

# Karl Marx's Writings on Alienation

Edited and introduced by Marcello Musto



# Marx, Engels, and Marxisms

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# Karl Marx's Writings on Alienation

Edited and introduced  
by Marcello Musto

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*Dedicated to Enrico.*  
*For his generosity, kindness and patience.*  
*But 15 is possible.*

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**Marcello Musto** is Professor of Sociology at York University (Toronto–Canada). He is author of: *Ripensare Marx e i marxismi. Studi e saggi* (Carocci, 2011); *Another Marx: Early Manuscripts to the International* (Bloomsbury, 2018); *Karl Marx. Biografia intellettuale e politica 1857–1883* (Einaudi, 2018); *The Last Years of Karl Marx: An Intellectual Biography* (Stanford University Press, 2020); and *Travels of Karl Marx: Destinations, Reflections and Encounters* (Europa Editions, forthcoming 2021).

Among his edited volumes there are: *Karl Marx's Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy 150 Years Later* (Routledge, 2008); *Marx for Today* (Routledge, 2012); *Workers Unite! The International 150 Years Later* (Bloomsbury, 2014); *The International After 150 Years: Labour Versus Capital, Then and Now* (with George Comninel and Victor Wallis, Routledge, 2015); *Marx's Capital after 150 Years: Critique and Alternative to Capitalism*, (Routledge, 2019); *Karl Marx's Life, Ideas, Influences: A Critical Examination on the Bicentenary* (with Shaibal Gupta and Babak Amini, Palgrave, 2019); *The Marx Revival: Key Concepts and New Interpretations* (Cambridge University Press, 2020) and *The Routledge Handbook of Marx's "Capital": A Global History of Translation, Dissemination and Reception* (with Babak Amini, Routledge, forthcoming 2021).

His articles appeared in many journals, including the *International Review of Social History*, *Contemporary Sociology*, *Science & Society*,

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1. *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, translated by Martin Milligan, in Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844 and the Communist Manifesto*, New York: Prometheus Books, 1988. Reprinted with permission from the publisher.
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11. *Marx-Engels-Gesamtausgabe* (MEGA<sup>2</sup>), vol. II/4.1, *Ökonomische Manuskripte 1863–1867*, Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1988. This excerpt has been translated from German into English for the first time, specifically for this anthology, by Patrick Camiller.
12. "Appendix: Results of the Immediate Process of Production", translated by Ben Fowkes, in Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Volume One*, London: Penguin, 1990. Reprinted with permission from the translator.
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The short introductions, indicated in italics, provided at the beginning of each section of Marx's writings have been written by the editor.

Part I  
MARCELLO MUSTO  
INTRODUCTION





# Alienation Redux: Marxian Perspectives

*Marcello Musto*

## 1 THE ORIGIN OF THE CONCEPT

Alienation was one of the most important and widely debated themes of the twentieth century, and Marx's theorisation played a key role in the discussions. Yet, contrary to what one might imagine, the concept itself did not develop in a linear manner, and the publication of previously unknown texts containing Marx's reflections on alienation defined significant moments in the transformation and dissemination of the theory.

The meaning of the term changed several times over the centuries. In theological discourse it referred to the distance between man and God; in social contract theories, to loss of the individual's original liberty; and in English political economy, to the transfer of property ownership. The first systematic philosophical account of alienation was in the work of G.W.F. Hegel (1770–1831), who in *The Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807) adopted the terms *Entäußerung* (literally self-externalisation or renunciation) and *Entfremdung* (estrangement) to denote spirit's becoming other than itself in the realm of objectivity. The whole question still featured prominently in the writings of the Hegelian Left, and Ludwig Feuerbach's (1804–1872) theory of religious alienation—that is, of man's projection of his own essence onto an imaginary deity—elaborated in the book *The Essence*

of *Christianity* (1841), contributed significantly to the development of the concept.

Alienation subsequently disappeared from philosophical reflection, and none of the major thinkers of the second half of the nineteenth century paid it any great attention. Even Marx rarely used the term in the works published during his lifetime, and it was entirely absent from the Marxism of the Second International (1889–1914).<sup>1</sup>

During this period, however, several thinkers developed concepts that were later associated with alienation. In his *Division of Labour* (1893) and *Suicide* (1897), Émile Durkheim (1858–1917) introduced the term “anomie” to indicate a set of phenomena whereby the norms guaranteeing social cohesion enter into crisis following a major extension of the division of labour. Social trends concomitant with huge changes in the production process also lay at the basis of the thinking of German sociologists: Georg Simmel (1858–1918), in *The Philosophy of Money* (1900), paid great attention to the dominance of social institutions over individuals and to the growing impersonality of human relations; while Max Weber (1864–1920), in *Economy and Society* (1922), dwelled on the phenomena of “bureaucratisation” in society and “rational calculation” in human relations, considering them to be the essence of capitalism. But these authors thought they were describing unstoppable tendencies, and their reflections were often guided by a wish to improve the existing social and political order—certainly not to replace it with a different one.

## 2 THE REDISCOVERY OF ALIENATION

The rediscovery of the theory of alienation occurred thanks to György Lukács (1885–1971), who in *History and Class Consciousness* (1923) referred to certain passages in Marx’s *Capital* (1867)—especially the section on “commodity fetishism” [*Der Fetischcharakter der Ware*—and introduced the term “reification” [*Verdinglichung, Versachlichung*] to describe the phenomenon whereby labour activity confronts human beings as something objective and independent, dominating them

<sup>1</sup>In the introduction to Richard Schacht’s (1941–...) volume *Alienation*, Walter Kaufmann (1921–1980) observed that it was even “scarcely credible that the modern vogue of ‘alienation’ should derive from such an unpromising beginning”, Walter Kaufmann, “The Inevitability of Alienation”, in Richard Schacht, *Alienation*, Garden City: Doubleday, 1970, p. XVII.

through external autonomous laws. In essence, however, Lukács's theory was still similar to Hegel's, since he conceived of reification as a "central structural problem".<sup>2</sup> Much later, after the appearance of a French translation by Kostas Axelos (1924–2010) and Jacqueline Bois (?)<sup>3</sup> had given this work a wide resonance among students and left-wing activists, Lukács decided to republish it together with a long self-critical preface (1967), in which he explained that "*History and Class Consciousness* follows Hegel in that it too equates alienation with objectification".<sup>4</sup>

Another author who focused on this theme in the 1920s was Isaak Rubin (1886–1937), whose *Essays on Marx's Theory of Value* (1928) argued that the theory of commodity fetishism was "the basis of Marx's entire economic system, and in particular of his theory of value".<sup>5</sup> In the view of this Russian author, the reification of social relations was "a real fact of the commodity-capitalist economy".<sup>6</sup> It involved "materialisation" of production relations and not only 'mystification' or illusion. This is one of the characteristics of the economic structure of contemporary society. [...] Fetishism is not only a phenomenon of social consciousness, but of social being".<sup>7</sup> Despite these insights—prescient if we consider the period in which they were written—Rubin's work did not promote a greater familiarity with the theory of alienation. Its reception in the West began only with its translation into English in 1972 and then from English into other languages.

The decisive event that finally revolutionised the diffusion of the concept of alienation was the appearance in 1932 of the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, a previously unpublished text from Marx's youth. It rapidly became one of the most widely translated, circulated and discussed philosophical writings of the twentieth century, revealing the central role that Marx had given to the theory of alienation during an important period for the formation of his economic thought:

<sup>2</sup>György Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1971, p. 83.

<sup>3</sup>György Lukács, *Histoire et conscience de classe*, Paris: Minuit, 1960.

<sup>4</sup>Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, p. xxiv.

<sup>5</sup>Isaak Illich Rubin, *Essays on Marx's Theory of Value*, Detroit: Black & Red, 1972, p. 5.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 28 (trans. modified).

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 59.

the discovery of political economy.<sup>8</sup> For, with his category of alienated labour [*entfremdete Arbeit*],<sup>9</sup> Marx not only widened the problem of alienation from the philosophical, religious and political sphere to the economic sphere of material production; he also showed that the economic sphere was essential to understanding and overcoming alienation in the other spheres.<sup>10</sup> In the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, alienation is presented as the phenomenon through which the labour product confronts labour “as something alien, as a power independent of the producer”. For Marx,

the alienation [*Entäusserung*] of the worker in his product means not only that his labour becomes an object, an external existence, but that it exists outside him, independently, as something alien to him, and that it becomes a power on its own confronting him; it means that the life which he has conferred on the object confronts him as something hostile and alien.<sup>11</sup>

Alongside this general definition, Marx listed four ways in which the worker is alienated in bourgeois society: (1) from the product of his labour, which becomes “an alien object that has power over him”; (2)

<sup>8</sup>In fact, Marx had already used the concept of alienation before he wrote the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*. In one text he published in February 1844, in the *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher*, he wrote: “it is [...] the task of history, once the other-world of truth has vanished, to establish the truth of this world. It is the immediate task of philosophy, which is in the service of history, to unmask self-estrangement in its unholy forms once the holy form of human self-estrangement has been unmasked. Thus, the criticism of heaven turns into the criticism of earth, the criticism of religion into the criticism of law and the criticism of theology into the criticism of politics”. Karl Marx, “A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right. Introduction”, in Karl Marx, *Early Writings*, London: Penguin Books, 1992, pp. 244–5.

<sup>9</sup>In Marx’s writings one finds the term *Entfremdung* as well as *Entäusserung*. These had different meanings in Hegel, but Marx uses them synonymously. See Marcella D’Abbio, *Alienazione in Hegel. Usi e significati di Entäusserung, Entfremdung Veräusserung*, Rome: Edizioni dell’Ateneo, 1970, pp. 25–7.

<sup>10</sup>This elaboration matured also thanks to the influence of the thought of Moses Hess. In fact, in the article “On the Essence of Money” he had argued that religious alienation had its explanation in the economic and social world. Cf. Moses Hess, *On the Essence of Money*, Ann Arbor: Charles River Editors, 2011: “what God is to the theoretical life, money is to the practical life in this inverted world: the externalised [*entäussert*] capacity of men, their sold-off life-activity”, p. 10.

<sup>11</sup>Karl Marx, “Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844”, in *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844 and the Communist Manifesto*, New York: Prometheus Books, 1988, p. 72.



in his working activity, which he perceives as “directed against himself”, as if it “does not belong to him”<sup>12</sup>; (3) from “man’s species-being”, which is transformed into “a being alien to him”; and (4) from other human beings, and in relation to “the other man’s labour and object of labour”.<sup>13</sup>

For Marx, in contrast to Hegel, alienation was not coterminous with objectification as such, but rather with a particular phenomenon within a precise form of economy: that is, wage labour and the transformation of labour products into objects standing opposed to producers. The political difference between these two positions is enormous. Whereas Hegel presented alienation as an ontological manifestation of labour, Marx conceived it as characteristic of a particular, capitalist, epoch of production, and thought it would be possible to overcome it through “the emancipation of society from private property”.<sup>14</sup> He would make similar points in the notebooks containing extracts from James Mill’s (1773–1836) *Elements of Political Economy* (1821):

My work would be a free manifestation of life, hence an enjoyment of life. Presupposing private property, my work is an alienation of life, for I work in order to live, in order to obtain for myself the means of life. My work is not my life. Secondly, the specific nature of my individuality, therefore, would be affirmed in my labour, since the latter would be an affirmation of my individual life. Labour therefore would be true, active property. Presupposing private property, my individuality is alienated to such a degree that this activity is instead hateful to me, a torment, and rather the semblance of an activity. Hence, too, it is only a forced activity and one imposed on me only through an external fortuitous need, not through an inner, essential one.<sup>15</sup>

So, even in these fragmentary and sometimes hesitant early writings, Marx always discussed alienation from a historical, not a natural, point of view.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 74.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 78. For an account of Marx’s four-part typology of alienation, see Bertell Ollman, *Alienation*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1971, pp. 136–52.

<sup>14</sup> Marx, “Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844”, p. 82.

<sup>15</sup> Karl Marx, “Comments on James Mill, *Éléments d’économie politique*”, in *Marx and Engels Collected Works, Volume Three*, London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1975, p. 228.

### 3 THE OTHER CONCEPTIONS OF ALIENATION

Much time would elapse, however, before a historical, non-ontological, conception of alienation could take hold. In the early twentieth century, most authors who addressed the phenomenon considered it a universal aspect of human existence. In *Being and Time* (1927), for instance, Martin Heidegger (1889–1976) approached it in purely philosophical terms. The category he used for his phenomenology of alienation was “fallenness” [*Verfallen*], that is the tendency of Being-There [*Dasein*]—which in Heidegger’s philosophy indicates the ontologically constituted human existence—to lose itself in the inauthenticity and conformism of the surrounding world. For Heidegger, “fallenness into the world means an absorption in Being-with-one-another, in so far as the latter is guided by idle talk, curiosity, and ambiguity”—something truly quite different from the condition of the factory worker, which was at the centre of Marx’s theoretical preoccupations. Moreover, Heidegger did not regard this “fallenness” as a “bad and deplorable ontical property of which, perhaps, more advanced stages of human culture might be able to rid themselves”, but rather as an ontological characteristic, “an existential mode of Being-in-the-world”.<sup>16</sup>

Herbert Marcuse (1898–1979), who, unlike Heidegger, knew Marx’s work well,<sup>17</sup> identified alienation with objectification as such, not with its manifestation in capitalist relations of production. In an essay he published in 1933, he argued that “the burdensome character of labour”<sup>18</sup> could not be attributed merely to “specific conditions in the

<sup>16</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, San Francisco: Harper, 1962, pp. 220–1. In the 1967 preface to his republished *History and Class Consciousness*, Lukács observed that in Heidegger alienation became a politically innocuous concept that “sublimated a critique of society into a purely philosophical problem”. Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, p. xxiv. Heidegger also tried to distort the meaning of Marx’s concept of alienation: in his *Letter on “Humanism”* (1946), he noted approvingly that, “by experiencing alienation, [Marx] attains an essential dimension of history”, Martin Heidegger, “Letter on Humanism”, in *Basic Writings*, London: Routledge, 1993, p. 243—a misleading formulation which has no basis in Marx’s writings.

<sup>17</sup> Appearing immediately after the publication of the “Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844”, see for example Herbert Marcuse, “The Foundation of Historical Materialism”, in *Studies in Critical Philosophy*, Beacon Press, Boston, 1972, pp. 1–49.

<sup>18</sup> Herbert Marcuse, “On the Philosophical Foundation of the Concept of Labor in Economics”, *Telos* 16 (1973), p. 25.

performance of labour, to the social-technical structuring of labour”,<sup>19</sup> but should be considered as one of its fundamental traits:

in labouring, the labourer is always “with the thing”: whether one stands by a machine, draws technical plans, is concerned with organisational measures, researches scientific problems, instructs people, etc. In his activity he allows himself to be directed by the thing, subjects himself and obeys its laws, even when he dominates his object. [...] In each case he is not “with himself” [...] he is with an “Other than himself” – even when this doing fulfils his own freely assumed life. This externalisation and alienation of human existence [...] is ineliminable in principle.<sup>20</sup>

For Marcuse, there was a “primordial negativity of labouring activity” that belonged to the “very essence of human existence”.<sup>21</sup> The critique of alienation therefore became a critique of technology and labour in general, and its supersession was considered possible only in the moment of play, when people could attain a freedom denied them in productive activity: “In a single toss of a ball, the player achieves an infinitely greater triumph of human freedom over objectification than in the most powerful accomplishment of technical labour”.<sup>22</sup>

In *Eros and Civilization* (1955), Marcuse took an equally clear distance from Marx’s conception, arguing that human emancipation could be achieved only through the abolition of labour and the affirmation of the libido and play in social relations. He discarded any possibility that a society based on common ownership of the means of production might overcome alienation, on the grounds that labour in general, not only wage labour, was

work for an apparatus which they [the vast majority of the population] do not control, which operates as an independent power to which individuals must submit if they want to live. And it becomes the more alien the more

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., pp. 16–17.

<sup>20</sup> Marcuse, “On the Philosophical Foundation of the Concept of Labor in Economics”, p. 25.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., pp. 14–15.

specialised the division of labour becomes. [...] They work [...] in alienation [...] in the] absence of gratification [and in] negation of the pleasure principle.<sup>23</sup>

The cardinal norm against which people should rebel was the “performance principle” imposed by society. For, in Marcuse’s eyes:

the conflict between sexuality and civilisation unfolds with this development of domination. Under the rule of the performance principle, body and mind are made into instruments of alienated labour; they can function as such instruments only if they renounce the freedom of the libidinal subject-object which the human organism primarily is and desires. [...] Man exists [...] as an instrument of alienated performance.<sup>24</sup>

Hence, even if material production is organised equitably and rationally, “it can never be a realm of freedom and gratification [...] It is the sphere outside labour which defines freedom and fulfilment”.<sup>25</sup> Marcuse’s alternative was to abandon the Promethean myth so dear to Marx and to draw closer to a Dionysian perspective: the “liberation of eros”.<sup>26</sup> In contrast to Sigmund Freud (1856–1939), who had maintained in *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1929) that a non-repressive organisation of society would entail a dangerous regression from the level of civilisation attained in human relations,<sup>27</sup> Marcuse was convinced that, if the liberation of the instincts took place in a technologically advanced “free society”<sup>28</sup> in the service of humanity, it would not only favour the march of progress but create “new and durable work relations”.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1966, p. 45.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 46–7. Georges Friedmann (1902–1977) was of the same view, arguing in *The Anatomy of Work*, New York: Glencoe Press, 1964, that the overcoming of alienation was possible only after liberation from work.

<sup>25</sup> Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, p. 156.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 155.

<sup>27</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, New York: Norton, 1962.

<sup>28</sup> Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, p. 198.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 155. Cf. The evocation of a “libidinal rationality which is not only compatible with but even promotes progress toward higher forms of civilised freedom”, p. 199. On the relationship between technology and progress, see Kostas Axelos, *Alienation, Praxis, and Techné in the Thought of Karl Marx*, Austin: University of Texas Press, 1976.

In this evolution of his thinking, a significant influence was exerted by the ideas of Charles Fourier (1772–1837) who, in his *Theory of the Four Movements* (1808), opposed advocates of the “commercial system”, to whom he used in a derogatory way the epithet of “civilised people”, and maintained that society would be free only when all its components had returned to expressing their passions. These were far more important to him than reason, “in the name of which were perpetrated all the massacres that history remembers”.<sup>30</sup> According to Fourier, the main error of the political regime of his age was the repression of human nature. “Harmony” would only be possible only if the individuals could have unleashed, as when they were in their natural state, all their instincts.

As for Marcuse, and his belief to oppose the technological domain in general, his indications about how the new society might come about were rather vague and utopian. He ended up opposing technological domination in general, so that his critique of alienation was no longer directed against capitalist relations of production, and his reflections on social change were so pessimistic as to include the working class among the subjects that operated in defence of the system.

The two leading figures in the Frankfurt School, Max Horkheimer (1895–1973) and Theodor Adorno (1903–1965), also developed a theory of generalised estrangement resulting from invasive social control and the manipulation of needs by the mass media. In *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1944), they argued that “a technological rationale is the rationale of domination itself. It is the coercive nature of society alienated from itself”.<sup>31</sup> This meant that, in contemporary capitalism, even the sphere of leisure time—free and outside of work—was absorbed into the mechanisms reproducing consensus.

After World War II, the concept of alienation also found its way into psychoanalysis. Those who took it up started from Freud’s theory that man is forced to choose between nature and culture, and that, to enjoy the securities of civilisation, he must necessarily renounce his impulses.<sup>32</sup> Some psychologists linked alienation with the psychoses that appeared in certain individuals as a result of this conflict-ridden choice, thereby

<sup>30</sup> Charles Fourier, *The Theory of the Four Movements*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996, p. 100.

