a form – the alienated nature of this inert totality. Alienation is an inherently dynamic concept: a concept that necessarily implies change. Alienated activity not only produces 'alienated consciousness', but also the 'consciousness of being alienated'. This consciousness of alienation, in however form it might appear ... not

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70 Marx 1992b, p. 348.

71 Mészáros 1970, p. 181.

only contradicts the idea of an alienated inert totality, but also indicates the appearance of a *need* for the supersession of alienation.<sup>72</sup>

This is certainly true, but it is close to a truism. That is, once we correctly highlight that there is no 'outside' from which to dissolve this alienated social existence, and that this is a transitory, historical phenomenon that is bound to disappear, it is evident that it must be the movement of alienated activity itself that produces the antagonistic form of alienated consciousness capable of putting an end to alienation. The question is about the concrete forms in which this negation of the negation asserts itself. Thus stated, Mészáros's argument simply involves a purely logical necessity. Moreover, what is of interest here is the *concrete*, fully developed revolutionary consciousness of this alienated social existence and not one that opposes it in 'however abstract a form'.<sup>73</sup> This is not for any scholastic reasons but because this study searches for the determinations of the transformative action of the proletariat embodying the social powers that enable it to abolish alienated labour. Hence, I do not find satisfactory the only reference to the materiality of social life that this author puts forward in simply arguing that 'needs produce powers just as much as powers produce needs'.<sup>74</sup> For the central question remains unanswered: what are the concrete social determinations of the *materiality of the productive subjectivity of the labourers* that give those very same 'powers and needs' a conscious revolutionary form? No response to this crucial question can be found in Mészáros's reading of this early text. As a matter of fact, he ends up offering a *moral* basis for the necessity of transcending the alienated forms of bourgeois society. More problematically, he even states that after the abolition of alienation, not only does morality persist but so too does the legal form.<sup>75</sup>

Without entering into a detailed assessment of the merits and limitations of Mészáros's own account, let me just point out that, at least from the exegetic point of view, this grounding of the revolutionary subjectivity of the proletariat on a moral necessity is completely misguided. As matter of fact, Marx makes the explicit critique of moral consciousness as an uncritical form of the alienated consciousness. Thus he states:

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72 Ibid.

73 Ibid.

74 Ibid.

75 Mészáros 1970, pp. 186–9.

It is inherent in the very nature of estrangement that each sphere imposes on me a different and contrary standard: one standard for morality, one for political economy, and so on. This is because each of them is a particular estrangement of man and each is centred upon one particular area of estranged essential activity; each is related in an estranged way to the other ...<sup>76</sup>

Mészáros is aware of this Marxian critique of morality as an uncritical expression of alienation.<sup>77</sup> But he reads Marx as implying that what is wrong is not morality *per se* but the abstract, transcendental form of the moral argument. One, precisely, that abstracts from the material questions that political economy deals with. For him, the unalienated moral consciousness is that which, while still arguing in terms of moral evaluation, critically reflects upon those material questions of the concrete life activity of human beings, e.g. the nature of productive activity. Yet I think that the quotation is quite revealing as a critique of moral standards altogether as the basis for any action aiming to revolutionise the alienated conditions of social life.

Although Mészáros's recourse to a moral necessity as the ground for the revolutionary subjectivity of the proletariat is unacceptable, his inability to find a consistent account of its determinations in the *Manuscripts* is, to some extent, understandable. For one of the problems of this early text is precisely its lack of a rigorous exposition of those social determinations and their historical genesis through the unfolding of the contradictions of alienated social life. This does not imply that no reference to this problematic can be found. Certainly, as commented above, Marx was well aware of the need to address this question. But the problem resides in the unsatisfactory character of his attempt at an explanation, derived, in turn, from the limitations of Marx's own comprehension of the 'laws of motion' of alienated labour at that time.

What, then, is Marx's account of the necessity of alienated labour and its transcendence in the *Paris Manuscripts*? It is difficult to find a straightforward answer to this question, since Marx's own discussion is unclear and hesitant. Thus he seems to oscillate between different grounds for the workers' revolutionary subjectivity. Now, I would like to argue that behind this

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76 Marx 1992b, p. 362.

77 Mészáros 1970, p. 187. To be more exact, moral consciousness is the alienated consciousness of the commodity producer who, unaware of the social determinations of her/his life activity, sees her/his social being as an external force standing over and against her/his apparently independent individuality in the form of an 'ought to be'. See Iñigo Carrera 2007, pp. 64–5.

insufficiency of Marx's exposition we can find the methodological limitations of this early text. For a satisfactory account of this problematic would have required the deployment of the critical power of the dialectical method understood as the 'reproduction of the concrete by means of thought'. This is the method that Hegel deployed, albeit in a mystified form, in his *Science of Logic*. The critical appropriation of Hegel's discovery fully crystallised only some years later in Marx's life through the development of his 'mature' critique of political economy. Regarding the question of the abolition of alienated labour, Marx's appropriation of the insights developed by Hegel related more to the 'materialist inversion' of Hegel's account of the historicity of the forms of human subjectivity and their historical development through the process of self-alienation and its transcendence:<sup>78</sup> hence Marx's account of the reason to be of private property. In a quite Hegelian fashion, he grounds the necessity of alienation in a very abstract and general dialectic, as a kind of movement of engendering a determinate negation through the previous development of its opposite into its plenitude. What Hegel essentially sees in terms of an abstract mental labour, that is, as a movement of consciousness, Marx grasps in its reality as the historical movement of real, sensuous productive activity of human beings.<sup>79</sup> Yet he takes from Hegel's account the validity of the general form of the historical movement in the 'dialectic of negativity as the producing principle'.<sup>80</sup> Although in the *Phenomenology* 'the various forms of estrangement which occur are therefore merely different forms of consciousness and self-consciousness',<sup>81</sup> Hegel has the merit of conceiving

the self-creation of man as a process, objectification as loss of object [*Entgegenständlichung*], as alienation and as supersession of this alienation; that he therefore grasps the nature of *labour* and conceives objective man – true, because real man – as the result of his own labour.<sup>82</sup>

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78 And yet, I shall argue in the next chapter that, already in the *Paris Manuscripts* – more precisely, in the section discussing Hegel's *Logic* – Marx initiated the critical appropriation of the rational kernel of the dialectical method as developed by Hegel.

79 For a good discussion of this aspect of the young Marx's critique of Hegel, which avoids the misreading of existential and phenomenological Marxism, see the already cited work by Arthur (1986).

80 Marx 1992b, pp. 385–6.

81 Marx 1992b, p. 385.

82 Marx 1992b, p. 386.

It is this form of the Hegelian ‘dialectic of negativity’ that Marx uses to account for the necessity of the historical dynamic of alienation and its supersession. For he seems to suggest that private property is necessary insofar as the human species-being, in order to develop the plenitude of its powers to objectify itself, must first negate itself as a fully conscious social productive activity, thus affirming itself as alienated, unconsciously social activity. In turn, only after the expansion and generalisation of private labour – hence, of private property – and the consequent plenitude of alienation, can the moment of negation of the negation emerge.

The *real, active* relation of man to himself as a species-being, or the realization of himself as a real species-being, i.e. as a human being, is only possible if he really employs all his *species-powers* – which again is only possible through the cooperation of mankind and as a result of history – and treats them as objects, which is at first only possible in the form of estrangement.<sup>83</sup>

We can see that the movement is presented as following an abstract and generic ‘dialectical’ necessity. This is not necessarily wrong as a formal description of the movement of the self-production of humanity, but it is precisely its generality that makes it insufficient to account for the concrete determinations that we are searching for. In other words, this general dialectic lacks any concrete specificity regarding the form of motion of the annihilation of capital through the revolutionary action of the working class.<sup>84</sup> This led Marx to offer several grounds for the proletariat’s revolutionary subjectivity. The reason for this is that every extreme manifestation of the alienated social existence (whether progressive or not) can be seen as a symptom of that state of plenitude and could therefore fit into that general scheme as the condition for the emergence of the revolutionary powers of the workers. One instance of this can be found in the passages I have already referred to regarding Marx’s views on a ‘truly human science’. There he argues that since the universal alienation in the object leads to the development of ‘industry’ and the consequent coming into being of the complete humanisation of nature, it must engender the scientific consciousness which eventually frees itself from all traces of its alienated

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83 Ibid.

84 One can say that in the *Manuscripts* Marx is guilty of the charges made by Dühring of externally imposing the negation of the negation on history. Engels correctly points out why this is not the case of *Capital*. See Engels 1975, pp. 107–12.

existence through the practical abolition of private property.<sup>85</sup> That is, it is the generalisation and complete intensification of inhumanity that produces the constitution of real humanity. As he states some pages later in the section called *Money*:

Only through developed industry, i.e. through the mediation of private property, does the ontological essence of human passion come into being, both in its totality and in its humanity; the science of man is therefore itself a product of the self-formation of man through practical activity.<sup>86</sup>

In another instance, he poses this movement as pertaining to the development of the totality of the physical and intellectual senses of the human being.<sup>87</sup> These can develop in a truly human form only after acquiring an alienated mode of existence whose synthetic expression is their one-sided subordination to the sense of having. Again we see the general dialectic at work:

Therefore *all* the physical and intellectual senses have been replaced by the simple estrangement of *all* the senses – the sense of *having*. So that it might give birth to its inner wealth, human nature had to be reduced to this absolute poverty.<sup>88</sup>

Marx, somehow idealistically, also fits the ‘self-development of communist consciousness’ into this general scheme. In his critical account of the different forms of communist consciousness, he states that ‘the supersession [*Aufhebung*] of self-estrangement follows the same course as self-estrangement’.<sup>89</sup> He seems to be arguing that, in order to develop itself, truly communist consciousness must first negate itself as the real determinate negation of private property by taking some undeveloped form. In the form of ‘crude communism’, the political programme put forward would not lead to the abolition of private property, but to its generalisation.<sup>90</sup> This ‘first positive abolition of private property’ is partially negated by those forms of communistic consciousness that, although clear about the necessity to abolish private property (instead of equalising its distribution) as the form of superseding human self-estrangement,

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85 Marx 1992b, p. 355.

86 Marx 1992b, p. 375.

87 Marx 1992b, pp. 351–4.

88 Marx 1992b, p. 352.

89 Marx 1992b, p. 345.

90 Marx 1992b, p. 346.

are 'still held captive and contaminated by private property'.<sup>91</sup> Finally, communist 'thinking consciousness' develops the plenitude of its critical powers completely to abolish alienated labour. In this form, it no longer represents the abstract negation of private property, but its determinate negation and therefore its truly positive supersession.<sup>92</sup>

Marx thus alternates between different foundations for the social necessity of abolishing alienated labour without offering a solid ground for this process of social transformation. Moreover, there is no account of the different stages through which alienated social development must pass before attaining its communistic form, or of the role of the political action of the workers – the class struggle – in that contradictory process. Marx just states the necessity of the starting point and the finishing line. But he does not demonstrate the genesis of either of them. What is worse, there is no real mediation between that material ground for the abolition of private property and the subjectivity of the labourers. The need for such mediation is correctly identified by Arthur:

[T]here are two levels of necessity for the overthrow of private property: (a) abstractly, there is the need to restore man to himself subsequent to the supersession of the system of estrangement; (b) concretely, there is the process whereby capital in its own development leaves the proletariat with no other option than to take the struggle against alienation to its conclusion through identifying the problem as capital, itself the product, expression and mediation of alienated labour.<sup>93</sup>

The key, as far as revolutionary subjectivity is concerned, is, precisely, the mediation between these two points. In the *Manuscripts*, the only connection in this regard is that condition (a) refers to the development of productive subjectivity and, regarding point (b), that the proletarians are the class of direct producers. Thus the emancipatory mission of the proletariat is derived from their being the active incarnation of the estranged relation to productive activity which lies at the basis of all forms of alienated social existence due to the 'ontological centrality' of labour in the constitution of social being.

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91 Marx 1992b, pp. 347–8.

92 Marx 1992b, p. 348.

93 Arthur 1986, p. 40.

It further follows from the relation of estranged labour to private property that the emancipation of society from private property, etc., from servitude, is expressed in the *political* form of the *emancipation of the workers*. This is not because it is only a question of their emancipation, but because in their emancipation is contained universal human emancipation. The reason for this universality is that the whole of human servitude is involved in the relation of the worker to production, and all relations of servitude are nothing but modifications and consequences of this relation.<sup>94</sup>

Arthur is right in pointing out that we should not read Marx as implying that the identification of the proletariat as the 'class of the future' is based on its universal suffering, as a 'matter of a sympathetic identification with their problems'.<sup>95</sup> However, I disagree with this commentator's view that Marx's grounding of the revolutionary nature of the proletariat in its 'strategic position in the economic order' where productive activity is the 'key social mediator', suffices as an explanation of the social determinations of the revolutionary subjectivity. This explanation must include the positive exposition about the forms of capital's development that produce in the workers not only the will to social transformation but also the material powers to achieve it. And it is this latter investigation that is missing in the *Manuscripts*. What is more, the materiality of the conditions generating Arthur's 'abstract necessity (a)' seems to stand in blatant contradiction to the barbaric materiality of the life conditions of the workers that Marx described to be the result of the movement of private property. Hence, it is not clear how that 'abstract level of necessity for the overthrow of private property' can be activated concretely in the subjectivity of the workers. In other words, how to reconcile that revolutionary scientific consciousness that discovers the necessity to abolish capital with the brutalised state to which the workers are condemned by the division of labour of manufacture? How to turn the degradation of the physical and intellectual senses of the workers into that fully developed human sensuousness that Marx claimed to be a necessary prerequisite for the emergence of communism? As Markus points out,

[T]here seems to be no imaginable practico-political strategy, able to bridge this gap and to render the initial contact between theory and

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94 Marx 1992b, p. 333.

95 Arthur 1986, p. 145.



practice, between the actual situation of the revolutionary subjects and the radical content of the theory possible.<sup>96</sup>

No wonder, then, that in attempting to offer this mediation, Marx only deploys again that generic dialectic of generation through extreme negation of the previous stage. Without a detailed positive account of the laws of motion of alienated labour and the determinations of the political action of the workers as personifications of the former, no significant guide to action can be drawn from revolutionary theory. Or, better stated, from a too general and undifferentiated account of the nature and movement of capitalist society, only an overly general and abstract political programme can be advanced: abolish alienated labour! The scientific critique of capital was bound to remain external and thus impotent to fully unite with practice.

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96 Marcus 1980, p. 84.

# The Overcoming of Philosophy and the Development of a Materialist Science

## Introduction

In the first chapter I have traced Marx's initial discovery of the proletariat as the revolutionary subject. My partial conclusion was that the *Paris Manuscripts* represented an enormous breakthrough in Marx's intellectual development. More concretely, I attempted to show that in that text one can find Marx's first attempt at a materialistic perspective on the determinations of the revolutionary subjectivity of the working class. However, I also argued that this first step did not solve all the questions that it had set out to answer. Rather, this early text can be seen as laying the foundations for the future research that he would undertake throughout the rest of his life. The *Paris Manuscripts* may be thus seen as both asking the correct questions and giving the *general* direction to be followed in order to find the social determinations of the revolutionary political action of the proletariat. That approach, I argued, consisted in focusing on the development of the materiality of human productive subjectivity in its historically specific forms as the basis for any investigation about the transformative powers of human action. However, I also showed that beyond a certain point Marx's exposition became incapable of further advancing his discoveries. In brief, I tried critically to engage with this 'early Marx' in order to highlight both the insights and limitations to be found at that stage of his development of the critique of political economy in the light of its developed form in *Capital*.

Regarding the merits of the *Paris Manuscripts*, I pointed out that one of the crucial steps forward made, which marked a difference in relation to his previous writings, was the definitive abandonment of the standpoint of philosophy. In other words, I claimed that Marx's adoption of a materialist perspective was tantamount to the transcendence of philosophy. On the other hand, I argued that most limitations of Marx's early critique could be explained by the inadequacy of the transformative method inherited from Feuerbach as the revolutionary form of the proletarian science.

In the previous chapter, these two rather strong claims were just tangentially touched upon. It is a first aim of this chapter to give those assertions closer scrutiny. I shall show that, in fact, both aspects are interrelated. This

is because, although Marx's positive development throughout the whole of the *Paris Manuscripts* already moves beyond the philosophical discourse, it is not until the third manuscript that he feels the need explicitly to address the question of the status of philosophical thinking. Initially, Marx develops this investigation through the critique of the Hegelian dialectic from a still Feuerbachian methodological perspective. However, in the very course of his discussion, he becomes aware of both the limitations of Feuerbach's materialist 'transformative criticism' and the critical power which, once purged from its idealist inversions, could be found in the dialectic. As we shall see, from this moment onwards, Marx's scientific enterprise consisted in further developing this insight up to the point of giving the critique of political economy a fully developed dialectical form.

### The Need to Come to Terms with Hegel's Philosophy

As Arthur suggests, Marx's turn to the critique of the Hegelian dialectic in the *Paris Manuscripts* seems to be quite abrupt. In effect, up to that point Marx had been developing his first critical confrontation with political economy along Feuerbachian methodological lines.<sup>1</sup> More concretely, a look at the original order in which Marx developed his argument (different from the one in which it was published), shows that this sudden turn occurs in the context of the discussion of the historical movement leading to the supersession of alienated labour in communism. It is at that point that he veers radically, momentarily leaving behind the critique of economic categories, in order to develop

by way of explanation and justification ... some considerations in regard to the Hegelian dialectic generally and especially its exposition in the *Phänomenologie* and *Logik* and also, lastly, the relation (to it) of the modern critical movement.<sup>2</sup>

How are we to understand this abrupt change in Marx's object of criticism? In his detailed commentary on the *Paris Manuscripts*, Arthur gives a plausible explanation for this. According to him, in discussing the process of the genesis of man as man (the historical realisation of the human species-being), Marx

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1 Arthur 1986, p. 45.

2 Marx 1992b, p. 379.

became aware of the formal similarity between that movement and the one Hegel attributes to the absolute spirit in his *Phenomenology of Spirit*.<sup>3</sup> Both involve a process of immediate unity between subject and object, a stage of opposition or radical difference and a recomposition of that unity but now as a mediated unity, in which both the subject and the object appear as the former's own product. In other words, in both cases we are facing a process of historical self-production. The difference between them lies in their views on which is the subject: absolute spirit for Hegel, and the human being as a natural productive being for Marx.

Whilst I do not want to deny the exegetical accuracy of this line of argument, I think that it is not the most fruitful way of approaching the question. First, this materialist appropriation of Hegel's historical dialectic, although important for Marx's discovery of communism as the immanent result of the historical development of human productive subjectivity in its alienated capitalist form, eventually proved incapable of grounding the revolutionary subjectivity of the working class. As I have already mentioned, that abstract dialectic could only account for the general form of movement of the development of human productive subjectivity up to the negation of its alienated form, but could not explain the concrete forms through which it unfolds in the course of history. In other words, that abstract dialectic did not say anything about the specific 'laws of motion' presiding over the movement of modern society. And neither did it explain the concrete historical genesis of the capitalist mode of production and, therefore, its concrete role in the 'natural history' of human productive subjectivity. In fact, we shall see that as Marx advanced in the scientific cognition of the concrete determinations of the movement of capital (and therefore, of the concrete determinations of the development of the conscious revolutionary action of the proletariat), he progressively dropped the recourse to that general dialectic as the ground for the abolition of capital. Hence, whatever the role it played in 1844, that 'materialist inversion' of the formal movement of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* played no significant part in Marx's subsequent intellectual development.

In the second place, although in the *Paris Manuscripts* Marx clearly started his critique of Hegel with a critique of the latter's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, he also engaged with Hegel's *Science of Logic*. And it is especially with the latter critique that Marx became aware of the essential character of philosophy as uncritical alienated thought. By converting logic into ontology, Hegel actually

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3 Arthur 1986, p. 46.

took philosophy to its necessary extreme, thereby exposing the idealist inversion inherent in all forms of philosophical thought. While other philosophers dogmatically and extrinsically imposed a general logical necessity upon the movement of real concrete forms, according to Marx, Hegel went further and self-consciously took the movement of pure logical forms as constituting or engendering the more abstract content of the real itself. In an absolutely inverted form, Hegel thus claimed to have eliminated the exteriority between the form and content of scientific knowledge, between method and object of cognition.<sup>4</sup>

As I shall try to show, this confrontation with Hegel's *Science of Logic* was crucial for Marx's discovery of the revolutionary essence of 'the reproduction of concrete by means of thought' – i.e. dialectical cognition – as the necessary method of science determined as practical criticism. A one-sided emphasis on Marx's materialist inversion of the form of motion of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* overlooks this crucial step in Marx's advance in the production of the critique of political economy as the scientific revolutionary consciousness of the proletariat.

Hence, to the implicit reason behind Marx's engagement with Hegel's thought mentioned by Arthur, I think it necessary to add the explicit one put forward by Marx himself in the opening passages of that section. There he states:

Modern German criticism was so pre-occupied with the old world, and so entangled during the course of its development with its subject-matter, that it had a completely uncritical attitude to the method of criticism, and was completely unaware of the seemingly formal but in fact essential question of how we now stand in relation to the Hegelian dialectic. The lack of awareness about the relation of modern criticism to Hegelian philosophy in general and to the dialectic in particular has been so

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4 On this particular point, Marx was simply following Feuerbach's groundbreaking path, for whom Hegelian philosophy represented the 'culmination of modern philosophy'. See Feuerbach 1986, p. 31. The difference between them, as I argue below, is that Feuerbach's critical supersession of Hegelian philosophy remained essentially philosophical. His 'new philosophy' entailed 'the *realization of* the Hegelian philosophy or, generally, of the philosophy that prevailed until now', albeit one which 'is at the same time the *negation*, and indeed the *negation without contradiction*, of this philosophy' (Feuerbach 1986, p. 31, original emphasis). In contrast, my claim is that Marx's overcoming of Hegelian's inverted dialectic involved the overcoming of philosophy as such, precisely through a materialist appropriation of the critical power of the dialectical method.

pronounced that critics like Strauss and Bruno Bauer are still, at least implicitly, imprisoned within Hegelian logic ...<sup>5</sup>

According to this passage, what moved Marx to a critical engagement with Hegel's philosophy is the fact that the critical form of consciousness prevailing in Germany at that time, far from going beyond the Hegelian mystification of the dialectic, was actually reproducing it 'word by word'.<sup>6</sup> The motivation, then, was not abstractly theoretical, but political through and through. In this sense, it is important to remember the domination by the Young Hegelians of the radical circles in Germany.<sup>7</sup> In particular, Marx is reproaching 'modern German criticism' for the fact that, by 'becoming imprisoned within Hegelian logic', their critique of modern society remains inevitably *philosophical*, that is, incapable of developing into *practical* criticism involving the radical transformation of the existing state of affairs. Instead of leading to the practical abolition of the contradictions of modern society, 'absolute Criticism' ends up trapped 'into the *single* dogmatic antithesis of its own cleverness and the stupidity of the world', which stubbornly remains indifferent to the 'absolute truths' discovered by the former.<sup>8</sup>

But why is philosophical critique necessarily incapable of achieving a radical transformation of the world? Is that not a specific problem of Hegel's *idealist* philosophy, which can be overcome by replacing it with a *materialist* one? As stated above, Marx's critique of Hegel's philosophy actually involved the critique of philosophy as such: this is because, as we shall see, Hegel is considered by Marx to be the one who pushed philosophy to its limits, unconsciously laying bare its essential nature as

nothing else but religion brought into thought and developed in thought, and that it is equally to be condemned as another form and mode of existence of the estrangement of man's nature.<sup>9</sup>

Therefore, a truly critical appropriation of Hegel's thought could only mean for Marx the transcendence of the philosophical standpoint *tout court*. For how can a mode of existence of the alienated consciousness, intrinsically bound to uncritically express human alienation, be the basis for its supersession? The

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5 Marx 1992b, pp. 379–80.

6 Marx 1992b, p. 380.

7 Shortall 1994, pp. 12–15.

8 Marx 1992b, p. 381.

9 *Ibid.*

‘establishment of *true materialism* and of *real science*’<sup>10</sup> initiated by Feuerbach, and which Marx attempted to bring to completion, was incompatible with the starting point of philosophical reflection. A real science, Marx learnt from Feuerbach, can only have as its point of departure ‘the social relationship of “man to man”’.<sup>11</sup> In fact, it was Feuerbach who had accomplished the development of a true materialist philosophy. Through the inversion of Hegel’s dialectic, he showed that a true philosophy should take nature not as a mediating stage in the self-development of the Idea, but must have the former as both starting point and endpoint of its theoretical reflection. As Schmidt points out:

For Feuerbach, Hegel’s philosophy is philosophy from the standpoint of the philosopher, while he is a philosopher from the standpoint of non-philosophy. Instead of beginning with philosophy in order to end with philosophy, he wanted to begin with non-philosophy in order to return through philosophy to non-philosophy ... The new philosophy no longer claimed any special position as against the other sciences but had its presupposition, like them, in nature.<sup>12</sup>

Yet even though Feuerbach developed his critique of Hegel from the standpoint of ‘non-philosophy’, he remained a philosopher. Although he did not see his own philosophy as bearing any privilege over the rest of the sciences, insofar as it also had its presupposition in nature,<sup>13</sup> he still saw his intellectual endeavour as a philosophical reflection. In other words, he offered a general – in his case, naturalist – *interpretation of the world* (a ‘worldview’) that was meant to provide an external ‘philosophical’ foundation for the materiality (and hence objectivity) of human subjectivity. The human subject (hence thought as her/his corporeal, material attribute) was thus turned into an *object of theoretical contemplation*.

The new philosophy makes man – with the inclusion of nature as the foundation of man – the unique, universal and highest foundation of philosophy.<sup>14</sup>

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10 Ibid.

11 Ibid.

12 Schmidt 1971, p. 24.

13 Ibid.

14 Feuerbach 1986, p. 70.

And from that philosophic standpoint, which ultimately still ‘regards the theoretical attitude as the only genuinely human attitude’,<sup>15</sup> it was impossible for Feuerbach to see the materiality of human thought in its determination as the form in which ‘sensuous human activity, practice’ is organised.<sup>16</sup>

At this juncture, and in order to clarify the matter further, it is worth delving deeper into my prior, admittedly controversial, claim, namely, that already in the *Paris Manuscripts* and for the rest of his lifetime, Marx’s materialist dialectical science entailed the transcendence of *all* philosophy.<sup>17</sup> In other words, the inability of philosophical thought to translate into transformative practical criticism – hence to achieve the real, and not merely formal, unity of ‘theory and practice’ – is not simply a problem of Feuerbach’s contemplative theoreticism, which could be redressed through the development of a materialist ‘philosophy of praxis’.<sup>18</sup> According to this latter train of thought, the key issue in Marx’s critique of Feuerbach comes down to the substitution of the historically situated productive activity of the human being as the active mediator in

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15 Marx 1976d, p. 3.

16 For good analyses of the similarities and differences between Marx and Feuerbach, see Colletti (1973, pp. 222–8; and 1992, pp. 51–6), Schmidt (1971, pp. 24–33) and, especially, Arthur (1986, pp. 114–25). In Spanish, Sánchez Vázquez (2003) provides an insightful discussion of the connection between Marx and Feuerbach, specifically focused on the notion of ‘praxis’, which also sheds light on the precise reason behind the latter’s ‘theoreticism’. In my view, he convincingly shows that attempts to downplay their distance such as Mondolfo’s (1960) remain unpersuasive.

17 From a *textual* point of view, as remarked by Korsch in *Marxism and Philosophy* (1970), the claim is uncontroversial after *The German Ideology* and the *Theses on Feuerbach*, where there are numerous remarks in which Marx and Engels explicitly reject philosophy for being inherently uncritical alienated thought. My claim is that this rejection already obtains in the *Paris Manuscripts*. It goes without saying, as Gunn (1989, p. 3) puts it, that this overcoming of the philosophical standpoint does not amount to a relapse into a positivism or scientism uninterested in ‘categorical questions’. See footnote 25 below.

18 The explicit formulation of the idea of Marxism as a ‘philosophy of praxis’ is usually attributed to Gramsci’s critique of the objectivism and scientism of the Marxism of the Second International epitomised in Bukharin’s *Manual*. See Sánchez Vázquez 2003, pp. 64–7. More generally, for a study of Gramsci’s thought as a whole, see the recent groundbreaking study by Thomas (2009). But, of course, the *philosophical* attempt at a restoration of subjectivity and the problematic of the unity of theory and practice has been the thread guiding all the works of the ‘founding fathers’ of so-called ‘Western Marxism’ (Adorno 2007; Korsch 1970; Lukács 1971). In my view, for reasons which will become apparent in what follows, the very fact that the attempt was carried out philosophically, rather than through the further systematic development of the critique of political economy, doomed it to failure.



the establishment of the unity between humanity and nature for the merely passive unity emphasised by the latter.<sup>19</sup>

That this is part and parcel of Marx's critique of Feuerbach is without dispute. But my argument is that the radicality of Marx's break with Feuerbach's philosophy, which in turn leads him to transcend philosophy altogether, cannot be captured if one stops short at that dimension of his critique. For, thus posed, the critique only amounts to a change of the cognitive *object* of philosophical analysis, which nonetheless remains in a materially external relation to transformative conscious life activity itself. In other words, 'historically-determined productive practice' replaces Feuerbach's 'abstract man' as the external object of cognition, but the abstractly and one-sidedly theoretical determination of scientific knowledge is not overcome. Scientific knowledge remains, to borrow Gunn's expression, a *theory of*, that is, a form of cognition that 'construes its object ... as something which stands over against the subject who lays claim to know it',<sup>20</sup> thus reifying its object. In this case, it becomes a *general theory of human practice* as an object of philosophical analysis.<sup>21</sup>

Thus, interpretations of Marx's dialectical science as a philosophy of praxis tend to take as their *point of departure* the construal of a general concept of human productive activity, in order to ground its essential rationality, freedom, transformativity, morality, cognitive objectivity, etc. On that basis, it is then 'applied' *normatively* to assess the potentialities of concretely existing human actions in their singularity. Or, alternatively, theory is instrumentally mobilised

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19 Schmidt 1971, pp. 26–7; Sánchez Vázquez 2003, pp. 123–5, 180.

20 Gunn 1992, p. 4.

21 Strictly speaking, Gunn's discussion of scientific knowledge as 'theory of' refers to 'society' rather than to 'practice' as a reified object of cognition. As for his own take on the connection between theory and practice in Marx's thought, Gunn tries to capture it through what he calls theory's practical reflexivity. According to Gunn (1989, pp. 6–7; see also 1987), a theory is practically reflexive when it not only theorises its 'object' but also, in the very same conceptual and totalising movement, self-consciously reflects both on its own practical situatedness (i.e. it inheres in a practical totality or it is an expression or 'moment' of an essentially practical social world) and on the validity of its own categories or truth criteria. Although Gunn (1987, p. 42) claims that this conceptualisation of the relation between theory and practice renders it 'internal', I think it does not transcend all exteriority between them, the latter still remaining a reified object from the point of view of the subject of cognition. Thus, theory reflects on itself while reflecting on practice, but it still subsists as an abstractly theoretical activity. It is 'in unity with' practice but nonetheless remains 'distinct from it' (Gunn 1987, p. 41). See Chapters 6 and 9 below for an elaboration of the further ramifications of this discussion.

to 'guide' or 'inform' human actions; in particular, revolutionary practice.<sup>22</sup> Either way, theory is rendered a self-subsistent activity which starts from itself and achieves closure within itself and which, only after its abstractly cognitive act reaches completion, is then utilised to guide or judge actually existing transformative actions. Seen in this way, and no matter the declamation of the philosopher of praxis, the connection between theory and practice is bound to remain external.

By contrast, as Iñigo Carrera insists, Marx's revolutionary science does not start out by construing a general philosophical concept of praxis, but takes as its starting point the search for an answer to the directly practical question about the conscious organisation of 'actually existing' human transformative action in the unity of its determinations.<sup>23</sup> It therefore immediately is, in its generic condition as a historical form of social consciousness, an *inner* moment of the unfolding of human practice itself: the ideal appropriation of nature's potentialities as the specifically human form of organising their real appropriation in the course of the social life process. This is why Marx remarks in the second 1844 *Manuscript* that 'the idea of one basis for life and another for science is from the very outset a lie'.<sup>24</sup>

In this sense, science as practical criticism does not need to be applied to or guide an externally conceived practice, since it situates itself *within* the field of real human action in its concrete singularity from the very outset. And it does so with the aim of uncovering and *ideally* appropriating human practice's *immanent* material and social determinations – hence its objective transformative potentialities – in order consciously to regulate their *real* actualisation through 'revolutionary', 'practical-critical' activity. This, I think, is the only meaningful way in which to materialistically understand the so-called 'unity of theory and practice'.<sup>25</sup>

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22 See Sánchez Vázquez 2003, whose study of the 'concept of praxis' in Marx and Marxism is a particularly telling case in point.

23 Iñigo Carrera 1992, p. 2.

24 1992b, p. 355.

25 Note that in the course of its unfolding, the search for the inner transformative potentialities of concretely existing human action will most certainly have to advance towards more abstract determinations which transcend immediate perception or intuition. Many of them will be forms of the real whose investigation usually falls within the domain of philosophical reflection (epistemological and/or even ontological) and which tend to be deemed 'metaphysical' questions by positivistic thought. As a matter of fact, many of the simpler ones have been discovered and expounded by Hegel in his *Science of Logic*, albeit within a mystical shell which comprises a series of redundant categories and formal steps

In brief, Feuerbach cleared the terrain for the necessary step forward in the development of a materialist standpoint. However, it was only Marx who took up this challenge and discovered that the completion of the materialist inversion of Hegel required more than the 'naturalisation' of philosophy. It involved the discovery that the starting point for any true materialist science was not just the 'social relation of man to man' in the abstract, but grasped in its essential determination as historically determined conscious productive practice. Moreover, the latter was not simply seen by Marx as an alternative external object of scientific-philosophical inquiry. Instead, it was the real form which carried, as an immanent necessary moment of its unfold-

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in the systematic-dialectical exposition. On this issue, see Caligaris and Starosta 2014. In this sense, science as practical criticism does not deny the objectivity of those more abstract determinations of human action. However, it does not approach them *philosophically* (hence as a self-contained external object that constitutes the point of departure of theoretical reflection) but through critical-practical dialectics. It thereby discovers them analytically as *immanent* in concretely existing human transformative practice itself in the very process of its conscious organisation (I shall return to the specific determination of the moment of analysis in the dialectical method in the next chapter). In other words, those more abstract determinations constitute an inner content which is carried by human action itself, the latter being their most concrete or complex mode of existence. To make the point differently, in the same vein as many Marxists acknowledge that Marx's dialectical investigation of the same capitalist social forms which political economy represents ideologically does not turn the former into an 'economic theory' but is a *critique of political economy*, the inquiry into more abstract determinations of the real which are usually the object of philosophical representation does not turn the Marxian scientific endeavour into a philosophy but represents a *critique* of it. In *Marxism and Philosophy*, Korsch (1970) poses the problematic quite sharply, but, presumably as an overreaction to the hostility to 'philosophical questions' in the positivistic Marxism of the Second International, did not dare making the next step involved in the transcendence of the standpoint of philosophy. Thus, he speaks of (and actually vindicates) the 'philosophical content' of Marxism and still sees the 'revolutionary materialist dialectic' as the 'philosophy of the working class', albeit one which aims at its self-abolition through the overthrow of bourgeois society as a whole. See Korsch 1970, p. 97. The same tension runs through Adorno's *Negative Dialectics* from the very opening lines of the Introduction: 'Philosophy, which now seems obsolete, lives on because the moment to realize it was missed' (Adorno 2007, p. 3). This hesitant attitude of Adorno's towards the status of Marxian practical-critical dialectics vis-à-vis philosophical thought has been carried over by his contemporary disciples who took up his methodological research programme to develop a critical reconstruction of the critique of political economy. Thus Backhaus (1992, p. 55) locates the latter 'in-between philosophy and science', since economic concepts are not simply economic but philosophical.

ing, the rational comprehension of its own inner determinations i.e. revolutionary theory. It was in the very nature of Feuerbach's philosophy, and *a fortiori* of *all* philosophical thought, to be incapable of grasping this elementary determination of human subjectivity. The development of a materialist science, as the comprehension – and hence conscious organisation – of concretely existing human transformative practice, entailed the overcoming of philosophy.

### Hegel and the 'Dilemma of Epistemology'

The central question of modern philosophy is, to put it simply, an epistemological one, in the sense of being an enquiry into the conditions for the genesis and attainment of true scientific knowledge. As Gunn puts it, modern philosophy is essentially a 'metatheory', a 'second-order discourse' aiming at evaluating and validating the categories employed by scientific theory, conceived as 'first-order discourse'.<sup>26</sup> More concretely, philosophy is meant to offer, in the manner of an external arbiter, the criteria against which we might attribute 'objective validity' to the representations produced by scientific theory. This means, therefore, that the objectivity of scientific knowledge is considered to be extrinsically grounded in the generic *subjectivity* of an abstractly rational and free-thinking human being.<sup>27</sup> The difficulties of epistemology arise because of its attempt to provide, through an act of cognition, a foundation for the conditions under which a valid act of cognition can take place.<sup>28</sup> From this starting point, two possible paths seem necessarily to follow. Either the formulation of a further external arbiter which could validate the procedures of the epistemological cognitive act itself, which would in turn be in need of external grounding; or the dogmatic utilisation of those very same criteria with which it attempts to found the original act of knowledge, in order to account for the objectivity of its own activity. Epistemology's own claims to truth seem to fall into the trap of either circularity or infinite regress.<sup>29</sup> Faced with this dilemma, Kant ended up claiming that the only way out is to humbly recognise the limits of true human knowledge which thus becomes restricted to the phenomenal world, leaving the 'thing-in-itself' as an unreachable content for the act of cognition.<sup>30</sup>

26 Gunn 1989, p. 89.

27 Iñigo Carrera 2008, p. 253.

28 Colletti 1973, p. 199.

29 Gunn 1989, pp. 89–90; Arthur 1986, p. 50.

30 Williams 1989, pp. 32–8.

With his characteristic sarcastic tone, in the Introduction to the *Encyclopaedia*, Hegel summarises very clearly the oxymoron that self-conscious traditional epistemology (which he saw in what he calls ‘critical philosophy’) had set for itself:

One of the main points of view in the *Critical Philosophy* is the following: before we embark upon the cognition of God, or of the essence of things, etc., we should first investigate our *faculty of cognition* itself, to see whether it is capable of achieving this. We should first get to know about the *instrument*, before undertaking the task that is supposed to be accomplished by means of it; for, otherwise, if the instrument is inadequate, then all further effort would have been expended in vain ... But the investigation of cognition cannot take place in any other way than cognitively; in the case of this so-called tool, the ‘investigation’ of it means nothing but the cognition of it. But to want to have cognition *before* we have any is as absurd as the wise resolve of Scholasticus to learn to swim before he ventured into the water.<sup>31</sup>

This point was also made by Hegel in the Introduction to the *Science of Logic*. There he remarked on the specific nature of the science which had thought as its own particular content. For the rest of the sciences, method and subject matter are distinguished so that they are

permitted to speak of their ground and its context and also of their method, only as premises taken for granted which, as forms of definitions and such-like presupposed as familiar and accepted, are to be applied straight-way, and also to employ the usual kind of reasoning for the establishment of their general concepts and fundamental determinations.<sup>32</sup>

However, since logic has those laws of thinking themselves as its own content, it cannot presuppose them but needs to discover them in the course of its development. This does not mean that no justification for the objectivity of pure thinking is needed. But this justification is not to be part of the science of pure thought itself but the presupposition of its beginning. Hegel had given this deduction, which is nothing more than the move-

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31 Hegel 1991, p. 34.

32 Hegel 1999, p. 43.

ment of consciousness until discovering the objectivity of its own cognising activity, in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*.<sup>33</sup>

The point is that the whole problematic arises because epistemology starts from the radical *separation* between knowledge and reality, or subject and object of cognition. Hegel's alleged solution was then to solve those contradictions by going right to their essential source in that deficient starting point of traditional epistemology. The general result of his *Phenomenology of Spirit* is precisely the ontological *identity* between thought and being.<sup>34</sup> This is the essential content of absolute knowledge as the self-knowledge of absolute spirit's own dialectic. Certainly, Hegel does not extrinsically *confront* this essential truth with the allegedly wrong starting point of traditional epistemology in order to replace it with his own, more satisfactory account. This would leave him with exactly the same dilemma that traditional epistemology faced. The whole gist of his phenomenological method consists precisely in taking what he calls the standpoint of consciousness (i.e. that which sees a radical separation between consciousness and its object) as the starting point for his science of the experience of consciousness (that is Hegel's definition of phenomenology). More precisely, he starts from the simplest figure of that knowing subjectivity, i.e. immediate certainty. From this beginning, and through a method of *immanent critique*, Hegel attempts to show that his own absolute knowledge is a necessary concrete form into which that simple initial figure of the knowing consciousness develops.<sup>35</sup> The phenomenology is the laborious odyssey of consciousness passing through all of its defective figures until reaching its plenitude as absolute knowledge. The crucial thing is that this development is not the product of the failure of the different forms of consciousness to measure up to some external yardstick provided by the philosopher, the alleged bearer of absolute truth. On the contrary, this motion is generated by the contradictions produced by each figure of consciousness itself when measured against its own standards. Although at first there seems to be a perfect identity between what consciousness takes to be the object in itself and the way it knows the object (i.e. the object for consciousness), closer scrutiny of each figure's cognising experience reveals that those two moments are actually in opposition. It is the development of its own contradictions that pushes consciousness forward to ever newer, more complex forms until reaching the stage of absolute knowing. In this sense, it is a process of philosophical self-

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33 Hegel 1999, p. 49.

34 Houlgate 2001 and 1998.

35 On immanent critique in Hegel, see Hyppolite 1991.

education of ordinary consciousness. The philosopher does not teach ordinary consciousness the content of absolute knowing (the identity of thought and being), but just describes the self-movement of the latter through which it eventually grasps that essential truth by itself. The false is then revealed to be not simply 'wrong', but a partial view that results from the fixation and absolutisation of what actually is a determinate moment or appearance of a more comprehensive, concrete totality, namely, absolute spirit's self-development.<sup>36</sup> At the end of the journey, consciousness thus learns that the opposition and dichotomy between subjectivity and objectivity was posited by consciousness itself.

Spirit, therefore, having won the Notion, displays its existence and movement in this ether of its life and its *Science* ... Whereas in the phenomenology of Spirit each moment is the difference between knowledge and Truth, and is the movement in which that difference is cancelled, Science on the other hand does not contain this difference and the cancelling of it. On the contrary, since the moment has the form of the Notion, it unites the objective form of Truth and of the knowing Self in an immediate unity.<sup>37</sup>

In this way, absolute knowing reveals that the externality between form and matter of cognition is an appearance that vanishes as soon as one comes to adopt its standpoint. Thus, according to Hegel, the problem of traditional epistemology is solved. The determinations of thought are not pure subjective forms that organise a given content but the immanent essential determination of everything that exists when grasped in its universality, that is, in the objectivity of its 'logical element'. Liberated from 'the opposition of consciousness', pure thinking recognises its own objectivity as the Notion, i.e. as

the nature, the peculiar essence, that which is genuinely permanent and substantial in the complexity and contingency of appearance and fleeting manifestation ... the notion of the thing, the immanent universal ... the very heart of things, their simple life-pulse, even of subjective thinking of them.<sup>38</sup>

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36 Hegel 1977, pp. 490–1.

37 Hegel 1977, p. 491.

38 Hegel 1999, pp. 36–7.

On this basis, logic is thus free to proceed with the presentation of the self-determining movement of the Notion by showing the multiplicity of different thought forms that structure being in all its complexity. However, after the reconstruction of the experience of consciousness in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* it becomes evident for philosophy that this exposition of objective pure thinking cannot consist in the mere external 'aggregate of definitions and propositions which ordinarily passes for logic'.<sup>39</sup> This collection of external relations among the different thought forms is, according to Hegel, the picture philosophy gets when it wrongly borrows its scientific method from the science of 'the quantitative aspects of the determinations', i.e. mathematics.<sup>40</sup> Quite to the contrary, Hegel argues, in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* he had already shown the workings of the 'scientifically correct method' as the ideal reproduction of the 'inner self-movement' of the object of cognition, which is governed by the 'dialectic which it possesses within itself'.<sup>41</sup> That is, science must proceed by following 'the inner negativity of the determinations as their self-moving soul'.<sup>42</sup>

All that is necessary to achieve scientific progress – and it is essential to strive to gain this quite simple insight – is the recognition of the logical principle that the negative is just as much positive, or that what is self-contradictory does not resolve itself into a nullity, into abstract nothingness, but essentially only into the negation of its particular content, in other words, that such a negation is not all and every negation but the negation of a specific subject matter which resolves itself, and consequently is a specific negation, and therefore the result essentially contains that from which it results; which strictly speaking is a tautology, for otherwise it would be an immediacy, not a result. Because the result, the negation, is a specific negation, it has content. It is a fresh Notion but higher and richer than its predecessor; for it is richer by the negation or opposite of the latter, therefore contains it, but also something more, and is the unity of itself and its opposite. It is in this way that the system of Notions as such has to be formed – and has to complete itself in a purely continuous course in which nothing extraneous is introduced.<sup>43</sup>

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39 Hegel 1999, p. 51.

40 Hegel 1999, p. 52.

41 Hegel 1999, p. 54; see also 1977, pp. 31–2.

42 Hegel 1999, p. 56.

43 Hegel 1999, p. 54.



Thus Hegel distinguishes between what he terms the ‘understanding’ and ‘speculative thought’. The former grasps thoughts as self-subsistent entities or immediate affirmations:

Thinking as *understanding* stops short at the fixed determinacy and its distinctness vis-à-vis other determinacies; such a restricted abstraction counts for the understanding as one that subsists on its own account, and simply is.<sup>44</sup>

Moreover, and this is what distinguishes understanding from mere ‘representation’, on that basis it attempts to establish

a necessary relation between the isolated determinations of representation – whereas representation leaves them *side by side*, in its undetermined space, linked only by the simple ‘and’.<sup>45</sup>

However, unwilling to recognise that ‘according to its proper determinacy ... the dialectic’, or negativity, ‘is the genuine nature that properly belongs to the determinations of the understanding, to things, and to the finite in general’,<sup>46</sup> the understanding can only end up establishing a connection among all those conceptions by means of purely *subjective* reflection, that is, by following a necessity which is *external* to the immanent determination of the object of cognition at stake.

Conversely, speculative thought involves the consciousness both of the ‘dialectical moment’ present in all ‘things [as they are] in and for themselves’,<sup>47</sup> and also of ‘the affirmative that is contained in their dissolution and in their transition’.<sup>48</sup> It therefore discovers in the dialectic ‘the moving soul of scientific progression ... the principle through which alone *immanent coherence and necessity* enter into the content of science’.<sup>49</sup> Speculative science thus grasps the relations among things in their objective, immanent necessity.

In this way, Hegel claims to have moved beyond the antinomies of philosophical thought. He sees himself as not only overcoming the externality between the form and content of knowledge, but also as discovering in the dia-

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44 Hegel 1991, p. 125.

45 Hegel 1991, p. 50.

46 Hegel 1991, p. 128.

47 Hegel 1991, p. 129.

48 Hegel 1991, p. 131.

49 Hegel 1991, p. 128.

lectic the form in which the universality of the Notion moves, thus giving life and motion to every particular real form, whether natural or 'spiritual'. Thus seen, logic 'no longer stands as a particular alongside other particulars, but includes them all within its grasp and is their essence, the absolutely True'.<sup>50</sup>

It is with these conclusions, according to Marx, that far from solving the dilemma of epistemology, Hegel carried the idealist inversion intrinsic to all philosophical thought to its limit. And this is so in a two-fold sense. Negatively, he thereby unwittingly exposed the source of the idealist inversion inherent in philosophy in the replacement of the movement of the real, i.e. its determinate immanent necessity, with a *logical necessity*. The content of the materialist inversion needed thus became clear, namely, the overcoming of all forms of *logical representation* of reality through the discovery of the *specific* necessity immanent in the *determinate* object of cognition (and hence of transformation) at stake, that is, through the 'reproduction of the concrete by means of thought'.<sup>51</sup> Positively, in discovering contradiction as the 'negativity which is the indwelling pulsation of self-movement and spontaneous activity'<sup>52</sup> of every existing real form, Hegel grasped the dialectic as the *form* of cognition (i.e. the method) capable of expressing the aforementioned 'inner necessity controlling the object' to be known. *With these two insights in their unity*, Marx would begin his positive development of science determined as a necessary concrete moment of the revolutionary transformation of society into the free association of individuals.<sup>53</sup>

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50 Hegel 1999, p. 59.

51 Following Iñigo Carrera (2008), I shall use the expressions 'logical representation' or 'representational thought' to refer to the form of scientific or philosophical cognition that moves according to a purely ideal necessity, external to the real forms to be known. By the 'reproduction of the concrete by means of thought' or, simply, 'dialectical knowledge', I mean that form of science which grasps the necessity for self-transformation immanent in things themselves. They correspond to what Hegel called 'understanding' and 'speculative thought', respectively, minus his idealist inversion.

52 Hegel 1999, p. 442.

53 The reduction of the materialist inversion of Hegel to the latter insight only, generally coupled with the dogmatic claim that the subject of the movement described by Hegel's *Logic* is not the 'Idea' but 'Matter', does not move an iota beyond logical representation. It just formally changes an idealist dialectical logic into a 'materialist' one, to be extrinsically applied to every determinate concrete form of material reality. This kind of reading of the 'Hegel-Marx connection' is broadly contained in the orthodox views of *Diamat* as epitomised in Stalin (1947) and official Soviet manuals, which in turn drew direct inspiration from the classical works of Engels (1987 and 1991), Plekhanov (1965), and Lenin (1961). In the founding works of *Diamat*, the *Logic* is usually taken as containing 'the

### Marx's Critique of Hegel's Philosophy in the *Paris Manuscripts*

Even among the most lucid commentaries on Marx's *Paris Manuscripts*, the section on the critique of the Hegelian dialectic is read primarily as an attempt to develop a materialist inversion of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*. In this sense, Arthur's detailed commentary is a case in point.<sup>54</sup> According to this author, the essence of Marx's criticism consists in the inversion of Hegel's historical dialectic through the replacement of 'his Bildungsroman of spirit with that of man'.<sup>55</sup> Thus Marx is seen as part of the Young Hegelian tradition of critical appropriation of Hegel's thought. This involves the recognition that Hegel's dialectic expresses truth but in mystified form. Feuerbach's influence in particular consisted in that attempt to refer all in Hegel that belongs to that abstraction called 'Spirit' to real man as an objective, natural being. However, the argument goes, against the passivity and ahistoricity of Feuerbach's views about the human being, Marx recovered the 'active', productive and historical side contained in the Hegelian dialectic. Hence the latter's positive aspect of the 'dialectic of negativity as the producing principle'.<sup>56</sup> The self-development of Spirit through alienation and its overcoming is actually a mystified representation of the human being's self-production through labour.<sup>57</sup> The essential difference between Marx's and Hegel's accounts thereby lies in the concrete subject of the dialectic of negativity. Whilst for Hegel the subject of this activity is an abstraction called consciousness, for Marx, building on Feuerbach's criticism, it is the 'real, corporeal *man*, his feet firmly planted on the solid earth, and breathing all the powers of nature'.<sup>58</sup> In turn, this question would revolve around the difference in political stances towards capitalist society between Hegel and Marx. For the former, the overcoming of alienation does not involve

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fundamental laws of dialectics', which are then to be applied to more concrete objects such as history, capitalism, and so on. It is thus argued that Hegel would have discovered those laws, but 'in his idealist fashion as mere laws of thought' (Engels 1987, p. 356). This position is nicely expressed by Lenin's famous aphorism in his *Philosophical Notebooks*: the question is to 'read Hegel materialistically ... that is to say ... cast aside for the most part God, the Absolute, the Pure Idea, etc.' (Lenin 1961, p. 104). A more thorough critical discussion of this orthodox perspective in connection with contemporary 'systematic dialectical' approaches can be found in Caligaris and Starosta (2014).

54 But see also Marcus 1980, pp. 82–3.

55 Arthur 1986, p. 56.

56 Marx 1992b, pp. 385–6.

57 Arthur 1986, p. 60.

58 Marx 1992b, p. 389.

the practical, real abolition of an alienated social world but only a change in the attitude of consciousness regarding those forms of objectivity.<sup>59</sup> In brief, in this reading, the primary aspect of Marx's criticism of Hegel in the *Paris Manuscripts* concerns the question of the idealist character of the Hegelian dialectic of human consciousness. Moreover, this critique would have served Marx as a way of developing the central insight of his 'social ontology', namely, the essentiality of *productive activity* in the historical development of human beings.

Although the relevance that this question about the idealism of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* had for Marx's development *in those years* is beyond dispute, I think that a more fruitful reading strategy should focus not on the critique of that 1807 text, but on Marx's confrontation with Hegel's *Logic*. And there are mainly two reasons for this. First, as was already discussed, although the question of productive subjectivity and its historical forms remained an essential element of Marx's materialist standpoint, the general dialectic of negativity as the foundation for the overcoming of alienated labour was left behind in his later works. Secondly, that one-sided emphasis on the discussion of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* overlooks the fact that Marx's concern for that early text is subordinate to his critique of the *Science of Logic* as the consummation of Hegel's hypostasis of logic's ideal necessity.<sup>60</sup> Hence, according to our reading

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59 Although I cannot address the question here, I would like to acknowledge the existence of a debate over the fairness of Marx's critique of Hegel. Thus Rose (1995, pp. 214–15) has challenged Marx's reading of Hegel for being essentially Fichtean (see Arthur 1986, pp. 74–6, for a reply to Rose; and Smith 1990b for a critique of Arthur). Other authors have also criticised Marx for not realising that, actually, there is no difference between Hegel's dialectic and his own (Fraser 1998, pp. 34–6). Fine (2001, Chapter 5) also argues that Marx failed to recognise the methodological affinity between his dialectical method and Hegel's. But, in addition, he explores the consequences of the misreading of Hegel for Marx's own thought. Be that as it may, the relevant point for this book is not whether Marx was right or wrong in his reading of Hegel, but the positive methodological insights developed *through* the critique of the latter.

60 The only commentator I am aware of who adopts this reading strategy of that section of the *Manuscripts* is Murray (1988, pp. 46–7). However, he does not develop this in the methodological direction of the distinction between representational thought and dialectics. Instead, he uses it to put forward his own variant of the 'homology thesis', which sees a parallel between Hegel's logical concept and capital, inasmuch as they are both hypostasised abstractions indifferent to any qualitative distinction. On the 'homology thesis', see the debate between Chris Arthur (2003a and 2003b) – supporter of a strong version of the thesis, whereby the parallel between the Idea and Capital is not just general but applies to almost every single category – and Tony Smith (2001 and 2003) – for

the significance of those pages for Marx's subsequent intellectual development is not so much 'socio-ontological' as *methodological*.

Certainly, Marx's initial entry point for the discussion of Hegel is the latter's abstract dialectic of absolute spirit with its allegedly conservative result. After praising Feuerbach for positing nature and the human being – 'the self-sustaining positive' – as the starting points of his philosophy, he goes on to argue that it is for exactly the opposite reason that Hegel's dialectic is to be criticised. However, this critique should recognise that, albeit in an idealist form, Hegel had unconsciously discovered the general form of motion of the historical process through which the human being is produced. According to Marx,

Hegel has merely discovered the *abstract, logical, speculative* expression of the movement of history. This movement of history is not yet the *real* history of man as a given subject, it is simply the process of his *creation, the history of his emergence*.<sup>61</sup>

While in the conventional reading this quotation is read with an emphasis on Hegel's finding of the form of the 'movement of history', I think that, conversely, the crux of the matter resides in Marx's emphasis on the 'abstract, logical, speculative' nature of Hegel's account. Thus Marx's praise of Hegel's discovery of the dialectic of negativity as the 'producing principle' should be qualified. The latter not only served Marx to reveal its material content in the dialectic of labour's self-alienation, but also gave a clear illustration of Hegel's speculative transformation of logic into the source of all movement and life. This is a crucial point. It exposes the procedure of philosophical representation consisting in the substitution of a mental, logical necessity for the real one. Instead of following the real movement of humanity's historical self-development and then discovering that, as far as its form is concerned, it moves according to a dialectic of negativity, Hegel sees the movement of real history only as an (other) instantiation of the logical principle of pure negativity.

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whom the thesis does not withstand close scrutiny. Another proponent of the mapping of Hegel's logical categories onto Marx's critique of political economy is Meany (2002), although he does it in relation to the *Grundrisse*. More recently, the examination of the homology thesis has been resumed in some of the articles in Moseley and Smith (2014). See, in particular, Smith 2014; Bellofiore 2014; Arthur 2014; Caligaris and Starosta 2014.

61 Marx 1992b, p. 382.

Since this so-called negativity is nothing more than the *abstract, empty* form of that real living act, its content can only be a *formal* content, created by abstraction from all content. Consequently there are general, abstract *forms of abstraction* which fit every content and are therefore indifferent to all content; forms of thought and logical categories torn away from *real* mind and *real* nature.<sup>62</sup>

This passage shows with utmost clarity the point which Marx is getting at and of which the discussion of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* constitutes a prelude, namely, the alienated nature of philosophy. That is why Marx wants to take stock of Hegel's philosophy in its entirety, which, inasmuch as he sees it as the most developed form of philosophical consciousness, entails a critique of philosophy *tout court*. In this sense, as Murray points out, Marx's 'concern for Hegel's *Phenomenology* must be understood in terms of the attention to his logic [of absolute idealism]'.<sup>63</sup> As Marx makes clear right at the beginning of that section of the *Manuscripts*, the critique of Hegel should aim at his philosophical *system* as a whole, as presented in the *Encyclopaedia*, since it is that work which condenses the essence of philosophical thought as alienated thought thinking itself.

Hegel's *Encyclopaedia* begins with logic, with *pure speculative thought*, and ends with *absolute knowledge*, with the self-conscious, self-comprehending philosophical or absolute mind, i.e. superhuman, abstract mind. In the same way, the whole of the *Encyclopaedia* is nothing but the *extended being* of philosophical mind, its self-objectification; and the philosophical mind is nothing but the estranged mind of the world thinking within its self-estrangement, i.e. conceiving itself abstractly.<sup>64</sup>

On the other hand, it is to be remembered that Hegel's *Phenomenology* is not part of his *system* but constitutes its *introduction*.<sup>65</sup> This is why Marx states that the critique of Hegel's philosophy as a whole must *begin* with his *Phenomenology*, which is 'the true birthplace and secret of the Hegelian philosophy'.<sup>66</sup> Hegel considers the *Phenomenology* the work that leads consciousness from its

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62 Marx 1992b, pp. 396–7.

63 Murray 1988, p. 46.

64 Marx 1992b, p. 383.

65 Houlgate 2003, pp. 368–70.

66 Marx 1992b, p. 383, my emphasis.

immediate mode of existence to the essential determination of absolute knowledge in the identity of thought and being. In this way, consciousness recognises that its thought determinations are not something different from the determinations of objects existing independently 'out there', but that its own thinking about itself *is* the thinking about the determinations of being. In the words of a Hegel scholar,

What consciousness comes to understand at the end of the *Phenomenology*, therefore, is the Kantian idea that the determinations of being are in fact the determinations of consciousness, together with the un-Kantian idea that the determinations of consciousness are the determinations of *being*.<sup>67</sup>

Only once consciousness has gone through that journey that lands it on the realm of absolute knowledge can proper philosophy actually begin by reconstituting the path from the abstract determinations of being to its most concrete forms of existence as Spirit. To put it differently, abstractly considered, a consciousness that, for whatever reason, does not hesitate a second about the identity between thought and being could easily skip the phenomenological experience and move straight to the starting point of the system of philosophy which begins with the *Logic*.<sup>68</sup> Hence Marx's critique of Hegel's false starting point with an abstract consciousness, the philosophical representation of the real, corporeal human individual (a point already made by Feuerbach) in her/his historical social relations (the specifically Marxian point). Because that possibility demonstrates that far from moving from the sensuous concrete to the abstract, Hegel's philosophical standpoint never abandoned the realm of abstraction. The alienated essence of philosophy is precisely exposed by its systemic starting point with logic, the science of pure thinking. In particular, the idealist inversion appears with full force in the problematic of the transition from the logical idea to nature. The autonomisation of thought forms from nature and consciousness in the form of pure logical categories and their further integration as moments of the logical Idea reaches its moment of truth when faced with its self-determination as its 'other'. Here Marx resorts to a Feuerbachian line of criticism. Indeed, Feuerbach's characterisation of Hegel as an 'abstract realist' in the *Principles for the Philosophy of the Future* speaks precisely to this problematic:

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67 Houlgate 2001, p. 135.

68 Houlgate 2003, p. 368.

The statement that only the 'concrete' notion that carries the nature of the real in itself is the true notion expresses the recognition of the truth of concreteness or reality.<sup>69</sup>

The difficulties of that transition betray the absoluteness of Hegel's Idea and actually constitute a proof that abstract, presuppositionless thought is nothing without nature.

Hegel's positive achievement in his speculative logic is to present *determinate concepts*, the universal *fixed thought forms* in their independence of nature and mind, as a necessary result of the universal estrangement of human existence, and thus also of human thought, and to comprehend them as moments in the process of abstraction ... But the abstraction which comprehends itself as abstraction knows itself to be nothing: it must relinquish itself, the abstraction, and so it arrives at something which is its exact opposite, *nature*. Hence the whole of the *Logic* is proof of the fact that abstract thought is nothing for itself, that the absolute idea is nothing for itself and that only *nature* is something.<sup>70</sup>

What makes this metaphysical transition from the idea to nature necessary is precisely the fact that during the whole movement of the idea in its purity (the *Logic*) no particular, determinate content was touched upon. Only the general, the logical, the essentialities or thought determinations were developed, which, because of their generality, are said to structure all forms of the real. But the abstraction reached in this form cannot but long for a particular content, otherwise abstract thought would keep revolving around itself. And this would mean the recognition of its non-absolute character, since its other (nature) would persist in its independence and 'otherness'. Hence the need to bring nature in. However, says Marx, alienated thought can only acknowledge nature as a thought entity. Its existence is the last logical necessity of the absolute idea in its purity, which, to demonstrate its absoluteness, has to self-posit itself in the form of externality, i.e. as nature.

[T]his whole idea, which conducts itself in such a strange and baroque fashion, and which has caused the Hegelians such terrible headaches, is purely and simply *abstraction*, i.e. the abstract thinker; abstraction which,

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69 Feuerbach 1986, p. 48.

70 Marx 1992b, p. 397.



taught by experience and enlightened as to its own truth, resolves under various conditions – themselves false and still abstract – to *relinquish itself* and to establish its other-being, the particular, the determinate, in place of its self-pervasion [*Beisichsein*], non-being, universality and indeterminateness; to let *nature*, which it concealed within itself only as a mere abstraction, as a thing of thought, *issue freely from itself*, i.e. to abandon abstraction and to take a look at nature, which exists *free* from abstraction.<sup>71</sup>

The philosopher, who, as ‘pure’ thinker, sees her/himself as the ultimate incarnation of the human, is actually the ultimate incarnation of the alienated existence of the human. Inasmuch as she/he sees her/his own species-being (that is, her/his specific determination as a labouring natural being) as the very negation of true humanity,<sup>72</sup> she/he can separate thought from the concrete, real thinking human and consider it as the attribute of an abstractly pure thinking subjectivity. Thought forms are thus transformed into categories of pure thinking, which moves according to its own mental necessity and is therefore indifferent to every natural (and hence human) determination. In other words, thought forms are turned into *logical categories* and their movement into logic. In this abstract universality, thought forms are thus seen to express the ideal necessity of reason in its purity, uncontaminated by the contingency of particular contents. While different philosophers tended to privilege this or that group of pure thought forms as the essential logical categories, Hegel synthesised them all in his *Logic* as the science of pure abstraction. This is one of the ways in which, according to Marx, Hegel represented the ultimate expression of philosophical thought. But additionally, as I have already noted, Hegel pushed the idealist inversion to a complacent self-awareness and hence to its plenitude. Certainly in a mystified form, philosophers before Hegel had still preserved some link between thought and the human being. To be more precise, an alienated, abstract representation of the human being as a purely thinking subject. But Hegel went one step further and completed the severance of thought from the human subject, the result of which could only be their reunion in an inverted form, that is, with the process of thought turned into an independent subject itself.<sup>73</sup>

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71 Marx 1992b, pp. 397–8.

72 Fracchia 1991, pp. 155–7.

73 Marx 1976g, p. 102.

The man estranged from himself is also the thinker estranged from his *essence*, i.e. from his natural and human essence. His thoughts are therefore fixed phantoms existing outside nature and man. In his *Logic* Hegel has locked up all these phantoms.<sup>74</sup>

And in a footnote, Marx adds:

We shall see later why Hegel separates thought from the *subject*; but it is already clear that if man is not human, then the expression of his essential nature cannot be human, and therefore that thought itself could not be conceived as an expression of man's being, of man as a human and natural subject, with eyes, ears, etc., living in society, in the world and in nature.<sup>75</sup>

It is the difficult and painful transition from pure thought to nature (difficult for the abstract thinker, that is) that exposes the speculative trick. Because now all the logical categories repeat themselves in the movement of nature, that is, not in their purity, but in the form of externality. Hence, the philosopher involuntarily reveals that those abstract logical categories which she sees herself as engendering by herself through her pure thinking activity, are in fact specific determinations of nature (matter), which she had abstracted from the latter and, by giving them the form of an abstract universality, transformed them into pure thought forms. The subsequent necessary return to nature can only produce an inverted image of nature, that is, as a dead materiality which has life, movement and meaning only as a mode of existence of the logical concept. In other words, the philosopher deals not with real nature, but with a thought entity.

But *nature* too, taken abstractly, for itself, and fixed in its separation from man, is *nothing* for man. It goes without saying that the abstract thinker who decides on intuition, intuits nature abstractly. Just as nature lay enclosed in the thinker in a shape which even to him was shrouded and mysterious, as an absolute idea, a thing of thought, so what he allowed to come forth from himself was simply this *abstract nature*, nature as a thing of thought – but with the significance now of being the other-being of thought, real, intuited nature as distinct from abstract thought. Or, to put it in human terms, the abstract thinker discovers from intuiting nature

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74 Marx 1992b, p. 398.

75 Marx 1992b, p. 389.

that the entities which he imagined he was creating out of nothing, out of pure abstraction, in a divine dialectic, as the pure products of the labour of thought living and moving within itself and never looking out into reality, are nothing more than *abstractions* from *natural forms*. The whole of nature only repeats to him in a sensuous, external form the abstractions of logic.<sup>76</sup>

Marx's critique of Hegel's *Logic* in the final section of the *Manuscripts*, and especially the transition from the Logical Idea to Nature, is crucial to grasp Marx's revolution in the mode of science. In effect, in the course of his engagement with Hegel he becomes aware of the source of the idealist inversion of which all representational thought suffers for being condemned to remain a concrete form of the reproduction of capital (i.e. uncritical alienated thought). And the key to this critique does not simply reside, as *Diamat* would have it, in the fact that Hegel sees the Idea as the subject of the dialectic, so that the inversion would consist in leaving his dialectic intact and dogmatically claiming that the subject is nature or matter. There is no doubt that all that exists (human thought included) is a more or less developed concrete form of matter, resulting from the latter's self-movement through a process of differentiation, that is, through the self-production of qualitative differences. The only alternative to this would be a creationist view. Now from a communist perspective, that point, however valid, is a self-evident truism. Already in Marx's time, the atheist standpoint was well established in the communist movement, so that, as he states in the *Manuscripts*, it already constituted a basic presupposition of revolutionary science.

Atheism, which is the denial of this unreality, no longer has any meaning, for atheism is a *negation of God*, through which negation it asserts *the existence of man* through this negation. But socialism as such no longer needs such mediation.<sup>77</sup>

But as this passage also makes clear, proletarian science does not come down to atheism. Or, more precisely, the revolutionary science of the working class does not even need such mediation, since 'its starting point is the *theoretically and practically sensuous consciousness* of man and of nature as *essential beings*'.<sup>78</sup>

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76 Marx 1992b, pp. 398–9.

77 Marx 1992b, p. 357.

78 Ibid.

Hence, the *philosophical* quarrels within Soviet Marxism over the question of the primacy of thought or matter in the process of knowledge, which is nothing but the disguised secular form of the classical theological question,<sup>79</sup> were not only scholastic but peculiarly anachronistic ones. As an expression of the backward nature of the Russian process of capital accumulation, those essentially ideological forms could not, as German criticism in Marx's time, but 'be preoccupied with the old world'.<sup>80</sup> Later, when the Stalinist regime completed the dogmatic codification of Marx's revolutionary science through its conversion into an official state ideology, that anachronistic emphasis on the materialist *philosophical worldview* as the distinguishing mark of proletarian science was taken even further. That distinction was used to legitimise the use of state violence against those who personified working class resistance to that absolutely centralised process of exploitation.

Coming back to my point: the importance of Marx's critique of Hegel's *Logic* in the *Paris Manuscripts* does not consist in opposing a materialist philosophy to Hegel's absolute idealism. The crux of the matter resides in the fact that through the critique of Hegel, Marx got to grips with the essential difference between representational thought, as the uncritical form of alienated consciousness, and the reproduction of the concrete by means of thought as the form of revolutionary science. Hegel's *Logic* exposed without ambiguity the source of the idealist inversion present in logical representation in all its expressions, whether scientific or philosophical. In a sense, the distinction between the idealist and the materialist standpoints was relevant for Marx. However, it did not pertain to two different 'philosophical outlooks', but was embodied in the very form of the process of cognition, in the mode of scientific knowledge. The point Marx is making is that the idealism of logical representation springs from its replacement of the determinate movement of nature and history with a mental construction, structured on the basis of a logical necessity. The latter, by its own nature as a subjective reflection, can only remain external to the particular natural or social forms at stake. Behind the need to provide an external mental necessity to put real forms into 'theoretical relation' rests the assumption that those forms are incapable of establishing relations by themselves. In other words, that those forms are lifeless abstractions which therefore do not embody any qualitative potentiality or determinacy whose realisation involves its self-transformation into another, more concrete form. As already mentioned, this is what Hegel discovered as the flawed procedure of what he

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79 Marx 1992b, p. 381.

80 Marx 1992b, p. 379; see also Pannekoek 1938, Chapter 7.

called the 'understanding', which represented real forms as a universe of indifferent and self-subsistent entities. Devoid of any immanent necessity driving them to self-movement, real forms can only be put into *external* relation by means of subjective reflection. Against this view, Hegel opposed the reproduction of the immanent movement of real forms or dialectical cognition as the scientifically correct method. However, for Hegel this did not involve the transcendence of logical thought. On the contrary, it involved the elevation of logic, the science of pure thinking, to the status of *the science par excellence*. For although he claimed the correct form of science to be the reproduction of the 'inner life' of the determinate object of cognition, the original source of that movement did not lie in those particular real forms themselves but *in their determination as concrete modes of existence of pure logical thought forms*. The latter are the ones that posit life into what would otherwise be lacking in meaning and inner movement. In the words of Marx,

In the natural form, superseded Movement as Matter corresponds to superseded Becoming as Being. Light is the *natural* form of *Reflection-in-itself*. Body as *Moon* and *Comet* is the *natural* form of the *antithesis* which, according to the *Logic*, is *the positive grounded on itself* and the *negative grounded upon itself*. The Earth is the *natural* form of the *logical ground*, as the negative unity of the antithesis, etc.