<sup>31</sup> Max Horkheimer, and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, New York: Seabury Press, 1972, p. 121.

<sup>32</sup> See Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, p. 62.

reducing the whole vast problematic of alienation to a merely subjective phenomenon.

The author who dealt most with alienation from within psychoanalysis was Erich Fromm (1900–1980). Unlike most of his colleagues, he never separated its manifestations from the capitalist historical context; indeed, his books *The Sane Society* (1955) and *Marx's Concept of Man* (1961) used the concept to try to build a bridge between psychoanalysis and Marxism. Yet Fromm likewise always put the main emphasis on subjectivity, and his concept of alienation, which he summarised as “a mode of experience in which the individual experiences himself as alien”,<sup>33</sup> remained too narrowly focused on the individual. Moreover, his account of Marx's concept based itself only on the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* and showed a deep lack of understanding of the specificity and centrality of alienated labour in Marx's thought. This lacuna prevented Fromm from giving due weight to objective alienation (that of the worker in the labour process and in relation to the labour product) and led him to advance positions that appear disingenuous in their neglect of the underlying structural relations.

Marx believed that the working class was the most alienated class. [...] He did not foresee the extent to which alienation was to become the fate of the vast majority of people. [...] If anything, the clerk, the salesman, the executive, are even more alienated today than the skilled manual worker. The latter's functioning still depends on the expression of certain personal qualities like skill, reliability, etc., and he is not forced to sell his “personality”, his smile, his opinions in the bargain.<sup>34</sup>

One of the principal non-Marxist theories of alienation is that associated with Jean-Paul Sartre (1905–1980) and the French existentialists. Indeed, in the 1940s, marked by the horrors of war and the ensuing *crise de conscience*, the phenomenon of alienation—partly under the influence

<sup>33</sup> Erich Fromm, *The Sane Society*, New York: Fawcett, 1965, p. 111.

<sup>34</sup> Erich Fromm, *Marx's Concept of Man*, New York: Frederick Ungar, 1961, pp. 56–7. This failure to understand the specific character of alienated labour recurs in his writings on alienation in the 1960s. In an essay published in 1965 he wrote: “One has to examine the phenomenon of alienation in its relation to narcissism, depression, fanaticism, and idolatry to understand it fully”. “The Application of Humanist Psychoanalysis to Marx's Theory”, in Erich Fromm (ed.), *Socialist Humanism*, New York: Doubleday, 1965, p. 221.

of Alexandre Kojève's (1902–1968) neo-Hegelianism<sup>35</sup>—became a recurrent reference both in philosophy and in narrative literature. Once again, however, the concept is much more generic than in Marx's thought, becoming identified with a diffuse discontent of man in society, a split between human individuality and the world of experience, and an insurmountable *condition humaine*. The existentialist philosophers did not propose a social origin for alienation, but saw it as inevitably bound up with all “facticity” (no doubt the failure of the Soviet experience favoured such a view) and human otherness. In 1955, Jean Hyppolyte (1907–1968) set out this position in one of the most significant works in this tendency:

[alienation] does not seem to be reducible solely to the concept of the alienation of man under capitalism, as Marx understands it. The latter is only a particular case of a more universal problem of human self-consciousness which, being unable to conceive itself as an isolated cogito, can only recognise itself in a word which it constructs, in the other selves which it recognises and by whom it is occasionally disowned. But this manner of self-discovery through the Other, this objectification, is always more or less an alienation, a loss of self and a simultaneous self-discovery. Thus, objectification and alienation are inseparable, and their union is simply the expression of a dialectical tension observed in the very movement of history.<sup>36</sup>

Marx helped to develop a critique of human subjugation, basing himself on opposition to capitalist relations of production. The existentialists followed an opposite trajectory, trying to absorb those parts of Marx's work that they thought useful for their own approach, in a merely philosophical discussion devoid of a specific historical critique.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>35</sup> See Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel: Lectures on the Phenomenology of Spirit*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980.

<sup>36</sup> Jean Hyppolyte, *Studies on Marx and Hegel*, New York: Basic Books, 1969, p. 88.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. István Mészáros, *Marx's Theory of Alienation*, London: Merlin Press, 1970, p. 241ff.

#### 4 THE DEBATE ON THE CONCEPTION OF ALIENATION IN MARX'S EARLY WRITINGS

The alienation debate that developed in France frequently drew upon Marx's theories. As the Second World War gave way to a sense of profound anguish resulting from the barbarities of Nazism and fascism, the theme of the condition and destiny of the individual in society acquired great prominence. A growing philosophical interest in Marx was apparent everywhere in Europe. Often, however, it referred only to the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*; not even the sections of *Capital* that Lukács had used to construct his theory of reification were taken into consideration. Moreover, some sentences from the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* were taken out of context and transformed into sensational quotes supposedly proving the existence of a radically different “new Marx”, saturated with philosophy and free of the economic determinism that critics attributed to *Capital*—often without having read it. Again on the basis of the 1844 texts, the French existentialists laid by far the greatest emphasis on the concept of self-alienation [*Selbstentfremdung*], that is, the alienation of the worker from the human species and from others like himself—a phenomenon that Marx did discuss in his early writings, but always in connection with objective alienation.

The same error appears in a leading figure of post-war political theory, Hannah Arendt (1906–1975). In her *The Human Condition* (1958), she built her account of Marx's concept of alienation around the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, even then isolating out only one of the types mentioned there by Marx: subjective alienation. This allowed her to claim:

expropriation and world alienation coincide, and the modern age, very much against the intentions of all the actors in the play, began by alienating certain strata of the population from the world. [...] World alienation, and not self-alienation as Marx thought, has been the hallmark of the modern age.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>38</sup> Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958, pp. 253–4.



Evidence of her scant familiarity with Marx's mature work is the fact that, in conceding that Marx "was not altogether unaware of the implications of world alienation in capitalist economy", she referred only to a few lines in his very early journalistic piece, "The Debates on the Wood Theft Laws" (1842), not to the dozens of much more important pages in *Capital* and the preparatory manuscripts leading up to it. Her surprising conclusion was: "such occasional considerations play[ed] a minor role in his work, which remained firmly rooted in the modern age's extreme subjectivism".<sup>39</sup> Where and how Marx prioritised "self-alienation"<sup>40</sup> in his analysis of capitalist society remains a mystery that Arendt never elucidated in her writings.

In the 1960s, the theory of alienation in the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* became the major bone of contention in the wider interpretation of Marx's work. It was argued that a sharp distinction should be drawn between an "early Marx" and a "mature Marx"—an arbitrary and artificial opposition favoured both by those who preferred the early philosophical work and those for whom the only real Marx was the Marx of *Capital* (among them Louis Althusser (1918–1980) and the Russian scholars). Whereas the former considered the theory of alienation in the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* to be the most significant part of Marx's social critique, the latter often exhibited a veritable "phobia of alienation" and tried at first to downplay its relevance<sup>41</sup>; or, when this strategy was no longer possible, the whole theme of alienation was written off as "a youthful peccadillo, a residue of Hegelianism"<sup>42</sup> that Marx later abandoned. Scholars in the first camp retorted that the 1844 manuscripts were written by a man of twenty-six just embarking on his major studies; but those in the second camp still refused to accept the importance of Marx's theory of alienation, even when the publication of new texts made it clear that he never lost interest in it and that it occupied an important position in the main stages of his life's work.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 254.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 187.

<sup>41</sup> The directors of the Institute of Marxism–Leninism in Berlin even managed to exclude the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* from the numbered volumes of the canonical *Marx-Engels Werke*, relegating them to a supplementary volume with a smaller print run.

<sup>42</sup> Adam Schaff, *Alienation as a Social Phenomenon*, Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1980, p. 100.

With the passage of time, successive supporters of the two positions engaged in lively debate, offering different answers concerning the “continuity” of his thought. Were there in fact two distinct thinkers: an early Marx and a mature Marx? Or was there only one Marx, whose convictions remained substantially the same over the decades?

The opposition between these two views became ever sharper. The first, uniting Marxist–Leninist orthodoxy with those in Western Europe and elsewhere who shared its theoretical and political tenets, downplayed or dismissed altogether the importance of Marx’s early writings; they presented them as completely superficial in comparison with his later works and, in so doing, advanced a decidedly anti-humanist conception of his thought.<sup>43</sup> The second view, advocated by a more heterogeneous group of authors, had as its common denominator a rejection of the dogmatism of official Communism and the correlation that its exponents sought to establish between Marx’s thought and the politics of the Soviet Union.

A couple of quotations from two major protagonists in the 1960s will do more than any possible commentary to elucidate the terms of the debate. For Althusser:

first of all, any discussion of Marx’s Early Works is a political discussion. Need we be reminded that Marx’s Early Works [...] were exhumed by Social-Democrats and exploited by them to the detriment of Marxism-Leninism? [...] This is the location of the discussion: the Young Marx. Really at stake in it: Marxism. The terms of the discussion: whether the Young Marx was already and wholly Marx.<sup>44</sup>

Iring Fetscher (1922–2014), on the other hand, wrote that

<sup>43</sup>Cf. David McLellan, *Marx*, London: Fontana, 1986, p. 80.

<sup>44</sup>Louis Althusser, *For Marx*, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1969, pp. 51 and 53. A few years later, in defending his concept of an “epistemological break” in Marx’s work, Althusser insisted that the discussion on the “Young Marx” was “in the last resort, political. [...] This is not a debate about philology! To hang on to or to reject these *words*, to defend them or to destroy them – something real is at stake in these struggles, whose ideological and political character is obvious. It is not too much to say that what is at stake today, behind the argument about words, is Leninism. Not only the recognition of the existence and role of Marxist theory and science, but also the concrete forms of the fusion between the Labour Movement and Marxist theory, and the conception of materialism and the dialectic”. Louis Althusser, *Essays in Self-Criticism*, London: New Books, 1971, pp. 114–5.

the early writings of Marx centre so strongly on the liberation of man from every form of exploitation, domination and alienation, that a Soviet reader must have understood these comments as a criticism of his own situation under Stalinist domination. For this reason then, the early writings of Marx were never published in large, cheap editions in Russian. They were considered to be relatively insignificant works by the young Hegelian Marx who had not yet developed Marxism.<sup>45</sup>

To argue, as so many did, that the theory of alienation in the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* was the central theme of Marx's thought was so obviously wrong that it demonstrated no more than ignorance of his work.<sup>46</sup> On the other hand, when Marx again became the most frequently discussed and quoted author in world philosophical literature because of his newly published pages on alienation, the silence from the Soviet Union on this whole topic, and on the controversies associated with it, provided a striking example of the instrumental use made of his writings in that country. For the existence of alienation in the Soviet Union and its satellites was dismissed out of hand,<sup>47</sup> and any texts relating to the question were treated with suspicion. As Henri Lefebvre (1901–1991) put it, “in Soviet society, alienation could and must no longer be an issue. By order from above, for reasons of State, the concept had to disappear”.<sup>48</sup> Therefore, until the 1970s, very few authors in the “socialist camp” paid any attention to the works in question.

A number of well-known Western authors also played down the complexity of the phenomenon. Lucien Goldmann (1913–1970), for instance, thought it possible to overcome alienation in the social-economic conditions of the time, and in his *Dialectical Research* (1959)

<sup>45</sup> Iring Fetscher, *Marx and Marxism*, New York: Herder and Herder, 1971, p. 314.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. Daniel Bell, “The Rediscovery of Alienation: Some notes along the quest for the historical Marx”, *Journal of Philosophy* 56, no. 24 (1959), pp. 933–52, which concluded: “while one may be sympathetic to the idea of alienation, it is only further myth-making to read this concept back as the central theme of Marx”, p. 935.

<sup>47</sup> A notable exception to this attitude was the Polish scholar Adam Schaff (1913–2006), who in his book *Marxism and the Human Individual*, New York: McGraw-Hill, 1970, highlighted how the abolition of private ownership of the means of production did not lead to the automatic disappearance of alienation, since even in “socialist” societies work retained the character of a commodity.

<sup>48</sup> Henri Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life*, London: Verso, 1991, p. 53.

argued that it would disappear, or recede, under the mere impact of planning. “Reification”, he wrote, “is in fact a phenomenon closely bound up with the absence of planning and with production for the market”; Soviet socialism in the East and Keynesian policies in the West were resulting “in the first case in the elimination of reification, and in the second case in its progressive weakening”.<sup>49</sup> History has demonstrated the faultiness of his predictions.

Whatever their academic discipline or political affiliation, interpreters of the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* may be divided into three groups. The first consists of all those who, in counterposing the Paris manuscripts to *Capital*, stress the theoretical pre-eminence of the former work. A second group attaches little significance in general to the manuscripts, while a third tends towards the thesis that there is a theoretical continuum between them and *Capital*.

Those who assumed a split between the “young” and the “mature” Marx, argued for the greater theoretical richness of the former, presented the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* as his most valuable text and sharply differentiated it from his later works. In particular, they tended to marginalise *Capital* often without studying it in any depth—a book altogether more demanding than the twenty-odd pages on alienated labour in the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, about which almost all advanced various philosophical cogitations.<sup>50</sup> In casting Marx’s thought as an ethical–humanist doctrine, these authors pursued the political objective of opposing the rigid orthodoxy of 1930s Soviet Marxism and contesting its hegemony within the workers’ movement. This theoretical offensive resulted in something very different, tending to enlarge the potential field of Marxist theory.<sup>51</sup> Though the formulations were often hazy and generic, Marxism was no longer considered merely as an economic determinist theory and began to exert a greater attraction for large numbers of intellectuals and young people.

This approach began to make headway soon after the publication in 1932 of the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* and continued to win converts until the late 1950s, partly thanks to the explosive effect

<sup>49</sup> Lucien Goldmann, *Recherches dialectiques*, Paris: Gallimard, 1959, p. 101.

<sup>50</sup> The originators of this line of interpretation were Siegfried Landshut (1897–1968) and Jacob Peter Mayer (1903–1992), shortly followed by Henri de Man (1885–1953).

<sup>51</sup> See Schaff, *Marxism and the Human Individual*, p. 5.

of a new text so unlike the dominant canon of Marxism. Its main sponsors were a motley group of heterodox Marxists, progressive Christians and existentialist philosophers,<sup>52</sup> who interpreted Marx's economic writings as a step back from what they saw as the centrality of the human person in his early theories.<sup>53</sup>

The second group of interpreters, who regarded the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* as a transitional text of no special significance in the development of Marx's thought. This was the most widely read account in the Soviet Union and its later satellite countries. The failure of the manuscripts to mention the "dictatorship of the proletariat", together with the presence of themes such as human alienation and the exploitation of labour that highlighted some of the most glaring contradictions of "actually existing socialism", led to their ostracisation at the top of the ruling Communist parties. Not by chance were they excluded from editions of the works of Marx and Engels in various countries of the "socialist bloc". Moreover, many of the authors in question wholly endorsed Vladimir Lenin's (1870–1924) definition of the stages in the development of Marx's thought—an approach later canonised by Marxism–Leninism, which, apart from being in many respects theoretically and politically questionable, made it impossible to account for Marx's important work newly published for the first time eight years after the death of the Bolshevik leader.

As the influence of the Althusserian school grew in the 1960s, this reading also became popular in France and elsewhere in Western Europe. But, although its basic tenets are generally attributed to Althusser alone, the seeds were already there in Pierre Naville (1903–1993). He believed that Marxism was a science and that Marx's early works, still imbued with the language and preoccupations of Left Hegelianism, marked a stage prior to the birth of a "new science" in *Capital*.<sup>54</sup> For Althusser, as we

<sup>52</sup> See Robert Tucker, *Philosophy and Myth*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1961, p. 168.

<sup>53</sup> After the Second World War, the main figures were Erich Thier (?), Heinrich Popitz (1925–2002) and Jakob Hommes (1898–1966) in Germany and—although they did not clearly endorse the claim to superiority of the 1844 manuscripts—Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908–1961), Pierre Bigo (1906–1997), Jean-Yves Calvez (1927–2010) and Axelos in France, and Fromm in the United States.

<sup>54</sup> See Henri Lefebvre, *Marx*, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1972, pp. 24 and 26.

have seen, the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* represented the Marx most distant from Marxism.

A philologically unfounded contraposition of Marx's early writings to the critique of political economy is shared by dissident or "revisionist" Marxists eager to prioritise the former and by orthodox Communists focused on the "mature Marx". Between them, they contributed to one of the principal misunderstandings in the history of Marxism: the myth of the "Young Marx".<sup>55</sup> This antagonism also gave rise to conflicts about the terminology and fundamental concepts of Marxian theory—for example, historical materialism versus historicism, or exploitation versus alienation.

The third and last group of interpreters of the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* consists of those who, from different political and theoretical standpoints, identified a substantive continuity in Marx's work.<sup>56</sup> The idea of an essential Marxian *continuum*, as opposed to a sharp theoretical break that completely discarded all that came before, was the inspiration for some of the best interpretations of the concept of alienation in the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*. Even then, however, there were a number of errors of interpretation—most notably, in certain authors, an underestimation of Marx's huge advances of the 1850s and 1860s in the field of political economy. This went together with a diffuse tendency to reconstruct Marx's thought through collections of quotations, without taking any account of the different periods in which the source texts had been written. All too often, the result was an author assembled out of pieces corresponding to the interpreter's particular vision, passing backwards and forwards from *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* to *Capital*, as if Marx's work were a single timeless and undifferentiated text.<sup>57</sup>

<sup>55</sup> Cf. Marcello Musto, "The Myth of the 'Young Marx' in the Interpretations of the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*", *Critique* 43, no. 2 (2015), pp. 233–60.

<sup>56</sup> Going back to Marcuse or Lukács in German and Jean Hyppolite (1907–1968) or Maximilien Rubel (1905–1996) in French, this approach became hegemonic in the English-speaking world through the work of Robert Tucker (1918–2010), David McLellan (1940–...) and Bertell Ollman (1935–...), then spread to most other parts of the world more widely from the late Sixties on, as the writings of Iring Fetscher (1922–2014), Shlomo Avineri (1933–...), István Mészáros (1930–2017) and Schaff testify.

<sup>57</sup> See the critical points made in this connection by Schaff and Raymond Aron (1905–1983). For the former, "Marx's texts from the 1840s cannot be quoted indiscriminately alongside those from the 1870s, as if they carried equal weight for our knowledge of Marxism and had an equal right of abode in our analysis", Schaff, *Marxism and the*

To underline the importance of the concept of alienation in the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* for a better understanding of Marx's development cannot involve drawing a veil of silence over the huge limits of this youthful text. Its author had scarcely begun to assimilate the basic concepts of political economy, and his conception of communism was no more than a confused synthesis of the philosophical studies he had undertaken until then. Captivating as they are, especially in the way they combine philosophical ideas of Hegel and Feuerbach with a critique of classical economic theory and a denunciation of working-class alienation, the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* are only a very first approximation, as is evident from their vagueness and eclecticism. They shed major light on the course Marx took, but an enormous distance still separates them from the themes and argument not only of the finished 1867 edition of *Capital, Volume One*, but also of the preparatory manuscripts for *Capital*, one of them published, that he drafted from the late 1850s on.

In contrast to analyses that either play up a distinctive "Young Marx" or try to force a theoretical break in his work, the most incisive readings of the concept of alienation in the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* have known how to treat them as an interesting, but only initial, stage in Marx's critical trajectory. Had he not continued his research but remained with the concepts of the Paris manuscripts, he would probably have been demoted to a place alongside Bruno Bauer (1809–1882) and Feuerbach in the sections of philosophy manuals devoted to the Hegelian Left.<sup>58</sup>

## 5 THE IRRESISTIBLE FASCINATION OF THE THEORY OF ALIENATION

In the 1960s a real vogue began for theories of alienation, and hundreds of books and articles were published on it around the world. It was the

*Human Individual*, p. 28, trans. modified. For the latter, "in the years after the war, during the existentialist period, the Jesuit priests Bigo and Calvez and the existentialists treated the whole of Marxist thought as an atemporal whole, some using texts from 1845, others from 1867, as if Marx's thought did not develop, as if the rough copy of 1844 (not even finished, still less published) contained the best of Marxism", Raymond Aron, *D'une Sainte Famille à l'autre*, Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1969, p. 223.

<sup>58</sup>Schaff, *Marxism and the Human Individual*, p. 28.

age of alienation *tout court*. Authors from various political backgrounds and academic disciplines identified its causes as commodification, over-specialisation, anomie, bureaucratisation, conformism, consumerism, loss of a sense of self amid new technologies, even personal isolation, apathy, social or ethnic marginalisation and environmental pollution.<sup>59</sup>

The concept of alienation seemed to express the spirit of the age to perfection, and indeed, in its critique of capitalist society, it became a meeting ground for anti-Soviet philosophical Marxism and the most democratic and progressive currents in the Catholic world. However, the popularity of the concept, and its indiscriminate application, created a profound terminological ambiguity.<sup>60</sup> Within the space of a few years, alienation thus became an empty formula ranging right across the spectrum of human unhappiness—so all-encompassing that it generated the belief that it could never be modified.<sup>61</sup>

With Guy Debord's (1931–1994) book *The Society of the Spectacle* (1967), which became soon after its publication a veritable manifesto for the generation of students in revolt against the system, alienation theory linked up with the critique of immaterial production. Building on the theses of Horkheimer and Adorno, according to which the manufacturing of consent to the social order had spread to the leisure industry, Debord argued that the sphere of non-labour could no longer be considered separate from productive activity:

<sup>59</sup>In this context, alienation also became “an intellectual commodity in the academic market”, a very fashionable topic on which to write books and, therefore, an effective and functional tool to make a career in the university world. Cf. David Schweitzer, *Fetishization of Alienation. Unpacking a Problem of Science, Knowledge, and Reified Practices in the Workplace*, in *Alienation, Ethnicity, and Postmodernism*, edited by F. Geyer, Westport: Greenwood, 1996, p. 26.

<sup>60</sup>Thus Richard Schacht, *Alienation*, Garden City: Doubleday, 1970, noted that there is almost no aspect of contemporary life which has not been discussed in terms of “alienation”, p. lix; while Peter C. Ludz, “Alienation as a Concept in the Social Sciences”, reprinted in Felix Geyer and David Schweitzer (eds.), *Theories of Alienation*, Leiden: Martinus Nijhoff, 1976, p. 3, remarked that “the popularity of the concept serves to increase existing terminological ambiguity”.

<sup>61</sup>Cf. David Schweitzer, “Alienation, De-alienation, and Change: A critical overview of current perspectives in philosophy and the social sciences”, in Giora Shoham (ed.), *Alienation and Anomie Revisited*, Tel Aviv: Ramot, 1982, for whom “the very meaning of alienation is often diluted to the point of virtual meaninglessness”, p. 57.



Whereas during the primitive stage of capitalist accumulation “political economy considers the proletariat only as a worker”, who only needs to be allotted the indispensable minimum for maintaining his labour-power, and never considers him “in his leisure and humanity”, this ruling-class perspective is revised as soon as commodity abundance reaches a level that requires an additional collaboration from him. Once his workday is over, the worker is suddenly redeemed from the total contempt toward him that is so clearly implied by every aspect of the organisation and surveillance of production, and finds himself seemingly treated like a grownup, with a great show of politeness, in his new role as a consumer. At this point the humanism of the commodity takes charge of the worker’s “leisure and humanity” simply because political economy now can and must dominate those spheres.<sup>62</sup>

For Debord, then, whereas the domination of the economy over social life initially took the form of a “degradation of being into having”, in the “present stage” there had been a “general shift from having to appearing”.<sup>63</sup> This idea led him to place the world of spectacle at the centre of his analysis: “The spectacle’s social function is the concrete manufacture of alienation”,<sup>64</sup> the phenomenon through which “the fetishism of the commodity [...] attains its ultimate fulfilment”.<sup>65</sup> In these circumstances, alienation asserted itself to such a degree that it actually became an exciting experience for individuals, a new opium of the people that led them to consume and “identify with the dominant images”,<sup>66</sup> taking them ever further from their own desires and real existence:

the spectacle is the stage at which the commodity has succeeded in totally colonising social life. [...] Modern economic production extends its dictatorship both extensively and intensively. [...] With the “second industrial revolution”, alienated consumption has become just as much a duty for the masses as alienated production.<sup>67</sup>

<sup>62</sup> Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, Canberra: Hobgoblin 2002, p. 13.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

In the wake of Debord, Jean Baudrillard (1929–2007) has also used the concept of alienation to interpret critically the social changes that have appeared with mature capitalism. In *The Consumer Society* (1970), distancing himself from the Marxist focus on the centrality of production, he identified consumption as the primary factor in modern society. The “age of consumption”, in which advertising and opinion polls create spurious needs and mass consensus, was also “the age of radical alienation”.

Commodity logic has become generalised and today governs not only labour processes and material products, but the whole of culture, sexuality, and human relations, including even fantasies and individual drives. [...] Everything is spectacularised or, in other words, evoked, provoked and orchestrated into images, signs, consumable models.<sup>68</sup>

Baudrillard’s political conclusions, however, were rather confused and pessimistic. Faced with social ferment on a mass scale, he thought “the rebels of May 1968” had fallen into the trap of “reifying objects and consumption excessively by according them diabolic value”; and he criticised “all the disquisitions on ‘alienation’, and all the derisive force of pop and anti-art” as a mere “indictment [that] is part of the game: it is the critical mirage, the anti-fable which rounds off the fable”.<sup>69</sup> Now a long way from Marxism, for which the working class is the social reference point for changing the world, he ended his book with a messianic appeal, as generic as it was ephemeral: “We shall await the violent irruptions and sudden disintegrations which will come, just as unforeseeably and as certainly as May 1968, to wreck this white Mass”.<sup>70</sup>

<sup>68</sup> Jean Baudrillard, *The Consumer Society*, London: Sage, 1998, p. 191.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 195–6.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 196.

## 6 ALIENATION THEORY IN NORTH AMERICAN SOCIOLOGY

In the 1950s, the concept of alienation also entered the vocabulary of North American sociology, but the approach to the subject there was quite different from the one prevailing in Europe at the time. Mainstream sociology treated alienation as a problem of the individual human being, not of social relations,<sup>71</sup> and the search for solutions centred on the capacity of individuals to adjust to the existing order, not on collective practices to change society.<sup>72</sup>

Here, too, there was a long period of uncertainty before a clear and shared definition took shape. Some authors considered alienation to be a positive phenomenon, a means of expressing creativity, which was inherent in the human condition in general.<sup>73</sup> Another common view was that it sprang from the fissure between individual and society<sup>74</sup>; Seymour Melman (1917–2004), for instance, traced alienation to the split between the formulation and execution of decisions, and considered that it affected workers and managers alike.<sup>75</sup> In “A Measure of Alienation” (1957), which inaugurated a debate on the concept in the *American Sociological Review*, Gwynn Nettler (1913–2007) used an opinion survey as a way of trying to establish a definition. But, in sharp contrast to the rigorous labour movement tradition of investigations into working conditions, his questionnaire seemed to draw its inspiration more from the McCarthyite canons of the time than from those of scientific research.<sup>76</sup>

<sup>71</sup>See for example John Clark, “Measuring Alienation Within a Social System”, *American Sociological Review* 24, no. 6 (1959), pp. 849–52.

<sup>72</sup>See Schweitzer, “Alienation, De-alienation, and Change”, pp. 36–7.

<sup>73</sup>A good example of this position is Walter Kaufman’s “The Inevitability of Alienation”, his introduction to Schacht’s previously quoted volume, *Alienation*. For Kaufman, “life without estrangement is scarcely worth living; what matters is to increase men’s capacity to cope with alienation”, p. lvi.

<sup>74</sup>Schacht, *Alienation*, p. 155.

<sup>75</sup>Seymour Melman, *Decision-Making and Productivity*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1958, pp. 18, 165–6.

<sup>76</sup>Among the questions that Nettler put to a sample considered susceptible to “alien orientation” were: “Do you enjoy TV? What do you think of the new model of American automobiles? Do you read *Reader’s Digest*? [...] Do you like to participate in church activities? Do national spectator-sports (football, baseball) interest you?” “A Measure of Alienation”, *American Sociological Review* 22, no. 6 (1957), p. 675. He concluded that

For in effect he identified alienation with a rejection of the conservative principles of American society: “consistent maintenance of unpopular and aversive attitudes toward familism, the mass media and mass taste, current events, popular education, conventional religion and the telic view of life, nationalism, and the voting process”.<sup>77</sup>

The conceptual narrowness of the American sociological panorama changed after the publication of Melvin Seeman’s (1918–2020) short article “On the Meaning of Alienation” (1959), which soon became an obligatory reference for all scholars in the field. His list of the five main types of alienation—powerlessness, meaninglessness (that is, the inability to understand the events in which one is inserted), normlessness, isolation and self-estrangement<sup>78</sup>—showed that he too approached the phenomenon in a primarily subjective perspective.

Robert Blauner (1929–2016), in his book *Alienation and Freedom* (1964), similarly defined alienation as “a quality of personal experience which results from specific kinds of social arrangements”,<sup>79</sup> even if his copious research led him to trace its causes to “employment in the large-scale organisations and impersonal bureaucracies that pervade all industrial societies”.<sup>80</sup>

American sociology, then, generally saw alienation as a problem linked to the system of industrial production, whether capitalist or socialist, and

negative answers were evidence of alienation: “there seems little doubt that this scale measures a dimension of estrangement from our society”.

<sup>77</sup>Ibid., p. 674. To prove his point, Nettler noted that “to the question, ‘Would you just as soon live under another form of government as under our present one?’ all responded with some indication of possibility and none with rejection”, p. 674. He even went so far as to claim “that alienation is related to creativity. It is hypothesised that creative scientists and artists [...] are alienated individuals [...] that alienation is related to altruism [and] that their estrangement leads to criminal behaviour”, pp. 676–7.

<sup>78</sup>Melvin Seeman, “On the Meaning of Alienation”, *American Sociological Review* 24, no. 6 (1959), pp. 783–91. In 1972 he added a sixth type to the list: “cultural estrangement”. See Melvin Seeman, “Alienation and Engagement”, in Angus Campbell and Philip E. Converse (eds.), *The Human Meaning of Social Change*, New York: Russell Sage, 1972, pp. 467–527.

<sup>79</sup>Robert Blauner, *Alienation and Freedom*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964, p. 15.

<sup>80</sup>Ibid., p. 3.

mainly affecting human consciousness.<sup>81</sup> This major shift of approach ultimately downgraded, or even excluded, analysis of the historical-social factors that determine alienation, producing a kind of hyper-psychologisation that treated it not as a social problem but as a pathological symptom of individuals, curable at the individual level.<sup>82</sup> Whereas in the Marxist tradition the concept of alienation had contributed to some of the sharpest criticisms of the capitalist mode of production, its institutionalisation in the realm of sociology reduced it to a phenomenon of individual maladjustment to social norms. In the same way, the critical dimension that the concept had had in philosophy (even for authors who thought it a horizon that could never be transcended) now gave way to an illusory neutrality.<sup>83</sup>

Another effect of this metamorphosis was the theoretical impoverishment of the concept. From a complex phenomenon related to man's work activity and social and intellectual existence, alienation became a partial category divided up in accordance with academic research specialisations.<sup>84</sup> American sociologists argued that this methodological choice enabled them to free the study of alienation from any political connotations and to confer on its scientific objectivity. But, in reality, this apolitical "turn" had evident ideological implications, since support for the dominant values and social order lay hidden behind the banner of de-ideologisation and value neutrality.<sup>85</sup>

<sup>81</sup>Cf. Walter R. Heinz, "Changes in the Methodology of Alienation Research", in Felix Geyer and Walter R. Heinz, *Alienation, Society and the Individual*, New Brunswick: Transaction, 1992, p. 217.

<sup>82</sup>See Felix Geyer and David Schweitzer, "Introduction", in Felix Geyer and David Schweitzer (eds.), *Theories of Alienation*, pp. xxi-xxii, and Felix Geyer, "A General Systems Approach to Psychiatric and Sociological De-alienation", in Giora Shoham (ed.), *Alienation and Anomie Revisited*, Tel Aviv: Ramot, p. 141.

<sup>83</sup>See Geyer and Schweitzer, "Introduction", pp. xx-xxi.

<sup>84</sup>David Schweitzer, "Fetishization of Alienation: Unpacking a Problem of Science, Knowledge, and Reified Practices in the Workplace", in Felix Geyer (ed.), *Alienation, Ethnicity, and Postmodernism*, Westport: Greenwood Press, 1996, p. 23.

<sup>85</sup>According to Marcuse, with this choice of field "sociology renounces its point of view. Society becomes a reality to be studied like any other field of scientific investigation [...], the broader views of philosophical concepts had to be left aside". In his opinion, moreover, this was a clearly political position, since "the acceptance of the principle of the invariability of social laws will educate men to discipline and obedience to the existing social order and will make it easier for them to resign themselves to that order", in Herbert Marcuse, "Zur Kritik der Soziologie", *Die Gesellschaft* 8, no. 2 (1931), p. 278.

So, the difference between Marxist and American sociological conceptions of alienation was not that the former were political and the latter scientific. Rather, Marxist theorists were bearers of values opposed to the hegemonic ones in American society, whereas the US sociologists upheld the values of the existing social order, skillfully dressed up as eternal values of the human species.<sup>86</sup> In the American academic context, the concept of alienation underwent a veritable distortion and ended up being used by defenders of the very social classes against which it had for so long been directed.<sup>87</sup>

## 7 THE CONCEPT OF ALIENATION IN CAPITAL AND ITS PREPARATORY MANUSCRIPTS

Marx's own writings played an important role for those seeking to counter this situation. The initial focus on the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* tended to shift after the publication of new texts and with them it was possible to reconstruct the path of his elaboration from the early writings to *Capital*.

In the second half of the 1840s, Marx no longer made frequent use of the term "alienation". The main exceptions were *The Holy Family* (1845), *The German Ideology* (1845–46) and the *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (1848) all jointly authored with Engels.

In *Wage-Labour and Capital* (1849), a collection of articles based on lectures he gave to the German Workers' League in Brussels in 1847, Marx returned to the theory of alienation. But the term itself did not

<sup>86</sup>Cf. John Horton, "The Dehumanization of Anomie and Alienation: A Problem in the Ideology of Sociology", *The British Journal of Sociology* 15, no. 4 (1964), pp. 292–3, and Schweitzer, "Fetishization of Alienation", p. 23.

<sup>87</sup>See Horton, "The Dehumanization of Anomie and Alienation", pp. 283–4. This thesis is proudly championed by Irving Louis Horowitz (1929–2012) in "The Strange Career of Alienation: how a concept is transformed without permission of its founders", in Felix Geyer (ed.), *Alienation, Ethnicity, and Postmodernism*, pp. 17–19. According to Horowitz, "alienation is now part of the tradition in the social sciences rather than social protest. This change came about with a broadening realisation that terms like being alienated are no more and no less value-laden than being integrated". The concept of alienation thus "became enveloped with notions of the human condition – [...] a positive rather than a negative force. Rather than view alienation as framed by 'estrangement' from a human being's essential nature as a result of a cruel set of industrial-capitalist demands, alienation becomes an inalienable right, a source of creative energy for some and an expression of personal eccentricity for others", p. 18.

appear in these texts, because it would have had too abstract a ring for his intended audience. He wrote that wage labour does not enter into the worker's "own life-activity" but represents a "sacrifice of his life". Labour-power is a commodity that the worker is forced to sell "in order to live", and "the product of his activity, therefore, is not the aim of his activity"<sup>88</sup>:

And the labourer who for twelve hours long, weaves, spins, bores, turns, builds, shovels, breaks stone, carries hods, and so on-is this twelve hours' weaving, spinning, boring, turning, building, shovelling, stone-breaking, regarded by him as a manifestation of life, as life? Quite the contrary. Life for him begins where this activity ceases, at the table, at the tavern seat, in bed. The twelve hours' work, on the other hand, has no meaning for him as weaving, spinning, boring, and so on, but only as earnings, which enable him to sit down at a table, to take his seat in the tavern, and to lie down in a bed. If the silk-worm's object in spinning were to prolong its existence as caterpillar, it would be a perfect example of a wage-worker.<sup>89</sup>

Until the late 1850s, there were no more references to the theory of alienation in Marx's work. Following the defeat of the 1848 revolutions, he was forced to go into exile in London; once there, he concentrated all his energies on the study of political economy and, apart from a few short works with a historical theme,<sup>90</sup> did not publish another book. When he began to write about economics again, however, in the *Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy* (1857–58), better known as the *Grundrisse*,<sup>91</sup> he more than once used the term "alienation". This text recalled in many respects the analyses of the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, although nearly a decade of studies in the British Library had allowed him to make them considerably more profound:

<sup>88</sup> Karl Marx, "Wage-Labour and Capital", in *Wage-Labour and Capital & Value, Price and Profit*, Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1970, p. 19.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> See for example *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, *Revelations Concerning the Communist Trial in Cologne* and *Revelations of the Diplomatic History of the Eighteenth Century*.

<sup>91</sup> For a commentary on this relevant, but complex, text by Marx see Marcello Musto (ed.), *Karl Marx's Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy 150 Years Later*, London: Routledge, 2008.

The social character of activity, as well as the social form of the product, and the share of individuals in production here appear as something alien and objective, confronting the individuals, not as their relation to one another, but as their subordination to relations which subsist independently of them and which arise out of collisions between mutually indifferent individuals. The general exchange of activities and products, which has become a vital condition for each individual - their mutual interconnection - here appears as something alien to them, autonomous, as a thing. In exchange value, the social connection between persons is transformed into a social relation between things; personal capacity into objective wealth.<sup>92</sup>

The account of alienation in the *Grundrisse*, then, is enriched by a greater understanding of economic categories and by more rigorous social analysis. The link it establishes between alienation and exchange value is an important aspect of this. And, in one of the most dazzling passages on this phenomenon of modern society, Marx links alienation to the opposition between capital and “living labour-power”:

The objective conditions of living labour appear as separated, independent values opposite living labour capacity as subjective being. [...] The objective conditions of living labour capacity are presupposed as having an existence independent of it, as the objectivity of a subject distinct from living labour capacity and standing independently over against it; the reproduction and realisation, i.e. the expansion of these objective conditions, is therefore at the same time their own reproduction and new production as the wealth of an alien subject indifferently and independently standing over against labour capacity. What is reproduced and produced anew is not only the presence of these objective conditions of living labour, but also their presence as independent values, i.e. values belonging to an alien subject, confronting this living labour capacity. The objective conditions of labour attain a subjective existence vis-à-vis living labour capacity – capital turns into capitalist.<sup>93</sup>

The *Grundrisse* was not the only text of Marx’s maturity to feature an account of alienation. Five years after it was composed, the “Results of the Immediate Process of Production”—also known as “*Capital, Volume One*:

<sup>92</sup>Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy*, London: Penguin Books, 1993, p. 157. In another passage on alienation we read: “rob the thing of this social power and you must give it to persons to exercise over persons”, p. 158.

<sup>93</sup>Ibid., pp. 461–2.