*Nature as nature*, i.e. insofar as it is sensuously distinct from the secret sense hidden within it, nature separated and distinct from these abstractions is *nothing*, a *nothing proving itself to be nothing*, it is *devoid of sense*, or only has the sense of an externality to be superseded.<sup>81</sup>

In discussing Hegel, the issue at stake for Marx was not the philosophical question of whether matter determined thought or vice versa, but the distinction between logic, which was 'completely indifferent to all real determinateness',<sup>82</sup> and the reproduction in thought of that 'real determinateness' as it unfolds in nature and history.<sup>83</sup> And here it is important to point to a subtle but crucial

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81 Marx 1992b, p. 399.

82 Marx 1992b, p. 383.

83 It is precisely on this point that Marx's critique of Hegel parted company with Feuerbach's earlier critique. For in too hastily identifying self-mediation or the movement of contradiction as inherently tied to Hegel's absolute idealism, Feuerbach missed the methodological rational kernel contained, certainly in a 'mystical form', in the dialectic. Thus, Feuerbach did nothing to make scientific use of Hegel's insight into the general form taken by the movement of 'real determinateness', i.e. self-negativity or self-mediation. Schmidt (1971,

difference between the critique of Hegel's *Logic* in the *Paris Manuscripts* and in the *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*. At first sight, they seem to come down to the same essential point. According to Marx, whether in the case of nature or the state, Hegel inverts their specific movement as an instantiation of the logical movement of the concept. Whilst this is true enough as far as the negative view of Hegel's idealistic inversion is concerned, this similarity of the critique between the two texts overlooks their difference regarding Marx's positive view on what was to replace Hegel's 'applied metaphysics'. Indeed, there is a substantial leap in the *Paris Manuscripts* compared with the criticism raised a year before in the *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*.<sup>84</sup> In this latter work, Marx opposed to Hegel's claim of generality for his logical concept ('the matter of logic'), the necessity to develop 'the logic of the matter'.<sup>85</sup> By contrast, in the *Manuscripts* Marx no longer distinguishes between a *general ideal* necessity and a *particular ideal* necessity. He realises that the relevant distinction is that between the ideal necessity *tout court* – logic – and the determinate movement of the real. In this way, he criticises philosophical representation in all of its forms. In other words, the clear distinction between the latter and dialectical cognition was not present in the 1843 critique. So much so that, as we have seen, in 1843 Marx still saw his work as philosophical, and revolution as the realisation of philosophy. In 1844, he came to see philosophy as the epitome of representational thought, as abstract thinking or alienated thought that thinks itself. Hence, emancipation cannot be the realisation of philosophy, but rather its annihilation.

On the other hand, in 1844 Marx started to get to grips with (or at least made explicit) something which he seemed to have overlooked in the 1843 critique regarding the 'rational kernel' to be recovered from the Hegelian dialectic. As argued above, Hegel was aware of what was at stake in the development of the 'scientifically correct method', namely, the overcoming of the externality between the ideal necessity of thought and the inner life of the object of scientific cognition characteristic of the 'understanding'. Notwithstanding the inverted nature of his proposed solution, the fact remained that he was the first thinker not only to pose the problematic and attempt a solution explicitly, but

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p. 28) correctly notes this, although he does not develop the discussion along its methodological implications. By contrast, Colletti (1973) fully endorses Feuerbach's identification of self-mediation with absolute idealism and attributes that view to Marx as well. As Caligaris and I (2014) have argued elsewhere, Colletti's argument is not only unconvincing but actually relies on a misreading of the dialectic of the 'finite' in Hegel's *Science of Logic*.

84 Iñigo Carrera 2008.

85 Marx 1975a, p. 18.

also to discover the *form of scientific cognition* with the power to overcome that externality, namely, the dialectic. Many years later, Marx gave recognition to this revolutionary aspect of Hegel's thought in the oft-quoted passage from his Postface to the second German edition of *Capital*:

The mystification which dialectic suffers in Hegel's hands, by no means prevents him from being the first to present its general form of working in a comprehensive and conscious manner. With him it is standing on its head. It must be turned right side up again, if you would discover the rational kernel within the mystical shell.<sup>86</sup>

However, my claim is that this rediscovery of the rational kernel in the distinction between the *representation* of reality and the *ideal reproduction in thought of the movement of the real* began to take shape already in 1844, precisely through the critique of the inverted solution put forward by Hegel. Against the latter's *absolutisation* of logic by giving it the form of the dialectic, Marx searched for the *overcoming* of logic by giving the revolutionary science of the proletariat precisely that general form discovered by Hegel.

The fact that this was the key issue in, and main result of, Marx's critique of Hegel's *Logic* becomes evident when one considers the direction that Marx's subsequent work took in *The Holy Family*, *The German Ideology* and *The Poverty of Philosophy*. In those texts, Marx directed his criticism at the vulgar version of Hegel's thought as represented by both the Young Hegelians and Proudhon. As we shall see in the following chapter, through the discussion of Marx's critique of Proudhon, the main point of his attack, ceaselessly made throughout those pages, was that instead of reproducing in thought the real movement of history and bourgeois society, Proudhon (as much as the Young Hegelians) replaced the latter with an ideal, logical necessity. I now turn to this question.

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86 Marx 1992b, p. 103.

# Marx on Proudhon: The Critique of Dialectical Logic and the Political Determination of Science as Practical Criticism

## Introduction

As much as his critique of the Young Hegelians, the central aim of Marx's critique of Proudhon was eminently political. In actual fact, one could say that the latter was even 'more' political than the former. This is not just because of the nature of the critique, but also because of its historic-political significance. While, in the last instance, the critique of the 'True Socialism' of the Young Hegelians remained within the boundaries of a discussion among a small circle of radical 'intellectuals', the critique of Proudhon involved a political intervention right at the heart of the dominant ideological form of the continental workers' movement as a whole. As Shortall notes, Proudhonian socialist ideas had a strong grip among the artisans and craftworkers who composed the great bulk of the working class at that time in continental Europe.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, by that time Marx and Engels had already made their first contacts with the existing forms of socialist activism and politics in London and Paris, and were attempting to get involved in the organisational aspects of the immediate political action of the working class of their time.<sup>2</sup> Hence the political urgency of Marx's text.

However, from the perspective of Marx's scientific development, the significance of that polemic against Proudhon went beyond his immediate political concerns. As we shall see, three main interrelated questions emerge from Marx's critical engagement with Proudhon's works. First, Marx made explicit that the materialist inversion of the Hegelian dialectic entailed more than the overcoming of its speculative nature, through its application to the 'material questions' of political economy. This approach can only lead to the conversion of the dialectic into another form of *logic* and, therefore, remains within the uncritical alienated realm of representational thought. Thus we encounter again the crucial *methodological* significance of Marx's text. Secondly, in *The*

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1 Shortall 1994, pp. 36–8.

2 Ibid.



*Poverty of Philosophy*, Marx attempted for the first time positively to unfold the reproduction in thought of the real movement of capitalist economic forms. Albeit in a rudimentary form, this represents Marx's first attempt at a dialectical critique of political economy. In turn, the latter is revealed as the necessary scientific form of the proletarian consciousness that gives course to the practical critique of capital. Thirdly, as a necessary corollary of this, science ceases to be an abstractly contemplative enterprise. Marx's critique of political economy is not meant to provide another economic theory of bourgeois society, albeit from the perspective of the working class. From that very moment, Marx's scientific endeavour constituted an attempt at the positive investigation of the social determinations – and hence necessity – of the different forms of the political action of the workers aiming at the radical transformation of the capitalist mode of production. In brief, we shall see that interest in the question of the 'scientifically correct method' turns out to be not abstractly epistemological, but directly political in nature. Let us now turn to the discussion of each of these aspects of Marx's polemic against Proudhon.

### The Dialectical Method as Logic in Proudhon

The first two sections of Marx's *The Poverty of Philosophy* comprise a reconstruction of Proudhon's arguments about the basic economic categories such as use value, exchange value and money. The gist of Marx's critique comes down to the following two aspects. In the first place, he demonstrates a lack of originality in Proudhon's ideas. In order to counter the latter's self-proclaimed originality, Marx resorts to some quotes from the classical political economists, particularly Ricardo, and demonstrates that the assertion that economists failed to deal properly with the 'opposition' between use value and exchange value is plainly false. In all this there is nothing particularly original in Marx's development itself and, fundamentally, he bases his economic analysis on the theories of the Ricardian school.

In the second place, Marx criticises Proudhon's absurdities about the opposition between an allegedly ethically ideal determination of value in labour time and its empirical determination through the contending wills of buyer and seller, which would lead to the deviation from the former due to the social power of direct exchangeability monopolised by money. According to Proudhon, it is not the exchange of commodities as such which lies at the basis of the capitalist exploitation of labour, but only its distorted concrete form of operation leading to unequal exchange. Therefore, Marx points out, Proudhon's deficient critical engagement with political economy actually justifies his

ideological view of socialism as the realisation of the ideas of justice and equality springing from the determinations of the commodity form itself. Again, in order to refute Proudhon's assertions Marx does not offer any original analysis and limits himself to the claim that, far from being the law regulating the negation of present-day society, the 'law of value' actually is the adequate expression of the movement of social labour in its capitalist form.

Ricardo shows us the real movement of bourgeois production, which constitutes value. M. Proudhon, leaving the real movement out of account, 'fumes and frets' in order to invent new processes and to achieve the reorganization of the world on a would-be new formula, which formula is no more than the theoretical expression of the real movement which exists and which is so well described by Ricardo ... Ricardo's theory of value is the scientific interpretation of actual economic life; M. Proudhon's theory of values is the utopian interpretation of Ricardo's theory.<sup>3</sup>

In this judgement, Marx basically cites approvingly the political economists, only adding the critical insight that these social forms do not represent the absolute realisation of human individuality but its enslavement in alienated forms. In this sense, the realisation of the determinations of the 'law of value' can hardly be the basis of the emancipation of the workers.

Thus relative value, measured by labor time, is inevitably the formula of the present enslavement of the worker, instead of being, as M. Proudhon would have it, the 'revolutionary theory' of the emancipation of the proletariat.<sup>4</sup>

In brief, in these first pages there is nothing significantly novel about Marx's critique of Proudhon. The interesting insights emerge when Marx turns to the discussion of the scientific source of the limitations suffered by Proudhon's critical approach to political economy. This source, Marx argues, is to be found in the defective way in which Proudhon tried to appropriate Hegel's dialectic in order to deal with the subject matter of political economy. The gist of Marx's attack against Proudhon is that far from developing a dialectical critique of political economy, the latter offers merely an idealist reconsideration of economic categories by subjecting them to an extrinsic applic-

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3 Marx 1976b, pp. 123–4.

4 Marx 1976b, p. 125.

ation of the categories of Hegel's *Science of Logic*. According to Marx, then, the source of Proudhon's idealism lies in his reduction of the dialectic to another *logical method*, a ready-made set of formal rules of thinking to be applied to the object of cognition at stake or, more precisely, to the theoretical representations of it. Marx characterises Proudhon's account in the following way:

Economists explain how production takes place in the above-mentioned relations, but what they do not explain is how these relations themselves are produced, that is, the historical movement which gave them birth. M. Proudhon, taking these relations for principles, categories, abstract thoughts, has merely to put into *order* these thoughts, which are to be found alphabetically arranged at the end of every treatise on political economy. The economists' material is the active, energetic life of man; M. Proudhon's material is the dogmas of the economists.<sup>5</sup>

Note how Marx emphasises the importance of reproducing in thought the real movement of production relations, instead of dealing with the 'categories' of political economy in an allegedly 'dialectical' fashion. According to Marx, the economists at least take as their starting point the confrontation of the real movement of economic forms, that is, they face the 'active, energetic life of man'. Yet they do so not to ideally reproduce the real movement, but to construct a *theoretical representation* of it. In other words, what the political economists lack is a grasp of the 'inner connections' between the different forms of social relations. This is because they lack the 'genetic' approach of the dialectical method that is needed to account for the movement through which 'these [social] relations themselves are produced'.

It is precisely this genetic approach that Proudhon claimed to be developing regarding the subject matter of political economy. But Marx's point is that that was far from being the case. The reason for this is that Proudhon did not take the necessary starting point of any dialectical investigation, namely, the confrontation of the concrete forms of social reality themselves. Instead, Proudhon's 'dialectical' critique took as its starting point the 'dogmas of the economists'. And what he then did was simply to reorder those 'categories' according to allegedly dialectical criteria and relations, giving the *appearance* of a dialectical presentation. In other words, Proudhon uncritically took the economic categories, 'which are to be found alphabetically arranged at the end of every

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5 Marx 1976b, p. 162.

treatise on political economy', and reorganised them according to a 'dialectical logic'.<sup>6</sup> What in Hegel was developed with the profundity characteristic of great thinkers making real discoveries (namely, the general form of motion of the dialectical method), in Proudhon led to an unhappy marriage of 'bad philosophy' and 'bad political economy'.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, what in Hegel was justified in its own terms (that is, his engagement with pure thought forms or categories) and given an explicit idealism which saw logical forms as the essentialities of things, led Proudhon to antinomies and absurd conclusions. In other words, the problem with Proudhon was not the construction of an idealist speculative dialectic, but the fact that he did not offer even that. He just provided a reformulation of theses already formulated by the political economists in a dialectical jargon, utilising logical categories and forms of argument taken from Hegel's *Logic*. Marx's point is that, instead of a critique of political economy, Proudhon develops just another form of 'applied metaphysics', in which the specific movement of economic relations is seen as an immediate expression of the abstract form of the logical movement.

It is important at this point to highlight that Marx did not object to the emphasis on the self-movement of real forms as the lesson to be drawn from Hegel. As evidenced by the following passage, Marx accepted that the most general determination of all reality is that it *self-moves*, in the specific sense that each form of the real carries the necessity to become another.

All that exists, all that lives on land and under water, exists and lives only by some kind of movement. Thus, the movement of history produces social relations; industrial movement gives us industrial products, etc.<sup>8</sup>

In other words, Marx took on board Hegel's insight on the 'mediacy of all immediateness', albeit without the idealist mystical shell. In fact, the passage just cited is but a 'materialist' paraphrasing of Hegel's remark on the inner connection between immediacy and mediation in the introductory section dealing with the question of science's systematic point of departure in his *Logic*.

Here we need only quote from it this, there is nothing, nothing in heaven, or in nature or in mind or anywhere else which does not equally con-

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6 Ibid.

7 Marx 1976b, p. 109.

8 Marx 1976b, p. 163.

tain both immediacy and mediation, so that these two determinations reveal themselves to be *unseparated* and inseparable and the opposition between them to be a nullity.<sup>9</sup>

Understood dialectically, this can only mean that reality is contradictory, the movement of contradiction. In turn, I would like to argue that, for Marx, this can only mean, in its simplest form, the affirming through self-negation of real forms. Still, it is true that in the above passage Marx just argues that real forms exist through some kind of movement but does not explicitly tell us the general form that that movement takes. However, in another text of the same year Marx reiterated that insight about all real forms realising their determination through movement (or what he in this case called 'development'), but now specified its general form, namely, the affirming through self-negation. Hence he states in *Moralising Criticism and Critical Morality*:

Any development, whatever its substance may be, can be represented as a series of different stages of development that are connected in such a way that one forms the *negation* of the other. If, for example, a people develops from absolute monarchy to constitutional monarchy, it *negates* its former political being. In no sphere can one undergo a development without negating one's previous mode of existence.<sup>10</sup>

But if the movement of contradiction is the 'rational kernel' that Hegel had discovered, what is wrong with the 'application' of this insight to the 'categories' of political economy? Precisely the idea that we are before an absolute *logical principle* that needs to be *applied* to *theoretical categories*, instead of the general form of motion of the real which we ideally grasp in the *specificity* of the particular different forms of 'all that exists'. In other words, what Marx criticises is the conversion of that simple truth regarding the general form of motion of reality into a logical category, in order to then account for every specific movement by recourse to an unmediated application of this most abstract determination. Self-mediation or self-movement is realised or exists in specific mediating forms. None of those more concrete mediations can be skipped over when facing a real form in order to cognise it and transform it. This means that there are no basic or general principles of thought (the unity of opposites, the negation of the negation, the transformation of quantity into quality, and so

9 Hegel 1999, p. 68.

10 Marx 1976a, p. 317.

on) to be followed in order to *represent* reality more accurately than through formal logic. Contradiction simply means that every real form (whether natural or social) realises its qualitative determination by transforming itself into a more concrete form, that the process of determination is a process of becoming another, i.e. a movement of self-mediation.<sup>11</sup> As the form of movement, the 'inner life', of the concrete object that we want to appropriate by means of thought, it has to be followed in its specific modes of existence and development. This is why, for instance, Marx's *Capital*, as a critique of political economy, is not, *pace* Engels, an application of dialectical logic to political economy,<sup>12</sup> but the ideal reproduction of the real determinations of capital as the alienated social subject of bourgeois society, starting with its simplest mode of existence, i.e. the commodity. In short, although contradiction is the general form of movement of reality, this is not a general axiomatic principle which is unmediatedly 'applied' to whatever concrete form we are facing.<sup>13</sup> In fact,

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11 Iñigo Carrera 2008, pp. 259–60. This is one of the elements of the rational kernel to be found in Hegel's *Logic*, which he explicitly discusses in the pages on the dialectic of the finite and the infinite. *Pace* Colletti (1973, pp. 14–15), Hegel is not demonstrating the idealistic 'annihilation of matter'. Instead, what he is simply expounding in those pages is that real forms of 'being' affirm through self-negation. It is in that specific sense that, according to him, reality is the movement of contradiction. To put it differently, Hegel's point in those pages is just to say that the true infinite is nothing but the immanent *self-movement* of finite forms of being (Hegel 1999, pp. 129–31; Houlgate 2005, p. 429). For a further elaboration of this point, see Caligaris and Starosta 2014.

12 Engels 1987, p. 343.

13 All this raises the following question, namely, how the most abstract determination of reality as the movement of contradiction is discovered. In other words, the question of the necessity of process of determination itself still needs to be addressed. I cannot elaborate on this issue here. Later in this chapter, I explain that it can never be a dogmatic, metaphysical starting point, but rather the result of the process of dialectical *analysis*, which constitutes the first stage of a scientific investigation that always has the question of the conscious organisation of transformative action as its starting point. As the simplest content of the real, the affirming through self-negation should be discovered as an inner determination carried, *in a highly mediated form*, by human transformative action itself. Thus, upon its *analytical* discovery, the movement of contradiction must be ideally reproduced in its *synthetic* self-development through the *full sequence* of diverse qualitative forms it assumes until returning back to the singularity of the concrete conscious human action that initially triggered the investigation, i.e. the revolutionary action of the working class. Strictly speaking, then, at stake here is not the discovery of an ideal metaphysical abstraction called 'matter' which would constitute the common generic 'substance' that makes up all that exists. Instead, the point is to uncover the *immanent materiality*, or *simplest inner material content*, of human 'critical-revolutionary' practice. In

and despite Marx's own usage, I think that the very term 'application' should be dispensed with altogether when referring to the development of dialectical cognition. The dialectical method is concretely *set into motion* on each occasion when one wants to appropriate in thought the determinations of a concrete subject matter, in order to realise through our own transformative action the potencies immanent in the object of cognition at stake. Dispensing with the mediation of the latter in the name of correct methodological *rules* or ontological determinations is precisely what reduces everything to applied logic or metaphysics.<sup>14</sup> According to Marx, this was the mistake made by both Hegel and Proudhon.

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this sense, although Alfred Schmidt (1971, pp. 34–5) is right to point out against *Diamat* that 'matter' always exists in definite concrete forms and cannot be taken dogmatically or metaphysically as an all-embracing universal or ontological first principle from which we can explain the world, he is wrong to conclude that human beings cannot objectively cognise the simplest or most abstract mode of existence of the real as the pure movement of affirmation through self-negation, which is what one could call 'matter as such' (Iñigo Carrera 2008, p. 259). For a 'stylised' and concise presentation of the most relevant mediations involved in the two-way process of analytic discovery and synthetic unfolding of the movement of contradiction, see Iñigo Carrera 2008, pp. 256 ff.

- 14 An attentive reader should have already realised that the champion of that inversion is *Diamat* (see Chapter 2, footnote 53 above). By transforming dialectics into logic, *Diamat unmediatedly applied its logical representation* of the more abstract determinations of matter into its more concrete forms of existence. This instead of reproducing in thought the way in which the abstract forms of matter self-develop into more concrete forms precisely by *qualitatively transforming (hence negating)* themselves, i.e. *by a process involving several mediations*. Hence *Diamat's* crude objectivism and naturalisation of the social world, which dissolved the specificity of the transformative powers of human productive subjectivity and action in the name of metaphysically conceived 'dialectical laws of matter'. Yet the critique of this vulgar materialism should not take the form, as happens with most Western Marxist currents, of a severing of the link between natural and social forms. This abstract radical separation between nature and society results from postulating that contradiction, the affirming through self-negation or self-movement at most only belongs to the human world, and that to claim otherwise necessarily leads to downplaying the active role of the human subject in the making of history (Colletti 1973; Lukács 1971; Schmidt 1971; Sartre 2004). This is the ground on which these authors take issue with Engels's project of a 'dialectics of nature'. Here it should be also noted that the question of whether the movement of contradiction constitutes a generic determination of both natural and social forms differs from that of whether Engels's own views on the matter are unproblematic, which I think in many respects they are. Now, as Veraza Urtuzuástegui (1997) convincingly shows, although there is no doubt that the idea of a 'dialectics of nature' *as understood by Diamat* certainly played the ideological part of reserving the role of conscious subject of history to the 'party-state' in order to suppress the struggles of workers, those reactionary

Just as by dint of abstraction we have transformed everything into a logical category, so one has only to make an abstraction of every characteristic distinctive of different movements to attain movement in its abstract condition – purely formal movement, the purely logical formula of movement. If one finds in logical categories the substance of all things, one imagines one has found in the logical formula of movement the *absolute method*, which not only explains all things, but also implies the movement of things ... All things being reduced to a logical category, and every movement, every act of production, to method, it follows naturally that every aggregate of products and production, of objects and of movement, can be reduced to a form of applied metaphysics. What Hegel has done for religion, law, etc., M. Proudhon seeks to do for political economy.<sup>15</sup>

In this idealist reduction of concrete movements to the logical form of movement, the transitions and relations between forms are justified by recourse to the logical necessity of the abstract form of movement, thus replacing the specific real necessity with general ideal ones. From its determination as the reproduction in thought of the real movement of things, method becomes, firstly, transformed into logic. Secondly, if one is to be consistent to eliminate the exteriority between form and content of knowledge, method becomes hypostatised as the force which bestows movement upon things (as, according to Marx, happened with Hegel).

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implications do not necessarily follow from the way in which Engels himself approached the question or, more importantly, from the idea of a 'dialectics of nature' as such. As a matter of fact, the rejection of the existence of the movement of contradiction – hence of internal relations – among purely natural forms of reality actually leads to quite embarrassing results. In the first place, it implies accepting capital-determined forms of natural-scientific knowledge (based as they are on logical representation and external relations) as the eternal mode of human cognition of nature. In other words, it entails postulating a form of social consciousness (natural science) which would not be an expression of social being (capital), unlike every other social form, which would be seen as historically determined. Secondly, it deprives the very specificity of the conscious human subject that it purports to extol of any material foundation in the movement of nature. Far from 'empowering' human subjectivity and its transformative action, this denial of its emergence out of the movement of contradiction of natural forms renders it a purely idealistic construct, which can only be grounded on an abstract freedom of the individual. Whereas *Diamat* postulates an abstract and unmediated unity between the movement of nature and that of history, its Western Marxist critics end up positing an abstract difference. They are just the mirror image of each other.

15 Marx 1976b, pp. 163–4.



But this is not all. In a sense, here Marx seems to be just repeating the critique of logical representation I have already discussed. And yet I think that this further formulation throws new light on the methodological question. First, because, as I have shown above, these passages make clear the all-important centrality of both Marx's insight that dialectical cognition consists in the ideal reproduction of the real movement of contradiction *and* his awareness of the risks of transforming the latter into another logical principle. This awareness, and the difficulties involved in their avoidance, would accompany Marx throughout the rest of his intellectual development of the critique of political economy. This is revealed, I think, by the explicit (albeit occasional) remarks he made about it, the reworking to which he subjected the crucial chapter one of *Capital*, and his eventual refraining from the publication of some pages with a summary of the general form of his method.<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, I think that Marx had no doubts about the source of the risk of relapsing into a logical representation. Namely, the reduction of the dialectical method to the formal way in which one deals with the *theoretical categories* through which representational science grasps real forms or, alternatively, which the dialectical logician constructs in the manner of representational thinking. In the case of Hegel, this was not really a problem, since he self-consciously considered that dialectical cognition should tackle the movement of pure thought forms as the prelude and source of movement of natural and social forms. But in the case of Proudhon, who attempted to develop a materialist account of the genesis and movement of economic forms of bourgeois society, it turned out to be quite problematic and actually led him to the most absurd contradictions and, eventually, to the most idealist of inversions.

Economic categories are only the theoretical expressions, the abstractions of the social relations of production, M. Proudhon, holding this upside down like a true philosopher, sees in actual relations nothing but the incarnation of the principles, of these categories, which were slumbering – so M. Proudhon the philosopher tells us – in the bosom of the ‘impersonal reason of humanity’.<sup>17</sup>

The central objection that Marx is raising against Proudhon is that he deals not with the forms of capital themselves – i.e. ‘the social relations of production’ – but with the ‘economic categories’ through which political eco-

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16 Murray 1988, p. 109.

17 Marx 1976b, p. 165.

nomy represents them – i.e. ‘the theoretical expressions’. Interestingly, as I have already pointed out in a previous chapter, that was precisely the methodological limitation of the *Paris Manuscripts*. But here Marx is unambiguous about the lesson he had drawn from those shortcomings of the 1844 text. The dialectical critique of political economy could not take the categories of political economy as ready-made, given presuppositions to constitute the starting point of an investigation. In other words, the critique of political economy does not consist in an allegedly more sophisticated logical treatment of categories, definitions, and so on, found in previous theories, the greater sophistication springing from the use of a dialectical logic instead of a traditional one. Quite to the contrary, it entails the confrontation of economic forms by oneself in order to provide a new ideal reproduction of the determinations immanent in them with the purpose of consciously acting upon them and thereby effecting their transformation.<sup>18</sup> I think that the crucial point Marx

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18 Needless to say, this does not exclude the critical study of other authors as part of the process of tracing out the inner connections between economic forms, as a question of self-clarification in the process of inquiry. But our point is that the aim guiding the dialectical investigation of bourgeois economic forms is not the solution of the antinomies of the science of economics (Cf. Althusser and Balibar 1968), but the production of a novel science, the critique of political economy, which, *additionally*, ‘solves’ the scientific questions left unresolved by the former. The so-called ‘transformation problem’ is a typical case in point. With respect to this question, Marx did not try to solve the theoretical conundrum of classical political economy, namely, the relation between ‘value’ and ‘price’. In the same vein, the problem for contemporary critics of political economy is not to prove that Marx was right, or to correct him by providing an alternative, ‘logically consistent’ solution to the ‘theoretical problem’ of the relation between value and price. The point is to develop the totality of the determinations of the forms of capital as the alienated subject of social life in order to find our revolutionary action as the necessary form in which capital produces its own annihilation. In this process we would certainly find that the law regulating the exchange of commodities, when seen in their most abstract determination as simple products of (privately performed) labour, negates itself as such when their most concrete determination as products of capital is discovered and followed into its further concrete forms. This would reveal that the law regulating the exchange of commodities takes on, as its own immanent necessity, a different concrete form when the latter is discovered in its concrete existence as an exchange of products of equally valorised individual capitals (Iñigo Carrera 1995). That is, of individual capitals affirming their unity as aliquot parts of total social capital – as a *class vis-à-vis* the workers (Arthur 2002a; Iñigo Carrera 1995). As a necessary moment of its development, this process of dialectical cognition would lay bare the real relations between the value of commodities and its concrete form of existence as price of production beyond the antinomies at which political economy arrives through its representation of those relations. However, this would not be

is getting at is exactly the same as the one made many years later in his last economic writing, the *Notes on Adolph Wagner's Lehrbuch der politischen Ökonomie*.

In the first place [*De prime abord*] I do not start out from 'concepts', hence I do not start out from the 'concept of value', and do not have to 'divide' these in any way. What I start out from is the simplest social form in which the labour-product is presented in contemporary society, and this is the 'commodity'.<sup>19</sup>

In opposition to this standpoint, Proudhon did proceed from 'concepts' or 'categories', and therefore inevitably reduced the dialectic to another empty formal methodology, used to give the appearance of a dialectical movement to the former, in turn uncritically taken from the political economists. Marx's later judgement about Lasalle's similar attempt at expounding political economy in the manner of Hegel is perfectly applicable to Proudhon as well. That is, the latter did not realise either that 'it is one thing for a critique to take a science to the point at which it admits of a dialectical presentation, and quite another to apply an abstract, ready-made system of logic to vague presentiments of just such a system'.<sup>20</sup>

Now, before proceeding to the reconstruction of further aspects of the Marxian critique of Proudhon's 'applied metaphysics of political economy', it is worth taking a detour and probing deeper into the implications of some passages contained in these pages of *The Poverty of Philosophy*, where Marx, in the course of his critical observations on Proudhon's peculiarly crude 'dialectical' treatment of economic categories, offers some methodological remarks whose significance is broader, and actually sheds additional light on his critique of Hegel's *Logic* beyond the points made in the previous chapter. Also, this discussion will hopefully provide further clarification of the point just made that Marx does not start out from 'concepts' or 'categories'. In a nutshell, Marx hints at the argument that Hegel's hypostasis of logic (hence his idealism) involves two prior interrelated steps, which the systematic unfolding of logical categories presupposes. In the first place, Marx takes Hegel to task for taking a *thought*

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the aim of that development, but, as it were, a secondary 'by-product'. As a 'theoretical problem', the so-called transformation of value into prices of production is a scholastic abstraction of representational science.

19 Marx 1975b, p. 198.

20 Marx 1983, p. 261.

*form* (that is, a purely *ideal or formal* abstraction) instead of a real concrete form of ‘material or sensuous being’ as the starting point of his ‘systematic-dialectical’ development. This somehow resonates with the earlier Feuerbach-inspired critique of the *Science of Logic* found in the 1844 *Manuscripts* and is not, strictly speaking, something new. Secondly, and here we encounter the actual novelty in these further critical comments on Hegel, Marx points out that an immediate source of such a flawed systematic beginning resides in the methodological procedure by which the former (and, more generally in Marx’s view, metaphysics) arrives at the simplest logical ‘categories’ which are deemed as the ‘essentialities of things’. The problem, Marx insinuates, is that Hegel substitutes an inherently idealist method of *abstraction* for a proper dialectical *analysis* of real material forms.

### **Abstraction vs. Analysis: From Hegel’s Ideal Reproduction of the Ideal to Marx’s Ideal Reproduction of the Material Concrete<sup>21</sup>**

In order to make sense of Marx’s rather incidental comments on Hegel in *The Poverty of Philosophy*, it is firstly necessary to contextualise them through a brief critical discussion of the beginning of the *Science of Logic*.

Hegel opens his book with the category of ‘pure being’ as thoroughly ‘empty thinking’.<sup>22</sup> In other words, the *Logic* starts with being as a *thought form* or the *thought of being*. The profound meaning and broader significance of this peculiar point of departure in Hegel’s philosophy has been the subject of numerous controversies among commentators, particularly with regard to the connection between this category of thought and ‘real being’. However, few scholars have actually taken Hegel to task for beginning his systematic dialectic with a thought form. In order to do so, I shall start out by critically examining the methodological procedure that is presupposed by Hegel’s discovery of ‘pure being’ as the simplest category that sets in motion the subsequent dialectical unfolding of logical forms.

Hegel’s choice of categorial starting point and the procedure by which he arrives at it follow from his idea that true speculative philosophy must involve *presuppositionless thinking*.<sup>23</sup> The ‘beginning’, he states, ‘must be an *absolute*, or

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21 This section draws heavily on Caligaris and Starosta (2014). I am grateful to my co-author for kindly agreeing for me to include material from our jointly written article in this chapter.

22 Hegel 1999, p. 82.

23 Houlgate 2005, pp. 29 ff.

what is synonymous here, an *abstract* beginning; and so it *may not presuppose anything*.<sup>24</sup> 'Strictly speaking', he further argues in the *Encyclopaedia*, 'this requirement is fulfilled by the freedom that abstracts from everything, and grasps its pure abstraction, the simplicity of thinking'.<sup>25</sup> More concretely, the procedure through which one can arrive at this pure abstraction consists in casting aside any thought that entails a certain complexity or concreteness, that is, any thought whose content presupposes the existence of any other thought. At this juncture, one could, of course, object that such an elementary abstraction would not have been reached on properly scientific grounds, that is, that it would be the result of a purely formal procedure that does not guarantee that we have actually reflected the immanent life of the subject matter under consideration. In other words, this category would be a purely *formal abstraction* resulting from an act of subjective reflection that remains external to the object of cognition. Indeed, Hegel's retrospective discussion of the beginning of science in the section on the Absolute Idea speaks to this issue: the simplest category constituting the point of departure of his *Logic* is depicted as an 'abstract universal', which is said to be arrived at by *abstracting from* all determinacy.<sup>26</sup> In other words, pure being, as the category that sets in motion the (synthetic) movement of the *Logic*, is a category akin to those of the 'understanding' or 'representational thought', that is, one which only grasps objects one-sidedly in terms of their abstract self-identity.<sup>27</sup> In fact, as Carlson suggests, it could be said that it is actually the understanding that undertakes the act of abstraction and not speculative thought as such.<sup>28</sup> In this sense, Hegel saw the specificity of his 'absolute method' as essentially residing in the synthetic moment, that is, in the reconstitution of the unity of the different moments of the totality through a movement from its most abstract thought form (pure Being) to its most concrete (the Absolute Idea).<sup>29</sup> Thus, he did not seem to recognise anything specifically speculative in the procedure through which the simplest category is arrived at, that is, in the reverse movement from the concrete to the abstract which the synthetic phase of systematic science presupposes.

Still, for Hegel, such a discussion of the nature of the act of abstracting is immaterial at the initial stage of the investigation, since, strictly speaking, sci-

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24 Hegel 1999, p. 70.

25 Hegel 1991, p. 124.

26 Hegel 1999, pp. 69–72, 827–9.

27 Hegel 1999, pp. 795 ff., 828.

28 Carlson 2007, pp. 27–8.

29 Hegel 1999, pp. 830–1, 838.

ence proper has not actually begun. As he puts it some pages later in the *Logic*, '[w]hen being is taken in this simplicity and immediacy, the recollection that it is the result of complete abstraction ... is left behind, outside the science'.<sup>30</sup> A Hegel scholar puts it nicely and helps clarify the point. In order to remain firmly on the path to a science without presuppositions, 'we must even abstract from and set aside – indeed deliberately forget – the very fact that pure being is the product of abstraction'.<sup>31</sup> Indeed, *once the standpoint of 'absolute knowing' is adopted*, and therefore *thought* as such is taken to be the legitimate immediate object of the investigation, the scientifically poor nature of the procedure through which its simplest category has been grasped (that is, the relative poverty of formal abstraction) does not compromise the validity of the subsequent dialectical unfolding that 'pure Being' sets in motion. Thus, regardless of the procedure used, the essential point is that in this process the speculative thinker has never abandoned her/his 'object realm', namely, pure thought. In this sense, as long as (some version of) the identity of thought and being reached in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* is taken on board, Hegel's argument is perfectly coherent on this score, although, as I argue below, it is inherently tied to his idealism.

However, matters are very different from a materialist standpoint. From this perspective, the method of formal abstraction as the prelude to synthetic development is rather problematic. In effect, when the immediate object of the act of cognition is not thought but an existing form of 'material being', the formal abstraction resulting from arbitrarily casting aside all specific determinations inevitably takes us rather far from, and actually outside, the very 'object realm' that we originally set about to cognise, namely, material reality. Here we can finally get at the gist of Marx's critique of Hegel's and the metaphysicians' methodological procedure in *The Poverty of Philosophy*, which he sarcastically presents through the example of the idealist reduction of a house to a logical category. As Marx puts it, if we abstract from the materials which make up a house, the result will be a purely ideal representation of a house with no materials, something which has no real referent, since there is no such thing in material reality.<sup>32</sup> Hence, in abstracting from particular features of a concrete material object (a procedure that can be repeated as many times as the thinker wishes in order to find an ever simpler or more universal determination), we will no longer be dealing with really existing objects, but with *purely*

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30 Hegel 1999, p. 99.

31 Houlgate 2005, p. 87.

32 Marx 1976b, p. 163.

*ideal or formal abstractions*, that is, with 'pure thoughts'. On this basis, the subsequent reconstitution of the unity of the object cannot but result in a purely ideal construct, which will remain external to the object of cognition that constituted the starting point, and which only by chance will reproduce in thought 'the immanent life of the subject matter'. It follows from this that, for a materialist, the consequence of using the method of formal abstraction is, if she/he does not wish to become a Hegelian idealist, the relapse into Kantian dualism, where the theoretical construct, no matter how internally consistent or coherent, will inevitably be radically separated from the real object of cognition.

This is why a materialist engagement with Hegel's *Logic* cannot avoid the critique of the method of absolute formal abstraction that sets into motion the whole systematic development, a question which is not often addressed by commentators. Thus, in criticising Proudhon, Marx takes the opportunity to take stock with this aspect of Hegel's thought. In fact, this was precisely the cornerstone of Feuerbach's foundational critique of Hegel, as the following passage from *Principles of the Philosophy of the Future* eloquently puts it. Hegelian philosophy, Feuerbach states,

... presupposes nothing; this is nothing more than to say that it abstracts from all objects given immediately ... In short, it abstracts from everything from which it is possible to abstract without stopping to think, and makes this act of abstraction from all objectivity the beginning of itself.<sup>33</sup>

In part, Marx would develop, in *The Poverty of Philosophy*, the critique of Hegel's idealist abstraction along clearly Feuerbachian lines:

Is it surprising that everything, in the final abstraction – for we have here an abstraction, and not an analysis – presents itself as a logical category? ... If we abstract thus from every subject all the alleged accidents, animate or inanimate, men or things, we are right in saying that in the final abstraction, the only substance left is the logical category. Thus the metaphysicians who, *in making these abstractions, think they are making analyses* ... are right in saying that things here below are embroideries of which the logical categories constitute the canvas.<sup>34</sup>

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33 Feuerbach 1986, p. 19.

34 Marx 1976b, p. 163, my emphasis.

The methodological significance of the latter passage for the purpose of my argument is broader and goes beyond a rehearsal of Feuerbach's earlier critique. More importantly, the text brings to light what Marx mentions as the alternative to Hegel's procedure of formal abstraction, namely, *analysis*. Unfortunately, despite the stark contrast between abstraction and analysis made in the text above, Marx does not probe into the issue any further. Moreover, despite the many occasions on which he highlights the important role of analysis as a necessary moment of his scientific method,<sup>35</sup> there is no place in his works where he fleshes out in any detail the *specific form* of the analytical process within his materialist dialectical method.

Now, although Marx did not leave us any written formalisation of the specificity of materialist analysis, we shall see in the next chapter that it is possible to grasp its concrete workings from the 'analysis of the commodity' contained in the opening pages of *Capital*. For the moment, it suffices to note that, as is now widely acknowledged in the literature, the sequence at that particular stage of Marx's argument consists in going from *form* to *content*. However, the crux of the matter does not simply reside in realising this (which, at any rate, is explicitly announced by Marx himself in those pages), but in grasping the precise way in which properly dialectical analysis discovers the content behind the form and, therefore, their inner connection. In order to discuss this crucial point, we need momentarily to stray away from Marx's critique of Proudhon.

It is here where we can appreciate the relevance of Iñigo Carrera's contribution to the contemporary debate on Marx's dialectical method. For in his work he not only throws light on the *synthetic* moment of the dialectical investigation (i.e. the movement from the abstract, or content, to the concrete, or form), as do most authors in the 'systematic dialectics' readings of *Capital*; he also puts particular emphasis on the formalisation of the specifically dialectical form of the phase of analysis in Marx's method (the reverse sequence from the concrete to abstract). Moreover, he shows that the two stages constitute an indissoluble unity in materialist dialectics, so that a proper grasp of the first analytical phase is the condition for a successful unfolding of the synthetic phase of reproduction proper.

As Iñigo Carrera points out,<sup>36</sup> conventional scientific method analyses a concrete form by separating what repeats itself from what does not in order to arrive at a certain characteristic. In turn, this common attribute makes possible

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35 Marx 1989b, p. 500; and 1993, p. 100.

36 Iñigo Carrera 2013.



the mental construction of a definition of that concrete form as that which has this or that attribute. On his part, I have shown how Hegel's pure abstraction in the *Logic* proceeds by casting aside all particular features of objects (that is, all determinacy) in order to find through that one step the 'abstract universal' that constitutes its simplest element. Regardless of their differences, these two procedures have in common that they result in strictly mental abstractions or categories which, by their own nature as 'pure thoughts', cannot but remain external and alien to real forms of material reality. Conversely, dialectical thought analyses a concrete form, first of all, by facing it as embodying a qualitative potentiality for transformation, and second, by grasping that qualitative potentiality as the concrete form in which a more abstract form realises its own qualitative potentiality, that is, its real necessity. Thus the dialectical analytical appropriation of the universe of different real forms does not proceed through an identification of the distinctiveness of forms on the basis of the degree of repetition of certain attributes. But neither does it operate, like Hegel, by *abstracting from* every particular determination. Rather, it analytically separates the different forms by discovering as *immanent* in a particular concrete form the realised potentiality of another real form, which is abstract with respect to the first one, but concrete with respect to another form of which it is the realised potentiality.

It follows that while conventional scientific method grasps the general determination of real forms as immediate affirmations and hence self-subsistent entities, the distinctive mark of the process of analysis in dialectical research is to grasp, *in the same analytic movement*, both the concrete form under scrutiny and the more abstract one of which the former is the developed mode of existence. In other words, dialectical thought grasps each form as the affirmation through self-negation of another, more abstract one (hence, as subjects of their own movement). Moreover, in contradistinction to Hegelian abstraction or conventional scientific analysis, Marx's dialectical analysis at no point leaves the terrain of the real. Both the immediate concrete form that he encounters and the relatively more abstract one discovered through analysis (the content) are wholly objective and real determinations of the object under scrutiny. In particular, it is important to highlight that the more abstract form is discovered *within* the immediate concrete form that constitutes the starting point. The content is thus immanent in the form as its mode of existence. This analytical procedure must be then renewed for those other more abstract forms, but now treated as the real concrete whose inner content the research is trying to uncover. Only once all those inner form determinations have been discovered through analysis should the investigation undertake the 'return journey' through which those

abstract determinations, now in their self-movement, lead to ‘the reproduction of the concrete by means of thought’.<sup>37</sup>

Now, this materialist intellectual reproduction of the concrete not only differs from Hegel’s idealist systematic dialectics by virtue of its distinctive starting point with a real determinate form of ‘material being’ as the object of *dialectical analysis* (as opposed to the purely ideal concepts or categories resulting from Hegel’s formal abstraction or representational analysis). Furthermore, and actually as a consequence of this, it leads to a different formal structure of the synthetic phase of reproduction, a point which is also picked up on by Marx in his methodological critical observations on metaphysics in *The Poverty of Philosophy*. Let us therefore elaborate further on this point, through an examination of the general form taken by Hegel’s systematic unfolding of categories.

Towards the end of the *Logic*, Hegel discusses this question explicitly. ‘What is to be considered here as method’, he states, ‘is only the movement of the *Notion* itself ... the *universal absolute activity*’.<sup>38</sup> However, this movement is not presented by Hegel as simply taking the generic form of affirmation through self-negation through which a self-determining subject realises its own immanent necessity. Instead, insofar as he conceives of it as a pure movement of thought striving for a fully developed mode of expressing its truth content, he presents it as the unity of the *three moments* through which thought needs to pass in order to self-posit in such an adequate shape. Thus, he concludes, ‘the whole form of the method is a triplicity’.<sup>39</sup> The movement of affirmation through self-negation, which, as the simplest content of the ‘immanent life’ of any material object, constitutes the generic form taken by a materialist dialectical unfolding, is represented by Hegel as the abstract sequence of an affirmation, a negation and, lastly, the negation of the negation. In other words, Hegel does not directly present the third moment, which is the only one that constitutes the effective material reality of the object. Instead, he firstly needs to posit the prior two ‘imperfect’ moments, which are just formal stages through which thought needs to go to grasp the ‘truth’ of the object, as if they were constitutive of the effective objective reality of the object itself. This ‘triadic structure’ of the absolute method, which derives from the idealist character of the Hegelian dialectic, is also eloquently and sarcastically criticised by Marx in *The Poverty of Philosophy*:

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37 Marx 1993, p. 100.

38 Hegel 1999, p. 826.

39 Hegel 1999, p. 836.

So what is this absolute method? The abstraction of movement. What is the abstraction of movement? Movement in abstract condition. What is movement in abstract condition? The purely logical formula of movement or the movement of pure reason. Wherein does the movement of pure reason consist? In posing itself, opposing itself, composing itself; in formulating itself as thesis, antithesis, synthesis; or, yet, in affirming itself, negating itself, and negating its negation.<sup>40</sup>

In brief, what is rational in Hegel's dialectic, that is, its method of immanent self-development of the life of the subject matter, appears inverted under the mystical form of the three moments of self-developing pure thought. Again, this mystical shell directly stems from the fact that Hegel's systematic dialectic does not ideally follow the immanent life of a concrete material object but an ideal one, namely, pure thought. Hegel's 'mysticism' in the *Logic* therefore derives from being the *ideal reproduction of the ideal*. By contrast, in engaging in analysis instead of abstraction, Marx's scientific method at no point leaves the concrete material object of investigation behind. No matter how abstract and far removed from its immediate sensuous existence the analytical process eventually takes him, *he remains firmly within the materiality of the object*. As a consequence, the moment of systematic synthetic unfolding cannot but be the 'reproduction of the concrete by means of thought'.

### **Marx's Movement of Contradiction beyond Proudhon's Representational 'Unity of Opposites'**

In addition to the previous aspect of Marx's critique of *dialectical logic* discussed above, which, as it were, dealt with the 'logical' part of the expression, there is in *The Poverty of Philosophy* another crucial dimension of the question related to the 'dialectical' part. Whilst the first part has been occasionally highlighted by the most elaborated commentaries on Marx's scientific method,<sup>41</sup>

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40 Marx 1976b, p. 164.

41 The works by Murray (1988) and Meikle (1985) are perhaps the most sophisticated in this respect, although I part company with the idiosyncratic conclusions developed by them from that correct initial insight about Marx's rejection of formalistic methodologies. For instance, I cannot agree that what follows from that insight is the conception of Marx's novel mode of scientific knowledge as involving a new relation between science and *morality* (Murray), or as involving a *philosophy* that prioritises ontology over epistemology (Meikle). Marx's revolution in the mode of cognition transcends both morality and philo-

the latter has been generally overlooked.<sup>42</sup> I am referring to the transformation that the real movement of contradiction suffers when *represented* through a *dialectical logic*. In the case of those forms of representational thinking that structure themselves following a traditional formal logic, the problem does not even arise. That is, since they start by excluding the contradictory character of reality as the elemental rule guiding their representations, the conscious attempt to ideally appropriate its movement does not even form part of their agenda. The case of those forms of thought explicitly accepting the reality of contradiction, and which therefore try to grasp its movement, is quite different. And it is this perspective of which Proudhon is a case in point. For what he attempted to develop is precisely the ‘system of economic contradictions’. Yet I would like to argue that the relevance of Marx’s critique of this aspect of Proudhon’s thought goes beyond this specific author. For the claim that the superiority of dialectics consists in its ability to deal conceptually with the contradictory nature of reality (natural and social for some, only social for others) has been a trademark of most currents of Marxist thought since its inception. The question is what do these authors understand by reality being ‘contradictory’. And the point I want to make is that Marx’s critique of Proudhon throws light on the way in which, when dialectic is reduced to a form of logic, contradiction and its movement are grasped through a *representation* of them. According to Marx’s critique of Proudhon’s ‘metaphysics of political economy’, in what does the representation of the movement of contradiction by

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sophy in all of its forms. Still, among its merits Meikle makes a crucial point rarely found among Marxists, namely, that in Marx there is no such a thing as ‘dialectical logic’. See especially Meikle 1979. Precisely for this reason, and in spite of its otherwise thought-provoking quality, I find unsatisfactory much of the recent literature on the dialectical method coming from that broad current within Marxism grouped under the name ‘new or systematic dialectics’, which makes use of Hegel’s *Logic* to make sense of the dialectical exposition in *Capital* (for a useful overview, see Kincaid 2008). Despite their own recognition of the inseparability of content and form of knowledge, one could argue that many of these authors run precisely the risk I have highlighted of turning the dialectical method into a general logic to be applied to an external content. See, among others, Reuten and Williams 1989; Tony Smith 1990a and 1993; Uchida 1988 – although not formally associated with the others – and, from the Uno School, Albritton 1999 and Sekine 1997. Supporters of the ‘homology thesis’ like Arthur (2002b) in a way avoid this shortcoming, but only at the cost of the adoption of a highly contentious idea about the strict isomorphism between *Capital* and the Idea.

42 This is another key methodological insight to be found in the work of Iñigo Carrera (1992 and 2008).

*dialectical logic* consist? In order to answer this question, let us take a look at the way in which Marx characterises Proudhon's depiction of contradiction.

Let us see now to what modifications M. Proudhon subjects Hegel's dialectics when he applies it to political economy.

For him, M. Proudhon, every economic category has two sides – one good, the other bad. He looks upon these categories as the petty bourgeois looks upon the great men of history: *Napoleon* was a great man; he did a lot of good; he also did a lot of harm.

The *good side* and the *bad side*, the *advantages* and *drawbacks*, taken together form for M. Proudhon the *contradiction* in every economic category.

The problem to be solved: to keep the good side, while eliminating the bad.<sup>43</sup>

If we set aside the specificities of Proudhon's particularly crude conception, consisting in the mere enunciation of a good side and a bad side in each economic category, we can reach a more general point regarding the representation of contradiction by dialectical logic. In a nutshell, the latter grasps the contradictory nature of things as consisting in being the *unity or interpenetration of opposites*.<sup>44</sup> In this sense, it claims to go beyond formal logic since it accepts that the real determinations of things cannot be grasped through a single attribute since they are the embodiment of antithetical determinations. But does it? In other words, is it in this form that we can appropriate in thought the inner life of the subject matter at stake, overcoming the appearance of externality through which the relation between real forms presents itself? In order to answer this question, let us recall the objective basis for the appearance of externality between real forms.

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43 Marx 1976b, p. 167.

44 Note that the key issue at stake is not terminological (i.e. whether Marx actually used the expression 'unity of opposites', which might have been occasionally the case), but revolves around the specific meaning attributed to the term. Thus, abstractly considered there is nothing wrong about referring to the contradictory nature of the real as involving a 'unity of opposites', as long as it is made clear that what matters is the *movement* that gives unity to those 'opposites', through which one becomes determined as the concrete mode of existence of the other, more abstract form. However, given the widespread association of the expression with the kind of representational perspective criticised in this section, I think it is sensible to refrain from using the term altogether.

In its immediate manifestation, reality appears as a universe of unconnected real forms. In this sense, every real form appears as a self-subsistent entity, and the realisation of its determination as an immediate affirmation. This appearance is not a subjective misconception but the necessary form in which the inner connections between real forms appear when the process of determination is externally grasped in its immediacy, as already realised. That is, when we obviate the mediations that make a real form a concrete mode of existence of the necessity of another, more abstract form. Since, as Marx stated regarding the relation between commodities and money, ‘the intermediate steps of the process vanish in the result and leave no trace behind’,<sup>45</sup> the objective illusion arises that ‘those intermediate steps’ do not exist at all. Hence, real forms of different degrees of concreteness appear as co-existing side by side without any real necessity linking them in a determinate fashion. In brief, the representation of the world through formal logic grasps the *movement* of affirmation through self-negation that constitutes the determination of real forms only in its result, sticking to the appearance of externality between an abstract form and its necessary concrete mode of existence.<sup>46</sup>

Now, the following question arises. Does the representation of real forms as a unity of opposites characteristic of dialectical logic overcome that manifestation of exteriority between them? It is my claim that it does not. For the difference between dialectical logic and formal logic actually comes down to the fact that the former does not represent real forms as isolated entities, but always finds each of them as ‘necessarily’ associated with another one which, it claims, is its ‘contrary’. However, this does not mean that the indifference between them has disappeared. Because the fact that each form is represented as coexistent with its opposite does not change the fact that each real form still continues to be seen as an *immediate* affirmation and so does their unity. But the *specific movement* that *mediates* the existence of ‘all that exists on land or under water’, and which constitutes the immanent connection between different real forms, continues to be beyond the comprehension of this alternative form of logical representation. The unity that is thereby grasped continues to be completely extrinsic. It is *a unity between two opposing immediate affirmations* which, at most, ‘interpenetrate in a relation of struggle’.<sup>47</sup> But each of

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45 Marx 1976g, p. 187.

46 Iñigo Carrera 2008, pp. 279–80.

47 The *locus classicus* of this latter formulation is the work of Mao (2007) who, despite the occasional reference (or rather ‘lip service’) to self-movement (2007, pp. 69–70), is unable to grasp the affirmation through self-negation of real forms. Mao himself was basically rehearsing the earlier remarks of Lenin in his *Philosophical Notebooks* (1961), and of

the poles of that unity does not carry within itself the necessity of its own self-transformation. That is why, again, movement is not seen as the immanent necessity characterising every real form, but needs to be insufflated by the ideal necessity of logic. Hence, it is only the subjective reflection of the dialectical logician that leaps from one pole to the other generating only the 'shadow of movement' which pushes cognition forward. As much as formal logic, dialectical logic is therefore impotent to reproduce the real movement in thought and represents real forms as motionless abstractions.

It is important to emphasise that I am not rooting for the replacement of one absolute logical principle (unity of opposites) with another, allegedly superior one (affirmation through self-negation). And yet I am aware that, confined to this abstract level, my discussion might give the false impression that this is the case. But my point is just that when cognition fails to reproduce in thought the *specific* necessity for self-negation immanent in a determinate real form, it inevitably ends up representing the former movement as a unity of opposites. Hence, in order to demonstrate this point fully, the general discussion of how dialectical logic represents the movement of contradiction through the unity of opposites remains insufficient. I should therefore proceed by showing concretely how this inversion takes place in the case of the determinations of a specific concrete form. However, that is not the path that I shall follow in the rest of this chapter. The reason for this is that a satisfactory way of addressing the question would require that I run too far ahead in the main argument of this book concerning Marx's discovery of the determinations of revolutionary subjectivity. I shall therefore deal with that issue in the following chapters, in

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Engels's unfortunate codification of the 'unity of opposites' as one of the three 'fundamental laws of dialectics' in the *Dialectics of Nature* (Engels 1987, pp. 357, 492–8). This is not the place to assess Engels's own views on the dialectical method, even less so to address the thorny issue of the extent to which his views coincided with those of Marx and/or whether they are the intellectual source of the vulgar materialism of *Diamat*. But it seems to me an uncontroversial point that there are a number of formulations in Engels's work in which he did tend to confuse affirming through self-negation with the unity of opposites. To begin with, he makes *reciprocal action* and the 'universal interconnection of everything' the central notion of his dialectics of nature (Engels 1987, pp. 511–12). See Veraza Urtuzuástegui 1997, for an excellent balanced commentary on this aspect of Engels's dialectics of nature. But this is also clear from the allegedly unorthodox formulation of the connection between economic and political forms of capitalist social relations in the oft-quoted 1890 letter to J. Bloch, in which he posits that the movement of society is a matter of 'the *interaction* of all these elements' (Engels 2001, p. 35). Clearly, he does not say that the movement of contradiction is a matter of *economic content and its self-negating political form of existence*.

which I will illustrate this critique of dialectical logic by looking at the different social forms taken by the modern alienated social subject. Moreover, and in order to show the political nature of what at first sight might seem a purely scholastic question, I shall also deal with the relevance of all this for the comprehension of the social determinations of the revolutionary consciousness of the proletariat.

I prefer, for the moment, to leave the discussion at this abstract level and move on with my reconstruction of the way Marx advanced in his revolution in the mode of scientific cognition. And I think that the next crucial step Marx made in that direction through the criticism of Proudhon was in making explicit the practical character of a truly dialectical critique. That is, in discussing the question of workers' strikes and combinations, Marx showed very clearly that the new science that he was in the process of developing was of an eminently political nature. In short, what was at stake in his investigation was the conscious organisation, i.e. the discovery of the social necessity, of the political action of the working class.

### **Marx on Proudhon II: Dialectical Knowledge and Political Action**

In the previous section, I dealt with the methodological significance of Marx's critique of Proudhon as a critique of dialectical logic from the perspective of a materialist dialectical *method*. However, I have already mentioned that this engagement with Proudhonian socialism entailed other aspects that I regard as crucial in the development of Marx's thought. I find these additional aspects, which also pertain to the specific mode of Marx's scientific thinking, and which expose without ambiguity the inherently political character of the methodological question, synthesised in Marx's discussion of workers' strikes and combinations. This question, together with Marx's insights on the adequate way of tackling it, illustrates very clearly the distinctive features of dialectical scientific thought as practical criticism. On the other hand, we shall see that Marx's own treatment of the question at that time was rather rudimentary and, in this sense, unsatisfactory as a way of displaying the plenitude of the critical and revolutionary powers of the critique of political economy. And yet I will show that those very limitations of Marx's scientific development also prove to be illuminating (albeit in a negative way) of the immediately practical nature of science in its dialectical form. Moreover, those limitations also provide an indication of the direction in which Marx's thought would subsequently take. That is, one can read the incompleteness of Marx's critique of political economy as programmatic for his mature works.



What triggered Marx's polemic against Proudhon was the latter's 'political indifferentism' concerning industrial action over wages and revolutionary action in general. Regarding the former, and as an expression of his economic analysis, which denied the practical operation of the determination of value by labour time in capitalist society, Proudhon saw it as completely useless. This is because he concluded that the only result of an increase in the nominal wage would be an increase in the price of the means of subsistence of the labourers, thereby leaving the real wage (i.e. the conditions of reproduction of the workers) intact. Regarding revolutionary action aimed at obtaining 'political supremacy', Proudhon rejected it too, preferring 'to burn property by a slow fire, rather than give it new strength by making a St Bartholomew's Night of the property owners'.<sup>48</sup> For him, the most potent form of political activity available to workers was not their revolutionary action upon the alienated forms of their social being in order to effect their transformation in the direction of their self-annihilation. According to Proudhon, those social forms should be left alone. Instead, the energies of the workers had to concentrate on building the alternative socialist schemes devised by socialist theoreticians. Hence Marx's sarcastic comment that 'the Socialists want the workers to leave the old society alone, the better to be able to enter the new society which they have prepared for them with so much foresight'.<sup>49</sup> That is, Marx criticised Proudhon for thinking that workers could escape their general social relation and implement alternative socialist schemes of mutual aid in the 'interstices' of this society. The abolition of capital would then be the result of the slow but progressive spread of these schemes 'by example'.<sup>50</sup>

The aim guiding Marx's polemic was, therefore, the nature of the political action of the working class. The question at stake was the provision of scientific grounds for his political position concerning the content and form of proletarian action antagonistic to capital. In other words, what this controversy shows is that for Marx the starting point of his scientific development was not an abstractly theoretical discussion of economic categories (for instance,

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48 Cited in McLellan 1973, p. 160.

49 Marx 1976b, p. 210.

50 Shortall 1994, p. 36. One could argue that there is a striking similarity between the Proudhonian understanding of the abolition of capital and the Autonomist Marxist view – widespread among some social movements associated with, for example, 'Social Centres' in Italy in the 1990s – that revolutionary activity is about the micro or molecular politics of experimental construction of 'autonomous spaces of freedom' (Negri and Guattari 1999, pp. 73–80; Krasivyy 1996; Wright 1995/6). Or, alternatively, about 'exodus' from capital, i.e. from the alienated *general* social relation of present-day society (see Virno 1996).

the wage), but the transformative action of the working class. Thus, this specific controversy exposes a more general feature of the dialectical method. Namely, what sets into motion the dialectical investigation is the answer to the question of the form that we must give our transformative action in order to 'change the world'. As practical criticism, science thereby consists in giving that transformative action a fully conscious form. This means that what draws our attention to a particular concrete form is not an abstract desire for knowledge. If we face a concrete form of reality as an object of scientific cognition, it is because it can affect us when realising its own determinations, or, more importantly, because we can realise the potentialities it embodies through the actualisation of the potentialities of our action. The discovery of the relation between those two potencies in the totality of its determinations (i.e. the real necessity of transformative action beyond any appearance) is the generic aim of dialectical cognition.<sup>51</sup> To transform or to be transformed; that is the question.

In the concrete case Marx was facing, the relevance of the first concrete form at stake in the discussion with Proudhon (the wage form) was almost self-evident. That is, even a superficial observation of the movement of wages revealed the way in which it could affect (i.e. transform) the social existence of the workers. The question to answer was, therefore, what is to be consciously done in relation to wages? What form should workers give to their action to transform a determinate concrete form they were facing (to begin with, the quantitative transformation of the wage)? Should they struggle? Should they co-operate in that struggle, i.e. organise themselves? Or should they refrain from political action, and harmoniously and unconditionally submit their will to that of the capitalist, since wages are not determined by their political action or the will of the capitalist, but through the operation of the laws of political economy? Or should they not combine, since at any rate any real rise in wages eventually dissolves as an effect of a correspondent increase in prices? Furthermore, assuming that they definitely need to form combinations, should their conscious association stop at the level of an individual capitalist firm or at the level of a branch of production? Or should the struggle against the capitalists become general and, therefore, take the form of a *class action and, therefore, a general political action*? The need to tackle these questions in a fully conscious manner (i.e. dialectically) is evidenced by the reactionary political conclusions that emerge when they are addressed by a form of scientific consciousness, such as that of economists and utopian socialists,

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51 Iñigo Carrera 1992.

which stops at the immediate appearances of real relations. In particular, the appearance of externality between the laws that regulate the 'regular process of industry' and the struggles of workers through the formation of 'combinations'.

According to the economists, wages are determined by the eternal laws of political economy and, among them, by its most sacred, i.e. the law of supply and demand. Moreover, combinations breach the main condition under which those laws can harmoniously operate in their purity, i.e. 'competition', and therefore act as an external disruption of the otherwise smooth workings of the economic process, thus leading to crises, the introduction of machinery and a further reduction in wages. Hence, the economists conclude, workers' struggles are not only ridiculous but also dangerous for the preservation of their own living conditions.<sup>52</sup> Thus was the advice of the spokespersons of the bourgeoisie.

For his part, Proudhon followed the economists in their rejection of combination not only for its lack of actual influence on the real wage, but also for its impotence *substantially* to alter the form of social relations. No matter how much they struggle, Proudhon's argument went, 'workers will continue nonetheless to be workers, and the masters will continue to be masters, just as before'.<sup>53</sup> Hence, instead of futilely wasting their energies in organising their struggle against capitalists, workers should devote themselves to the peaceful implementation of fair utopias based on the eternal principles of human reason, leaving the movement of the wage to the unjust laws of political economy.

As stated above, Marx's reply to the objection to working class 'combinations' by both Proudhon and the economists shows at the same time the insights he was developing regarding the role of science as the conscious organisation of proletarian political action, and the limitations of his approach, given the preliminary status of his development of the critique of political economy at that time.

Regarding the former, it is interesting to note how Marx tackled the question by attempting to overcome the appearance of externality between 'the laws of political economy' (i.e. the movement of capital accumulation) and the political action of workers (i.e. the class struggle) through the conscious reproduction of the relevant determinations at stake. This involved, in the first place, the dialectical sensitivity to grasp the inner connection between

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52 Marx 1976b, p. 209.

53 Marx 1976b, p. 210.

what appeared to the ideological consciousness as absolute opposites, namely, competition and direct association, in the relation among workers. For the logical representation of both the economists and Proudhon, either one or the other operated in capitalist society. For the former, the atomistic relations of competition between commodity owners were the essence of the 'pure' laws of capital accumulation, whose smooth operation could not but be disrupted by what was a clear attempt to impose some sort of 'monopsonic' conditions in the sale of labour power. For his part, Proudhon agreed with the economists on the natural character of competition, since, as an 'economic category', it must be just another incarnation of the 'impersonal reason of humanity'. The problem resided, according to him, in the distorted way in which it operated in bourgeois society and which brings about the 'bad side' of competition. Far from attempting to negate, through their political action, the atomistic relations in which they find themselves, workers should try to recreate them but in pure form, through the implementation of alternative schemes 'outside' bourgeois society. The establishment of relations of direct solidarity between workers in their struggle over the wage was seen by Proudhon not only as being incapable of really affecting the level of wages, but also as playing no role in the radical transformation of bourgeois society.

Against these two views, Marx came up with the discovery that far from being absolute opposites, competition and association were necessary forms that the relations among workers took as concrete forms of the movement of their alienated general social relation, i.e. the accumulation of capital. That is why, 'in spite of both of them, in spite of manuals and utopias, combination has not yet ceased for an instant to go forward and grow with the development and growth of modern industry'.<sup>54</sup> In other words, Marx is highlighting that the relations of solidarity among workers are not the abstract negation of their competitive relations, but the concrete form in which the latter develop as a result of their own movement. On the one hand, competition is actually the most general social relation characteristic of the mercantile nature of bourgeois society, 'which is association founded on competition'.<sup>55</sup> On the other hand, inasmuch as it develops large-scale industry, it is the very result of the movement of competition to produce the necessity of its own negation, namely, 'combination'.

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54 Marx 1976b, p. 210.

55 Marx 1976b, p. 194.

Large-scale industry concentrates in one place a crowd of people unknown to one another. Competition divides their interests. But the maintenance of wages, this common interest which they have against their boss, unites them in a common thought of resistance – *combination*.<sup>56</sup>

Thus, the direct association between workers does not represent the *elimination* of relations of competition between commodity owners. It just polarises the latter into two antagonistic classes of commodity owners: capitalists and workers.

Thus combination always has a double aim, that of stopping competition among the workers, so that they can carry on general competition with the capitalist. If the first aim of resistance was merely the maintenance of wages, combinations, at first isolated, constitute themselves into groups as the capitalists in their turn unite for the purpose of repression, and in the face of always united capital, the maintenance of the association becomes more necessary to them than that of wages.<sup>57</sup>

In brief, Marx is arguing that it is in the nature of the laws of motion of the present form of social being (and not a distortion of it) to engender the necessity of the collective political action of workers through the formation of associations. In this sense, workers cannot abstractly *choose* not to do it. As personifications of their alienated social being, they are *compelled* to associate by the very conditions in which they are reproduced and, as Marx continues, they will eventually and inevitably *expand the scope* and *transform the aim* of their association.<sup>58</sup> Furthermore, he makes clear that the objective potency to succeed in that struggle does not spring from the abstractly self-determining will of the proletariat, but rather arises from the objective determinations of the reproduction of the specifically capitalist social relations of production ('competition'). So much so that the result of its struggle eventually crystallises in the only form in which the general conditions of social reproduction can impose themselves as an alienated attribute of capital, namely, as a legal regulation by the capitalist state.

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56 Marx 1976b, p. 210.

57 Marx 1976b, pp. 210–11.

58 And yet, as we shall see in the second part of the book, the alienated social necessity to establish relations of solidarity in the sale of labour power, which the workers must personify, is mediated by their *apparently* free will.

In England, combination is authorized by an Act of Parliament, and it is the economic system which has forced Parliament to grant this legal authorization. In 1825, when, under the Minister Huskisson, Parliament had to modify the law in order to bring it more and more into line with the conditions resulting from free competition, it had of necessity to abolish all laws forbidding combinations of workers. The more modern industry and competition develop, the more elements there are which call forth and strengthen combination, and as soon as combination becomes an economic fact, daily gaining in solidity, it is bound before long to become a legal fact.<sup>59</sup>

Thus far, I have reconstructed the way Marx replied to the objections of the economists and Proudhon to the collective industrial action of the workers. From the point of view of *method*, the important point to highlight is that the form of his reply was to develop (albeit in a rudimentary and insufficient way) the scientific consciousness of the real determinations of the workers' trade-union struggles so as to become aware of their *necessity*.

Now, even if necessary as a form of political action, the question remains as to whether trade-union struggle has any role to play in the overcoming of capitalist society. In this sense, it is important to remember that Proudhon's opposition to that form of political action not only came down to its futility regarding the quantitative movement of wages, but also, and more importantly, involved its rejection as a valid form of attempting to go beyond capital.

Again, one can see Marx's way of putting the question as being exemplary of the dialectical form of tackling any concrete form as an issue concerning the political action of the class. For although Marx grasped the social necessity of trade-union action, he also realised that it was limited in its *immediate* transformative power: in its simplest determination, it can only produce a quantitative change of the wage form, but not a substantial qualitative transformation of it, i.e. its abolition. Hence the need for workers' political action to transcend that limited form and Marx's subsequent 'phenomenology of class struggle' leading to the revolutionary conquest of political power in the rest of the text. However, Marx did not just extrinsically *counterpose* the different forms of political action of the proletariat, confining trade-union action to the realm of reformism, in turn seen as the abstract opposite of revolutionary action. As I mentioned above, dialectical cognition must provide the neces-

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59 Marx 1976b, p. 209.

sity of the transformative action of the workers in the *totality* of its determinations. And seen from a 'world-historical' perspective, the political action of the proletariat is the unity of its different necessary moments until it becomes produced as a fully conscious revolutionary action with the power to abolish capital through the construction of the free association of individuals.<sup>60</sup> In this sense, the struggle over wages and working conditions, along with the formation of trade unions as its adequate organisational form, is seen by Marx as one of those necessary moments in the historical production of the fully developed revolutionary subjectivity of the proletariat.<sup>61</sup> On the other hand, we shall see that it is precisely on that point that the insufficiency of Marx's positive development of the critique of political economy at that stage was more strongly felt. For, in actual fact, in this text Marx did not provide a dialectical exposition of all the determinations involved in the different forms of political action of the workers necessary for its production as fully conscious revolutionary action. Quite to the contrary, he offered no more than an impressionistic description of the concrete history of the workers' movement in England, which he extrapolated and generalised as *the* historical tendency of the working class as a whole.

In all fairness to Marx, it is important to point out that his insights into the determinations of proletarian action went a little further. For, in relation to the particular case of trade-union action, Marx was already aware that its determinations were not exhausted in being an active force in the quantitative transformation of the wage form. As we can see from the following passage, the former's transformative power exceeded the mere quantitative change in the wage form:

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60 Thus the traditional opposition between reform and revolution misses the point. The common understanding of those two terms is the ideological representation of different moments of the progressive transformations of capitalism towards the free association of individuals personified by distinct forms of the political action of the working class, which emerges when we abstract those transitions from their concrete determinations. From a dialectical standpoint, what is always at stake is precisely the recognition of the necessity of a determinate form of political action as a concrete form in which capital develops and, therefore, moves towards its dissolution through the conscious revolutionary activity of the proletariat. This recognition involves the discovery of the concrete determinations of each form of political action, which would show their respective transformative power in its determinacy, that is, both in its potentiality and the limitations to that potentiality.