Book 1, Chapter VI, unpublished” (1863–64)—brought the economic and political analyses of alienation more closely together. “The rule of the capitalist over the worker”, Marx wrote, “is the rule of things over man, of dead labour over the living, of the product over the producer”.<sup>94</sup> In capitalist society, by virtue of “the transposition of the social productivity of labour into the material attributes of capital”,<sup>95</sup> there is a veritable “personification of things and reification of persons”, creating the appearance that “the material conditions of labour are not subject to the worker, but he to them”.<sup>96</sup> In reality, he argued:

Capital is not a thing, any more than money is a thing. In capital, as in money, certain specific social relations of production between people appear as relations of things to people, or else certain social relations appear as the natural properties of things in society. Without a class dependent on wages, the moment individuals confront each other as free persons, there can be no production of surplus value; without the production of surplus value there can be no capitalist production, and hence no capital and no capitalist! Capital and wage-labour (it is thus we designate the labour of the worker who sells his own labour-power) only express two aspects of the self-same relationship. Money cannot become capital unless it is exchanged for labour-power, a commodity sold by the worker himself. Conversely, work can only be wage-labour when its own material conditions confront it as autonomous powers, alien property, value existing for itself and maintaining itself, in short as capital. If capital in its material aspects, i.e. in the use-values in which it has its being, must depend for its existence on the material conditions of labour, these material conditions must equally, on the formal side, confront labour as alien, autonomous powers, as value – objectified labour – which treats living labour as a mere means whereby to maintain and increase itself.<sup>97</sup>

In the capitalist mode of production, human labour becomes an instrument of the valourisation process of capital, which, “by incorporating living labour-power into the material constituents of capital, [...] becomes

<sup>94</sup> Karl Marx, “Results of the Immediate Process of Production”, in Karl Marx, *Marx, Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Volume One*, London: Penguin Books, 1990, p. 990.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1058.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1054.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 1005–6.

an animated monster and [...] starts to act as if consumed by love”.<sup>98</sup> This mechanism keeps expanding in scale, until co-operation in the production process, scientific discoveries and the deployment of machinery—all of the social processes belonging to the collective—become forces of capital that appear as its natural properties, confronting the workers in the shape of the capitalist order:

The productive forces [...] developed [by] social labour [...] appear as the productive forces of capitalism. [...] Collective unity in co-operation, combination in the division of labour, the use of the forces of nature and the sciences, of the products of labour, as machinery – all these confront the individual workers as something alien, objective, ready-made, existing without their intervention, and frequently even hostile to them. They all appear quite simply as the prevailing forms of the instruments of labour. As objects they are independent of the workers whom they dominate. Though the workshop is to a degree the product of the workers’ combination, its entire intelligence and will seem to be incorporated in the capitalist or his understrappers, and the workers find themselves confronted by the functions of the capital that lives in the capitalist.<sup>99</sup>

Through this process, capital becomes something “highly mysterious”. “The conditions of labour pile up in front of the worker as social forces, and they assume a capitalised form”.<sup>100</sup>

Beginning in the 1960s, the diffusion of “*Capital, Volume One: Book 1, Chapter VI, unpublished*” and, above all, of the *Grundrisse* paved the way for a conception of alienation different from the one then hegemonic in sociology and psychology. It was a conception geared to the overcoming of alienation in practice—to the political action of social movements, parties and trade unions to change the working and living conditions of the working class. The publication of what, after the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* in the 1930s, may be thought of as the “second generation” of Marx’s writings on alienation therefore provided not only a coherent theoretical basis for new studies of alienation, but above all an anti-capitalist ideological platform for the

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., p. 1007. On Marx’s use of this Johann Wolfgang von Goethe’s (1749–1832) *Faust* metaphor see the insightful considerations of Siebert S. Praver, *Karl Marx and World Literature*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978, p. 325.

<sup>99</sup> Marx, “Results of the Immediate Process of Production”, p. 1054.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., p. 1056.

extraordinary political and social movement that exploded in the world during those years. Alienation left the books of philosophers and the lecture halls of universities, took to the streets and the space of workers' struggles, and became a critique of bourgeois society in general.

## 8 COMMODITY FETISHISM

One of Marx's best accounts of alienation is contained in the famous section of *Capital* on "The Fetishism of the Commodity and Its Secret", where he shows that, in a capitalist society, people are dominated by the products they have created.<sup>101</sup> Here, the relations among them appear not "as direct social relations between persons [...], but rather as material relations between persons and social relations between things".<sup>102</sup> As he famously wrote:

The mysterious character of the commodity-form consists [...] 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 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. [...] It is nothing but the definite social relation between men themselves which assumes here, for them, the fantastic form of a relation between things. In order, therefore, to find an analogy we must take flight into the misty realm of religion. There the products of the human brain appear as autonomous figures endowed with a life of their own, which enter into relations both with each other and with the human race. So, it is in the world of commodities with the products of men's hands. I call this the fetishism which attaches itself to the products of labour as soon as

<sup>101</sup> On the making of *Capital*, see Marcello Musto, *Another Marx: Early Manuscripts to the International*, London: Bloomsbury, 2018, pp. 137–68. On Marx's *magnum opus* cf. also the recent Marcello Musto (ed.), *Marx's Capital after 150 Years: Critique and Alternative to Capitalism*, London: Routledge, 2019.

<sup>102</sup> Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Volume One*, London: Penguin Books, 1990, p. 166.

they are produced as commodities, and is therefore inseparable from the production of commodities.<sup>103</sup>

Two elements in this definition mark a clear dividing line between Marx's conception of alienation and the one held by most of the other authors we have been discussing. First, Marx conceives of fetishism not as an individual problem but as a social phenomenon, not as an affair of the mind but as a real power, a particular form of domination, which establishes itself in market economy as a result of the transformation of objects into subjects. For this reason, his analysis of alienation does not confine itself to the disquiet of individual women and men, but extends to the social processes and productive activities underlying it. Second, for Marx fetishism manifests itself in a precise historical reality of production, the reality of wage labour; it is not part of the relation between people and things as such, but rather of the relation between man and a particular kind of objectivity: the commodity form.

As a consequence of this peculiarity of capitalism, individuals had value only as producers, and "human existence" was subjugated to the act of the "production of commodities".<sup>104</sup> Hence "the process of production" had "mastery over man, instead of being controlled by him".<sup>105</sup> Capital "care[d] nothing for the length of life of labour-power" and attached no importance to improvements in the living conditions of the proletariat. Capital "attained this objective by shortening the life of labour-power".<sup>106</sup>

In bourgeois society, human qualities and relations turn into qualities and relations among things. This theory of what Lukács would call reification illustrated alienation from the point of view of human relations, while the concept of fetishism treated it in relation to commodities. *Pace* those who deny that a theory of alienation is present in Marx's mature work, we should stress that commodity fetishism did not replace alienation but was only one aspect of it.<sup>107</sup>

The theoretical advance from the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* to *Capital* and its related materials does not, however, consist

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., pp. 164–5.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., p. 172.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., p. 175.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., p. 376.

<sup>107</sup> Cf. Schaff, *Alienation as a Social Phenomenon*, p. 81.

only in the greater precision of his account of alienation. There is also a reformulation of the measures that Marx considers necessary for it to be overcome. Whereas in 1844 he had argued that human beings would eliminate alienation by abolishing private production and the division of labour, the path to a society free of alienation was much more complicated in *Capital* and its preparatory manuscripts.

Marx held that capitalism was a system in which the workers were subject to capital and the conditions it imposed. Nevertheless, it had created the foundations for a more advanced society, and by generalising its benefits humanity would be able to progress along the faster road of social development that it had opened up. One of Marx's most analytic accounts of the positive effects of capitalist production is to be found towards the end of *Capital, Volume One*, in the section entitled "Historical Tendency of Capitalist Accumulation". In the passage in question, he summarises the six conditions generated by capitalism—particularly by its centralisation—that constitute the basic prerequisites for the birth of communist society. These are: (1) the co-operative labour process; (2) the scientific–technological contribution to production; (3) appropriation of the forces of nature by production; (4) creation of machinery that workers can only operate in common; (5) the economising of all means of production; and (6) the tendency to the creation of the world market. For Marx:

Hand in hand with this centralisation, or this expropriation of many capitalists by a few, other developments take place on an ever-increasing scale, such as the growth of the co-operative form of the labour process, the conscious technical application of science, the planned exploitation of the soil, the transformation of the means of labour into forms in which they can only be used in common, the economising of all means of production by their use as the means of production of combined, socialised labour, the entanglement of all peoples in the net of the world market, and, with this, the growth of the international character of the capitalist regime.<sup>108</sup>

Marx well knew that the concentration of production in the hands of a small number of bosses increased "the mass of misery, oppression, slavery, degradation and exploitation"<sup>109</sup> for the working class, but he was also

<sup>108</sup> Marx, *Capital, Volume One*, p. 929.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*

aware that “the co-operation of wage labourers is entirely brought about by the capital that employs them”.<sup>110</sup> He was convinced that the extraordinary growth of the productive forces under capitalism, greater and faster than in all previously existing modes of production, had created the conditions to overcome the social-economic relations that capitalism had itself brought about—and therefore to achieve the transition to socialist society.

## 9 COMMUNISM, EMANCIPATION AND FREEDOM

According to Marx, a system that produced an enormous accumulation of wealth for the few and deprivation and exploitation for the general mass of workers must be replaced with an “association of free men, working with the means of production held in common, and expending their many different forms of labour-power in full self-awareness as one single social labour force”.<sup>111</sup> In *Capital, Volume One*, Marx explained that the “ruling principle” of this “higher form of society” would be “the full and free development of every individual”.<sup>112</sup> In the *Grundrisse*, he wrote that in communist society production would be “directly social”, “the offspring of association, which distributes labour internally”. It would be managed by individuals as their “common wealth”.<sup>113</sup> The “social character of production” [*gesellschaftliche Charakter der Produktion*] would “make the product into a communal, general product from the outset”; its associative character would be “presupposed” and “the labour of the individual [...] from the outset taken as social labour”.<sup>114</sup> As Marx stressed in the *Critique of the Gotha Programme* (1875), in post-capitalist society “individual labour no longer exists in an indirect fashion but directly as a component part of the total labour”.<sup>115</sup> In addition, the workers would be able to create the conditions for the eventual disappearance of “the enslaving subordination of the individual to the division of labour”.<sup>116</sup>

<sup>110</sup>Ibid., p. 449.

<sup>111</sup>Ibid., p. 171.

<sup>112</sup>Ibid., p. 739.

<sup>113</sup>Marx, *Grundrisse*, p. 158.

<sup>114</sup>Ibid., pp. 171–2.

<sup>115</sup>Karl Marx, *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, in *Marx Engels Collected Works*, vol. 24, London: Lawrence & Wishart, 2010, p. 85.

<sup>116</sup>Ibid., p. 87.

In *Capital, Volume One*, Marx highlighted that in communism, the conditions would be created for a form of “planned co-operation” through which the worker “strips off the fetters of his individuality and develops the capabilities of his species”.<sup>117</sup> In *Capital, Volume Two* (1885), Marx pointed out that society would then be in a position to “reckon in advance how much labour, means of production and means of subsistence it can spend, without dislocation”, unlike in capitalism “where any kind of social rationality asserts itself only *post festum*” and “major disturbances can and must occur constantly”.<sup>118</sup>

This type of production would differ from wage labour because it would place its determining factors under collective governance, take on an immediately general character and convert labour into a truly social activity. This was a conception of society at the opposite pole from Thomas Hobbes’s (1588–1679) “war of all against all”. In referring to so-called free competition, or the seemingly equal positions of workers and capitalists on the market in bourgeois society, Marx stated that the reality was totally different from the human freedom exalted by apologists of capitalism. The system posed a huge obstacle to democracy, and he showed better than anyone else that the workers did not receive an equivalent for what they produced.<sup>119</sup> In the *Grundrisse*, he explained that what was presented as an “exchange of equivalents” was, in fact, appropriation of the workers’ “labour time without exchange”; the relationship of exchange “dropped away entirely”, or it became a “mere semblance”.<sup>120</sup> Relations between persons were “actuated only by self-interest”. This “clash of individuals” had been passed off as the “the absolute form of existence of free individuality in the sphere of production and exchange”. But for Marx “nothing could be further from the truth”, since “it is not individuals who are set free by free competition; it is, rather, capital which is set free”.<sup>121</sup> In the *Economic Manuscripts of 1863–67*, he denounced the fact that “surplus labour is initially pocketed, in the name of society, by the capitalist”—the surplus labour that is “the

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., p. 447.

<sup>118</sup> Karl Marx, *Capital, Volume Two*, London: Penguin, 1992, p. 390.

<sup>119</sup> On these questions, see Ellen Meiksins Wood, *Democracy Against Capitalism*, Cambridge University Press, 1995, esp. pp. 1–48.

<sup>120</sup> Marx, *Grundrisse*, pp. 674 and 458.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., p. 650.

basis of society's free time" and, by virtue of this, the "material basis of its whole development and of civilisation in general".<sup>122</sup> And in *Capital, Volume One*, he showed that the wealth of the bourgeoisie was possible only by "turning the whole lifetime of the worker and his family into labour-time".<sup>123</sup>

In the *Grundrisse*, Marx observed that in capitalism "individuals are subsumed under social production", which "exists outside them as their fate".<sup>124</sup> This happens only through the attribution of exchange value conferred on the products, whose buying and selling takes place *post festum*.<sup>125</sup> Furthermore, "all social powers of production"—including scientific discoveries, which appear as alien and external to the worker,<sup>126</sup> are posited by capital. The very association of the workers, at the places and in the act of production, is "operated by capital" and is therefore "only formal". Use of the goods created by the workers "is not mediated by exchange between mutually independent labours or products of labour", but rather "the social conditions of production within which the individual is active".<sup>127</sup> Marx explained how productive activity in the factory "concerns only the product of labour, not labour itself",<sup>128</sup> since it "will occur initially only in a common location, under overseers, regimentation, greater discipline, regularity and the posited dependence in production itself on capital".<sup>129</sup>

In order to change these conditions, contrary to the view of many of Marx's socialist contemporaries, a redistribution of consumption goods was not sufficient to reverse this state of affairs. A root-and-branch change in the productive assets of society was necessary. Thus, in the *Grundrisse*, Marx noted that "the demand that wage labour be continued but capital suspended is self-contradictory, self-dissolving".<sup>130</sup> What was

<sup>122</sup>Karl Marx, "Economic Manuscript of 1861–63", in *Marx Engels Collected Works*, vol. 30, London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1988, p. 196.

<sup>123</sup>Marx, *Capital, Volume One*, p. 532.

<sup>124</sup>Marx, *Grundrisse*, p. 158.

<sup>125</sup>Ibid., p. 172.

<sup>126</sup>Ibid., p. 585.

<sup>127</sup>Ibid., p. 172.

<sup>128</sup>Ibid., p. 586.

<sup>129</sup>Ibid., p. 587.

<sup>130</sup>Ibid., pp. 308–9.



required was “dissolution of the mode of production and form of society based upon exchange value”.<sup>131</sup> In the address published under the title *Value, Price and Profit* (1865), he called on workers to “inscribe on their banner” not “the conservative motto: ‘A fair day’s wage for a fair day’s work!’ [but] the revolutionary watchword: ‘Abolition of the wages system!’”<sup>132</sup>

Furthermore, the *Critique of the Gotha Programme* made the point that in the capitalist mode of production “the material conditions of production are in the hands of non-workers in the form of capital and land ownership, while the masses are only owners of the personal condition of production, of labour-power”.<sup>133</sup> Therefore, it was essential to overturn the property relations at the base of the bourgeois mode of production. In the *Grundrisse*, Marx recalled that “the laws of private property - liberty, equality, property - property in one’s own labour, and free disposition over it - turn into the worker’s propertylessness, and the dispossession of his labour, i.e. the fact that he relates to it as alien property and vice versa”.<sup>134</sup> And in 1869, in a report of the General Council of the International Working Men’s Association, he asserted that “private property in the means of production” served to give the bourgeois class “the power to live without labour upon other people’s labour”.<sup>135</sup> He repeated this point in another short political text, the Preamble to the Programme of the French Workers’ Party (1880), adding that “the producers cannot be free unless they are in possession of the means of production” and that the goal of the proletarian struggle must be “the return of all the means of production to collective ownership”.<sup>136</sup>

<sup>131</sup> Ibid., p. 264. According to Paul Mattick, *Marx and Keynes*, Boston: Extending Horizons Books, 1969, “For Marx, the law of value ‘regulates’ market capitalism but no other form of social production”. Therefore, he held that “socialism was, first of all, the end of value production and thus also the end of the capitalist relations of production”, p. 362.

<sup>132</sup> Karl Marx, “Value, Price and Profit”, in *Marx Engels Collected Works*, vol. 20, London: Lawrence & Wishart, 2010, p. 149.

<sup>133</sup> Marx, *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, p. 88.

<sup>134</sup> Marx, *Grundrisse*, p. 674.

<sup>135</sup> Karl Marx, “Report of the General Council on the Right of Inheritance”, in *Marx Engels Collected Works*, vol. 21, London: Lawrence & Wishart, 2010, p. 65.

<sup>136</sup> Karl Marx, “Preamble to the Programme of the French Workers’ Party”, in *Marx Engels Collected Works*, vol. 24, London: Lawrence & Wishart, 2010, p. 340.

In *Capital, Volume Three* (1894), Marx observed that when the workers had established a communist mode of production “private property of the earth by single individuals [would] appear just as absurd as private property of one human being by another”. He directed his most radical critique against the destructive possession inherent in capitalism, insisting that “even an entire society, a nation, or even all simultaneously existing societies taken together, are not the owners of the earth”. For Marx, human beings were “simply its possessors, its beneficiaries, and have to bequeath it in an improved state to succeeding generations, as good heads of the household [*boni patres familias*]”.<sup>137</sup>

A different kind of ownership of the means of production would also radically change the lifetime of society. In *Capital, Volume One*, Marx unfolded with complete clarity the reasons why in capitalism “the shortening of the working day is [...] by no means what is aimed at in capitalist production, when labour is economised by increasing its productivity”.<sup>138</sup> The time that the progress of science and technology makes available for individuals is in reality immediately converted into surplus value. The only aim of the dominant class is the “shortening of the labour-time necessary for the production of a definite quantity of commodities”. Its only purpose in developing the productive forces is the “shortening of that part of the working day in which the worker must work for himself, and the lengthening [...] the other part [...] in which he is free to work for nothing for the capitalist”.<sup>139</sup> This system differs from slavery or the *corvées* due to the feudal lord, since “surplus labour and necessary labour are mingled together”<sup>140</sup> and make the reality of exploitation harder to perceive.

In the *Grundrisse*, Marx showed that “free time for a few” is possible only because of this surplus labour time of the many.<sup>141</sup> The bourgeoisie secures growth of its material and cultural capabilities only thanks to the limitation of those of the proletariat. The same happens in the most advanced capitalist countries, to the detriment of those on the periphery

<sup>137</sup> Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Volume Three*, London: Penguin Books, 1991, p. 911.

<sup>138</sup> Marx, *Capital, Volume One*, pp. 437–8.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 438.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 346.

<sup>141</sup> Marx, *Grundrisse*, p. 708.

of the system. In the *Economic Manuscript of 1861–63*, Marx emphasised that the “free development” of the dominant class is “based on the restriction of development” among the working class; “the surplus labour of the workers” is the “natural basis of the social development of the other section”. The surplus labour time of the workers is not only the pillar supporting the “material conditions of life” for the bourgeoisie; it also creates the conditions for its “free time, the sphere of [its] development”. Marx could not have put it better: “the free time of one section corresponds to the time in thrall to labour of the other section”.<sup>142</sup>

For Marx, communist society, by contrast, would be characterised by a general reduction in labour time. In the “Instructions for the Delegates of the Provisional General Council”, composed in August 1866 for the International Working Men’s Association,<sup>143</sup> Marx wrote in forthright terms: “a preliminary condition, without which all further attempts at improvement and emancipation must prove abortive, is the limitation of the working day”. It was needed not only “to restore the health and physical energies of the working class” but also “to secure them the possibility of intellectual development, sociable intercourse, social and political action”.<sup>144</sup> Similarly, in *Capital, Volume One*, while noting that workers’ “time for education, for intellectual development, for the fulfilling of social functions, for social intercourse, for the free play of the vital forces of his body and his mind” counted as pure “foolishness” in the eyes of the capitalist class,<sup>145</sup> Marx implied that these would be the basic elements of the new society. As he put it in the *Grundrisse*, a reduction in the hours devoted to labour—and not only labour to create surplus value for the capitalist class—would favour “the artistic, scientific etc. development of the individuals in the time set free, and with the means created, for all of them”.<sup>146</sup>

<sup>142</sup> Marx, “Economic Manuscript of 1861–63”, pp. 192, 191.

<sup>143</sup> On the life of the so-called “First International” and on the political role of Marx in this organisation see Marcello Musto, “Introduction”, in Marcello Musto (ed.), *Workers Unite! The International 150 Years Later*, London: Bloomsbury, 2014, pp. 1–68.

<sup>144</sup> Karl Marx, “Instructions for the Delegates of the Provisional General Council. The Different Questions”, in *Marx Engels Collected Works*, vol. 20, London: Lawrence & Wishart, 2010, p. 187.

<sup>145</sup> Marx, *Marx, Capital, Volume One*, p. 375.

<sup>146</sup> Marx, *Grundrisse*, p. 706.

On the basis of these convictions, Marx identified the “economy of time, along with the planned distribution of labour time among the various branches of production” as “first economic law on the basis of communal production”.<sup>147</sup> In *Theories of Surplus Value* (1862–63), he made it even clearer that “real wealth” was nothing other than “disposable time”. In communist society, workers’ self-management would ensure that “a greater quantity of time” was “not absorbed in direct productive labour but [...] available for enjoyment, for leisure, thus giving scope for free activity and development”.<sup>148</sup> In this text, so too in the *Grundrisse*, Marx quoted a short anonymous pamphlet entitled *The Source and Remedy of the National Difficulties, Deduced from Principles of Political Economy, in a Letter to Lord John Russell* (1821), whose definition of well-being he fully shared: that is, “truly wealthy a nation, if there is no interest or if the working day is 6 hours rather than 12”. Wealth is not command over surplus labour time—the real wealth——“but disposable time, in addition to that employed in immediate production, for every individual and for the whole society.”<sup>149</sup> Elsewhere in the *Grundrisse*, he asked rhetorically: “what is wealth other than the universality of individual needs, capacities, pleasures, productive forces [...] the absolute working out of his creative potentialities”?<sup>150</sup> It is evident, then, that the socialist model in Marx’s mind did not involve a state of generalised poverty, but rather the attainment of greater collective wealth.

For Marx, living in a non-alienated society meant building a social organisation in which a fundamental value was given to individual freedom. His communism was radically different from the levelling of classes envisaged by his various predecessors or pursued by many of his epigones. In the *Grundrisse* however, he pointed to the “foolishness of those socialists (namely the French, who want to depict socialism as the realisation of the ideals of bourgeois society articulated by the French revolution) who demonstrate that exchange and exchange value etc. are originally [...] a system of universal freedom and equality, but that they

<sup>147</sup> Ibid., p. 173.

<sup>148</sup> Marx, “Economic Manuscript of 1861–63”, p. 390.

<sup>149</sup> Marx, *Grundrisse*, p. 397.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid., p. 488.

have been perverted by money, capital”.<sup>151</sup> He labelled it an “absurdity” to regard “free competition is the ultimate development of human freedom”; it was tantamount to a belief that “the rule of the bourgeoisie is the terminal point of world history”, which he mockingly described as “middle-class rule is the culmination of world history - certainly an agreeable thought for the parvenus of the day before yesterday”.<sup>152</sup> In the same way, Marx contested the liberal ideology according to which “the negation of free competition [was] equivalent to the negation of individual freedom and of social production based upon individual freedom”. In bourgeois society, the only possible “free development” was “on the limited basis of the domination of capital”. But that “type of individual freedom” was, at the same time, “the most sweeping abolition of all individual freedom and the complete subjugation of individuality to social conditions which assume the form of objective powers, indeed of overpowering objects [...] independent of the individuals relating to one another”.<sup>153</sup> As he wrote in *Capital, Volume Three*:

The realm of freedom really begins only where labour determined by necessity and external expediency ends; it lies by its very nature beyond the sphere of material production proper. Just as the savage must wrestle with nature to satisfy his needs, to maintain and reproduce his life, so must civilised man, and he must do so in all forms of society and under all possible modes of production. This realm of natural necessity expands with his development, because his needs do too; but the productive forces to satisfy these expand at the same time. Freedom, in this sphere, can consist only in this, that socialised man, the associated producers, govern the human metabolism with nature in a rational way, bringing it under their collective control instead of being dominated by it as a blind power; accomplishing it with the least expenditure of energy and in conditions most worthy and appropriate for their human nature. But this always remains a realm of necessity. The true realm of freedom, the development of human powers as an end in itself, begins beyond it, though it can only flourish with this realm of necessity as its basis. The reduction of the working day is the basic prerequisite.<sup>154</sup>

<sup>151</sup> Ibid., p. 248.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid., p. 652.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid.

<sup>154</sup> Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Volume Three*, pp. 958–9.

This postcapitalist system of production, together with scientific–technological progress and a consequent reduction of the working day, creates the possibility for a new social formation in which the coercive, alienated labour imposed by capital and subject to its laws is gradually replaced with conscious, creative activity beyond the yoke of necessity, and in which complete social relations take the place of random, undifferentiated exchange dictated by the laws of commodities and money.<sup>155</sup> It is no longer the realm of freedom for capital but the realm of genuine human freedom.

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<sup>155</sup>Cf. Marcello Musto, "Communism", in Musto (ed.), *The Marx Revival: Key Concepts and New Interpretations*, Cambridge University Press, 2020, pp. 24–50.

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Part II  
KARL MARX  
WRITINGS ON ALIENATION





## CHAPTER 2

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# Early Philosophical and Political Writings

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M. Musto, *Karl Marx's Writings on Alienation,*  
Marx, Engels, and Marxisms,

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## I ECONOMIC AND PHILOSOPHIC MANUSCRIPTS OF 1844 (1844)

*In this text, first published in 1932, Marx considered the problem of alienation—which he had previously approached almost exclusively from a philosophical point of view—in its relationship to political economy and production. In his view, the worker in bourgeois society is alienated in four senses: (1) by the product of his labour, which becomes “an alien object exercising power over him”; (2) in his work activity, which is seen as “turned against him” and not “belong[ing] to him”; (3) by the human race, since “man’s species being” is transformed into a “being alien to him”; and (4) by other people, with regard to “to the other man’s labour and object of labour”.*

\* \* \*

The worker becomes all the poorer the more wealth he produces, the more his production increases in power and range. The worker becomes an ever cheaper commodity the more commodities he creates. With the increasing value of the world of things proceeds in direct proportion the devaluation of the world of men. Labour produces not only commodities: it produces itself and the worker as a commodity and does so in the proportion in which it produces commodities generally.

This fact expresses merely the object which labour produces—labour’s product—confronts it as something alien, as a power independent of the producer. The product of labour is labour which has been congealed in an object, which has become material: it is the objectification of labour. Labour’s realisation is its objectification. In the conditions dealt with by political economy this realisation of labour appears as loss of reality for the workers; objectification as loss of the object and object-bondage; appropriation as estrangement, as alienation.

So much does labour’s realisation appear as loss of reality that the worker loses reality to the point of starving to death. So much does objectification appear as loss of the object that the worker is robbed of the objects most necessary not only for his life but for his work. Indeed, labour itself becomes an object which he can get hold of only with the greatest effort and with the most irregular interruptions. So much does the appropriation of the object appear as estrangement that the more objects the worker produces the fewer can he possess and the more he falls under the dominion of his product, capital.

All these consequences are contained in the definition that the worker is related to the product of his labour as to an alien object. For on this premise it is clear that the more the worker spends himself, the more powerful the alien objective world becomes which he creates over against himself, the poorer he himself—his inner world—becomes, the less belongs to him as his own. It is the same in religion. The more man puts into God, the less he retains in himself. The worker puts his life into the object; but now his life no longer belongs to him but to the object. Hence, the greater this activity, the greater is the worker's lack of objects. Whatever the product of his labour is, he is not. Therefore, the greater this product, the less is he himself. The alienation of the worker in his product means not only that his labour becomes an object, an external existence, but that it exists outside him, independently, as something alien to him, and that it becomes a power on its own confronting him; it means that the life which he has conferred on the object confronts him as something hostile and alien.

[...]

The laws of political economy express the estrangement of the worker in his object thus: the more the worker produces, the less he has to consume; the more values he creates, the more valueless, the more unworthy he becomes; the better formed his product, the more deformed becomes the worker; the more civilised his object, the more barbarous becomes the worker, the mightier labour becomes, the more powerless becomes the worker, the more ingenious labour becomes, the duller becomes the worker and the more he becomes nature's bondsman.

Political economy conceals the estrangement inherent in the nature of labour by not considering the direct relationship between the worker (labour) and production. It is true that labour produces for the rich wonderful things—but for the worker it produces privation. It produces palaces—but for the worker, hovels. It produces beauty—but for the worker, deformity. It replaces labour by machines—but some of the workers it throws back to a barbarous type of labour, and the other workers it turns into machines. It produces intelligence—but for the worker idiocy, cretinism.

[...]

Until now we have been considering the estrangement, the alienation of the worker only in one of its aspects, i.e. the worker's relationship to the products of his labour. But the estrangement is manifested not only in the result but in the act of production—within the producing

activity itself. How would the worker come to face the product of his activity as a stranger, were it not that in the very act of production he was estranging himself from himself? The product is after all but the summary of the activity, of production. If then the product of labour is alienation, production itself must be active alienation, the alienation of activity, the activity of alienation. In the estrangement of the object of labour is merely summarised the estrangement, the alienation, in the activity of labour itself.

What, then, constitutes the alienation of labour?

First, the fact that labour is external to the worker, i.e. it does not belong to his essential being; that in his work, therefore, he does not affirm himself but denies himself, does not feel content but unhappy, does not develop freely his physical and mental energy but mortifies his body and ruins his mind. The worker therefore only feels himself outside his work, and in his work feels outside himself. He is at home when he is not working, and when he is working he is not at home. His labour is therefore not voluntary, but coerced; it is forced labour. It is therefore not the satisfaction of a need; it is merely a means to satisfy needs external to it. Its alien character emerges clearly in the fact that as soon as no physical or other compulsion exists, labour is shunned like the plague. External labour, labour in which man alienates himself, is a labour of self-sacrifice, of mortification. Lastly, the external character of labour for the worker appears in the fact that it is not his own, but someone else's, that it does not belong to him, that in it he belongs, not to himself, but to another. Just as in religion the spontaneous activity of the human imagination, of the human brain and the human heart, operates independently of the individual—that is, operates on him as an alien, divine or diabolical activity—in the same way the worker's activity is not his spontaneous activity. It belongs to another; it is the loss of his self.

As a result, therefore, man (the worker) no longer feels himself to be freely active in any but his animal functions—eating, drinking, procreating or at most in his dwelling and dressing-up, etc.; and in his human functions he no longer feels himself to be anything but an animal. What is animal becomes human and what is human becomes animal.

Certainly drinking, eating, procreating, etc., are also genuinely human functions. But in the abstraction which separates them from the sphere of all other human activity and turns them into sole and ultimate ends, they are animal.



We have considered the act of estranging practical human activity, labour, in two of its aspects. (1) The relation of the worker to the product of labour as an alien object exercising power over him. This relation is at the same time the relation to the sensuous external world, to the objects of nature as an alien world antagonistically opposed to him. (2) The relation of labour to the act of production within the labour process. This relation is the relation of the worker to his own activity as an alien activity not belonging to him; it is activity as suffering, strength as weakness, begetting as emasculating, the worker's own physical and mental energy, his personal life or what is life other than activity—as an activity which is turned against him, neither depends on nor belongs to him. Here we have self-estrangement, as we had previously the estrangement of the thing.

We have yet a third aspect of estranged labour to deduce from the two already considered.

[...]

In estranging from man (1) nature, and (2) himself, his own active functions, his life-activity, estranged labour estranges the species from man. It turns for him the life of the species into a means of individual life. First it estranges the life of the species and individual life, and secondly it makes individual life in its abstract form the purpose of the life of the species, likewise in its abstract and estranged form.

For in the first place labour, life-activity, productive life itself, appears to man merely as a means of satisfying a need—the need to maintain the physical existence. Yet the productive life is the life of the species. It is life-engendering life. The whole character of a species its species character is contained in the character of its life-activity; and free, conscious activity is man's species character. Life itself appears only as a means to life.

The animal is immediately identical with its life-activity. It does not distinguish itself from it. It is its life-activity. Man makes his life-activity itself the object of his will and his consciousness. He has conscious life-activity. It is not a determination with which he directly merges. Conscious life-activity directly distinguishes man from animal life-activity. It is just because of this that he is a species being. Or it is only because he is a species being that he is a Conscious Being, i.e. that his own life is an object for him. Only because of that is his activity free activity. Estranged labour reverses this relationship, so that it is just because man is a conscious being that he makes his life-activity, his essential being, a mere means to his existence.

[...]

It is just in the working-up of the objective world, therefore, that man first really proves himself to be a species being. This production is his active species life. Through and because of this production, nature appears as his work and his reality. The object of labour is, therefore, the objectification of man's species life: for he duplicates himself not only, as in consciousness, intellectually, but also actively, in reality, and therefore he contemplates himself in a world that he has created. In tearing away from man the object of his production, therefore, estranged labour tears from him his species life, his real species objectivity, and transforms his advantage over animals into the disadvantage that his inorganic body, nature, is taken from him.

Similarly, in degrading spontaneous activity, free activity, to a means, estranged labour makes man's species life a means to his physical existence.

The consciousness which man has of his species is thus transformed by estrangement in such a way that the species life becomes for him a means.

Estranged labour turns thus:

(3) Man's species being, both nature and his spiritual species property, into a being alien to him, into a means to his individual existence. It estranges man's own body from him, as it does external nature and his spiritual essence, his human being.

(4) An immediate consequence of the fact that man is estranged from the product of his labour, from his life-activity, from his species being is the estrangement of man from man. If a man is confronted by himself, he is confronted by the other man. What applies to a man's relation to his work, to the product of his labour and to himself, also holds of a man's relation to the other man, and to the other man's labour and object of labour.

In fact, the proposition that man's species nature is estranged from him means that one man is estranged from the other, as each of them is from man's essential nature.

The estrangement of man, and in fact every relationship in which man stands to himself, is first realised and expressed in the relationship in which a man stands to other men.

Hence within the relationship of estranged labour each man views the other in accordance with the standard and the position in which he finds himself as a worker.

We took our departure from a fact of political economy the estrangement of the worker and his production. We have formulated the concept

of this fact-estranged, alienated labour. We have analysed this concept hence analysing merely a fact of political economy.

Let us now see, further, how in real life the concept of estranged, alienated labour must express and present itself.

If the product of labour is alien to me, if it confronts me as an alien power, to whom, then, does it belong?

[...]

If the product of labour does not belong to the worker, if it confronts him as an alien power, this can only be because it belongs to some other man than the worker. If the worker's activity is a torment to him, to another it must be delight and his life's joy. Not the gods, not nature, but only man himself can be this alien power over man.

We must bear in mind the above-stated proposition that man's relation to himself only becomes objective and real for him through his relation to the other man. Thus, if the product of his labour, his labour objectified, is for him an alien, hostile powerful object independent of him, then his position towards it is such that someone else is master of this object, someone who is alien, hostile, powerful and independent of him. If his own activity is to him an unfree activity, then he is treating it as activity performed in the service, under the dominion, the coercion and the yoke of another man.

Every self-estrangement of man from himself and from nature appears in the relation in which he places himself and nature to men other than and differentiated from himself. For this reason religious self-estrangement necessarily appears in the relationship of the layman to the priest, or again to a mediator, etc., since we are here dealing with the intellectual world. In the real practical world self-estrangement can only become manifest through the real practical relationship to other men. The medium through which estrangement takes place is itself practical. Thus through estranged labour man not only engenders his relationship to the object and to the act of production as to powers that are alien and hostile to him; he also engenders the relationship in which other men stand to his production and to his product, and the relationship in which he stands to these other men. Just as he begets his own production as the loss of his reality, as his punishment; just as he begets his own product as a loss, as a product not belonging to him; so he begets the dominion of the one who does not produce overproduction and over the product. Just as he estranges from himself his own activity, so he confers to the stranger activity which is not his own.

[...]

Through estranged, alienated labour, then, the worker produces the relationship to this labour of a man alien to labour and standing outside it. The relationship of the worker to labour engenders the relation to it of the capitalist, or whatever one chooses to call the master of labour. Private property is thus the product, the result, the necessary consequence, of alienated labour, of the external relation of the worker to nature and himself.

Private property thus results by analysis from the concept of alienated labour, i.e. of alienated man, of estranged labour, of estranged life, of estranged man.

True, it is as a result of the movement of private property that we have obtained the concept of alienated labour (of alienated life) from political economy. But on analysis of this concept it becomes clear that though private property appears to be the source, the cause of alienated labour, it is really its consequence, just as the gods in the beginning are not the cause but the effect of man's intellectual confusion. Later this relationship becomes reciprocal.

[...]

A forcing-up of wages (disregarding all other difficulties, including the fact that it would only be by force, too, that the higher wages, being an anomaly, could be maintained) would therefore be nothing but better payment for the slave, and would not conquer either for the worker or for labour their human status and dignity.

Indeed, even the equality of wages demanded by Proudhon only transforms the relationship of the present-day worker to his labour into the relationship of all men to labour. Society is then conceived as an abstract capitalist.

Wages are a direct consequence of estranged labour, and estranged labour is the direct cause of private property. The downfall of the one aspect must therefore mean the downfall of the other.

From the relationship of estranged labour to private property it further follows that the emancipation of society from private property, etc., from servitude, is expressed in the political form of the emancipation of the workers; not that their emancipation alone was at stake but because the emancipation of the workers contains universal human emancipation and it contains this, because the whole of human servitude is involved in the relation of the worker to production, and every relation of servitude is but a modification and consequence of this relation

## 2 COMMENTS ON JAMES MILL'S "ELEMENTS OF POLITICAL ECONOMY" (1844)

*In these notes, contained in the notebooks where Marx copied quotations from James Mill's work, alienation was described as a phenomenon in which "man regards his will, his activity and his relation to other men as a power independent of him and them". The human being, who should be "the lord of his creation" appears instead as "the servant of this creation", and money represents the "complete domination of the estranged thing over man".*

\* \* \*

The essence of money is not, in the first place, that property is alienated in it, but that the mediating activity or movement, the human, social act by which man's products mutually complement one another, is estranged from man and becomes the attribute of money, a material thing outside man. Since man alienates this mediating activity itself, he is active here only as a man who has lost himself and is dehumanised; the relation itself between things, man's operation with them, becomes the operation of an entity outside man and above man. Owing to this alien mediator—instead of man himself being the mediator for man—man regards his will, his activity and his relation to other men as a power independent of him and them. His slavery, therefore, reaches its peak.

[...]