61 Marx 1976b, pp. 210–12.

In England, strikes have regularly given rise to the invention and application of new machines. Machines were, it may be said, the weapon employed by the capitalist to quell the revolt of specialized labor. The *self-acting mule*, the greatest invention of modern industry, put out of action the spinners who were in revolt. If combinations and strikes had no other effect than that of making the efforts of mechanical genius react against them, they would still exercise an immense influence on the development of industry.<sup>62</sup>

That is, even if in its simplest determination the result of trade-union action is limited in its transformative power to quantitative variations of the wage, Marx was already aware that it also carried within itself a further mediated potentiality. Namely, the determination of strikes as 'triggers' of technical innovations, such as the introduction of machinery or, to put it differently, the determination of the class struggle as a progressive active force in the development of the material productive forces of society. In this sense, the transformative powers of proletarian struggle also entailed the transformation of the wage form through the *qualitative* mutation of the material conditions of social labour and, therefore, in the social form of existence of the productive subjectivity of the workers themselves. But this determination as such did not involve the *immediate* production of the conditions for the social constitution of the fully conscious revolutionary subjectivity. Marx already knew that it was in the very nature of capital to constantly revolutionise the material conditions of social labour. And if we take those two insights together, a necessary conclusion follows which reinforces the social necessity of proletarian struggle. In short, the latter is not only the way in which the proletariat can put a limit to the fall of wages below subsistence level, but also the form in which they force capital to produce the conditions for its supersession, i.e. the development of the material productive forces of society.

An oppressed class is the vital condition for every society founded on the antagonism of classes. The emancipation of the oppressed class thus implies necessarily the creation of a new society. For the oppressed class to be able to emancipate itself, it is necessary that the productive powers already acquired and the existing social relations should no longer be capable of existing side by side. Of all the instruments of production, the greatest productive power is the revolutionary class itself. The organiz-

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62 Marx 1976b, p. 207.



ation of revolutionary elements as a class supposes the existence of all the productive forces which could be engendered in the bosom of the old society.<sup>63</sup>

We can see how Marx's science as practical criticism allowed him to discover how the class struggle is also determined as an active force in the production of the material conditions under which it will be produced as the personification of the historical necessity to abolish capital. Moreover, Marx insists against Proudhon that this transformation can only take place in the determinate concrete form which the latter rejected, namely, 'through the organisation of the revolutionary elements as a class'.

### **The Limits to Marx's Early Attempt at a Dialectical Revolutionary Critique of Political Economy**

Thus far I have focused on the advances made by Marx in his development of the dialectical cognition as the most potent form of organisation of the political action of the working class. However, it should be obvious that at that time that development was still rudimentary. Marx was very far from accomplishing what *needed to be done*: the positive conscious development of the determinations of capital. Certainly, as I tried to show with my previous discussion, Marx had produced certain discoveries that allowed him to go beyond the 'utopianism' of Proudhon. But it should be noted that these were actually more like discrete insights whose real determinations and inner connections were still beyond Marx's horizon. Thus it would be more accurate to say that Marx only *hinted* at the discovery of the social necessity of the different forms of political action of the workers which aim at revolutionising capitalist society.

That this is the case is revealed by Marx's subsequent intellectual development immediately after *The Poverty of Philosophy*. The next scientific endeavour on which Marx embarked was an attempt to deepen his understanding of the determinations of wages and the necessary connection between their movement and the struggles of the workers through the formation of associations. This materialised in the manuscript edited as 'Wages', which formed the basis of Marx's lectures on the subject in Brussels published in 1849 as *Wage-Labour and Capital*. This betrays the fact that Marx himself was aware of the limits of the critique of political economy he had produced in those years.

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63 Marx 1976b, p. 211.

In fact, in the preliminary words to *Wage-Labour and Capital*, Marx explicitly acknowledges his deficit and states that it is the purpose of that work to cover it.

From various quarters we have been reproached for neglecting to portray the economic conditions which form the material basis of the present struggles between classes and nations. With set purpose we have hitherto touched upon these conditions only when they forced themselves upon the surface of the political conflicts ... But now, after our readers have seen the class struggle of the year 1848 develop into colossal political proportions, it is time to examine more closely the economic conditions themselves upon which is founded the existence of the capitalist class and its class rule, as well as the slavery of the workers.<sup>64</sup>

Marx then states that he attempts to explain the economic conditions upon which the class struggle, already 'proved' empirically in 1848, is based. And I take him to mean that he was going to develop the concrete determinations behind the necessity of the class struggle, the task that he had begun in *The Poverty of Philosophy*. And yet this first conscious attempt at a systematic presentation of the determinations of capital as the adequate form of the critique of political economy would also prove insufficient. In a nutshell, the conclusion that Marx draws regarding his investigation of the determinations of wages is that they have a tendency to fall as the result of the movement of the accumulation of capital. This he grounds in terms of the effect of the detailed division of labour on the value of labour (power), the displacement of labour brought about by the introduction of machinery and the inclusion of female and child labour which, in turn, increases the competition among labourers.<sup>65</sup> He then moves to another effect of the movement of capital accumulation which is to intensify its crisis tendencies. In turn, crises result in the further degradation of the living conditions of the working class since they increase the competition among them, thus putting the burden of their consequences upon the shoulders of the workers.<sup>66</sup> Certainly, when seen from the perspective of the explanation offered in *Capital*, this appears as a completely one-sided account which centres on workers whose productive subjectivity becomes degraded through capital's development of the system of machinery.

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64 Marx 1977, p. 197.

65 Marx 1977, p. 227.

66 Marx 1977, p. 228.

As an account of the necessity of class struggle, this work is still unsatisfactory. Marx seems more concerned to show the negative impact of capitalist development upon the living conditions of the working class than to provide a thorough investigation of the concrete determinations of the movement of wages and the role of the class struggle in that movement. Marx seems eager to provide a stronger foundation for the direct confrontation with those who claimed that there was some sort of harmony of interests between workers and employers. If the unchecked imposition of the will of the capitalist class leads to those degraded conditions, the working class cannot submit itself unconditionally to the interests of the capitalists but must affirm its own, antagonistic interests. The necessity of the struggle and the formation of associations is seen simply as a way of preventing wages from falling even below the ever decreasing 'minimum' or, when possible, to temporarily raise them above it. This account was still miles away from the one offered in *Capital*, where the question entails the distinction between labour and labour power, between the price and the value of labour power, the determination of the latter as an expression of the concrete materiality of the productive subjectivity of the labourers determined by the forms of production of relative surplus value, and so on.

These shortcomings are even more marked when considered in relation not just to the necessity of that limited form of the class struggle, but also to the development of the conscious revolutionary subjectivity of the workers. According to Marx, the associations are not just a means for the struggle over wages. More generally, they also serve to bring workers together and to constitute themselves as a class against the bourgeoisie. That is, it is the way in which their competition turns into its opposite, direct or conscious association. And this conscious collective action is the form that the revolutionary activity of the working class must take. Therefore, Marx sees these associations as a necessary 'training ground' for the revolutionary struggle of the class which would emerge under determinate material conditions (which capitalist development itself brings about, as he notes in the section that follows called 'Positive aspect of wage labour').

If in the associations it really were a matter only of what it appears to be, namely the fixing of wages, if the relationship between labour and capital were eternal, these combinations would be wrecked on the necessity of things. But they are the means of uniting the working class, of preparing for the overthrow of the entire old society with its class contradictions ... And if in their moments of philanthropy Messrs the bourgeois and their economists are so gracious as to allow in the minimum wage, that is, in the

minimum life, a little tea, or rum, or sugar and meat, it must by contrast appear to them as shameful as incomprehensible that the workers reckon in this minimum a little of the costs of war against the bourgeoisie and that out of their revolutionary activity they even make the maximum of their enjoyment of life.<sup>67</sup>

Implicit in this account is the rather simplistic view that the revolutionary subjectivity of the workers is the result of the 'accumulation of experience of struggle', a kind of quantitative extension of the trade-union struggle. Marx does not offer here a proper basis for this view. He just wants to say something about the transition between non-revolutionary and revolutionary forms of working class subjectivity in order to show the transitory nature of capital. But in light of the lack of a proper account of the concrete determinations of the latter, he can only offer a general statement based on the abstract self-development of the consciousness of the workers which is indifferent to the social determinations producing the different forms of working class subjectivity.

In this sense, Marx did not advance much from the 'phenomenology' of organisational forms of the class struggle already offered in *The Poverty of Philosophy*. Initially, workers organise just in the form of combinations. But then, this merely 'economic' form of the class struggle takes increasingly political forms. In a passage already quoted, Marx states:

But the maintenance of wages, this common interest which they have against their boss, unites them in a common thought of resistance – *combination* ... If the first aim of resistance was merely the maintenance of wages, combinations, at first isolated, constitute themselves into groups as the capitalists in their turn unite for the purpose of repression, and in the face of always united capital, the maintenance of the association becomes more necessary to them than that of wages ... In this struggle – a veritable civil war – all the elements necessary for a coming battle unite and develop. Once it has reached this point, association takes on a political character.

Economic conditions had first transformed the mass of the people of the country into workers. The combination of capital has created for this mass a common situation, common interests. This mass is thus already a class as against capital, but not yet for itself. In the struggle, of which we have noted only a few phases, this mass becomes united, and constitutes

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67 Marx 1976f, p. 435.

itself as a class for itself. The interests it defends become class interests. But the struggle of class against class is a political struggle.<sup>68</sup>

The first remarkable point of this passage is the presence of the distinction between 'class in itself' and 'class for itself'. But note as well that this distinction refers not, as is generally interpreted, to the fully conscious revolutionary forms of the class struggle, but rather to the class struggle in general. The class constituted as a class 'for itself' just means the class affirming its essential antagonistic relation to the bourgeoisie through the political action of its members, whatever form the latter takes. So it does not necessarily imply a fully developed revolutionary proletariat consciously transforming capitalist society into the free association of individuals through its self-abolition as a class. Secondly, it is true that Marx makes a distinction between forms of the class struggle that do not take a political form and political struggles. But note that not only does he not refer to the former as merely 'economic', but he also makes clear how class struggle in a political form is a necessary form which the embryonic non-political forms of struggle tend toward. Thus these passages clearly go against the Leninist rigid separation between economic struggles and political struggles, the former developing spontaneously but the latter needing the external intervention of a revolutionary vanguard. That is why that quote has often been used by defenders of so-called 'spontaneist' accounts of the development of revolutionary subjectivity (along the lines of Luxemburg) to make a case for their anti-Leninist position.<sup>69</sup> However, although those approaches are right in their criticism of the Leninist separation between economic and political struggles, they are wrong in identifying Marx's reference to the political character of the struggle with its revolutionary form. When Marx refers to the 'political struggle' between the two classes, he refers to the class struggle in general, not just to its revolutionary form. Its political character derives from the following interrelated points. Firstly, it objectively reaches the universality of the members of the class. Secondly, it transcends the confrontation with capitalists within the boundaries of individual capitals or restricted groups of them within branches of production, to become directly centred on the struggle over the form of political representation of social capital, i.e. the state. In this way it becomes determined as the form through which the directly general conditions of social reproduction are established.<sup>70</sup> 'Non-political' forms of the class

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68 Marx 1976b, pp. 210–11.

69 Müller and Neusüss 1975.

70 Marx 1965.

struggle are, for Marx, those first manifestations of the class struggle in which the proletariat had not yet affirmed itself as a class with an independent political representation.

Be that as it may, it is clear that the inadequacy of this early formulation of the question by Marx paves the way for all this confusion. In particular, taken at face value, Marx's formulation can certainly be read as a kind of 'Luxemburgist' approach based on an 'accumulation-of-experience-through-struggle' theory of revolutionary subjectivity. Briefly put, for that approach, revolutionary subjectivity is the product of the 'self-development' of class consciousness in the course of the struggle against capital, a potentiality which is carried by any form of the class struggle. While it is evident that the different (antagonistic) forms of class consciousness can only develop through the political actions of the workers against capital, this does not mean that class struggle as such is the self-determining ground for the production of revolutionary subjectivity. In fact, the picture of working-class consciousness as set into motion by itself, now growing, now retreating – that is, as essentially self-moving – is the one we get when externally grasped in its apparent concrete forms. Only as an expression of determinate material conditions does proletarian struggle acquire a conscious revolutionary form. This is what Marx makes clear immediately after the quoted passage when he states that 'the organization of revolutionary elements as a class supposes the existence of all the productive forces which could be engendered in the bosom of the old society'. However, this is no more than a very general statement, which does not do much as an account of the qualitatively specific form that those productive forces must acquire, or of the historical process that begets them, including the role of the different forms of proletarian political action in it.

Clearly, then, Marx's investigation of the concrete determinations of the political action of the working class, i.e. the critique of political economy, was at that time in an embryonic stage. Therefore, Marx could not but eventually *represent* the qualitatively different forms of the class struggle in terms of the *quantitative* difference of their respective scope. That is why, when read as a self-contained account, it could be read in a simplistic and mechanistic fashion, as involving a linear and continuous expansion of working-class organisation until reaching its truly revolutionary form. Or, alternatively, as a 'contradictory learning process', with steps forward and setbacks, but always potentially self-developing into revolutionary subjectivity. However, when read from the vantage point of Marx's more developed dialectical account in *Capital*, a different picture emerges. On the one hand, it is clear that Marx was (becoming) aware of the need to grasp the specific qualitative determination immanent in each of the forms of the class struggle in order to discover their necessity.

On the other hand, Marx's insufficient development of the critique of political economy allowed him to offer just a glimpse of the concrete determinations involved in those social forms. As a result of this, when those determinations do appear, however deficiently, in Marx's discussion (for instance, regarding the relation between 'associations' and the movement of the wage), they give the impression of being merely the 'objective conditions' for proletarian action. In turn, those conditions appear as 'moulding', 'limiting' or 'constraining' the deployment of the otherwise self-determining potentiality of the 'subjective factor'. In a nutshell, when externally grasped, the social determinations of working-class consciousness and action become reduced to a 'context' in which the latter freely develops (maybe as a 'response' to the latter).<sup>71</sup>

I would like to argue that in both their merits and shortcomings, these texts embody a wider significance beyond the concrete questions they address and the specific (and limited) answers they give. For, when seen from the perspective of the direction that Marx's subsequent scientific development took, we can see those texts as embodying a programmatic significance regarding the specific form of dialectical cognition in its immediate condition of conscious organisation of human transformative action. The starting point of Marx's investigation, the very form in which he attempted to address the questions to be answered, and the limitations he encountered, all reveal *the general form of motion of scientific knowledge determined as practical criticism*. This, I think, is the lesson that Marx drew from his polemic against Proudhon and, a little bit later, from the defeat of the 1848 revolutions.

It is my claim that Marx became aware that only through the positive reproduction in thought of the determinations of capital and its form of movement could the working class develop its revolutionary consciousness. Science, as Alfred Schmidt puts it, becomes determined as the 'conscious product of historical movement'.<sup>72</sup> Moving forward in its production and giving it a socially reproducible form – i.e. a book – thereby turned out to be a most urgent polit-

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71 In fact, it could be argued that the whole history of Marxism revolves around the attempt to solve this (false) antinomy between the forms of objectivity and subjectivity of the capital relation. This illusion arises because, as we have seen, when the inner connections between social forms is broken by logical representation, abstract and concrete forms appear side by side as self-subsistent entities, which, at most, interpenetrate. And this applies to the relation between the objective and the subjective forms of the alienated social being as well. For excellent historical accounts of this problematic, and for thought-provoking reflections, see *Aufheben* 1993, 1994 and 1995; Marramao 1975/6 and 1982; Jacoby 1971 and 1975.

72 Schmidt 1983, p. 29.

ical task. In a letter to Meyer from 1867, in which he apologises for the tardiness of his reply, Marx speaks in this way about his activities of the previous years:

Why then did I not answer you? Because I was the whole time at death's door. I thus had to make use of every moment when I was capable of work to complete my book [*Capital*] to which I have sacrificed my health, happiness, and family. I hope this explanation suffices. I laugh at the so-called 'practical' men and their wisdom. If one wanted to be an ox, one could, of course, turn one's back on the sufferings of humanity and look after one's own hide. But I should really have thought myself *unpractical* if I had pegged out without finally completing my book, at least in manuscript.<sup>73</sup>

That book, *Capital*, turned out to be Marx's most developed attempt to concretise the general form of motion of dialectical cognition determined as revolutionary science and outlined in this first part of the book through the discussion of Marx's early works. In the second part of this book, I shall attempt to demonstrate this through a critical reading of Marx's mature critique of political economy. The latter, I shall argue, is but the scientific development of the revolutionary consciousness of the proletariat becoming aware of its own social determinations in their unity and, therefore, of the historical task which, by virtue of them, it will be compelled to do: the conscious production of communism as the most developed form of the critique of capital.

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73 Marx 1987c, p. 366.



**PART 2**

*Dialectical Knowledge in Motion:  
Revolutionary Subjectivity in Marx's  
Mature Critique of Political Economy*





# The Commodity Form and the Dialectical Method

## Introduction

In the Preface to the First Edition of *Capital*, Marx makes evident that he was fully aware of the complexity entailed by the first steps in the critique of political economy. Thus he states:

Beginnings are always difficult in all science. The understanding of the first chapter, especially the section that contains the analysis of commodities, will therefore present the greatest difficulty.<sup>1</sup>

The endless debates over the real meaning and implications of Marx's discussion of the commodity form seem to suggest that, if anything, Marx's warning actually fell short of the real difficulties at stake. And whether it is explicitly acknowledged or not, it is clear that the diverse readings of Marx's critique of political economy entail different political implications.<sup>2</sup> In fact, it could be argued – and, hopefully, this chapter and the ones that follow will substantiate this claim – that those 'minutiae', which the discussion of the determinations of the commodity form 'appear to turn upon',<sup>3</sup> are of paramount importance for the conscious organisation of the revolutionary action of the proletariat. This is shown not only in Marx's insistence on the impossibility of correctly grasping the determinations of those more abstract social forms from the bourgeois standpoint of political economy,<sup>4</sup> but also in the central role they played in his critique of the ideological representations of them coming from the working class movement itself, e.g. Proudhonian socialism.<sup>5</sup>

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1 Marx 1976g, p. 89.

2 Dimoulis and Milios 2004.

3 Marx 1976g, p. 90.

4 Marx 1976g, p. 174.

5 See Clarke (1994) and Shortall (1994) for good reconstructions of Marx's critique of Proudhonian socialism based on the latter's misunderstanding of the nature of the commodity and money forms. Thus, the gist of Marx's critique of Gray's proposal to preserve private commodity production while replacing the money form with labour time certificates issued by a national bank, comes down to the latter's inability to comprehend the immanent necessity of the value of commodities to take on the independent form of money (see Elson 1979b, pp. 135–6). Similarly, in the *Grundrisse*, Marx ridicules Darimon's proposal of abolishing the privilege of money (that of being directly exchangeable for all commodities) by making 'by decree'

It is my view that this diversity in the ways in which Marx's followers have read the ideal reproduction of the determinations of the commodity form contained in *Capital* is closely connected to the varied methodological perspectives from which those authors have attempted to grasp the former. In other words, those different interpretations of the actual *content* of the first section of *Capital* express different understandings of the very *form* of scientific knowledge unfolded in that book. Seen the other way round, and this is the fundamental issue to be discussed in this chapter and the next, I would argue that only on the basis of a sound comprehension of the dialectical method can the implications of Marx's investigation of the commodity form be uncovered in all their plenitude.

The need to reconsider Marx's presentation of the commodity form in Chapter 1 of *Capital* through a reassessment of his dialectical method (in particular, its connection to Hegel's *Science of Logic*) has been widely recognised by a growing number of scholars. In effect, the last twenty to twenty-five years have witnessed a renewed interest in Marx's dialectical method and its implications for value theory.<sup>6</sup> However, despite all the light that these works have cast on the form of Marx's argument, they have been mainly focused on the *synthetic* aspects of Marx's dialectical presentation (i.e. on the exposition of the dialectical movement from the 'abstract to the concrete'). In this sense, it could be argued that this literature has glossed over two further fundamental aspects of Marx's dialectical method, which I have discussed in the previous chapter. First, those works have not sufficiently thematised the peculiar role of the *phase of analysis* in Marx's dialectical investigation generally and in his presentation in *Capital* in particular. Second, they have not paid sufficient attention to the *specific form of the analytical process within dialectical thought*.<sup>7</sup> My aim here, therefore, is to fill these gaps in the literature.<sup>8</sup>

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all commodities directly exchangeable (Marx 1993, p. 126). In all these cases, the common thread of the Marxian critique lies in the incapacity of those authors to grasp the necessary inner connection between the commodity and money forms.

6 See, among others, Murray 1988; Smith 1990a; Moseley 1993; Moseley and Campbell 1997; Arthur 2002b; Albritton and Simoulidis 2003.

7 The distinction between analysis (in the sense of dissection of the 'whole' into 'parts' or 'identification of differences') and synthesis (in the sense of reconstitution of the 'unity' of the whole) is not peculiar to dialectics. As I argue below, what sets the latter apart from formal-logical methodologies is the specific *form* taken both by the analytical and synthetic processes in dialectical thought. Zelený provides a concise discussion of the different meanings of analysis and synthesis in science and philosophy, which also traces back their intellectual lineage (see Zelený 1980, Chapter 10).

8 These other aspects have not been entirely absent in the literature. However, they came up in

The main purpose of this chapter is to provide a methodologically minded critical reading of Marx's argument about the determinations of the value form of the product of labour in the first chapter of *Capital*. Through this reading, I shall substantiate the claim made in the first part of the book that *Capital* crystallises the positive deployment of the methodological insights gained by the 'young Marx' through his critique of Hegel, the Young Hegelians and Proudhon. In other words, I shall show that *Capital* contains Marx's dialectical method, as discussed in the first part, concretely set into motion for the intellectual reproduction of capitalist social forms. While this latter statement is true of the book as a whole (or, at least, to its first volume, the only one that Marx prepared for publication), the detailed examination of the structure of the first three sections of Chapter 1 is of particular significance. In effect, the exposition of the determinations of the commodity form contained there is, arguably, the most paradigmatic place where he presented the concrete workings of his dialectical method of research in the indissoluble unity of its analytic and synthetic stages.<sup>9</sup> On these grounds, additionally, I will try to show that many of the confusions and misunderstandings among both followers and critics of Marx spring from an inadequate grasp of the dialectical structure of Marx's exposition.

Finally, this close examination of the expositional structure of the first three sections will set the stage for the discussion in the following chapter of this book, in which I discuss Marx's presentation of the fetish character of the commodity. As will become evident later on, only by properly grasping the precise content and formal structure of the first three sections of Chapter 1 of *Capital* can the specific object of exposition and systematic significance of the section on 'commodity fetishism' be fully appreciated.

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the debate among 'new dialecticians' relatively late (Murray 2002; Reuten 2000) and have not been pursued any further until recently (see Reuten 2014, who does address in great detail the connection between analysis and synthesis, and that between inquiry and presentation, in systematic dialectics). See also Brown et al. (2002) for a discussion of some of these issues through a comparison between critical realism and systematic dialectics. Be that as it may, it is my view that compared to the light thrown on the synthetic aspects of Marx's method of presentation, the nature of the relation between analysis and synthesis in the presentation, and the way in which this relates to the formal determinations of the dialectical inquiry, have not been explored with the same degree of clarity.

9 Iñigo Carrera 2013.

### Inquiry and Presentation, Analysis and Synthesis: On Some Controversies over the Initial Passages of Marx's Argument in *Capital*

In *Capital*, Marx puts into motion the discoveries which allowed him to overcome the limitations of his early account of alienated labour and its supersession. In contradistinction to the *Paris Manuscripts*, and as he clearly states in the *Marginal Notes on Adolf Wagner*, he takes as a point of departure neither the concepts of political economy nor any concept whatsoever,<sup>10</sup> in order thereby to discover alienated labour as their presupposition. As the title of his most important work denotes, the subject whose determinations the dialectical investigation proceeds to discover and present is *capital*, which, as the alienated subject of social life becomes 'the all-dominating economic power of bourgeois society' and must therefore 'form the starting point as well as the finishing point' of the ideal reproduction of the concrete.<sup>11</sup> In this sense, Marx's exposition in *Capital* does not advance towards the discovery of alienation, but instead starts from what the dialectical inquiry revealed as its most abstract and general form.<sup>12</sup> He starts with the immediate observation of the simplest *concretum* in which the alienation of labour is expressed in order to develop the real determinations specific to this social form.<sup>13</sup> As has now been widely acknowledged, this starting point is not an ideal-typical – or worse, historically existent – simple commodity-producing society, as in the orthodoxy derived from Engels and popularised by authors such as Sweezy and Meek.<sup>14</sup> In Marx's own words, he starts with the commodity as the 'economic cell form of bourgeois society'.<sup>15</sup>

We begin with the commodity, with this specific social form of the product – for it is the foundation and premise of capitalist production. We take the individual product in our hand and analyse the formal determinants that it contains as a commodity and which stamp it as a commodity.<sup>16</sup>

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10 Marx 1975b, p. 198.

11 Marx 1993, p. 107.

12 Iñigo Carrera 2008, p. 323; Meikle 1985, pp. 71–2; Schmidt 1983, pp. 48–9.

13 Marx 1975b, p. 198.

14 Engels 1980; Sweezy 1968; Meek 1973. For a critique of the Engelsian orthodoxy on this question, see Arthur 1996, 1997 and 1998b; Backhaus 1980; Robles Báez 2000; Reichelt 1995; Weeks 1981.

15 Marx 1976g, p. 90.

16 Marx 1976c, p. 1059.

However, Marx's presentation does not directly start with the essential determinations of the commodity form, but rather starts from the immediate observation of an individual commodity in its outward appearance.<sup>17</sup> In a presentation which will prove full of 'metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties',<sup>18</sup> Marx shows that what determines the commodity as a form of social wealth is not only that, as any product of labour, it possesses a use value, but that the latter acts as the material bearer of a second attribute, namely, exchange value. The further analysis of the commodity reveals that exchange value is actually the form of expression of a content distinguishable from it – the value form, or the attribute of general exchangeability of the commodity – the substance of which resides in the abstract labour congealed in it, and whose magnitude is consequently determined by the socially necessary abstract labour time required for its production.

The above line of reasoning has been the subject of all kinds of objections put forward by different interpreters of Marx. As I argue below, those reservations about Marx's argument have their source in an inadequate comprehension of, or insufficient attention to, the nature of the crucial distinction between two different moments involved in Marx's dialectical inquiry and presentation, namely, the stage of analysis and that of synthesis. In particular, I think that it is confusion over these questions that lies at the basis of widespread critiques of Marx's line of argument about the determinations of the commodity form;

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17 Properly speaking, there is a previous step in Marx's presentation. He first starts with the form in which social wealth appears in capitalist society, namely, an 'immense collection of commodities' (Marx 1976g, p. 125), the individual commodity being its elementary form. The unfolding of the determinations behind this appearance is not completed until Volume II, where the unity of the movement of the total social capital itself, in the form of the circuit of commodity capital, is revealed as positing social wealth in the form of an immense collection of commodities (Marx 1978, pp. 174–7). The secondary literature on Volume II is remarkably limited compared to what has been written on Volumes I and III. Certainly, there has been a lot of discussion of the final part on the schemes of reproduction, misguidedly revolving around the notion of a mechanical impossibility of capitalist reproduction as constituting the limit to capital (see Rosdolsky 1986, for a survey of the early classical debates on that question). But the first part of Volume II has been generally neglected. Some of the few works available that deal in some detail with aspects of the former include: Fine 1975; Shortall 1994; Fine and Saad-Filho 2003; Arthur and Reuten 1998. On the circuit of capital, see especially the contribution by Arthur (1998a) in the latter book. More recently, David Harvey has contributed to redress the situation in the second volume to his *Companion to Marx's Capital* (Harvey 2013).

18 Marx 1976g, p. 163.

not only by well known critics such as Böhm-Bawerk,<sup>19</sup> but also among some of Marx's disciples.<sup>20</sup> In brief, the general thrust of those objections is as follows: in *Capital*, Marx did not provide an adequate 'logical proof' that commodities have a 'something' in common and that that 'something' is congealed abstract labour.<sup>21</sup>

The first point at stake in this objection has already been forcefully made by other scholars, so I will refer to it only briefly. In a nutshell, the question comes down to the radical methodological difference which, as Meikle insightfully notes, separates Marx's dialectical approach to science from the formalism and atomism of bourgeois conceptions.<sup>22</sup> Clearly based on the latter, Böhm-Bawerk's objections came from someone who could only see science as a purely

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19 Böhm-Bawerk 1975.

20 Thus both Reuten (1993, p. 107) and Arthur (1993, p. 76) agree that Böhm-Bawerk's objections to Marx's line of reasoning about abstract labour as the substance of value are justified; not because Marx is wrong in seeing abstract labour as the substance of value, but because his grounding of that point is defective from a 'systematic dialectical' perspective. This objection can actually be traced back to Hans-Georg Backhaus's groundbreaking essay of 1969, 'On the Dialectics of the Value-Form' (Backhaus 1980, pp. 99–100). A non-Ricardian, value-form critique of Backhaus (and defence of Marx's argument) can be found in Murray (2013).

21 A good and concise account of the essence of this critique can be found in Kay (1979, pp. 48–58). See also Park 2003. Specifically, Böhm-Bawerk objected that Marx did not take into consideration common properties other than being products of labour – e.g. utility, scarcity, and so on – as possible determinants of exchange value (Böhm-Bawerk 1975, pp. 74–5). In this sense, it is worth noting that in the process of *inquiry* Marx did consider – but discarded and, hence, excluded from the *presentation* – 'utility in general' as the substance of value. This is evidenced by the following remarks from the preparatory *Manuscripts of 1861–63*: 'We have seen that the basis of value is the fact that human beings relate to each other's labor as equal, and general, and in this form social, labor. This is an abstraction, like all human thought, and social relations only exist among human beings to the extent that they think, and possess this power of abstraction from sensuous individuality and contingency. The kind of political economist who attacks the determination of value by labor time on the ground that the work performed by 2 individuals during the same time is not absolutely equal (although in the same trade), doesn't yet even know what distinguishes human social relations from relations between animals. He is a beast. As beasts, the same fellows then also have no difficulty in overlooking the fact that no 2 use values are absolutely identical (no 2 leaves, Leibniz) and even less difficulty in judging use-values, which have no common measure whatever, as exchange values according to their degree of utility' (Marx 1988, p. 232).

22 Meikle 1985, Chapter 3.



'logical construct' and not the reproduction in thought of 'how things essentially are'.<sup>23</sup> Thus, with 'the characteristic empiricist gap between "truths" and the entities they are supposed to be true of',<sup>24</sup> he could only read Marx's initial pages as an abstract, formal process of 'logical proof'.<sup>25</sup> The possibility that those pages unfold the real nature and specific self-movement of a determinate content (the commodity form of the product of labour) and do not contain a formal deduction was beyond Böhm-Bawerk's formalistic field of vision.<sup>26</sup>

Secondly, and more important for the purpose of this chapter, at stake here is another aspect of Marx's argument in the first pages of *Capital* that has not been sufficiently or satisfactorily explored by most scholars: the specific nature and significance of the difference between the phase of analysis and that of synthesis within a dialectical exposition. This double movement in the dialectical *presentation* is not an arbitrary stylistic or rhetorical strategy introduced by Marx, but, as discussed in the first part of this book, reflects a real difference characterising the specificity of dialectical *inquiry*. The latter must involve *both* identification of the different forms taken by the subject whose determinations the dialectical investigation attempts to reproduce in thought (i.e. the analytical separation between social forms according to their relative degree of concreteness) *and* the 'tracking down of their inner connection' (i.e. the *synthetic* discovery of the immanent real necessity linking those different forms).<sup>27</sup> A fundamental implication follows from this: the exposition of the

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23 Meikle 1985, p. 80.

24 Meikle 1985, p. 79.

25 As Sayer (1979, pp. 94–5) notes, Althusser and Balibar (1968) and his British followers (Hindess and Hirst 1975 and 1977) fell prey to this appearance.

26 Kay 1979, pp. 51–2. Besides, it is to be noted that Böhm-Bawerk completely missed the actual object of Marx's presentation in Chapter 1 of *Capital*, which is the commodity and not the causal determination of exchange ratios (Kliman 2000, p. 104).

27 Marx 1976g, p. 102. Here my approach differs from that of both Murray and Reuten. The former seems simply to identify analysis with inquiry (what he calls 'phenomenology'), and synthesis with presentation (Murray 2000, pp. 36–8). Reuten does allow for synthetic moments in the process of inquiry, but only as 'provisional outlines of inseparability of phenomena' (Reuten 2000, p. 143). Moreover, although he is right to see the need for the dialectical presentation to be fundamentally synthetic, he does not fully explore the possibility that the dialectical researcher presenting the results of the inquiry may include 'stylised' moments of analysis in order to highlight the unity of the dialectical process of cognition. He only mentions this possibility in passing when discussing Banaji's argument about the twofold starting point of Chapter 1 of *Capital* (Banaji 1979, pp. 36–40; Reuten 2000, p. 158). But as I argue below, this presentational strategy plays a central role at least in

*explanation* proper of the necessity underlying the relations between different social forms – what would amount to a ‘logical proof’ in the language of formalistic methodological approaches – is not to be found in the dialectical *analysis*, but in the *synthetic* movement of the exposition. Now, since it is in the latter only that the unfolding of the real movement of determination – hence the explanation – actually takes place, the presentation of the findings of the dialectical inquiry could take, in principle, a fully synthetic form.<sup>28</sup> However, this is not the way Marx structured his dialectical exposition in Volume I of *Capital* (the only one he edited for publication himself); this exposition tends to include, in a ‘stylised’ form, brief presentations of the analytic process.<sup>29</sup> Since this peculiar structure of Marx’s presentation of the determinations of the commodity form actually recurs throughout most of Volume I, and given that its misunderstanding has caused so many controversies among critics and followers alike, it might be worth providing further elaboration on this last point.

In a nutshell, this structure of Marx’s dialectical presentation starts by taking the immediate concrete appearance of the determinate social form at stake. Through a brief analytic movement, it subsequently uncovers its inner essential determination.<sup>30</sup> The exposition then proceeds by synthetically unfolding the realisation of that (more abstract) determination. This stage goes on until the specific potentiality defining the essential determination of the social form

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the whole of Volume I. Fineschi (2009) offers an interesting overview of German debates in the 1970s dealing with the connection between Marx’s method of inquiry and his method of presentation.

28 Iñigo Carrera 2008, p. 317.

29 On the role and the pros and cons of this analytic moment in the peculiar structure of the dialectical exposition in *Capital*, Volume I, organised around presentational ‘nodes’, see Iñigo Carrera 2008, p. 323.

30 Marx sometimes includes *apparent* (hence flawed) analytical paths in his exposition that are revealed to be such through a movement that leads the reader back to the unmediated starting point, that is, without making any progress towards the discovery of the underlying specific determination defining the object under scrutiny (Iñigo Carrera 2008, p. 320). The presentational role of the inclusion of these flawed analytical movements is mainly pedagogical; they serve to place more emphasis on the correct analytical path. Marx’s consideration of the possibility that the particular material properties of the commodity under investigation constitute the more abstract form behind the attribute of general exchangeability is an example of this (Marx 1976g, pp. 127–8). Incidentally, it is to be noted that this is the real meaning of what Böhm-Bawerk mistakenly saw as Marx’s ‘method of exclusion’, through which he allegedly provided a ‘purely negative proof’ of abstract labour as the substance of value (see Böhm-Bawerk 1975, pp. 68–9).

under scrutiny, and whose realisation the exposition is ideally reproducing, negates itself as immediately carried by that abstract social form to become affirmed as immediately pertaining to the more concrete form into which it has metamorphosed. This signals that the first presentational node has been exhausted. A new one thereby begins, but now with the more concrete form whose genesis has been traced in the former as the subject of the movement to be ideally reproduced. However, the new node does not directly start with the inner determinations of this more concrete social form but, again, with its immediate manifestation. An analytic movement therefore precedes the former.<sup>31</sup>

Returning to my main argument about the general aspects of this formal structure of Marx's presentation: as mentioned above, it is the exposition of the *dialectical synthesis* that reveals the 'why' of real relations. The analytic stage only separates a social form from a more abstract one, whose realised potentiality it carries within itself in the form of its own immanent potentiality. In this sense, the analytic stage is about not the *why*, but the *what*. Evidently, since the separation of social forms according to their relative degree of abstractness/concreteness ideally expresses the objective necessity (the real relations) residing in the object, and is not the product of the subjective caprice or imagination of the scientist, the mere reference to the 'what' carries implicitly some hint of the 'why'. Thus, if the dialectical analysis reveals that the value form is the concrete form in which the objectification of the abstract character of private and independent labour affirms itself as an abstract form, the separation between the two already says something about the real relation involved. But this something is no more than, as it were, a 'pointing out', an observation. The actual ideal reproduction of that inner connection – the explanation – takes place in the synthetic movement.<sup>32</sup>

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31 At this juncture, it is important to point out that, in the dialectical *inquiry*, analysis and synthesis overlap in the concrete intellectual labour of the scientist. Thus the actual activity of inquiry of the dialectical researcher involves a constant passage from phases of analysis to phases of synthesis, and therefore they do not immediately appear as distinct aspects of the process of cognition. However, they do constitute two real determinations of the dialectical method and therefore it is crucial to bear their difference in mind. And it is this real difference which appears 'in its purity' in the dialectical exposition, when the author decides to reproduce the analytical stage (whether in whole or in part) in the presentation.

32 In his *Science of Logic*, Hegel refers to this distinction between the role of analysis and synthesis as the difference between the *apprehension* of what is and its *comprehension* (Hegel 1999, pp. 793–4). However, Hegel develops this distinction as pertaining to the 'under-

With this in mind, it is easy to understand the main reason why the criticisms levelled at Marx over his inadequate explanation of abstract labour as the substance of value in the first pages of *Capital* are not simply based on a misunderstanding about the particularities of his argument, but are completely off the mark. To put it simply, those critiques search for an explanation in the wrong place, that is, in the pages where Marx is just presenting the analytic separation of real forms, which comprise the first two sections of Chapter 1. Marx's alleged explanation of why abstract labour is the substance of value in those pages sounds unconvincing simply because it is not there. As we will see, the unfolding of this particular 'why' only occurs in section three, which discusses exchange value as the form of manifestation of value. Before engaging in that aspect of Marx's presentation of the determinations of the commodity form, let us first probe deeper into the *specifically dialectical* form of the analytical moment that precedes it.<sup>33</sup>

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standing', that is, an underdeveloped form of thought. Dialectical cognition, 'speculative science' in Hegel's parlance, is for him essentially synthetic (see Caligaris and Starosta 2014).

- 33 Regarding Chapter 1 in particular, this structure has been recognised by Banaji (1979) and Elson (1979a). However, they both seem to reduce the content of the synthetic stage of the presentation simply to the question of revealing exchange value as the necessary mode of expression of value, i.e. to the formal necessity of the money form. But as I argue below, the latter is precisely the moment when Marx is synthetically unfolding the necessity of privately performed abstract labour as the substance of value. Neither Elson nor Banaji explicitly address the question of where exactly the 'why' of abstract labour as the substance of value can be found. Elson in particular seems to concur with Rubin (see below) that it is actually in section 4. Murray (1988, pp. 148–9) rightly sees the structure of Chapter 1 as comprising a 'double movement' of form to content and then from content to form. However, presumably reducing the dialectical movement to the synthetic stage, he sees nothing particularly dialectical in the first movement; hence his analogy with Descartes's analytical reduction of the bit of wax to primary quality matter, i.e. a search for a 'third party' or common element. In reality, the general point about the twofold movement of analysis and synthesis in Marx's exposition had already been made by Rubin in his seminal work on the theory of value (Rubin 1972, p. 113). However, as I shall discuss below, his understanding of the way they structure the exposition is, I think, incorrect. Furthermore, although Rubin does distinguish between the analytic and the synthetic (genetic, as he calls it) stages of the presentation, he seems to restrict the dialectical method to the latter (Rubin 1978, p. 110). In this way, the specific form of the dialectical analysis vis-à-vis the analysis of representational scientific thought is overlooked.

### The Phase of Analysis

In contrast to the claims of those critics referred to above, I think that in the opening pages of Chapter 1, Marx is not searching for a common property in commodities. Rather, he is searching for (i.e. not yet unfolding) the specific determination defining the potentiality of the commodity as a historical form of social wealth.<sup>34</sup> This potentiality Marx initially ‘discovers’ by looking at the use value of the individual commodity, which in capitalist societies acts as bearer of a second, *historically specific* attribute of the products of labour, namely, *exchange value*. Two things follow from this. First, inasmuch as it is materially borne by the use value of the commodity, this attribute is *intrinsic* to the commodity itself. Second, as argued above, Marx is not *trying to prove logically the existence of a common property*, but *the commodity itself*, in its immediacy, shows that it *has* that ‘common property’ immanent in it.

Here a problem might arise, because Marx does not explicitly say in what that second attribute of the commodity consists. He just names it (exchange value) and then directly proceeds to its analysis. I think that the reason for this is that the meaning of that attribute was self-evident in the name itself in light of its everyday usage at that time. The fact that commodities have ‘exchange value’ simply means that they have the *power of exchangeability*, that is, *the ‘fantastic’ aptitude to be transformed into a different use value without the mediation of any material transformation in its bodily existence*.<sup>35</sup> What immediately follows in Marx’s exposition is, then, the *dialectical analysis* of this social power of exchangeability of commodities. That is, Marx proceeds to answer what is the source of this specific potentiality intrinsic to the commodity, i.e. what is the abstract form appearing in the concrete form of the power of exchangeability.

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34 The difference between these two forms of grasping Marx’s argument in the first pages of *Capital* expresses the difference between the dialectical form of the analysis and that of representational thinking. Many authors have highlighted the distinction between the abstractions of dialectics and those of representational thought as one between ‘real abstractions vs. mental generalisation’ (Saad-Filho 2002) or ‘empiricist abstractions vs. determinate abstractions’ (Gunn 1992). ‘Empiricist abstractions’ have also been called ‘formal abstractions’ (Clarke 1991a) or ‘general abstractions’ (Murray 1988). However, as Iñigo Carrera (2008, p. 282) points out, what most authors have overlooked is that the difference in the respective kinds of abstraction emerges as a result of the very *form* of the process of cognition on the basis of which those abstractions are identified. My argument is that this difference in form not only applies to the synthetic or genetic phase – as is usually assumed – but *crucially pertains to the process of analysis as well*.

35 Iñigo Carrera 2007, p. 216.

As happens with every real form, the first thing he encounters when facing the exchangeability of the commodity is its *immediate manifestation* – the quantitative relation ‘in which use-values of one kind exchange for use-values of another’.<sup>36</sup> Thus, the first step in the analysis of exchangeability is the separation of the *content and form* of that specific attribute of the commodity, this being the only way in which one can penetrate through the concrete form in which an abstract form presents itself. Again, this is the immediate object of Marx’s exposition in the passages that follow, and not the search for a ‘common something’ or ‘third thing’, the existence of which the distinction between form and content presupposes.<sup>37</sup> This separation between form and content reveals that the different *particular* exchange relations that a commodity establishes with other commodities are actually expressions of something else that inheres in commodities and which gives them the identical *qualitative* potentiality of *general exchangeability* in a certain *magnitude*. Once form and content of the attribute of general exchangeability are distinguished, Marx continues with the analysis of the latter, which consists in separating that form of general exchangeability from the abstract form whose necessity it carries within itself as its ‘other’. The particular form that this analysis takes is, again, not the search for a common element, but the search for the determinate action which posits that specific attribute existing in commodities.<sup>38</sup> That action, Marx states, is a human action in one of its facets, namely, productive labour in its general character or abstract labour. Commodities have this attribute of general exchangeability as products of the abstract character of the labour objectified in them.<sup>39</sup>

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36 Marx 1976g, p. 126.

37 In order to avoid confusions, I am not implying that the existence of a common property and exchange equivalence are not important elements of Marx’s arguments. My point is that Marx is not *logically proving* the existence of a common property or that the only possible substance of that common property is abstract labour. He *finds* that common property immanent in the commodity (actually, its immediate manifestation), and then proceeds to its *dialectical* analysis (i.e. separation of form and content). See Kicillof and Starosta 2007a and Iñigo Carrera 2007, for a fuller discussion of why being the products of the abstract character of labour is the only reasonable determination behind the value of commodities.

38 Iñigo Carrera 2007, p. 218.

39 Admittedly, Marx’s transition to abstract labour might seem abrupt and too unproblematic. But here it is important to bear in mind that insofar as it presents results laboriously obtained through previous research, the dialectical exposition has a fluidity which does not reflect the complexity of the real activity of analysis in the process of inquiry, in which the researcher might have mistakenly taken other analytical steps. In principle, the latter

And here there is a tricky aspect in Marx's presentation, which might have contributed to much of the confusion. Because, although at that stage of the argument he has already shown that the common 'something' is the form of general exchangeability, he does not actually *name* it until separating, in turn, that form from its content or substance.

All these things now tell us is that human labour power has been expended to produce them, human labour is accumulated in them. As crystals of this social substance, which is common to them all, they are values – commodity values [*Warenwerte*].

We have seen that when commodities are exchanged, their exchange value manifests itself as something totally independent of their use value. But if we abstract from their use value, there remains their value, as it has just been defined. The common factor in the exchange relation, or in the exchange value of the commodity, is therefore its value.<sup>40</sup>

Marx names that intrinsic attribute of general exchangeability which is manifested in exchange value, and which is posited by the abstract character of labour, *value*.<sup>41</sup> Now, in opposition to the claims of a great deal of contempor-

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do not need to be included in the dialectical presentation, although the researcher might decide to present them in order to stress the correct analytical path that leads to the discovery of the determinate content behind a specific social form (see footnote 30 above). Hence, when considering the action that posits the form of general exchangeability of commodities, the only actions other than labour that Marx contemplates (and obviously discards) are purely natural actions. In other words, he does not consider other kinds of human action, such as exchange or subjective 'valuation' of the utility of the commodity. However, as Iñigo Carrera (2007, p. 24) points out, neither of those other human actions can explain the *two* features that, at that stage of argument, Marx has already discovered as constituting the commodity. First, the fact that the attribute of general exchangeability is specific to capitalist society (subjective valuation of utility is a human action which occurs in non-capitalist modes of production as well, and yet it does not objectify in the value form of the product). Second, the value form is materially carried by the use value of the commodity as its bearer, which means that the action that posits those two attributes must be the same (in this sense, exchange is an action which *presupposes* rather than posits the existence of the use value of the commodity).

40 Marx 1976g, p. 128.

41 This postponement of the naming of value is one of the changes that Marx made to the First Edition of *Capital*. In the latter, the naming of 'value' occurs *before* discovering its content as 'congealed abstract labour' (see Marx 1976e, p. 9). As Fitzsimons (2012, p. 25) notes, the introduction of specific terms *after* the content of their respective determina-

ary literature on Marx's theory of the value form, I think that the (analytic) search for the specific determinations of the commodity – Marx's stated aim in Chapter 1, according to the quote above – is evidently not achieved with the discovery of abstract labour as the substance of value.<sup>42</sup> Quite to the contrary, that very specificity seemed to have slipped through Marx's fingers. In effect, although he found the specific attribute of the commodity in its value, when he moved to account for its substance he ended up with something which bears

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tions has been unfolded is an aspect of Marx's exposition that recurs throughout *Capital*. This presentational strategy is underpinned by a substantive methodological issue that sets apart dialectics from representational thought. Whereas the latter starts out from 'concepts' or 'categories' (i.e. purely ideal or mental abstractions) and their definitions, in dialectical science definitions do not *determine* in advance the content of a term and therefore cannot be the point of departure of the exposition. Instead, they only encapsulate determinations that have already been laboriously *developed*. In other words, definitions are arrived at rather than departed from.

- 42 As a reaction to the ahistorical, Ricardian reading of Marx's account of the value form, the 'new consensus' tends to see abstract labour as a purely historical, specific social form. See, among others, De Angelis 1995; Postone 1996; Reuten 1993; Arthur 2001b; Bellofiore and Finelli 1998; Kay 1999; Saad-Filho 1997; Mohun and Himmelweit 1978; de Vroey 1982; Eldred and Haldon 1981; Bellofiore 2009a; Heinrich 2009; Mavroudeas 2004; McGlone and Kliman 2004; Roberts 2004. I have developed a more extended critique of this new consensus in Kicillof and Starosta (2007a and 2007b). Here I can only offer some brief remarks on this issue. As I argue below, abstract labour is a generic material form, a 'productive expenditure of human brains, muscles, nerves, hands etc.' (Marx 1976g, p. 134). What is specific to capitalist society is the role it plays by being determined as the substance of the most abstract form of objectified social mediation, namely, value. Murray (2000) comes very close to recognising this through the distinction between 'physiological' abstract labour and 'practically abstract' labour. A proper discussion of Murray's own solution to what he terms 'Rubin's dilemma' exceeds the scope of this chapter. Here I would only like to note that Murray's merit is to grasp the importance of highlighting the *materiality* of abstract labour while making clear that this does not necessarily lead to an asocial perspective on the value form. In this way, his recent contribution to the debate provides a necessary correction to what I see as a formalist overreaction of much recent theorising on the value form. See also Reuten's reply to Murray (Reuten 2000) and the latter's rejoinder (Murray 2002). Whilst still seeing abstract labour as capital-specific, Robles Báez (2004) offers probably one of most interesting treatments of the *movement of the contradiction* between the generic, physiological materiality of abstract labour and its historically specific *social* determination as the substance of value deriving from the private character of labour in capitalism. See also Carchedi (2009 and 2011a, pp. 60–74) for a similar argument. The debate on the nature of abstract labour has not been settled and has continued in more recent times. See Bonefeld 2010b and 2011a; Carchedi 2011b; Kicillof and Starosta 2011.



no specifically capitalist character: 'merely congealed quantities of homogeneous human labour, i.e. of human labour power expended without regard to the form of its expenditure'.<sup>43</sup> But it is evident that in any form of society, human beings objectified their subjective labour power and that that process of objectification entailed both a concrete or particular character and an abstract or general one. Thus far, then, this stage of the analytic process does *not* show *why* this generic materiality takes the objectified social form of value. It does not even tell us *what* is the historical form of social labour which is determined as value-producing. It *only* tells us *what* is the *material* determination of that which in capitalist society is *socially* represented in the form of value. This is the reason why Marx still carries on with the analytic search for the '*formal determinants* that it contains as a commodity and which stamp it as a commodity'.<sup>44</sup> This leads Marx's dialectical analysis to give closer scrutiny to the labour that produces commodities. As any attentive reader could tell, the analytic process continues and only in the section on the dual character of labour does Marx finally find the historically specific form of social labour that produces commodities and, hence, value.

In effect, Marx observes that the individual commodity he is analysing is only one among many within a totality of different commodities. But the same follows for the particular labours that underlie the varied use values taking the commodity form. In other words, Marx points out that generalised commodity production presupposes the existence of an extended social division of labour and that the latter, as the 'totality of varying deployments of useful labour', is an 'eternal necessity of nature for the sake of mediating the material interchange between man and nature (i.e. human life)'.<sup>45</sup> On the other hand, this analysis also makes clear that the reverse relationship does not hold, that is, the division of labour must not necessarily take the social form of the production of commodities. The formal determination of the commodity must therefore spring from the specific social form taken by the organisation of the division of labour in our present-day society. The commodity, Marx eventually concludes, is the objectification 'of mutually independent acts of labour, performed in isolation'.<sup>46</sup> In other words, it is the 'labour of private individuals who work independently of each other',<sup>47</sup> or *private and independent labour*,

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43 Marx 1976g, p. 128.

44 Note that had abstract labour as such constituted the specificity of value-positing human action, Marx's analytical search would have come to an end.

45 Marx 1976e, p. 12.

46 Marx 1976g, p. 131.

47 Marx 1976g, p. 165.

which constitutes the specifically capitalist form of labour or productive activity. In this social form of the human life process, the producer has the full conscious productive capacity to control the individual character of her/his labour, but cannot recognise and organise (i.e. she/he is unconscious about) the social determinations of human individuality. Hence the inversion of those social powers into an attribute of the product of labour, namely, the value form. The analytic process completes the search for the specific determinations of the value form by revealing that the attribute of general exchangeability of the commodity springs from the abstract or general character of socially necessary *privately performed* labour materialised in it. The value form, then, becomes known in its essential determination as the *objectified or reified expression of the social character of the individual labour of private and independent producers*. Its objectivity is thus revealed to be wholly social, without an atom of ‘matter’ entering into it.<sup>48</sup>

### The Synthetic Phase of Reproduction Proper

It is only now that the synthetic stage of the presentation begins. This consists in ideally following the realisation of the discovered potentiality immanent in the commodity. From then on, the commodity ceases to be grasped in its exteriority as an ‘inert’ social form – as a sheer external object – and the exposition starts to follow its self-movement as the subject of the development of those determinations – previously discovered through analysis – into its more concrete forms.<sup>49</sup> This is subtly indicated by Marx at the end of his discussion of the qualitative determinations of the relative form of value.

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48 Marx 1976g, p. 138.

49 Iñigo Carrera 2008, p. 321. In a recent article, Arthur (2004a, pp. 41–2) also acknowledges this important aspect of Marx’s presentation. However, he still maintains that Marx failed to provide in Chapter 1 an adequate explanation for the determination of abstract labour as the substance of value and should have postponed the introduction of abstract labour until the level of abstraction of the capital form. See also Arthur 2005, p. 119. The shortcoming of this view – also shared by Lapavitsas (2005) and Campbell (2013), the latter following Reichelt (2007) – is that it leads to a formalistic understanding of the value form, which obscures the very question that the latter, in its own reified way, is meant to solve: the establishment of the material unity of social labour when it takes the form of private labour (Brown 2008). This idiosyncratic separation of the form of value from its substance at the level of the commodity form had already been advanced by Itoh (1988). See Clarke (1989), for a critique of Itoh’s radical separation of the theory of the form of value and the theory of the substance of value.

We see, then, that everything our analysis of the value of commodities previously told us is repeated by the linen itself, as soon as it enters into association with another commodity, the coat. Only it reveals its thoughts in a language with which it alone is familiar, the language of commodities. In order to tell us that labour creates its own value in its abstract quality of being human labour, it says that the coat, in so far as it counts as its equal, i.e. is value, consists of the same labour as it does itself. In order to inform us that its sublime objectivity as value differs from its stiff and starchy existence as a body, it says that value has the appearance of a coat, and consequently that in so far as the linen itself is an object of value [*Wertding*], it and the coat are as like as two peas.<sup>50</sup>

The unfolding of this movement spoken 'in the language of commodities' is precisely what the subsequent synthetic stage of the presentation consists of. Being a *purely social* power of the commodity, value cannot be immediately expressed in its sensuous corporeal materiality. As the capacity of the commodity to be exchanged for other different commodities, value can only be manifested in the social relation between commodities. Therefore, the value of a commodity necessarily expresses itself only in the use value of the commodity that is exchanged for the commodity in question as its equivalent. In this way, value takes the concrete shape of exchange value as its necessary form of appearance. In its most developed form, value acquires independent existence as money and the expression of value in the particular commodity acting as money becomes determined as price. The opposition inherent in the commodity is thus externalised through the doubling of the commodity form into ordinary commodities and money. The power of direct exchangeability of commodities negates itself as such to become affirmed as a social power monopolised by the money form.

It is in the course of the synthetic movement of this development, when seen from the point of view of its *qualitative content*, that the answer to the 'why' questions which the analytic stage was unable to provide is given. In other words, it is the development of the expression of value that unfolds the explanation as to why the objectification of the abstract character of privately performed labour takes the social form of value or, to put it differently, why private labour is value-producing.

In a nutshell, the issue comes down to the fact that it is only the expression of value that progressively reveals to us the problem that the commodity form of

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50 Marx 1976g, pp. 143–4.

the product of labour is meant to solve. I am referring to the mediation in the establishment of the unity of social labour when performed in a private and independent manner. And since this unity becomes condensed in the money form, it is the unfolding of its determinations, synthesised in the peculiarities of the equivalent form and derived from its general determination as the form of immediate exchangeability, that provides the answer to the question as to why private labour must produce value.<sup>51</sup>

As the other side of its two-step analytic discovery, the synthetic ideal reproduction of the determinations of the value form comprises two aspects, each one corresponding, respectively, to the second and third peculiarities of the

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51 In the Second Edition of *Capital* and the 'Value form' appendix to the First Edition, Marx develops all the peculiarities of the equivalent form as part of his discussion of the *simple* form of value. By contrast, in the First Edition, the second and third peculiarities are developed in the context of the 'reversed' form of the expanded form of value, an intermediate step which Marx did not include in the Second Edition, where he directly jumped from the expanded form of value to the general form. I think that, for my purpose here, the presentation of the First Edition is clearer. In effect, as Marx himself notes (Marx 1976e, p. 26), the solution to the problem at stake (the establishment of the unity of social labour) is revealed only when the expression of value acquires its plenitude as the form of general exchangeability by relating through the value form the universe of all existing commodities. This only occurs with the general form of value (although a defective – because it is not unified – manifestation, is already found in the expanded form). That is why I shall follow the presentation of the First Edition. On the other hand, there might be a strong reason why Marx decided to move the peculiarities of the equivalent form to the simple expression of value. In a nutshell, the point is that for the presentation of the unfolding of the specific content of the *qualitative* determination involved in the expression of value, its simple form suffices. That is why Marx states that 'the whole mystery of the form of value lies hidden in this simple form' (Marx 1976g, p. 139). The *further* formal unfolding of the more developed expressions of value only entails *quantitative* differences within that very same *qualitative determination* (Iñigo Carrera 2013). Certainly, that purely *formal* construction *helps* the comprehension of the qualitative determination entailed in the form of value by making explicit aspects of the former which are not *immediately visible* in the simple form. But no novel *quality* is unfolded. In this sense, and contrary to the claims of some scholars (Robles Báez 1997), the expansion and inversion of the simple form of value does not entail, properly speaking, any 'dialectical' or immanent self-movement. It is only a wholly formal (hence extrinsic) *representation*, which involves a *quantitative generalisation* of the qualitative determination already *fully realised* in the simple form. Incidentally, this illustrates what is the role of *formal logic* within dialectical knowledge, namely, the *representation* of the (necessarily external) determinations of quantity, that is, of 'difference determined as indifference' (Iñigo Carrera 2008, pp. 269–70). In the words of Hegel, 'a being that is indifferent with regard to determinacy' (Hegel 1991, p. 157).

equivalent form. The first one – whereby the concrete labour that produces the particular commodity acting as general equivalent becomes the form of manifestation of the general character of human labour – shows, precisely, why that material expenditure of labour power has to act as the social form of labour, i.e. why it is that *abstract* labour is the substance of value. The second one – whereby the private labour that produces the equivalent commodity becomes the immediate incarnation of directly social labour – in turn makes it evident why private labour must produce value at all.

In effect, through the general expression of value, all commodities relate to each other as possessing an identical social essence as exchangeable things in the same magnitude. In other words, albeit in a mediated form that reflects their social form of value as the immediate attribute of the general equivalent, their social relation of general exchangeability achieves its unity. But since they are only values as expressions of the same common social substance, i.e. abstract labour, the unity of the expression of value puts us before the unity of *undifferentiated* human labour. In determining the concrete labour that produced the equivalent as the immediate mode of appearance of abstract human labour, now the social relation between commodities itself makes plain that the different concrete labours that produced them are but different ways in which the total labour power of society has been expended. Those varied useful labours now show themselves to be what they actually are: differentiations of the expenditure of human labour power or determinate modes in which the human body has been productively exerted. In this ‘roundabout way’, as Marx puts it, the development of exchange value confronts us with the generic problem that any society must confront, namely, *the social regulation of the differentiation of human labour*, which ‘is capable of receiving each and every determination ... but is undetermined just in and for itself’,<sup>52</sup> and which is necessary for the reproduction of human life. The exposition of the dialectical analysis of the commodity had already discovered that a commodity-producing society presupposed an extended division of labour. Now we can see that the materialised social relation itself – the value form – *affirms itself as the mediator* in the articulation of that division of labour, i.e. in establishing the relation between different labours as organic specifications of human labour in general.

As *values* the commodities are expressions of the *same unity*, of abstract human labour. In the form of *exchange value* they appear to one another

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52 Marx 1976e, p. 20.

*as values and relate themselves to one another as values.* They thereby relate themselves at the same time to abstract labour as their *common social substance*. Their *social relationship* consists exclusively in counting with respect to one another as expressions of this social substance of theirs which differs only quantitatively, but which is qualitatively equal and hence replaceable and interchangeable with one another ... It is only the kind of thing that can turn mere objects of use into *commodities* and hence into a *social rapport*. But this is just what *value* is. The *form* in which the commodities *count* to one another as values – as coagulations of human labour – is consequently their *social form*.<sup>53</sup>

The necessity of abstract labour as the substance of value thus becomes finally unfolded. Abstract labour is the substance of value not because a logical argument says that it is the common property of commodities we were searching for in the name of sound principles of logic. Abstract labour becomes determined as the substance of value because *in reality* the latter is the objectified social form that mediates the organisation of that purely material expenditure of the human body into its different concrete forms across society. Given that the latter is what the value form mediates, what else could be represented in that objectified form? On the other hand, it is self-evident that abstract labour does not cease to be a generic material form because of this determination as the substance of value. Hence, as stated above, the determination of labour as abstract labour is not the reason behind its existence as value-producing labour. What is specific to capitalist society is that this purely material form negates itself as simply such so as to become affirmed as the producer of the (objectified) general social relation.<sup>54</sup> Once objectified, the generic *materiality* of the abstract character of labour plays a particular social role in the process of social metabolism by being represented as the *social objectivity of value*.

The commodities' social form is their relationship to one another as *equal labour*; hence – since the equality of *toto coelo* [utterly] different labours can only consist in an *abstraction from their inequality* – their relationship to one another as *human labour* in general: expenditures of human labour power, which is what all human labours – whatever their content or mode of operation – actually *are*. In each social form of labour, the labours of

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53 Marx 1976e, pp. 28–9.

54 Kicillof and Starosta 2007a, 2007b and 2011; Iñigo Carrera 2008, pp. 340–1.

different individuals are related to one another as human labours too, but in this case this *relating itself* counts as the *specifically social form* of the labours.<sup>55</sup>

To recapitulate, thus far I have discussed how the formal development of exchange value, and in particular the unfolding of the determinations of the second peculiarity of the equivalent-form, contains the account of the reason why *abstract labour* is the substance of value. What still remains to be answered is why this general material character of the expenditure of human labour power becomes *substance of value*. In other words, we have to see why human productive activity becomes determined in capitalist society as value-producing, the second step in the synthetic movement referred to above.

The answer to this question follows from the third peculiarity of the equivalent form. In effect, as the social incarnation of human labour in general, the concrete labour that produces the equivalent acquires in its immediacy the form of equality with respect to the other concrete useful labours. In this form of immediate identity with every other concrete labour, the labour that materialises in the general equivalent is *immediately social*, whilst the useful labours producing the rest of commodities remain *not-immediately social*. Thus the development of the expression of value in the form of exchange value puts us before the reason why the organisation of the division of labour must necessarily be mediated in this reified form or, what is the same, why commodity-producing labour is essentially value-producing. Although materially dependent upon one another as part of the 'primordial system of the division of labour', this irreducibly social character of *private labours* is not immediately manifested when they are actually objectified in the direct process of production. Hence, this necessary social articulation of private labours is realised through the mediation of the exchange of the products of private labour as commodities. Only at that moment is the question of whether the expenditure of the portion of social labour which each producer personifies is socially useful able to be answered. This is the reason why the social character of the privately performed individual productive activities is specifically represented as a determinate objective attribute of the products of labour: the form of their general exchangeability or their value form. The basis of this reified social mediation thus resides in the fact that the unity of social labour is manifested, as Marx puts it in the *Grundrisse*, only *post festum*, through the exchange of the products of

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55 Marx 1976e, p. 32.

labour.<sup>56</sup> Furthermore, the unity of social labour thus becomes socially represented in the form of the particular private product that the rest of commodities separate as their general equivalent and which eventually ossifies in the money form. In tracing the genesis of the latter through the ideal reproduction of the expression of value, the synthetic stage of the dialectical exposition thereby positively unfolds the determinations of that which the analytic process could only *point out*. Namely, that the value form of the product of labour is the materialised general social relation of human beings in the capitalist mode of production and, therefore, the *social subject* of the *form* taken by the social process of production of human life in this historical stage of its development.<sup>57</sup>

Only at this juncture does Marx introduce the fundamental discussion of the fetish character of commodities. The question that immediately arises, and which is hardly addressed in the literature, is why only and precisely then? I think that the answer to this question is inseparable from the issue about the determinate content of the section on commodity fetishism and its place in the overall structure of Marx's exposition in *Capital*. The aim of the next chapter, then, is to proceed to deal with these questions. Again, I will show that only through a proper grasp of the dialectical method can the full implications and significance of Marx's account of commodity fetishism be uncovered.

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56 Marx 1993, p. 172.

57 We shall see that in becoming capital, the materialised social relation of private and independent individuals is constituted as the social subject of the *form and content* of the process of production of human life.



# The Role and Place of Commodity Fetishism in Marx's Dialectical Exposition in *Capital*

## Introduction

Ever since the publication of works such as Rubin's *Essays on Marx's Theory of Value*<sup>1</sup> or Lukács's *History and Class Consciousness*,<sup>2</sup> the emphasis on Marx's analysis of commodity fetishism has been a hallmark of critical traditions of Marxism. In effect, according to those traditions, commodity fetishism is the cornerstone upon which the understanding of Marx's mature works as a *critique* of political economy (as opposed to political economy or economics) depends.<sup>3</sup> While there is no doubt that the fetishism of commodities plays a fundamental part in Marx's critique of political economy, the question is, once we accept that premise, what are the precise meanings and implications of such a notion for the scientific comprehension of capitalist society as a whole, and, more concretely, for the proletarian political action through which the movement of capital realises its own annihilation? Here, the mere reference to the centrality of the historicity of bourgeois social forms and their fetishistic character does not suffice to grasp the critical and revolutionary nature of the critique of political economy. As I have been arguing throughout this book, the specific form of the dialectical method is fundamental in this respect. And *pace* Rubin,<sup>4</sup> however central to the comprehension of Marx's critique of political economy, the fetishism of commodities is *not* the basis of the determinations of the value form. On the contrary, I would like to argue that the former is a necessary development of the latter.<sup>5</sup> This is far from being a minor point and is actually crucial for a proper comprehension of the nature of commodity fetishism and, therefore, for the ideal reproduction of the determinations of the most general concrete forms of objectivity and subjectivity of capitalist society.

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1 Rubin 1972.

2 Lukács 1971.

3 Clarke 1991a; Holloway 1992; Postone 1996; Backhaus 2005; Reichelt 2005.

4 Rubin 1972, p. 5.

5 See Iñigo Carrera (2008, pp. 347–51) for a critique of this inversion by Rubin. De Angelis (1996, p. 15) makes a similar critical point, although from a very different approach.

### The Immediate Object of Exposition of the Section on Commodity Fetishism and Its Systematic Place and Significance

In order to clarify the issue, let me go straight to the point and pose the fundamental question which underlies the proper comprehension of the systematic place and significance of the section on commodity fetishism in the structure of Marx's presentation, namely, from the point of view of the dialectical method, what is the immediate object of the exposition in that section? As Iñigo Carrera points out,<sup>6</sup> those pages fundamentally develop the determinations of the alienated consciousness of the commodity producer. Or, better stated, they unfold the determinations of the alienated consciousness as such, which, therefore, becomes *explicitly expounded* as an alienated consciousness. This is because, in reality, the whole of Chapter 1 (and, actually, the whole of *Capital*) has as its object the alienated consciousness of the commodity producer. However, the text starts out not with the alienated consciousness in and for itself, but with its most general *objectified* form of existence, namely, the commodity. Although the commodity *will prove to be* the alienated consciousness of the commodity producer, it is not yet known to be such at the beginning of the dialectical presentation. The commodity, not its producer, is thus the immediate subject of the determinations unfolded in the first three sections of Chapter 1.

Conversely, in the section on commodity fetishism, Marx turns his attention to the reasons why the products of private labour appear, to the producers themselves, as bearers of those reified powers whose autonomous self-movement he ideally reproduced through the expression of value contained in the exchange relation. Having discovered behind the power of exchangeability of commodities the historically specific form in which capitalist society resolves the social organisation of the organic unity of human life, the exposition needs to explain why the producers, the actual subjects whose material reproduction is at stake, must represent that process in their consciousness in such a mystical and fetishistic form. The transition is, then, from the *formal* subject of the value determinations, i.e. the commodity, to the *material* subject, i.e. the human individual.

In this respect, it could be said that the section on commodity fetishism opens a kind of new presentational (sub)node, which, in turn, will prove to be a necessary mediation for the determinations to be unfolded in Chapter 2 on the process of exchange. This is the case insofar as the section on com-

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6 Iñigo Carrera 2007, pp. 260–1.

modity fetishism focuses on the determinations of the consciousness of the commodity producer analytically separated from the human action it regulates in the process of exchange. In other words, it expounds the determinations of consciousness mainly with regard to its *form*. Once Marx has established the historical formal determinations of human consciousness, in Chapter 2 he can then follow the mode in which the latter moves in the realisation of the general social relation, i.e. in its unity with action as conscious practice in the sphere of circulation (which is the phase of material reproduction in which human individuals *directly* confront, albeit as 'representatives of commodities', the manifestation of the general unity of social labour *indirectly* established behind their backs).<sup>7</sup>

As corresponds to the nodal structure of Marx's exposition, he starts the section on commodity fetishism with an immediate observation: 'A commodity appears at first sight an extremely obvious, trivial thing'.<sup>8</sup> However, very quickly he develops the analytic movement which brings us to the inner determinations of the commodity discovered in the previous section. In effect, Marx points out that although it immediately appears as a trivial thing, the commodity is in reality an entity full of metaphysical subtleties, a sensible/suprasensible being with the fantastic power of being transformed into another use value without even touching its materiality.<sup>9</sup> On the other hand, at this stage of the process of cognition, we already know where to find the source of such mysticism; it must derive from the commodity form itself, i.e. from its character as the reified mediator in the establishment of the unity of the social character of private labour. In the commodity, all the qualitative and quantitative determinations of social labour appear to the material subject of this activity as objective attributes of its product.

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7 And even at that level, the alienated action that personifies the realisation of the necessity of the commodity to establish an exchange relation is still abstract and is part of what Marx calls, in the *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, the 'theoretical phase of circulation' of commodities, 'preparatory to real circulation' (Marx 1987a, p. 303), which can only take place once 'as a result of establishing prices, commodities have acquired the form in which they are able to enter circulation' (Marx 1987a, p. 323). By this Marx means the ideal reproduction of the determinations of the circulation of commodities which constitute the premises of its actual movement. This 'theoretical circulation' comprises Chapters 1 and 2, and the first section of 3 (the functions of measure of value and standard of prices). Only then is the actual circulation of commodities reproduced in thought, revealing the subsequent functions of money not as its preconditions, but as its concrete forms.

8 Marx 1976g, p. 163.

9 Marx 1976g, p. 163.

Whence, then, arises the enigmatic character of the product of labour, as soon as it assumes the form of a commodity? Clearly, it arises from this form itself. The equality of the kinds of human labour takes on a physical form in the equal objectivity of the products of labour as values; the measure of the expenditure of human labour power by its duration takes on the form of the magnitude of the value of the products of labour; and finally the relationships between the producers, within which the social characteristics of their labours are manifested, take on the form of a social relation between the products of labour.<sup>10</sup>

In the passage above, Marx is simply bringing together the results reached by the ideal reproduction of the form determinations of the commodity in the previous three sections of Chapter 1. However, the dialectical exposition has so far uncovered this essential content of the commodity form purely in terms of the search for the latter's immanent social determination as an exchangeable entity. As I shall argue in more detail below, the form determinations of the commodity must now be revisited from the perspective of the human being, which in section 3 has been implicitly discovered as the actual material subject of those determinations formally carried by the product of labour. In doing so, the dialectical presentation will shed new light on that very content itself. By way of a momentary analytic 'detour' from the synthetic movement of the presentation, which penetrates further into the inner determinations of the fetishistic appearance of the commodity as an autonomous subject with the social power to establish the exchange relation, the value form is revealed as the inverted representation, in the consciousness of the human being, of the social character of her/his own activity. In other words, the commodity proves to be the alienated mode of existence of the private producer's consciousness of the immanent unity of social labour of which her/his own activity is but an organic moment. It is the transposed form in which the producers consciously experience the indirect nature of their general social relation in this mode of production, projecting it as a social power external to their own individuality.