Since human nature is the true community of men, by manifesting their nature men create, produce, the human community, the social entity, which is no abstract universal power opposed to the single individual, but is the essential nature of each individual, his own activity, his own life, his own spirit, his own wealth.

[...]

But as long as man does not recognise himself as man, and therefore has not organised the world in a human way, this community appears in the form of estrangement, because its subject, man, is a being estranged from himself. Men, not as an abstraction, but as real, living, particular individuals, are this entity. Hence, as they are, so is this entity itself. To say that man is estranged from himself, therefore, is the same thing as saying that the society of this estranged man is a caricature of his real community, of his true species life, that his activity therefore appears to him as a torment, his own creation as an alien power, his wealth as poverty, the

essential bond linking him with other men as an unessential bond, and separation from his fellow men, on the other hand, as his true mode of existence, his life as a sacrifice of his life, the realisation of his nature as making his life unreal, his production as the production of his nullity, his power over an object as the power of the object over him, and he himself, the lord of his creation, as the servant of this creation.

The community of men, or the manifestation of the nature of men, their mutual complementing the result of which is species life, truly human life—this community is conceived by political economy in the form of exchange and trade. Society, says Destutt de Tracy, is a series of mutual exchanges. It is precisely this process of mutual integration. Society, says Adam Smith, is a commercial society. Each of its members is a merchant.

It is seen that political economy defines the estranged form of social intercourse as the essential and original form corresponding to man's nature.

[...]

Labour to earn a living involves: (1) estrangement and fortuitous connection between labour and the subject who labours; (2) estrangement and fortuitous connection between labour and the object of labour; (3) that the worker's role is determined by social needs which, however, are alien to him and a compulsion to which he submits out of egoistic need and necessity, and which have for him only the significance of a means of satisfying his dire need, just as for them he exists only as a slave of their needs; (4) that to the worker the maintenance of his individual existence appears to be the purpose of his activity and what he actually does is regarded by him only as a means; that he carries on his life's activity in order to earn means of subsistence.

Hence the greater and the more developed the social power appears to be within the private property relationship, the more egoistic, asocial and estranged from his own nature does man become.

Just as the mutual exchange of the products of human activity appears as barter, as trade, so the mutual completion and exchange of the activity itself appears as division of labour, which turns man as far as possible into an abstract being, a machine tool, etc., and transforms him into a spiritual and physical monster.

[...]

The complete domination of the estranged thing over man has become evident in money, which is completely indifferent both to the nature of

the material, i.e. to the specific nature of the private property, and to the personality of the property owner. What was the domination of person over person is now the general domination of the thing over the person, of the product over the producer.

[...]

My work would be a free manifestation of life, hence an enjoyment of life. Presupposing private property, my work is an alienation of life, for I work in order to live, in order to obtain for myself the means of life. My work is not my life.

Secondly, the specific nature of my individuality, therefore, would be affirmed in my labour, since the latter would be an affirmation of my individual life. Labour therefore would be true, active property. Presupposing private property, my individuality is alienated to such a degree that this activity is instead hateful to me, a torment, and rather the semblance of an activity. Hence, too, it is only a forced activity and one imposed on me only through an external fortuitous need, not through an inner, essential one.

### 3 THE HOLY FAMILY (1845)

In *The Holy Family, or Critique of Critical Critique*. Against Bruno Bauer and Company, published jointly with

*Engels, the term alienation was used polemically against theorists of the Hegelian Left. In contrast to them, Marx argued that the exploitation of workers could be eliminated only through actual struggles, not with mere theoretical abstractions.*

\* \* \*

The propertied class and the class of the proletariat present the same human self-alienation. But the former class finds in this self-alienation its confirmation and its good, its own power: it has in it a semblance of human existence. The class of the proletariat feels annihilated in its self-alienation; it sees in it its own powerlessness and the reality of an inhuman existence.

[...]

Workers, employed [...] in the Manchester or Lyons workshops, [...] know that property, capital, money, wage labour and the like are no ideal figments of the brain but very practical, very objective sources of their self-estrangement and that they must abolish in a practical, objective way.

[...]

The mass therefore rises against its own deficiency when it rises against the independently existing products of its self-debasement just as man, turning against the existence of God, turns against his own religiosity. But as those practical self-estrangements of the mass exist in the real world in an outward way, the mass must fight them in an outward way. It must by no means consider these products of its self-alienation as mere ideal fancies, mere alienation of self-consciousness, and must not wish to abolish material estrangement by a purely inward spiritual action.



## 4 THE GERMAN IDEOLOGY (1845–1846)

*In this text, written together with Engels and first published in 1932, Marx treated the concept of estrangement in relation to his critique of the division of labour. The “fixation of social activity” is a characteristic element of alienation. Marx and Engels also pointed to the limits of the co-operation among workers in the capitalist factory. Their association was not a voluntary action on their part but is imposed as “an alien force” outside their control.*

\* \* \*

The division of labour offers us the first example of how, [...] man’s own deed becomes an alien power opposed to him, which enslaves him instead of being controlled by him. [...] This fixation of social activity, this consolidation of what we ourselves produce into an objective power above us, growing out of our control, thwarting our expectations, bringing to naught our calculations, is one of the chief factors in historical development up till now.

The social power, i.e. the multiplied productive force, which arises through the co-operation of different individuals as it is determined by the division of labour, appears to these individuals, since their co-operation is not voluntary but has come about naturally, not as their own united power, but as an alien force existing outside them, of the origin and goal of which they are ignorant, which they thus cannot control, which on the contrary passes through a peculiar series of phases and stages independent of the will and the action of man, nay even being the prime governor of these.

[...]

This “alienation” (to use a term which will be comprehensible to the philosophers) can, of course, only be abolished given two practical premises. For it to become an “intolerable” power, i.e. a power against which men make a revolution, it must necessarily have rendered the great mass of humanity “propertyless”, and produced, at the same time, the contradiction of an existing world of wealth and culture, both of which conditions presuppose a great increase in productive power, a high degree of its development.

## 5 WAGE LABOUR AND CAPITAL (1849)

*In this series of articles, published in the daily Neue Rheinische Zeitung, Marx again addressed the phenomenon of alienation, though without actually using the term. Wage labour does not enter into the worker's "life-activity" but constitutes a "sacrifice of his life". Labour-power is a commodity that the worker is forced to sell "in order to live", and "the product of his activity is not the aim of his activity".*

\* \* \*

Wages are the amount of money which the capitalist pays for a certain period of work or a certain amount of labour.

The capitalist buys their labour with money. They sell him their labour for money.

[...]

The workers exchange their commodity, labour, for the commodity of the capitalist, for money, and this exchange takes place in a definite ratio. So much money for so long a use of labour-power. For twelve hours' weaving, two shillings. [...] The exchange value of a commodity estimated in money is called its price. Wages therefore are only a special name for the price of labour-power and are usually called the price of labour. It is the special name for the price of this peculiar commodity, which has no other repository than human flesh and blood.

[...]

Wages, therefore, are not a share of the worker in the commodities produced by himself. Wages are that part of already existing commodities with which the capitalist buys a certain amount of productive labour-power.

Consequently, labour-power is a commodity which its possessor, the wage worker, sells to the capitalist. Why does he sell it? It is in order to live.

But the putting of labour-power into action, i.e. the work, is the active expression of the labourer's own life. And this life-activity he sells to another person in order to secure the necessary means of life. His life-activity, therefore, is but a means of securing his own existence. He works that he may keep alive. He does not count the labour itself as a part of his life; it is rather a sacrifice of his life. It is a commodity that he has auctioned off to another. Hence, also, the product of his activity is not the aim of his activity. What he produces for himself is not the silk that he weaves, not the gold that he draws up the mining shaft, not the

palace that he builds. What he produces for himself is wages; and the silk, the gold and the palace are resolved for him into a certain, quantity of necessaries of life, perhaps into a cotton jacket, into copper coins, and into a basement-dwelling. And the labourer who for twelve hours long, weaves, spins, bores, turns, builds, shovels, breaks stone, carries hods and so on—is this twelve hours' weaving, spinning, boring, turning, building, shovelling, stone-breaking, regarded by him as a manifestation of life, as life? Quite the contrary. Life for him begins where this activity ceases, at the table, at the tavern seat, in bed. The twelve hours' work, on the other hand, has no meaning for him as weaving, spinning, boring and so on, but only as earnings, which enable him to sit down at a table, to take his seat in the tavern and to lie down in a bed. If the silk-worm's object in spinning were to prolong its existence as caterpillar, it would be a perfect example of a wage-worker.

Labour-power was not always a commodity (merchandise). Labour was not always wage labour, i.e. free labour. The slave did not sell his labour-power to the slave-owner, any more than the ox sells his labour to the fanner. The slave, together with his labour-power, was sold to his owner once for all. He is a commodity that can pass from the hand of one owner to that of another. He himself is a commodity, but his labour-power is not his commodity. The serf sells only a portion of his labour-power. It is not he who receives wages from the owner of the land; it is rather the owner of the land who receives a tribute from him. The serf belongs to the soil, and to the lord of the soil he brings its fruit. The free labourer, on the other hand, sells his very self, and that by fractions. He auctions off eight, ten, twelve, fifteen hours of his life, one day like the next, to the highest bidder, to the owner of raw materials, tools, and means of life, i.e. to the capitalist. The labourer belongs neither to an owner nor to the soil, but eight, ten, twelve, fifteen hours of his daily life belong to whomsoever buys them. The worker leaves the capitalist, to whom he has sold himself, as often as he chooses, and the capitalist discharges him as often as he sees fit, as soon as he no longer gets any use, or not the required use, out of him. But the worker, whose only source of income is the sale of his labour-power, cannot leave the whole class of buyers, i.e. the capitalist class, unless he gives up his own existence. He does not belong to this or to that capitalist, but to the capitalist class, and it is for him to find his man, i.e. to find a buyer in this capitalist class.

[...]

The social relations within which individuals produce, the social relations of production, are altered, transformed, with the change and development of the material means of production, of the forces of production. The relations of production in their totality constitute what is called the social relations, society and, moreover, a society at a definite stage of historic development, a society with peculiar, distinctive characteristics. Ancient society, feudal society, bourgeois society are such totalities of relations of production, each of which denotes a particular stage of development in the history of mankind.

Capital, also, is a social relation of production. It is a bourgeois relation of production, a relation of production of bourgeois society.

[...]

How, then, does a sum of commodities, of exchange values, become capital?

By maintaining and multiplying itself as an independent social power, that is, as the power of a portion of society, by means of its exchange for direct, living labour. The existence of a class which possesses nothing but the ability to work is a necessary presupposition of capital.

It is only the dominion of past, accumulated, materialised labour over immediate living labour that stamps the accumulated labour with the character of capital.

Capital does not consist in the fact that accumulated labour serves living labour as a means for new production. It consists in the fact that living labour serves accumulated labour as the means of preserving and multiplying its exchange value.

What is it that takes place in the exchange between the capitalist and the wage labour?

The labourer receives means of subsistence in exchange for his labour-power; but the capitalist receives, in exchange for his means of subsistence, labour, the productive activity of the labourer, the creative force by which the worker not only replaces what he consumes, but also gives to the accumulated labour a greater value than it previously possessed.

## 6 SPEECH AT THE ANNIVERSARY OF "THE PEOPLE'S PAPER" (1856)

*In this speech, at an occasion marking the fourth anniversary of the founding of the working-class The People's Paper, the term alienation does not appear. But when Marx criticised the use of wealth and scientific advances in the capitalist system, he said that it generated productive and social processes "endowing material forces with intellectual life" and "stultifying human life into a material force"—a formulation very similar to those found in his theory of alienation.*

\* \* \*

The so-called revolutions of 1848 were but poor incidents—small fractures and fissures in the dry crust of European society. However, they denounced the abyss. Beneath the apparently solid surface, they betrayed oceans of liquid matter, only needing expansion to rend into fragments continents of hard rock. Noisily and confusedly they proclaimed the emancipation of the Proletarians i.e. the secret of the nineteenth century, and of the revolution of that century. That social revolution, it is true, was no novelty invented in 1848. Steam, electricity and the self-acting mule were revolutionists of a rather more dangerous character than even citizens Barbes, Raspail and Blanqui. But, although the atmosphere in which we live, weighs upon everyone with a 20,000 lb. force, do you feel it? No more than European society before 1848 felt the revolutionary atmosphere enveloping and pressing it from all sides. There is one great fact, characteristic of this our nineteenth century, a fact which no party dares deny. On the one hand, there have started into life industrial and scientific forces, which no epoch of the former human history had ever suspected. On the other hand, there exist symptoms of decay, far surpassing the horrors recorded of the latter times of the Roman Empire. In our days, everything seems pregnant with its contrary. Machinery, gifted with the wonderful power of shortening and fructifying human labour, we behold starving and overworking it. The new-fangled sources of wealth, by some strange weird spell, are turned into sources of want. The victories of art seem bought by the loss of character. At the same pace that mankind masters nature, man seems to become enslaved to other men or to his own infamy. Even the pure light of science seems unable to shine but on the dark background of ignorance. All our invention and progress seem

to result in endowing material forces with intellectual life, and in stultifying human life into a material force. This antagonism between modern industry and science on the one hand, modern misery and dissolution on the other hand; this antagonism between the productive powers and the social relations of our epoch is a fact, palpable, overwhelming and not to be controverted. Some parties may wail over it; others may wish to get rid of modern arts, in order to get rid of modern conflicts. Or they may imagine that so signal a progress in industry wants to be completed by as signal a regress in politics. On our part, we do not mistake the shape of the shrewd spirit that continues to mark all these contradictions. We know that to work well the new-fangled forces of society, they only want to be mastered by new-fangled men—and such are the working men. They are as much the invention of modern time as machinery itself. In the signs that bewilder the middle-class, the aristocracy and the poor prophets of regression, we do recognise our brave friend, Robin Goodfellow,<sup>1</sup> the old mole that can work in the earth so fast, that worthy pioneer—the Revolution. The English working men are the first-born sons of modern industry. They will then, certainly, not be the last in aiding the social revolution produced by that industry, a revolution, which means the emancipation of their own class all over the world, which is as universal as capital rule and wage slavery. I know the heroic struggles the English working class have gone through since the middle of the last century—struggles less glorious, because they are shrouded in obscurity, and burked by the middle-class historian. To revenge the misdeeds of the ruling class, there existed in the middle ages, in Germany, a secret tribunal, called the “Vehmgericht”.<sup>2</sup> If a red cross was seen marked on a house, people knew that its owner was doomed by the “Vehm”. All the houses of Europe are now marked with the mysterious red cross. History is the judge—its executioner, the proletarian.

<sup>1</sup> Robin Goodfellow is a character in Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*.

<sup>2</sup> The *Vehmgericht*, derived from *Vehme* (judgment, punishment) and *Gericht* (court). It was a secret tribunal which exercised great power in Westphalia from the end of the twelfth to the middle of the sixteenth century.



CHAPTER 3

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From the *Grundrisse* to the *Theories of Surplus Value*

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M. Musto, *Karl Marx's Writings on Alienation,*

Marx, Engels, and Marxisms,

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## I GRUNDRISSE: OUTLINES OF THE CRITIQUE OF POLITICAL ECONOMY (1857–1858)

*In these manuscripts, published posthumously in 1939–41, the concept of alienation was repeatedly used by Marx. His considerations on the subject were not only much deeper and more detailed than those in his early writings. They also contained many passages in which he outlined the non-alienated postcapitalist society that he had in view.*

\* \* \*

The exchange value of a product creates money alongside the product. Now, just as it is impossible to suspend the complications and contradictions which arise from the existence of money alongside the particular commodities merely by altering the form of money (although difficulties characteristic of a lower form of money may be avoided by moving to a higher form), so also is it impossible to abolish money itself as long as exchange value remains the social form of products. It is necessary to see this clearly in order to avoid setting impossible tasks, and in order to know the limits within which monetary reforms and transformations of circulation are able to give a new shape to the relations of production and to the social relations which rest on the latter.

[...]

To the degree that production is shaped in such a way that every producer becomes dependent on the exchange value of his commodity, i.e. as the product increasingly becomes an exchange value in reality, and exchange value becomes the immediate object of production—to the same degree must money relations develop, together with the contradictions immanent in the money relation, in the relation of the product to itself as money. The need for exchange and the transformation of the product into a pure exchange value progresses in step with the division of labour, i.e. with the increasingly social character of production. But as the latter grows, so grows the power of money, i.e. the exchange relation establishes itself as a power external to and independent of the producers. What originally appeared as a means to promote production becomes a relation alien to the producers. As the producers become more dependent on exchange, exchange appears to become more independent of them, and the gap between the product as product and the product as exchange value appears to widen. Money does not create these antitheses and



contradictions; it is, rather, the development of these contradictions and antitheses which creates the seemingly transcendental power of money.

[...]

The product becomes a commodity; the commodity becomes exchange value; the exchange value of the commodity is its immanent money property; this, its money property, separates itself from it in the form of money, and achieves a general social existence separated from all particular commodities and their natural mode of existence.

[...]

The rise of exchange (commerce) as an independent function torn away from the exchangers corresponds to the rise of exchange value as an independent entity, as money, torn away from products. Exchange value was the measure of commodity exchange; but its aim was the direct possession of the exchanged commodity, its consumption [...]. The purpose of commerce is not consumption, directly, but the gaining of money, of exchange values. This doubling of exchange—exchange for the sake of consumption and exchange for exchange—gives rise to a new disproportion [...]. The possibility of commercial crises is already contained in this separation.

[...]

The social character of activity, as well as the social form of the product, and the share of individuals in production here appear as something alien and objective, confronting the individuals, not as their relation to one another, but as their subordination to relations which subsist independently of them and which arise out of collisions between mutually indifferent individuals. The general exchange of activities and products, which has become a vital condition for each individual—their mutual interconnection—here appears as something alien to them, autonomous, as a thing. In exchange value, the social connection between persons is transformed into a social relation between things; personal capacity into objective wealth. The less social power the medium of exchange possesses (and at this stage it is still closely bound to the nature of the direct product of labour and the direct needs of the partners in exchange) the greater must be the power of the community which binds the individuals together, the patriarchal relation, the community of antiquity, feudalism and the guild system. Each individual possesses social power in the form of a thing. Rob the thing of this social power and you must give it to persons to exercise over persons. Relations of personal dependence (entirely spontaneous at the outset) are the first social forms, in which

human productive capacity develops only to a slight extent and at isolated points. Personal independence founded on objective dependence is the second great form, in which a system of general social metabolism, of universal relations, of all-round needs and universal capacities is formed for the first time. Free individuality, based on the universal development of individuals and their subordination of their communal, social productivity as their social wealth, is the third stage.

[...]

But within bourgeois society, the society that rests on exchange value, there arise relations of circulation as well as of production which are so many mines to explode it. A mass of antithetical forms of the social unity, whose antithetical character can never be abolished through quiet metamorphosis. 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.

[...]

In one of the forms of money—in so far as it is medium of exchange not measure of exchange value—it is clear to the economists that the existence of money presupposes the objectification of the social bond; in so far, that is, as money appears in the form of collateral which one individual must leave with another in order to obtain a commodity from him. Here the economists themselves say that people place in a thing (money) the faith which they do not place in each other. But why do they have faith in the thing? Obviously only because that thing is an objectified relation between persons; because it is objectified exchange value, and exchange value is nothing more than a mutual relation between people's productive activities. Every other collateral may serve the holder directly in that function: money serves him only as the "dead pledge of society",<sup>1</sup> but it serves as such only because of its social (symbolic) property; and it can have a social property only because individuals have alienated their own social relationship from themselves so that it takes the form of a thing.