The mysterious character of the commodity-form consists therefore simply in the fact that the commodity reflects the social characteristics of men's own labour as objective characteristics of the products of labour themselves, as the socio-natural properties of these things. Hence it also reflects the social relation of the producers to the sum total of labour as

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10 Marx 1976g, p. 164.

a social relation between objects, a relation which exists apart from and outside the producers. Through this substitution, the products of labour become commodities, sensuous things which are at the same time supra-sensible or social ... [The value-relation] is nothing but the definite social relation between men themselves which assumes here, for them, the fantastic form of a relation between things.<sup>11</sup>

Now, before proceeding with this reconstruction of Marx's further unfolding of the determinations of the alienated consciousness of the commodity producer, it is worth probing deeper into some methodological aspects of the way in which his exposition approaches the determinations discussed just above. As we will see, the peculiar structure that he gives to the presentation disrupts the fluidity of the pure synthetic ideal reproduction of the commodity form. This has several consequences that could result in a misunderstanding of the systematic sequence of form determinations by inattentive (or rather, uncritical) readers. On the one hand, and more generally, it could give the impression that the section on commodity fetishism actually has no determinate *systematic* place and significance whatsoever, simply being a 'sociological' analysis which constitutes the basis of Marx's 'theoretical political economy',<sup>12</sup> or a 'philosophical' excursus which strays away from the exposition of the unfolding of the 'economic' determinations of the value form.<sup>13</sup> On the other hand, we will see that this presentation inevitably leads to repetitions of points already made earlier on in Chapter 1, which can generate the appearance of an inverted order of presentation of certain determinations.<sup>14</sup>

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11 Marx 1976g, pp. 164–5.

12 Rubin 1972.

13 Balibar 2007.

14 As far as I am aware, works coming from the 'New Dialectics' approach, which are those that emphasise the systematic dialectical structure of Marx's argument (and hence the necessity of the sequence of form determinations), tend not to discuss the precise role and place of commodity fetishism (although they obviously do highlight its fundamental importance in the critique of political economy). For an overview, see Kincaid 2008; see also Reuten and Williams 1989; Tony Smith 1990a and 1993; Arthur 2002b; Uchida 1988; and from the Uno School, see Albritton 1999 and Sekine 1997. Heinrich (2012), in his introduction to the three volumes of *Capital*, offers a very detailed and rigorous commentary of each paragraph of the section on commodity fetishism which, at least implicitly, implies the acknowledgement that there is a systematic guiding thread structuring the flow of Marx's argument. However, he does not connect the latter with the form of motion of the dialectical presentation. Furthermore, oddly enough, without offering any explicit reason, Heinrich introduces the commentary on the section on commodity fetishism after his dis-

The first point to note in this regard is that one of the particular features of Marx's presentation in the section on commodity fetishism is that, unlike the analytic passage from the form of value to its substance between sections 1 and 2,<sup>15</sup> or the synthetic return to the unity of that substance with its form of existence in section 3,<sup>16</sup> he does not *explicitly inform* the reader about the content of the presentational movement that he is undertaking (e.g. the passage from value and its monetary mode of existence to the consciousness of the commodity producer), or about the formal necessity of that step in the dialectical sequence of form determinations. However, this does not mean that there is no immanent necessity structuring the flow of the argument, as implied by Reichelt's claim that Marx tended to 'conceal' the dialectical method in the published versions of the critique of political economy (and especially in the second edition of *Capital*) in order to popularise the exposition.<sup>17</sup> As Iñigo Carrera points out,<sup>18</sup> what Marx removed from the exposition, in contrast to that of earlier manuscripts like the *Grundrisse*, are the explicit reflections on the direction that his ideal reproduction of the immanent unity of content and form of a determination should take. In fact, Iñigo Carrera continues,<sup>19</sup> those remarks are, strictly speaking, external to the ideal reproduction of the inner determinations of the object of cognition, which is what the dialectical method is all about. In this sense, the exposi-

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discussion of Chapter 3 on the functions of money. This undermines his otherwise insightful attempt at showing the systematic connection between the first two chapters of Volume 1. As argued in this chapter, the section on commodity fetishism is a necessary mediating link between the commodity and the action of commodity owners in the process of exchange. Still, the rigour of Heinrich's commentary markedly sets it apart from David Harvey's popularising reading in his recent *Companion to Marx's Capital* (see Harvey 2010). In this recent book, Harvey characterises the writing style of the section on commodity fetishism as 'literary ... evocative and metaphoric, imaginative, playful and emotive, full of allusions and references to magic, mysteries and necromancies', which he contrasts with the 'dull accountancy style of the previous sections' (Harvey 2010, p. 38). Although probably a humorous remark in a book based on lectures to postgraduate students, that characterisation of the passage from the 'language of commodities' to the 'language of human beings' has the unintended consequence of trivialising (and thus obscuring) the systematic necessity of such a transition and, as a consequence, the significance of commodity fetishism in the dialectical development of form determinations.

15 Marx 1976g, p. 128.

16 Marx 1976g, p. 139.

17 Reichelt 1995; 2005 and 2007.

18 Iñigo Carrera 2013, p. 65.

19 Iñigo Carrera 2013, pp. 65–6.

tion in the published versions of the critique of political economy could be said to be actually *improved* from the point of view of the dialectical method, since it focuses more 'purely' on the 'immanent life of the subject matter' without any alien additions. It is down to the critical reader to recognise and make explicit those formal-methodological aspects which are only implicit in Marx's presentation. By contrast, this could, of course, lead other 'inattentive' readers to think that the section on commodity fetishism has no systematic place in the dialectical presentation, however fundamental it may be in other respects.

The second issue concerns the point made above about the 'disruption' of the fluidity of the systematic ordering of form determinations, partly entailed by Marx's idiosyncratic exposition in the first chapter of *Capital*, but partly a reflection of the nature of the subject matter under consideration itself. In effect, one of the peculiar features of Marx's exposition of the determinations of the commodity form in sections 1 to 3 is that when analytically moving to the more detailed discussion of 'labour' as the human action that posits the value form (more specifically in section 2), he treats it, as it were, in a purely 'objective' fashion, simply as the source or substance of value, i.e. as the content of the attribute of general exchangeability of commodities. The consequence of this is that nothing is said at that stage about what labour generically is, namely, the specifically human form of the life process and, in that determination, the *conscious* action of the working subject. In Marx's exposition, the explicit positing of this generic determination of labour as conscious metabolic interaction with 'external' nature occurs only in Chapter 7 on the 'The Labour Process and the Valorisation Process'.<sup>20</sup> However, he develops the

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20 Here I would like to argue that there is an element of flexibility in the dialectical presentation. Although overall form determinations tend to follow a 'strict' systematic sequence, there are certain aspects of the object of cognition which, in principle, could be addressed at different points of the presentation. In those cases, it is down to the researcher to judge where a particular determination fits better. An example of this is Marx's postponement of the treatment of the transfer of the value of the means of production until Chapter 8. Although there is no strict systematic necessity not to address the different roles of past and new labour in the process of value formation at the level of the commodity form (since all the determinations presupposed by that qualitative difference have been unfolded at that stage), there are formal reasons that make it more sensible to leave it until later on in the dialectical presentation. Arguably, the distinction acquires full significance in relation to the determination of the diverse elements of the labour process as modes of existence of the production of *surplus value*. Dead labour now becomes a necessary form that capital must assume in order to absorb the only direct source of its valorisation

generic determination of consciousness as the form of organisation of human productive action rather one-sidedly, that is, only in relation to an abstractly presented individual character of labour without regard to its immanent social determinations.<sup>21</sup>

Be that as it may, the important point for the purpose of my argument here is that in the first three sections of Chapter 1, labour as subjective activity (hence consciousness) is entirely omitted from Marx's presentation. Although no more than an 'informed guess', a plausible explanation for this is that Marx wanted to stress the *real automatism* characterising commodity production as the general social relation. For this reason, he structured his exposition purely around the movement of the commodity, that is, around the simplest form of the labour *product* and the explanation of its power of exchangeability as its historically specific objective attribute (the value form). Thus, instead of directly starting with 'individuals producing in society' as he had earlier announced in the Introduction to the *Grundrisse*,<sup>22</sup> in *Capital* Marx took as his point of departure the *thing* that appears as the immediate carrier of that power to establish the unity of the general social relation when the human individual does not consciously organise the latter as his/her personal attribute.<sup>23</sup> What follows from that starting point is the ideal reproduction of the self-movement of those form determinations, and only as a *result* of this exposition, culminating with the money form as the thing-like mode of existence of the social character of labour in capitalism, does Marx make clear that at stake here is the form in which 'individuals produce in society'. But *in the course* of the dialectical unfolding of the commodity, its producer (and hence her/his consciousness) is virtually absent. The consequence of this is that when Marx does eventually address the consciousness of the commodity producer as the immediate object of his expos-

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(living labour), but in which its generic determination as a self-expanding magnitude is immediately negated. It becomes posited as *constant* capital in opposition to the only part that does attain self-valorisation, i.e. *variable* capital. From the perspective of the simple production of commodities, the explicit differentiation between the modalities in which the diverse functional elements of the labour process enter into the formation of value of the final product is less relevant. What fundamentally matters for the simple commodity producer is that her/his commodity's value is realised in full in order to be able to buy all the other use values she/he needs for the production of her/his life. The division of the total socially necessary labour into past and fresh new living labour expended is not of the essence.

21 Fitzsimons 2012, pp. 43–4.

22 Marx 1993, p. 83.

23 Iñigo Carrera 2013, p. 68.



ition in section 4, the transition might appear as an abrupt (if not extrinsic) leap. However, my claim is that it immanently follows from the determinations discovered in section 3.

Now, regardless of Marx's 'extreme' presentational strategy of obliteration of all reference to human subjectivity in the first three sections of Chapter 1, the very 'inner life' of the subject matter precludes an earlier introduction of a fuller discussion of the form determinations of the consciousness of the commodity producer as immediate object of exposition.<sup>24</sup> In effect, insofar as the commodity *really is* the form taken by the general social relation in capitalist society, its content in the general social character of labour could hardly be posited until presenting its 'roundabout' manifestation through the expression of value in section 3, that is, in indissoluble unity with its necessary reified mode of social mediation. Seen from a different angle, when Marx's exposition eventually addresses (commodity-producing) labour as such in section 2, it is quite simply impossible to immanently discover the unity of the general social relation since, precisely by virtue of the private character of productive activity in this society, that general social character of production is not directly manifest as an attribute of labour in act. *A fortiori*, it is not possible at that stage to expound in and of itself the form in which commodity producers carry that social character of their individual productive activity as a form determination of their consciousness. Although the 'socially necessary' aspect of value-producing labour discovered through *analysis* already makes evident that the product must be useful for an individual other than its producer (it must be a 'social use value'), this social character is still not posited (and hence fully discovered) as entailing the *general unity* of the process of human metabolism as whole. True, Marx does discover in section 2 that the existence of the commodity he is analysing presupposes a *generalised* social division of labour (yet the latter is not the 'consequence of propensity to truck, barter and exchange', as Adam Smith argued in Chapter 2 of *The Wealth of Nations*). However, this analytical discovery is reached by *representational* means when facing the concrete character of labour;<sup>25</sup> more concretely, by the external observation that

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24 This is valid, of course, if one wants firmly and strictly to remain true to the ideal reproduction of the object. However, the dialectical researcher could decide, for didactic and pedagogic reasons, to introduce remarks which are external to the real movement at stake, but which might help readers who will most likely be used to representational thought but unfamiliar with the form of motion of the dialectical method. In other words, there is a trade-off between rigour and 'reader friendliness' in a context where dialectical cognition is not yet the general form of scientific thought.

25 Iñigo Carrera 2007, p. 229.

the totality of heterogeneous use-values or physical commodities reflects a totality of similarly heterogeneous forms of useful labour, which differ in order; genus, species and variety: in short, a social division of labour.<sup>26</sup>

In other words, Marx simply points to the seemingly unconnected collection of different concrete labours which comprise social production. In turn, the specificity of the contemporary form of social mediation of the division of labour is discovered by an equally extrinsic comparison of commodity-producing society with pre-capitalist forms of organisation social life, showing that the division of labour is 'common' to both and hence a generic determination that does not explain the historicity of value production. At most, then, the initial analytical encounter with 'labour', resulting from the search for the substance of value, could present the determination of consciousness as the human form of organising the one-sidedly individual character of productive activity. This would then reveal that, in the organisation of her/his privately undertaken process of production, the consciousness and will of the commodity producer is not directly subordinated to any other consciousness and will that could tell him/her how to allocate her/his labour power in a determinate concrete form. In other words, the productive consciousness of the commodity producer would be grasped as being in full control over the *individual* character of labour. However, nothing could be said at that stage of the presentation about the way in which that productive consciousness mediates the organisation of the insertion of that singular productive action into the system of the social division of labour, i.e. about the social character of individual labour.<sup>27</sup>

In sum, an exposition that rigorously sticks to the ideal reproduction of the object can address the form determinations of the consciousness of the commodity producer only after facing the unity of the general social relation. The latter can be firstly discovered only as 'spoken in the language of

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<sup>26</sup> Marx 1976g, p. 132.

<sup>27</sup> An earlier introduction of the subjectivity of the commodity producer along the lines suggested above can be found in Iñigo Carrera's alternative exposition of the commodity (see Iñigo Carrera 2007, pp. 33–4). The advantage of this presentational strategy is that it allows a smoother transition between the form of value and commodity fetishism, since by the beginning of section 4 consciousness is already there confronting its own social determinations in the autonomous shapes of the commodity and money forms. The downside is that it 'spoils' the strategy of making the presentation reflect more starkly the objective automatism of the organisation of the process of social metabolism through the commodity form.

commodities' (i.e. through the expression of the value content in the form of exchange value) and not directly as a personal determination of the human individual. However, once that point in the dialectical exposition of the commodity has been reached (now *known*, in its money form, as the immediate carrier of the unity of the general social relation of production), its own immanent development demands that the presentation veers toward the explicit scrutiny of the consciousness of the producer as its immediate subject matter.

Now, in this passage, the exposition will inevitably have to retrace some of its steps and reconsider 'commodity-producing labour'. However, in this new take on its determinations, labour can be immediately grasped in the unity of its individual and general social character *and* 'spoken in the language of human beings', that is, as their *conscious* socially determined individual life activity. It is this reconsideration of labour as human action which, as anticipated above, allows the exposition to throw new light on the *content* of the value form. For, as we have seen, the latter is thus revealed not simply as the thing-like representation of the social character of privately undertaken labour. Additionally, it can now be recognised as a form of objectivity which is unconsciously projected by human consciousness itself when regulating such a privately performed productive action. Value becomes known as the mode of existence of the alienated consciousness of the private producer, a 'socially valid', therefore objective, form of thought.<sup>28</sup>

Note, however, that from the point of view of the formal structure of presentation, this reconsideration of the content of value, even if necessary, entails an instance of diversion from the synthetic progress of dialectical development. It is the 'analytic detour' in Marx's presentation to which I referred above, and that takes the reader from value/money back to privately organised social labour (now explicitly posited as mediated by consciousness). Once this analytic deepening of the content of value is exhausted, the dialectical presentation must obviously resume the synthetic movement of reproduction from the prior point at which the analysis culminated, namely, the discovery of value as the alienated form in which the consciousness of the private producer organises her/his individual participation in the process of social metabolism in its unity. But this obviously implies an unavoidable element of repetition of the passage over the synthetic sequence from 'private labour' to 'value'. As I shall

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<sup>28</sup> Marx 1976g, p. 169. On the connection between commodity form and consciousness, see the detailed discussion in Fitzsimons (2012). Reichelt (2007) also provides insightful reflections on value objectivity as 'unconsciously posited by an act of consciousness'.

argue below, it is precisely those passages from Marx's discussion of commodity fetishism which constitute the textual source of the rather widespread but mistaken reading that considers that section as mainly providing the explanation of why private labour must take the value form of its product. In order to clarify this point, let us return to the more detailed reconstruction of Marx's systematic argument in the fourth section of Chapter 1.

### **The Determinations of the Alienated Form Taken by the Productive Consciousness of the Private Individual**

My methodologically minded reading of the section on commodity fetishism has so far reached the point at which Marx's exposition analytically discovers the alienated consciousness of the (private) producer behind the commodity form of the product of labour. The limits of this analytic discovery of the alienated consciousness for the further progress of the dialectical investigation are formally analogous to those experienced by the search for the content of the exchangeability of the commodity in sections 1 and 2 of Chapter 1 of *Capital*. As a reflection of the general role of the phase of analysis in the dialectical method discussed in the previous chapters, it can only account for the 'what' of the phenomenon under scrutiny, but is incapable of offering an explanation of its determinate 'why'. Specifically, the analysis of the commodity form from the perspective of the human being as the material subject of social labour can shed light on what the fetish-like character of the product is: the inverted representation of the social determinations of individual labour in the form of value. But this raises the question as to why the consciousness of the human being must experience her/his own immanent determinations in such an alienated form. As follows from Marx's materialist standpoint, this fetishised form of consciousness can have no other basis than the historical form taken by social being in capitalism, that is, the 'specific social character of the labour which produces' commodities, namely, private labour: 'Objects of utility become commodities only because they are the products of the labour of private individuals who work independently of each other'.<sup>29</sup>

The explanation of the necessity of the alienated consciousness of the commodity producer must therefore lie in the ideal reproduction of the form in which the social character of private labour asserts itself through the exchange

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<sup>29</sup> Marx 1976g, p. 165.

of commodities. Having reached that point, Marx's exposition thus resumes, in the rest of the sixth paragraph of section 4, the synthetic unfolding of the movement of the unity of the general social relation mediated by the commodity form. However, unlike the earlier account in section 3 on the 'Value form, or exchange value', the dialectical development can now explicitly posit the indirect form in which social labour attains unity from the perspective of the conscious practical activity of private individuals.

The sum total of the labour of these private individuals forms the aggregate labour of society. Since the producers do not come into social contact until they exchange the products of their labour, the specific social characteristics of their private labours appear only within this exchange. In other words, the labour of the private individual manifests itself as an element of the total labour of society only through the relations which the act of exchange establishes between the products, and, through their mediation, between the producers. To the producers, therefore, the social relations between their private labours appear as what they are, i.e. they do not appear as direct social relations between persons in their work, but rather as material [*dinglich*] relations between persons and social relations between things.<sup>30</sup>

Marx's presentation thus finally unfolds the necessity of the alienated consciousness of the commodity producer. As a private and independent human being, the producer is incapable of recognising that her/his productive action possesses social determinations that transcend the immediacy of its singularity. Consequently, when organising the expenditure of the labour power that she/he embodies, the consciousness of the human individual must project or transpose – hence confront – those individually borne social powers as external to her/his individuality and existing as the objective attribute of the product, which allows it to enter the exchange relation and manifest indirectly the human subject's immanent determination as an individual organ of social labour: the form of exchangeability or the value form. In sum, the latter is the fetishised form in which the consciousness of the private producer resolves the organisation of her/his participation in the general process of social metabolism.

With this Marx expounds the determination of consciousness with regards to its most *general form* in capitalism. From this simplest determination of

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30 Marx 1976g, pp. 165–6.

the consciousness of the commodity producer, he then proceeds to unfold its more concrete form of realisation in its generic condition as the human form of organising transformative action upon nature. In the first place, through the productive action that it privately regulates in the direct process of production. Thus, the producer not only faces her/his own social powers as external to her/his subjectivity and carried by the product of her/his labour in the process of exchange through which social labour attains unity. As exchange extends its role in social reproduction, the plenitude of which is reached in capitalist society where it becomes the general social relation, this inverted consciousness starts to regulate the direct production process itself. Under those circumstances, already at that moment must the commodity producer put her/his consciousness at the service of social powers which she/he sees as alien to her/his subjectivity, that is, as belonging to the commodity.<sup>31</sup> When resolving the concrete form in which she/he will privately expend the aliquot part of the total labour power of society that she/he embodies, the social character of her/his labour already appears to the consciousness of the producer as an attribute of the product in a twofold sense.<sup>32</sup> Firstly, she/he must produce a use value which must satisfy the needs of other individuals with whom she/he does not have any immediate or direct social nexus. Secondly, that socially useful character of the product must be formally mediated by its determination as the bearer of the property to be transformed into any other use value, that is, the attribute of general exchangeability or the value form. Thus, at the very moment in which she/he actually exerts her/his productive subjectivity in the direct process of production, and in order to organise her/his affirmation as an individual organ of the social division of labour, the private individual must produce not only socially useful things, but also exchangeable products; she/he must posit value. In brief, the private individual must already alienate her/his productive consciousness in the commodity when acting in the immediate production process.<sup>33</sup>

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31 Iñigo Carrera 2007, pp. 58–9.

32 Marx 1976g, p. 166.

33 In this sense, value-positing is for Marx an immanent result of the direct production process and not, as Rubin and contemporary 'circulationist' value-form theorists argue, a determination of the sphere of circulation which 'leaves its imprint' on a labour process that posits value only 'mentally' or 'latently' (Rubin 1972; Reuten and Williams 1989; Heinrich 2011 and 2012). For a more detailed critique of Rubin's circulationist value-form theory and its political implications, see Kicillof and Starosta 2007a. Bonefeld (2010b), drawing on Bellofiore (2009a) and Arthur (2001b), attempts to avoid the pitfalls of Rubin's circulationist views by giving an objective character (as opposed to merely mental or

At this juncture, after having uncovered value as the reified mode of existence of the determinations of consciousness, Marx hastens to clarify that this by no means implies that the human individual is actually aware of this fact. Thus, he argues, it is not the case that commodity producers consciously recognise the determination of their private labours as individual fragments of human social labour and thereby exchange their products as equivalent materialisations of abstract labour, i.e. give them the form of value. It is the other way round. They *unconsciously* give the products of labour the form of value and, through this reified social mediation, they equalise behind their own backs their private labours as individual organs of the total labour of society on the basis of their material identity as pure expenditures of human labour power.<sup>34</sup> The constitution of the social objectivity of the value form, although being the spontaneous product of their own brain (hence of their consciousness), appears to the commodity producers as a *fait accompli* springing by nature from the materiality of the product of labour. In sum, the consciousness of the commodity producer, in its most general and simple form, is not only an inverted consciousness, but also an apparent one. As the bearer of that form of consciousness, the human individual is unable to recognise the necessity – i.e. the determinations – of her/his conscious action beyond the appearance of being an abstractly independent action. As the necessary ‘spontaneous and natural’ form in which the producer privately organises the insertion of her/his practical action into the social metabolic process as a whole, this immediate practical consciousness persists even after political economy scientifically discovers the labour content of the value form.<sup>35</sup>

In this sense, the corollary of Marx’s discussion of commodity fetishism is that consciousness is actually torn asunder when social being takes the form of private labour. It simultaneously exists both as a form of the subject of social labour and as an objective form of its product.<sup>36</sup> Before continuing with the textual commentary on commodity fetishism, let us probe deeper into this fundamental point.

In its generic condition as the specifically human capacity to organise the life process, consciousness always entails a twofold determination as much as the

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ideal) to the projection of the ghost-like objectivity of value back into production from its original constitution in exchange. For a critique of Bonefeld’s position, see Kicillof and Starosta 2011.

34 Marx 1976g, pp. 166–7.

35 Marx 1976g, p. 167.

36 Fitzsimons 2012, p. 37.

labouring activity that it regulates.<sup>37</sup> On the one hand, it is the form in which the human being rules the immediacy of the individual productive expenditure of her/his corporeal powers in order to appropriate and transform external nature into a means for human life. In this determination, consciousness is the human capacity to organise the unfolding of the individual character of labour. On the other hand, those individually borne productive powers can only be constituted socially, that is, they can only develop as a result of the productive action of other individuals (who, for instance, have participated in the production of the use values whose consumption resulted in the productive attributes borne by the former individual's labour power). Moreover, the individual labourer produces use values not solely for her/his own consumption, but for others, that is, *social* use values. Although an individual human action, labour therefore always has an intrinsically social character as well. This twofold character is borne by consciousness as its necessary form of organisation. Consciousness thereby does not simply undertake the regulation of the individual appropriation of the potentialities of external nature in order to transform it, but must also mediate the establishment of individual labour's immanent unity with the socially general metabolic process of which it is an organic part. As an attribute borne by the individuality of each human being, consciousness is thus the capacity to establish the unity of social labour through the individual productive action of each of its subjects, i.e. to regulate the social character of individual labour.

It is this twofold immanent potentiality of consciousness which is torn apart in commodity-producing society. Insofar as the private form of labour negates the capacity of human subjectivity to recognise and control the social character of its activity, that material potentiality of consciousness becomes formally alienated in the commodity. In this social determination, consciousness thereby exists in the mode of the objectivity of value. But the other side of this inversion is that, as subjective capacity, the consciousness of the commodity producer becomes determined as an abstractly individual human attribute. Only in this one-sided form does consciousness immediately exist *as consciousness*.

Based on these premises, let us now return to Marx's argument in the section on commodity fetishism. After having established the *genesis* or *social constitution* of the doubling of the consciousness of the commodity producer, Marx systematically proceeds to unfold the concrete form in which this abstractly individual practical subjectivity apprehends the alienated mode of existence of

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37 Fitzsimons 2012, pp. 44–6; Iñigo Carrera 2007, pp. 43–9.



its social determinations as an *already constituted objective form*. More specifically, the immediate practical consciousness of the commodity producer ideally represents the movement of her/his alienated social being in the form of an estimate of the proportions in which her/his commodities will exchange for the other commodities she/he needs. Thus, Marx comments:

What initially concerns producers in practice when they make an exchange is how much of some other product they get for their own; in what proportions can the products be exchanged?<sup>38</sup>

Now, insofar as consciousness is but the organisation of human action, the next systematic step after presenting the *form* in which the private producer represents 'in her/his head' the value determinations in a constituted form, must consist in expounding the way in which this practical subjectivity productively *acts* on this basis in order to take part in the system of all-round material interdependence characterising generalised commodity production. When faced with the movement of the unity of their social life process in a form that escapes their own individual potentialities, human beings are condemned to act, in Reichelt's eloquent formulation, as

executors of constraints generated and reproduced by themselves, which are implemented in and through their conscious actions without, however, being consciously accessible to them.<sup>39</sup>

At stake here, then, is the *autonomisation* of the general social relation from the conscious control of individuals and the consequent real appearance or 'objective illusion' of *automatism* characterising capitalistic production.

As Marx argues, this determination of the practical action of private individuals becomes firmly established only when the movement of the quantitative articulation of the social division of labour becomes regulated by the magnitude of value.<sup>40</sup> This is because the degree in which the products of labour are exchangeable starts to vary independently of the producer's individual consciousness and will. Hence, in order to satisfy her/his qualitatively and quantitatively determined needs – thereby reproducing her/his natural life – the producer cannot but determine her/his consciousness and will as the servants

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38 Marx 1976g, p. 167.

39 Reichelt 2007, p. 5.

40 Marx 1976g, p. 167.

of the capricious changes of the magnitude of value of the commodity she/he produces, which varies ‘continually, independently of the will, foreknowledge and actions of the exchangers.’<sup>41</sup> In other words, she/he not only faces her/his own social determinations as alien powers borne by the product of labour, but the latter comes to control the producer herself/himself. As Iñigo Carrera succinctly puts it,<sup>42</sup> the commodity producer can reproduce herself/himself as a *person* only by acting as the most object *personification* of the commodity.<sup>43</sup>

With this characterisation of the practical subjectivity of human beings as personifications of the movement of the value form, Marx’s exposition completes the ideal reproduction of the simplest social determinations of the alienated consciousness of the private individual and its concrete forms in the sphere of production. From the point of view of the formal structure of the dialectical presentation, the important point to bring out is the precise sequence of form determinations that guides the flow of Marx’s argument, which I will now formally sketch out.

As I have shown in the previous section, Marx’s exposition firstly moves analytically in order to discover the alienated consciousness of the commodity producer behind the value form and private labour as the foundation of the former. From that point onwards, he undertakes again the synthetic return journey from private labour to value, albeit now as mediated by consciousness, thereby accounting for the ‘why’ of the latter’s alienated mode of existence in the commodity. In this phase of his argument, the unfolding of novel form determinations concerning the inner connection between consciousness and value inevitably overlaps with repetitions of points made earlier about the inner connection between private labour and value. After moving from human subjectivity to its transposed form of existence in the objectivity of value, Marx turns his attention back to the material subject of social labour in order to uncover the form of this consciousness which, in its immediacy, appears as abstracted from its social determinations. It is here that, strictly speaking, the presentation of entirely new content actually starts to unfold. The exposition thus reveals the sundering of the immanent twofold determination of human

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41 Ibid.

42 Iñigo Carrera 2008, pp. 11–12.

43 The rest of the section in Chapter 1 of *Capital* deals with the *ideological* scientific form of the alienated consciousness of the modern individual (political economy) and with general comments on other social forms and their respective forms of social consciousness. The latter are external observations in the dialectical presentation which evidently play a didactic or pedagogical role by helping to emphasise the specificity of capitalist social forms.

productive consciousness (individual and social) into an abstractly individual attribute of the material subject of social labour and the objectified mode of existence of its social determinations in the commodity, the latter being posited by the spontaneous or unconscious act of consciousness itself. What follows is the development of the concrete form in which the private producers ideally reflect on those social determinations, grasping them in their immediacy as already existing forms of human life. On the basis of these immediate appearances, they organise their alienated practical action in order to reproduce the materiality of their lives, thereby becoming determined as personifications of the autonomised self-movement of those objectified forms of social mediation. Note in this regard that this means that the relation between consciousness and value suffers, as it were, a reversal. If, at the beginning, value appeared as the self-negating mode of existence of consciousness, the exposition later reveals that human subjectivity and its conscious practical action actually develop into a concrete form of the self-movement of the value form. One could argue that in this way Marx eventually justifies his presentational strategy of total obliteration of subjectivity when structuring the argument in the first three sections of Chapter 1 in apparently 'objectivistic' terms around the explanation of the exchangeability of the commodity as such: the establishment of the unity of capitalist social production proves to be predicated on a real automatism and not on the conscious knowing and willing of the material subject of social labour.

With all this in mind, we can now take stock of the precise systematic place and significance of the section on commodity fetishism in Marx's order of presentation. Inasmuch as it has the consciousness of the commodity producer as its immediate object of exposition, it can only appear *after* the analytic and synthetic development of the determinations of the value form. The reason for this is that the determinations unfolded in the former are nothing more than the forms in which the latter concretely develop. To put it plainly, *the individual consciousness of the commodity producer is a concrete form in which the commodity, as the formal subject of the process of human metabolism, realises its own determinations.*

The full significance of this order of determination can be better appreciated in Chapter 2, in which, as anticipated above, Marx presents that alienated consciousness in motion, effectively acting as personification of her/his commodity in the sphere of exchange, that is, in the phase of the social reproduction process in which the unity of the social character of labour becomes manifest through a direct relation between human beings (i.e. the voluntary contract). In other words, when he presents the process of exchange as the concrete realisation of the social relation materialised in the commodity. After analytically

penetrating the immediate appearance that it is the human individual who consciously and voluntarily controls the product of labour, Marx sets out to unfold the realisation of the essential determination with which the previous section finished, namely, in capitalist society,

the characters who appear on the economic stage are merely personifications of economic relations: it is as the bearers of these economic relations that they come into contact with each other.<sup>44</sup>

What follows, then, is the alienated action of individuals determined as personifications who, through their unconsciously organised social action, cannot help manifesting by way of their ‘natural instinct’ the ‘natural laws of the commodity’ discovered in Chapter 1.<sup>45</sup> In effect, out of the development of the exchange process necessarily crystallises the money form of the commodity. The value form of the product of labour affirms itself as an abstract form through its self-negation, that is, by realising its own necessity in the form of the atomistic action of commodity owners, which act as vehicles for the realisation of the ‘will’ of their commodities.<sup>46</sup> Hence the importance of not only grasping the unity between the section on commodity fetishism and the rest of Chapter 1, but also accounting for the crucial presentational unity between the latter as a whole and Chapter 2.

As the ideal reproduction of these real relations among forms of different levels of abstraction, the dialectical presentation cannot posit the fetishism of commodities – i.e. the inverted self-consciousness of the commodity producer and its determination as personification of the value form – prior to the unfolding of the social relations whose unity is ideally mediated in that historical form of consciousness. If it did so, it would, like it or not, fall prey to the idealist inversion of positing consciousness as taking concrete form in social being. And since the times of *The German Ideology*, Marx and Engels had made clear that such a way of conceiving of the relation between social being and forms of consciousness entailed turning the real relations upside down. Maybe aware of the risk that his own exposition might be read in that inverted fashion, Marx in the first edition of *Capital* explicitly stated the order of the relation:

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44 Marx 1976g, p. 179.

45 Marx 1976g, p. 180.

46 Arthur correctly points this out (see Arthur 2004a, pp. 37–8). Heinrich also brings out this issue in distinguishing between Marx’s exposition of the ‘economic determinate form’ and the ‘activity of commodity owners’ (see Heinrich 2012, pp. 72–9).

First their relationship exists in a practical mode. Second, however, their relationship exists as relationship for them. The way in which it exists for them or is reflected in their brain arises from the very nature of the relationship.<sup>47</sup>

In order to highlight the importance of this, let us briefly discuss Rubin's claim that the account of commodity fetishism constitutes the 'propaedeutic' to, and basis of, the determinations of the value form.<sup>48</sup> In a nutshell, Rubin considers that the content of the section on fetishism is what, as I have argued above, in reality corresponds to section 3 on the form of value or exchange value, i.e. the synthetic exposition of the reason why the product of labour must take on the value form. And this confusion should come as no surprise, since, as I have already pointed out, Marx's exposition itself contains elements for an inattentive reader to be led to these mistaken conclusions. In effect, we have seen that Marx interjects as part of the development of the alienated consciousness as such *repetitions* of arguments he had already developed when he was effectively presenting the determinations of the commodity as the general social relation (the objectified social being, so to speak). That many of those passages just restate points already made earlier is evidenced by the way in which Marx introduces them:

*As the foregoing analysis has already demonstrated, this fetishism of the world of commodities arises from the peculiar social character of the labour which produces them.*<sup>49</sup>

Now, regardless of the ambiguities in Marx's presentation, it is not there that the basis for Rubin's confusion is to be found. The problem resides, in reality, in Rubin's inadequate comprehension of the dialectical structure of the exposition in Chapter 1 of *Capital*. As we have seen, the place where Marx unfolds the synthetic movement from (private) labour to value is not in the fourth section which, in broad systematic outline, corresponds to the synthetic movement leading from value to consciousness, albeit necessarily retracing some steps in order to discuss the social determinations of the productive consciousness of the commodity producer, but in section three on 'The form of value or exchange value' (in which, as I have argued, the sequence from private labour to value is

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47 Marx 1976e, p. 36.

48 Rubin 1972, pp. 6, 61.

49 Marx 1976g, p. 165, my emphasis. Heinrich also notes that with that introductory line Marx refers to the content of the previous sections (Heinrich 2011, p. 176).

unfolded in the ‘language of commodities’, that is, in unity with that which leads from value to exchange value/money). And yet in Rubin’s scheme of things, this latter section plays no fundamental part. Why? Because, for him, section 3 of the first chapter contains a *purely formal* development that simply illustrates the different forms of exchange value as modes of expression of value. In Rubin’s view, there is nothing about the qualitative content that is affirming itself through self-negation in the mode of that formal development.<sup>50</sup> So much so that in the 275 pages of his book on the theory of value, the formal development of exchange value only deserves some comments in passing<sup>51</sup> and a couple of footnotes.<sup>52</sup> In these places, moreover, Rubin only mentions the development of exchange value to state that he will not occupy himself with the form of value, only with value as form.<sup>53</sup> No wonder, then, that when he later in the book finds those repetitions of the synthetic movement from private labour to value in the section on commodity fetishism, he is led to think that that development appears for the first time there and, therefore, constitutes its fundamental content.<sup>54</sup>

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50 This is how Rubin comments on the content of section 3 of Chapter 1: ‘Marx himself mentions “the form of value” in various passages incidentally. The third section of Chapter 1 of *Capital* has the title “The Form of Value or Exchange Value”. But Marx does not remain on the explanation of the form of value, and quickly passes to its various modifications, to the individual “forms of value”: accidental, expanded, general and monetary’ (Rubin 1972, p. 114). Thus, the precise place where Marx unfolds in great detail the explanation of the reason to be of value is taken by Rubin as containing no more than a merely ‘incidental’ brief passage on value as social form.

51 See, for example, Rubin 1972, pp. 122–3.

52 Rubin 1972, pp. 68, 112.

53 If section three only contains a non-fundamental formal development, one wonders, then, why did Marx introduce in the first edition an appendix on the form of value? Besides, had Rubin paid attention to that appendix, he would have noticed that insofar as the section on commodity fetishism is a concrete form of the development of the form of value, Marx introduced the former discussion as the fourth peculiarity of the equivalent form (Marx 1976e, p. 59). The point about the place of commodity fetishism in the appendix to the first edition has also been noted in passing by Arthur (2009).

54 And where exactly does Rubin find a ‘detailed elaboration’ of the value form? For instance, in a footnote, specifically, number 34 in the Penguin edition of *Capital* (Rubin 1972, p. 114). Now, by definition, a footnote can hardly contain the elaboration of the essential content of a form determination. Furthermore, in that particular footnote, Marx is unambiguously commenting on the ideological and apologetic character of the science of political economy (for falling prey to the fetish-like character of the commodity), and is not, by any stretch of the imagination, ‘elaborating in greater detail’ on the determinations of the value form.

What are the implications of this misreading, so influential among contemporary followers of Marx? In a nutshell, a conception of Marx's critique of political economy, and in particular of the section on commodity fetishism, one-sidedly determined as an exposition of the social constitution of the forms of objectivity of capitalist society. The transposed relation between human practical activity and its objectified forms of social mediation is exhausted in the constitution of those forms of objectivity as a hostile alienated social power standing above and constraining human individuality. But this inversion is not followed through to its necessary unfolding in the determination of the latter as personification of the value form. This has the consequence of rendering the most general determination of human individuality in capitalism under-theorised, thus opening up the possibility of postulating an instance of exteriority between human consciousness and will (i.e. subjectivity) and the value form; the former is thus seen as not fully determined as a mode of existence of the latter. As we shall see later on, this exteriority eventually hinders the full comprehension of what a consequent dialectical development of these abstract determinations necessarily leads to, namely, the discovery of the determination of (social) capital as the concrete alienated subject of the historical movement of present-day society. To put it differently, I will show that those readings fail to follow the transition from the fetishism of commodities to the fetishism of capital, that is, from its abstract determination as a formal inversion between subject and product of social labour up to its full transformation into a complete real inversion. I shall leave this aside for the moment, since it will be the topic of later chapters. In the next chapter, I return to the discussion of commodity fetishism in order to probe deeper into the concrete forms taken by the alienated subjectivity of the commodity producer.

# The Commodity Form, Subjectivity and the Practical Nature of Defetishising Critique

## Introduction

As we have seen above, the historical specificity of the commodity form of social relations resides in the constitution of private and independent production as the mode of existence of social labour. This, I have argued, constitutes the ground of the historical determination of productive labour as value-producing. The commodity producer is condemned to see the social determinations of her/his activity as an objective attribute of the product of labour. Thus far, then, the determinations of the alienated consciousness of the commodity producer have been reconstructed on the basis of Marx's explicit account of commodity fetishism. The question that needs to be addressed now is the following: how must this private producer, who has projected her/his social powers as the value form of the product of labour, see herself/himself in order to effectively act as the personification of her/his commodity? In other words, if the commodity form is the *objective* form of existence of the alienated consciousness, what is its corresponding *subjective* form?

The answer to this question is another fundamental aspect of the determinations of alienated consciousness, which arises already at the level of the commodity form, and which, I think, even the most sophisticated readings tend to overlook.<sup>1</sup> Admittedly, this is not *explicitly* posed by Marx in the section

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1 The *programmatic* statement about the commodity form as the basis for the forms of objectivity and subjectivity of capitalist society can be traced back to Lukács in *History and Class Consciousness* (1971). However, the specifics of his argument, overly leaning on a romantic abstract opposition between activity and passivity, and a Weberian conception of reification as an 'iron cage', undermined his otherwise valid research programme (Starosta 2001). More recently, the research programme has been taken up by Postone (1996, pp. 36–9, 216–25, 273–7, 314–25) in a way that avoids many of Lukács's shortcomings by more consistently attempting to ground forms of subjectivity immanently and historically in the alienated movement of present-day 'structures of social mediation' (both capital-reproducing and capital-transcending forms of consciousness). See also Postone 2003. However, I think that Postone's own approach does not fully fulfil its programmatic premises (Starosta 2004). Thus, despite some references in passing to bourgeois forms of individuality (Postone 1996, pp. 32–



on commodity fetishism. However, it appears more clearly in the *Grundrisse* and, as far as *Capital* itself is concerned, it is scattered in different parts of Volume I.

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3, 273–7), Postone fails to grasp the apparently self-determining freedom of the commodity producer as the most general subjective form taken by the realisation of her/his alienated productive subjectivity. As a consequence, he is unable to specify the concrete form taken by the consciousness that constitutes the determinate negation of freedom as the form of alienation. In fact, although he claims to ground revolutionary consciousness socially and historically, capital's intrinsic developmental dynamic as unfolded in his book only posits immanently the *possibility* for emancipatory subjectivity to emerge, by creating an internal tension between the actuality of capitalist industrial production, which is impoverishing for the many, and the historical potentialities it contains for the mode of social labour to become 'enriching' to everyone (Postone 1996, pp. 28, 34–5). But the *realisation* of that possibility is not seen by Postone as an immanent necessity engendered by the very movement of that alienated form of social mediation. Although not explicitly stated by Postone, it follows from his approach that revolutionary subjectivity must be eventually posited as abstractly free and self-determining, externally 'reacting' or 'responding' to the 'objective' contradictions of capital in the form of self-activating 'needs, demands and conceptions that point beyond capitalism' (Postone 1996, p. 37). In the end, he offers an admittedly more sophisticated version of the Classical Marxist abstract opposition between objective and subjective conditions for the abolition of capital, the former providing the external context which 'facilitates' or 'triggers' the self-development of the latter. It is more sophisticated insofar as the essential contradiction of capitalism is not represented simply as one between socialised production and private appropriation, but, following Marx's discussion of the fragment on machines in the *Grundrisse*, as a contradiction between materiality and social form intrinsic to the capitalistic form of the labour process itself (large-scale industry in particular). However, the *objectivistic* way in which he conceives of that essential contradiction – the tendential disappearance of direct labour rendering anachronistic its determination as source of value (Postone 1996, pp. 24–5) – does not allow him to see the way in which its historical development can only find 'room to move' in the form of its self-overcoming, which in turn must necessarily take the form of the revolutionary political subjectivity of the working class. Thus, Postone not only fails to see how the immanent contradictions of the capital form (the content) can only exist and develop in and through the political action of workers as a class; in addition, partly as result of a flawed reading of the qualitative determinations of the productive subjectivity of large-scale industry, he also denies the working class the determination of material bearer of the necessity to abolish capital. Instead, he postulates a socially undetermined 'people' as the subject of the 'reappropriation of socially general capacities that are not ultimately grounded in the working class and had been constituted historically in alienated form as capital' (Postone 1996, p. 357). As I shall argue later on, the key to avoiding these shortcomings consists in discovering that the essential contradiction of capitalism is immanently carried by the transformations of the qualitative determinations of the productive subjectivity of the working class. I come back to these questions in the last two chapters of the book.

Be that as it may, even if it is not *systematically* integrated by Marx into the dialectical exposition, one of key insights to be found in Iñigo Carrera's work is to have shown that it is implicit in *Capital* from the very first chapter. Indeed, I think that here lies one of Iñigo Carrera's most important contributions to the contemporary reconstruction of the Marxian critique of political economy: as he forcefully argues at great length, in capitalism free consciousness is neither the abstract opposite to nor the content of alienated consciousness, but the concrete form in which the latter affirms through its own negation.<sup>2</sup> In other words, the other side of the coin by which the human individual sees her/his social powers as the objective attribute of the product of social labour is her/his self-conception as the bearer of an abstractly free subjectivity. This insight will prove to have fundamental implications for the comprehension of that which, as I have been arguing, is the central aim of the scientific development of the critique of political economy, namely, the self-consciousness of the determinations of its own revolutionary subjectivity by the working class. Let us therefore subject this issue to closer scrutiny.

### Free Subjectivity as Alienated Subjectivity

The development of the commodity as the general social relation presupposes the dissolution of all relations of personal dependence. The consciousness and will of the commodity producer is therefore not subordinated to any other consciousness and will in the organisation of her/his material life. In other words, seen in its immediacy (and that is the standpoint of all ideological representations of capitalist society), the consciousness of the commodity producer is *free* from subordination to the direct authority of any other individual or any other direct social relation (such as customary community or kinship relations). What is the actual meaning of this freedom when seen from the only materialist point of view, that is, from the point of view of the organisation and development of human productive subjectivity? Inasmuch as she/he is not subject to any relation of personal dependence, the private individual has the *full conscious control* over the *individual* character of her/his productive activity. The 'tragedy' of this individual is that she/he is not the only one enjoying this apparently absolute freedom. In the same vein as every other consciousness and will is completely excluded from her/his own productive decisions, she/he is absolutely incapable of having any say in the organisation

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<sup>2</sup> Iñigo Carrera 2007, Chapter 3.

of any other process of individual metabolism, the organic totality of which comprises the metabolism of society. This means not only that the commodity producer has no personal capacity to establish the concrete form in which other members of society will exert the labour power that each of them embodies. It also involves the incapacity to organise their consumption, which means that she/he has no control over the determination of the products of her/his labour as *social* use values.<sup>3</sup> Hence the cost at which the plenitude of this control over the individual character of labour comes, namely, the absolute lack of control over its *social* character and the consequent constitution of the value form as the reified mediator in the process of production of human life. And hence the need to put this free consciousness and will to produce an alien social power – i.e. value – in the best possible manner, as the only way to reproduce the producer's material life. The realisation of her/his freedom proves to be the concrete form taken by its inner determination as personification of the social powers of her/his commodity. In other words, her/his free consciousness is, in reality, a concrete mode of existence of an essentially alienated consciousness.<sup>4</sup>

The crucial point at this juncture is to grasp the real relation between this freedom as autonomy or self-determination and alienation beyond any externality – or inversion – between them. Thus the inverted appearance could arise that the relation between form and content of the consciousness of the private individual is such that alienation is the mode of existence of an ahistorically conceived freedom of the human subject. But my point is that the real relation consists of alienated consciousness affirming through self-negation by realising its immanent social determination in the form of free consciousness.

Perhaps I can put this important point across more clearly by briefly comparing this perspective to the one put forward by Richard Gunn who, in probably one of the most sophisticated attempts to explicitly deal with this question within Marxism, clings precisely to that inverted appearance between freedom and alienation.<sup>5</sup> For Gunn, the whole 'trick' that is necessary to grasp the contradictory relation between freedom and alienation in capitalist soci-

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3 Iñigo Carrera 2007, p. 51.

4 In other words, from a materialist standpoint, complete freedom is neither the absence of all determination nor an abstractly individual self-determination ('doing as one pleases' in the face of 'external' constraints). Instead, it is the self-conscious control by the human being over her/his twofold *immanent* determination (individual and social) as a working subject, that is, over her/his *individual* participation in the *intrinsically social* process of human metabolism.

5 Gunn 1992.

ety is 'to see unfreedom as a mode of existence of freedom'.<sup>6</sup> Thus he claims that, in reality, there is no such thing as unfreedom, but only 'unfree freedom', which 'amounts to freedom contradicted, or to freedom subsisting alienatedly, i.e. in the mode of being denied'.<sup>7</sup> We shall see the practical consequences of this kind of inversion below, but for the moment let us just focus on the *methodological* dimension of this discussion and note that despite his references to dialectics being the ideal expression of the real movement, Gunn reaches these conclusions through an exemplary exercise in dialectical *logic*. He starts with an axiomatic (ontologically or transcendently grounded?) definition of the concept of freedom as self-determination and then subjects this concept to the general *logical* necessity of 'affirming through self-negation'.

In the argument presented here, by contrast, I started, paraphrasing Marx's remark in his notes on Adolph Wagner, with a 'concretum': not the universal 'concept of freedom', but the historically determined free consciousness of the commodity producer. And by concretely reproducing in thought the realisation of its *specific* material potentiality as capable of ruling the individual character of labour, but not its social character, I uncovered its actual determination as the form of the alienated consciousness, hence as personification of the value form. Only *after* concretely unfolding the movement of these social forms could one *recognise* the general form of motion as one of 'affirmation through self-negation'. But I did not justify this *specific* form determination by recourse to that *general* form of movement of the real. This, I think, illustrates the sometimes thin line separating the dialectical *method* from dialectical *logic*, already identified in Chapter 3.

Thus, it is not that this freedom as apparent 'self-determination', abstractly conceived of as a natural attribute of human beings, is negated in capitalist society by taking the form of an alienated consciousness, which is 'constrained' to produce value by the external compulsion emanating from the 'objective social context' in which the individual finds herself/himself. It is the other way round. In the material process of producing her/his life at this particular stage in the historical development of the material productive forces of society, individuals can only socially relate with each other through the production of value, i.e. as personifications of the commodity, which, in turn, produces in these individuals this free consciousness as its necessary concrete form. It is by seeing herself/himself – and therefore practically acting – as personally free that the

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6 Gunn 1992, p. 29.

7 Ibid.

individual reproduces the subordination to the commodity form. The affirmation of this freedom as abstract self-determination of the subject becomes determined as the concrete form of the movement of the alienation inherent in the commodity form of social relations, i.e. in private labour. The fetishistic appearances of the objective forms of the alienated consciousness are thus paralleled by the corresponding 'fetishism' of their subjective forms. We have seen the determination of the alienated consciousness of the commodity producer as an apparent consciousness that cannot recognise in value the social determinations of her/his individual productive activity, thereby seeing it as a natural attribute springing from the materiality of the product of labour. In the same vein, the commodity producer is incapable of recognising her/his free consciousness as the necessary concrete form taken by the affirmation of its alienated character, thereby seeing it as a natural attribute of human individuals springing from an anthropological determination of the species. In their unity, the value form of the product of labour and the apparently free consciousness of the producer, respectively, constitute the most general, objective and subjective forms of existence of the alienated consciousness in the capitalist mode of production.<sup>8</sup>

As evidenced by my reconstruction of Marx's account of commodity fetishism in Chapter 1 of the first Volume of *Capital*, his presentation of the determinations of the alienated consciousness of the commodity producer does not explicitly address its concrete form of subjectivity as free consciousness at that stage. In general, the references to the latter appear in the context of more concrete determinations, i.e. at the level of the capital form. Furthermore, only in the chapter on simple reproduction, when the plenitude of alienation is presented through the constitution of social capital as the subject even of the process of individual consumption, does Marx make the explicit point about free consciousness as the necessary form of reproduction of its alienated con-

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8 Note that the problem does not reside in the isolated or 'monadic' affirmation of this free consciousness, whose limitations would be overcome by simply assuming a directly collective mode of realisation of this very same freedom. As I argue below, the determinate negation of this apparent freedom consists in a form of consciousness which is free not for being 'self-determined', but by virtue of being conscious of its own immanent social determinations; which in this mode of production, given the latter's real inverted existence in an objectified form, can only mean being self-conscious of its own alienated nature and of the productive potentialities historically developed in such an alienated form. In other words, it also involves a *transformation* of the form of human freedom into the fully conscious knowledge of the social determinations of individual labour and, as a *consequence*, the recognition of the necessity to regulate it as a directly collective power.

tent.<sup>9</sup> At the level of the commodity form, the closest reference to this determination of free consciousness appears very briefly only in relation to its more concrete *juridical* expression at the beginning of Chapter 2. That is, it appears only in relation to commodity *owners* (as opposed to producers), in the context of the *direct* (hence conscious and voluntary) relation between two *particular* private individuals established in the process of *exchange* – the contract – through which the *general indirect* (hence unconscious) relations of commodity *production* assert themselves.<sup>10</sup>

In the *Grundrisse*, however, not only are the juridical forms of commodity production subject to a more detailed treatment, but in addition, Marx makes the point about this determination of free consciousness as the concrete form of the alienated consciousness without ambiguity.

In present bourgeois society as a whole, this positing of prices and their circulation etc. appears as the surface process, beneath which, however, in the depths, entirely different processes go on, in which this apparent individual equality and liberty disappear. It is forgotten, on one side, that the *presupposition* of exchange value, as the objective basis of the whole of the system of production, already in itself implies compulsion over the individual, since his immediate product is not a product for him, but only *becomes* such in the social process, and since it *must* take on this general but nevertheless external form; and that the individual has an existence only as a producer of exchange value, hence that the whole negation

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9 Marx 1976g, pp. 717–19.

10 See Iñigo Carrera 2012. It is precisely those more concrete *juridical* expressions of free consciousness – the notion of legal personality – that recent contributions within Marxism have developed (Fine 2002; Reuten and Williams 1989; Miéville 2005), in general on the basis of a critical appropriation of the pioneering work of Pashukanis (1983). However, my point is that the determination of free consciousness as the concrete form of the alienated consciousness already obtains at the more abstract level of the materiality of the organisation of the development of productive subjectivity. It is to this more abstract determination that I have been referring. As Marx puts it in the *Grundrisse*, the juridical concrete forms taken by the free productive subjectivity of the private working individual are just ‘this basis to a higher power’: ‘Therefore, when the economic form, exchange, posits the all-sided equality of its subjects, then the content, the individual as well as the objective material which drives towards the exchange, is *freedom*. Equality and freedom are thus not only respected in exchange based on exchange values but, also, the exchange of exchange values is the productive, real basis of all *equality* and *freedom*. As pure ideas they are merely the idealized expressions of this basis; as developed in juridical, political, social relations, they are merely this basis to a higher power’ (Marx 1993, p. 245).

of his natural existence is already implied; that he is therefore entirely determined by society; that this further presupposes a division of labour etc., in which the individual is already posited in relations other than that of mere *exchanger*, etc. That therefore this presupposition by no means arises either out of the individual's will or out of the immediate nature of the individual, but that it is, rather, *historical*, and posits the individual as already *determined* by society. It is forgotten, on the other side, that these higher forms, in which exchange, or the relations of production which realize themselves in it, are now posited, do not by any means stand still in this simple form where the highest distinction which occurs is a formal and hence irrelevant one. What is overlooked, finally, is that already the simple forms of exchange value and of money latently contain the opposition between labour and capital, etc.<sup>11</sup>

In this passage, Marx raises two critical points. First, against those who want to preserve the forms of freedom and equality which emerge out of the simple circulation of commodities without its transformation into a process of capitalist exploitation, he states that simple circulation is just the abstract form in which capital's valorisation process – the exploitation of labour – appears. This is the part of Marx's critique of modern freedom and equality that is generally – and correctly – emphasised within Marxism, usually in debates over the derivation of the state form.<sup>12</sup> But note that Marx develops another aspect of his critique, which is precisely the one I have been stressing. Namely, that even at the level of abstraction of the commodity form, the freedom of private individuals is revealed as the way in which they act as personifications of the social determinations of their commodities. Their free consciousness is the concrete form of subjectivity of their 'existence only as producers of exchange value'.

Leaving exegetical questions aside, my discussion should have made clear that even if not explicitly addressed by Marx, the whole section on commodity fetishism latently contains the exposition of the determinations of free productive consciousness as the form of an essentially alienated consciousness. At any rate, the important point is not whether Marx said it or not, but what are the implications of this discovery of the inner connection between freedom and alienation in the capitalist mode of production for the determination of science as practical criticism and, on the other hand, what are the consequences of overlooking it? In the following section, I move to the discussion of these

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11 Marx 1993, pp. 247–8.

12 See, for instance, Blanke et al. 1978.

further fundamental issues in order to show, once again, that only on the basis of the dialectical method can these questions be adequately dealt with.

### **Why Does Method Make a Difference? The Implications of Marx's Investigation of the Commodity Form for the Determinations of Revolutionary Subjectivity**

The discussion in the previous section permits me to draw a first provisional conclusion about the *differentia specifica* of Marx's *critique* of political economy, as opposed to political economy or sociology (no matter how radical or 'Marxist' their political stance). Through the ideal reproduction of the determinations of capital, Marx discovers its historical specificity in the private form taken by social labour, this being the general social relation of production regulating the reproduction of human life and hence the development of human productive subjectivity. As an expression of this historical form of social being, the consciousness of the private and independent individual becomes concretely determined as alienated. This alienated consciousness acquires two concrete modes of existence: objectively, it takes the value form of the product of labour thereby determined as a commodity; subjectively, it is realised through the apparently free consciousness of the modern individual. The most general defining characteristic of Marx's scientific enterprise as a *critique of political economy* consists precisely in the discovery of this *twofold* determination of social existence (hence social consciousness) in capitalist society. As the essential *content* of revolutionary knowledge of capitalist social forms, those discoveries can only be the result of its *dialectical form*. In order to substantiate this point further, let us see the consequences of the attempt ideally to apprehend the determinations discussed above through the lenses of *representational thought*, i.e. through *logic* (whether formal or dialectical), an issue which, I think, has also been insightfully and systematically explored by Iñigo Carrera and beyond the insight Marx left us explicitly in *Capital*.<sup>13</sup>

In the case of formal logic, the question is very straightforward. Since it conceives of real forms as isolated immediate affirmations, freedom and alienation repel each other by definition. From this point of view, freedom is freedom, and alienation is alienation, there being no way that one could be the mode of existence of the other. If, as generally happens, it stops short at the more immediate appearances of bourgeois society, it falls prey to the illusion that the

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13 Iñigo Carrera 2007, pp. 67 ff.; and 2008, pp. 252–6.



human individual is free by nature and that the 'objective context' of capitalist social relations allows that freedom to express the plenitude of its potentialities. This has been the simplest element defining the apologetic character of *bourgeois* social science. This is perfectly compatible with the postulation of this or that external limitation to the affirmation of freedom engendered by the autonomised regulation of capitalist social relations. In this case, adequate social reform by the state is conceived of as being capable of removing those constraints, thereby leading to a kind of capitalism with a 'human face'.<sup>14</sup> Still, formal logic has even made its incursions within Marxism. Rational Choice or Analytic Marxism is a case in point.<sup>15</sup> In this more radical version, this formal-logical representation could even find the constraints to the affirmation of freedom in whole 'institutions' which they see as defining the capitalist mode of production itself. For instance, this would be the case of capitalist private property, which is seen as limiting freedom by leading to an unjust distribution of social wealth, resources and/or capabilities. Hence, defenders of 'market socialism' see the transcendence of capitalism as entailing the preservation of the freedom and independence inherent in the commodity form, which they take as given as the natural form of productive subjectivity of human beings, but without the inequality springing from private property in the means of production. In other words, they put forward a political programme which postulates the oxymoron of wanting to preserve the commodity as the general social relation without its necessary development into capital. Here formal logic provides these Marxists with another service: the respective existences of the commodity form and the capital form are just immediate affirmations, so we can have one without having the other.

This inability to grasp the real relation between freedom and alienation in capitalist society manifests itself in a more subtle way in the case of *dialectical logic*.<sup>16</sup> The latter, I think, has been the way in which Marxism has been attempting to grasp said relation between free consciousness and alienated consciousness, which can be seen as such an application of a dialectical logic. In this case, the issue is all the more relevant since it directly pertains to the central theoretico-practical question I have been tracing in this book, namely, the determinations of revolutionary subjectivity. In a nutshell, the question at

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14 This is, for instance, Keynes's utopia in the *General Theory*, which amounts to capitalism without capital (Kicillof 2004).

15 See Roemer 1986. An excellent critique of Rational Choice Marxism can be found in Bensaïd 2002.

16 On the distinction between dialectical *method* and dialectical *logic*, see the discussion of Marx's critique of Proudhon in Chapter 3.

stake is the following: if the general social relation regulating human life in the capitalist mode of production takes concrete form in a reified consciousness, how is the overcoming of alienation and consequent affirmation of human freedom possible? The question turns out to be posed in terms of the relation between the form of consciousness bound to reproduce its alienation and the one embodying the potentiality of its transcendence, i.e. revolutionary subjectivity. And here is where – more or less explicitly – dialectical logic comes into play. Sticking to the apparent external relation between free subjectivity and alienated subjectivity in the capitalist mode of production, the consciousness of the subject of revolutionary transformation – the working class – is logically represented as the antagonistic unity of those opposing determinations.<sup>17</sup> What is more, the relation is not only grasped in an external fashion, but also becomes actually inverted. Hence, also falling prey to the appearance of ‘free creative subjectivity’ as the natural attribute of human beings, the dialectical-logical representation conceives of the latter as the essential pole of that relation which is contradicted by the coexistence of the reified pole, in turn seen as constituting the inessential or apparent side of that relation. The difference between the different currents arises by virtue of the precise way in which they conceptualise that unity of opposing yet immediate affirmations.<sup>18</sup> But in all cases, working class consciousness is more or less implicitly represented as the unity of an alienated pole (‘false’ or ‘reified’ consciousness) and a free one (the true class consciousness, corresponding to the essential being of the proletariat as the ‘universal class’). In turn, each pole is usually assigned to a specific kind of action by workers so that some forms of working-class action are seen as being the affirmation of a false or reified consciousness, whilst others – in particular, revolutionary action – are seen as the affirmation of the workers’ essential freedom, i.e. not determined as a concrete form of their alienation in capital.<sup>19</sup> At most, this dialectical-logical representation could go as

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17 Iñigo Carrera 2008, p. 254.

18 Thus, note that this applies both to so-called ‘Leninist’ and ‘spontaneist’ conceptions. The difference between them resides in the concrete social subject that appears as the immediate bearer of that freedom: the vanguard (who must guide or enlighten, and hence liberate, workers) or the working class as a whole. But in both cases, the ‘substance’ of revolutionary subjectivity is the apparently natural freedom of the human being.

19 See footnote 50 of Chapter 7 for various references to this ontological or transcendental grounding of revolutionary class struggle in diverse currents of Marxism. But take, for instance, Lukács’s argument in *History and Class Consciousness*. In that text he stresses that, at least in its immediacy, the standpoint of the proletariat is not different from that of the bourgeoisie; it is a reified consciousness and, hence, cannot go beyond the immedi-

far as submitting that the antagonistic unity of opposites permeates all capitalist social existence, so that the two poles cut across every manifestation of class struggle (indeed, the singularity of each human subject), there being no privileged form of action which can be said to express the affirmation of a pure non-alienated subjectivity. 'Reform' ('labour as a moment of social reproduction in the form of capital') and 'Revolution' ('as process in and against capital in terms of working class self-determination') are therefore seen as constituting 'extreme poles of a dialectical continuum that social practice represents'.<sup>20</sup>

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ate appearances of capitalist society in order radically to transform it (Lukács 1971, p. 150). However, he later claims that any transformation can only come about 'as the product of the *free* action of the proletariat itself' (Lukács 1971, p. 209, my emphasis). The most paradigmatic expression of the grounding of revolutionary action in a pure 'autonomous creativity' of the subject within Marxism can be found in the Autonomist's 'inversion of class perspective' centred on the concept of working-class 'self-valorisation', which designates the self-determined positive power to constitute new practices outside capitalist social forms (Cleaver 1992, pp. 128ff.; De Angelis 2007, pp. 225ff.). Furthermore, this pure affirmation of the working class as autonomous subject is considered as (onto)logically prior to its 'cooption' or 'repression' by capital, deliberately represented, in line with post-structuralist thinking, as an external and self-constituting 'disciplinary' power (Hardt 1993). Thus, according to De Angelis, the theoretical starting point for the understanding of revolutionary subjectivity must be the self-sustaining *affirmation* of the multiplicity of needs, aspirations, affects and relations of human subjects (De Angelis 2005).

- 20 Bonefeld 1992, p. 102. Thus, as evidenced in the quote above from Bonefeld, so-called Open Marxists consider that the moment of 'transcendence' (i.e. revolutionary subjectivity), even if always intertwined with 'integration' (the determination of the wage worker's alienated subjectivity as personification of the reproduction of capital), is the expression of working-class *self-determination*, that is, as an element of subjectivity that is not a mode of existence of (hence determined by) the capital form. Open Marxists are usually at pains to overcome the externality between labour and capital extolled by 'Autonomist Marxists' (see previous footnote), without relapsing into a structural functionalism (e.g. Jessop 1991) that reduces class struggle to a form of the reproduction of capital and denies its capital-transcending potentialities (Bonefeld 1993, pp. 26–8). They do so precisely by emphatically stressing the 'internal or dialectical relation' between labour and capital as one between material content ('the constitutive power of human practice') and its alienated mode of existence ('social reproduction as domination'). However, when it comes to grounding the determination of the class struggle as capital-transcending revolutionary action, this initial premise is left behind. In the very course of their argument, they surreptitiously transform contradiction, from a self-negating mode of existence of a determinate content, into an interpenetration of two antagonistic opposite contents in struggle that cut across the working class itself: the aforementioned 'dialectical continuum' between integration and transcendence ('the presence of labour *in and against* capital'), whose resolution is 'open to the process of struggle itself' (Bonefeld 1992, p. 102).

Moreover, the specifically revolutionary resolution of that struggle is seen as an *unmediated* assertion of the undetermined, residual and pristine human content lurking behind those fetishised social forms. 'Revolution', Gunn and Wilding thus state in a recent sympathetic critical assessment of Holloway's *Crack Capitalism*, 'is an expression and articulation of already-free action' (Gunn and Wilding 2012, p. 178), albeit one which exists in a 'distorted form' *in a pre-revolutionary situation* (Gunn and Wilding 2012, pp. 181–2). In other words, for Gunn and Wilding, mediation only pertains to capital-reproducing 'moments' of subjectivity, but not to the revolutionary 'pole of the continuum', which is seen as an affirmation of the human being's innately free self-determining subjectivity that 'breaks through' its alienated 'integument'. This shows very clearly in the way they conceptualise 'uncontradicted self-determination', in a twofold sense. In the first place, when they claim that in a generally non-revolutionary situation, such an uncontradicted self-determination already makes its appearance within an alienated society, albeit in a 'proleptic or prefigurative' fashion, in and through 'islands of mutual recognition' in the 'cracks and fissures' of a contradictory social world (Gunn and Wilding 2014). Out of the blue, human life is now turned into the unity of two intertwining opposites: an alienated pole for the greater part of social existence and a free one in those 'islands of mutual recognition'. In the second place, it is noteworthy how they construct their concept of freedom on the basis of Hegel's concept of recognition as played out in the Master-Slave dialectic from Chapter IV of his *Phenomenology of Spirit* and further developed historically in Chapter VI, which culminates with the discussion of patterns of recognition in the French Revolution. In other words, they construct the ground of the communist revolution based on a conceptual framework whose actual content is but the emergence and concrete development of the modern, capitalistic 'self-determining' freedom of the commodity owner out of relations of personal dependence, which is ideologically presented by Hegel in an inverted fashion as the movement of an abstract individual self-consciousness deprived of social determinations. As a consequence of all this, their critique of Holloway's occasional appeal to a 'pristine' or 'undistorted' freedom is thus limited to noting that 'such an immediacy that lies outside alienation's realm' cannot be taken '*as starting point*' for the search for the genesis of revolutionary subjectivity within a non-revolutionary situation (Gunn and Wilding 2012, p. 184), yet it does constitute the 'key' to (i.e. the content of) its interstitial emergence and eventual proliferation. Hence, despite their best efforts, Open Marxists end up sneaking an abstractly free subjectivity through the backdoor as the ground for the revolutionary transformation of society. In the end, the difference from the Autonomists comes down to a more sober and cautious *subjective attitude* when assessing 'really-existing' working-class struggles. Against the 'euphoric and triumphalist poetry that prevails in various *Autonomia*-influenced accounts', Gunn and Wilding's Open Marxist perspective 'allows for respect for a reality principle (in Freud's sense)' (2012, p. 182), a 'word of warning' about the 'difficulties' and 'complexities' involved in revolution. But the ground of revolutionary subjectivity in an abstractly free and self-determined subject remains the same. I return to the critical engagement with the Open Marxist approach in the next section, through a discussion of the practical nature of 'defetishising' critique.

Still, I think that despite their differences and distinct degrees of sophistication and depth, a common thread runs through most of those conceptions. And this is the idealist notion that, somehow or another, the revolutionary consciousness embodying the overcoming of alienation derives from some more or less residual element of externality to the alienated general social relation through which human beings reproduce their life in capitalist society. In other words, the source of the power to abolish the capitalist mode of production is to be sought in the (smaller or larger) irreducible element of free, self-determining productive subjectivity, eternally present in human life. It is the immediate affirmation of this abstract freedom that is seen as constituting the substance of the revolutionary abolition of alienated social existence. As Postone rightly points out, the underlying assumption of that train of thought is that 'revolutionary consciousness must be rooted ontologically or transcendently'.<sup>21</sup>

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21 Postone 1996, p. 39. As an illustration of this, see the contributions to the symposium on Postone's 'Time, Labor and Social Domination'. With the exception of Stoetzler (2004) and Neary (2004), most authors explicitly distance themselves from the view that the subsumption of the working class to capital (hence alienation) is total and end up postulating a moment of human subjectivity external to its inverted mode of existence as the transcendental or ontological ground for revolutionary consciousness (see Albritton 2004; Bonefeld 2004; Arthur 2004b; Hudis 2004; McNally 2004). As I have argued above (see footnote 1), Postone himself cannot follow through his initial insight right to its full implications and ends up grounding revolutionary consciousness in a self-activating transformative action that reacts to the contradictions of its 'objective conditions', which are therefore rendered external to the subject (as opposed to immanently carried by subjectivity). On the other hand, even authors like Stoetzler who, as just mentioned, does not 'recoil in horror' in the face of the social constitution of capital as alienated total subject (see also Stoetzler 2012, p. 200, n. 7), ends up grounding capital-transcending action outside capital, in an abstract freedom of the subject. Thus, after critically noting that the notion of an abstract, pure subject keeps being reintroduced through the back door in Holloway's earlier argument in *Change the World without Taking Power* (Stoetzler 2005), in his assessment of Holloway's more recent formulation in *Crack Capitalism*, Stoetzler makes an extremely problematic (yet thought-provoking) distinction between *revolution-as-the-negation-of-capital* (which would be done by *us-as-capital*) and *communism-as-the-negation-of-capital* (which would be done by *us-as-not-capital*) (Stoetzler 2012, p. 192), i.e. in a moment of subjectivity not determined as personification of objectified forms of social mediation. In reality, Stoetzler's approach just resembles Postone's train of thought which, as discussed above, relapses into positing an externality between the objective and subjective conditions for the abolition of capital; the former conditions creating the *possibility* of communism and the latter abstractly self-developing to undertake (or not) its realisation. However, unlike Postone's implicit assumption, he makes *explicit* his reliance on an abstractly free subjectivity as the source of 'communism-as-the-negation-of-capital':

Now, from where does this notion of self-determining free subjectivity, which constitutes for those Marxist currents the content of revolutionary subjectivity, arise? Certainly not from the imagination of the theorist. When looked at more closely, we can realise that it is in fact the concrete form of the alienated consciousness abstracted from its content, transformed into its 'logical' opposite and, from that apparent exteriority, posited as the source of the revolutionary negation of alienated subjectivity. On the other hand, we can now appreciate how this is just the other side of the unilateral reading of Marx's critique of political economy (and especially, the section on commodity fetishism) solely as a genetic development of the forms of objectivity of capitalist society. Because according to this reading, the fetishism of commodities refers only to the social constitution of an apparently self-subsistent objectivity which confronts individuals as an alien and hostile power that dominates them. In this way, it overlooks the concrete form of free consciousness that is the necessary other side of the constitution of that alienated form of social objectivity.<sup>22</sup> Emancipation is then posed in terms of riddance of the external coercion imposed by those modes of social objectivity upon its self-

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*No less, no more:* by way of constituting capital, we also constitute its intrinsic, in-built, inevitable self-negation, but not, in and of itself, communism. Not communism, but only the possibility of communism follows from the inherent contradictions of the capital relation. Although capital's self-negating dynamic produces the elements and conditions of communism, communism is more than just the self-negation of capital. Communism emerges from capitalism only as a potentiality; it is born out of freedom, if it is born at all, not out of necessity. Freedom is what communism essentially is. In other words, the abolition of capitalism will create a chance which humanity has the freedom to spoil or to use. Only because we can spoil it we can also make communism: if it were a guaranteed outcome, it would be freedom arrived at by ways of unfreedom; guaranteed, necessary freedom, though, is implausible' (Stoetzler 2012, p. 193).

- 22 Some authors do develop and subject to criticism the notion of bourgeois individuality. But the latter is reduced to *individualism*, that is, to the *atomistic* affirmation of that abstractly free subjectivity. Hence, the collective, solidaristic affirmation of that very same subjectivity in the form of class struggle is seen as the absolute opposite of alienated subjectivity (or, at least, as embodying the immediate potentiality to 'self-develop' into such an absolute negation of bourgeois individuality). See, for instance, Shortall's derivation of a 'counter-dialectic of class struggle' – i.e. 'the potential class subjectivity of the working class' – that 'comes to delimit the functioning of the dialectic of capital', and whose foundation resides in the presupposition of the worker 'as both a free subject and as *non-capital*' (Shortall 1994, pp. 128–9, original emphasis). By contrast, I will show in the next chapter that the solidaristic collective affirmation of that abstractly free subjectivity is but a more concrete realisation of the very same alienated content, hence, of the reproduction of capital.

determination by that apparently free consciousness. In other words, that one-sided reading aspires to get rid of the commodity, money, capital and the state *precisely on the basis* of the concrete form of the alienated consciousness which is the necessary complement of the existence of those forms of objectivity.

As stated above, the *critique* of political economy is such not only for grasping in thought the inner determinations of the value form of the product of labour as an alienated social form, but also for discovering free consciousness determined as the concrete form of alienated consciousness in the capitalist mode of production. By ignoring this second 'leg' of the critique of political economy, Marxism deprives the latter of its revolutionary character and condemns it to remain just another concrete form of the reproduction of alienated human activity. Thus, it thereby transforms the critique of political economy from the revolutionary reproduction of the concrete by means of thought into another logical representation.

### **Fetishism and Critique in Contemporary Marxian Theory: A Methodological Assessment of Some Recent Contributions**

Another methodological issue implicit in the above discussion is the precise nature of the method of critique involved in Marx's account of commodity fetishism. Associated with the aforementioned one-sided reading of commodity fetishism as an account of the genesis of the most general forms of objectivity of capitalist society is what one could term a Feuerbachian understanding of Marx's mature method of critique, i.e. a kind of transformative criticism. Even in its most sophisticated versions, which one could locate in some of the contributions to the so-called *Neue Marx-Lektüre* in Germany,<sup>23</sup> and its Anglophone, more 'political' reception and appropriation by Open Marxist scholars,<sup>24</sup> this critique boils down to demystifying commodity fetishism by tracing the human origins of that alien objectivity. In this sense, there appears to be no difference between this method of critique and the one in the *Paris Manuscripts*. The only difference would be that in *Capital* Marx not only reduces alienated social forms to their human content, but also answers (more fully) the question

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23 Backhaus 1980, 1992 and 2005; Reichelt 1982, 1995, 2005 and 2007; Heinrich 2009; Fineschi 2009.

24 Bonefeld 1998, 2001 and 2014. For a concise historical and intellectual contextualisation of the *Neue Marx-Lektüre* in English, see Endnotes 2010.

of why that content takes that fetishistic form. But the thrust of the critique is seen to consist just in uncovering the practical activity of human beings as the social foundation of value.

But if the point is to change the world, then the subsequent problem is how to turn this insight into *practical criticism*, that is, how to convert it into emancipating conscious practice. And here lies the crux of the matter. Because for these readings, that connection seems to be as follows: the recognition of relations between human beings behind relations between things constitutes the foundation of radical transformative action. Since the content of the value form is our conscious practice, i.e. the 'determining power of social labour', then it follows that we must have the power of giving our practice another social form and getting rid of the value form. In other words, for such Marxists the transformative powers of our action are located not in commodity-determined practice itself, but in the essential character of an abstract material content deprived of social determinations which is 'logically' prior to its perverted social form as value-producing, albeit only appearing and existing immanently in and through it. For those readings, this mere discovery of the human content of 'economic categories' exhausts the thinking needed consciously to organise the practical critique of capitalism.<sup>25</sup> Let us examine this matter more closely through a discussion of some of these contributions.

Perhaps a good place to start is the work of Hans-Georg Backhaus, who explicitly traces the Feuerbachian lineage of Marx's method of critique. According to Backhaus, from an initial application 'in his critique of the metaphysical theory of the state', Marx expanded the scope of this method to economic objects as material forms of self-estrangement, commensurable to its metaphysical and theological forms.<sup>26</sup> This 'critical genetic method' is said to have two main aspects – the critical and the anthropological. The former does not simply consist in describing and denouncing the existing contradictions between dogmas and institutions, but aims fundamentally at explicating the inner genesis or necessity of those contradictions.<sup>27</sup> In turn, the anthropological aspect of the method involves an *ad hominem* reduction, the demonstration of the human basis of the economic object as a material form of self-estrangement, which is thus rendered in its totality as an object of critique.<sup>28</sup> The critique of economic categories thus entails the transcendence of the economic standpoint.<sup>29</sup>

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25 Holloway 1995 and 2002b; Bonefeld 1995, 2010a and 2012.

26 Backhaus 2005, pp. 18–19.

27 Backhaus 2005, p. 19.

28 Ibid.

29 Backhaus 2005, p. 23.



In Backhaus's reading, this 'application' of the 'critical genetic method' to the discipline of economics is employed by Marx not only in his early writings (an indisputable fact which I have already discussed in the first part of this book), but also in his mature critique of political economy.<sup>30</sup> The main thrust of the critique remains the same: whilst economics

accept[s] economic forms and categories without thought, that is in an unreflective manner ... Marx, in contrast, seeks to 'derive' these forms and categories as inverted forms of social relations.<sup>31</sup>

The 'dialectical method of exposition' is thus essentially seen as the genetic development of those alienated forms of *objectivity* out of human sensuous practice.<sup>32</sup> The general method of critique does not change in this reading, only its terminology.<sup>33</sup> In the words of Backhaus himself:

In variation of this thought process, Marx argues in the mature *Critique* of 1859 that what the economists 'have just ponderously described as a thing reappears as a social relation and, a moment later, having been defined as a social relation, teases them once more as a thing' (Marx 1971, p. 35). If one replaces 'social relation' by 'appearance of humanness' and thing qua 'value thing' by the thing in 'difference from humanness' that, as a transcendental thing, is transposed in a sphere 'outside of Man', then the continuity of the fundamental character of Marx's critique of economics from the early writing to *Capital* becomes sufficiently clear.<sup>34</sup>

Now, lest my argument be misread, my claim is not that these contributions from the *Neue Lektüre* see no methodological change whatsoever between Marx's early critique of economics and his mature version. My point is that they do not posit any change insofar as the nature of *critique* is concerned: the *reductio ad hominem* is considered to be the continuing ground for revolutionary praxis.<sup>35</sup> Yet, this novel reading does develop two additional methodological elements which are relevant for the purpose of the present discussion.

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30 Backhaus 2005, pp. 21 ff.

31 Backhaus 2005, p. 21.

32 Backhaus 2005, p. 22.

33 Backhaus 2005, p. 25.

34 Ibid.

35 Reichelt 2005, p. 38.

In the first place, these authors argue that in Marx's mature critique, the genetic aspect of his method is not simply predicated on Feuerbach. Insofar as the 'inverted world of capital' (as self-valorising value) resembles Hegel's second supersensible world, 'which in its reality ... contains within itself ... both the sensuous and the first supersensible world',<sup>36</sup> Marx's mature critique also drew on Hegel's *Logic* for the 'dialectical development of categories'.<sup>37</sup> In other words, Hegel's dialectical method served Marx for the *synthetic* exposition of the necessary sequence of form determinations understood as 'objective forms of thought'.<sup>38</sup>

Secondly, taking cue from Adorno's concept of society as the 'unity of subject and object',<sup>39</sup> which involves 'an ongoing process of inversion of subjectivity and objectivity, and vice versa',<sup>40</sup> both Backhaus and Reichelt posit the alienated determination of human beings as 'personifications of economic categories' or 'character masks', as a central element of Marx's dialectical method in *Capital*.<sup>41</sup> Abstractly considered, this insight could be a promising programmatic starting point for an attempt at a critical investigation of the determinations of revolutionary subjectivity. Unfortunately, this is not a path that these German scholars followed. Their discussion tends to remain at a very high level of abstraction, dealing with the simpler form determinations of capital. As Endnotes write, 'class plays little role in the writings of Backhaus and Reichelt and they treat the question of revolution as outside their field of academic expertise'.<sup>42</sup> Nonetheless, it is possible to examine the practical implications of this

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36 Reichelt 2005, p. 32.

37 Reichelt 2005, p. 43.

38 Reichelt 2005, p. 57.

39 Backhaus 1992, p. 56.

40 Backhaus 1992, p. 60.

41 Ibid; Reichelt 1982, p. 168.

42 Endnotes 2010, p. 99. It goes without saying that the treatment of the question of revolution as 'outside their field of expertise' by scholars whose research programme revolves around the Marxian notion of *critique* seems quite odd, to say the least. The real reason seems to reside at a deeper level and is actually political. As Endnotes further remark: 'Most accounts of the *Neue Marx-Lektüre* understand as one of its main characteristics to be a rejection of Marx's attribution of an historical mission to the proletariat and a sensibility of scepticism towards the class struggle has been prevalent on the German Left' (2010, p. 98). Moreover, although seldom discussed explicitly by these scholars, there are certain passages in their work which give the impression that they would tend to locate the source of revolutionary subjectivity in a moment of human individuality which transcends its alienated existence as 'character mask': 'Marx presents the humans themselves only insofar as they have intercourse with one another as character masks. Insofar as they come into

approach by turning to the work of Werner Bonefeld who, as stated above, has not only introduced it into Anglophone Marxism, but also developed it further along resolutely political lines, i.e. by putting the revolutionary class struggle at the centre of his investigation.<sup>43</sup>

A recent article by Bonefeld on Adorno and social praxis is a fertile ground to discuss this issue. The starting point of Bonefeld's discussion is the recognition that in capitalism the 'subject's objectification exists in an inverted form, in which the thing subjectifies itself in the person, and the person objectifies him- or herself in the thing'.<sup>44</sup> In other words, Bonefeld takes up the Adornian insight, which originally triggered the *Neue Marx-Lektüre*,<sup>45</sup> that in this society, individuals become determined as 'character masks' or 'agents of value': their social activity becomes the activity of 'personifications of economic categories'.<sup>46</sup> In more overtly Adornian terms, Bonefeld speaks of this phenomenon as involving a specific 'objective conceptuality', which 'holds sway in reality (*Sache*) itself'.<sup>47</sup> However, unlike Backhaus and Reichelt, Bonefeld explicitly poses the question of the implication of this form determination of human individuality for emancipatory praxis, i.e. for revolutionary class struggle:

The critique of political economy is not satisfied with perpetuating the labourer. Its reasoning is subversive of all relations of human indignity. Subversion is not the business of alternative elites that seek revolution as mere conformist rebellion – a revolution for the perpetuation of wage slavery. Their business is to lead labour, not its self-emancipation. Subversion aims at general human emancipation.<sup>48</sup>

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relation with one another as individuals, they are not the object of the theory. Insofar as they act as individuals, they withdraw from the building of theory in this specific sense; there they anticipate something which still has to be constructed' (Reichelt 1982, p. 168). If my reading is correct, rather than simply residing 'outside their field of expertise', for these scholars revolutionary subjectivity would lie outside the scope of the dialectical presentation of 'economic categories'.

43 Endnotes 2010, p. 98. For an earlier assessment of the relation between value-form theory, systematic dialectics and revolutionary politics, see also the discussion provided by Eldred 1981.

44 Bonefeld 2012, p. 125.

45 Reichelt 1982.

46 Bonefeld 2012, p. 124.

47 Bonefeld 2012, pp. 125–6.

48 Bonefeld 2010a, pp. 62–3.

The interesting thing about Bonefeld's answer to this question is that, at least in principle, he explicitly rejects those attempts at grounding 'resistance' against reification in an 'asserted subject conceived in contradistinction to society', and whose transhistorical basis would be the worker's 'humanity and soul' (Lukács), 'the inner transcendence of matter' (Bloch), a 'materialist instinct' (Negt and Kluge), or biopower (Hardt and Negri).<sup>49</sup> In other words, Bonefeld is at pains not to relapse into any exteriority to the perverted forms of existence of the social individual as the ground for the revolutionary subject:

And Adorno? He would have none of this. The idea that there is a world out there that has not yet been colonized by the logic of things is nonsensical. Instead of a concept of society, these differentiations of society into system and soul/transcendent matter/materialist instinct/bio-power separate what belongs together.<sup>50</sup>

Bonefeld elaborates further on this through a 'philosophical' discussion of Hegel's conception of the relation between essence and appearance.<sup>51</sup> Essence, he argues following Hegel, has to appear (it cannot choose not to do so). Moreover, this appearance is its (only) mode of existence. This means that there is no exteriority to essence's actual manifestation, however perverted the latter might be: 'its appearance is thus at the same time its disappearance'.<sup>52</sup> Translated into social theory, this philosophical argument means that human sensuous practice (essence) does exist as personification of economic categories (appearance), and that this inversion is no mere subjective illusion, but is all too real. Now, whilst this certainly allows Bonefeld formally to avoid relapsing into an externality between human subject and society, it begs the question as to how to avoid the political dead-end to which Adorno pessimistically succumbed. In other words, the question arises as to how to avoid the conclusion that 'there could be no such thing as emancipatory praxis because the reified world of bourgeois society would only allow reified activity'.<sup>53</sup>

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49 Bonefeld 2012, p. 131. As Charnock and Ribera-Fumaz (2011, p. 617) note, Henri Lefebvre is also an exemplary proponent of this kind of 'residualist' view of revolutionary class struggle. For a critical discussion of the relationship between Lefebvre's contribution and the Open Marxist tradition, see Charnock 2014.

50 Bonefeld 2012, p. 131.

51 Bonefeld 2012, pp. 127–8.

52 Bonefeld 2012, p. 128.

53 Bonefeld 2012, p. 124.

And here lies the crux of the matter, because, in my view, Bonefeld can remain true to the project of emancipatory praxis only by backtracking on his declamation to reject any exteriority between 'essence' and 'appearance'. Thus, right after claiming that the former vanishes in the latter, he endorses Adorno's claim in *Negative Dialectics* that 'objects do not go into their concepts without leaving a remainder' since 'the concept does not exhaust the thing conceived'.<sup>54</sup> According to Bonefeld, the critical move consists in 'opening the non-conceptual within the concept'.<sup>55</sup> This non-conceptual content, Bonefeld further argues, 'subsists within its concept but *cannot be reduced to it*'.<sup>56</sup> Crucially, *it is this moment of irreducibility of the content which, in that simplicity and unmediatedness, constitutes the ground of revolutionary subjectivity*. In other words, the latter is seen by Bonefeld as the expression of the direct affirmation of the ('non-conceptual') content. The fact that he does not see this affirmation as a pure positivity but only as negation of 'the negative human condition'<sup>57</sup> makes no difference. The point is that the immediate 'source' of that negativity is located in the (formless) content itself: 'Subversion is able to negate the established order because it is "man" made'.<sup>58</sup> The postulate of immanence between content and form ultimately thereby remains just a formal declaration which is belied as the argument unfolds. In the end, an element of exteriority to alienated social practice creeps back in as the residual 'substance' of revolutionary subjectivity.<sup>59</sup>

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54 Adorno 2007, p. 5.

55 Bonefeld 2012, p. 130.

56 Bonefeld 2012, p. 130, my emphasis.

57 Bonefeld 2012, p. 130.

58 Bonefeld 2010a, p. 66.

59 In more concrete terms, Bonefeld puts it as follows: 'For example, the conceptuality of the wage-labourer as a personification of variable capital entails what it denies. It denies sensuous practice, and this practice is immanent in the concept wage-labour. Sensuous practice exists within the concept of variable capital in the mode of being denied – sensuous practice cannot be reduced to the concept of variable capital – it subsists within its concept but cannot be reduced to it. Further, for variable capital to function, it requires the ingenuity and spontaneity of human purposeful practice. Yet, this too is denied in its concept' (2012, p. 130). The revolutionary class struggle is seen by Bonefeld as an expression of that sensuous human practice that 'variable capital' denies. In actual fact, his point seems to be that all struggles by workers express something more than their social determination as personifications of 'variable capital', namely, their 'human social autonomy' and 'freedom'. That is why they can always potentially develop, in and of themselves (i.e. not as expressions of any concrete social determination), into communist struggles. See Bonefeld 2010a, pp. 68–72.

Now, I have already discussed at greater length the shortcomings of this kind of approach in the previous section. Here the important point to address is the implication of this conception of revolutionary subjectivity for the *meaning of science as critique*. Briefly put, for Bonefeld, dialectical critique comes down to the demystification of 'economic categories' by revealing their social constitution as perverted modes of existence of human activity, that is, by discovering sensuous practice as the negated content behind those reified forms of social mediation.<sup>60</sup> What follows from this is that, for Bonefeld, the 'subversive' moment of Marx's methodological programme is essentially *analytic*: it consists in the discovery of the content of a determinate form. Drawing on the work of Backhaus commented on above,<sup>61</sup> it is through *reductio ad hominem* that science as critique provides enlightenment on revolutionary practice.

Yet I have shown in earlier chapters that dialectical analysis is actually incapable of offering an *explanation* (hence comprehension) of the *raison d'être* of determinate concrete forms of reality. In moving 'backwards' from concrete form to content, dialectical analysis can at most reveal *what* are the more abstract determinations whose realisation is presupposed and carried by the immediate concrete form under scrutiny. But it cannot account for its 'why' (i.e. its necessity). In this sense, the analytical discovery of the human content of fetishised relations between things can shed little light on the comprehension of revolutionary subjectivity. As we have seen, that was the achievement of the early Marxian critique of political economy, which allowed him to grasp the *simplest* (human) determination behind the content and form of the abolition of the fetishism of capitalist social relations. But the whole point of Marx's subsequent scientific endeavour was precisely to advance in the comprehension of the *further mediations* entailed by the social and material constitution of the revolutionary subject, which could only be the result of their *synthetic* ideal reproduction.

Evidently, this presupposes that one considers that there actually *are* further mediations that need to be unfolded synthetically in order fully to comprehend revolutionary practice. But this is what Bonefeld's approach denies. As I have argued, despite his critique of other perspectives that resort to the immediacy of 'an asserted subject externally counterposed to society', his own endeavour ultimately finds the immanent ground of revolutionary subjectivity in something simple and unmediated, i.e. the abstract materiality of 'sensu-

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60 Bonefeld 2001, pp. 56–9; and 2012, p. 127.

61 Bonefeld 1998.

ous human practice' which 'lives within and through relations between things'. Bonefeld's restriction of the subversive moment of dialectical critique to analysis is therefore perfectly coherent on this score. In his view, when it comes to revolutionary subjectivity, there are actually no *determinations* at stake, there is nothing to be explained. In other words, the revolutionary abolition of capital has no material, social or historical *immanent necessity*.<sup>62</sup> Its only 'necessity' is moral, the practical realisation of the 'communist categorical imperative of human emancipation'.<sup>63</sup> In brief, it is the result of an abstractly free and socially autonomous political action, represented as the absolute opposite of the alienated automatism of the capital form (albeit one that can only exist as 'negativity', i.e. in the struggles 'in and against' capitalist oppression):

The existence of the labourer as an economic category does therefore not entail reduction of consciousness to economic consciousness. It entails the concept of economy as an experienced concept, and economic consciousness as an experienced consciousness. At the very least, economic consciousness is an unhappy consciousness. It is this consciousness that demands reconciliation: freedom turns concrete in the changing forms of repression as resistance to repression.<sup>64</sup>

It follows that the only thing that actually requires explanation is the social constitution of the fetishised forms of objectivity in which human practice exists in capitalism. In this sense, Bonefeld acknowledges that the critical power of the dialectical method involves not only analysis, but also, fundamentally, syn-

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62 Bonefeld 2010a, p. 64. Taking at face value the orthodox Marxist *mechanistic* (hence extrinsic) notion of determination of subjectivity for the only available one, Bonefeld can only see in the idea of historical necessity an accommodating and passive attitude towards the alienated laws of motion of capital. It can never be the point of departure for the conscious organisation of its practical abolition: "The future that will come will not result from some objective laws of historical development but will result from the struggles of today. The orthodox argument about the objective laws of historical development does not reveal abstract historical laws. It reveals accommodation to "objective conditions", and derives socialism from capitalism, not as an alternative but as its supposedly more effective competitor. There is no universal historical law that leads humankind from some imagined historical beginning via capitalism to socialism. Neither is history on the side of the working class. History takes no sides: it can as easily be the history of barbarism as of socialism' (Bonefeld 2010a, pp. 63–4).

63 Bonefeld 2010a, pp. 66, 77.

64 Bonefeld 2010a, p. 71.

thetic or 'genetic' reproduction. Thus, in an article on the meaning of critique, he approvingly quotes Marx's methodological remark that

It is, in reality, much easier to discover by analysis the earthly kernel of the misty creations of religion than to do the opposite, i.e. to develop from the actual, given relations of life the forms in which these have been apotheosized.<sup>65</sup>

However, this synthetic reproduction is recognised by Bonefeld as the only materialist and scientific method for the genetic development of perverted social forms, i.e. for the social constitution of fetishised *forms of objectivity* out of human relations. As far as forms of *subjectivity* are concerned, they might at most be considered part of the genetic development of forms only insofar as individuals 'act rationally as executors of economic laws over which they have no control',<sup>66</sup> which for this approach is the only aspect under which human beings act as personifications of economic categories. But as for *antagonistic* forms of subjectivity and action, they seem to fall outside the scope of the systematic unfolding of 'economic categories' (except, of course, as instances of abstract negation of the latter's self-movement, i.e. as struggles *against* it). Thus Bonefeld states: 'Does it really make sense to say that workers personify variable capital? Variable capital does not go on strike. Workers do.'<sup>67</sup> And they do so not (only?) as owners of labour power trying to secure the reproduction of their commodity. More importantly, the workers struggle daily against 'the capitalist reduction of human purposes to cash and product'.<sup>68</sup>

In sum, for this kind of approach the synthetic movement of the dialectical exposition concerns the social constitution of 'economic categories' and the continuous process of reproduction of the constitutive premise of their existence at every turn of the conceptual development. Bonefeld locates this premise in the 'logic of separation' of labour from its conditions,<sup>69</sup> i.e. in the *formal subsumption of labour to capital*. But the systematic sequence does not entail any progress in the knowledge of the immanent determinations of

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65 Marx 1976g, p. 494.

66 Bonefeld 2012, p. 128.

67 Bonefeld 2010a, p. 68.

68 Bonefeld 2012, p. 72. As we shall see in the next chapter, strictly speaking, workers do not go on strike as 'variable capital', but as owners of the commodity labour power. Be that as it may, the point is that they do it in full accordance with their alienated social being as 'executors of economic laws that they cannot control' and not in 'defiance' of them.

69 Bonefeld 2011b, p. 395.



revolutionary subjectivity. The significance that Bonefeld attaches to the culminating point of Marx's systematic exposition in Volume I of *Capital*, which for him should be better confined to the concept of *primitive accumulation*, is symptomatic in this regard.<sup>70</sup> The chapter on the 'historical tendency of capitalist accumulation' only matters insofar as 'it also continues the process of expropriation in its own terms, as capital centralization'.<sup>71</sup> As for the revolutionary expropriation of the expropriators and the bursting asunder of the capitalist integument that Marx posits as the necessary outcome of the alienated socialisation of private labour, Bonefeld considers that they should be left aside as 'desperately triumphal remarks'.<sup>72</sup> This should come as no surprise. As I have shown, according to his approach, revolutionary subjectivity is quite simply self-grounded in an abstract inner negativity, which is expressed in every manifestation of resistance to oppression. However, I have also shown that this idea is deeply problematic: it entails the naturalisation of the apparently free consciousness of the commodity producer and hence the practical impotence to abolish the fetishism of commodities.<sup>73</sup> The connection between science as critique and commodity fetishism thus requires an alternative formulation. To this discussion I will now turn.

### Commodity Fetishism and Science as Practical Criticism

According to the approach developed in this book, the question must be posed differently. As already argued in the first part, the starting point of a truly dialectical critique of political economy must be our own conscious practice in its singularity. Science as practical criticism is such for being the conscious organisation of transformative action. Thus, the question under investigation when engaged in dialectical research relates to the social determinations, i.e. the necessity, of our action.<sup>74</sup> Only on that basis can we come to know what concrete form our action should take in order to achieve the willed transformation

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70 It is also symptomatic that in his otherwise rigorous, stylised reconstruction of the systematic sequence of Marx's exposition in *Capital*, Volume I, the concrete forms of production of relative surplus value are absent (Bonefeld 201b, pp. 392–5). As we shall see later on, it is precisely in those chapters on the *real subsumption of labour to capital* that Marx unfolds (albeit incompletely) the determinations of revolutionary subjectivity.

71 Bonefeld 201b, p. 394.

72 Bonefeld 201b, p. 395.

73 Iñigo Carrera 2007.

74 Iñigo Carrera 1992, p. 1.

of the world. As Lukács puts it in *History and Class Consciousness*, the question at stake is the establishment of the 'genuine and necessary bond between consciousness and action'.<sup>75</sup>

My own reconstruction of Marx's dialectical investigation of the determinations of the commodity form (commodity fetishism included) thus leads to a different conclusion regarding the social determinations of revolutionary action. True enough, in this process of cognition we become aware of the human content of the objective social powers borne by the commodity. However, what follows from this insight is not that we therefore immediately carry the power to negate the commodity form of our general social relation. Rather, it follows that whatever power we might have to radically transform the world must be a concrete form of the commodity itself. Yet, far from revealing the existence of that transformative power, the abstract determinations of social existence contained in the commodity form show no potentiality other than the reproduction of that alienated social form. So much so that the free association of individuals (the *determinate* negation of capitalism) appears in Chapter 1 (incidentally, precisely in the section on fetishism) as the *abstract* opposite of value-producing labour and hence, as the *extrinsic* product of the *imagination* of the subject engaged in that process of cognition. Thus, Marx starts that passage referring to communism by saying 'let us finally *imagine* ...'.<sup>76</sup>

Thus, the defetishising critique of revolutionary science does not simply consist in discovering the constituting power of a generic human practice as the negated content of capitalist alienated forms, which would constitute the ground for our revolutionary transformation of the world. Rather, it involves the production of the self-awareness that the reproduction of human life in all of its moments, *including our transformative action*, takes an alienated form in capitalism. The immediate result of the demystifying critique of the fetishism of commodities is to become conscious of our own alienated existence, i.e. of our determination as personifications or 'character masks'. This *is* our general social being and there is no exteriority to it. This means that fetishism *is total* which, in turn, means the social powers of our transformative action are effectively borne by the product of labour and we cannot but personify them.

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75 Lukács 1971, p. 2. As I have argued elsewhere (Starosta 2003), although Lukács correctly posed the problem of dialectical knowledge as practical criticism, he eventually *failed* in establishing that link between consciousness and action. This failure lies behind his relapse into the Leninist separation between scientific organisation and execution proper in the political action of the working class (Starosta 2003, pp. 57–8).

76 Marx 1976g, p. 171, my emphasis.

This obviously bears on the question discussed earlier on the relationship between alienation and freedom. Specifically, this means that upon consciously discovering the social basis of the value form, we do not *cease* to be determined as its personifications and become able to affirm an abstractly free self-determining action. What this discovery changes is, as Iñigo Carrera puts it, that our social determination as personification of the commodity no longer operates behind our backs.<sup>77</sup> In this way, we do affirm our freedom. However, we do so not because we realise that ‘in reality’ we are free beings by nature and could thereby choose to ‘stop making capitalism’ if we tried hard enough, i.e. if we *turned our backs* on our social being.<sup>78</sup> Instead, through the critical investigation of the value form we affirm our freedom because we come *consciously to cognise* our own determination as alienated social subjects.<sup>79</sup> Armed with that objective knowledge of the alienated nature of our subjectivity, we could *consciously act upon* those alienated determinations in order to transform them in the direction of their revolutionary transcendence. Still, this would only be possible if those determinations actually carried the objective potentiality for their self-abolition, which is something that the simple commodity form of social relations does not show. This does not mean that commodity fetishism cannot be abolished. It only signals the need to move forward in the dialectical investigation of the more concrete social determinations of its revolutionary abolition.

Perhaps a good way to clarify this argument is by examining a methodological external remark that Marx introduces when discussing the function of money as means of payment in the 1859 *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*. It is worth quoting that profoundly rich text at length:

But the metamorphosis of commodities, in the course of which the various distinct forms of money are evolved, transforms the commodity-owners as well, and alters the social role they play in relation to one another. In the course of the metamorphosis of commodities the keeper of commodities changes his skin as often as the commodity undergoes a change or as money appears in a new form. Commodity-owners thus faced each other originally simply as commodity-owners; then one of them became a seller, the other a buyer; then each became alternately buyer and seller; then they became hoarders and finally rich men. Com-

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77 Iñigo Carrera 2007, p. 204.

78 Cf. Holloway 2010.

79 Iñigo Carrera 2007, p. 204.

modity-owners emerging from the process of circulation are accordingly different from those entering the process. The different forms which money assumes in the process of circulation are in fact only crystallisations of the transformation of commodities, a transformation which is in its turn only the objective expression of the changing social relations in which commodity-owners conduct their exchange. New relations of intercourse arise in the process of circulation, and commodity-owners, who represent these changed relations, acquire new economic characteristics.<sup>80</sup>

This passage could be read as a kind of *dynamic* development of the alienated determination of human productive individuality, whose simplest expression Marx presented through the discussion of the fetishism of commodities. As we have seen, in the latter text Marx unfolds the way in which the productive consciousness of the private individual unconsciously posits its own immanent determinations in the external form of the value-objectivity. Subsequently, he shows how the very subjectivity of the commodity producer becomes determined as the personification of those objectified forms of social mediation it had unconsciously engendered. What we have here is a statement of the transformative dynamics structuring the constitution of novel forms of subjectivity as an expression of the further concretisation of the 'law of value' beyond its simplest form. It is, as it were, the 'law of private subjectivity' that regulates the development of further concrete forms in which human beings act as 'personifications of economic categories'.

Certainly, those more complex forms in which the movement of value attains unity remain 'only the objective expression of the changing social relations in which commodity owners conduct their exchange', i.e. their *simplest* (social) content remains the general productive relation between human beings. However, the real inversion of those social relations as attributes of things means that human beings cannot consciously control the self-transformation of their subjectivity (at least not with the determinations unfolded so far). This transformation thereby occurs 'behind their back' as a result of the self-transformation of the alienated forms of objectivity through which their social metabolic process takes place. As those objectified forms self-develop and change, commodity owners 'who represent these changed relations, acquire new economic characteristics', i.e. they progressively emerge from the circulation process wearing different 'character masks' from those with which they entered.

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<sup>80</sup> Marx 1987a, p. 371.

In the passage above, Marx specifies the forms of subjectivity that have emerged up to that particular stage of his presentation. More concretely, he mentions the figure of simple commodity owner, buyer and seller, hoarder and rich man. However, the implication of this discussion is that commodity owners shall undergo further 'changes of skin'. Thus, a few pages later he develops the figure of debtor and creditor,<sup>81</sup> noting also how the corresponding general ideological forms change as well. From religion as the ideological form corresponding to the hoarder, we now move to jurisprudence as the one corresponding to the subjective form of creditor.<sup>82</sup> Furthermore, 'as money develops into world money, so the commodity owner becomes a cosmopolitan', the general ideological form of which is that of 'cosmopolitanism, a cult of practical reason, in opposition to traditional religious, national and other prejudices which impede the metabolic process of mankind'.<sup>83</sup>

The fundamental point of this discussion is that those passages from the 1859 *Contribution* bring out very nicely a claim that I had made earlier about the object of Marx's 'systematic dialectic': it includes both the forms of *objectivity and subjectivity* of capitalist society. But additionally, they implicitly contain important methodological insights into the way in which the genesis of different forms of subjectivity should be materialistically investigated, namely, as necessary mediations of the autonomised self-movement of forms of objectivity. This, I think, is the only method which allows us *immanently* to ground forms of consciousness and will *within* the movement of present-day social relations. Crucially, my central claim is that if we want to stay true to this materialistic approach, this method should not only 'apply' to 'value-reproducing' forms of subjectivity and action, *but must also include revolutionary subjectivity as well*. In other words, the form of 'revolutionary political subject' (more specifically, of our own subjectivity as an individual organ of such a collective class subject) must be immanently unfolded as a much more developed mode of existence taken by the original commodity owner with which the dialectical exposition started.<sup>84</sup>

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81 Marx 1987a, p. 373.

82 Ibid.

83 Marx 1987a, p. 384.

84 As we shall see in the following chapters, those transformations of commodity owners do not simply derive from the 'new economic characteristics' with which they 'emerge from the process of circulation' as it develops novel determinations. Instead, they derive from the changes they experience as they enter into, and emerge from, a capitalistic *process of production* that will develop revolutionary transformations as well.

To put it in more general terms, the immanent ground of revolutionary subjectivity is not simple and unmediated. Instead, it is a 'unity of many determinations', which therefore means that its scientific comprehension can only be the result of a complex dialectical investigation involving *both* the analytic movement from the concrete to the abstract, and the synthetic, mediated return to the concrete starting point, i.e. revolutionary transformative action. Dialectical research must therefore analytically apprehend all relevant social forms and synthetically reproduce the 'inner connections' leading to the constitution of the political action of wage labourers as the form taken by the revolutionary transformation of the historical mode of existence of the human life process.

Now, if the reproduction of the concrete in thought shows that the determinations immanent in the commodity form do not carry, in their simplicity, the necessity of transcending value-production, the search for the latter must move forward unfolding the subsequent concrete forms in which the former develop. Our process of cognition still needs to go through more mediations in order to become fully aware of the necessity of our action in the totality of its determinations, i.e. beyond any appearance presented by it. In order to develop the plenitude of its potentiality, this conscious development must reach a concrete form of our alienated social being which embodies a determinate potentiality whose realisation: (a) entails the abolition of alienated labour itself; and (b) has our transformative action as its necessary concrete form. In sum, revolutionary action must personify a concrete determination of value-producing human practice; a determination, however, whose realisation precisely consists in the abolition of value production itself.

Thus, the ideal reproduction of the commodity form is thereby but the *first step* in the broader process of dialectical cognition through which the subject of revolutionary transformation discovers the alienated character of her/his social being and, consequently, of her/his consciousness and will (including its transformative will). However, we shall see that when developed in its totality, this process also produces the awareness of the historical powers developed in this alienated form and, consequently, of the revolutionary action that, as personification of 'economic categories', the emancipatory subject needs to undertake.<sup>85</sup> This is not the awareness of the *external circumstances* or *objective conditions* of a self-determining action.<sup>86</sup> It is the awareness of the *inner determ-*

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85 Iñigo Carrera 2008.

86 Note that Marx himself occasionally relapsed into this representational language of external relations and spoke of conditions and circumstances for human action. An example

*inations* of our alienated transformative action. Thus, dialectical social science does not look outside our action in order to comprehend the 'objective' circumstances that 'constrain' its affirmation, but rather, in penetrating its immediate appearances, goes right 'inside' it. In this way, the field of human practice is never abandoned. Only by virtue of its dialectical form does the critique of political economy become determined as the fully conscious organisation of human practice in the capitalist mode of production and, hence, as the revolutionary science of the working class.<sup>87</sup>

Thus far, however, this critical reading of Marx's *Capital* has shown no sign of providing us with the consciousness of the concrete determinations of our radical transformative action. In fact, all references to the working class as the revolutionary subject were, strictly speaking, completely extrinsic to the determinations we had before us. Therefore, in the next chapter, I jump ahead in Marx's dialectical presentation right into the heart of the determinations of social existence taking the form of the class struggle, in order to see the extent to which they shed light on the necessity of revolutionary action.

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of this is the oft-quoted opening lines from *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*: 'Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past' (Marx 1979, p. 103). Contrary to most Marxists who tend to celebrate this passage, I think that it is actually quite unfortunate.

87 Iñigo Carrera 2007.

# Capital Accumulation and Class Struggle: On the Content and Form of Social Reproduction in Its Alienated Form

## Introduction

In the previous chapters, I have critically reconstructed Marx's presentation of the determinations of the commodity form and shown the fundamental importance of his dialectical method for a proper understanding of those first steps in the critique of political economy. I have also discussed the implications of such an understanding for the translation of those initial insights into the conscious organisation of the practical abolition of the alienation inherent in the commodity form of social relations. Thus, I concluded that although those first steps already revealed to us the alienated nature of our social existence (hence of our consciousness), they provided no answer to the question about all the social determinations behind our radical transformative action, i.e. about revolutionary subjectivity. The very idea of a revolutionary subject, or even of social life taking the form of a political action, was completely extrinsic to the determinations we had before us. The reproduction of the concrete by means of thought thereby still needs to advance towards more concrete determinations of the real in order to account for the necessity of the practical abolition of alienated social life.

The main aim of this chapter is, therefore, to move forward in the critical reconstruction of Marx's critique of political economy up to the point at which, for the first time in his presentation, he shows capitalist social existence as taking concrete form in an antagonistic political relation between classes. In other words, we shall discuss Marx's presentation of the specifically capitalist determinations of the class struggle. Again, the discussion will be carried out in a methodologically minded fashion, so as to highlight the intrinsic connection between the specific form of Marx's scientific argument and its revolutionary content as practical criticism. I argue that, for Marx, the class struggle is a necessary concrete form in which the accumulation of capital realises its determinations. More concretely, the class struggle is the most general *direct* social relation between *collective personifications of commodities* through which the *indirect* relations of capitalist production assert themselves.<sup>1</sup> This

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<sup>1</sup> Iñigo Carrera 2008, p. 15.



real relation is not grounded in the abstract general principles of structuralist methodology.<sup>2</sup> Rather, it is the necessary expression of the development of the historically specific alienation inherent in the commodity form into its more concrete social form of capital. In other words, that real relation expresses the fact that, as an expression of an alienated social existence, *the total social capital becomes determined as the concrete subject of the movement of modern society*.<sup>3</sup> This, I think, is the fundamental discovery of Marx's critique of political economy, which, in turn, allowed him to find the determinations of revolutionary class struggle as *immanent* in the historical movement of alienation itself. Moreover, we shall see that only on the basis of the unfolding of that determination is it possible to understand the limited transformative powers of the class struggle as a form of the reproduction of capital, its specific revolutionary powers behind its determination as the form of the latter's abolition and, finally, the mediation between the two.

In order fully to understand these determinations of the class struggle in capitalist society, it is evidently necessary to unfold the more abstract social forms which the latter presupposes. The following section, then, briefly reconstructs Marx's dialectical presentation of the determinations of

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2 This oversweeping accusation of 'structuralism' hurled at anyone making the *critical* (as opposed to apologetic) point about the real constitution of capital as *alienated* subject has been a recurrent feature of the Open Marxist and other 'workerist' approaches. See, for instance, Bonefeld 1995, 2004 and 2014. In a recent article, Stoezler makes a sharp response to that line of reasoning: 'When some humanist and workerist Marxists, in terms of a defence of subjectivity and agency, slander as "structuralists" those who emphasize the deplorable fact that we humans are ruled and overpowered by a structure, a form of our self-incurred immaturity or tutelage, they grant structuralism too much. The tradition that, following on from Marx, discovered and critiqued dichotomies in various aspects of the *capitalist* reality of human subjectivity – explicitly *not* of trans-historical human subjectivity – merely needed to spell out what was implied in Marx's suggestion that more and more aspects of human and societal reality are "really subsumed" to capital and its nuclear structure, the commodity form. The discovery that humans have, over the last two centuries, formed a dangerous and increasingly dominating social structure (totality) that urgently needs to be destroyed has nothing to do with structuralism. It was Marx who referred to value as an "automatic subject" (in the fourth chapter of *Capital* vol. 1; Marx, 1990: 255) that turns those to whose activity it owes itself into its "carriers", character masks, object-automatons; the point is that such a thing as an automatic subject, like the totality that forms it, should not exist. Emancipation means the de-automatization of subjectivity, a shared concern of the Enlightenment and all its inheritors' (Stoezler 2012, p. 200).

3 Iñigo Carrera 2012, p. 59.

capitalist social relations whose realisation leads to the constitution of the class struggle as a social form.<sup>4</sup>

### Capital: The Materialised Social Relation That Takes Possession of the Species-Powers of Humanity

#### *Capital as the Subject of the Circulation Process*

The point of departure of Marx's analysis of the capital form is the result of the circulation of commodities, namely, money. As already mentioned, the circulation of commodities and its development engenders money in its functional determinations. The question arises, then, as to why it is necessary to start the exposition of capital with the money form. The reason can be found in the fact that Marx, as in the analysis of the commodity, starts the analysis of capital with an immediate observation, i.e. with capital 'as it appears at first sight'.<sup>5</sup> On a formal level, this point of departure reflects Marx's structuring principle of the different chapters around presentational nodes, with the capital form constituting a new stage in an exposition which, again, takes the immediate appearance of the social form under consideration as its starting point. And in its simplest manifestation capital presents itself as money. What needs to be investigated is, therefore, the specific nature of money as capital in contradis-

4 Compared to the detailed discussion of Chapter 1 of *Capital* offered in the previous chapters of this book, and the one on Chapter 10 that makes up the focus of this chapter, my commentary on Chapters 4 to 9 will be admittedly sketchier. Thus, I will mostly limit myself to the summary of Marx's argument on its own terms, without critically bringing out many methodological or substantive issues underpinning his dialectical presentation. Similarly, I will not examine as many controversies among Marxists to which these chapters have given rise.

5 Campbell (2013, pp. 154–5) also notes the isomorphism in the structure of exposition between Chapters 1 and 4 of *Capital*. Additionally, she rightly points out that this structure of the exposition generates the *appearance* of a lack of immanent unity (hence of a 'dialectical transition') between the commodity and money forms, on the one hand, and the capital form, on the other. As she also notes, this unity is given by the progressive 'autonomisation' of value in the course of the unfolding of the different functions of money (Campbell 2013, pp. 152–3; and 2005). Uncritically falling prey to the aforementioned appearance, some authors thus make a case for a *rupture* between the 'market form' and the 'capital form' (Bidet 2005, pp. 140–2; and 2007, p. 163; see also Saad-Filho 2002, p. 13). Reichelt (1995) somehow represents an intermediate perspective. Like Campbell, Reichelt agrees on the existence of an immanent unity between money and capital premised on the increasing independence of value. However, he considers that Marx argued along those lines in the *Grundrisse*, but not in *Capital*.

inction to money simply as such. Through this investigation, Marx presents the *analytic* moment of the exposition.

All that our immediate observation can tell us about this specificity is that it resides in the *form of its circulation*. Whereas the circulation of money as means of circulation can be represented with the form 'C–M–C, the transformation of commodities into money and the re-conversion of money into commodities: selling in order to buy', money that is transformed into capital circulates in the form of 'M–C–M, the transformation of money into commodities, and the re-conversion of commodities into money: buying in order to sell'.<sup>6</sup> However, behind these two distinct *forms* of circulation a difference of *content* lies hidden.<sup>7</sup> In the case of the simple circulation of money within the framework of the circulation of commodities, the content of the process is given by satisfaction of needs, that is, by individual consumption. In other words, the use value of the commodity is what constitutes the immediate object of the circuit.<sup>8</sup> In this sense, the aim of the cycle is external to the process itself. In the other case, on the contrary, the circuit 'proceeds from the extreme of money and finally returns to the same extreme. Its driving and motivating force, its determining purpose, is therefore exchange-value'.<sup>9</sup> This has a twofold consequence. In the first place, insofar as both extremes of the cycle M–C–M are identical, this process as such simply appears meaningless. Consequently, the extremes must be distinguished from each other in order for the circuit to acquire a purpose. Inasmuch as they are *qualitatively identical*, the only possible difference (and hence that which must become the aim of the process) is the *quantitative increase*. Thus, the adequate form of this process of circulation must necessarily be M–C–M' where the initial sum of money (value in its concrete form of appearance) produces through its movement a larger amount of value, that is, a *surplus value*.<sup>10</sup> Money which circulates according to this form becomes determined as *capital*.<sup>11</sup> Secondly, and in contradistinction to what happens in the circuit C–M–C, the aim of the process is not external to it. The motive force – i.e. the valorisation of value – is internal to the process; it derives from the movement of circulation itself. Once the circulation of money as capital is complete, we return to the same point of departure: a quantitatively limited sum of money. And if the latter is to act as capital it must be thrown back into

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6 Marx 1976g, pp. 247–8.

7 Marx 1976g, p. 248.

8 Marx 1976g, p. 250.

9 Ibid.

10 Marx 1976g, p. 251.

11 Marx 1976g, p. 252.

circulation. This means that the process of valorisation of value carries within itself the necessity of its own renewal, giving the process the character of being *formally* boundless.<sup>12</sup>

The exposition started with the circulation of capital as it appears in its immediacy and found the production of surplus value to be its content. The following point that needs to be accounted for is the source of the necessity of that movement. In other words, the phase of analysis still needs to go on in order to discover what sets into motion this process of multiplication of value. As with the analysis of the commodity, Marx presents his argument by first looking at apparent paths that the dialectical analysis could follow. Thus, it might seem that this process originates in the abstractly free activity of the possessor of money. However, as already shown by the analysis of commodity fetishism, through their free conscious and voluntary action the owners of commodities cannot but act as the personification of the social powers inherent in their commodities. Inasmuch as she/he is an alienated human being, the capitalist only realises through her/his apparently free action the immediate necessity of her/his capital.<sup>13</sup> The movement of value, although mediated by the subjectivity of the capitalist, is not grounded in her/his consciousness and will. Thus, Marx discovers that *the necessity of the process of circulation of money as capital comes from the automatic movement of value itself*.<sup>14</sup> In becoming capital, value – the materialised social relation of the private and independent individuals – turns into the concrete *subject* of the process of circulation of social wealth.<sup>15</sup> In turn, the commodity and money, the particular and the general mode of existence of mercantile wealth, become determined as transitory forms which value takes in its process of self-expansion. As Marx states,

[V]alue is here the subject of a process in which, while constantly assuming the form in turn of money and commodities, it changes its own magnitude, throws off surplus-value from itself considered as original value, and thus valorises itself independently. For the movement in the course of which it adds surplus-value is its own movement, its valorisation is therefore self-valorisation [*Selbstverwertung*].<sup>16</sup>

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12 Marx 1976g, p. 253.

13 Marx 1976g, p. 254.

14 Marx 1976g, p. 255.

15 Robles Báez (1992) provides a useful discussion of the mediations involved in the constitution of capital as subject.

16 Marx 1976g, p. 255.

The alienation of the human individual thus reaches a new stage. It is not only about a process of social production mediated by the value form of the product. Not even about one that simply has value as the direct object of the process of exchange. The objectified abstract labour represented as the exchangeability of commodities has taken possession of the potencies of the process of circulation of social wealth itself. This moment of the human life process is turned into an attribute of the life cycle of capital, which has the production of more of itself, i.e. its quantitative increase, as its only general qualitative determination.<sup>17</sup> This is where the formal specificity of capital as an *indirect*, hence *materialised*, social relation resides. Thus, the production of human life has ceased to be the content of the movement of social reproduction and has become the unconscious outcome of the production of surplus value, that is, of the *only* (alienated) content presiding over the movement of modern society.<sup>18</sup>

In my view, this is probably the most important *critical* insight of the fully developed Marxian critique of political economy and also the link with the so-called 'early writings': the discovery of the social constitution of capital as an autonomous and self-moving subject amounts to the concretisation of the young Marx's account of alienated labour. Thus, unlike its first manifestation at the level of the commodity form, the activation of the autonomised regulation of social life no longer has the private individuals' apparently free decision to engage in the organisation of their production as its premise. Furthermore, it is not extinguished upon the completion of its mediating role in the cycle of metabolic exchange – that is, once the commodity leaves circulation and enters the sphere of personal consumption. Upon reaching the capital form, the automatism of the general social relation between private and independent individuals becomes the constantly renewed *premise and result* of the social metabolic process itself. The social relation between humans, existing in the form of the attribute of a thing, becomes *self-activating* and sets the 'human exchange of matter' into motion by itself, with the only aim of boundlessly expanding its magnitude.

Now, as Marx puts it in the *Grundrisse*, this 'twisting and inversion [*Verdre- hnung und Verkehrung*]' of the general objectified form of social mediation into the self-moving subject of the process of human metabolism is 'not merely a *supposed one* existing merely in the imagination of the workers and the capitalists'.<sup>19</sup> On the contrary, it is a '*real phenomenon*',<sup>20</sup> unconsciously or spon-

17 Iñigo Carrera 2008, p. 12.

18 The emphasis on 'only' will become clear in the discussion below.

19 Marx 1993, p. 831, original emphasis.

20 Ibid.

taneously posited as ‘socially-valid objectivity’ by the human brain itself, when the general social character of labour is established behind the back of the privately undertaken activity of individuals. At least two important questions follow from this.

In the first place, insofar as from Marx’s materialist perspective this social production process is not simply ‘the reproduction of the physical existence of the individuals’, but a ‘definite form of expressing their life, a definite *mode of life* on their part’,<sup>21</sup> there can be absolutely no aspect of human existence that does not become determined as an instance of this metabolic interaction inverted as an attribute of capital. However inverted in its form, this *is* the mode in which the materiality of human life exists. As a consequence, there can be no exteriority to its movement. The upshot of the constitution of capital as alienated subject is that *all* the determinations of the human life process will *really* prove to be material bearers of the former’s self-expansion. From this point onwards, the exposition will show that individuals, *precisely* for being the *material* subjects of this process (rather than ‘in spite of’), shall become fully *form-determined* as personifications of different determinations emerging out of the movement of value’s self-valorisation.

In the second place, this means that capital, as self-valorising value, is not simply an ‘abstract social structure of impersonal *domination*’ over human beings.<sup>22</sup> It certainly is such a form of objective or impersonal subjection, but only as the concrete form taken by its essential character as a mode of ‘articulation’ of the social division of labour, i.e. a specific form in which society resolves the establishment of the material unity between social production and consumption. That the form of capital taken by this process entails its inversion into a *means* for an *alien purpose* does not change the matter. At stake here is first and foremost the material reproduction of human society and not a system of ‘power or domination’.<sup>23</sup>

Yet, although at this stage of Marx’s argument there are already elements which allow the reader to *infer* that capital turns into the alienated subject of human life *in its totality*, this unity is still to be concretely *posited* by the dialectical exposition. Certainly, the unfolding of the commodity and money forms reached a point in which, in the form of the movement of simple circulation as a whole, a first expression of such social unity became manifest. But that unity was only abstractly posited. As Marx states in those pages, that ‘the scattered

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21 Marx and Engels 1976a, p. 31, original emphasis.

22 Cf. Postone 1996, p. 30.

23 Cf. Holloway 2002b and 2010.

elements' comprising 'society's productive organism' attained 'qualitative and quantitative articulation' into 'the system of the division of labour' appeared as entirely haphazard.<sup>24</sup> On the other hand, as the exposition moved on to the inversion of simple circulation of commodities into the circulation of capital, that abstractly posited unity fell apart. In effect, Marx immanently discovers the general determination of capital as self-valorising value by reproducing in thought an *individual* cycle of money-as-capital. Both the fact that capital subsumes the content of social (re)production in its unity and the concrete form in which that unity is formally and materially established as its own alienated attribute, has not been systematically posited by the dialectical presentation. As a matter of fact, the gradual unfolding of this progressive subsumption of the materiality of the human life process under the movement of capital is what the rest of the three volumes of *Capital* are all about. At that stage, however, Marx only encountered the most abstract appearance of this total social process, which is the constitution of individual capitals as the subjects of their apparently autonomous respective cycles of valorisation in the sphere of circulation. Let us resume Marx's exposition from that point.

Having discovered the generic essential determination of capital as self-valorising value, Marx's exposition turns to follow the concrete form in which this content, i.e. the production of surplus value, is realised. The analytic phase of the exposition thereby gives way to the synthetic stage, which consists in positively unfolding by means of thought the previously discovered self-movement of capital as the alienated subject of that process.

As the dominant subject [*übergreifendes Subjekt*] of this process, in which it alternately assumes and loses the form of money and the form of commodities, but preserves and expands itself through all these changes, value requires above all an independent form by means of which its identity with itself may be asserted ... Value therefore now becomes value in process, money in process, and, as such, capital. It comes out of circulation, enters into it again, preserves and multiplies itself within circulation, emerges from it with an increased size, and starts the cycle again and again.<sup>25</sup>

At this point, the exposition seems to face an impasse: the determinations developed thus far are revealed to be impotent to account by themselves for

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24 Marx 1976g, p. 203.

25 Marx 1976g, pp. 255–6.

this process of multiplication of value. The law that governs the movement of the sphere of circulation – that is, the exchange of equivalents – is incapable of explaining the generation of a surplus value.<sup>26</sup> As Clarke succinctly puts it, this process

cannot take place within exchange, at least as so far developed, because exchange does not *create* value, it merely changes its form. It is certainly the case that unequal exchanges could take place, but such exchanges could not yield a *surplus* value, they can only redistribute a portion of an existing sum of value as gains and losses balanced out.<sup>27</sup>

Although having circulation as its point of departure and hence with this sphere as one of its moments, the process of value's self-expansion pushes beyond circulation itself. The movement of capital shows the necessity to find within the circulation of commodities a commodity whose use value for capital is to produce more value than it costs. The existence of the doubly free worker provides capital with this requirement.<sup>28</sup> As an independent human being, this worker can freely dispose of her/his individual productive powers.<sup>29</sup> However, insofar as she/he is deprived of the objective conditions in which to externalise her/his free subjectivity, she/he must give her/his labour power the form of a commodity to be sold on the market to the immediate personification of capital.<sup>30</sup>

What are the determinations of the commodity in its concrete form of the labour power of the doubly free worker? As any other commodity, labour power is a unity of value and use value. The former is thus determined by the socially necessary labour time required for the production of this commodity which, in this particular case, resolves itself into the production of the means of subsistence necessary to reproduce the physical and mental powers of the labourer.<sup>31</sup> The latter is nothing other than the actualisation of the productive capacities of the worker, i.e. labour.<sup>32</sup> As stated above, it is through the appropriation of

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26 Marx 1976g, Chapter 5.

27 Clarke 1991a, p. 114.

28 Marx 1976g, p. 270.

29 Marx 1976g, p. 271.

30 Marx 1976g, p. 272.

31 Marx 1976g, pp. 274–6. Marx's account of the determination of the value of labour power has generated some controversies among his followers, which I discuss in an appendix at the end of this chapter.

32 Marx 1976g, pp. 270, 274–5.



the use value of this peculiar commodity that capital is able to valorise itself. The exposition must therefore develop the determinations of the process of consumption of labour power, which takes place 'outside the market'.<sup>33</sup> In this way, we will see in the next section how capital not only becomes the subject of the process of circulation of social wealth, but also turns into the subject of the immediate process of production.

*Capital as the Subject of the Immediate Process of Production*

In order to valorise itself, then, capital has to take possession of the potencies of the human labour process. Through the movement of material production that at the same time produces the reified general social relation – value – capital is able to carry out its real valorisation, which, before this point, was only potential. At this stage of the presentation, in which capital takes the materiality of the labour process as a given presupposition (the *formal subsumption* of labour in capital), the only possibility to actualise capital's valorisation is to expand the amount of labour power productively consumed by extending the working day of the labourer beyond the hours of labour socially necessary to reproduce the value of labour power (which therefore becomes determined as necessary labour).<sup>34</sup> Thus, the secret of the immediate source of surplus value is revealed: its origin lies in the surplus labour that the labourers perform under the control of the capitalist to whom they freely sold their labour power at its value. Consequently, this surplus value becomes materialised in the product of labour which takes the form of the rightful private property of the capitalist.<sup>35</sup> In other words, the valorisation of capital takes concrete form through the exploitation of the productive powers of living labour. In this way, it determines the production of use values in the commodity form as a concrete form of the production of surplus value. From now on, the labour process becomes determined as the material bearer of the process of value's self-valorisation. In this unity, the immediate process of production becomes a process of production of capital.<sup>36</sup>

Although capital is essentially determined to be indifferent to any qualitative distinction other than the production of its quantitative increase, its material embodiment in the labour process produces its qualitative differentiation. It is clear that the production of use values, through which the production of surplus value takes place, necessarily involves the organic unity of labour power

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33 Marx 1976g, p. 279.

34 Marx 1976g, pp. 301–2.

35 Marx 1976g, p. 292.

36 Marx 1976g, p. 304.

and means of production in order to put the labour process into motion.<sup>37</sup> However, the only portion of capital able to change its magnitude is the one that is materialised in labour power, which thus becomes determined as *variable capital*.<sup>38</sup> The portion materialised in the form of means of production lacks this capacity and hence negates the essential determination of capital of being an inherently variable magnitude. The value of the means of production is transferred by living labour to the product and just reappears in the same magnitude.<sup>39</sup> Capital is thus negated simply as such to affirm itself as *constant capital* which, however, constitutes a necessary condition for the affirmation of its power of self-valorisation.<sup>40</sup> In short, the valorisation of capital can only take concrete form through its qualitative differentiation between variable and constant capital.

### Valorisation of Capital and Class Struggle

The differentiation of the total capital advanced into constant and variable capital reveals to us that, on condition that a part of capital does take the concrete shape of means of production in the right proportion, the actual change of magnitude in which the valorisation process consists immediately springs from the part of capital materialised in the form of labour power.<sup>41</sup> The inner measure of the degree in which capital self-valorises thus becomes determined by the ratio of the surplus value produced to the variable capital.<sup>42</sup> This is what Marx terms the rate of surplus value. From the perspective of its material content, the rate of surplus value expresses, in a specifically capitalist form, the relation between surplus labour and necessary labour.<sup>43</sup> The latter is the part of the working day necessary to produce the means of consumption which allow the reproduction of the labour power of the workers. The former is constituted by the labour expended during the part of the working day which goes beyond the labour time necessary for the reproduction of labour power.

With the determinations unfolded thus far, the value of labour power – hence the magnitude of variable capital – is a given quantity for capital's

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37 Marx 1976g, pp. 283–90.

38 Marx 1976g, p. 317.

39 Marx 1976g, pp. 314–16.

40 Marx 1976g, p. 317.

41 Marx 1976g, p. 323.

42 Marx 1976g, p. 324.

43 Marx 1976g, p. 325.

process of valorisation.<sup>44</sup> In effect, with the productive subjectivity of the wage labourer and the material forms of the objective conditions of the process of production as an external presupposition, the means of subsistence which enter into the consumption bundle of the labourer and the productivity of labour constitute a given condition for capital's production of surplus value. Thus, if we look at the circuit of capital's valorisation in its purity – i.e. assuming that the law of equivalence regulates exchange – the value of labour power appears to constitute an external limit to the realisation of capital's essential determination as self-expanding value. Under these circumstances, the degree of capital's valorisation depends on the length of the working day, which, unlike the value of labour power, appears in its immediacy to be a variable quantity with no inherent limit to its extension apart from the absolute one constituted by the 24 hours of the day.<sup>45</sup> However, this appearance vanishes as soon as we consider the materiality of the process of consumption of labour power; the physical determinations of the expenditure of labour power already pose a limit to the prolongation of the working day. In addition, the very reproduction of labour power in the conditions determined by what Marx calls 'the general level of civilisation' – and which, again, are external to capital at this stage of the presentation – requires that a part of the day is spent on the satisfaction of the 'intellectual and social requirements' of the labourer.<sup>46</sup>

It is only at this juncture that Marx, for the first time in the dialectical exposition of the critique of political economy, shows the necessity of the class struggle as a capitalist social form. In Marx's exposition, the class struggle is presented only as the necessary concrete form in which the physical and social limits to the extension of the working day are set. However, a closer scrutiny of Chapter 10 of *Capital* makes clear that its essential *simplest* determination is actually more general: *the historically specific determination of the class struggle in the capitalist mode of production consists in being the necessary concrete form of the buying/selling of the commodity labour power at its value.*

In order to appreciate this, it is fundamental to highlight an aspect of Marx's presentation which could otherwise appear as capricious and extrinsic to the concrete determinations we had before us, namely, the calculation of the *daily* value of labour power, which is the one that ensures the reproduction of labour power throughout the whole of a worker's working life.<sup>47</sup> What Marx intends to show by means of that calculation is that the excessive prolongation

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44 Marx 1976g, p. 340.

45 Marx 1976g, p. 341.

46 Ibid.

47 Marx 1976g, p. 343.

of the working day actually involves the payment of labour power below its value. Hence, the resistance to that extension in the productive consumption of labour power beyond a socially determined 'normality' is only a concrete manifestation of the broader question about the realisation of the full value of labour power.<sup>48</sup> This is illustrated by Marx through the words of that fictional average wage worker who, in giving the reasons for his refusal to let the capitalist impose her/his will on the determination of the length of the working day, claims: 'I demand a normal working day because, like every other seller, I demand the value of my commodity'.<sup>49</sup>

The above quote has crucial implications. It shows without ambiguity that, in opposition to the claims of many contemporary Marxists, for Marx the *simplest* social determination of the class struggle is not to be the antagonism between two different and irreconcilable principles of organisation of social life: the valorisation of capital and the production for human needs, or the 'logic of abstract labour' and the 'logic of concrete labour'. In this sense, the resistance of workers to the extraction of surplus value does not immediately express (however 'contradictorily') the absolute opposite of the general social relation through which they reproduce their lives, namely, the valorisation of capital.<sup>50</sup> On the contrary, I think that Marx's discussion of the length of the working day

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48 See the appendix for a discussion of the meaning and determination of the 'normality' involved in the purchase of labour power at its value.

49 Marx 1976g, p. 343.

50 For instance, the 'recalcitrance of use value' (Arthur 2001b) to the pure dialectic of the value form, 'a world of pure form empty of content' (Arthur 2001a, p. 33). One could argue that the essentials of this train of thought can be found, in different guises, in various traditions of unorthodox Marxism. See, among others, Cleaver 1979 and 1992; Albritton 2003; Radical Chains Collective 1993; Kay and Mott 1982; Dunayevskaya 1988; Dinerstein 2002. The difference between these alternative versions resides in the specific determination in which they locate this radical 'otherness' to capital which sets into motion its abolition. They all seem to have in common the view that the revolutionary negation of capital is not an alienated necessity of the accumulation of capital itself, engendered by the latter's own historical movement, instead of being its abstract negation. And notice that I mean this in the profoundest 'dialectical' sense of 'intrinsic connection'. That is, not just in the banal sense that the revolutionary action is 'produced' by capital because the proletariat 'reacts' to the miserable or inhuman conditions to which capital condemns it. Thus posed, the relation is completely external. The question is: which concrete historical potentiality of the valorisation of capital – the *only* present-day *general* social relation – carries within itself, as its only form of realisation, the necessity of its own annihilation through the revolutionary action of the working class? At the other extreme of those 'ontologisations' of the class struggle lies its 'biologisation' by Kautsky, for whom the class struggle was simply a human instance of the natural struggle for survival characterising the relation among species. See Kautsky 1978, p. 201.

in Chapter 10 of *Capital* implies exactly the opposite: it presents the struggle of workers as a concrete form of the movement of alienated social life as any other form of their life activity. In other words, though clearly an 'endemic' reality of the capitalist mode of production, the class struggle is not *ontologically* but *socially* constitutive of capitalism, since capitalist and worker, as *owners of commodities* (not as embodiments of ontologically different principles of social reproduction), personify social determinations of the process of valorisation of capital whose realisation is antagonistic.<sup>51</sup> Let us return to Marx's text in order to substantiate this point.

Marx's starting point in his presentation of the determinations of the class struggle over the length of the working day is the individual direct relationship between capitalist and worker, whose antagonistic character, far from constituting the abstract negation of the indirect social relations regulating the circulation of commodities, springs from the realisation of those laws themselves. The capitalist, acting as the personification of the necessity of her/his capital, wants to extend the length of the working day as much as possible. As a rightful buyer of commodities, she/he wants daily to extract as much use value as possible from the commodities she/he buys;<sup>52</sup> among them, the labour power of the wage labourer. Actually she/he is forced to do so by the competition from other individual capitals that mediates her/his determination as personification of the most immediate necessity of capital: the production of surplus value.<sup>53</sup> The worker wants to limit that daily extraction. Actually she/he is compelled to do so if she/he wants to preserve her/his productive attributes in the conditions needed to be able to sell her/his labour power in the future. In other words, if she/he wants to get paid the full value of the latter throughout the course of her/his productive lifetime. As we have seen, the struggle of the worker over the length of the working day is actually a concrete manifestation of the struggle over the realisation in full of the value of labour power.<sup>54</sup>

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51 It could be argued, following Shortall (1994, Chapter 5) – building on insights originally developed by Negri in *Marx Beyond Marx* (1991) – and Lebowitz (2003), that my reading of Marx's presentation of the class struggle in *Capital* is perfectly accurate but only because Marx's account itself is one-sided and/or incomplete, leaving the struggles of wage labourers which go beyond their determination as 'variable capital' out of the picture. Although these authors also give the class struggle an ontological foundation, they differ from those referred to above, insofar as they recognise that was not Marx's formulation, although it should have been.

52 Marx 1976g, p. 342.

53 Marx 1976g, p. 381.

54 Hence, we can see now that every circumstance affecting the reproduction of labour

Thus, Marx concludes, the very operation of the *indirect* laws of commodity exchange leads to equally rightful but antagonistic stands on the length of the working day. The resolution of this antinomy makes the valorisation of capital take the concrete form of a *direct* social relation of *force*:

There is here therefore an antinomy, of right against right, both equally bearing the seal of the law of exchange. Between equal rights, force decides. Hence, in the history of capitalist production, the establishment of a norm for the working day presents itself as a struggle over the limits of that day, a struggle between collective capital, i.e. the class of capitalists, and collective labour, i.e. the working class.<sup>55</sup>

The point to note here is that although Marx claims that that direct social relation is actually a class relation, the determinations unfolded thus far do not show any necessity for such transition from the individual antagonism between capitalist and worker to its constitution as *class* struggle. In reality, that observation is at this stage of an external character, an anticipation of the actual presentation of the determinations of the valorisation process that make it take the form of an antagonism between social classes. Marx unfolds this presentation of the essential determinations of the class struggle through a very long ‘historical sketch’ of the particular forms through which the former acquired concrete existence. Here, I shall concentrate on the general aspects of the determinations at stake, that is, I shall attempt to capture from Marx’s account the contradictory tendencies of capital’s valorisation process as such without reference to the concrete forms taken in the history of England as described by him.<sup>56</sup>

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power – such as the intensity of labour, the wage, health and safety of working conditions, and so on – is a concrete expression of the question of the buying/selling of labour power at its full value.

55 Marx 1976g, p. 344.

56 On the dialectical-methodological significance of the notion ‘historical sketch’, see the seminal contribution by Müller and Neusüss to the so-called ‘German State Derivation Debate’ (Müller and Neusüss 1975). In that text, these authors highlight very well the need for concrete empirical study to see how the general determinations of capital accumulation unfold in the course of history in order to avoid the twin shortcomings of both an unmediated ‘application’ of the latter which would lead to a ‘dogmatic history’, and the abstract empiricism of sociology and political science. More generally, Müller and Neusüss’s reconstruction of Marx’s argument in the chapter on the working day is still one of the best accounts to date. Marx himself concisely presents the general determination

Marx organises his exposition by sketching out the way in which opposing tendencies regarding the length of the working day asserted themselves in the course of the movement of the history of the capitalist mode of production. Initially, he shows that a tendency to the brutal extension of the working day, which overstepped all traditional limits inherited from pre-capitalist social forms, made its way through history. In its general determination, this roughly corresponds to unchecked imposition of the will of the immediate personifications of capital in their voracious search for the utmost valorisation of their individual capitals, before ‘the working class, stunned at first by the noise and turmoil of the new system of production, had recovered its senses to some extent’ and ‘began to offer resistance’.<sup>57</sup> In other words, the realisation of that tendency in its purity manifests the determinations of the valorisation process as they take shape without the constitution of the sellers of labour power as a class, i.e. through the individual antagonistic relationship they establish with the buyers of the only commodity they own, as discussed above. Under these circumstances, the respective power of buyer and seller of labour power is systematically biased towards the capitalist. Thus, if between equal rights, force decides, there will be a systematic tendency for the immediate personifications of capital to impose their will regarding the duration of the working day. Which means, as we have seen, the strife for ‘the full 24 hours, with the deduction of the few hours of rest without which labour-power is absolutely incapable of renewing its services’.<sup>58</sup> Whilst the capitalist could survive without buying the labour power of any particular labourer, the latter faces the sale of her/his labour power, which is her/his only general social relation, as an immediate necessity. Thus, in the desperate attempt to establish her/his general social relation, the worker faces the competition of other individuals who can only personify the commodity form of their labour power. Although at this stage it cannot but be an external reflection, Marx points out that even immediate observation suffices to see how the very movement of the alienated regulation

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at stake ‘in its purity’ – i.e. without its particular realisation in the course of the history of capital accumulation in England – in the preparatory *Manuscripts of 1861–3* (Marx 1988, pp. 180–5). As a matter of fact, the addition of a historical narrative to illustrate the systematic exposition of the general determination already developed by 1861–3 was not part of Marx’s original plan. Thus, in a letter to Engels from 10 February 1866, he reports that he decided to elaborate ‘the section on the “Working Day” from the historical point of view, which was not part of my original plan’ because his poor health conditions prevented him from making progress ‘with the really theoretical part’ (Marx 1987b, p. 224).

57 Marx 1976g, p. 390.

58 Marx 1976g, p. 375.

of social life engenders the existence of a surplus population relative to the needs of capital's valorisation process, thus making evident that not all workers will be able to sell their labour power and thereby placing them in a relation of exacerbated competition. Hence the capitalist knows that she/he will always find a worker willing to sell her/his labour power, however long the working day might be:

What experience generally shows to the capitalist is a constant excess of population, i.e., an excess to capital's need for valorization at a given moment, although this throng of people is made up of generations of stunned, short-lived, and rapidly replaced human beings, plucked, so to speak, before they were ripe.<sup>59</sup>

Marx then goes on to show the consequences of the pure operation of this tendency for the lengthening of the working day when the fixation of its limits is left to the unilateral action of the immediate personifications of capital, namely, the impossibility of workers to reproduce their labour power in the very conditions that the valorisation of capital demands from them, which means, sooner or later, the impossibility of reproducing labour power as such.