In the lists of current prices, where all values are measured in money, it seems as though this independence from persons of the social character of things is, by the activity of commerce, on this basis of alienation

<sup>1</sup>Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book V, Chapter 5, paragraph 14.

where the relations of production and distribution stand opposed to the individual, to all individuals, at the same time subordinated to the individual again. Since, “if you please”, the autonomisation of the world market (in which the activity of each individual is included), increases with the development of monetary relations (exchange value) and vice versa, since the general bond and all-round interdependence in production and consumption increase together with the independence and indifference of the consumers and producers to one another; since this contradiction leads to crises, etc., hence, together with the development of this alienation, and on the same basis, efforts are made to overcome it: institutions emerge whereby each individual can acquire information about the activity of all others and attempt to adjust his own accordingly [...]. To be further noted here only that a comprehensive view over the whole of commerce and production in so far as lists of current prices in fact provide it, furnishes indeed the best proof of the way in which their own exchange and their own production confront individuals as an objective relation which is independent of them. In the case of the world market, the connection of the individual with all, but at the same time also the independence of this connection from the individual, has developed to such a high level that the formation of the world market already at the same time contains the conditions for going beyond it. Comparison in place of real communality and generality.

It has been said and may be said that this is precisely the beauty and the greatness of it: this spontaneous interconnection, this material and mental metabolism which is independent of the knowing and willing of individuals, and which presupposes their reciprocal independence and indifference. And, certainly, this objective connection is preferable to the lack of any connection, or to a merely local connection resting on blood ties, or on primeval, natural or master–servant relations. Equally certain is it that individuals cannot gain mastery over their own social interconnections before they have created them. 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-a-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. It is the bond natural to

individuals within specific and limited relations of production. Universally developed individuals, whose social relations, as their own communal relations, are hence also subordinated to their own communal control, are no product of nature, but of history. The degree and the universality of the development of wealth where this individuality becomes possible supposes production on the basis of exchange values as a prior condition, whose universality produces not only the alienation of the individual from himself and others, but also the universality and the comprehensiveness of his relations and capacities. In earlier stages of development the single individual seems to be developed more fully, because he has not yet worked out his relationships in their fullness, or erected them as independent social powers and relations opposite himself. It is as ridiculous to yearn for a return to that original fullness as it is to believe that with this complete emptiness history has come to a standstill.

[...]

When we look at social relations which create an undeveloped system of exchange, of exchange values and of money, or which correspond to an undeveloped degree of these, then it is clear from the outset that the individuals in such a society, although their relations appear to be more personal, enter into connection with one another only as individuals imprisoned within a certain definition, as feudal lord and vassal, landlord and serf, etc., or as members of a caste, etc., or as members of an estate etc. In the money relation, in the developed system of exchange (and this semblance seduces the democrats), the ties of personal dependence, of distinctions of blood, education, etc., are in fact exploded, ripped up (at least, personal ties all appear as personal relations); and individuals seem independent (this is an independence which is at bottom merely an illusion, and it is more correctly called indifference), free to collide with one another and to engage in exchange within this freedom; but they appear thus only for someone who abstracts from the conditions, the conditions of existence within which these individuals enter into contact (and these conditions, in turn, are independent of the individuals and, although created by society, appear as if they were natural conditions, not controllable by individuals). The definedness of individuals, which in the former case appears as a personal restriction of the individual by another, appears in the latter case as developed into an objective restriction of the individual by relations independent of him and sufficient unto themselves. (Since the single individual cannot strip away his personal definition, but may very well overcome and master external relations,

his freedom seems to be greater in case. A closer examination of these external relations, these conditions, shows, however, that it is impossible for the individuals of a class, etc., to overcome them *en masse* without destroying them. A particular individual may by chance get on top of these relations, but the mass of those under their rule cannot, since their mere existence expresses subordination, the necessary subordination of the mass of individuals.) These external relations are very far from being an abolition of “relations of dependence”; they are rather the dissolution of these relations into a general form; they are merely the elaboration and emergence of the general foundation of the relations of personal dependence. Here also individuals come into connection with one another only in determined ways. These objective dependency relations also appear, in antithesis to those of personal dependence (the objective dependency relation is nothing more than social relations which have become independent and now enter into opposition to the seemingly independent individuals; i.e. the reciprocal relations of production separated from and autonomous of individuals) in such a way that individuals are now ruled by abstractions, whereas earlier they depended on one another. The abstraction, or idea, however, is nothing more than the theoretical expression of those material relations which are their lord and master. Relations can be expressed, of course, only in ideas, and thus philosophers have determined the reign of ideas to be the peculiarity of the new age, and have identified the creation of free individuality with the overthrow of this reign. This error was all the more easily committed, from the ideological standpoint, as this reign exercised by the relations (this objective dependency, which, incidentally, turns into certain definite relations of personal dependency, but stripped of all illusions) appears within the consciousness of individuals as the reign of ideas, and because the belief in the permanence of these ideas, i.e. of these objective relations of dependency, is of course consolidated, nourished and inculcated by the ruling classes by all means available.

[...]

The communal character of production would make the product into a communal, general product from the outset. The exchange which originally takes place in production—which would not be an exchange of exchange values but of activities, determined by communal needs and communal purposes—would from the outset include the participation of the individual in the communal world of products. On the basis of exchange values, labour is posited as general only through exchange. But

on this foundation it would be posited as such before exchange; i.e. the exchange of products would in no way be the medium by which the participation of the individual in general production is mediated. Mediation must, of course, take place. In the first case, which proceeds from the independent production of individuals—no matter how much these independent productions determine and modify each other *post festum* through their interrelations—mediation takes place through the exchange of commodities, through exchange value and through money; all these are expressions of one and the same relation. In the second case, the presupposition is itself mediated; i.e. a communal production, communality, is presupposed as the basis of production. The labour of the individual is posited from the outset as social labour. Thus, whatever the particular material form of the product he creates or helps to create, what he has bought with his labour is not a specific and particular product, but rather a specific share of the communal production. He therefore has no particular product to exchange. His product is not an exchange value. The product does not first have to be transposed into a particular form in order to attain a general character for the individual. Instead of a division of labour, such as is necessarily created with the exchange of exchange values, there would take place an organisation of labour whose consequence would be the participation of the individual in communal consumption. In the first case the social character of production is posited only *post festum* with the elevation of products to exchange values and the exchange of these exchange values. In the second case the social character of production is presupposed, and participation in the world of products, in consumption, is not mediated by the exchange of mutually independent labours or products of labour. It is mediated, rather, by the social conditions of production within which the individual is active.

[...]

On the basis of communal production, the determination of time remains, of course, essential. The less time the society requires to produce wheat, cattle, etc., the more time it wins for other production, material or mental. Just as in the case of an individual, the multiplicity of its development, its enjoyment and its activity depends on economisation of time. Economy of time, to this all economy ultimately reduces itself. Society likewise has to distribute its time in a purposeful way, in order to achieve a production adequate to its overall needs; just as the individual has to distribute his time correctly in order to achieve knowledge in proper proportions or in order to satisfy the various demands on his

activity. Thus, economy of time, along with the planned distribution of labour time among the various branches of production, remains the first economic law on the basis of communal production.

[...]

Money is therefore the god among commodities. Since it is an individuated, tangible object, money may be randomly searched for, found, stolen, discovered; and thus general wealth may be tangibly brought into the possession of a particular individual. From its servile role, in which it appears as mere medium of circulation, it suddenly changes into the lord and god of the world of commodities. It represents the divine existence of commodities, while they represent its earthly form. Before it is replaced by exchange value, every form of natural wealth presupposes an essential relation between the individual and the objects, in which the individual in one of his aspects objectifies himself in the thing, so that his possession of the thing appears at the same time as a certain development of his individuality: wealth in sheep, the development of the individual as shepherd, wealth in grain his development as agriculturist, etc. Money, however, as the individual of general wealth, as something emerging from circulation and representing a general quality, as a merely social result, does not at all presuppose an individual relation to its owner; possession of it is not the development of any particular essential aspect of his individuality; but rather possession of what lacks individuality, since this social [relation] exists at the same time as a sensuous, external object which can be mechanically seized, and lost in the same manner. Its relation to the individual thus appears as a purely accidental one; while this relation to a thing having no connection with his individuality gives him, at the same time, by virtue of the thing's character, a general power over society, over the whole world of gratifications, labours, etc. It is exactly as if, for example, the chance discovery of a stone gave me mastery over all the sciences, regardless of my individuality. The possession of money places me in exactly the same relationship towards wealth (social) as the philosophers' stone would towards the sciences.

Money is therefore not only an object, but is the object of greed. It is essentially *auri sacra fames*. Greed as such, as a particular form of the drive, i.e. as distinct from the craving for a particular kind of wealth, e.g. for clothes, weapons, jewels, women, wine, etc., is possible only when general wealth, wealth as such, has become individualised in a particular thing, i.e. as soon as money is posited in its third quality. Money is therefore not only the object but also the fountainhead of greed. The mania

for possessions is possible without money; but greed itself is the product of a definite social development, not natural, as opposed to historical.

[...]

As material representative of general wealth, as individualised exchange value, money must be the direct object, aim and product of general labour, the labour of all individuals. Labour must directly produce exchange value, i.e. money. It must therefore be wage labour.

[...]

When labour is wage labour, and its direct aim is money, then general wealth is posited as its aim and object [...]. Money as aim here becomes the means of general industriousness. General wealth is produced in order to seize hold of its representative. In this way the real sources of wealth are opened up. When the aim of labour is not a particular product standing in a particular relation to the particular needs of the individual, but money, wealth in its general form, then, firstly, the individual's industriousness knows no bounds; it is indifferent to its particularity, and takes on every form which serves the purpose; it is ingenious in the creation of new objects for a social need, etc.

[...]

On the other hand, it is in the character of the money relation— as far as it is developed in its purity to this point, and without regard to more highly developed relations of production—that all inherent contradictions of bourgeois society appear extinguished in money relations as conceived in a simple form; and bourgeois democracy even more than the bourgeois economists takes refuge in this aspect (the latter are at least consistent enough to regress to even simpler aspects of exchange value and exchange) in order to construct apologetics for the existing economic relations. Indeed, in so far as the commodity or labour is conceived of only as exchange value, and the relation in which the various commodities are brought into connection with one another is conceived as the exchange of these exchange values with one another, as their equation, then the individuals, the subjects between whom this process goes on, are simply and only conceived of as exchangers. As far as the formal character is concerned, there is absolutely no distinction between them, and this is the economic character, the aspect in which they stand towards one another in the exchange relation; it is the indicator of their social function or social relation towards one another. Each of the subjects is an exchanger; i.e. each has the same social relation towards the other that the other has towards him. As subjects of exchange, their relation



is therefore that of equality. It is impossible to find any trace of distinction, not to speak of contradiction, between them; not even a difference. Furthermore, the commodities which they exchange are, as exchange values, equivalent or at least count as such (the most that could happen would be a subjective error in the reciprocal appraisal of values, and if one individual, say, cheated the other, this would happen not because of the nature of the social function in which they confront one another, for this is the same, in this they are equal; but only because of natural cleverness, persuasiveness, etc., in short only the purely individual superiority of one individual over another. The difference would be one of natural origin, irrelevant to the nature of the relation as such, and it may be said in anticipation of further development, the difference is even lessened and robbed of its original force by competition, etc.).

[...]

The subjects in exchange exist for one another only through these equivalents, as of equal worth, and prove themselves to be such through the exchange of the objectivity in which the one exists for the other. Since they only exist for one another in exchange in this way, as equally worthy persons, possessors of equivalent things, who thereby prove their equivalence, they are, as equals, at the same time also indifferent to one another; whatever other individual distinction there may be does not concern them; they are indifferent to all their other individual peculiarities.

[...]

Only the differences between their needs and between their production gives rise to exchange and their social equation in exchange; these natural differences are therefore the precondition of their social equality in the act of exchange, and of this relation in general, in which they relate to one another as productive. Regarded from the standpoint of the natural difference between them, individual A exists as the owner of a use value for B, and B as owner of a use value for A. In this respect, their natural difference again puts them reciprocally into the relation of equality. In this respect, however, they are not indifferent to one another, but integrate with one another, have need of one another; so that individual B, as objectified in the commodity, is a need of individual A, and vice versa; so that they stand not only in an equal, but also in a social, relation to one another. This is not all. The fact that this need on the part of one can be satisfied by the product of the other, and vice versa, and that the one is capable of producing the object of the need of the other, and that each confronts the other as owner of the object of the other's need, this

proves that each of them reaches beyond his own particular need, etc., as a human being, and that they relate to one another as human beings; that their common species being is acknowledged by all.

[...]

In so far as these natural differences among individuals and among their commodities [...] form the motive for the integration of these individuals, for their social interrelation as exchangers, in which they are stipulated for each other as, and prove themselves to be, equals, there enters, in addition to the quality of equality, that of freedom. Although individual A feels a need for the commodity of individual B, he does not appropriate it by force, nor vice versa, but rather they recognise one another reciprocally as proprietors, as persons whose will penetrates their commodities. Accordingly, the juridical moment of the person enters here, as well as that of freedom, in so far as it is contained in the former. No one seizes hold of another's property by force. Each divests himself of his property voluntarily.

[...]

Out of the act of exchange itself, the individual, each one of them, is reflected in himself as its exclusive and dominant (determinant) subject. With that, then, the complete freedom of the individual is posited: voluntary transaction; no force on either side; positing of the self as means, or as serving, only as means, in order to posit the self as end in itself, as dominant and primary; finally, the self-seeking interest which brings nothing of a higher order to realisation; the other is also recognised and acknowledged as one who likewise realises his self-seeking interest, so that both know that the common interest exists only in the duality, many-sidedness and autonomous development of the exchanges between self-seeking interests. The general interest is precisely the generality of self-seeking interests. 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 idealised expressions of this basis; as developed in juridical, political, social relations, they are merely this basis to a higher power. And so it has been in history. Equality and freedom as developed to this extent are exactly the opposite of the freedom and equality in the world of antiquity, where developed exchange value was not their

basis, but where, rather, the development of that basis destroyed them. Equality and freedom presuppose relations of production as yet unrealised in the ancient world and in the Middle Ages. Direct forced labour is the foundation of the ancient world; the community rests on this as its foundation; labour itself as a “privilege”, as still particularised, not yet generally producing exchange values, is the basis of the world of the Middle Ages. Labour is neither forced labour; nor, as in the second case, does it take place with respect to a common, higher unit (the guild).

[...]

Finally, even equality now posits itself tangibly, in money as medium of circulation, where it appears now in one hand, now in another, and is-indifferent to this appearance. Each appears towards the other as an owner of money, and, as regards the process of exchange, as money itself. Thus indifference and equal worthiness are expressly contained in the form of the thing. The particular natural difference which was contained in the commodity is extinguished, and constantly becomes extinguished by circulation.

[...]

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 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 realise themselves in it, are now posited, do not by any means standstill 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. Thus, what all this wisdom comes down to is the attempt to stick fast at the simplest economic relations, which, conceived by themselves, are pure abstractions; but these relations are, in reality, mediated by the deepest antithesis, and represent only one side, in which the full expression of the antitheses is obscured.

What this reveals, on the other side, is the foolishness of those socialists (namely the French, who want to depict socialism as the realisation of the ideals of bourgeois society articulated by the French revolution) who demonstrate that exchange and exchange value, etc., are originally (in time) or essentially (in their adequate form) a system of universal freedom and equality, but that they have been perverted by money, capital, etc. Or, also, that history has so far failed in every attempt to implement them in their true manner, but that they have now, like Proudhon, discovered, e.g. the real Jacob, and intend now to supply the genuine history of these relations in place of the fake. The proper reply to them is: that exchange value or, more precisely, the money system is in fact the system of equality and freedom, and that the disturbances which they encounter in the further development of the system are disturbances inherent in it, are merely the realisation of equality and freedom, which prove to be inequality and unfreedom. It is just as pious as it is stupid to wish that exchange value would not develop into capital, nor labour which produces exchange value into wage labour.

[...]

Just as, on one side the pre-bourgeois phases appear as merely historical, i.e. suspended presuppositions, so do the contemporary conditions of production likewise appear as engaged in suspending themselves and hence in positing the historic presuppositions for a new state of society.

Now, if we initially examine the relation such as it has become, value having become capital, and living labour confronting it as mere use value, so that living labour appears as a mere means to realise objectified, dead labour, to penetrate it with an animating soul while losing its own soul to it—and having produced, as the end-product, alien wealth on one side and, on the other, the penury which is living labour capacity's sole possession—then the matter is simply this, that the process itself, in and by itself, posits the real objective conditions of living labour (namely, material in which to realise itself, instrument with which to realise itself, and necessities with which to stoke the flame of living labour capacity, to protect it from being extinguished, to supply its vital processes with the necessary

fuels) and posits them as alien, independent existences—or as the mode of existence of an alien person, as self-sufficient values for themselves, and hence as values which form wealth alien to an isolated and subjective labour capacity, wealth of and for the capitalist. The objective conditions of living labour appear as separated. independent values opposite living labour capacity as subjective being, which therefore appears to them only as a value of another kind (not as value, but different from them, as use value). Once this separation is given, the production process can only produce it anew, reproduce it and reproduce it on an expanded scale. How it does this, we have seen. The objective conditions of living labour capacity are presupposed as having an existence independent of it, as the objectivity of a subject distinct from living labour capacity and standing independently over against it; the reproduction and realisation, i.e. the expansion of these objective conditions, is therefore at the same time their own reproduction and new production as the wealth of an alien subject indifferently and independently standing over against labour capacity. What is reproduced and produced anew is not only the presence of these objective conditions of living labour, but also their presence as independent values, i.e. values belonging to an alien subject, confronting this living labour capacity. The objective conditions of labour attain a subjective existence vis-a-vis living labour capacity—capital turns into capitalist; on the other side, the merely subjective presence of the labour capacity confronted by its own conditions gives it a merely indifferent, objective form as against them—it is merely a value of a particular use value alongside the conditions of its own realisation as values of another use value. Instead of their being realised in the production process as the conditions of its realisation, what happens is quite the opposite: it comes out of the process as mere condition for their realisation and preservation as values for themselves opposite living labour capacity. The material on which it works is alien material; the instrument is likewise an alien instrument; its labour appears as a mere accessory to their substance and hence objectifies itself in things not belonging to it. Indeed, living labour itself appears as alien vis-a-vis living labour capacity, whose labour it is, whose own life's expression it is, for it has been surrendered to capital in exchange for objectified labour, for the product of labour itself. Labour capacity relates to its labour as to an alien, and if capital were willing to pay it without making it labour it would enter the bargain with pleasure. Thus labour capacity's own labour is as alien to it—and it really is, as regards its direction, etc.,— as are material and instrument. Which is why the product

then appears to it as a combination of alien material, alien instrument and alien labour—as alien property, and why, after production, it has become poorer by the life forces expended, but otherwise begins he drudgery anew, existing as a mere subjective labour capacity separated from the conditions of its life. The recognition of the products as its own, and the judgement that its separation from the conditions of its realisation is improper—forcibly imposed—is an enormous advance in awareness, itself the product of the mode of production resting on capital, and as much the knell to its doom as, with the slave’s awareness that he cannot be the property of another, with his consciousness of himself as a person, the existence of slavery becomes a merely artificial, vegetative existence and ceases to be able to prevail as the basis of production.

[...]