By extending the working day, therefore, capitalist production, which is essentially the production of surplus-value, the absorption of surplus labour, not only produces a deterioration of human labour-power by robbing it of its normal moral and physical conditions of development and activity, but also produces the premature exhaustion and death of this labour-power itself.<sup>60</sup>

More generally, this implies that when considered at the level of the individual antagonistic relationship between capitalist and worker, the valorisation of capital inevitably leads to a tendency for labour power to be sold *systematically below* its value. However appealing this might be to the voracious appetite for an extra surplus value of the individual capital, this *immediate* necessity goes against the *mediated* necessity of the reproduction of the valorisation of capital as such to prevent the productive attributes of labour power, the one and only *direct* source of surplus value and hence of self-expansion, from exhaustion. Marx points this out by looking at this same phenomenon from another angle,

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59 Marx 1976g, p. 380.

60 Marx 1976g, p. 376.



i.e. by commenting on what would happen if labour power was consumed during an unnaturally prolonged working day:

If then the unnatural extension of the working day ... shortens the life of the individual worker, and therefore the duration of his labour-power, the forces used up have to be replaced more rapidly, and it will be more expensive to reproduce labour-power ... It would seem, therefore, that the interest of capital itself points in the direction of a normal working day.<sup>61</sup>

It is this other necessity of the valorisation of capital that takes shape through the antagonistic will of the worker, who tries to limit her/his conscious and voluntary subjection to the will of the capitalist in the immediate production process. And this is what gives rise to the opposite tendency of the valorisation of capital regarding the length of the working day, whose concrete realisation takes the form of the struggle of workers as a class. Marx illustrates this by showing how only the long and protracted resistance of workers eventually led to the intervention of the capitalist state, which, in the alienated form of a law, imposed the direct general regulation of the extensive quantitative limit to the productive consumption of labour power by individual capitals. Seen from the perspective of the worker, this appears as the only way of securing her/his material and social reproduction in its capitalist form, that is, of getting paid the full value of labour power. And she/he can only succeed at this – on average, through the cyclical oscillation of the wage around the value of labour power – by establishing a relation of conscious co-operation with the rest of the workers in order to sell their labour power as a directly collective force. The general relation of competition among sellers of labour power is thus realised in the form of its self-negation, i.e. by taking the form of a relation of solidarity.<sup>62</sup> Hence the social constitution of antagonistic *class* wills or the necessary concrete form of *class struggle* taken by the reproduction of the alienated existence of social life.

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61 Marx 1976g, p. 377.

62 Here we have the same point that the young Marx made against Proudhon that I commented upon in the first part of the book, namely, that co-operation or solidarity is not the abstract opposite of competition, but rather its necessary concrete form when labour power becomes a commodity. However, in *Capital* the same conclusion is reached by Marx after unfolding all the determinations presupposed by it, thus eliminating the traces of externality in the relation between those two social forms contained in his presentation in *The Poverty of Philosophy*.

For 'protection' against the serpent of their agonies, the workers have to put their heads together and, as a class, compel the passing of a law, an all powerful social barrier by which they can be prevented from selling themselves and their families into slavery and death by voluntary contract with capital.<sup>63</sup>

Thus far I have developed the textual reconstruction of the simplest determinations of the class struggle in the capitalist mode of production, as they derive from their systematic place in Marx's dialectical presentation of the critique of political economy. As the above quote from *Capital* makes clear, in its simplest and most general form, the class struggle carries no content other than the establishment of the conditions for the preservation and reproduction of the productive attributes of workers as wage labourers. That is, it is the necessary form of the buying/selling of the commodity labour power at its full value. More generally, this implies that the determinations implicated in the mere existence of labour power as commodity (or the merely *formal subsumption* of labour to capital) do not give the class struggle the transformative potentiality to go beyond the capitalist mode of production.<sup>64</sup> In this simple determination, the political action of the working class is merely determined as a concrete form of the *reproduction* of capitalist social relations.<sup>65</sup> Although for the first time in

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63 Marx 1976g, p. 416.

64 In an earlier presentation of the argument which eventually appeared in *Time, Labor and Social Domination*, Postone made a similar point from his own idiosyncratic perspective. See Postone 1978, pp. 781–3, where he refers to this determination as involving 'class-constituting consciousness', as opposed to properly revolutionary consciousness, which he terms 'class-transcending consciousness'.

65 In contrast to my reading, Psychopedis (2005, pp. 80–1) sees in the implementation of legal norms to regulate the working day an immediate expression of the 'logic of revolution' already at work. Writing from a broadly understood 'Open Marxist' perspective, Psychopedis grounds revolutionary subjectivity in the affirmation of a generic human materiality that exists in the mode of being denied, i.e. in an alienated social form. On this score, his argument does not substantially differ from that of Bonefeld discussed in the previous chapter. However, Psychopedis gives the overall argument an idiosyncratic twist. In his own words, 'the dialectical presentation is not simply a matter of contrasting the "bad form" with the "good contents"' (Psychopedis 2005, p. 80). Instead, it is a matter of 'the demonstration that in capitalism the social forces of production become forces of destruction', so that 'this form poses a real threat to the continued existence of this materiality' (Ibid). The ground of the revolution is thereby seen as residing 'in the attempt of preserving the conditions of life' in the face of capitalism's destructive tendencies and the ultimately *unstable* character of the capitalist state's direct regulation of the material

this reconstruction of Marx's reproduction of the concrete by means of thought, we faced the necessity of capitalist social life to take the form of a political action of the working class, nothing in this journey put us before the necessity of the abolition of capital or, *a fortiori*, of the political action of the working class as its concrete form.<sup>66</sup> The search for the determinations of revolutionary subjectivity must therefore proceed into even more concrete determinations.

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conditions of social reproduction, insofar as 'in the long run capital cannot tolerate regulations that reduce the profit margin' (Psychopedis 2005, p. 81). As compared to Bonefeld's approach, this train of thought has the merit of acknowledging that the foundation of revolution is not contained in the *simplest* contradiction between human content and reified form, but in a *more concrete determinate expression* of that contradiction. The further dialectical exposition of form determinations beyond commodity fetishism thus becomes more meaningful for the discovery of the social foundation of the emergence of the revolutionary subject. Nevertheless, Psychopedis still relapses into grounding revolutionary subjectivity in an element which is external to the contradictory self-movement of the capital form: revolution is seen as the affirmation of an abstractly self-determining struggle for society's survival in response to capital's destructive barbarism. Thus, the necessity of revolution is not *immanently* carried by the capital form; instead it is carried by the reproductive conditions of an abstractly conceived 'society' lacking in form determinations, whose existence is 'thwarted' by its subsumption under the capital form. In the end, Psychopedis's account comes down to a more sophisticated version of Luxemburg's 'socialism or barbarism', i.e. of the classical Marxist view of socialism as the 'only salvation for humanity' in the face of 'war, famine and disease' (Luxemburg 1971, p. 367).

66 In order to avoid misunderstandings, let me note that I do not restrict the determination of the class struggle as a *political* action to the conquest of state power or to an action involving demands directed at the state. The political determination of the class struggle springs from the *objectively general* scope of the antagonistic direct social relation between capitalists and wage workers (Iñigo Carrera 2008, pp. 267–8). As Marx puts it in a letter to Bolte, 'a *political* movement' is 'a movement of the *class*, with the object of enforcing its interests in a general form, in a form possessing general, socially coercive force' (Marx 1965). Whether that general determination is manifested in the form of fragmented 'economic movements' or an immediately general 'political movement' is something which cannot be addressed at this level of abstraction. What should be clear is that the determination of the class struggle as the form of the sale of labour power at its value does not simply involve the 'trade union' form of the class struggle. Concomitantly, neither does that simplest determination of the class struggle mean that it will always be realised through the development of mere 'trade union consciousness'. In other words, that determination may well manifest itself in *apparently* extremely radical or militant forms of the class struggle. In brief, what is at stake in this discussion is the simplest *content* of the class struggle regardless of its *concrete forms*. The confusion between content and concrete form of the class struggle is precisely what lies at the basis of the orthodox rigid separation between economic and political consciousness of the working class.

This will be the subject of the next chapter. For the moment, I would first like to further explore the implications of this determination of the class struggle as a concrete form of the valorisation of capital.

*Class Struggle and the Concrete Subject of the Movement of Capitalist Society*

The form of class struggle taken by the movement of capitalist society evidently implies the obstruction of the ceaseless movement of valorisation that constitutes the most general determination of capital as the alienated subject of that process. This could raise the question as to whether this determination entails the absolute negation of capital as the subject of the valorisation process, thus reducing the latter to a concrete form of the class struggle.<sup>67</sup> Or, as commented above, it could lead to the conclusion that since workers' struggles press in the opposite direction to the immediate necessity of capital personified by the capitalists, they must be expressing a different principle of social reproduction from the valorisation of capital. Thus, although it might be true that capital is the subject of the valorisation process, this does not exhaust the 'logic of capitalism as a whole', which is said to comprise the antagonistic unity between the political economy of capital and the political economy of wage labour.<sup>68</sup> Each pole of that unity in opposition is seen as the concrete subject of its own production process and the realisation of their respective goals is seen as repelling the other – hence their antagonism. However, each side needs the mediation of the other for its own reproduction – hence their unity.<sup>69</sup>

There is no doubt that the interruption of the valorisation process constitutes the immediate negation of the most general necessity of capital as subject. However, as my reconstruction of Marx's argument has shown, the form of class struggle taken by the movement of society is actually a determination of the *affirmation* of capital as subject, albeit through *its own negation*. In other words, my point is that the social form of class struggle does not abstractly negate capital's condition of alienated subject, but only expresses the necessarily *contradictory* character of its own movement as one of *affirmation through self-negation*. What the class struggle does negate is the condition of subject of the process of valorisation to what up to that point *appeared* to be the bearer of that social determination, namely, the *individual* capital. The fact that the actions of individual capitals undermine the reproduction of the very direct source of

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67 Cf. Bonefeld 1995.

68 Lebowitz 2003, Chapters 4 and 5.

69 Lebowitz 2003, pp. 75–6.

their self-expansion thus makes clear that the production of surplus value is an attribute that exceeds the former's potentiality as particular private fragments of social labour. However, this does not reveal the class struggle as the self-determining force behind the movement of capitalist production, nor does it unveil the emergence an antagonistic principle of organisation of social life other than the valorisation of capital, which would be, in turn, incarnated in the working class.<sup>70</sup> Rather, it only shows that the production of surplus value is a potentiality of the alienated existence of social labour *in its unity*. In other words, Marx's exposition of the social form of class struggle evidences, for the first time in the pages of *Capital*, that the concrete subject of the process of valorisation – and hence of the movement of alienated social production – is the *total social capital*.<sup>71</sup>

The class struggle, then, is the concrete form of development of the antithetical social necessities generated by this alienated total social subject in its process of valorisation. The fact that the most *immediate* necessity of capital is the *formally boundless* quantitative expansion of the surplus value produced does not imply that the limitation to that expansion is not a necessity of its own reproduction. However, we have seen that the latter is a *mediated* necessity, this being the reason why it cannot be realised through the actions of capital's *immediate or positive* personifications – i.e. the capitalists – and why it can only be *negatively or mediatedly* personified by the working class in its struggle

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70 De Angelis 1995 and 1996.

71 From a textual point of view, Marx does not *name* the total social capital at this stage. Instead he refers to an abstract 'society', acting through the state as the representative of its general interests (standing as an external force over the particular interests of social classes), as the subject that compels capital to take 'account of the health and life of the worker' (Marx 1976g, p. 381). However, as Caligaris remarks (2012, p. 80), for Marx 'society' in the abstract is a meaningless entity. For him, society always exists in a specific historical form. On the other hand, in its general determination, society is not an abstraction existing over and against human beings, but is the general social relation through which the immanent social unity of their individual actions is posited. But insofar as this unity in capitalism operates behind the backs of individuals (hence of social classes), it appears as an external power vis-à-vis human beings. In the chapter on the Working Day, this alienated social unity is posited in its directly political form as the *state*. But its economic content (material reproduction in its value form) is not yet fully posited. A first instance of this positing eventually occurs in the chapter on simple reproduction. In my view, this is why Marx decides at that particular stage explicitly to name the total social capital as the concrete alienated subject of material reproduction in its unity. Retrospectively, it then becomes clear that the 'society' of Chapter 10 was actually the total social capital, and the state was the latter's general political representative (Caligaris 2012; Iñigo Carrera 2012).

against the bourgeoisie. Hence, when the workers struggle, they do not cease to be subsumed to the movement of reproduction of alienated social life. On the one hand, their subjectivity does not act according to an abstractly different 'logic' from that of capitalist commodity production. As we have seen, the relation of conscious solidarity established by workers in their opposition to the positive personifications of capital is in complete accordance with the specific form of their social being, that is, with their determination as private and independent individuals and, more precisely, as commodity sellers.<sup>72</sup> Their conscious co-operation in the form of a political action is not the unmediated expression of a relation of solidarity between *human beings as such*. Rather, it is such a solidaristic relation mediated by the workers' condition as alienated human beings, that is, as *personifications*. In acting in this way without being aware of their determination as attributes of the total social capital – i.e. *in seeing themselves as naturally free* but under an external compulsion which thwarts the affirmation of that personal freedom – they unconsciously personify a necessity of the *reproduction* of their alienated general social relation, albeit one which is evidently antagonistic to that personified by the capitalist.<sup>73</sup>

### *Once Again, the Question of the Dialectical Method*

At this juncture we can now appreciate the methodological significance of this discussion. For the aforementioned notion that the political action of the working class ultimately expresses social necessities radically opposed to those of the accumulation of social capital rests on what we have seen in the first part of the book as the *logical representation* of the specific movement of affirmation through self-negation constituting the determination of social forms, in the form of a unity of two immediate affirmations. Thus, when the mediated necessities of the total social capital are only grasped in their immediate concrete form of existence as simple and abstract 'human' needs of the working class, the development of the latter appears as a social process regulated by different 'laws' from those of the reproduction of the valorisation of the total social capital itself. This is a process that furthermore appears to stand in external opposition to the needs of the total social capital, one-sidedly reduced

72 Cf. Postone 1996, pp. 314–23.

73 It follows from this that the distinction between capital-reproducing and capital-transcending consciousness does not revolve around that between 'trade-union' or 'economic' consciousness, and 'political' or 'socialist' consciousness. It is a matter of whether wage workers are conscious of their own alienation in the totality of its determinations, or whether they fall prey to the appearance of natural human freedom taken by their subordination to the total social capital.

to those immediate ones that are personified by the capitalist class. Moreover, this appearance is reinforced by the form taken by the circuit of reproduction of labour power, which has the satisfaction of needs – hence the production of the worker – as its immediate result ( $LP-M-C \dots P_{LP} \dots LP^*$ ;  $C-M-C^*$  in its most general form).<sup>74</sup> From this, the conclusion is drawn that this circuit expresses a different existential logic or social ontology from that of capital's valorisation process ( $M-C \dots P \dots C'-M'$ ) and, according to some authors, that it thereby provides the social basis for the revolutionary subjectivity of the proletariat.

In a nutshell, the general question at stake concerns the social determinations of both the needs of workers and the social form of their satisfaction. Thus, it may seem that, at least outside the process of production, i.e. in the sphere of individual consumption, the freedom of the wage labourer ceases to be a concrete form of her/his alienation. There is no doubt that outside the immediate process of production, and in the process of individual consumption through which labour power is reproduced, wage labourers freely pursue their own goals. Unlike the subordination to the capitalist's despotic will reigning in the immediate process of production, in the process of reproduction of labour power the wage worker appears to be freely acting as a 'being-for-self' and not 'for another', as 'one who approaches capital as a *means*, a means whose end is the worker for self'.<sup>75</sup> And yet, since the selling of labour power as a commodity is the general social relation regulating the reproduction of the worker's life, she/he must apply that free consciousness and will materially to produce her/his productive subjectivity in the conditions determined by the autonomised movement of social life as an attribute of the product of social labour – i.e. by the production of surplus value. The second sense of her/his freedom (the divorce of the labourer from the means of production) means that she/he can reproduce her/his natural life only by producing her/his attributes as a human individual in the material and moral conditions in which *the total social capital* needs her/him in order to produce surplus value; that is, by producing herself/himself as an adequate personification of the only commodity she/he owns. Certainly, in this process of self-production, the wage labourer is not subsumed to the cycle of valorisation of the *individual* capital and, therefore, she/he does not act for this or that particular 'other'. However, the whole gist of Marx's arguments aims at showing that precisely through this free individual consumption (which certainly can only be secured by the class struggle),

74 Where LP is the abbreviation of labour power and  $P_{LP}$  corresponds to the process of reproduction of labour power through individual consumption.

75 Lebowitz 2003, pp. 71–2.

the worker reproduces her/his subsumption to the total social capital, which thereby affirms itself as the concrete subject not only of the processes of production and circulation of social wealth, but also of the process of individual consumption.

The individual consumption of the worker, whether it occurs inside or outside the workshop, inside or outside the labour process, remains an aspect of the production and reproduction of capital ... The fact that the worker performs acts of individual consumption in his own interest, and not to please the capitalist, is something entirely irrelevant to the matter ... The maintenance and reproduction of the working class remains a necessary condition for the reproduction of capital. But the capitalist may safely leave this to the worker's drive for self-preservation and propagation.<sup>76</sup>

In short, the individual consumption of the labourer is neither for the benefit of individual capital nor for herself/himself, but for the total social capital. The cycle  $LP-M-C \dots P_{LP} \dots LP^*$  is a moment of the accumulation of capital – and hence of capital's 'goal' of self-valorisation – as any other aspect of alienated social reproduction.<sup>77</sup>

As we can see, there is no exteriority to the alienated social relations of capital. Therefore, any revolutionary will and actual *material powers* the workers might have to go beyond these alienated social relations can only derive from this complete subsumption of humanity to capital's 'principle' of valorisation. With the determinations unfolded thus far, the class struggle embodies no transformative potentiality other than being the form in which labour power is sold at its value and, therefore, a form of the reproduction of the alienation of human productive powers in the form of capital. And yet, even in this simple form, the class struggle puts us before a determination which, although unable to account for the *content* of the necessity for the abolition of the capitalist mode of production, already sheds light on the reason why the latter can only have a political action of the working class as its *form*. I am referring to the

76 Marx 1976g, p. 718.

77 As a matter of fact, we shall see in the next chapter, when discussing large-scale industry, that concerning the productive attributes of workers (hence the satisfaction of their needs), the interests of individual capitals might clash with the needs of the reproduction of the total social capital, which is why the latter must be personified by the struggle of wage workers as a class. *Pace* Arthur, the essential implication of this is that labour power is *not* 'an external condition of capitalist production'. See Arthur 2006, p. 92.



fact that the class struggle is the most general form taken by the organisation of social labour through a conscious and voluntary *collective* action in capitalist society.<sup>78</sup> This is because determining the value of labour power entails the determination of the way in which the total labour power of society is allocated into its different useful forms; in this case, the general division between necessary labour and surplus labour. And we have seen how this is resolved in the capitalist mode of production through the establishment of a direct relation of solidarity among workers in order to develop a consciously organised collective action. On the other hand, the annihilation of capital through the creation of the society of the consciously – hence concretely free – associ-

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78 Iñigo Carrera 2008, p. 15. By virtue of this character as a conscious collective action, the class struggle becomes determined as a *political form* of social relations, which mediates the general *indirect* relation through the value form (determined as the *economic form* of social relations). The emergence of the class struggle and the distinction between individual capitals and the total social capital are therefore at the basis of the historically specific differentiation of the capitalist social relations into economic and political forms. This is the rational kernel of the best contributions to the so-called ‘German State Derivation Debate’ (Müller and Neusüss 1975; Altvater 1973), and to its reception within the Conference of Socialist Economists in the UK (Clarke 1988 and 1991b). My own views on the nature of the state are more directly informed by Iñigo Carrera (2012), insofar as he grounds the differentiation of economic and political forms of the capital relation in a manner which is consistent with the determination of the total social capital as alienated subject. Thus, although the antagonistic character of the class relation is a necessary form taken by the reproduction of the total social capital, it disrupts the fluidity of the former’s valorisation. The establishment of the general unity of social labour must therefore take shape through a further objectified form of social mediation, the state, which confronts commodity owners (the personifications of money-as-capital and of the commodity labour power) as an apparently external power with the authority and capacity to establish the overall direct regulation of their antagonistic social relations. The state thus develops as the most concrete political form that embodies the direct organisation of the unity of the conditions of social reproduction in its alienated capital form. That is, it is a concrete form of the essentially indirect social relations through the valorisation of capital. By virtue of this content, the state becomes the *general political representative of the total social capital*. Far from enjoying ‘autonomy’ (relative or otherwise), state actions are a necessary mode of realisation of the contradictory content of the economic mode of existence of capitalist social relations. In other words, class struggle and state policies are not to be conceived of as independent, self-subsisting factors that externally modify or influence the workings of the ‘law of value’. Instead, they need to be grasped as necessary modes of motion through which the law of value further unfolds beyond the strictly economic forms immediately springing from the indirect nature of the social relations of capitalist production.

ated producers precisely consists of a social action of such a nature. Evidently, the latter is a social action which no longer expresses the total social capital's need for labour power being sold at its value. Rather, it expresses the historically determined necessity to move forward in the development of human productive subjectivity in a form which negates capital's existence as the general social relation reproducing human life, namely, by giving the materiality of social life the form of its conscious general organisation as an attribute borne by each of the associated individuals. But the point is that the *material content* of this transformation is achieved in the *form* of the political action of the (self-abolishing) proletariat, only because the latter already contains, within its simplest form, the potentiality of being the necessary concrete form taken by the general conscious organisation of social labour as a moment of the reproduction of the total social capital.<sup>79</sup>

#### Appendix: Some Marxist Controversies over the Determination of the Value of Labour Power<sup>80</sup>

As we have seen, Marx argues that the value of labour power is *determined* by the socially necessary labour time required to produce this particular commodity, which in this case comes down to the socially necessary labour time required for the production of the use values which must be consumed in order to (re)produce the physical and intellectual productive powers of the wage worker in 'normal' conditions. On the other hand, my close reading of Marx's presentation of the establishment of a normal working day has shown that the *realisation* of the full value of labour power must necessarily be *mediated* by (i.e. *takes concrete form* in and through) the class struggle. Yet, these two aspects of Marx's account of the determination of the value of labour power have not remained without controversy among his followers. Thus, some Marxist scholars have either challenged their validity or offered an alternative reading which in my view parts company with Marx's actual argument in *Capital*. More specifically, some authors have objected to the commodity nature of labour power (hence to the very idea of there being a 'value' of labour power).<sup>81</sup>

79 It is this determination that generates the appearance that the class struggle as such embodies the potentiality to transcend the capitalist mode of production.

80 For a fuller discussion of the issues treated in this Appendix, see Caligaris and Starosta 2015; Fitzsimons and Starosta 2015.

81 The rejection of the commodity nature of labour power, and *a fortiori* of Marx's account of the determination of its value, has come from rather disparate traditions, namely, the

In the second place, and more intimately connected with the theme of this chapter, many (if not most) Marxists tend to claim that the value of labour power is (at least partially) *determined* by the class struggle. In light of the centrality of this latter issue for the content of this book, it is worth giving it closer scrutiny.

*Class Struggle and the Determination of the Value of Labour Power:  
The 'Received Wisdom' and Its Limits*

As mentioned above, most if not all Marxists tend to take for granted that the class struggle determines, at least in part, the 'standard of necessity' or 'customary living standard' implied in the reproduction of the class of wage workers. There are, however, variations within this theme.

At one end of the spectrum, there are those scholars who conceive of the class struggle as the fundamental (if not the only) *determinant* of the value of labour power. For instance, this is the case of authors belonging to the so-called 'New Solution' perspective.<sup>82</sup> As Mavroudeas perceptively notes,<sup>83</sup> the implication of the 'New Solution' approach is that the value of labour power must be considered, in a rather Smithian fashion, as the quantity of 'labour commanded' by the money wage, which in turn is solely determined by the class struggle in the sphere of *distribution* (or maybe mediated through specific 'institutional arrangements'). The 'Autonomist' theory of the *political* determination of the wage can also be seen as sharing in this broad perspective, albeit with a more 'orthodox' focus on the class struggle in *production* (thus preserving the link between socially necessary labour time actually expended in the production of 'wage goods' and the value of labour power, which is lost in the 'New Solution' approach).<sup>84</sup> Despite their differences, however, for both perspectives the determination of the value of labour power ultimately comes down to a simple expression of *power relations* between social classes. There are two problems with this. Firstly, the objective social basis of the respective power of each social class is left without explanation. More importantly, since thus conceived the value of labour power bears no relation to the conditions

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systematic dialectics strand of value form theory (Arthur 2006, pp. 90–3; Reuten 1988, p. 56; Reuten and Williams 1989, pp. 68–9) and the so-called New Solution to the 'transformation problem' (Lipietz 1985, p. 154; Mohun 1994b, pp. 397–8, 400–1; Foley 1982, pp. 42–3). For a critique of the New Solution's departure from Marx's argument about the commodity nature of labour power, see Mavroudeas 2001.

82 For references, see previous footnote.

83 Mavroudeas 2001, p. 55.

84 Negri 1991, pp. 132–3; Cleaver 1979, pp. 80–5.

in which labour power is expended in the direct process of production, all connection is lost between the reproduction of the capital relation and the *materiality* of the human metabolic process in its unity (i.e. the nexus between social production and consumption).

However, the majority of Marxist scholars tend to support a rather different approach to the determination of the value of labour power. This widespread view hinges on the distinction made by Marx in Chapter 6 of *Capital* between the 'physical' element of the value of labour power ('natural needs, such as food, clothing, fuel and housing') and the 'historical and moral' component ('which depend therefore to a great extent on the level of civilisation attained by a country' and 'on the conditions in which, and consequently on the habits and expectations with which, the class of free workers has been formed').<sup>85</sup> Insofar as the former element is usually seen as directly linked to the recovery from the prior expenditure of labour power in the direct production process, the materiality of the reproduction of the wage labourer is taken into consideration by this approach. However, these authors add to what they consider to be the strictly material element of the value of labour power a historical and social element constituted by the 'customary standard of living', which in turn is seen as determined by the class struggle.<sup>86</sup> It is this latter component which, allegedly, sets Marx's approach apart from Ricardo's 'beast of burden' view of the determination of the 'value of labour'. Whilst this perspective on the value of labour power is more rigorous and consistent with the Marxian critique of political economy, it is not itself exempt from shortcomings.

The first thing to note in this regard is that despite its widespread acceptance among Marxists, the idea of the *determination* of the value of labour power by the class struggle has no supporting textual evidence from Marx's writings. There is no single passage in *Capital* (or in other works for that matter) in which he states that the 'average' amount and qualitative nature of means of subsistence results from the balance of class forces. More specifically, at no

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85 Marx 1976g, p. 275. This, I think, is the general determination underlying E.P. Thompson's historical study of the 'moral economy'. See Thompson 1971.

86 The references for this perspective are numerous since it constitutes the general consensus among Marxists. See Mavroudeas (2001, pp. 58–9), Lapidés (1998, p. 177), and Lebowitz (2003, p. 74), for paradigmatic exponents who discuss the matter explicitly and at great length. Still, the same ideas are touched upon in passing by many other authors. See, for instance, Bellofiore (2009b, pp. 194–7) and Heinrich (2012, p. 94).

point does Marx state that, in contrast to the physical element of the value of labour power, the historical and moral element is constituted by the class struggle. What he does say is that that the latter component expresses the specific conditions inherited from *pre-capitalist* social relations underlying the genesis of each national fragment of the global working class, i.e. the 'general level of civilisation' attained in a particular place at a particular time. In Marx's own words, 'the important part' in the determination of those social conditions is not played by the class struggle but, as he puts it in *Value, Price and Profit*, by 'historical tradition and social habitude'.<sup>87</sup>

Incidentally, it is *Value, Price and Profit* from which some scholars draw the textual evidence for the idea of the class struggle as determining the value of labour power.<sup>88</sup> However, in those passages Marx only states that the fixation of the actual degree of *profit* among the immense scale of possible variations up to its maximum is settled by the continuous struggle between capital and labour.<sup>89</sup> This maximum corresponds to the 'physical minimum of wages and the physical maximum of the working day'. In other words, it corresponds only to the 'physical component' of the value of labour power. Thus, what Marx discusses in that text is the extent to which the class struggle manages to make the actual level of the *wage* approximate the full value of labour power, which includes the 'traditional standard of life' above the physical minimum.

As far as *Capital* is concerned, the situation of a price of labour power falling below the traditional standard of life to its 'minimum' is characterised by Marx as involving the purchase of labour power below its value.<sup>90</sup> But he does not state that the 'traditional standard of life' (and *a fortiori* the full value of labour power) itself varies according to the ebbs and flows of the class struggle.<sup>91</sup> Exegetical issues aside, we shall see in the next section that, even at a substantive level, matters are much more complex than they appear at first sight.

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87 Marx 1985, p. 145.

88 See, for example, Lapides 1998, p. 177.

89 Marx 1985, p. 146.

90 Marx 1976g, p. 277.

91 In one of the few remarkable exceptions (if not the only one) to the 'received wisdom', David Harvey makes a similar point in *Limits to Capital* (2006, pp. 54–6). However, the question is one-sidedly reduced (in a rather 'Luxemburgist' or underconsumptionist fashion) to the essentially *quantitative* problem of the realisation of surplus value.

*Rethinking Marx's Account of the Determinations of the Value of Labour Power*

The main thrust of Marx's argument about the determination of the quantity and quality of the bundle of commodities that constitutes the value of labour power is that it is resolved into what is 'needed to maintain it, i.e. to maintain the worker's life as worker, so that having worked today he will be able to repeat the same process under the same conditions the next day'.<sup>92</sup> As Marx puts it in Chapter 6 of Volume 1 of *Capital*, 'the means of subsistence must therefore be sufficient to maintain him in his *normal state* as a *working individual*'.<sup>93</sup> Several key issues follow from this.

In the first place, this implies that it is the consumption of those means of subsistence that (re)produces 'the muscles, nerves, bones and brains of existing workers',<sup>94</sup> and whose materiality bears 'the aggregate of those mental and physical capabilities which he sets into motion whenever he produces a use-value of any kind'.<sup>95</sup> In other words, it is through the appropriation of those use values that the worker (re)produces the *materiality* of her/his *productive subjectivity* which, as argued at great length in the first part of the book, is nothing more (but also nothing less) than her/his human individuality or species-being. Consumptive activity therefore reproduces the materiality of the specifically human attributes of the individual: her/his productive consciousness and will, i.e. 'what distinguishes the worst architect from the best of bees'.<sup>96</sup> The other side of the same coin, however, is that the 'amount and quality of the means of subsistence, and therefore also the extent of needs'<sup>97</sup> that enter into the wage worker's consumption bundle, can have no material determination other than that which is necessary to reproduce whichever specific form the productive 'ability, aptitude and power enclosed in the living body of the worker' takes at a 'certain level of civilisation'.

Furthermore, this raises the question as to what exactly Marx means by the '*normal state as a working individual*'. A first self-evident but trivial answer is that the wage labourer must be able to act in the particular labour process in which she/he usually takes part. However, a passage quoted above from the 1861–3 *Manuscripts* is a little more specific: she/he has to be able to repeat her/his participation in the labour process *in the same conditions* as the pre-

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92 Marx 1988, p. 42.

93 Marx 1976g, p. 275, my emphasis.

94 Marx 1976g, p. 717.

95 Marx 1976g, p. 270.

96 Marx 1976g, p. 284.

97 Marx 1988, p. 42.

vious day. The question therefore turns to what is entailed by those conditions. In many passages Marx gives the impression that he has in mind only the *physical* reconstitution of the wage worker as implicated in the normal state of her/his labour power. Thus, in Chapter 6 of *Capital*, he explicitly refers to those same conditions in relation to health and strength.<sup>98</sup> At some point in the 1861–3 *Manuscripts*, he adds ‘vitality in general’ to the list.<sup>99</sup> These formulations can lend themselves to the association of the normal state of labour power solely with the so-called ‘physical’ component of the value of labour power.<sup>100</sup> However, two arguments militate against this reading.

Firstly, in those preparatory manuscripts, just a few lines below, Marx introduces a clarifying remark stating that ‘it is hardly necessary to mention here that the head belongs to the body as well as the hand’.<sup>101</sup> I take it to mean that the normal state as a working individual involves not only fully functioning physical capabilities, but also the ‘*mental*’ capabilities whose ‘aggregate’ constitute labour power in its unity, according to Marx’s own definition. This is, to some extent, self-evident, insofar as the particular concrete labour performed by some wage workers might involve mainly intellectual activity (e.g. academic labour). Both Marx’s stress on the physical ‘wear and tear’ of labour power, and his clarification that ‘*mental*’ capabilities must not be forgotten, might have to do with the fact that in his time the great majority of workers performed mainly ‘manual’ labour in the direct production process and intellectual wage labour was scarcely developed. However, I shall argue below that much more is involved in the normal reproduction of those ‘*mental capabilities*’ than what Marx insinuates. Secondly, I showed above that in *Capital* Marx is unambiguous that the reduction of the price of labour power to a magnitude which only covers the ultimate minimum given by the *physically* indispensable means of subsistence, involves its fall below its value. As I see it, the upshot of this is that for Marx it is the overall ‘customary standard of life’, which *includes* the ‘historical and moral’ component, that constitutes the wage labourer’s ‘normal state as a working individual’.

This latter point dovetails with another key issue worthy of discussion following from Marx’s simplest definition of the value of labour power. It also relates to the aforementioned broader significance of the ‘*mental capabilities*’ that comprise labour power. For the productive attributes of workers (and so

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98 Marx 1976g, p. 275.

99 Marx 1988, p. 51.

100 Cf. Lebowitz 2003, p. 103.

101 Marx 1988, p. 51.

their productive subjectivity) do not just include those that are strictly necessary for the labour process in a restricted 'technical' sense (the specific knowledge required for the performance of the determinate productive tasks under their individual responsibility). Additionally, they comprise what, in keeping with Marx's terminology of the historical and moral component of the value of labour power, can be referred to as 'moral attributes' as well. By this I mean the 'aggregate' of determinate forms of consciousness, self-understanding, attitudes and dispositions that *also* need to be 'set into motion whenever the workers produce a use value of any kind'. These moral attributes are of course not natural but the product of history, and therefore vary with the 'level of civilisation' attained by society, i.e. with the historically specific technical configuration of the production process that constitutes the general material basis in each phase of capitalist development. Moreover, they differ for each partial organ of the collective labourer in accordance with the differences in the productive functions that each of them respectively undertakes under the command of capital. Crucially, primordial and generic among those 'moral' attributes (hence cutting across every segment of the working class) is what I have presented (in Chapter 6) as the most general form of subjectivity taken by the alienated consciousness of the private individual in the capitalist mode of production, namely, the personal freedom and independence of the commodity producer.<sup>102</sup> As we have seen, this freedom as a concrete form of the alienation in the commodity form is not simply an abstractly ideological, juridical or cultural form. It is first and foremost a *material* determination of the productive subjectivity of the human individual, a *productive power or attribute*.<sup>103</sup>

With all these elements in mind, I would like to suggest a possible interpretation (or resignification) of what Marx might have been getting at with the distinction between the 'physical' and the 'historical and moral' component of the value of labour power. Succinctly put, the former broadly corresponds to the (re)production of the strictly 'technical' dimension of labour power as defined above. Here I am quite simply sticking to the letter of Marx's text (with the pro-

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102 In reality, all those other dimensions of the 'moral' productive attributes of wage workers are diverse *specifications* of their free consciousness as the *generic* determination of their subjectivity of private working individuals. In *The Results of Immediate Process of Production*, Marx discusses in great depth the determination of 'the idea of self-determining freedom' as a productive attribute. See Marx 1976c, pp. 1026–34.

103 This actually applies to all moral attributes described above. So-called 'cultural' forms, 'values' and 'identities' are not abstractly autonomous entities floating in mid-air, but concrete forms of existence of the production and reproduction of the materiality of human productive subjectivity.



viso that, as he further clarifies, the costs of education and training deriving from the degree of complexity of labour power must be added to this 'technical' component). As a consequence, the point is rather uncontroversial and there are few disagreements among commentators. The key contentious issue hinges on the 'historical and moral' element which, as we have seen, without any solid textual evidence most Marxists take for granted as condensing the result of the class struggle. By contrast, my argument is that this other component of the standard of life of workers condenses the *materially determined* aggregate of use values which are qualitatively and quantitatively necessary to (re)produce her/his productive attributes as a personally free working subject who, through this freedom, affirms her/his objective subjection to the autonomised movement of the product of her/his social labour (capital). Thus, *both* the 'technical' attributes of labour power and the different dimensions of the general 'moral' attribute as a personally free subject are *productive requirements* for the reproduction of capital. In this sense, *both* are *fully determined* by the *material* conditions of the valorisation of capital in the production process.<sup>104</sup>

At this juncture, a final question obviously arises. For in this account of the determinations of the value of labour power, and contrary to the 'received

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104 Although not free from ambiguities, the conceptualisation of the nexus between working-class consumption and their reproduction as bearers of the capital-relation can be traced back to Aglietta's *A Theory of Capitalist Regulation* (2000). In that book, Aglietta explicitly states that the workers' consumption is a process that is subject to a 'general logic' of reconstitution of the forces expended in social practices and of preservation of capacities and attitudes entailed by the social relations of which individuals are carriers (2000, p. 156). What is more, among those 'capacities and attitudes' Aglietta includes those processes that maintain 'social relations of an ideological nature', making clear that those other relations 'posses just as "material" an existence as economic relations' (2000, p. 157). However, presumably under the influence of the then fashionable Althusserian structuralism, Aglietta further argues that those processes 'are not directly under the sway of the relations of production' (*ibid.*). In this way, he ends up losing sight of the inner material connection between the process of capitalist production and the 'norm of consumption' in its totality. As noted by Mavroudeas (2003), this severance of the link between capitalist production and working-class consumption is even more pronounced in Aglietta's concrete empirical analysis of the evolution of capital accumulation in the United States. Thus, the 'Fordist' norm of consumption is not seen as expressing the reproduction of wage-workers with novel productive attributes (both physical and moral), as demanded by the new material forms of the labour process. Instead, the change in the norm of consumption is, in underconsumptionist fashion, attributed to the need to resolve the disequilibrium between sector I (that produces means of production) and sector II (that produces means of subsistence), in the context of an 'intensive regime of accumulation'.

wisdom' of Marxists, the class struggle seems to play absolutely no part. It could seem that in order to access the means of subsistence that they need for the normal reproduction of their labour power, workers can safely leave the establishment of its value to the 'automatic' operation of the 'iron law of wages'. Unlike the establishment of a normal working day discussed above, here there would be no need to 'put their heads together as a class' in order to obtain in circulation the full value of their labour power. In the concluding section of this Appendix, I show why this is not the case.

*Content and Form of the Determination of the Value of Labour Power: On the Role of the Class Struggle*

In contrast to the view outlined above, Marxists tend to conceive of the inner connection between the conditions of reproduction of labour power and the material forms of its consumption in the capitalist production process as solely pertaining to the 'physical/technical' component of the workers' consumption. Regarding this part of the workers' standard of necessity, they would not deny that it is *determined* by the material conditions of the direct production process of capital. However, all the means of subsistence which do not appear as immediately linked to the physical and technical reconstitution of labour power are seen as having no intrinsic connection whatsoever with the materiality of the capitalist labour process. The 'historical and moral' element is therefore rendered as *materially indeterminate* and subject to the *contingent* result of the struggle between capitalists and workers, who are therefore not seen as personifications of antagonistic necessities of the reproduction of their alienated social being in its unity (i.e. the total social capital), but as abstractly free political subjects pursuing the satisfaction of their class interests and needs.

The approach developed here leads to another view of the connection between the determination of the value of labour power and the class struggle. True to the methodological perspective informing this book, the key to this nexus hinges on the 'unity-in-difference' between the content and the form of the determination at stake; or, to put it differently, between the determination proper and its necessary mode of motion or realisation. Specifically, the material conditions of the reproduction process of capital (i.e. the unity between social production and consumption) constitute the *content* of the determination of the value of labour power. They do so by materially determining the differentiated forms of productive subjectivity that compose the collective labourer and, as a consequence, the quantity and kind of means of subsistence that workers need to consume to produce and reproduce those diverse qualitative attributes (both technical and moral) of labour power. In turn, the class struggle becomes the necessary *form* that *mediates* the establishment of the

material unity between the productive and consumptive requirements of the reproduction of the total social capital. Note, however, that the necessary mediating role of the class struggle in concretely *fixing* (as opposed to *determining*) the customary living standard of workers does not only apply to the historical and moral component; it also pertains to the workers' consumption bundle as *a whole*, i.e. including the physical or technical element. In other words, there is not a single use value entering the determination of the value of labour power, whose consumption is not *secured through* the struggle of wage workers as a class. Conversely, the other side of the same coin is that there is not a single use value consumed by wage workers which is not *determined by* the material requirements of the valorisation process of the total social capital (which, it goes without saying, might clash with the immediate interest of individual capitals).

From a textual point of view, this perspective is consistent with the only evidence on this issue that Marx left us in his works. On the one hand, I have briefly mentioned above his comments from *Value, Price and Profit*, the only text in which he *explicitly* discusses the connection between the class struggle and the quantitative and qualitative determination of the 'norm of consumption' of the working class. On the other hand, the close textual reconstruction of Chapter 10 of *Capital* on the 'Working Day' offered earlier in this chapter tends to support and confirm this reading. According to Marx's account in those pages, class antagonism is not the self-determining process that contingently establishes the duration of the working day. By contrast, it is the *mediating social form* that forces the capitalist state to set legal limits to its extension beyond its *normal* length. However, the *content* of this normality is not undetermined, although it *appears* as such at first sight at the beginning of the presentation in the respective chapter. But as the exposition unfolds, it emerges that the normal duration of the working day is *materially determined by* the conditions in which labour power is consumed by capital in the process of production.<sup>105</sup> A normal working day is therefore that which does not lead to the premature exhaustion of

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105 Since at the systematic expositional stage of Chapter 10, the material forms of the labour process are an external presupposition vis-à-vis the self-movement of capital, Marx does not need to say much about the specific determinations that generate the necessity for the shortening of the working day beyond a general reference to overwork and premature exhaustion of labour power caused by capital's 'voracious appetite for surplus labour'. However, as the systematic exposition progresses to the real subsumption of labour to capital, the material foundation of that alienated social necessity is brought to light: the shortening of the working day is the necessary concrete form taken by the increase of the *intensity* of labour that large-scale industry brings about. See Marx 1976g, p. 536.

labour power. The class struggle over the length of the working day thus gives shape to the payment of labour power at its full value. It is the same with the amount and quality of means of consumption that enter into the reproduction of working class.

Substantively, all this is a necessary corollary of the constitution of the total social capital as the alienated subject of the human reproduction process in its unity. As much as the determinations of the direct production process, the process of individual consumption becomes inverted into an attribute of capital. The development of human labour power is not the end of capitalist production, but simply a means for the only finality presiding over its movement: the production of surplus value. To claim that the material content of social consumption does not (fully) derive from the requirements of the reproduction of capital renders that moment of the human metabolic process as external to the alienated social forms in which the latter exists. In other words, it involves an unmediated grounding of workers' needs in an anthropological determination of the human species. *A fortiori*, working class struggles over the conditions of their material reproduction become represented as a political assertion 'of the needs of workers as *human beings* in opposition to the rights of capital as property'.<sup>106</sup> We have seen, however, that when workers struggle as a class, they do not unmediatedly act in their abstract determination as persons (i.e. as human beings), but as *personifications* of the only commodity they own and, in that condition, as executors of the establishment of the material unity of the total social capital. Through their apparently free struggle for their personal needs, they therefore satisfy an alienated 'need' of the total social capital. The theoretico-political challenge for the critique of political economy is to discover the form determination that *immanently* carries the objective potentiality for their conscious self-abolition as such personifications. The determination of the value of labour power is no such form.

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106 Lebowitz 2003, p. 99. Indeed, for Lebowitz, the ground of the tendency to drive beyond wage labour is the abstract humanity of the worker: 'Ultimately, then, both for the Young Marx and the mature Marx (the "scientist"), it is because workers are not *merely* wage-labourers but are human beings that there is a tendency to drive beyond wage-labour. Underlying the struggle against capital is that the worker "strives not to remain something he has become, but is in the absolute movement of his becoming" (Marx, 1973: 488). *In the end, we understand the contradiction of capital and wage-labour as that of wage-labour and the human being*' (Lebowitz 2003, p. 207).

# Real Subsumption and the Genesis of the Revolutionary Subject

## Introduction

Thus far, my critical reconstruction of Marx's argument in *Capital* has focused on determinations which belong to what Marx termed the *formal* subsumption of labour to capital, i.e. to the concrete form of production of surplus value in which the materiality of the production process remains a given presupposition of the valorisation process. As we have seen, nothing in those determinations places us before the central question I have been trying to answer through this reading of Marx's texts, namely, the necessity of revolutionary subjectivity. From a merely textual point of view and, as it were, 'by default', this already offers a clue as to the alternative place in which to search for those social determinations: the *real* subsumption of labour to capital. In effect, I shall argue in this chapter that it is precisely in the development of the ever-changing concrete forms of the real subsumption that the answer to the question about revolutionary subjectivity is to be found.<sup>1</sup>

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1 A methodological question that immediately arises concerns the role of the different concrete forms of the real subsumption in Marx's 'systematic-dialectical' exposition in *Capital*. On the one hand, Tony Smith argues that simple co-operation – which, incidentally, he incorrectly sees as expressing the formal subsumption of labour to capital – 'does not characterize a specific stage in the reconstruction in thought of the value-form' (1990a, p. 126). On the other hand, he does admit that capital's necessity to transform the materiality of the production process of human life must have a place in the 'systematic ordering of the categories'. But this transformative dynamic, captured by the category 'capital as principle of transformation', must remain at that level of generality, the specific concrete forms of the production of relative surplus value having no necessity other than being arbitrary 'historical examples' among 'a myriad of combined and uneven forms that could have been selected' (Smith 1990a, p. 127). Murray, for his part, correctly points out against Sayer (1987) and Balibar (1968) that all three material forms of the labour process belong to the real subsumption of labour to capital. However, he considers that only the general concept of co-operation belongs to the systematic dialectical argument, the three concrete forms of co-operation belonging to a separable historical dialectics (Murray 2004, pp. 251, 258). Finally, Reuten and Williams (1989) simply exclude the concrete forms of production of relative surplus value from their systematic presentation of the determinations of the 'bourgeois epoch'. In my view, a rigorous

The proposition that the real subsumption constitutes the ground of revolutionary subjectivity should come as no surprise. In reality, this is no more than the concretisation of that insight about the most general determination of the process of 'natural history' constituting the development of humanity that Marx expounded in the *Paris Manuscripts* in 1844. According to that early text, the content of the history of the human species consists in the development of the specific material powers of the human being as a working subject, that is, of *human productive subjectivity*. It is in the historical transformation of its material and social forms, Marx concluded, that the key to the abolition of capital – hence, to revolutionary subjectivity – should reside. However, I have argued in the first part of this book that this early attempt at the critique of political economy could not offer a rigorous scientific comprehension of the social determinations underlying the revolutionary transformation of society.

It was fundamentally in *Capital* (but, crucially, also in the *Grundrisse*), mainly through the exposition of the determinations of the different forms of production of relative surplus value (hence of the real subsumption of labour to capital), where Marx managed to concretise the systematic dialectic of alienated human labour which he had grasped only abstractly in his early writings. He did this by showing precisely what the capital form does to the materiality of human productive subjectivity as it takes possession of, and transforms, the labour process. Seen externally, the implicit concrete question under investigation was the following: does capital transform human productive subjectivity in a way that eventually equips the latter with the material powers to transcend its

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treatment of the qualitatively different concrete forms of the real subsumption must be an essential moment of the systematic-dialectical presentation of the determinations of capital. The chapters of Marx's *Capital* dealing with the forms of production of relative surplus value are not there simply for the sake of an arbitrary historical illustration. Rather, as I demonstrate below, they are part and parcel of the dialectical unfolding of the immanent dynamic of self-valorising value, and the transition between them expresses the necessary forms of development of human productive subjectivity as an alienated attribute of capital. Their exclusion from the presentation can only result in a formalistic comprehension of the nature of capital, which posits as contingent the relation between the latter and historical transformations of the materiality of the production process of human life. On the other hand, it should be noted that neither the distinction between formal and real subsumption, nor the one among the different forms of the latter, express pure historical phases of capitalist development on the basis of which to construct a formalistic periodisation. The historical material in those chapters should be read in exactly the same way as that of the chapter on the working day, that is, as a 'historical sketch' which, in its 'empirical' existence, expresses the realisation of the more abstract determination.

alienated social form of development? From this materialist standpoint, only if this were the case would it make sense to pose the question of conscious revolutionary action as a concrete objective potentiality immanent in capitalist society. As Marx puts it in an oft-quoted passage from the *Grundrisse*,

On the other hand, if we did not find concealed in society as it is the material conditions of production and the corresponding relations of exchange prerequisite for a classless society, then all attempts to explode it would be quixotic.<sup>2</sup>

In other words, Marx's point was the need to discover the material determinations of communist society in their present mode of existence as an *alienated potentiality* engendered by the autonomised movement of the capital form to be realised – that is, turned into *actuality* – precisely and necessarily through the conscious revolutionary action of the self-abolishing proletariat.<sup>3</sup>

Those determinations appear scattered and are just mentioned in passing in several of Marx's texts. They all characterise the simplest defining character of communism as the fully self-conscious organisation of social labour as a collective potency by the thereby freely associated producers. It is in the *Grundrisse*, in the context of the critique of Adam Smith's conception of labour as sacrifice, that Marx offers the clearest and most concise characterisation of the general attributes of what he calls 'really free working'.

The work of material production can achieve this character [i.e. as 'really free working'] only (1) when its social character is posited, (2) when it is of a scientific and at the same time general character, not merely human exertion as a specifically harnessed natural force, but exertion as subject, which appears in the production process not in a merely natural, spontaneous form, but as an activity regulating all the forces of nature.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Marx 1993, p. 159.

<sup>3</sup> Note that as a consistent materialist, Marx tended vigorously to reject the formulation of 'recipes (Comtist ones?) for the cook-shops of the future' (Marx 1976g, p. 99). In other words, he refused time and again to elaborate on the *actual concrete forms* that social life would take under the free association of individuals or communism. However, this did not prevent him from grasping the *most general or simplest* determinations of the social form that constitutes the determinate negation of the capitalist mode of production in the only way available to an individual living before the emergence of the material conditions for the abolition of capital, i.e. as an objective potentiality.

<sup>4</sup> Marx 1993, pp. 611–12. This crucial passage has not generally caught the attention of Marxists.

The interesting and ‘intriguing’ aspect of this passage is that Marx claims not only that in order to be really free labour must become a consciously organised, directly social activity, but also that the consciousness regulating that emancipated productive activity must be of a *general* and *scientific* kind.<sup>5</sup> As we shall see later, this latter attribute, scarcely mentioned by Marx on other occasions,<sup>6</sup> will prove to be of paramount importance for the comprehension of the concrete determinations of revolutionary subjectivity; a task that Marx himself achieved, although not without tensions and ambiguities. At this stage, I would just like to reformulate the question of the relation between capital and productive subjectivity posed above in light of that passage from the *Grundrisse*. Does the development of capital transform human productive subjectivity in such a way as to engender the necessity of producing the latter with the two general attributes mentioned by Marx? Furthermore, is the working class the material subject bearing them?

I think that the answer to these questions lies at the basis of any attempt to develop a materialist account of the determinations of revolutionary subjectivity. It is a question not just of the mere will to radically ‘change the world’, but of the concrete *material powers* to do so. In this final chapter, then, I discuss the way in which Marx, through the dialectical exposition of the contradictory movement of the real subsumption, actually presented the genesis of the revolutionary subject, thereby determining the critique of political economy as the proletariat’s self-consciousness of the *alienated* social necessity of its political action.

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An exception can be found in Schmidt (1971, pp. 143–4), who offers an interesting discussion of the determinations of emancipated labour.

- 5 The Nicolaus translation of that passage of *Grundrisse* is not uncontroversial. The ‘general’ character of labour that is really free is Nicolaus’s English choice of word for ‘allgemeine Arbeit’. However, a passage of Volume III of *Capital* in which Marx also refers to scientific labour as ‘allgemeine Arbeit’ (Marx 1991, p. 199) is translated by Fernbach as ‘universal labour’. This latter translation seems preferable in light of the argument developed in this chapter. Besides, it is to be noted that ‘das Allgemeine’ is the term that Hegel uses in his *Logic* to refer to ‘the universal’. See Inwood 1992, pp. 302–3.
- 6 See, however, Marx’s remarks in the *Paris Manuscripts* on the need for the constitution of ‘natural science of man’ or ‘human natural science’ as the basis for emancipated human practice (Marx 1992, p. 355).



### The Production of Relative Surplus Value: General Determinations

With the determinations unfolded so far in this reconstruction of *Capital*, i.e. with the material conditions of production and the value of labour power taken as a given presupposition, the valorisation of capital can only expand through the increase in the amount of labour that it sets into motion. This, in turn, can only be achieved by the lengthening of the working day and/or by the increment of the number of workers exploited. I have already mentioned how the physical and social limits to the duration of the working day are asserted in the concrete form of the class struggle.<sup>7</sup> The extension of number of wage workers option has its 'mathematical limits' determined by the growth of the working population.<sup>8</sup> These barriers to the production of surplus value are transcended by capital by giving its valorisation the concrete form of the production of relative surplus value.

The revolution in the material conditions of the social process of production, and the consequent *real subsumption* of labour under the rule of capital, constitutes the general determination of the production of relative surplus value. In its different forms, the production of relative surplus value consists in the transformation of the materiality of the labour process (and, crucially for my argument, *in the subjectivity of the wage labourers*) in order to raise the productivity of labour and, therefore, reduce the value of labour power and increase the rate of surplus value. In this way, capital internalises the determination of that which, up to this stage, existed as an external condition for its power of self-valorisation, namely, the magnitude of variable capital. Notice that I am not referring here just to an abstract increase in the productivity of social labour unilaterally taken in its quantitative determination, i.e. as the development of the capacity to produce more use values with the same amount of labour. As we shall immediately see, the key to this development lies in its specific *qualitative* aspect (which obviously entails a quantitative determination as well), consisting in the advance of the productive co-operation of the labourers through simple co-operation, the division of labour of manufacture and the automatic system of machinery of large-scale industry.

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7 Besides, the extension of the working day would reach its absolute limit at the point of determining the whole 24 hours of the day as a means of producing surplus value. See Marx 1976g, p. 419.

8 Marx 1976g, p. 442.

### Co-operation and Capital's *raison d'être* in the Historical Process

In simple co-operation, the free wage labourer must apply her/his consciousness and will to the realisation of her/his individual productive activity which, as with the independent artisan, still involves the production of the commodity in its entirety. However, insofar as she/he is *doubly* free, she/he must do so in the conditions imposed by the direct relation established with the capitalist (to whom she/he freely sold her/his labour power) within the immediate process of production. On the other hand, the capitalist is able to transform her/his money into capital because she/he employs not just one wage labourer, but a relatively large number of them. Thus, the possession by the capitalist of a certain magnitude of capital becomes a material condition for the realisation of this social production process.<sup>9</sup>

The labour of these numerous workers working 'together side by side in accordance with a plan, whether in the same process, or in different but connected processes' takes the form of *co-operation*.<sup>10</sup> *Simple* co-operation, the mere agglomeration of the individual wage labourers under the same roof, produces a first transformation in their labour process by determining them as members of a collective productive organism, a collective labourer.<sup>11</sup> The initial *formal* expression of this is the objective constitution of the expenditure of the labour power of the co-operating labourers as *average social labour*.<sup>12</sup> However, beyond this formal aspect and the aforementioned constitution of a collective labourer, the materiality of the individual human productive subjectivity of the workers qualitatively remains the same as in pre-capitalist forms of handicraft labour. As Marx puts it, these developments in the process of production of human life derived from simple co-operation do not entail any major 'alteration in the method of work' itself.<sup>13</sup>

And yet, a *material* revolution in the conditions of the labour process does take place: simple co-operation gives the free wage labourers' labour process a *directly social character*. In the first instance, Marx notes, this mainly affects the objective conditions of the production process, which start to be consumed in common, thereby resulting in the economy in the use of means of production.<sup>14</sup>

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9 Marx 1976g, p. 448.

10 Marx 1976g, p. 443.

11 As Marx points out, co-operation is the 'fundamental form of the capitalist mode of production', whereas simple co-operation is its most abstract form (Marx 1976g, p. 454).

12 Marx 1976g, pp. 440–1.

13 Marx 1976g, pp. 441.

14 Marx 1976g, pp. 441–2.

But, in addition, the directly social character of the labour process reacts on the subjective factor as well. Although the productive subjectivity of each worker remains unaltered, the productive powers of human labour do suffer a development. First, the human individual being a social animal, through this co-operation the productive powers of social labour are enhanced so that the worker 'strips off the fetters of his individuality, and develops the capabilities of his species'.<sup>15</sup> Secondly, not only do the workers develop their individual productive powers, but also a directly social potency is created, 'a new productive power, which is intrinsically a collective one'.<sup>16</sup>

The significance of all this cannot be overestimated. For even these simplest determinations of the real subsumption suffice to put us, for the first time in this reconstruction of Marx's dialectical exposition, before an all-important aspect of the critique of political economy. I am referring to the discovery of the *material specificity* of capital. In effect, one of the central questions addressed by Marx's presentation in Chapter 13 of *Capital* is to show that, as a social form, capital not only entails a formal specificity – the inversion of human powers as powers of the product of labour – but also a material one. Or rather, it involves a specific material determination that can only develop through a specific social form. More concretely, *capital is the social form that transforms the productive powers of free but isolated individual labour into powers of directly and consciously organised social labour*.<sup>17</sup>

As Marx points out, co-operation in the production process can be found in earlier social forms of the reproduction of human life. However, those forms presuppose a very weak development of the individuality of the human producer, either because they are based on the common ownership of the conditions of production and on an individual who 'has as little torn himself free from the umbilical cord of his tribe or community as a bee has from his hive', or, alternatively, because they 'rest on direct relations of domination and servitude, in

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15 Marx 1976g, p. 447.

16 Marx 1976g, p. 443.

17 Strictly speaking, Marx's exposition encounters a first manifestation of this immanent self-negation of the productive powers of private labour when discovering the doubling of the commodity producer into capitalist and wage labourer. As we have seen, already in Chapter 7 Marx shows how the capitalist acts as the productive consciousness of the unity of the worker's activity in the direct process of production. In other words, already at that stage the dialectical presentation reveals that private labour as the general social relation actually involves a situation in which a personally free individual directly organises the labour of another personally free human being within each private fragment of social labour.

most cases on slavery'.<sup>18</sup> Capitalist co-operation, on the contrary, presupposes a degree of development of the productive individuality of the labourer historically 'attaining classical form' in the form of the *freedom and independence* of the *isolated* individual labour of the peasant and the artisan, i.e. on the basis of the *dissolution* of all relations of personal dependence.<sup>19</sup> As Marx puts it when summarising at the end of Volume 1 the essence of the historical tendency of capital accumulation,

[t]he private property of the labourer in his means of production is the foundation of petty industry, whether agricultural, manufacturing, or both; petty industry, again, is an essential condition for the development of social production and of the free individuality of the labourer himself ...<sup>20</sup>

At this juncture it is necessary to emphasise that the mode of existence of social labour as private labour is not simply a juridical form referring to the fragmentation of the property of means of production (though that is certainly its *simplest* juridical expression).<sup>21</sup> But neither should it be understood as an abstract atomisation of social production unilaterally seen from an exclusively formal point of view, i.e. as just another social form of the production process

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18 Marx 1976g, p. 452.

19 Marx 1993, p. 156. That is why Marx centres the great bulk of his exposition of primitive accumulation and of the historical tendency of capitalist accumulation in the (violent) expropriation of the independent agricultural producer, which 'forms the basis of the whole process' (Marx 1976g, p. 876), instead of elaborating on the 'direct transformation of slaves and serfs into wage-labourers', which is a 'mere change of form' in the exploitation of the direct producers (Marx 1976g, p. 927). It is the former transition that condenses the essential material content of the social transformation at stake, i.e. the specific historical powers of the capital form in the development of human productive subjectivity. This point is completely overlooked by those formalistic approaches that reduce the capital form to a relation of power and struggle. Thus, to Holloway, the essence of the genesis of the capitalist mode of production is best captured as the process of conversion of the serf into a wage labourer (Holloway 2002b, pp. 180–3), i.e. as the 'mere change of form' of exploitation of the direct producers. The *raison d'être* of capital in the materiality of human (pre)history is simply left out of the picture.

20 Marx 1976g, p. 927.

21 As Chattopadhyay (1996) notes, in the classic works of Soviet Marxism (including Lenin, Trotsky, Bukharin and Preobrazhensky) there was a noticeable tendency to conceive of the social relations of production as primarily *juridical*. The 'juridicist' ideological representation can also be found in Kautsky (1978).

of humanity that constitutes the present-day objective conditions in which human individuals exercise their naturally free productive consciousness. As a social form, the private character of labour must be understood in its essential determination as a mode of development of the material productive forces of society borne by individual labour, i.e. of human productive subjectivity. Hence the simplest form determination of private and independent labours discussed in Chapter 5: the absolute *material* capacity consciously to rule the individual character of labour, with no control of its general social character. In other words, private labour as a social form must be comprehended in relation to the *individually borne material powers of human beings* consciously to organise their socially determined transformative action upon the natural environment, i.e. the productive consciousness of human beings as working subjects.

It follows from this that if human beings invert their social powers as the value form of the product of labour, it is because they have developed the individual character of their productive powers to a degree that cannot be further expanded under relations of personal dependence. However, the other side of this coin is that they have not yet created the universality of the material powers needed to regulate their social reproduction in a fully conscious form either. This is why the product of their social labour still confronts them as an alien power in the form of capital and the material development of their productive subjectivity takes the form of the production of relative surplus value.

But it is an insipid notion to conceive of this merely *objective bond* as a spontaneous, natural attribute inherent in individuals and inseparable from their nature (in antithesis to their conscious knowing and willing). This bond is their product. It is a historic product. It belongs to a specific phase of their development. The alien and independent character in which it presently exists *vis-à-vis* individuals proves only that the latter are still engaged in the creation of the conditions of their social life, and that they have not yet begun, on the basis of these conditions, to live it.<sup>22</sup>

It is the socialisation of that historical form of free labour – necessarily realised through the alienated value form of the product of labour and through the relative mutilation of that individuality imposed by the second sense of the freedom of the wage labourer – that constitutes the *raison d'être* of capital in the history of the development of the powers of the human species. Although

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22 Marx 1993, p. 162.

capital is the historical producer of the powers of directly social labour, it achieves this by subordinating direct productive co-operation to the autonomised movement of social life alienated as an attribute of the material product of labour. In other words, those powers are developed by determining directly social labour as a concrete form of development of the powers of private labour, i.e. as a mode of existence of capital's self-valorisation through the production of relative surplus value.<sup>23</sup> The movement of self-valorisation constitutes capital's *formal specificity*, the necessary social form in which the aforementioned *material* transformation of the production process of human life is historically achieved.<sup>24</sup>

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23 In other words, those productive powers are developed by determining personally free subjectivity as a concrete form of its alienated determination. Or, to grasp it from a different angle, by determining the organisation of social labour in the form of direct (i.e. conscious) social relations in the immediate process of production as a concrete form of the essentially *indirect general organisation* of social labour through the valorisation of capital.

24 The material specificity of the concrete forms of production of relative surplus value has been generally ignored by orthodox Marxism, which tended to reduce the problem to a question of who manages those very forms of the labour process. A classic example of this is Lenin's (1971) claim, after the Russian Revolution, that Taylorism could provide in its immediacy the material forms of the labour process for a socialist society (for a brief account of the evolution of Lenin's changing views of Taylorism throughout his writings, see Scoville 2001). However, it is not just a question of simply noting the specifically capitalist character of the labour process and concluding that they cannot immediately provide the basis for a communist society, as many Marxists have done in opposition to the orthodox uncritical silence on this issue (just to name a few classic works from very different heterodox traditions, see Braverman 1998; Dunayevskaya 1988; Panzieri 1980). The crux of the matter resides in grasping the *relative historical necessity* of those material forms, which certainly express the alienated domination of capital over labour, as a *vanishing* moment in the process of development of human productive subjectivity and, hence, in the production of the necessity of their own supersession. See Marx 1993, pp. 831–2. This, on the other hand, cannot but be overlooked if the critique of capital-determined technology is reduced to the representation of this technological form as a simple weapon in the class struggle, i.e. as an attempt by capitalists to re-impose discipline on the labour process when faced with the insubordination of workers, with capitalist control in turn achieved through the arbitrary imposition of divisions and hierarchies (Cleaver 1979, pp. 109–14, and 1982; Holloway 1991). Seen in this light, the capitalist form of the production process of human life is represented as having no necessity other than an abstract power relation between capitalist and worker in the immediate process of production. Eventually, the logic of such an approach must lead to the very abandonment of the specific notion of the capitalist process of production as the unity of the labour process and the valorisation process, and to its replacement with the abstract unity of the 'technique of production' and

Just as the social productive power of labour that is developed by co-operation appears to be the productive power of capital, so co-operation itself, contrasted with the process of production carried on by isolated independent producers, or even by small masters, appears to be a specific form of the capitalist process of production. It is the first change experienced by the actual labour process when subjected to capital ... This starting point coincides with the birth of capital itself. If then, on the one hand, the capitalist mode of production is a historically necessary condition for the transformation of the labour process into a social process, so, on the other hand, this social form of the labour process is a method employed by capital for the more profitable exploitation of labour, by increasing its productive power.<sup>25</sup>

The significance of this *twofold* character of capital's historical specificity (*social and material*) cannot be overestimated. In effect, overlooking this material determination can only result in depriving the working class of the historical specificity of its revolutionary powers, thus making it impossible to distinguish

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'technique of dominating those who are producing' (Gorz 1976, p. viii). See also Marglin (1974) and Brighton Labour Process Group (1977) for other examples of extrinsic juxtaposition of power relations and technical forms. For a critique of this kind of approach, see Reinfelder (1980). This perspective actually renders inexplicable the historical specificity of the material forms of the production of relative surplus value. To begin with, it cannot account for the fact that 'co-operation remains the fundamental form of the capitalist mode of production' (Marx 1976g, p. 454). And secondly, as we shall see below, it cannot account for the universal productive subjectivity that such co-operation eventually entails when taking the form of large-scale industry. If the inner motive of capital were to 'dominate workers', it would quite simply refrain from introducing technical changes that under certain circumstances might actually enhance workers' solidarity and that, eventually, lead to its own supersession. But as self-valorising value, capital has no other purpose than producing surplus value, the most potent form of which is the increase in the productivity of labour. In reality, those approaches actually conflate two distinct determinations, both mentioned by Marx in the same section of *Capital*, pertaining, as it were, to different levels of abstraction, namely, the determination of the materiality of the production process as a concrete mode of existence of capital's production of relative surplus value (Marx 1976g, pp. 553–62) – the content – and the deliberate use of machinery by the capitalist as a weapon in the class struggle over the value of labour power (Marx 1976g, pp. 562–3) – the mediating concrete form. The necessity of those material forms is grounded in capital's immanent drive to produce relative surplus value. The class struggle is certainly a necessary mediation in such an alienated development of the productive powers of humanity, but it does not determine it.

25 Marx 1976g, p. 453.

the proletarian revolution, i.e. the political form taken by the fully conscious organisation of the social production process of human life, from the revolt of slaves against the personal domination of their owner.<sup>26</sup>

In a nutshell, Marx's uncovering of this twofold determination of capital constitutes the first step – but *only* the first step – in the reproduction in thought of the material genesis of the revolutionary subject. On the one hand, we can appreciate now that the conscious organisation of the immediate production process of human life is not, as it appeared when we were before the most abstract determinations of social life synthesised in the commodity form, the abstract negation of our present-day general social relation. However, the determinations unfolded so far also carry a *limit* to the expansion of directly social labour, thereby still determining it as a concrete form of the historical development of the powers of its opposite: private labour.

In effect, although the constitution of simple co-operation represents a step forward in the organisation of human life as a directly collective potency, this social power is not yet the self-conscious product of the direct association of the producers. Instead, it is set into motion with the previous mediation of the sale of their labour power as independent and isolated individuals to the capitalist. Therefore, since 'their co-operation only begins with the labour process, but by

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26 See De Angelis (1995) and Holloway (2002b) for examples of such a formalistic understanding of capital. In a way, one could argue that these approaches ultimately remain refined versions of what Loren Goldner in the early 1980s insightfully noted concerning not just twentieth-century 'official Marxism' (broadly conceived to include authors as diverse as Lenin, Bukharin, Baran, Sweezy, Bettelheim), but also 'Western Marxist' currents such as the Frankfurt School, namely, the comprehension of 'capitalism ... not [as] a system of valorization, but [as] a system of power', according to which 'capital ceased to be a dynamic and was transformed into a "hierarchy"' (Goldner 1981). The consequence of this is, as Goldner comments concerning 'Monopoly Capital' theory, the production of a theory which ceases to be 'about forces and relations of production', and becomes 'a *sociological* theory of hierarchy and oppression, the balance of forces between the classes in question being a question of struggle and will' (Goldner 1981). Whilst the approaches that constitute the explicit target of Goldner's critique tended directly to ignore the general determination of capital as value-in-process, the interesting thing about works such as those of De Angelis and Holloway referred to above is how they relapse into the same reduction of the critique of political economy to a sociological theory of oppression, *while* at the same time paying lip-service to the categories of Marx's *Capital*. See Goldner (2001, pp. 2–3) for suggestive reflections on the historical conjuncture underpinning this cultural mood of 'middle-class radicalism', which, unlike the Marxian notion of freedom as the fully conscious transformation of necessity, 'conceives of freedom as "transgression", as the breaking of laws, the "refusal of all constraints"'.



then they have ceased to belong to themselves',<sup>27</sup> and their labour now belongs to capital, all the productive powers of labour that spring from the social combination of the workers are transformed into attributes of capital. In their very corporeality as working subjects, i.e. in the materiality of their productive subjectivity, the labourers 'merely form a particular mode of existence of capital' in its movement of valorisation.<sup>28</sup> What is more, not only are those directly social productive powers of co-operation inverted as an attribute of the wage workers' materialised social relation, but its conscious organisation is not even exercised by them but by the immediate personification of self-valorising value, namely, the capitalist. Inasmuch as it is through her/his consciousness and will that the now collective conditions required for the wage labourers' individual labours to take place are posited, the capitalist becomes the conscious incarnation of the direct organisation of the social character of the labour of the group of workers under her/his command. For the workers, this social character thus appears in the ideal form of a 'plan drawn up by the capitalist, and, in practice, as his authority, as the powerful will of a being outside them, who subjects their activity to his purpose'.<sup>29</sup> On the other hand, inasmuch as it is not only oriented to the production of a use value but to the valorisation of capital through the production of surplus value – i.e. through the exploitation of labour – the direction of this process by the capitalist takes a despotic form.<sup>30</sup>

The determinations of simple co-operation thereby seem to intensify the power of the capitalist over the worker in the antagonistic direct relationship that they establish in the immediate process of production. This power is not simply the formal result of the separation of the labourer from the objective conditions of labour. Inasmuch as the capitalist concentrates the 'work of directing, superintending and adjusting the co-operative labour of wage-workers',<sup>31</sup> her/his command becomes a *material* prerequisite of the labour process itself. As Marx puts it, 'that a capitalist should command in the field of production is now as indispensable as that a general should command on the field of the battle'.<sup>32</sup> The dependence of the wage labourers upon capital now starts to be expressed even in relation to the materiality of the production process. Far from moving in the direction of the determination of the working

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27 Marx 1976g, p. 451.

28 Ibid.

29 Marx 1976g, p. 450.

30 Ibid.

31 Marx 1976g, p. 449.

32 Marx 1976g, p. 448.

class as a revolutionary subject, these developments seem to deepen the latter's subjection to the alienated movement of capital's valorisation.

And yet, the very same alienated form of their co-operation that, furthermore, strengthens the power of the capitalist, engenders a countertendency which presses in the opposite direction to the unchecked imposition of capitalist discipline. In effect, by putting the workers together under the same roof, capital facilitates the establishment of the relations of solidarity through which, as we have seen in the previous chapter, the workers attempt to restrict the consumption of their labour power by the capitalist.<sup>33</sup> However, Marx immediately adds, this intensified resistance does not yet express an absolute limit to the development of the alienation inherent in the capital form. It only increases 'the pressure put on by capital to overcome this resistance'<sup>34</sup> through the development of the despotism of capitalist command in the forms that are peculiar to it.<sup>35</sup> Eventually, capital attempts to break this barrier to its valorisation by revealing 'in practice' that simple co-operation is just one particular figure of the production of relative surplus value 'alongside the more developed ones'.<sup>36</sup>

### **Capitalist Manufacture and the Material Basis of the Class Struggle over the Full Value of Labour Power**

Whatever the historical origins of the production process of capitalist manufacture – i.e. whether it arises from a combination of formerly independent crafts into one collective labour process of a single commodity, or whether its genesis is found in the analytical decomposition of an existing activity into its component parts – the essence of this concrete form of production of relative surplus value consists in the division of the total labour necessary for the production of a determinate use value into particular detail operations. The labour process of an entire commodity now involves the articulation of those differentiated productive functions into a co-ordinated whole. As the resulting different manual tasks involved are assigned to what now become specialised workers, their labour becomes more productive.<sup>37</sup> With this increased productivity of labour, capital's production of relative surplus value is consequently achieved. This increased surplus value is not just the result of the enhanced productivity.

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33 Marx 1976g, p. 449.

34 Ibid.

35 Marx 1976g, p. 450.

36 Marx 1976g, p. 454.

37 Marx 1976g, p. 458.

Since the latter is the result of the simplification of the required necessary skills, the 'expenses of apprenticeship' are reduced (or almost disappear in the case of the unskilled type of labourer also produced by the development of manufacture). This has the additional result of *decreasing the value of labour power*.<sup>38</sup> Moreover, the fixation of the worker in a single form of activity eliminates the time necessary to change from one sort of activity to the other, permitting capital to *increase the intensity of labour*.<sup>39</sup>

These transformations of the productive subjectivity of the individual labourers have their counterpart in the way in which they are articulated organically as part of a single labour process. In other words, those mutations result in the transformation of the determinations of the collective labourer, which actually becomes 'the item of machinery specifically characteristic of the manufacturing period'.<sup>40</sup> The latter no longer consists in the mere agglomeration of individual productive processes under the same roof. It now becomes a complex, directly social body differentiated into qualitatively distinct partial organs. In turn, these transformations not only make the qualitative articulation of the different individual labours a more complex process. They also determine, as a material necessity of the labour process, the establishment of a quantitative proportionality between the qualitatively different partial organs of the collective labourer. The individual labour of the workers in itself ceases to be productive of commodities. This attribute now belongs to the integration of those particular and partial labours, i.e. to the collective labourer as such.<sup>41</sup> The immediately social character of the production process within the workshop is thus no longer limited to the positing of its objective conditions, but reaches the labouring activity itself, a point that Marx brings out by comparing the determinations of the organisation of the fragment of social labour under the command of an individual capitalist with the general organisation of social labour through the commodity form across society.<sup>42</sup> Furthermore, since the renewal of the production of relative surplus value involves the further development of the division of labour within the workshop, it becomes a law of the valorisation of capital that the number of partial organs comprising the collective labourer – and hence the conscious organisation of social labour – must keep extending.<sup>43</sup>

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38 Marx 1976g, p. 470.

39 Marx 1976g, p. 460.

40 Marx 1976g, p. 468.

41 Marx 1976g, pp. 469, 475.

42 Marx 1976g, pp. 475–7.

43 Marx 1976g, p. 480.

In this way, capital makes another step forward in the realisation of its civilising mission. However, it still does so by determining directly social labour as a concrete form of development of the powers of private – hence alienated – labour, so that ‘anarchy in the social division of labour and despotism in the manufacturing of labour mutually condition each other’.<sup>44</sup> As happened with simple co-operation, all the emerging powers of social labour deriving from this more developed form of human productive co-operation are turned into attributes of capital in its process of self-expansion through the production of relative surplus value.<sup>45</sup> But the subsumption of the powers of living labour under the rule of capital is now not only expressed in that formal inversion between subject and object of social production. With the manufacturing division of labour, the alienated development of the powers of social labour is achieved through the deepening of the material mutilation or degradation of the individual productive subjectivity of wage labourers. As a consequence, this process gives the conscious organisation of social labour within the workshop a *specifically capitalist character*, not only because of its determination as the material bearer of the valorisation of capital and, hence, as an attribute despotically exercised by the capitalist, but by virtue of the materiality of the production process itself. In effect, the specialisation of the worker in a single operation means that a one-sided aspect of human personality is developed, undermining all the potential universality of human productive capacities. The wage labourer thus becomes a fragmented individual. If with simple co-operation the productive subjectivity (hence activity) of the worker formally became a *mode of existence* of capital, now her/his *corporeality as a working subject*, in its very materiality, becomes a *result* of the production of relative surplus value.

While simple cooperation leaves the mode of the individual’s labour for the most part unchanged, manufacture thoroughly revolutionizes it, and seizes labour-power by its roots. It converts the worker into a crippled monstrosity by furthering his particular skill as in a forcing-house, through the suppression of the whole world of productive drives and inclinations, just as in the states of La Plata they butcher a whole

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44 Marx 1976g, p. 477. This point about the ‘inner connection’ between the general unconscious regulation of social life through the valorisation of capital and the despotic nature of the conscious plan inside the workshop (later on, the factory) has been correctly emphasised by Dunayevskaya and her followers against the uncritical celebration of the latter by orthodox Marxists (Dunayevskaya 1988; Hudis 1998, p. 103).

45 Marx 1976g, p. 486.

beast for the sake of his hide or his tallow. Not only is the specialized work distributed among the different individuals, but the individual himself is divided up, and transformed into the automatic motor of a detail operation, thus realizing the absurd fable of Menenius Agrippa, which presents man as a mere fragment of his own body.<sup>46</sup>

The directly social powers of the collective labourer are thus developed *at the expense* of the productive attributes of the individual worker.<sup>47</sup> This specifically capitalist concrete form of human labour power means that the direct producer actually further *loses* the productive consciousness of the unity of the labour process of the entire commodity – now immediately social within the workshop – which the simple commodity producer still preserved. The productive consciousness of the unity of the collective labourer becomes an attribute personified by the capitalist, the workers only keeping conscious control of the ever more partial individual activity under their responsibility, now only a fragment of the total labour process of the determinate use value at stake.

The knowledge, the judgement, and the will, which, even though to a small extent, are exercised by the independent peasant or handicraftsman, in the same way as the savage makes the whole art of war consist in the exercise of his personal cunning, are faculties now required only for the workshop as a whole. The possibility of an intelligent direction in production expands in one direction, because it vanishes in many others. What is lost by the specialized workers, is concentrated in the capital that confronts them. It is a result of the division of labour in manufacture that the worker is brought face to face with the intellectual potentialities [*geistige Potenzen*] of the material process of production as the property of another and as a power that rules over him. This process of separation starts in simple co-operation, where the capitalist represents to individual workers the unity and the will of the whole body of social labour. It is developed in manufacture, which mutilates the worker, turning him into a fragment of himself. It is completed in large-scale industry, which makes science a potentiality for production which is distinct from labour and presses it into the service of capital.<sup>48</sup>

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46 Marx 1976g, pp. 481–2.

47 Marx 1976g, p. 483.

48 Marx 1976g, p. 482.

In this process, the alienation of the human powers of the labourer as attributes of capital reaches a further stage. What the workers lose with their subjection to the manufacturing division of labour is that specific human attribute that, as Marx discusses in Chapter 7 of *Capital* but had claimed as early as in the 1844 *Manuscripts*, distinguishes the human form of the appropriation of the forces of nature from its animal form, namely, the 'spiritual powers' of the production process or the conscious capacity to organise its rationality and purpose. Concerning the total labour process in which the workers take part, that which 'distinguishes the worst architect from the best of bees'<sup>49</sup> is stripped of their productive subjectivity. In this specifically material sense, capital is thus an *inhuman* social form of development of human productive powers.<sup>50</sup>

The subordination of workers to the rule of capital and the dependence of the production process on the direction of the capitalist that already started to appear with simple co-operation is thereby intensified in the division of labour of manufacture. The conversion of the worker into 'the automatic motor of a detail operation' means that the wage labourer not only has to sell her/his labour power for not possessing the objective means necessary for exercising her/his subjective productive capacities. The crippling of her/his productive abilities means that 'now his own individual labour power withholds its services unless it has been sold to capital'.<sup>51</sup> The worker whose labour power is now the product of the production of relative surplus value does not even know how to produce an entire commodity by herself/himself. She/he becomes increasingly forced to sell her/his labour power to capital as the only means to reproduce her/his life.

And yet, these very same determinations, which appear to weaken the workers' resistance to capital's restless striving for relative surplus value, engender a barrier to this affirmation of the materialised social relation as the concrete subject of the process of production of human life. The key to the comprehension of this contradiction immanent in capital's valorisation process lies in the very essence defining the division of labour of manufacture:

Whether complex or simple, each operation has to be done by hand, retains the character of a handicraft, and is therefore dependent on the

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49 Marx 1976g, p. 284.

50 This inhumanity reaches its extreme with capital's production of a relative surplus population, comprising the workers who are literally prevented from the exercise of their own species being.

51 Marx 1976g, p. 482.

strength, skill, quickness and sureness with which the individual worker manipulates his tools.<sup>52</sup>

In other words, the production process of manufacture still depends on the crucial intervention of the handicraft expertise of the labourer. The structure of co-operation is purely subjective, gaining articulation only through the bodily motion of the individual workers as the fundamental material subjects of that collective labour process. The fluidity of the labour process (hence, of the valorisation process which it sustains) depends on the willingness of individual workers to act as partial organs of the collective labourer. Hence, this lack of 'an objective framework independent of the workers themselves'<sup>53</sup> as the foundation of manufacture provides a *material basis* for an empowered resistance of workers in the antagonistic relation they establish with capital.<sup>54</sup> This material basis, however, does not yet provide the class struggle with a different *qualitative* determination other than being the concrete form which secures the realisation of the full value of labour power (whether being the form of the expropriation of the bourgeoisie, or being the form of the abolition of capital). It only increases the *magnitude* of the force borne by the working class in its political action.<sup>55</sup> Thus, the insubordination of the workers constitutes an obstacle to the valorisation of capital which does not yet express the need for the development of the productive powers of social labour to transcend its alienated form as production of relative surplus value. As Marx makes clear, it only forces the latter to develop into a concrete form which undermines that material basis underlying the said obstacles to the domination of capital, namely, the system of machinery.

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52 Marx 1976g, p. 458.

53 Marx 1976g, p. 489.

54 Marx 1976g, p. 490. Note, however, that this material basis also engenders a countertendency to that increased political force through the fragmentation of workers caused by their insertion into a wage hierarchy revolving around skills.

55 The relevance of this determination is not confined to the historical comprehension of the now very distant past used by Marx as illustration in *Capital*. It is crucial, for instance, to understand the peculiar political power of the workers during the so-called Fordist cycle of accumulation (Iñigo Carrera 2008, pp. 63–4). In effect, especially concerning the production of machinery itself, and however degraded the productive subjectivity of workers, Fordist methods still involved the subordination of the adjustment and calibration of machines and even the assembling process itself to the manual skills of labourers.

One of its [manufacture's] most finished products was the workshop for the production of the instruments of labour themselves, and particularly the complicated pieces of mechanical apparatus already being employed ... This workshop, the product of the division of labour in manufacture, produced in its turn – machines. It is machines that abolish the role of the handicraftsman as the regulating principle of social production. Thus, on the one hand, the technical reason for the lifelong attachment of the worker to a partial function is swept away. On the other hand, the barriers placed in the way of the domination of capital by this same regulating principle now also fall.<sup>56</sup>

As we can see, the form of manufacture taken by the immediate production process further develops the contradictions and tendencies immanent in the movement of capital as alienated subject which were insinuated by the determinations of simple co-operation. In the first place, both capital's world-historical role in the development of the species powers of humanity and its contradictory march forward in the historical process of its realisation acquire a clearer expression. Thus, in giving an immediately social character not only to the 'objective factor' of the labour process but also to the 'subjective factor', capital shows its historical tendency to produce at least the first of the two general attributes of productive subjectivity which, as mentioned in the introduction, are crucial for the constitution of 'really free working' (and hence for the abolition of capital itself). However, the division of labour of manufacture also reveals the contradictory form in which that process unfolds. In the first place, the socialisation of labour is still achieved by formally determining immediately social labour as a concrete form of the self-movement of valorisation of capital. But additionally, this contradiction acquires a further *material* expression in the mutilation of the individual character of the productive subjectivity of wage labourers, which is revealed as a historical mediation in the production of direct producers with the material powers consciously to organise their social life process as a fully self-conscious collective labour power.

In the second place, we can now appreciate more clearly that the determinations of the class struggle over the value of labour power are not exhausted in the *formal* subsumption of labour to capital. If one stops short at that level of abstraction as developed in Chapter 10 of *Capital*, the appearance arises that the balance of class forces – and so, for instance, the duration of the working day – is purely contingent. However, Marx's discussion of simple co-operation

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56 Marx 1976g, p. 491.



and, even more so, of the division of labour of manufacture, makes evident that there is a *material basis* for the respective political power of each class in struggle.<sup>57</sup> Thus, the further unfolding of the determinations of the valorisation of capital reveals that the materiality of the forms of the *real* subsumption of labour to capital *mediate* not only the transformative power of the workers' political action determined as the form of *capital's transcendence* (a point I have been anticipating but still need to prove), but also that of its role as moment of *capital's reproduction*.<sup>58</sup>

I have followed the transformations of the collective labourer brought about by capital through the first two forms of existence of the production of relative surplus value, namely, simple co-operation and the division of labour of manufacture. From the perspective of the development of the revolutionary subjectivity of the working class, these changes in the materiality of social life still do not equip the workers with the material powers to abolish capital synthesised in the two general productive attributes necessary for 'really free working' mentioned in the introduction. Although their individual labours increasingly become directly social, their work of material production is evidently *not* of a 'scientific and general character'. First, the very 'technically narrow basis' of manufacture – i.e. handicraft – 'excludes a really scientific divi-

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57 In those two chapters, Marx refers to the resistance of workers in general. Specifically concerning the length of the working day, the plenitude of this determination becomes manifest in the chapter on machinery and large-scale industry. As I have mentioned in the previous chapter, in the chapter on large-scale industry Marx shows without ambiguity that the *material* determination behind the normal duration of the working day lies in the inverse relation between its length and the intensity of labour. Grossmann, in the final considerations to *The Law of Accumulation and Breakdown of the Capitalist System* (unpublished in the abridged English translation), correctly highlights the direct relation between the intensification of labour and the increase in the value of labour power, thus showing (in opposition to Kautsky, Luxemburg and Bukharin) the existence of a material determination underlying the success of working class struggles over real wages (Grossmann 1979, pp. 374–84).

58 More generally, this also can serve to illustrate once again the importance of the dialectical method as the 'reproduction of the concrete by means of thought'. Here we can appreciate very clearly why we can see through all appearances presented by a determinate social form (in this case, the class struggle) only by grasping it in the *totality* of its determinations, i.e. by making the full, laborious journey from the abstract to the concrete. Laziness and/or hastiness of thought thereby translates into impotence to fully comprehend and hence transform the concrete; which, as Marx reminds us in the *Grundrisse*, is such precisely for being 'the concentration of many determinations, hence the unity of the diverse' (Marx 1993, p. 101).

sion of the production process into its component parts'.<sup>59</sup> Secondly, far from developing workers with *general* productive attributes, we have seen that manufacture involves an individual labour of a *particularistic* kind.<sup>60</sup> The search for the determinations of revolutionary subjectivity must therefore carry on. Let us then turn to Marx's discussion of large-scale industry and see if those determinations are contained there.

### Large-Scale Industry and Workers' Productive Subjectivity in *Capital*

As I have been arguing, the guiding thread running through Marx's exposition of the concrete forms of production of relative surplus value resides in the revolutions to which capital subjects the productive subjectivity of the doubly free labourer as the means for the multiplication of its power of self-valorisation. However, it is not there that Marx's presentation of the determinations of large-scale industry begins. The reason for this derives from the very starting point of the production of relative surplus value through the system of machinery characterising large-scale industry. As Marx points out, if in manufacture the point of departure of the transformation of the material conditions of social labour was productive subjectivity as such (with the transformation of the instrument of labour, in the form of a specialisation, determined as a result of the former), in large-scale industry the transformation of the instrument of labour constitutes the starting point, the transformation of the wage labourer being its result.<sup>61</sup>

Marx presents the essence of this transformation of the human labour process by developing the specific materiality of machinery, in particular vis-à-vis the labour process in manufacture. In reality, the simplest determination of

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59 Marx 1976g, p. 458.

60 The constitution of a section of unskilled labourers in manufacture, that is, of workers whose speciality is the lack of all specialisation (Marx 1976g, p. 470), does constitute a first insinuation of the emergence of labourers with universal productive attributes. However, this universality is not the expression of an expanded productive subjectivity of wage labourers, but of an absolute degradation. Moreover, the number of unskilled universal workers required by manufacture remains relatively small, the essence of the latter being expressed mainly in workers with particularistic development of their productive attributes. Universal workers, on the contrary, are the most genuine product of the system of machinery.

61 Marx 1976g, p. 492.

that difference was already anticipated by Marx in the transition contained in the previous chapter of *Capital*, where the necessity of the development of machinery was laid bare. I am referring to capital's need to do away with the subjective basis of manufacture through the development of an 'objective framework' for material production, independent of the manual expertise and immediate practical knowledge of workers. In brief, it is about giving an objective form to the powers of social labour springing from direct productive cooperation.<sup>62</sup>

The twofold material specificity of the machine thereby springs from the objectification of both the – however restricted – knowledge and manual skills and strength of the manufacturing labourer. On the one hand, capital strives to substitute the movement of the forces of nature for that of the human hand as the immediate agent in the transformation of the object of labour into a new use value. On the other hand, it attempts to displace the immediate subjective experience of the worker as the basis for the conscious regulation of the labour process, i.e. as the basis for knowledge of the determinations of the latter. This implies, in the first place, the need to turn the production of that knowledge into an activity which, whilst clearly remaining an inner moment of the organisation of social labour, nonetheless acquires a differentiated existence from the immediacy of the direct production process. Coupled with the need to objectify it as a productive power directly borne by the 'dead labour' represented in the machine, that knowledge must necessarily take the general form of *science*. As Marx summarises,

As machinery, the instrument of labour assumes a material mode of existence which necessitates the replacement of human force by natural forces, and the replacement of the rule of thumb by the conscious application of natural science.<sup>63</sup>

We can now start to appreciate how capital advances, for the first time in human (pre)history, in the generalisation of the application of science as an immediate potency of the direct process of production.<sup>64</sup>

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62 Marx 1976g, pp. 490–1.

63 Marx 1976g, p. 508.

64 I say 'generalisation' because capital did not invent natural science. However, by converting science into the general principle of material production, the production of relative surplus value enormously fostered its development and continuous progress. And yet, it can only develop scientific thought within the limits springing from its determination as an alienated social form. I shall come back to this crucial issue below.

The employment of the natural agents – their incorporation so to speak into capital – coincides with the development of *scientific knowledge* as an independent factor in the production process. In the same way as the production process becomes an *application of scientific knowledge*, so, conversely, does science become a factor, a function so to speak, of the production process. Every invention becomes the basis of new inventions or new, improved methods of production. It is the capitalist mode of production which first puts the natural sciences to the service of the direct production process, while, conversely, the development of production provides the means for the theoretical subjugation of nature.<sup>65</sup>

Through this concrete form of production of relative surplus value, capital starts to move in the direction of the social constitution of the second general attribute of productive subjectivity which the coming into existence of ‘really free working’ presupposes, namely, the determination of productive consciousness as scientific, thereby objective, in character. Note, however, that at this stage of the exposition, scientific knowledge does not appear directly as productive activity, but only as already objectified in the form of the machine, that is, simply as a presupposition for the latter’s existence.

Large-scale industry does not only move forward in the constitution of the scientific character of production. It also fosters the deepening of the other material determination of ‘really free working’, that of labour becoming directly social. In effect, with the system of machinery the co-operative character of labour comes to be a presupposition of the actual exercise of productive activity, whose necessity springs from the materiality of the instrument of labour itself. What is more, it is possible to see now that those two general attributes are not extrinsically related, but each one presupposes the other.

Large-industry ... possesses in the machine system an entirely objective organization of production, which confronts the worker as a pre-existing material condition of production ... Machinery, with the few exceptions to be mentioned later, operates only by means of associated labour, or labour in common. Hence the co-operative character of the labour process is in this case a technical necessity dictated by the very nature of the instrument of labour.<sup>66</sup>

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65 Marx 1994, p. 32.

66 Marx 1976g, p. 508.

Thus far, then, these are the fundamental aspects of Marx's exposition of the *material* specificity of the production process of capital based on the system of machinery, i.e. the transformations it suffers in its aspect as a process of production of use values. But the process of production of capital is such for being the unity of the labour process and the valorisation process. Hence, Marx's presentation goes on to develop the specific impact of the system of machinery on the latter, which can be summarised in the following points:

\*As happened with all the productive powers deriving from the exercise of human productive co-operation in an immediately social form (whether in its simple form or through the manufacturing division of labour), the use of scientific discoveries costs capital nothing. They are natural forces of social labour that capital appropriates for free for the purpose of its valorisation.<sup>67</sup>

\*However, the productive consumption of the results of science involves the utilisation of ever more complex and costly means of production in an ever increasing scale. The capitalist appropriation of science thus entails an expanding magnitude of the average capital disbursement necessary to set the production of relative surplus value, springing in this case from the growth of constant capital.<sup>68</sup>

\*This increment in the magnitude of constant capital is evidently reflected in the value of the product. However, the twofold nature of the capitalist production process as the unity of the labour process and the valorisation process means that this reflection is not simple or immediate. Machines do not create value, but living labour transfers their value to the product; and it does so only in proportion to 'its average daily wear and tear'.<sup>69</sup> On the other hand, they enter as a whole in their determination as a material factor of the labour process. This 'difference between the mere utilisation of the instrument and its depreciation',<sup>70</sup> and expression of the powers of the objectification of past labour, is also appropriated gratuitously by capital.

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67 Ibid.

68 Marx 1976g, p. 509.

69 Marx 1976g, p. 510.

70 Marx 1976g, pp. 509–10.

\*However attractive these gratuitous services to capital's valorisation brought about by the introduction of machinery might be, the latter faces a specific limit *stricter* than the generically mercantile one given by the difference between the labour the machine costs and the labour it saves.<sup>71</sup> The reason for this is founded in capital's valorisation taking concrete form through the appropriation of *unpaid* surplus labour. Thus, for the capitalist, the limit to the use of the machine 'is therefore fixed by the difference between the value of the machine and the value of *labour-power* replaced by it'.<sup>72</sup>

With this, Marx's presentation exhausts the novel determinations brought about by the system of machinery to the production process as they pertain to its 'objective factor'. What necessarily follows, then, is the investigation of the impact of these transformations on the 'subjective factor' of the labour process, that is, on the worker.

In the third section of the chapter on large-scale industry, Marx initially presents what he refers to as only 'some general effects' of the system of machinery on the worker, that is, those changes that can be discussed without developing the specific form in which the 'human material is incorporated with this objective organism'.<sup>73</sup> In other words, these are the effects whose development

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71 Marx 1976g, p. 515.

72 Marx 1976g, p. 515, my emphasis. This specifically capitalist limit to the introduction of machinery thus not only evidences the *restricted* character of this alienated social form of development of the material productive forces of society vis-à-vis a classless, communist society (Marx 1976g, p. 515, n. 16) – incidentally, a determination completely overlooked by bourgeois economists who, like Schumpeter and his contemporary disciples (Schumpeter 1934 and 1947; Dosi et al. 1988), make a great fuss about the technological dynamism of the capitalist mode of production. See Smith (2004) for a Marxist critique of Neo-Schumpeterian economics, and Bellofiore (1985) for a comparison between Marx and Schumpeter. In addition, this also sheds light on the contradictory forms in which capital unfolds its nonetheless undeniable dynamism in the development of the productive powers of social labour. As Marx points out, the development of the system of machinery in some branches of industry may create such a surplus labour force in others that capitalists could force down wages below the value of labour power as a source of extra profit, thereby *hindering* the development of the productive forces in those sectors of production (Marx 1976g, p. 516). Finally, this also gives the 'exact demonstration' of the progressive character of the class struggle over the value of labour power as an active force in the development of the productive powers of society and, therefore, in the production of the material conditions for its more concrete determination as the form of the abolition of capital.

73 Marx 1976g, p. 517.

does not involve any new *qualitative* determination in the productive subjectivity of workers. Rather, they refer to the *quantitative* changes that machinery brings about in capital's valorisation process as a process of exploitation of living labour. These include: the quantitative extension of the mass of exploitable labour power through the incorporation of female and child labour; the tendency to prolong the working day; and the tendency to increase the intensive magnitude of the exploitation of human labour.

It is in section 4, through the presentation of the functioning of 'the factory as a whole', that Marx starts to unfold the specific *qualitative* determinations of the productive subjectivity of large-scale industry. The discussion of a passage from Ure serves Marx succinctly to identify the most general determination of the factory as the sphere of capitalist society where the conscious regulation of an immediately social production process takes place. A conscious regulation, however, that is determined as a concrete form of the *inverted general social regulation* as an attribute of the materialised social relation in its process of self-expansion. In the factory – and this is the issue that Ure's definition overlooks – this inverted social existence reaches a further stage in its development by acquiring a 'technical and palpable reality'.<sup>74</sup>

Thus, the scientific conscious regulation of social labour characterising large-scale industry is not an attribute borne by those workers performing direct labour in the immediate production process. For them, those powers exist already objectified in the system of machinery, to whose automatic movement they have to subordinate the exercise of their productive consciousness and will, to the point of becoming 'its living appendages'.<sup>75</sup> Large-scale industry consequently entails an enormous scientific development of the 'intellectual faculties of the production process' only by exacerbating their separation from direct labourers. In its mode of existence as a system of machinery, the product of labour comes to dominate the worker in the direct process of production not only formally but even materially as well. Capital thus appears to those workers as the *concrete material subject* of the production process itself.

As the personification of the system of machinery acting as a material mode of existence of capital, the capitalist represents before the direct labourers the consciousness of the unity of their productive co-operation. The conscious articulation of their directly social labour therefore appears as the product of the capitalist's autocratic will which, given the increasing complexity and scale

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74 Marx 1976g, p. 548.

75 Ibid.

of the co-operative production process under her/his command, acquires an objective form in the factory code and its 'barrack-like discipline'.<sup>76</sup>

With all these elements, we can now turn to summarise the specific determination of the productive subjectivity of the worker of large-scale industry. In (*tendentially*) doing away with the need for all specialised skill and knowledge of workers, the production of relative surplus value through the system of machinery gives the development of their productive subjectivity the concrete form of an *absolute degradation*. In this brutal way, and in opposition to the *particularism* of the subjectivity of the wage labourer of manufacture, large-scale industry begets, as its most genuine product, a *universal worker*, that is, a productive subject capable of taking part in any form of the human labour process. In the words of Marx,

Hence, in place of the hierarchy of specialised workers that characterizes manufacture, there appears, in the automatic factory, a *tendency* to equalize and reduce to an identical level every kind of work that has to be done by the minders of the machines; in place of the artificially produced distinctions between the specialized workers, it is natural differences of age and sex that predominate.<sup>77</sup>

With this tendency to the production of workers who are capable of working with any machine, the simple material or technical necessity for the life-long attachment of individuals to a single productive function disappears.<sup>78</sup> However, insofar as machines become specialised into certain particular productive functions, the persistence of the division of labour in the factory is still technically *possible*. Indeed, Marx argues, the exploitative relation between capitalists and workers that mediates the development of the material productive forces of social labour as an alienated attribute of its product, leads to the reproduction of the 'old division of labour' in an even more hideous fashion.<sup>79</sup> Large-scale industry's tendency to produce an increasingly universal worker is thereby realised in the concrete form of its negation, that is, by multiplying the spaces for the exploitation of living labour on the basis of an exacerbation of 'ossified particularities'. Thus, the individual capitalist could not care less about the disappearance of the technical necessity for a particular-

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76 Marx 1976g, p. 549.

77 Marx 1976g, p. 545.

78 Marx 1976g, p. 546.

79 Marx 1976g, p. 547.



istic development of the worker's productive subjectivity. Under the pressure of competition, his/her only individual motive is the production of an extra surplus value. If he/she can obtain it by attaching the worker to 'the lifelong speciality of serving the same machine',<sup>80</sup> so she/he will. In effect, the reproduction of the division of labour under the new technical conditions implies that a lower value of labour power can be paid – since 'the expenses necessary for his [the workers'] reproduction' are 'considerably lessened'. In addition, it implies that a greater docility on the part of the exploitable human material is induced – since 'his helpless dependence upon the factory as a whole, and therefore upon the capitalist, is rendered complete'.<sup>81</sup>

It is crucial at this juncture to be clear about this contradictory movement between universality and particularity of the determinations of the productive subjectivity of large-scale industry. Paraphrasing Marx, here, as everywhere else, we must distinguish between the general tendency of capital accumulation and the concrete forms in which the essence of the historical movement is realised. *Thus, the essential determination which, as we shall see, expresses the reason to be of the capitalist mode of production, lies in the tendency to universalise the productive attributes of wage labourers.* This is the general movement of the production of relative surplus value through the system of machinery which underlies – hence, gives unity to – the variegated forms that the labour process presents in the course of capitalist development.<sup>82</sup> In order to substantiate this, let us now move ahead in this reading of Marx's investigation of large-scale industry to the point in *Capital* where he further unfolds the movement of

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80 Ibid.

81 Ibid.

82 Again, this point can help us highlight the fundamental importance of the twofold movement of the dialectical method (analytic and synthetic) underlying its power both to penetrate the surface appearances of reality in order to discover the essence of social forms, and to unfold the necessity of the concrete forms in which that essential moment is realised. Regarding the capitalist labour process, the dialectical method can avoid the twin shortcomings present in the Marxist literature of both a one-sided empiricist focus on its more concrete forms – which substitutes a radical industrial sociology for a proper dialectical investigation (Burawoy 1979 and 1985; Edwards 1979) – and the speculative, unmediated imposition of the general determination on concrete forms which still involve its negation – as happens, for instance, with the 'immaterial labour' thesis popularised by Negri and Hardt's *Empire* (2000, pp. 28–30), and originally coming from their and their colleagues' work around the journals *Futur Antérieur* and *Multitudes* (Lazzarato 1996; Lazzarato and Negri 1991). An empirical study informed by such an approach can be found in Corzani, Lazzarato et al. (1996).

the identified contradiction, i.e. to the subsequent discussion of factory legislation in section 9 of this same chapter.<sup>83</sup>

Marx's exposition starts by reminding the reader of the most general determination of factory legislation as the mode of existence of the *general* conscious regulation of social labour as an alienated power of the accumulation of capital, i.e. not simply *within* each private fragment of the total social capital but to the establishment of the general conditions which must be presupposed by all of them. This further illustrates the point I made earlier in the discussion of the legal regulation of the duration of the working day by the capitalist state: the automatism of the movement of the indirect organisation of social labour through the valorisation of capital engenders the general direct regulation (i.e. its negation) as its necessary product.

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83 In my view, Marx's presentation is not fully clear and consistent in distinguishing between essential determination (and therefore general tendency) and concrete form in which it is realised. This lack of clarity probably stems from the uneasy coexistence of systematic and historical moments in the exposition. Thus, he firstly presents the general determination of the productive subjectivity of large-scale industry (namely, its universality) 'in its purity', without necessarily implying that it has been fully realised in its historical concrete forms. However, in his subsequent empirical illustrations he seems to treat the general determination as an immediate actuality. He therefore posits the persistence of the particularistic development of productive subjectivity as '*artificially*' reproduced by superimposing the division of labour where its technical necessity has actually disappeared. See Marx 1976g, pp. 546–7, where he remarks that the insignificance of 'on-the-job' skills required for machine work has done away with the need to bring up a special kind of worker and that the attachment of the worker to a single specialised machine represents a 'misuse' of the latter. While this might have been more or less the case in the particular industries that he discusses, this was by no means the general situation of large-scale industry in his time. The general tendency for a universal productive subjectivity is realised only *gradually* in the historical course of capital development. In this sense, the technical necessity for particularistic attributes of labour power is not done away with overnight. Without a doubt, the historical development of large-scale industry registers a tendency for the degradation of experienced-based ('tacit') knowledge of the determinations of the labour process. However, the progress of capitalist automation has so far involved the recreation of the technical necessity for certain (albeit increasingly more limited) particularistic development of productive subjectivity. Thus, even during the so-called 'Fordist' cycle of accumulation, the full mastery of machines required a relatively lengthy learning process achieved by shadowing a skilled operator. Only with the more recent wave of computer-based automation have particularistic or experienced-based skills significantly lost their former centrality (without, however, fully disappearing). On these recent transformations of the labour process, see Balconi 2002.

Factory legislation, that first conscious and methodical reaction of society against the spontaneously developed form of its production process, is, as we have seen, just as much the necessary product of large-scale industry as cotton yarn, self-actors and the electric telegraph.<sup>84</sup>

But if in its *material content* this determination of the production of relative surplus value shows its progressive character as a form of development of the productive powers of social labour, its concrete realisation as state regulation – in turn, only imposed upon the immediate personifications of capital with the mediation of the class struggle – reveals the limits springing from its *alienated form*. Hence, as Marx points out, the fact that factory acts cannot go beyond only meagre provisions ‘strikingly demonstrates that the capitalist mode of production, by its very nature, excludes all rational improvement beyond a certain point’.<sup>85</sup>

The crucial point for my argument is that section 9 completes (as far as *Capital* is concerned) the development of the specific determinations of the productive subjectivity of large-scale industry. In effect, Marx’s exposition in section 4 had left the dialectical presentation with an unresolved contradiction between large-scale industry’s general tendency for universality and the exacerbation of the particularism of the division of labour that, left to the unrestrained will of individual capitalists, it allowed. In addition, we shall see how this discussion leads Marx, for the first time in his dialectical exposition, to uncover the revolutionary historical potentialities carried by this specifically capitalist form of human labour power.

The movement of ‘the contradiction between the division of labour under manufacture and the essential character of large-scale industry’<sup>86</sup> acquires a first expression in the establishment of compulsory elementary education for working children. As Marx points out, the unchecked exploitation of child labour by individual capitals led not only to the ‘physical deterioration of children and young persons’,<sup>87</sup> but also to an artificially produced intellectual degeneration, which transformed ‘immature human beings into mere

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84 Marx 1976g, p. 610.

85 Marx 1976g, p. 612. The uncritical glorification of the advance in the state regulation of social production by ‘state socialists’ (whether in its reformist or ‘revolutionary’ guise) grasps the content of this process without being aware of its alienated form. The abstract critique of ‘libertarian’ communist currents grasps the oppressive nature of the form but ignores that, in this way, a progressive content realises itself.

86 Marx 1976g, p. 615.

87 Marx 1976g, p. 520.

machines for the production of relative surplus-value'.<sup>88</sup> Since 'there is a very clear distinction between this and the state of natural ignorance in which the mind lies fallow without losing its capacity for development, its natural fertility',<sup>89</sup> these excesses of the capitalist exploitation of child labour power eventually reacted back on the very capacity of valorisation of total social capital by jeopardising the existence of the future generation of adult workers in the 'material and moral conditions' needed by capital accumulation itself. This is illustrated by Marx through a discussion of the case of the English letter-press printing trade, which, before the introduction of the printing machine, was organised around a system of apprenticeship in which workers 'went through a course of teaching till they were finished printers' and according to which 'to be able to read and write was for every one of them a requirement of their trade'.<sup>90</sup> With the introduction of printing machines, however, capitalists were allowed to hire children from 11 to 17 years of age, who 'in a great proportion cannot read' and 'are, as a rule, utter savages and very extraordinary creatures'.<sup>91</sup> These young workers were day after day attached to the simplest of tasks for very long hours until being 'discharged from the printing establishments' for having become 'too old for such children's work'.<sup>92</sup> Those then 17-year-old workers were left in such intellectual and physical degradation that they were unfit to provide capital, *even in the same factory*, with the miserably restricted productive attributes that it required from its immediate source of surplus value, namely, human labour power.

The education clauses of the factory legislation allow Marx not only to dispel any doubt about capital's 'universal vocation' in its transformation of human productive subjectivity. They also serve to highlight, for the first time in his whole dialectical exposition, that it is *only* the development of *that* specific form of human productive subjectivity that expresses capital's historic movement in the production of the material powers for its own supersession as the general social relation regulating human life.

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

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88 Marx 1976g, p. 523.

89 Ibid.

90 Marx 1976g, p. 615.

91 Marx 1976g, p. 615.

92 Marx 1976g, p. 615.

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.<sup>93</sup>

Notice, however, that Marx makes clear that the education clauses represent the *germ* – and just that – of the ‘education of the future’. To put it differently, Marx’s discussion aims at showing *both* that the social forms of the future are effectively carried as a potentiality by the productive subjectivity of large-scale industry under consideration *and* that, with the determinations unfolded so far, that potentiality is not yet immediate. On the contrary, in their ‘paltriness’, the education clauses reveal that these determinations are far from being a ‘method of producing fully developed human beings’. Rather, they are forms of positing individuals whose productive subjectivity is still trapped within the miserable forms imposed by the reproduction of the conditions for capital’s valorisation. Other material transformations are still needed to mediate the development of those germinal elements into their plenitude.

The total social capital’s necessity to produce universal workers is not exhausted by the obstacles to its valorisation posed by the division of labour within the workshop. As Marx remarks, ‘what is true of the division of labour within the workshop under the system of manufacture is also true of the division of labour within society’.<sup>94</sup> In effect, inasmuch as the technical basis of large-scale industry is essentially revolutionary, it entails the permanent transformation of the material conditions of social labour and, therefore, of the forms of exertion of the productive subjectivity of individual workers and of their articulation as a directly collective productive body.<sup>95</sup> This continuous technical change thereby requires individuals who can work in the ever-renewed material forms of the production of relative surplus value. ‘Thus’, Marx concludes, ‘large-scale industry, by its very nature, necessitates variation of labour, fluidity of functions, and mobility of the worker in all directions’.<sup>96</sup> However, he also points out again how the general organisation of social production through the valorisation of independent fragments of social capital negates the immediate realisation of this tendency for an all-sided development of individuals.<sup>97</sup> The private fragmentation of social labour, and its reified social mediation through the capital form, permits the reproduction of ‘the old

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93 Marx 1976g, p. 614.

94 Marx 1976g, p. 615.

95 Marx 1976g, p. 617.

96 Marx 1976g, p. 617.

97 Bellofiore (1998) provides suggestive reflections on this question.

division of labour with its ossified particularities'.<sup>98</sup> Thus, it gives the imposition of variation of labour the form of 'an overpowering natural law, and with the blindly destructive action of a natural law that meets with obstacles everywhere'.<sup>99</sup> In this contradictory form, the realisation of large-scale industry's tendency to produce universal workers nonetheless marches forward, also revealing that it is in the full development of this determination that this alienated social form finds its own *absolute limit*.<sup>100</sup> In other words, that it is in the fully expanded universal character of human productive subjectivity that the *material basis* for the new society rests.

This possibility of varying labour must become a general law of social production, and the existing relations must be adapted to permit its realization in practice ... the partially developed individual, who is merely the bearer of one specialized social function, must be replaced by the totally developed individual, for whom the different social functions are different modes of activity he takes up in turn.<sup>101</sup>

With this discussion Marx unfolds the way in which the general necessities of the reproduction of the total social capital – in this case, workers bearing a universal productive subjectivity – clash with its concrete realisation through the private actions of individual capitals (which strive for the perpetuation and exacerbation of the particularistic development of productive subjectivity). Moreover, we see how this contradiction moves by determining the working class as the personification of the mediated necessities of the valorisation of capital, the latter providing the material and social foundation for proletarian political power.

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98 Marx 1976g, p. 617.

99 Marx 1976g, p. 618.

100 Marx 1976a, p. 617.

101 Marx 1976g, p. 618. For postmodern social thought, any claim that there is something progressive in capital's tendency to produce universal subjectivities can only represent a totalitarian attack by Western metaphysics of the subject aimed at suppressing the ontologically irreducible difference on which human subjectivity is predicated. In the same vein as Adam Smith could not distinguish labour from alienated labour and therefore saw productive activity as intrinsically a sacrifice, postmodern social thought cannot distinguish the progressive nature of the development of the universality of human subjectivity as such from the alienated capitalist form in which the conditions for its realisation are historically achieved, i.e. from the alienated universality of the determination of human beings as *personifications*. See Goldner 2001, pp. 91–7, for interesting reflections on this issue.

In effect, the development of large-scale industry makes the possession of a universal subjectivity a matter of survival for the members of the working class since, as evidenced by the aforementioned case of the printing trade workers, only in that way can they be in a position to sell their labour power to capital (thereby turning the alienated necessities of social capital into an immediate need for their social and material reproduction). Thus, workers have to 'put their heads together' again and, through their struggle as a class, force the capitalist state to 'proclaim that elementary education is a compulsory precondition for the employment of children'.<sup>102</sup> But what is elementary education if not a – certainly very basic – step in the formation of future *universal workers*? That is, in the development of productive attributes that equips the labourer to work not in this or that particular aspect of the immediately social labour process of the collective labourer of large-scale industry, but in whatever task that capital requires from her/him?<sup>103</sup>

The total social capital's need for universal workers thereby provides another material basis for the political power of the working class in its confrontation with the capitalist class over the conditions of its social reproduction. In this first expression of that relation between large-scale industry and workers' power represented by the Factory Acts, the class struggle does not appear to transcend its most general determination as the form of the buying/selling of the commodity labour power at its value, which Marx unfolds in Chapter 10 on 'The Working Day'. Yet Marx advances the proposition that, when concretely developed, that tendency towards universal productive subjectivity will eventually provide the class struggle with expanded transformative powers, namely, those necessary for the establishment of the workers' 'political supremacy' as a class.

Though the Factory Act, that first and meagre concession wrung from capital, is limited to combining elementary education with work in the factory, there can be no doubt that, with the inevitable conquest of polit-

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102 Marx 1976g, p. 613.

103 Recent historical developments of machine-based production have confirmed the general tendency identified by Marx: degradation of particularistic productive attributes developed on the job, coupled with expansion of the requirements of formal education to produce its more *universal* dimensions. The latter is the necessary prerequisite for the constitution of the more general and abstract knowledge that the contemporary operator of computer-based technologies sets into motion vis-à-vis the 'Fordist' machinist ('controlling' that a task is automatically done correctly rather than actually 'doing' it). See Balconi 2002.

ical power by the working class, technological education, both theoretical and practical, will take its proper place in the schools of the workers.<sup>104</sup>

Now, the question immediately arises as to what are the more concrete determinations behind this inevitability of the proletarian conquest of political power? Unfortunately, Marx provides no answer in these pages. In fact, one could argue that no answer could have been provided at all. The unfolding of the necessity of 'proletarian dictatorship' as a concrete social form involves still more mediations and, therefore, the former is not carried by the social form we are facing at this point of the exposition in the form of an *immediate potentiality* to be realised through the political action of the workers as a class.<sup>105</sup> Thus, at this stage of the dialectical presentation, both this latter remark and the one discussed above regarding the totally developed individual as the basis for the abolition of capital cannot but be unmediated observations, external to the concrete determinations of the productive subjectivity of large-scale industry that we have before us. On the other hand, inasmuch as the latter *does* involve a *certain degree* of universality, a limited, albeit real, expression of the underlying tendency for the production of its fully developed shape, Marx's reflections, although external, are undoubtedly pertinent. From a methodological point of view, he could therefore legitimately introduce those remarks in order to anticipate the direction that the further unfolding of this historically specific contradiction of the capitalist mode of production – 'the only historical way in which it can be dissolved and then reconstructed on a new basis' –<sup>106</sup> should take. But as a proper, complete dialectical account of the determinations underlying the proletarian conquest of political power or, above all, of the revolutionary production of the free association of individuals, the presentation as so far developed definitely falls short.<sup>107</sup>

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104 Marx 1976g, p. 619.

105 This would need the exposition of the tendency for the concentration and centralisation of capital as the alienated expressions of the socialisation of labour in the capitalist mode of production and whose absolute limit is reached when the total capital of society immediately exists as a single capital (Marx 1976g, p. 779).

106 Marx 1976g, p. 619.

107 In the same vein, Marx's comments on capital's *raison d'être* in the chapter on simple cooperation also bear this twofold mark of externality and pertinence. The former because, unlike the condensed recapitulation of the general movement in the chapter on the 'Historical Tendency of Capitalist Accumulation', the totality of the determinations behind the realisation of that world-historical role is not yet there. The latter because, as I have pointed out earlier in my argument, that certainly is the first time in the presentation that



This, in itself, should not be problematic. From the perspective of the dialectical investigation as such, this juncture of this critical reading of Marx's search for the determinations of revolutionary subjectivity is not a dead-end at all. It only means that the journey from the abstract to the concrete needs to proceed forward as our end-point – namely, revolutionary subjectivity – still lies ahead. In this sense, no anomaly lies before us. However, the question is very different when approached from the standpoint of the elements for such an investigation we can find already objectified in Marx's *Capital*. In that respect, the problem that the contemporary reader of *Capital* attempting to discover those determinations faces is, to put it briefly, that *they are not there*. Let us expand on this point.

We have seen how Marx, when faced with the tendential universality of the worker of large-scale industry and the growing conscious regulation of social labour it entails, *extrinsically* reflects upon the specific material form of productive subjectivity necessary to 'build society anew' on a really free basis. On the other hand, we have highlighted the methodological pertinence of such a reflection given that – as the passage on 'really free working' from the *Grundrisse* quoted above stated – the latter itself has as one of its determinations that of being a bearer of universal productive attributes, that is, capable of 'material production of a general character'. So far so good. But, as the reader will remember, the attribute of universality did not exhaust the determinations of the form of *productive* subjectivity with the immediate potentiality for 'really free working' (which, as I argued, should provide the material foundation of revolutionary *political* subjectivity). In the first place, the latter also entailed a process of material production whose general social character was immediately posited. This condition is present – at least tendentially – in the productive subjectivity of large-scale industry as developed in *Capital* too.<sup>108</sup> But, in addition, note that Marx's passage from the *Grundrisse* mentions that the uni-

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one can grasp an initial manifestation of the historical powers of private labour to take concrete form in their opposite: consciously organised, directly collective labour.

108 In the chapter on 'Machinery and Large-Scale Industry', the tendency to expand the scope of the conscious regulation of the social character of labour coexists with an opposite tendency to multiply the number of privately mediated branches of the social division of labour, which is also the product of the movement of this form of production of relative surplus value (Marx 1976g, p. 572). But no reason is given for one or the other tendency to prevail. This occurs later in Marx's presentation, when he unfolds the determinations of the 'General Law of Capitalist Accumulation'. There, the tendencies to the concentration and centralisation of capital show how the first tendency eventually imposes itself over the second.

versality of 'revolutionary' productive subjectivity must be the expression of a *scientific* consciousness, capable of organising work as 'an activity regulating all the forces of nature'. And herein lies the crux of the matter.

Although the productive subjectivity of the worker of large-scale industry as presented in *Capital* tends to become universal, this universality is the product not of the *scientific expansion* of her/his capacity consciously to regulate the production process, but of the increasing (eventually absolute) *deprivation* of all knowledge of the social and material determinations of the labour process of which she/he is part. As we have seen above, for the workers engaged in the direct process of production, the separation of intellectual and manual labour reaches its plenitude. This kind of labourer can certainly work in any automated labour process which capital puts before her/him, but not as the 'dominant subject' with 'the mechanical automaton as the object'. Rather, for those workers 'the automaton itself is the subject, and the workers are merely conscious organs, co-ordinated with the unconscious organs of the automaton, and together with the latter, subordinated to the central moving force'.<sup>109</sup> The scientific productive powers needed to regulate the forces of nature, and which are presupposed to their objectified existence in a system of machinery, are not an attribute that capital puts into the hands (or, rather, in the heads) of direct labourers. In brief, in the figure of this wage labourer bearing what, following Iñigo Carrera,<sup>110</sup> I term an absolutely *degraded productive subjectivity*, scientific consciousness and universality do not go together, but are in opposition to one another. In other words, it is not this degraded productive subjectivity that, simply as such, carries in its immediacy the historical revolutionary powers that Marx himself considered necessary to make capital 'blow sky high'. Moreover, neither has Marx's exposition demonstrated that the very movement of the present-day alienated general social relation – capital accumulation – leads to the social necessity to transform, in the political form of a revolution, the productive subjectivity of those labourers in the direction of their reappropriation of the powers of scientific knowledge developed in this alienated form.

Yet, despite this insufficiency as an account of the material genesis of the revolutionary subject, it is here that Marx's exposition in *Capital* about the determinations of human productive subjectivity as an alienated attribute of the product of labour comes to a halt.<sup>111</sup> In the rest of Volume I (and the two remaining volumes), Marx no longer advances, in any systematic manner, in

109 Marx 1976g, pp. 544–5.

110 Iñigo Carrera 2008.

111 This statement needs qualification insofar as the creation of a surplus population relative to the needs of the accumulation process also constitutes a transformation of productive

the unfolding of the material and social determinations of the revolutionary subject. From the point of the presentation reached, and after moving to the exteriority of the inner determinations of the production of surplus value and to its reproduction, accumulation and the general law that presides over its movement, he just makes a gigantic leap into the conclusion contained in the chapter on the 'Historical Tendency of Capitalist Accumulation', where Marx offers the following well-known account of the determinations leading to the abolition of the capitalist mode of production.

Along with the constant decrease in the number of capitalist magnates, who usurp and monopolize all the advantages of this process of transformation, the mass of misery, oppression, slavery, degradation and exploitation grows; but with this there also grows the revolt of the working class, a class constantly increasing in numbers, and trained, united and organized by the very mechanism of the capitalist process of production. 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. The integument is burst asunder. The knell of capitalist private property sounds. The expropriators are expropriated.

If we leave aside the question of the misleading conflation between two *qualitatively different* (and, therefore, *analytically separable*) 'moments' of the revolutionary action of the working class contained in this passage – namely, the expropriation of the bourgeoisie and the abolition of capital<sup>112</sup> – the question remains as to whether the determinations developed by Marx in the previous chapters suffice to justify the transition to this excessively simplistic and all too general account of the way 'the capitalist integument is burst asunder'.<sup>113</sup> Certainly, the tendency to the centralisation of capital discussed in the chapter on the 'General Law of Capital Accumulation' does provide an exposition of the necessity behind the progressive socialisation of labour as an attribute of the capitalist form of private labour. But such an account stops short at the exter-

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subjectivity produced by the development of large-scale industry. More concretely, it represents the most extreme case of material mutilation of the productive attributes of the working class, that is, not simply their degradation but their outright non-reproduction.

112 I return to this fundamental point in the concluding remarks developed after the present chapter.

113 Marx 1976g, p. 929.

iority of the *quantitative determination* of the scope of consciously organised social labour without saying anything about the *qualitative transformations* of the productive subjectivity of the collective labourer that such an extension of the scale of the former presupposes. Seen from that perspective, I think that the transition to revolutionary subjectivity contained in the passage is definitely unmediated.<sup>114</sup> How are those workers whose productive subjectivity has been emptied of almost all content to organise the allocation of the total labour power of society in the form of a *self-conscious* collective potency (the latter being what the abolition of capital is all about)? The growing 'misery, degradation, oppression and so on' certainly confront those labourers with particularly extreme *immediate* manifestations of the alienated mode of existence of their social being. Therefore, they could lead them to reinforce their collective resistance to capitalist exploitation by strengthening their relations of solidarity in the struggle over the value of labour power. In themselves, however, those expressions of capitalist alienation have no way of transforming the class struggle from a form of the reproduction of that alienation into the form of its fully self-conscious transcendence. From a materialist perspective, the question does not boil down to the will to radically transform the world, but to the objective existence of the material powers to do so. As Marx puts it in *The Holy Family*, it is about an 'absolutely imperative *need*' determined as 'the practical expression of *necessity*'.<sup>115</sup> The emergence of the social necessity underlying the historical constitution of those revolutionary transformative powers involves the mediation of more revolutions in the materiality of the productive subjectivity of workers.<sup>116</sup>

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114 This weakness in Marx's argument in *Capital* has been perceptively noted by Wendling 2009, p. 168.

115 Marx and Engels 1975, p. 37.

116 The above-cited passage from Chapter 32 of Volume I of *Capital*, if arbitrarily taken out of its systematic methodological context, can certainly lead to the most mechanistic of accounts of revolutionary subjectivity, very easy to codify into a dogma. See, for instance, Kautsky 1936. The point is that the whole content of the chapter on the 'Historical Tendency of Capital Accumulation' merely *summarises* the general movement that Marx has been systematically unfolding *throughout the whole of Volume I and, in particular, in the chapters on relative surplus value and the general law of capitalist accumulation*. When seen in this light, it is obvious that the development of the determinations of revolutionary subjectivity is a very complex (i.e. mediated) one indeed. The mechanistic misreading of that chapter is not restricted to traditional orthodox perspectives. It can also be found in critical interpretations of Marx's *Capital*, albeit in order to take issue with its content. Thus, in his *Introduction to the Three Volumes of Capital*, Heinrich maintains that in that passage: 'Marx drew conclusions amounting to a sort of historical determinism that *are not*

In this sense, I concur in general with those who claim that Marx's *Capital* is *incomplete*. However, not in the sense that the dialectic of capital needs to be complemented with that of class struggle,<sup>117</sup> or with the political economy of wage labour,<sup>118</sup> as if those latter aspects were not an inner moment of the former itself. Rather, I think that it is the very 'dialectic of capital', and, more concretely, the contradictory movement of the production of relative surplus value through the system of machinery, that is in need of completion. Without this further exploration into the development of human productive subjectivity as an alienated attribute of social capital, a gap is bound to remain between the 'dialectic of human labour' unfolded in the relevant chapters of *Capital* and the revolutionary conclusions at the end of Volume I.

In the following section, I shall examine Marx's presentation of the determinations of the system of machinery in the *Grundrisse*. Although the complete *systematic* unfolding of the missing determinations is not there either, the main *elements* for such a further investigation of revolutionary subjectivity can be extracted from that text.

### **The *Grundrisse* and the System of Machinery: In Search of the Missing Link in the Determinations of Revolutionary Subjectivity**

As an entry point to Marx's account of the system of machinery in the *Grundrisse*, let us return for a moment to the examination of the determinations of large-scale industry as presented in *Capital*. More concretely, let us go back to the relation between science and the production process. Although this form of production of relative surplus value entailed the general application of science as a productive force, the latter was not an attribute materially borne by those

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*justified by his categorical depiction*. To that extent, the passage is more an expression of hope than analysis; revolutionary enthusiasm triumphed over the cool scholar' (Heinrich 2012, p. 198, my emphasis). By contrast, my claim is that Marx's conclusions are not simply *without justification* in his systematic development. The problem is that their ground is not *fully* unfolded. It is, however, possible (and indeed necessary) to complete the systematic development which those revolutionary conclusions presuppose. But this is not what Heinrich has in mind. For him, revolutionary subjectivity has no immanent determinations or necessity that need to be reproduced by means of dialectical thought. It therefore falls outside the systematic 'depiction of the capitalist mode of production', which 'itself is not dependent upon these questionable conclusions' (Heinrich 2012, p. 198).

117 Shortall 1994.

118 Lebowitz 2003.

labourers engaged in direct labour in the immediate process of production. For them, that scientific knowledge took the form of an alien power already objectified in the machine. Marx notes this in the *Grundrisse* as well.

The worker's activity, reduced to a mere abstraction of activity, is determined and regulated on all sides by the movement of the machinery, and not the opposite. The science which compels the inanimate limbs of the machinery, by their construction, to act purposefully, as an automaton, does not exist in the worker's consciousness, but rather acts upon him through the machine as an alien power, as the power of the machine itself.<sup>119</sup>

Yet, as Marx puts it in the *Results of the Immediate Production Process*, those scientific powers ultimately are themselves the products of labour.<sup>120</sup> Thus, although the *formal* subject of those powers – as happens with all the powers springing from the direct organisation of human co-operation – remains capital, the question immediately arises as to who is the *material* subject whose (alienated) *intellectual* labour develops the scientific capacities of the human species and organises their practical application in the immediate process of production. Having discarded manual labourers as such a productive subject, it would seem that the only alternative must be to turn our attention to the remaining character present in the direct production process, namely, the capitalist. Is it she/he who personifies, through the development of her/his productive consciousness and will, capital's need for the powers to scientifically control the movement of natural forces? The answer is given by Marx in a footnote to the chapter on 'Machinery and Large-Scale Industry' in *Capital*:

Science, generally speaking, costs the capitalist nothing, a fact that by no means prevents him from exploiting it. 'Alien' science is incorporated by capital just as 'alien' labour is. But 'capitalist' appropriation and 'personal' appropriation, whether of science or of material wealth, are totally different things. Dr. Ure himself deplores the gross ignorance of mechanical science which exists among his beloved machinery-exploiting manufacturers, and Liebig can tell us about the astounding ignorance of chemistry displayed by English chemical manufacturers.<sup>121</sup>

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119 Marx 1993, p. 693.

120 Marx 1976c, p. 1055.

121 Marx 1976g, p. 508.

Thus, it is not the capitalist who embodies the intellectual powers to develop the scientific knowledge presupposed by its objectified existence in a system of machinery. The science incorporated in the immediate production process is the result of the appropriation of the product of the intellectual labour of an 'other'. This 'other', whose productive activity the direct production process of large-scale industry carries as a necessary mediation, is not explicitly present in Marx's exposition in *Capital*. There might be two reasons for this exclusion. First, in Marx's time such a social subject was only beginning to develop. Secondly, and following from the previous point, Marx's presentation in *Capital* is restricted to the transformations suffered by the productive subjectivity of those workers remaining in the direct production process. However, what his whole discussion implicitly suggests is that among the transformations that large-scale industry brings about is the extension of material unity comprising its total labour process outside the boundaries of the 'factory walls'.<sup>122</sup> Hence, the direct process of production becomes just an aspect of a broader labour process which now entails two additional moments: the development of the power consciously to regulate in an objective and universal fashion the movement of natural forces – namely, science – and the application of that capacity in the practical organisation of the automatic system of machinery and whatever remains of direct labour – the technological application of science, including the consciousness of the unity of productive co-operation. Certainly, these other moments are also present in *Capital*.<sup>123</sup> However, Marx's presentation there seems to revolve around the emphasis on their separated mode of existence vis-à-vis the subjectivity of direct labourers and which is presupposed by their activity. By contrast, in the *Grundrisse* he oscillates between such an angle on the question,<sup>124</sup> and one which puts at the forefront the underlying material unity of the total activity of living labour, where the development of science and its technological applications act as essential constitutive moments.<sup>125</sup> With the system of machinery,

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122 In this examination of the further determinations of the production process of large-scale industry, I draw on Iñigo Carrera (2008, pp. 17–23).

123 Marx 1976g, p. 549.

124 Marx 1993, pp. 693–4.

125 Dunayevskaya (1989, pp. 80–6) correctly notes the difference in presentation between the account of the system of machinery in the *Grundrisse* – where the emancipatory potentialities of the system of machinery are considered – and the one in *Capital* – where its determination as a materialised expression of the domination of dead over living labour is emphasised. However, she wrongly attributes that to a change in Marx's view on the subject, instead of as an account of *qualitatively different* potentialities engendered by the

the entire production process appears as not subsumed under the direct skillfulness of the worker, but rather as the technological application of science. [It is,] hence, the tendency of capital to give production a scientific character; direct labour [is] reduced to a mere moment of this process.<sup>126</sup>

The determinations presupposed by the production of relative surplus value involve the specification of commodity owners into capitalist and wage labourer. Having discarded the former as the material subject of scientific labour, it is self-evident that only those determined as doubly free individuals can personify the development of this moment of the production process of large-scale industry. Thus, although not explicitly addressed by Marx, the benefit of historical hindsight makes it very easy for us to recognise how the total social capital deals with its constant need for the development of the productive powers of science, namely, by engendering a special partial organ of the collective labourer whose function is to advance in the conscious control of the movement of natural forces and its objectification in the form of ever more complex automatic systems of machinery. Whilst the system of machinery entails the progressive deskilling of those workers performing what remains of direct labour – to the point of emptying their labour of any content other than the mechanistic repetition of extremely simple tasks – it also entails the tendential *expansion* of the productive subjectivity of the members of the intellectual organ of the collective labourer. Capital requires from these workers ever more *complex* forms of labour.<sup>127</sup> As much as those discussed in *Capital*, these are also ‘immediate effects of machine production on the worker’. Needless to say, inasmuch as this expanded productive subjectivity is nothing more

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very same development of the system of machinery and personified by the different partial organs of the collective labourer.

126 Marx 1993, p. 699.

127 Braverman's (1998) so-called ‘deskilling’ thesis is obviously a one-sided reduction of this *twofold* movement of degradation/expansion of the productive subjectivity of the collective labourer required by the system of machinery to one of its moments (Iñigo Carrera 2008, p. 44). One of the immediate reasons behind such a unilateral account lies, as Tony Smith points out, in its very restricted definition of ‘skill’, very much referring to *manufacturing* skills (Smith 2000, p. 39). An early in-depth critical examination of Braverman's thesis can be found in Elger (1979). In fact, one could argue that both ‘Fordist’ and ‘Post-Fordist’ methods involve both deskilling and the enhancement of workers’ ‘skills’ (Tomaney 1994). On Fordism, see Clarke 1992. Clarke (1990) also demolishes the fantasies of most of the literature on ‘Post-Fordism’, laying bare its purely ideological character. On ‘lean production’ in particular, see the work of Tony Smith just referred to above.



than a concrete form of the production of relative surplus value, the exercise of the newly developed intellectual productive powers is inverted into a mode of existence of capital in its movement of self-valorisation as well.<sup>128</sup>

In this alienated form, capital thereby produces a material transformation whose fundamental significance exceeds the production of wage labourers simply bearing different productive attributes. At stake here, first and foremost, is a radical substantial transformation of the very nature of human labour.<sup>129</sup> The latter progressively ceases to consist in the direct application of labour power onto the object of labour with the purpose of changing its form. It now increasingly becomes an activity aimed at the conscious control of the movement of natural forces in order to make *them* automatically act upon the object of labour and, in this way, effect its change of form. According to Marx's exposition of the system of machinery in the *Grundrisse*, it is in the contradictory historical unfolding of this specific material transformation of human productive subjectivity that the key to the absolute limit to capital resides.

To the degree that labour time – the mere quantity of labour – is posited by capital as the sole determinant element, to that degree does direct labour and its quantity disappear as the determinant principle of production – of the creation of use values – and is reduced both quantitatively, to a smaller proportion, and qualitatively, as an, of course, indispensable but subordinate moment, compared to general scientific labour, technological application of natural sciences, on one side, and to the general productive force arising from social combination [*Gliederung*] in total production on the other side – a combination which appears as a natural fruit of social labour (although it is a historic product). *Capital thus works towards its own dissolution as the form dominating production.*<sup>130</sup>

To put it briefly, the issue here is the old question of the relation between intellectual and manual labour.<sup>131</sup> More concretely, the fundamental point to

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128 That is, the productive powers of science take an alienated form not just vis-à-vis manual labourers, who face them already objectified in the system of machinery. Intellectual labourers also confront the development of science, which they themselves personify, as an alien power borne by the product of their social labour. Moreover, the alienated nature of this development of intellectual labour is even expressed in its general scientific form, that is, in its method. I return to this question in the concluding remarks below.

129 Iñigo Carrera 2008, p. 20.

130 Marx 1993, p. 700, my emphasis.

131 Sohn-Rethel's *Intellectual and Manual Labour* (1978) has become a *locus classicus* on this

grasp is the specifically capitalist form in which the antithetical movement of those two moments of living labour asserts itself with the development of the system of machinery. The revolutionary aspect of this historically specific transformation of living labour in capitalist society is that both the scale and complexity of the production process and, in particular, the increasingly scientific character of its organisation, make the subjectivity of the capitalist (the non-labourer) incapable of personifying the now directly social labour under the rule of her/his capital. This means, in other words, that the development of the powers of intellectual labour and their exercise becomes an attribute of the 'labouring classes'. As Marx states in the *Theories of Surplus-Value*:

*Concentration of capital ... It is in this extreme form of the contradiction and conflict that production – even though in alienated form – is transformed into social production ... As functionaries of the process which at the same time accelerates this social production and thereby also the development of the productive forces, the capitalists become superfluous in the measure that they, on behalf of society, enjoy the usufruct and that they become overbearing as owners of this social wealth and commanders of social labour. Their position is similar to that of the feudal lords whose exactions in the measure that their services became superfluous with the*

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question. It certainly provides a good starting point, especially concerning the historicity of the forms of scientific thought. However, his idiosyncratic approach is not exempt from shortcomings. For a critical assessment of Sohn-Rethel's work, see Kapferer 1980; Bahr 1980; Reinfelder and Slater 1978. The main shortcoming of Sohn-Rethel's book, correctly highlighted by these critical appraisals, is its ambiguity on the question of the capital-determined nature of the very materiality of technological forms and the forms of science presupposed by them. In effect, despite all his emphasis on the historicity of what I have termed 'representational scientific thought', Sohn-Rethel actually attributes the latter full objective validity, albeit with 'false consciousness', meaning a lack of awareness of its own social existence and historical genesis (Kapferer 1980, p. 81). The transcendence of the capitalist mode of production therefore does not actually involve the transformation of the very forms of scientific knowledge and technology; only liberation from their blindness to their own social determinations as an inner moment of human labour. This is the result of the reunification of intellectual and manual labour. But if Sohn-Rethel ultimately failed to grasp the inherently capitalist nature of the very structure of modern science and technology, the critics referred to above fail to see the necessity of the transcendence of those forms of scientific thought as an immanent potentiality engendered by the historical movement of the capital form itself, albeit one which expresses the necessity of its own annihilation.

rise of bourgeois society, became mere outdated and inappropriate privileges and who therefore rushed headlong to destruction.<sup>132</sup>

The scientifically expanded productive subjectivity of intellectual labour is, by its own nature, increasingly general or universal. The exertion of this form of human labour power aims at the expansion of the conscious control over the *totality* of the forces of nature. Moreover, this subordination of the latter to the powers of living labour involves the comprehension of their *general* determination in order thereby to develop their *particular* technological applications in ever-evolving systems of machinery. Thus, as Marx puts it in Volume III of *Capital* in order to highlight its specificity vis-à-vis co-operative labour, scientific labour is, by definition, universal labour.<sup>133</sup>

With the constitution and permanent revolutionising of this organ of the collective labourer, capital thereby engenders *another* tendency for the production of workers bearing a universal productive subjectivity.<sup>134</sup> However, this universality is no longer the *empty* universality deriving from the absolute *lack* of individual productive capacities to which direct labourers are condemned. When developed into its plenitude, it becomes the rich, concrete universality of organs of a collective subject who become increasingly able to consciously rule their life process by virtue of their capacity scientifically to organise the production process of any automatic system of machinery and, therefore, any form of social co-operation on the basis of large-scale industry. As the productive subjectivity of workers expands, it progressively ceases to be the case that the worker's individuality vanishes 'as an infinitesimal quantity in the face of the science, the gigantic natural forces, and the mass of social labour embodied in the system of machinery'.<sup>135</sup> For the latter *are* the direct products of the objectification of their productive subjectivity.

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132 Marx 1989b, p. 449.

133 Marx 1991, p. 199.

134 A remarkable weakness of Postone's (1996) otherwise interesting discussion of real subsumption lies in his implicit reduction of the working class of large-scale industry to direct manual labourers. Clearly, the *formal subject* of the development of science and technology is capital, as happens with all the productive powers of social labour springing from the direct co-operation of workers. However, the development of those productive powers has no *material subject* in Postone's account. That is one of the reasons why he cannot see that the potentiality for the abolition of capital is actually borne by the proletariat.

135 Marx 1976g, p. 549.

Nature builds no machines, no locomotives, railways, electric telegraphs, self-acting mules etc. These are products of human industry; natural material transformed into organs of the human will over nature, or of human participation in nature. They are *organs of the human brain, created by the human hand*; the power of knowledge, objectified. The development of fixed capital indicates to what degree general social knowledge has become a *direct force of production*, and to what degree, hence, the conditions of the process of social life itself have come under the control of the general intellect and been transformed in accordance with it. To what degree the powers of social production have been produced, not only in the form of knowledge, but also as immediate organs of social practice, of the real life process.<sup>136</sup>

We saw how in *Capital* Marx focused on the ‘negative side’ of the effects of production of relative surplus value through the system of machinery upon the material forms of the productive subjectivity of the working class. The historical emergence of the social necessity for the constitution of a ‘fully-developed social individual’ thus appeared as an abstract possibility, whose connection to capital’s development of machine-based production seemed to be completely external. Conversely, we can appreciate now how in the *Grundrisse* Marx posits capital’s relentless tendency to ‘call to life all the powers of science and of nature, as of social combination and of social intercourse’<sup>137</sup> as necessarily engendering the historical becoming of that concrete universal subjectivity itself.

No longer does the worker insert a modified natural thing [*Naturgegenstand*] as middle link between the object [*Objekt*] and himself; rather, he inserts the process of nature, transformed into an industrial process, as a means between himself and inorganic nature, mastering it. He steps to the side of the production process instead of being its chief actor. In this transformation, it is neither the direct human labour he himself performs, nor the time during which he works, but rather the appropriation of his own general productive power, his understanding of nature and his mastery over it by virtue of his presence as a social body – it is, in a word, the development of the social individual which appears as the great foundation-stone of production and of wealth.<sup>138</sup>

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136 Marx 1993, p. 706.

137 Ibid.

138 Marx 1993, p. 705.

Moreover, and here in accordance with *Capital*, he presents the latter as the one whose further expansion eventually clashes with its alienated capitalist social form and, therefore, as the material form of productive subjectivity that carries as an immediate potentiality the necessity for the 'creation of the new society'. Hence, Marx continues,

The *theft of alien labour time*, on which the present wealth is based, appears a miserable foundation in face of this new one, created by large-scale industry itself ... The *surplus labour of the mass* has ceased to be the condition for the development of general wealth, just as the *non-labour of the few*, for the development of the general powers of the human head. With that, production based on exchange value breaks down, and the direct, material production process is stripped of the form of penury and antithesis.<sup>139</sup>

It might seem that Marx is here substituting the intellectual labourer for the manual labourer as the revolutionary subject. However, the point is that the key consists not in abstractly opposing intellectual and direct manual labour in order to privilege one over the other, but rather in grasping the contradictory forms in which capital historically develops these two necessary moments of the labour process. Since Marx's exposition in the *Grundrisse* is only concerned with the *general* tendency and, more specifically, its historical result – that is, with the movement of 'bourgeois society in the long view and as a whole'<sup>140</sup> – he does not pay much attention to the contradictory forms in which the latter asserts itself. However, it is clear that in the historical unfolding of the tendency for the progressive objectification of all direct application of human labour power onto the object of labour as an attribute of the machine, capital actually *reproduces and exacerbates* the separation between intellectual and manual labour.<sup>141</sup>

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139 Marx 1993, pp. 705–6.

140 Marx 1993, p. 712.

141 One of the central weaknesses of recent theories of 'immaterial labour' or 'cognitive capitalism', which heavily rely on the 'Fragment on Machines', is their 'stagist' reading of that text. See, for example, Virno 2007; Lazzarato 1996; Vercellone 2007. In other words, those authors use those passages from the *Grundrisse* for a formalistic specification of a qualitatively different stage of capitalist development that is said to supersede not only large-scale industry, but also real subsumption: the epoch of the 'general intellect'. Worse still, those theories unmediatedly – hence speculatively – apply the essential tendency and finished form described in the *Grundrisse* onto contemporary concrete

In effect, inasmuch as capital's conversion of the subjective expertise of the direct labourer (both intellectual and manual) into an objective power of the machine is not an instantaneous event, but rather is done by degrees, every leap forward in the abolition of manual labour brought about by the revolution in the material forms of the process of production is realised by actually multiplying the spaces for the exploitation of manual living labour. In fact, the new technological forms themselves might generate as their own condition of existence the proliferation of a multitude of production processes still subject to the manual intervention of the labourer, whether as an appendage of the machine, as a partial organ in a manufacturing division of labour or even in the form of 'domestic industry'. Thus, until the conditions for the (nearly) total elimination of manual labour are produced, direct labour as an appendage of the machine and/or the division of labour of manufacture tend to be reproduced under the new conditions and with even more degraded forms of productive subjectivity and harsher conditions of capitalist exploitation.<sup>142</sup>

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forms of realisation that still represent its negation (Starosta 2012). The result is that they overlook or downplay the contradictory movement of expansion/degradation and universalisation/particularisation entailed by current material forms of real subsumption. As we have seen, what the 'Fragment on Machines' unfolds is not the abstract opposite of the determinations of the productive subjectivity of large-scale industry, but rather their more concrete development. The significance of that undoubtedly essential text is therefore *systematic*. And, incidentally, so is that of the distinction between the three different forms of real subsumption presented in *Capital* and that between formal and real subsumption. For a forceful case against the 'stagist' reading of those chapters of *Capital*, see Tomba 2007 and 2013.

142 This is illustrated by Marx in section 8 of the chapter on 'Machinery and Large-scale Industry' in *Capital*. See Marx 1976g, pp. 588–610. There he shows how the production of relative surplus value through the system of machinery reproduces modern manufacture, handicrafts and domestic industry. In this way, capital revolutionises the determinations of the social existence of not only those workers incorporated into large-scale industry, but also those of the sections of the working class still working under the division of labour in manufacture or domestic industry. The latter forms of the social production process persist in their survival only through the imposition of the most brutal forms of the exploitation of the workers. However, Marx makes clear that the subsistence of manufacture and domestic industry is always provisional, even if it appears to hang on for long periods of time. The general tendency of capital is for the total development of large-scale industry. Moreover, Marx's discussion makes clear that the working class does not have to 'sit and wait' until the limit for the subsistence of manufacture is reached – a limit given by the extent to which the overexploitation of labour power compensates for its relative lower productivity of labour vis-à-vis large-scale industry. Inasmuch as the struggle for the shortening of the working day succeeds in forcing its implementation in

Yet it is certainly the case that this internal differentiation of the collective labourer on the basis of the respective forms of productive subjectivity is the self-negating form in which the *abolition* of that separation is realised in the historical process. Thus, through the very exacerbation of their separation, capital tendentially abolishes the qualitative and quantitative weight of manual labour in the process of reproduction of social life, thereby converting the essential moment of living labour into an intellectual process. In this way, capital's transformation of the labour process eventually reaches a point at which the separation between intellectual labour and what is now a quantitatively and qualitatively insignificant amount of manual labour cannot materially obtain as a form of organising the life process of humanity. The development of the material productive forces of society can only assert itself through the embodiment of the intellectual powers of social production in the individual subjectivity of every partial organ of the now directly social productive body. Moreover, this incorporation of the powers of the 'general intellect' into every individual worker must now have the form of objective social knowledge – namely, science – rather than being the product of the immediate subjective productive experience of the labourer (as was the case of independent handicraft production). As we shall see below, it is the consciously organised political action of the *whole* working class – whatever its productive subjectivity – that is the necessary form in which this latter material transformation is realised.<sup>143</sup>

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the branches of production where manufacture persists, it accelerates the development of large-scale industry by not allowing the selling of labour power below its value and, therefore, by reducing the capitalist limit to the introduction of machinery. Here we have a clear instance of the way in which progressive politics mediates revolutionary politics, the former being the concrete form of the development of the material determinations for the emergence of the latter.

143 Besides, it goes without saying that although the workers bearing an expanded productive subjectivity express the *movement towards* the development of an all-sided universal individuality, they do so within the limits of capital as an alienated social form. In other words, it is not the *immediacy* of the material forms of their productive subjectivity that constitutes the kind of 'rich and all-sided individuality' discussed by Marx (1993, p. 325). As much as workers with a degraded productive subjectivity, they have to not only change 'society', but also undergo a process of self-change in the course of the revolutionary process. Hence, *both* organs of the collective labourer have to 'get rid of the muck of ages' imposed by the determination of human subjectivity as a concrete form of the production of relative surplus value. More concretely, this entails the *transformation* of intellectual labour (i.e. in the mode of scientific cognition or the kind of scientific method) and its *generalisation* to all members of the collective productive body.

In its formally boundless movement of self-valorisation, capital therefore cannot stop in the historical production of universal productive subjects. At the same time, this constant revolution in the material forms of human productive subjectivity can only take place through the progressive socialisation of private labour, thereby positing the extension of the scope of the conscious regulation of directly social labour as an immediate necessity for capital's production of relative surplus value. Thus, through the development of large-scale industry, capital works towards the historical emergence of the other precondition for 'really free working' as well.

In the production process of large-scale industry ... just as the conquest of the forces of nature by the social intellect is the precondition of the productive power of the means of labour as developed into the automatic process, on one side, so, on the other, is the labour of the individual in its direct presence posited as suspended individual, i.e. as social, labour. Thus the other basis of this *mode of production falls away*.<sup>144</sup>

On the twofold basis of the expansion of the scientific productive powers of the 'general intellect' and of the determination of human labour as directly social, capital moves tendentially towards reaching its absolute historical limit as a social form. This limit is not reached when capital accumulation *ceases* to develop the material productive forces of society as, following Trotsky,<sup>145</sup> orthodox Marxists would have it. On the contrary, capital clashes with its limit when the very same alienated socialisation and scientific universalisation of the powers of human labour through the production of relative surplus value begets, *as its own immanent necessity*, the development of the productive forces of society in a particular material form, namely, the fully conscious organisation of social labour as the *general* social relation regulating the reproduction of human life and, therefore, as an attribute borne by every singular productive subjectivity comprising the collective labourer. Under those circumstances, the further leap forward in the material productive forces of society – dictated by the most immediate necessity of capital itself, that is, the production of relative surplus value – comes into conflict with capitalist relations of production. Translated into our mode of expression, this classical Marxian insight can only mean the following: the *alienated* social necessity arises for the human being to be produced as a productive subject that is fully and objectively conscious

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144 Marx 1993, p. 709.

145 Trotsky 1938, pp. 1–2.



of the social determinations of her/his individual powers and activity. Thus, she/he no longer sees society as an alien and hostile power that dominates her/him. Instead, he/she consciously experiences the materiality of social life (that is, productive co-operation) as the necessary condition for the development of the plenitude of his/her individuality, and therefore consciously recognises the social necessity of the expenditure of her/his labour power in organic association with the other producers. However, this form of human subjectivity necessarily collides with a social form (capital) that produces human beings as *private and independent individuals* who consequently see their general social interdependence and its historical development as an alien and hostile power borne by the product of social labour. The determination of the material forms of the labour process as bearers of objectified social relations can no longer mediate the reproduction of human life. *Capital accumulation must therefore come to an end and give way to the free association of individuals.*

But with the suspension of the *immediate* character of living labour, as merely *individual*, or as general merely internally or merely externally, with the positing of the activity of individuals as immediately general or *social* activity, the objective moments of production are stripped of this form of alienation; they are thereby posited as property, as the organic social body within which the individuals reproduce themselves as individuals, but as social individuals. The conditions which allow them to exist in this way in the reproduction of their life, in their productive life's process, have been posited only by the historic economic process itself; both the objective and the subjective conditions, which are only the two distinct forms of the same conditions.<sup>146</sup>

In brief, capital exhausts its *raison d'être* in the historical process, thereby producing the social necessity for its abolition and, at the same time, revealing the material content pushing forward in that alienated form: *the self-production of the human individual as a working subject or the historical development of human productive subjectivity.*

As the system of bourgeois economy has developed for us only by degrees, so too its negation, which is its ultimate result. We are still concerned now with the direct production process. When we consider bourgeois society in the long view and as a whole, then the final result of the process

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146 Marx 1993, p. 832.

of social production always appears as the society itself, i.e. the human being itself in its social relations. Everything that has a fixed form, such as the product etc., appears as merely a moment, a vanishing moment, in this movement. The direct production process itself here appears only as a moment. The conditions and objectifications of the process are themselves equally moments of it, and its only subjects are the individuals, but individuals in mutual relationships, which they equally reproduce and produce anew. The constant process of their own movement, in which they renew themselves even as they renew the world of wealth they create.<sup>147</sup>

It is possible to appreciate now the significance of the 'Fragment on Machines' from the *Grundrisse* for the completion of the dialectical exposition of the productive subjectivity of large-scale industry. Although clearly in an unsystematic fashion (after all, they are only research manuscripts), that earlier version of the critique of political economy contains the elements for the systematic unfolding of the plenitude of the determinations that constitute the immanent potentiality of capital-transcending transformative practice that *Capital* only partially achieves. These further mediations are crucial for the concretisation of that which in *Capital* appeared as an abstract possibility: the emergence of the historical and social necessity underlying the abolition of capital.

Yet the exposition in the *Grundrisse* itself seems to be incomplete too, although for exactly the opposite reasons behind the incompleteness of Marx's discussion in *Capital*. Whereas in the latter text it is the unfolding of the material determinations of the *productive* subjectivity of large-scale industry which is in need of completion, in the 1857–8 *Manuscripts* it is the part played by the *political* subjectivity of wage workers in the abolition of capital that is in need of clarification. If anything, the political action of the proletariat is noticeable for its *absence* in Marx's account of the dissolution of the capitalist mode of production in the *Grundrisse*. As Rovatti points out, the 'Fragment on Machines' is perfectly compatible with a fatalist, objectivist or mechanical conception of the abolition of capital, which posits its necessity in an external relation with the revolutionary intervention of the proletariat.<sup>148</sup> Indeed, this is the read-

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147 Marx 1993, p. 712.

148 Rovatti 1973. Rovatti, however, can escape the objectivist reading only by falling into its abstract opposite, namely, subjectivism. The objectivist reading results when the contradiction immanent in the system of machinery is grasped in purely quantitative terms,

ing that results when the account of the development of large-scale industry is grasped as the positing of abstractly objective conditions for revolutionary action, which would need to be complemented by equally abstract subjective ones (generally seen as grounded in the mere existence of labour power as a commodity, i.e. in the formal subsumption of labour to capital). However, I think that this is not a properly dialectical way of grasping what Marx is getting at in those passages of the *Grundrisse*.

As I argued in Chapter 6, from the methodological perspective of science as practical criticism, the question is not one of investigating the objective circumstances constraining the affirmation of our freely self-determining action. Rather, it is a matter of apprehending in thought the *inner* material and social determinations of our radical transformation of the world. In other words, the question under investigation does not revolve around the discovery of the 'objective and subjective conditions' for the revolutionary transcendence of capital, but rather that of its *content and form*. Seen in this light, we can easily see what Marx's exposition in the 'Fragment on Machines' in the *Grundrisse* is all about: it unfolds the *content* of the social necessity for the abolition of the capitalist mode of production *without* specifying its *form*. By contrast, in *Capital*, Marx does establish, albeit by means of an insufficiently grounded exposition, the character of that necessary form, namely, the revolutionary political action of the whole working class. In their unity, the *Grundrisse* and *Capital* therefore provide the elements for the scientific exposition of the determinations of capital leading to the social constitution of the revolutionary proletariat.<sup>149</sup> What remains to be done is to flesh out more explicitly that immanent

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rather than in terms of the qualitative determinations of productive subjectivity. That is, when focusing on how capital's reduction of necessary labour to a minimum leads to the impossibility of converting disposable time into surplus labour. Concomitantly, communism becomes reduced to a problem of overcoming scarcity or of the generalisation of abundance. Piccone (1975, p. 245), even if trying to go beyond the 'orthodox' reading of the *Grundrisse* offered by Nicolaus in the Foreword, shares that quantitative reading of the section on machines. Other objectivist readings focus on the alleged contradiction between the tendential disappearance of immediate labour in machine-based production and the determination of value as based on 'labour-time'. See Heinrich (2013) for a critique of this latter interpretation of the 'Fragment on Machines', which he nonetheless sees as correct as a *reading* of Marx's *Grundrisse*. His critical point is that Marx himself was wrong (or unclear) in that early version of the critique of political economy.

149 Caffentzis's recent assessment of the 'Fragment on Machines' from *Grundrisse vis-à-vis* Marx's views in *Capital* precisely fails to uncover this necessary connection between content and form of the abolition of capital respectively contained in each of the two texts. For him, the *Grundrisse* and *Capital* contain 'two images of revolution', the earlier

connection between the content and form of the abolition of capital. In the following chapter, and by way of a conclusion, I offer some final reflections in order to establish that link. Additionally, bringing together the major insights found in the work of Iñigo Carrera, which has informed my reading of Marx, I develop some further considerations about determinations of revolutionary subjectivity which, I think, are also needed to complete the picture found in both *Capital* and the *Grundrisse*.

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manuscript based on 'the external workings of the system driven by the introduction of science and technology', and the later version based on 'a working class that was inside the system, threatening to burst out of capital's desiccated skin' (Caffentzis 2013, p. 281).

## By Way of a Conclusion: Further Explorations into the Determinations of Revolutionary Subjectivity

### Revolutionary Subjectivity as Alienated Subjectivity

In order to make explicit the *necessary* mediation between the content and form of the revolutionary abolition of capital, which is absent from the *Grundrisse*, we must bring back Marx's discussion of the role of the class struggle as presented in *Capital*. As we have seen, both through the discussion of the establishment of a legal working day and the Factory Acts, Marx unfolds the determination of the political action of the working class as the necessary mediation, in the form of a consciously organised collective action, for the imposition of the *general* conscious regulation of social labour in the capitalist mode of production, that is, as a concrete form of the essentially *unconscious* – hence inverted – organisation of social life through the capital form. Furthermore, we saw above that the struggle of wage labourers as a class was also the necessary form in which the total social capital's need for workers with an increasingly universal productive subjectivity, resulting from the movement of the *real* subsumption in the form of large-scale industry, asserted itself. True, in Marx's exposition in Chapter 15 of *Capital*, the class struggle does not transcend its determination as a mediating moment of the total social capital's reproduction. This is because he does not unfold its immanent material content – the socialisation and universal development of human productive subjectivity – up to its absolute limit. But this is precisely what the *Grundrisse* do; they do not unfold a *different* content, but rather develop a more complex shape of that content itself. *A fortiori*, its concrete mode of realisation remains the same: the struggle of wage labourers as a class. A struggle, however, that is no longer determined as form of capital's *reproduction*. As an expression of the plenitude of its content, the political action of wage labourers now becomes determined as the mode of existence of capital-*transcending* human practice.

In effect, I have shown that the material content of the communist transformation of social life precisely consists in the realisation of the plenitude of the two determinations underlying capital's historic mission, namely, the production of a fully developed universal productive subjectivity, which is in turn the necessary form of human *individuality* presupposed by the fully conscious organisation of *social* life as a directly collective process. Thus, as the material

subject whose productive subjectivity this historic process transforms 'behind its back' in the direction of a fully developed and socialised universality, the working class thereby becomes determined to personify, through its revolutionary political action, the *alienated* necessity of capital to be superseded in the free association of individuals or communism. Fundamental implications follow from this.

When discussing commodity fetishism, I mentioned that behind the traditional Marxist view rests the idea of revolutionary consciousness as the absolute opposite of alienated consciousness. In other words, revolutionary political action is seen as grounded in an abstractly free human subjectivity of the proletariat, which in that capital-transcending practice gets rid of objectified forms of social mediation that constrain the affirmation of their natural freedom. By contrast, what follows from the approach developed here is that revolutionary consciousness can only be a concrete form of the alienated consciousness itself. Let me elaborate on this.

In the first place, this means that the necessity for revolutionary transformation springs from the movement of self-valorising value itself. More concretely, it is a concrete determination of capital's incessant drive to produce relative surplus value. The crux of the matter is that it is a necessity of relative surplus value production, which can only take concrete shape through the abolition of the capital form (hence of surplus value production) itself. To put it differently, that particular cycle of material reproduction of society is *autonomously* set into motion by the valorisation of capital as its immanent purpose. However, the determinate form of the *material* transformation of the labour process – dictated by the most immediate necessity of capital to expand its magnitude – becomes the fully conscious organisation of human productive co-operation. Which, in turn, means that the *social* form of the life process of humanity must be revolutionised as well: it is a change of the materiality of the production process which, albeit required by the valorisation of capital, can no longer proceed on the basis of that alienated general social form.

Perhaps I can flesh out this point more clearly by discussing the following oft-quoted passage from *The Holy Family* in light of Marx's mature critique of political economy:

Indeed private property drives itself in its economic movement towards its own dissolution, but only through a development which does not depend on it, which is unconscious and which takes place against the will of private property by the very nature of things, only inasmuch as it produces the proletariat as proletariat, poverty which is conscious of its spiritual and physical poverty, dehumanization which is conscious of its

dehumanization, and therefore self-abolishing ... Not in vain does it [the proletariat] go through the stern but steeling school of *labour*. It is not a question of what this or that proletarian, or even the whole proletariat, at the moment *regards* as its aim. It is a question of *what the proletariat is*, and what, in accordance with this *being*, it will historically be compelled to do.<sup>1</sup>

In this passage, Marx still seems to be within the boundaries of the kind of argument developed in the *Paris Manuscripts*, where revolutionary subjectivity seems to be grounded in a generic dialectic of the negation of the negation. Thus, in the proletariat all the inhumanity of private property is concentrated. Therefore, as that human incarnation of the complete negation of humanity, they are bound to revolt against those inhuman conditions. In turn, this revolt against inhuman conditions of life cannot but represent its negation and, therefore, the affirmation of humanity. It is this aspect which is generally emphasised within Marxism. Yet as my discussion of the limitations of that approach should make evident, one must focus elsewhere. The key points are as follows.

First, it is crucial to note how Marx uses the term 'compelled' to refer to the relation of the workers to their own revolutionary activity. I think this shows that for Marx the alienated subject of that historical movement culminating in (hence including) the revolution is capital itself (what he refers to as 'private property'). In this sense, the revolutionary powers are not 'self-developed' by the workers, but are an alienated attribute that capital puts into their own hands through the transformations of their productive subjectivity produced by the alienated socialisation of private labour. This is the reason why *revolutionary consciousness is itself a concrete form of the alienation of human powers as capital's powers*. The abolition of capital is not an abstractly free, self-determining political action, but one that the workers are *compelled* to undertake as *personifications* of the alienated laws of movement of capital itself. In this sense, when the workers consciously organise the revolutionary abolition of the capitalist mode of production, they do so not as the incarnation of the powers of an abstract human practice deprived of social determinations, but as 'character masks' or 'representatives' of the inverted existence of the powers of their social labour, i.e. capital. The point is that it is an alienated action that *in the course of its own development* liberates itself from all trace of its alienated existence. Paraphrasing that passage from the *1859 Contribution*, which I

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1 Marx and Engels 1975, pp. 36–7.

quoted toward the end of Chapter 6, individuals 'emerging from the reproduction process are accordingly different from those entering it'. They enter it as wage workers personifying capital's need to produce relative surplus value. Yet, in the course of the revolutionary action they undertake as such personifications, they 'change skin' and emerge as consciously (thus freely) associated fully developed social individuals.

Secondly, this leads to the question of the specific *qualitative content* of revolutionary consciousness. This consciousness is not simply an extension of partial struggles based on the very same 'class identity' constituted around the affirmation of an abstract human freedom against the (apparently) external coercion imposed by the capital-determined modes of social objectivity. Revolutionary political action is such because of the *qualitative* potentiality it embodies, which resides in its being the form in which the fully conscious organisation of social life is historically produced. In this specific determination, *it has to be a fully conscious action itself*. Thus, it is a question not just of struggling against capitalist society as a 'totality', but also of the determinate form in which wage workers *consciously grasp*, as the way of organising that political action, their alienated general social relation. However general in its scope and fierce in its intensity, the political action of workers cannot be determined as revolutionary except when ideally reproducing capital in the totality of its social determinations. In other words, this essentially means that workers must comprehend the determinations of their own social being in their unity beyond any appearance presented by it. This does not only involve seeing through the transposed concrete forms of *objectivity* presented by the alienated consciousness in the capitalist mode of production, i.e. the value form and its concrete development into capital. In addition, it also entails discovering the content behind the most general concrete form of subjectivity assumed by the alienated consciousness of the modern individual, namely, the apparently natural self-determining freedom of the commodity owner. Thus, revolutionary workers must grasp the immanently alienated nature of their own subjectivity or their existence as attributes of the total social capital, which has become the concrete subject of modern society. But this also entails the discovery of the material productive powers that, as capital's mode of existence, they have developed in that inverted form. In this way, workers shall recognise the social necessity of the historical task that, as fully conscious yet *alienated* individuals, they have to personify through their self-abolishing political action, namely, the revolutionary supersession of capital through the production of the communist organisation of social life.



### Revolutionary Subjectivity as Productive Subjectivity

In the traditional Marxist account of the revolutionary abolition of capital, the latter presupposes the development of two sets of clearly distinct necessary conditions: the 'objective' ones (generally associated with one aspect of the 'economic' laws of motion of capital such as its crisis-ridden character, the mechanical impossibility of economic reproduction, the tendency for the concentration and centralisation of capital, generalised barbaric conditions of human civilisation), and the 'subjective' ones (class consciousness and organisation). The whole history of Marxism could be reconstructed on the basis of the ways in which the different currents emphasised one or the other factor, or, alternatively, tried to combine the objective and subjective factors. But what unites most approaches, and, I think, what dooms their attempts at discovering the concrete determinations of revolutionary action to failure, is the complete independence they posit between the *political* consciousness of the working class and the development of the materiality of the production process of human life. Because even when the need for material conditions *is* emphasised, the problem is that the particular condition or set of conditions generally posited as *objectively* grounding the necessity for the abolition of capital (be it a fatal economic crisis or the monopolisation of the property of capital simply as such) has no connection whatsoever with the political subjectivity of the working class. The latter is seen as developing according to its own different 'logic', generally deriving from the determinations of the *formal* subsumption of labour to capital and therefore irrespective of the material transformations of human life. To put it differently, those approaches do not actually pose an inner *material determination* or necessity for the development of the revolutionary *political consciousness* of the working class. As pointed out before, they just provide an objective *context*, which is seen as spurring, accelerating or facilitating the *self-determining* movement of the subjective factor which 'reacts' to those external circumstances. But there is no real mediation between the materiality of social life and the political consciousness of workers. It is this mediation that the approach developed in this book attempts to provide.

As we have seen above, it is the historical necessity for the all-sided development of the universality of productive attributes of the workers beyond its capitalist 'integument' – generated by the alienated movement of capital itself – that is realised in the concrete form of the communist revolution. In this sense, the material determinations for the abolition of capital are not *external* to the concrete individuality of workers. Rather, they essentially pertain to their *subjectivity* as working individuals, that is, to their subjective

powers to consciously organise the transformation of the environment into a means for the reproduction of human life. It is only when those material determinations of the development of human productive subjectivity emerge in the course of history that the proletariat acquires the social powers necessary to abolish their alienated general social relation. Hence, what this line of thought suggests is that *the revolutionary political consciousness of the working class can only be a concrete mode of existence of their productive consciousness.*

This has important broader ramifications for the nature of the revolutionary movement itself. Because overlooking that material determination of the political consciousness of the working class necessarily leads to conceiving of the revolutionary process in purely formal terms, that is, as a *mere* transformation of social forms. But what this approach suggests is that what the revolutionary movement realises (its content) is, fundamentally, the transformation of the materiality of the productive forces of the human individual and, *therefore*, of their social forms of organisation and development. In other words, it is about a *material* mutation of the production process of human life, which takes concrete shape through a *social* transformation, which, in turn, expresses itself through a *political* action.

This means, in the first place, that the revolution does not consist in the simple appropriation of the objectified form of the productive forces engendered by capital, although subjecting them to another form of social organisation. This is, broadly speaking, the standard classical Marxist understanding of the nature of the communist revolution (starting with Lenin's socialist use of so-called 'Taylorism', but also including the Council Communist reduction of the communist programme to the demand to 'get rid of the bosses', i.e. self-management of existing material forms of the production process).<sup>2</sup> Moreover, this also means going beyond the well-known 'Western Marxist' correction that consists of adding that the transformation of the social forms of human activity needs to be complemented by the development of an alternative 'socialist technology', which would replace existing forms of the material conditions of social labour that have been 'moulded' by the needs of capital.<sup>3</sup> In this alternative version, the external relation between material forms of the life process

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2 The formalism entailed by the Council Communist ideology of self-management has been insightfully highlighted many years ago by some currents of the so-called 'Neo-Bordigist Ultra-Left' in France (Négation 1973; Barrot and Martin 1974).

3 See, for instance, Murray 2004; Arthur 2003c. See also Dyer-Witheford 2000, Chapter 3, for a review of Marxist approaches to 'technology-as-domination'.

and social relations still persists. On the one hand, we have social relations. On the other, we have the materiality of the productive forces of the human individual. Since capitalist social relations have 'moulded' technology, the construction of a socialist society requires that both are transformed, as if it were possible to do one thing without doing the other. So conceived, the transformation of the material forms of the production process is once again reduced to an external objective condition, instead of being grasped as the immanent content of the communist revolution itself.<sup>4</sup>

In a nutshell, revolutionary practice is not about an external leap from capitalism to communism involving, on the one hand, the abolition of capital and, on the other, the construction of a communist society, as if they were different things. Hence, it is not that the historical powers of the capital form to develop the forces of production are exhausted and come to a halt, and then comes a social revolution which changes the social forms of the life process of humanity, in order to then set into motion the productive forces again, but now on a new basis. Rather, as a political action, working class revolution *is* the conscious organisation of that material transformation of the productive forces of the human individual through the change in the social forms of their organisation. This is why it makes no sense to consider that the 'objective or material conditions' for the revolution are ripe, but the 'subjective factor' is not. For those material *determinations* can have no concrete mode of existence and movement other than the consciously organised political action of the whole working class. To say that those material determinations can exist by themselves without the emergence of the fully conscious revolutionary subjectivity of the proletariat is as meaningless as the claim that value can unmediatedly exist in quantities of its substance and not in the form of money prices.<sup>5</sup>

Only because of all this does the revolutionary process transform both 'circumstances and human activity', i.e. involves 'self-change', as the third Thesis

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4 In other approaches, it is conceived of as an ethical question, part of a 'moral theory of human perfectibility' (Murray 2003). See also Gould (1978), who finds in Marx's *Grundrisse* a critique of the injustices of capitalism and sees the development of the fully developed social individual, hence the historical emergence of human freedom, as the realisation of justice.

5 More generally, the question at stake in this discussion about the connection between productive forces and revolutionary consciousness is the difference between *immanent determination* of a form by its content (ideally reproduced through dialectics), and the exteriority of a lifeless mechanical relation between two self-subsistent entities (when grasped through logical representation).

on Feuerbach claims.<sup>6</sup> This, I think, is also the underlying meaning of Marx and Engels's well-known passage from the *The German Ideology*:

Both for the production on a mass scale of this communist consciousness, and for the success of the cause itself, the alteration of men on a mass scale is necessary, an alteration which can only take place in a practical movement, a *revolution*; the revolution is necessary, therefore, not only because the *ruling* class cannot be overthrown in any other way, but also because the class *overthrowing* it can only in a revolution succeed in ridding itself of all the muck of ages and become fitted to found society anew.<sup>7</sup>

Hence the general determination of the communist revolution: to be the political form of the riddance of the 'muck of ages' engendered by the production

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6 Marx 1976d, p. 4. The determination of revolutionary practice as a process involving self-transformation has been emphasised by various authors (Geras 1989; Barker 1995; Smith n.d.), who thereby provide a necessary warning against the uncritical glorification of existing forms of working class subjectivity as immediately 'fit to found society anew'. However, I think that, in most cases, this process of 'getting rid of the muck of ages' through 'self-transforming' political practice is seen in terms of the constitution of an abstract 'socialist culture of solidarity', with no reference to the materiality of the production process of human life. In other words, the question is idealistically seen as 'ethical' or 'cultural', but not fundamentally in terms of *productive subjectivity*. Lebowitz (2003) does grasp the need to focus on the latter. However, he sees the question as a matter of two different, externally related grounds for the development of the workers' revolutionary consciousness: on the one hand, the transformation of the materiality of the production process of human life and, on the other, the class struggle. By contrast, I am arguing that it is a question of the development of the materiality of human productive subjectivity taking concrete form through the revolutionary political action of workers. Mészáros provides perhaps one of the most suggestive approaches in this respect, explicitly addressing the need for determinate *material mediations* as the ground for the development of 'communist consciousness on a mass scale' and seeing the revolutionary process as the political *form* in which that material *content* is realised (1995, pp. 917–36). However, unilaterally sticking to the immediate concrete form of fragmentation and division through which capital's tendency for the production of universal productive subjects is realised, he cannot see the social necessity for the material transformation at stake as the *immanent* product of the alienated movement of the production of relative surplus value itself. The necessity of revolutionary subjectivity ultimately remains external to the general social relation presiding over the movement of modern society and is represented as consisting in the completion of a historic task that capital leaves unfinished. Again, revolution is seen as an external leap.

7 Marx and Engels 1976a, pp. 52–3.

of relative surplus value, that is, the form taken by the historical production of the subjectivity of the 'rich individuality which is as all-sided in its production as in its consumption, and whose labour also therefore appears no longer as labour, but as the full development of activity itself'.<sup>8</sup>

### Revolutionary Subjectivity as Scientific Subjectivity

If the simplest *content* of revolutionary consciousness entails the self-awareness about the workers' alienated subjectivity, the question immediately arises as to what is the specific *form* of consciousness capable of discovering the former. The answer to this question is self-evident in the very intellectual process I have been unfolding in this book. In effect, inasmuch as the *critique of political economy* entails the reproduction in thought of the concrete unity of all the determinations of social existence implied in the necessity for the abolition of capital, it becomes determined as *the self-consciousness of the working class of the social determinations of its revolutionary action as an alienated subject* – an alienated subject, however, that has developed the material powers and historic task to put its own alienation (and hence its existence as working class) to an end. On the other hand, drawing on the methodological insights found in the work of Iñigo Carrera,<sup>9</sup> I have attempted to demonstrate throughout this book that the critique of political economy embodies such a transformative power only by virtue of its specific, *dialectical form*. In the first part of the book, this was just stated although not fully demonstrated. If successful, my methodologically minded reading of Marx's 'mature' dialectical critique of political economy, understood as the unfolding of the determinations of capital leading to the social constitution of the revolutionary working class, should have substantiated that point.

But there was another fundamental claim, only tangentially touched upon in the book, whose justification remained incomplete. I am referring to the historical determinations behind the distinction I made between representational scientific thought (or logical representation) and dialectical knowledge. As argued before, whilst the former is the mode of scientific knowledge determined as a form of capital's reproduction, the latter is the mode of scientific knowledge determined as the conscious organisation of the practical critique of the capitalist mode of production. However, a proper grounding of this dis-

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8 Marx 1993, p. 325.

9 Iñigo Carrera 1992 and 2008.

inction was not possible at that stage of the book. It is only now that I have discussed the determinations of the production of relative surplus value through the system of machinery that I can properly address that question.

In effect, we have seen that it is that particular material form taken by capital's valorisation that calls into life the powers derived from the scientific regulation of natural and social processes. In this way, capital increasingly determines scientific knowledge as the general form of productive consciousness organising the life process of society. Furthermore, we have seen that this also means that the productive consciousness regulating the labour process ceases to be subordinated to the immediate subjective experience of the wage labourer. In other words, it becomes an objective consciousness. However, this is an objective consciousness which is not the expression of the 'development of human powers as an end in itself'.<sup>10</sup> It is determined as a concrete form of the expanded reproduction of capital through the production of relative surplus value. In other words, it is an objective consciousness bound to reproduce its essential determination as an alienated consciousness. As I have already shown, firstly in my discussion of commodity fetishism and later when dealing with the relationship between class struggle and the valorisation of capital, it is by falling prey to the inverted appearance as free consciousness taken by alienated consciousness that human beings reproduce their own alienation. In this sense, the objective character of scientific knowledge confronts a limit which it cannot trespass without ceasing to be a concrete form of capital's perpetuation: it must be strictly developed in such a form that it does not discover its own immanent determination as an alienated consciousness. Thus, whilst needing to be scientific – hence objective – in order to produce relative surplus value, productive consciousness as an attribute of capital must remain incapable of fully seeing through the appearances presented by the real movement of social life and, therefore, cannot become *fully* objective. It has to remain *ideological*. How are these two requirements of the reproduction of capital reconciled?

I think that the discussion of the difference between dialectical cognition and logical representation in the first part of the book provides the key to answer this question. For the very *form* of representational science (i.e. its *method*) condemns it to grasp the relations between real forms in their apparent externality, and, therefore, to stick to some inverted appearance presented by them. Moreover, in being incapable of reproducing the contradictory movement of the real by means of thought, this form of scientific knowledge leads to uncertainty about its own objectivity. It therefore has to seek the found-

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<sup>10</sup> Marx 1991, p. 959.

ation for its own objectivity outside of itself, in the alleged general rules of correct thinking – logic – guiding the thinking activity of an abstract subject of knowledge. In other words, it is an objective knowledge ultimately resting on *subjective* foundations and which is therefore unable ideally to reproduce the immanent self-movement of social and natural forms. Thus, we can now see the way in which the contradictory development of scientific knowledge within the boundaries of the reproduction of capital ‘finds room to move’, namely, by taking the form of *representational science*. As Iñigo Carrera emphatically argues, the historically specific determination of social existence (and hence of social consciousness) becomes therefore expressed in the very *form* of the process of scientific cognition of reality, i.e. in its *method*.<sup>11</sup> Since the mode of scientific cognition is a social form, as any other it must have a historical determination as well. Armed with that scientific consciousness, the political action of the working class becomes condemned to personify the need of capital to reproduce itself, instead of personifying the necessity to supersede itself into the free association of individuals.

Exactly the opposite line of reasoning applies to the form of consciousness that organises the action which, whilst alienated, in the course of its development transcends that very alienation. I am referring to the ‘communist consciousness’, the ‘consciousness of the necessity of a fundamental revolution’,<sup>12</sup> whose content, as we have seen, is the development of the ‘control and conscious mastery of these powers’ springing from ‘the world-historical co-operation of individuals’.<sup>13</sup> This fully conscious organisation of the development of the social powers of the human being – ‘the reality which communism creates’<sup>14</sup> – presupposes that the latter ceases to see the determinations of her/his social existence as an external force existing independently of the individuality of her/his conscious practical activity upon nature. And this can only be the product of a form of consciousness that is fully *objective* in character and that can therefore recognise and organise the immanent social determinations of human individuality beyond any appearance. This is recognised by Marx in the *Grundrisse*:

The great historic quality of capital is to create this *surplus labour*, superfluous labour from the standpoint of mere use value, mere subsistence; and its historic destiny [*Bestimmung*] is fulfilled as soon as, on one side,

11 Iñigo Carrera 2008, pp. 252–3.

12 Marx and Engels 1976a, p. 52.

13 Marx and Engels 1976a, p. 51.

14 Marx and Engels 1976a, p. 81.

there has been such a development of needs that surplus labour above and beyond necessity has itself become a general need arising out of individual needs themselves – and, on the other side, when the severe discipline of capital, acting on succeeding generations [*Geschlechter*], has developed general industriousness as the general property of the new species [*Geschlecht*] – and, finally, when the development of the productive powers of labour, which capital incessantly whips onward with its unlimited mania for wealth, and of the sole conditions in which this mania can be realized, have flourished to the stage where the possession and preservation of general wealth require a lesser labour time of society as a whole, and where *the labouring society relates scientifically to the process of its progressive reproduction*, its reproduction in a constantly greater abundance; hence where labour in which a human being does what a thing could do has ceased.<sup>15</sup>

Thus, in the communist association, not only will human activity take a mediated form, but as the social form of organisation of the universal development of ‘human powers as an end in itself’ through conscious co-operation, it will also elevate the social mediation of individual activity to new levels and forms. That is, the human process of metabolism will not return to the simplicity of pre-capitalist forms of social production, but, quite to the contrary, it will achieve even more complex forms than the ones produced under the alienated rule of capital. For the fully developed social individual, the problem at stake will be the integration of her/his individual productive action into the activity of a collective body composed out of the universal and all-round co-operation of human beings. And thought being the way in which the social forms of the life process express themselves in the human head, how can the regulation by means of thought of such a complex process of reproduction take the form of a consciousness not involving mediation? Certainly, then, social relations will

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15 Marx 1993, p. 325, my emphasis. It is remarkable that in this passage Marx states that human beings only do that which is specifically human and cannot be done by ‘things’. Although he does not say it explicitly, it seems obvious to me that much if not all of what is now done manually is among those tasks that can be done by ‘things’. In other words, manual direct labour is one of those things that should be consigned to the dustbin of history by the communist revolution. ‘Really free working’ will fundamentally (if not exclusively) involve *intellectual* labour. This should come as no surprise, since it is the regulation of the life process by means of *thought* that, according to Marx, from the *Paris Manuscripts* right up to *Capital*, constitutes the specifically human form of the material life process.



become 'transparent' under the free association of producers. However, this will be the result not of an *immediate* insight,<sup>16</sup> but of a scientific consciousness that passes through all the mediations involved in the fully conscious organisation of what will be a highly complex form of human activity. The necessity for a scientific comprehension of the social determinations of human life will not disappear under communism, but will become the general form in which individuals organise their life activities. Paraphrasing Marx, there is no royal road to the self-conscious organisation of directly social human practice! As he put it already as early as the *Paris Manuscripts*,

My *universal* consciousness is the *theoretical* form of that whose *living* form is the *real* community, society, whereas at present *universal* consciousness is an abstraction from real life and as such in hostile opposition to it. Hence the *activity* of my universal consciousness – as activity – is my *theoretical* existence as a social being.<sup>17</sup>

Yet social being takes in the capitalist mode of production an alienated form. Thus, in its first historical manifestation, this 'universal consciousness' emerges as an alienated attribute of capital, albeit of its immanent necessity to transform the materiality of the human reproduction process beyond the capital form. Whilst *necessarily scientific*, 'communist consciousness' must therefore acquire a form that allows it to penetrate all inverted appearances presented by social being in order to discover its own alienated nature. At this stage of my argument, it is self-evident what this form is: dialectical knowledge. Only this form of knowledge, as 'the reproduction of the concrete by means of thought', ideally expresses the material power to organise the communist abolition of capital. Hence, whilst *logical representation is the scientific method determined as a form of capital's reproduction, dialectical knowledge is the mode of scientific cognition determined as the form of capital's transcendence and, a fortiori, of the free association of individuals ('the reality that communism creates')*. In brief, it is a question not just of abolishing the separation between intellectual and manual labour through the reduction of the latter to 'quantitative and qualitative insignificance', but, fundamentally, of the revolution in the very general form of scientific intellectual labour itself.<sup>18</sup>

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16 Cf. Cohen 1972.

17 Marx 1992b, p. 350.

18 Inasmuch as it is determined to emerge for the first time in the course of history in the alienated form of the conscious organisation of the abolition of capital, dialectical knowledge initially takes the concrete form of *critique of political economy*. Once liberated from

## Revolutionary Subjectivity as Consciously Self-Organised Subjectivity

The rejection of the need for (dialectical) scientific knowledge to organise the transformation of the capitalist mode of production into the free association of individuals has generally come from the abstract critique of Leninist 'vanguardism and substitutionism' by so-called libertarian currents of Marxism.<sup>19</sup> Holloway's recent work is a case in point. For him, the postulation of the need for a scientific organisation of communist revolutionary activity can only lead to the separation between the 'intellectual elite' and the masses. In turn, this would mean that the revolution ceases to be the self-emancipation of the working class and becomes the changing of society by the self-proclaimed vanguard on behalf of the working class.<sup>20</sup>

Clearly, Holloway is not arguing for a complete refusal of the need for critical theory. He explicitly acknowledges that 'intellectual work is part of that struggle'.<sup>21</sup> However, afraid that this claim could lead him to intellectual elitism, he then hastens to add that although it is another expression of the class struggle, revolutionary thought does not enjoy any 'privileged role' in the practical critique of capital. The fully developed consciousness of the social determinations of alienated human activity is just another form of the critique of alienated labour, coexisting alongside social struggles based on more or less immediate consciousness. Or, in Holloway's own words, theory is simply 'a peculiar way of articulating our [the theorists'] participation in the conflict in which all participate'.<sup>22</sup> The real, material unity of theory and practice to be achieved by the critical-revolutionary activity of the proletariat thus dissolves into the purely formal unity consisting in the coexistence of 'critique in theory' and 'critique in practice'.

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its existence as an alienated attribute of capital existing in the heads of the self-abolishing proletarians, dialectical science does not wither away, but must acquire a new concrete form: *human natural science* or the *natural science of humanity* (Marx 1992b, p. 356).

19 This rejection is a particular expression of a more generalised 'cultural mood' in the present times of general political retreat of the working class. In the realm of theory, this mood is expressed in the emergence of postmodernism as the dominant ideological form taken by social theory. In the realm of practical politics, this acquires expression in the anti-intellectualism characterising the current 'anti-globalisation' movement. For concise suggestive reflections on this, see *Aufheben* 1992, pp. 1–2.

20 Holloway 2002a, p. 30.

21 Holloway 2002a, p. 63.

22 Holloway 2002a, p. 30.

By contrast, I think that when its concrete determinations are properly grasped, far from leading to a Leninist separation between 'party direction/intellectuals' and 'masses', the scientific organisation of political action actually constitutes its only genuine practical critique. In effect, the general material content of the conscious revolutionary action of the proletariat suffices to understand why it can definitely *not* take the form of the institutionalisation of the separation of the conscious organisation of that action from its execution proper. And this is not just a matter of an abstract moral superiority of radically democratic forms of social organisation over hierarchical ones. Rather, it is but a consequence of the materiality of the social transformation at stake, namely, the production of the consciousness about the social character of human transformative action as the general social relation reproducing human life. In other words, this is the consequence of the necessary *conscious* nature of such a collective process of social transformation, which can only be such precisely for being the organic unity of the conscious transformative practice of each individual. Only in this way can such action be fully conscious and thereby acquire the plenitude of its transformative powers.<sup>23</sup>

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23 The reduction of the communist transformation to a question of radical democracy has been a longstanding characteristic of the anti-Stalinist left and has gained new life in recent times within the so-called anti-globalisation movement. This 'obsession' with democracy is an evidently understandable but *abstract* reaction of the revolutionary left to the bureaucratic experience of the Soviet Union (and also of Social Democracy in Western Europe). The critique of this 'formalist consciousness' with its 'fetishism of organisational forms' has also been one of the themes insightfully discussed by the 'Neo-Bordigist' ultra-left in France (Barrot and Martin 1974). As Goldner notes, the critique of capital from the perspective of radical democracy basically follows from the representation of capital as essentially a *hierarchical relation of power* (Goldner 1981). But as value-in-process, capital is a materialised form of social mediation that becomes the self-moving subject of human life, a determination that derives from the essentially unconscious form of social reproduction through the commodity form. Hence, the content of the communist transformation is not the democratisation of society, but the abolition of the determination of the human life process as the material bearer of the self-expansion of capital through the conscious association of fully developed social individuals. Inasmuch as its production involves the conscious organisation of collective human practice as an attribute borne by each human individual, one could anachronistically call that 'democratic'. But without a critique of the commodity form, money form, capital form and the abstractly free subjectivity of the private individual, the call for radical democracy mystifies rather than throws light on the communist revolution.

Thus, the monopoly over the conscious organisation of the general social character of human action by some individuals (let us say, the ‘intelligentsia’) can signal just one thing, namely, that the rest of the members of society are acting *unconsciously*, uncritically accepting the appearance that the would-be leaders really are acting consciously, no matter how democratic the mediations between those two poles, or how much the leaders are predisposed to ‘learn’ from the spontaneous movement of the masses.<sup>24</sup> When Marx spoke of communism as the conscious association of individuals, he really meant it. And this is not just a matter of ‘feeling like’ associating with others, or of instinctively doing it under the pressure of external circumstances (even less a question of ethical duty), but more so of being fully and objectively aware of the social necessity of this association in the totality of its determinations.<sup>25</sup> On the other hand, this is why the reproduction in thought of the social determinations of the political action that accomplishes said transformation of the whole process of human metabolism (dialectics), must be, by its very essence, a collective class product, whose production involves *all* individuals concerned. The development of science as the practical critique of capital thereby involves not only the *transformation* of the mode of scientific cognition, but also its *generalisation*. To put it simply, dialectical knowledge (hence, ‘communist consciousness’) must become an attribute borne by each member of the self-abolishing proletariat as a whole, regardless of the particular form of productive subjectivity inherited from the different role played as partial organs of the production and circulation of capital with which they enter the revolutionary process. Only in this way can the ‘genuine bond of consciousness and action’ (Lukács) be established in the course of human history, thereby making the immediate *material* unity of theory and practice become the general social relation reproducing human life.

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24 See Shandro 1995 for an interesting but futile attempt to save Lenin’s theory of the party.

25 Thus it is in the very essence of dialectical knowledge to require the reproduction in thought of the social determinations of human purposeful activity in the singularity of each individual action. This is why, by its very form, dialectical cognition is inherently self-critical: on each occasion it is set into motion, it subjects its existing forms to criticism (Iñigo Carrera 1992). I shall return to this below.

### Revolutionary Subjectivity 'Proper' and the Revolutionary Conquest of the Political Power of the State

We have seen in the previous chapter that Marx's dialectical exposition in *Capital* culminates with the 'expropriation of a few usurpers by the mass of the people';<sup>26</sup> a process which he identifies as immediately coinciding with the 'point at which they [the centralisation of the means of production and the socialisation of labour] become incompatible with the capitalist integument', which therefore 'is burst asunder'.<sup>27</sup> I have already mentioned that this concise statement about the revolutionary transcendence of capital is rather problematic. The reason for this is that it conflates two qualitatively different determinations of the 'Historical Tendency of Capitalist Accumulation': the expropriation (hence abolition) of the bourgeoisie or capitalist class and the abolition of capital itself as a materialised social relation.

Yet this conflation between those two distinct (yet related) social processes lies at the basis of the traditional or orthodox Marxist conception of revolutionary subjectivity and the abolition of the capitalist mode of production. This conception actually follows from the ideological representation of the social relations of production as juridical property relations. In effect, socialism was seen as complete state ownership of the means of production by a workers' state. The proletarian conquest of state power alongside the expropriation of the bourgeoisie was accordingly represented as synonymous with the transcendence of the capitalist mode of production.<sup>28</sup> As should be evident from

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26 Marx 1976g, p. 930.

27 Marx 1976g, p. 929.

28 See Chattopadhyay 1992, 1996 and 2010, for textual evidence of this conception of socialism in Soviet Marxism. In other words, socialism was seen as a *transitional society* between capitalism and communism. This distinction was usually legitimised with reference to Marx's discussion of a lower and higher phase of the society that supersedes the capitalist mode of production in the *Critique of the Gotha Programme* (Marx 1989a). However, as Chattopadhyay demonstrates in the works just cited, the orthodox Marxist differentiation between a socialist and communist society represents a misreading of Marx's argument in the *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, which referred to two phases *within* the communist association of individuals, interchangeably referred to as Communism and Socialism. Incidentally, this misreading is not exclusively a Soviet or orthodox Marxist feature. For instance, despite Camatte's otherwise radically unorthodox reading of Marx, in *Capital and Community*, he mistakenly posits the dictatorship of the proletariat as one of the *three* successive *post-capitalist* phases (the other two being 'lower socialism' and 'communism', as in the Leninist reading of Marx's discussion in the *Critique of the Gotha Programme*). See Camatte 1988, pp. 121–3, 139.

my critical reading of *Capital* and the *Grundrisse*, this conception of the overcoming of capitalism substantially differs from Marx's views.

Thus, whatever the ambiguities of Marx's formulation in the passage from the chapter on the 'Historical Tendency of Capital Accumulation' referred to above, a cursory reading of his so-called 'political writings' makes evident that he was very clear about the '*unity-in-difference*' between the expropriation of the bourgeoisie and the abolition of capital. To begin with, this is condensed in the political programme of the working class to be implemented through the revolutionary 'conquest of political supremacy' contained in the *Communist Manifesto*, whose *immediate* economic content unequivocally comes down to the absolute centralisation of capital in the form of state-property – hence the abolition of the bourgeoisie – and does not involve the abolition of the capitalist mode of production.<sup>29</sup> As Chattopadhyay competently shows,<sup>30</sup> for Marx the revolutionary conquest of political power together with the expropriation of the bourgeoisie were the *necessary forms* in which to *start* the process of transformation of the capitalist mode of production into the free association of individuals. But unlike the conception found in Lenin and orthodox Marxism in general, Marx was very clear that the political rule of the working class 'does not by itself signify the collective *appropriation by society*, and does not indicate the end of *capital*'.<sup>31</sup> The 'dictatorship of the proletariat' was, for Marx, a *period within the capitalist mode of production* – hence, not a non-capitalist transitional *society* – in which the latter was to be entirely revolutionised in every nook and cranny up to the point of fully preparing wage workers for their self-emancipation – hence for their self-abolition as working class.<sup>32</sup> This has several implications beyond those discussed in Chattopadhyay's rigorous but mainly exegetical commentary.

First, during that period, workers continue to be wage labourers. The sale of labour power as a commodity to a single state-owned capital for a wage continues to be the general *indirect* social relation regulating the establishment of the unity between production and individual consumption (and hence mediating the reproduction of the worker's life). In this sense, material reproduction as a whole is not *fully* socialised under those circumstances. Although the allocation of the total labour power of society in its different concrete

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29 Marx and Engels 1976b, pp. 504–5. Strictly speaking, Marx and Engels's programme is even more timid. They suggest the *gradual* expropriation of the bourgeoisie, which would eventually lead to the absolute centralisation of capital as state property.

30 Chattopadhyay 1992, pp. 92–3.

31 Chattopadhyay 1992, p. 93.

32 Ibid.

forms is no longer privately organised in formally independent direct production processes, the part of the total product of social labour that corresponds to the reproduction of labour power still takes the commodity/value form.<sup>33</sup> Consequently, the process of metabolism does not attain social unity in a completely direct form and the social character of labour therefore continues to take the form of capital, i.e. of an objectified social power that dominates the direct producers. In effect, as with simple co-operation, the constitution of an immediately collective productive body is not yet the direct product of the fully self-conscious association of the producers, but is set into motion with the previous mediation of the sale of their labour power as private and independent individuals to the single state-owned capital. Therefore, whilst this figure of the collective worker now personifies the direct organisation of all the functions of the immediate production process in its totality, 'their co-operation only begins with the labour process, but by then they have ceased to belong to themselves'.<sup>34</sup> Their labour belongs to the total social capital, which now immediately exists as a singular capital that subsumes the co-operation of the collective labourer as a whole. In other words, in the reified form of money-as-capital, the materialised general social relation of workers still *pre-exists* and *autonomously sets into motion* their productive co-operation with the only alienated purpose of expanding its own magnitude, i.e. of producing surplus value.

In the second place, no matter how radically democratic is the self-government of the direct producers during the dictatorship of the proletariat (and Marx thought it would be),<sup>35</sup> they still confront the social determinations of their individual life activity as an alienated power.<sup>36</sup> Similarly to workers' cooperatives within an individual private fragment of social labour, general political self-government by wage labourers is tantamount to the self-management 'of the use of the means of production to *valorize their own labour*'<sup>37</sup> for the total social capital. That wage workers have dispensed with the mediation of the direct relation established with a capitalist or a state bureaucrat in the labour process does not change the fact that they are self-organising the *alienated objectification of their productive activity*. Certainly, they no longer submit their productive subjectivity to the consciousness and will of another person (or rather, personification). But they still have to submit their conscious action

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33 Iñigo Carrera 2008, p. 38.

34 Marx 1976g, p. 451.

35 See Draper 1974, for a textual analysis of this point.

36 Iñigo Carrera 2008, p. 26.

37 Marx 1991, p. 571, my emphasis.

to the unity of society existing in the form of a self-activating objective process that they do not control in a fully conscious manner. The despotism and coercion of the production process of human life determined as material bearer of capital's valorisation process does not disappear. It only takes the concrete form of a democratically self-imposed compulsion – yet one that is objectively determined behind their backs – to expand the materialised social relation.<sup>38</sup> In other words, even if, for the sake of argument, we assume with Marx that the *Commune* was 'the political form at last discovered under which to work out the economical emancipation of Labour';<sup>39</sup> this communal *political* organisation still represents, *pace* Lebowitz,<sup>40</sup> a form of existence of the *capitalist state* and not a 'workers' state'.<sup>41</sup> The form determination of the state is to be the political mode of existence of the movement of the total social capital, i.e. the objectified embodiment of the direct organisation of the unity of the conditions of social reproduction in its alienated capital form. Neither the fact that this general political representation comes to be personified by the rule of wage workers as a class, nor the radically democratic character of its institutional or organisational structure transform this content of the state, the basis of which lies in the economic mediation of the unity of social labour through the commodity, money and capital forms. Yet I shall argue below that *precisely by virtue of this content of the state* the working class can achieve its self-abolition (and hence the abolition of both capital and the state) only through the 'conquest of political supremacy'.

Thirdly, this means that, although taking place in the form of a revolution, the political action of the working class that conquers state power and expro-

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38 To make the point as clear as possible, it might be the coercion emanating from a democratically reached consensus in a universal assembly which, as long as its individual members continue to see themselves as private and independent, will still confront their species-powers as an external force, a 'general will' to which she/he must submit her/his activity. Thus, she/he will experience the mandates generated in the assembly (including attendance to the assembly itself) as an obligation, moral or legally sanctioned (even if she/he participated in the 'decision making' process). Only when the human being *objectively and fully consciously* recognises the social determinations of her/his individuality, in communism, will the unity of society cease to appear as an alien force that dominates the individual.

39 Marx 1986, p. 334.

40 Lebowitz 2003, pp. 189–96; 2009, Chapter 18.

41 I say 'for the sake of argument' because, in my view, in those sorts of grandiose statements Marx 'the militant' got carried away and came dangerously close to offering 'recipes for the cook-shops of the future'. A similar point could be made about many of Marx's arguments in the *Critique of the Gotha Programme*.



priates the bourgeoisie cannot be the product of a fully self-conscious subjectivity. Otherwise it would not continue to see the social determinations of human individuality as external to the latter and hence as objectively borne by the product of labour. It is not only an alienated action, but also one that is still unaware of its own alienated nature as the personification of the movement of the total social capital. In other words, the immanent content, which determines this action, still operates behind the backs of workers, who still see their political activity as an affirmation of their abstractly free subjectivity. By 'getting rid of the bosses', they now attain full *personal* 'self-determination' as *collective commodity producers and owners*, overcoming both the relative mutilation that their personally free productive consciousness experienced by virtue of the mediation of the figure of the capitalist in the direct process of production (and, one could add at this stage, in circulation); and, again assuming with Marx the 'Commune form' taken by the dictatorship of the proletariat, also that of 'state parasites, richly paid sycophants and sinecurists' in the general political representation of the unity of the total social capital. Nevertheless, the content and result of this political action is not the self-abolition of the working class, but rather its reproduction, hence that of the valorisation of capital.<sup>42</sup> The dictatorship of the proletariat represents the plenitude of the affirmation of the specific productive powers of the doubly free worker and, for this reason, it also constitutes the plenitude of her/his alienation: under these circumstances, the separation and alienation of the labourer from the means of production does not even need the mediation of the private property of the non-labourer.<sup>43</sup>

In this sense, the form of political subjectivity that undertakes the revolutionary expropriation of the bourgeoisie by conquering state power is *not* the one that expresses the historical necessity for the self-conscious transcendence of capitalist production and whose determinations have been the main focal points of this book's investigation. In other words, it is not *revolutionary subjectivity 'proper'*. It is only the expression of the clash of the production of relative surplus value with the mediation of private property, i.e. of the need for capital, as a moment of its own expanded reproduction, to take the form of a directly collective property, the immediate 'form of social capital (capital of directly associated individuals) in contrast to private capital'.<sup>44</sup> Even more so than the joint-stock companies mentioned by Marx in Volume III of *Capital*,

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42 Iñigo Carrera 2008, p. 37.

43 Ibid.

44 Marx 1991, p. 567.

‘this is the abolition of capital as private property within the confines of the capitalist mode of production itself’.<sup>45</sup>

In the first place, this politically enforced unification of the ‘entire social capital as one single capitalist company’ under state ownership is the necessary form in which the production of relative surplus value drives the alienated socialisation of personally free labour to its limits *within the capitalist mode of production*, i.e. it is the necessary mode of motion of the *absolute centralisation of capital*. But secondly, it is the form in which the total social capital gets rid of the figure of the capitalist when the very material conditions of production (and circulation) make her/him superfluous for the valorisation process. In effect, the complexity and scale of the co-operation of the collective worker of large-scale industry render the subjective powers of the capitalist incapable of personifying in the name of her/his capital even the unproductive labour of superintendence of the productive organs of the former.<sup>46</sup> Thus, as the separation of active function in the reproduction process from capital ownership reaches completion, its existence becomes a barrier to the accumulation of capital itself. The parasitic nature of the capitalist, though not yet of capital, thereby becomes materially concrete.<sup>47</sup> And note that this expresses an alienated necessity of the accumulation of the total social capital: the consumption of the capitalist represents a deduction of the potential surplus value that could be devoted to its self-expansion.

Yet given that the centralisation of capital is the most potent form for the production of relative surplus value and, *a fortiori*, for the alienated historical movement toward the constitution of directly socialised universal productive subjects, the conquest of political supremacy and the expropriation of the bourgeoisie become ‘a necessary point of transition towards the transformation of capital back into the property of the producers’ and ‘towards the transformation of all functions formerly bound up with capital ownership in the reproduction process into simple functions of the associated producers, into social

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45 Ibid.

46 As Marx himself notes (1976g, p. 549; 1991, pp. 510–11), with large-scale industry all the functions of supervision, coercion and management come to be personified by a partial organ of the collective labourer.

47 Incidentally, the confusion over the parasitic nature of the capitalist and that of the capital form as such underlies Negri’s views of the present, ‘Postfordist’ forms of human co-operation as carrying in their immediacy – that is, without the mediation of additional material transformations – the potentiality to explode the capital relation. See Negri 1992, pp. 65–8; Negri and Guattari 1999, pp. 156–60.

functions'.<sup>48</sup> In this sense, the 'ultra-leftist' political programme for 'immediate communisation' is, broadly speaking, right *as far as the content of the political action of the fully developed, self-conscious revolutionary subject is concerned*.<sup>49</sup> It is wrong to think that such a form of subjectivity can emerge in the course of history without passing 'through long struggles, through a series of historic processes transforming circumstances and men',<sup>50</sup> and which can only come about as the result of the 'conquest of political supremacy' that undertakes the absolute centralisation of capital.<sup>51</sup>

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48 Marx 1991, p. 568.

49 See *Théorie Communiste* 2003; *Aufheben* 2003 and 2004; Endnotes 2008b and 2008a. A useful critical assessment and discussion of this political milieu can be found in the recent collection of essays edited by Noys (2011).

50 Marx 1986, p. 335.

51 The problem with the traditional view on the historical production of communism is not, as the aforementioned ultra-leftist milieu would have it, that it postulated the need for the mediation of the dictatorship of the proletariat (cf. Endnotes 2008b, p. 13). As argued above, the problem is that it conceived of the dictatorship of the proletariat as a *post-capitalist transitional society*, whereas my claim is that it is a necessary form taken by the development of the capitalist mode of production, and which is presupposed by the constitution of revolutionary subjectivity 'proper'. At least formally, one could argue that *Théorie Communiste's* version of the 'communisation' thesis does acknowledge the need for historical mediations in the becoming of revolutionary subjectivity. Thus, they attribute a historical role to what they call the 'programmatism' of the 'old workers' movement' in the development of the capital relation up to the point at which it can be immediately abolished (*Théorie Communiste* 2008, pp. 155–66). Unlike the views of those associated with the *Troploin* journal (Dauvé 2008; Dauvé and Nestic 2008), they consider that the determination of the supersession of capital as the immediate content of the proletarian struggle is a *result* of the historical development of the capitalist class relation and not its 'invariant' character (a 'produced overcoming'; see Endnotes 2008a, pp. 215–16). However, in their idiosyncratic account of the history of the capital relation, so-called 'programmatism' is said to have exhausted its historical *raison d'être* in the development of the revolutionary working class *without* having actualised its full potentiality through the absolute centralisation of the total social capital on a world scale. From the perspective adopted in this book, such a situation is quite simply an oxymoron; the kind of subjectivity that immediately personifies the fully self-conscious abolition of the capital form through the revolutionary production of the communist association of individuals (i.e. revolutionary subjectivity 'proper') cannot skip over the necessary mediation of the *actual historical realisation* of the absolute centralisation of capital in the political form of the global dictatorship of the proletariat. At bottom, the more general underlying weakness of the approach of collectives such as *Théorie Communiste* and *Endnotes* (of which their unconvincing historical narrative is a concrete expression) is that despite their own claims to the contrary (Endnotes 2008a, p. 215), they fail to supersede the dualism between

This need to 'take power' is not simply grounded in strategic considerations, insofar as historical experience shows that refusal to take state power has only resulted in those aiming at revolutionary change being eventually thrashed by it.<sup>52</sup> Nor is it the way in which the workers can freely 'realize their own need for self-development'<sup>53</sup> by gradually depriving capital 'of its greatest weapon – the dependence of wage-labourers upon it for employment and for the ability to satisfy their requirements'.<sup>54</sup> Instead, it is grounded in the alienated nature of the workers' subjectivity and, therefore, in the alienated forms necessarily taken by its development and transformation.

As I argued in Chapter 6, the inverted character of capital-determined social existence implies that the subjectivity of commodity owners 'changes skin' only as the necessary mediation of the autonomised self-movement of forms of objectivity. Thus, workers cannot freely self-transform their form of subjectivity in order to develop a revolutionary political consciousness. Insofar as the latter is but an expression of the workers' *productive* subjectivity, the only way of unfolding the necessary underlying transformation of the production process is to 'force capital' to develop that specific revolution in the material conditions of social labour through the production of relative surplus value. As we have seen, workers can obviously not do this by turning their back on their objectified general social relation and its economic and political forms (i.e. capital and the state).<sup>55</sup> There is no exteriority to their

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objectivism and subjectivism. Thus, revolutionary action is not seen as an alienated action that personifies a necessity of the accumulation of the total social capital. Instead, it is ultimately conceived of as abstractly self-moving, yet 'conditioned' or 'shaped' by the historically changing objective configuration of the subsumption of labour to capital. In turn, the latter is idiosyncratically characterised in terms of 'the degree of integration of the circuits of reproduction of capital and labour-power' (Endnotes 2008a, p. 212) and not on the basis of the qualitative determinations of the productive subjectivity of the collective labourer.

52 Bensaïd 2005, p. 179.

53 Lebowitz 2003, p. 190.

54 Lebowitz 2003, p. 192.

55 See Holloway 2002b. Holloway's argument for the refusal to take political power is that the state is a form of existence of capital and that 'its own continued existence is tied to the reproduction of capitalist social relations as a whole'. This might be the case, but so is the very subjectivity of wage labourers. Would that mean that workers should refrain from acting politically in any form because they are a mode of existence of capital? Clearly, this is not Holloway's conclusion. The 'trick', as I have already argued, is that Holloway eventually glorifies a residual or pristine element of the worker's subjectivity, which remains external to capital.

determination as ‘executors’ of the alienated movement of their social being (the accumulation of the total social capital). On the contrary, they have to act upon it in order to make it reach its absolute limit as an alienated mode of development of productive subjectivity. And this can only come about through the absolute centralisation of the entire social capital as the property of a world state.<sup>56</sup> Only in this way can workers impel capital to unleash ‘the historic processes transforming circumstances and men’<sup>57</sup> in the forms needed by their constitution as alienated yet fully conscious revolutionary subjects. As such bearers of revolutionary subjectivity ‘proper’, workers shall eventually become aware of their world-historic, truly emancipatory task: consigning capital-determined alienation to the dustbin of (pre)history through the production of the conscious association of the fully developed social individuals.<sup>58</sup>

### Final Words: Whose Revolutionary Action is It Anyway?

The reader might be tempted to grasp what I have been doing in this book as an exercise in ‘Marxology’, yet another *interpretation* of the works of Karl Marx. However, the very form of the dialectical method as discussed in this work already provides us with a first reason as to why it should not be seen as an ‘interpretation of texts’.<sup>59</sup> As argued above, the point of departure of any materialist dialectical investigation must be the conscious organisation of the form to be given to *our* transformative action in order to realise with the latter the potentialities existing in our reality (the here and now) to ‘change the world’. That is why I have been referring to this book as a *critical reading* of Marx’s work, a necessary moment of the broader question of the positive development of the critique of political economy, which in turn is but the conscious organisation of the practical abolition of capital.

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56 Iñigo Carrera 2008, pp. 37, 124.

57 Marx 1986, p. 335.

58 Note that the distinction between the absolute centralisation of capital through the conquest of political supremacy and the revolutionary abolition of the capital form is essentially analytic. It refers to two necessary *qualitative* ‘moments’ of the transcendence of the capitalist mode of production into the free association of individuals or communism. Whether they will crystallise as two neatly defined historical periods, or as phases of a single historical process, is something that cannot be said today without, again, relapsing into providing ‘recipes for the cook-shops of the future’.

59 Iñigo Carrera 2008, p. 317.

In this sense, what should interest the contemporary reader of Marx's works is not 'what he really said', but rather the development of the objective knowledge of the social determinations of *contemporary* social forms of existence of capital and, fundamentally, of *our* political action among its concrete forms. As argued earlier, this process cannot be spared from the development of the laborious analytical journey from the concrete to the abstract, and the subsequent synthetic return from the abstract to the concrete. In this endeavour, the reading of Marx's works, i.e. of socially pre-existing objectifications of dialectical knowledge, can only serve to *enhance* the potency of our process of cognition. In effect, inasmuch as it is an original development from the *individual* point of view but a process of *re-cognition* as far as its *social* character is concerned, we can engage in the inquiry with the advantage of being able to individually appropriate already existing social powers of the 'general intellect', thereby giving our own process of self-knowledge increased agility and efficiency ('real economy of time', as Marx puts it in the *Grundrisse*).<sup>60</sup>

On the other hand, this necessity to *re-cognise* all the mediations involved in the forms of present-day social being is what gives the very form of dialectical cognition an intrinsically *self-critical* quality. Thus, in my presentation of the different forms of capital as the alienated subject of modern social life through the reconstruction of Marx's texts, I was both following the immanent necessity of those forms *and*, in the very same movement, providing a critique of Marx's own discoveries. As we have seen, one of the critical results of this investigation has been the awareness of the incompleteness of the unfolding of the determinations of revolutionary subjectivity in *Capital*. A huge gap exists between Marx's exposition of the transformations of the *materiality* of the productive subjectivity of the collective labourer and the *politically* revolutionary subjectivity outlined in the end of Volume I of that work. Although I argued that the core elements for such a systematic dialectical presentation of the social necessity of revolutionary subjectivity could be found in the *Grundrisse*, it was necessary to put together those pieces – scattered in an unpublished manuscript – and integrate them as necessary mediations into the reproduction in thought of the qualitative determinations of the real subsumption of labour to capital.

Furthermore, in this concluding chapter I tried to go beyond Marx in the specification of the determinations of the revolutionary subject. I essentially did this by explicitly addressing aspects of revolutionary subjectivity that, I think, are only implicit in Marx's work (although they certainly *are* there):

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60 Iñigo Carrera 2008, pp. 317–18.

namely, its alienated nature; its being a concrete expression of the historical transformations of productive subjectivity; the specific form of its essentially scientific character (hence the historicity of scientific method); and finally, the *materiality* of its organisational form (the overcoming of the separation between 'conception' and 'execution' in the political action of the working class).

And yet, even if including more concrete mediations than Marx, this book evidently still remained at a considerably high level of abstraction. As much as Marx himself, I also considered 'bourgeois society in the long view and as a whole'.<sup>61</sup> That is, with the exception of some digressions in passing, I only addressed the *essential determination* and *general tendency* behind revolutionary subjectivity, with no attention to the concrete forms in which the latter unfolds in the course of the history of capitalist development and, more importantly, in the *contemporary* forms of the essentially global accumulation of capital. On the other hand, I believe that the approach presented here does provide us with the key to such an investigation, namely, the movement of the twofold contradiction between universality and particularity, and between the expansion and degradation of the productive subjectivity of the different organs of the collective labourer, as it springs from the production of relative surplus value.<sup>62</sup>

As a necessary moment of the class struggle, a most urgent task arises for that partial organ of the collective labourer that is nowadays responsible for the production of the critical scientific knowledge of capitalist social forms (i.e. communist intellectual labourers). What is required is dialectical research on contemporary concrete forms in which the alienated development of the productive subjectivity of the workers towards its fully developed universality realises itself through its own negation, that is, by fragmenting the different partial organs of the collective labourer and by keeping the productive attributes of the labourers (even when they are expanded as in the case of intellectual labourers) miserably bound to being those required by the material forms of the production of relative surplus value.

Needless to say, and at this stage of our investigation this might sound redundant, this does not entail an abstractly theoretical interest, but is the

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61 Marx 1993, p. 712.

62 See Iñigo Carrera 2008, Chapter 2; Grinberg and Starosta 2009 and 2014; Starosta 2010, for more concrete discussions of the contemporary configuration of the global economy based on the approach that informs this book. Charnock, Purcell and Ribera-Fumaz (2014) also draw some of the implications of this perspective for the investigation of crisis-ridden dynamics of capital accumulation in Spain.

necessary method for discovering the form of political action that could mediate the immediate needs of workers with the 'historical interests of the proletariat as a whole', i.e. the development of the productive subjectivity of the global collective worker beyond its alienated capitalist form.



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