In the production process of capital [...] labour is a totality—a combination of labours—whose individual component parts are alien to one another, so that the overall process as a totality is not the work of the individual worker, and is furthermore the work of the different workers together only to the extent that they are forcibly combined, and do not [voluntarily] enter into combination with one another. The combination of this labour appears just as subservient to and led by an alien will and an alien intelligence—having its animating unity elsewhere—as its material unity appears subordinate to the objective unity of the machinery, of fixed capital, which, as animated monster, objectifies the scientific idea, and is in fact the coordinator, does not in any way relate to the individual worker as his instrument; but rather he himself exists as an animated individual punctuation mark; as its living isolated accessory. Thus, combined labour is combination in-itself in a double way; not combination as a mutual relation among the individuals working together, nor as their predominance either over their particular or individual function or over the instrument of labour. Hence, just as the worker relates to the product of his labour as an alien thing, so does he relate to the combination of labour as an alien combination, as well as to his own labour as an expression of his life, which, although it belongs to him, is alien to him and coerced from him, and which A. Smith, etc., therefore conceives as a burden, sacrifice, etc. Labour itself, like its product, is negated as the labour of the particular, isolated worker. This isolated labour, negated, is now indeed communal or combined labour, posited. The communal or combined labour posited in this way—as activity and in the passive, objective form—is however at the same time posited as another towards the really existing individual

labour—as an alien objectivity (alien property) as well as an alien subjectivity (of capital). Capital thus represents both labour and its product as negated individualised labour and hence as the negated property of the individualised worker. Capital therefore is the existence of social labour—the combination of labour as subject as well as object—but this existence as itself existing independently opposite its real moments—hence itself a particular existence apart from them. For its part, capital therefore appears as the predominant subject and owner of alien labour, and its relation is itself as complete a contradiction as is that of wage labour.

[...]

In the sweat of thy brow shalt thou labour! was Jehovah's curse on Adam. And this is labour for Smith, a curse. "Tranquillity" appears as the adequate state, as identical with "freedom" and "happiness". It seems quite far from Smith's mind that the individual, "in his normal state of health, strength, activity, skill, facility", also needs a normal portion of work, and of the suspension of tranquillity. Certainly, labour obtains its measure from the outside, through the aim to be attained and the obstacles to be overcome in attaining it. But Smith has no inkling whatever that this overcoming of obstacles is in itself a liberating activity—and that, further, the external aims become stripped of the semblance of merely external natural urgencies, and become posited as aims which the individual himself posits—hence as self-realisation, objectification of the subject, hence real freedom, whose action is, precisely, labour. He is right, of course, that, in its historic forms as slave labour, serf labour, and wage labour, labour always appears as repulsive, always as external forced labour; and not-labour, by contrast, as "freedom, and happiness". This holds doubly: for this contradictory labour; and, relatedly, for labour which has not yet created the subjective and objective conditions for itself (or also, in contrast to the pastoral, etc., state, which it has lost), in which labour becomes attractive work, the individual's self-realisation, which in no way means that it becomes mere fun, mere amusement, as Fourier, with *grisettes* like naivete, conceives it.

[...]

The sacrifice of tranquillity can also be called the sacrifice of laziness, unfreedom, unhappiness, i.e. negation of a negative state. A. Smith considers labour psychologically, as to the fun or displeasure it holds for the individual. But it is something else, too, in addition to this emotional relation with his activity—firstly, for others, since A's mere sacrifice would be of no use for B; secondly, a definite relation by his own self to the

thing he works on, and to his own working capabilities. It is a positive, creative activity.

[...]

Because competition appears historically as the dissolution of compulsory guild membership, government regulation, internal tariffs and the like within a country, as the lifting of blockades, prohibitions, protection on the world market—because it appears historically, in short, as the negation of the limits and barriers peculiar to the stages of production preceding capital; because it was quite correctly, from the historical standpoint, designated and promoted by the Physiocrats as *laissez-faire*, *laissez-passer*; it has [therefore] never been examined even for this merely negative side, this, its merely historical side, and this has led at the same time to the even greater absurdity of regarding it as the collision of unfettered individuals who are determined only by their own interests—as the mutual repulsion and attraction of free individuals, and hence as the absolute mode of existence of free individuality in the sphere of consumption and of exchange. Nothing can be more mistaken.

[...]

It is not individuals who are set free by free competition; it is, rather, capital which is set free. As long as production resting on capital is the necessary, hence the fittest form for the development of the force of social production, the movement of individuals within the pure conditions of capital appears as their freedom.

[...]

Hence, on the other side, the insipidity of the view that free competition is the ultimate development of human freedom; and that the negation of free competition = negation of individual freedom and of social production founded on individual freedom. It is nothing more than free development on a limited basis—the basis of the rule of capital. This kind of individual freedom is therefore at the same time the most complete suspension of all individual freedom, and the most complete subjugation of individuality under social conditions which assume the form of objective powers, even of overpowering objects—of things independent of the relations among individuals themselves. The analysis of what free competition really is, is the only rational reply to the middle-class prophets who laud it to the skies or to the socialists who damn it to hell. The statement that, within free competition, the individuals, in following purely their private interest, realise the communal or rather the general interest means nothing other than that they collide with one



another under the conditions of capitalist production, and hence that the impact between them is itself nothing more than the recreation of the conditions under which this interaction takes place. By the way, when the illusion about competition as the so-called absolute form of free individuality vanishes, this is evidence that the conditions of competition, i.e. of production founded on capital, are already felt and thought of as barriers, and hence already are such, and more and more become such. The assertion that free competition is equivalent to the ultimate form of the development of the forces of production, and hence of human freedom, means nothing other than that middle-class rule is the culmination of world history—certainly an agreeable thought for the parvenus of the day before yesterday.

[...]

Value as such is always an effect, never a cause. It expresses the amount of labour by which an object is produced, hence—presupposing the same stage of the productive forces—the amount of labour by which it can be reproduced. The capitalist does not exchange capital directly for labour or labour time; but rather time contained, worked up in commodities, for time contained, worked up in living labour capacity. The living labour time he gets in exchange is not the exchange value, but the use value of labour capacity.

[...]

Hence, the exchange which proceeds between capitalist and worker thus corresponds completely to the laws of exchange; it not only corresponds to them, but also is their highest development.

[...]

By virtue of having acquired labour capacity in exchange as an equivalent, capital has acquired labour time—to the extent that it exceeds the labour time contained in labour capacity—in exchange without equivalent; it has appropriated alien labour time without exchange by means of the form of exchange. This is why exchange becomes merely formal, and, as we saw, in the further development of capital even the semblance is suspended that capital exchanges for labour capacity anything other than the latter's own objectified labour; i.e. that it exchanges anything at all for it. The turn into its opposite therefore comes about because the ultimate stage of free exchange is the exchange of labour capacity as a commodity, as value, for a commodity, for value; because it is given in exchange as objectified labour, while its use value, by contrast, consists of living labour, i.e. of the positing of exchange value. The turn into

its opposite arises from the fact that the use value of labour capacity, as value, is itself the value-creating force, the substance of value and the value-increasing substance. In this exchange, then, the worker receives the equivalent of the labour time objectified in him, and gives his value-creating, value-increasing living labour time. He sells himself as an effect. He is absorbed into the body of capital as a cause, as activity. Thus the exchange turns into its opposite, and the laws of private property—liberty, equality, property—property in one's own labour, and free disposition over it—turn into the worker's propertylessness, and the dispossession of his labour, [i.e.] the fact that he relates to it as alien property and vice versa.

[...]

As long as the means of labour remains a means of labour in the proper sense of the term, such as it is directly, historically, adopted by capital and included in its realisation process, it undergoes a merely formal modification, by appearing now as a means of labour not only in regard to its material side, but also at the same time as a particular mode of the presence of capital, determined by its total process—as fixed capital. But, once adopted into the production process of capital, the means of labour passes through different metamorphoses, whose culmination is the machine, or rather, an automatic system of machinery (system of machinery: the automatic one is merely its most complete, most adequate form, and alone transforms machinery into a system), set in motion by an automaton, a moving power that moves itself; this automaton consisting of numerous mechanical and intellectual organs, so that the workers themselves are cast merely as its conscious linkages. In the machine, and even more in machinery as an automatic system, the use value, i.e. the material quality of the means of labour, is transformed into an existence adequate to fixed capital and to capital as such; and the form in which it was adopted into the production process of capital, the direct means of labour, is superseded by a form posited by capital itself and corresponding to it. In no way does the machine appear as the individual worker's means of labour. Its distinguishing characteristic is not in the least, as with the means of labour, to transmit the worker's activity to the object; this activity, rather, is posited in such a way that it merely transmits the machine's work, the machine's action, on to the raw material—supervises it and guards against interruptions. Not as with the instrument, which the worker animates and makes into his organ with his skill and strength, and whose handling therefore depends on his virtuosity. Rather, it is the machine

which possesses skill and strength in place of the worker, is itself the virtuoso, with a soul of its own in the mechanical laws acting through it; and it consumes coal, oil, etc. (*matieres instrumentales*), just as the worker consumes food, to keep up its perpetual motion. 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. The appropriation of living labour by objectified labour—of the power or activity which creates value by value existing for itself—which lies in the concept of capital, is posited, in production resting on machinery, as the character of the production process itself, including its material elements and its material motion. The production process has ceased to be a labour process in the sense of a process dominated by labour as its governing unity. Labour appears, rather, merely as a conscious organ, scattered among the individual living workers at numerous points of the mechanical system; subsumed under the total process of the machinery itself, as itself only a link of the system, whose unity exists not in the living workers, but rather in the living (active) machinery, which confronts his individual, insignificant doings as a mighty organism. In machinery, objectified labour confronts living labour within the labour process itself as the power which rules it; a power which, as the appropriation of living labour, is the form of capital. The transformation of the means of labour into machinery, and of living labour into a mere living accessory of this machinery, as the means of its action, also posits the absorption of the labour process in its material character as a mere moment of the realisation process of capital. The increase of the productive force of labour and the greatest possible negation of necessary labour is the necessary tendency of capital, as we have seen. The transformation of the means of labour into machinery is the realisation of this tendency. In machinery, objectified labour materially confronts living labour as a ruling power and as an active subsumption of the latter under itself, not only by appropriating it, but in the real production process itself; the relation of capital as value which appropriates value-creating activity is, in fixed capital existing as machinery, posited at the same time as the relation of the use value of capital to the use value of labour capacity; further, the value objectified in machinery appears as a presupposition against which the value-creating power of the individual

labour capacity is an infinitesimal, vanishing magnitude; the production in enormous mass quantities which is posited with machinery destroys every connection of the product with the direct need of the producer, and hence with direct use value; it is already posited in the form of the product's production and in the relations in which it is produced that it is produced only as a conveyor of value, and its use value only as condition to that end. In machinery, objectified labour itself appears not only in the form of product or of the product employed as means of labour, but in the form of the force of production itself. The development of the means of labour into machinery is not an accidental moment of capital, but is rather the historical reshaping of the traditional, inherited means of labour into a form adequate to capital. The accumulation of knowledge and skill, of the general productive forces of the social brain, is thus absorbed into capital, as opposed to labour, and hence appears as an attribute of capital, and more specifically of fixed capital, in so far as it enters into the production process as a means of production proper. Machinery appears, then, as the most adequate form of fixed capital, and fixed capital, in so far as capital's relations with itself are concerned, appears as the most adequate form of capital as such. In another respect, however, in so far as fixed capital is condemned to an existence within the confines of a specific use value, it does not correspond to the concept of capital, which, as value, is indifferent to every specific form of use value, and can adopt or shed any of them as equivalent incarnations. In this respect, as regards capital's external relations, it is circulating capital which appears as the adequate form of capital, and not fixed capital.

Further, in so far as machinery develops with the accumulation of society's science, of productive force generally, general social labour presents itself not in labour but in capital. The productive force of society is measured in fixed capital, exists there in its objective form; and, inversely, the productive force of capital grows with this general progress, which capital appropriates free of charge. This is not the place to go into the development of machinery in detail; rather only in its general aspect; in so far as the means of labour, as a physical thing, loses its direct form, becomes fixed capital and confronts the worker physically as capital. In machinery, knowledge appears as alien, external to him; and living labour [as] subsumed under self-activating objectified labour. The worker appears as superfluous to the extent that his action is not determined by capital's requirements.

The full development of capital, therefore, takes place—or capital has posited the mode of production corresponding to it—only when the means of labour has not only taken the economic form of fixed capital, but has also been suspended in its immediate form, and when fixed capital appears as a machine within the production process, opposite labour; and the entire production process appears as not subsumed under the direct skilfulness 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.

[...]

While machinery is the most appropriate form of the use value of fixed capital, it does not at all follow that therefore subsumption under the social relation of capital is the most appropriate and ultimate social relation of production for the application of machinery.

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 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.

[...]

It is therefore a highly absurd bourgeois assertion that the worker shares with the capitalist, because the latter, with fixed capital (which is, as far as that goes, itself a product of labour, and of alien labour merely appropriated by capital) makes labour easier for him (rather, he robs it of all independence and attractive character, by means of the machine), or makes his labour shorter. Capital employs machinery, rather, only to the extent that it enables the worker to work a larger part of his time for capital, to relate to a larger part of his time as time which does not belong to him, to work longer for another.

[...]

The specific mode of working here appears directly as becoming transferred from the worker to capital in the form of the machine, and his own

labour capacity devalued thereby. Hence the workers' struggle against machinery. What was the living worker's activity becomes the activity of the machine. Thus the appropriation of labour by capital confronts the worker in a coarsely sensuous form; capital absorbs labour into itself—"as though its body were by love possessed".<sup>2</sup>

The exchange of living labour for objectified labour—i.e. the positing of social labour in the form of the contradiction of capital and wage labour—is the ultimate development of the value-relation and of production resting on value.

[...]

Real wealth manifests itself, rather—and large industry reveals this—in the monstrous disproportion between the labour time applied, and its product, as well as in the qualitative imbalance between labour, reduced to a pure abstraction, and the power of the production process it superintends. Labour no longer appears so much to be included within the production process; rather, the human being comes to relate more as watchman and regulator to the production process itself. (What holds for machinery holds likewise for the combination of human activities and the development of human intercourse.) No longer does the worker insert a modified natural thing as middle link between the object 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 wealth. 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. As soon as labour in the direct form has ceased to be the great well-spring of wealth, labour time ceases and must cease to be its measure, and hence exchange value [must cease to be the measure] of use value. 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

<sup>2</sup>Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Faust*, Pt. I, Act 5, "Auerbach's Cellar in Leipzig".

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. The free development of individualities, and hence not the reduction of necessary labour time so as to posit surplus labour, but rather the general reduction of the necessary labour of society to a minimum, which then corresponds to the artistic, scientific, etc., development of the individuals in the time set free, and with the means created, for all of them. Capital itself is the moving contradiction, [in] that it presses to reduce labour time to a minimum, while it posits labour time, on the other side, as sole measure and source of wealth. Hence it diminishes labour time in the necessary form so as to increase it in the superfluous form; hence posits the superfluous in growing measure as a condition—question of life or death—for the necessary. On the one side, then, it calls to life all the powers of science and nature, as of social combination and social intercourse, in order to make the creation of wealth independent (relatively) of the labour time employed on it. On the other side, it wants to use labour time as the measuring rod for the giant social forces thereby created, and to confine them within the limits required to maintain the already created value as value. Forces of production and social relations—two different sides of the development of the social individual—appear to capital as mere means, and are merely means for it to produce on its limited foundation. In fact, however, they are the material conditions to blow this foundation sky-high.

[...]

The creation of a large quantity of disposable time apart from necessary labour time for society generally and each of its members (i.e. room for the development of the individuals' full productive forces, hence those of society also), this creation of not-labour time appears in the stage of capital, as of all earlier ones, as not-labour time, free time, for a few. What capital adds is that it increases the surplus labour time of the mass by all the means of art and science, because its wealth consists directly in the appropriation of surplus labour time; since value directly its purpose, not use value. It is thus, despite itself, instrumental in creating the means of social disposable time, in order to reduce labour time for the whole society to a diminishing minimum, and thus to free everyone's time for their own development. But its tendency always, on the one side, to create disposable time, on the other, to convert it into surplus labour. If it succeeds too

well at the first, then it suffers from surplus production, and then necessary labour is interrupted, because no surplus labour can be realised by capital. The more this contradiction develops, the more does it become evident that the growth of the forces of production can no longer be bound up with the appropriation of alien labour, but that the mass of workers must themselves appropriate their own surplus labour. Once they have done so—and disposable time thereby ceases to have an antithetical existence—then, on one side, necessary labour time will be measured by the needs of the social individual, and, on the other, the development of the power of social production will grow so rapidly that, even though production is now calculated for the wealth of all, disposable time will grow for all. For real wealth is the developed productive power of all individuals. The measure of wealth is then not any longer, in any way, labour time, but rather disposable time. Labour time as the measure of value posits wealth itself as founded on poverty, and disposable time as existing in and because of the antithesis to surplus labour time; or, the positing of an individual's entire time as labour time, and his degradation therefore to mere worker, subsumption under labour.

[...]

The development of the productive forces brought about by the historical development of capital itself, when it reaches a certain point, suspends the self-realisation of capital, instead of positing it. Beyond a certain point, the development of the powers of production becomes a barrier for capital; hence the capital relation a barrier for the development of the productive powers of labour. When it has reached this point, capital, i.e. wage labour, enters into the same relation towards the development of social wealth and of the forces of production as the guild system, serfdom, slavery, and is necessarily stripped off as a fetter. The last form of servitude assumed by human activity, that of wage labour on one side, capital on the other, is thereby cast off like a skin, and this casting-off itself is the result of the mode of production corresponding to capital; the material and mental conditions of the negation of wage labour and capital, themselves already the negation of earlier forms of unfree social production, are themselves results of its production process. The growing incompatibility between the productive development of society and its hitherto existing relations of production expresses itself in bitter contradictions, crises, spasms. The violent destruction of capital not by relations external to it, but rather as a condition of its self-preservation, is the most striking form in which advice is given it to be gone and to give room to a higher



state of social production. It is not only the growth of scientific power, but the measure in which it is already posited as fixed capital, the scope and width in which it is realised and has conquered the totality of production.

[...]

The fact that in the development of the productive powers of labour the objective conditions of labour, objectified labour, must grow relative to living labour [...] appears from the standpoint of capital not in such a way that one of the moments of social activity—objective labour—becomes the ever more powerful body of the other moment, of subjective, living labour, but rather—and this is important for wage labour—that the objective conditions of labour assume an ever more colossal independence, represented by its very extent, opposite living labour, and that social wealth confronts labour in more powerful portions as an alien and dominant power. The emphasis comes to be placed not on the state of being objectified, but on the state of being alienated, dispossessed, sold; on the condition that the monstrous objective power which social labour itself erected opposite itself as one of its moments belongs not to the worker, but to the personified conditions of production, i.e. to capital. To the extent that, from the standpoint of capital and wage labour, the creation of the objective body of activity happens in antithesis to the immediate labour capacity—that this process of objectification in fact appears as a process of dispossession from the standpoint of labour or as appropriation of alien labour from the standpoint of capital—to that extent, this twisting and inversion is a real [phenomenon], not a merely supposed one existing merely in the imagination of the workers and the capitalists. But obviously this process of inversion is a merely historical necessity, a necessity for the development of the forces of production solely from a specific historic point of departure, or basis, but in no way an absolute necessity of production; rather, a vanishing one, and the result and the inherent purpose of this process is to suspend this basis itself, together with this form of the process. The bourgeois economists are so much cooped up within the notions belonging to a specific historic stage of social development that the necessity of the objectification of the powers of social labour appears to them as inseparable from the necessity of their alienation vis-a-vis living labour. 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.

The worker's propertylessness, and the ownership of living labour by objectified labour, or the appropriation of alien labour by capital—both merely expressions of the same relation from opposite poles—are fundamental conditions of the bourgeois mode of production, in no way accidents irrelevant to it.

## 2 THE ORIGINAL TEXT OF “A CONTRIBUTION TO THE CRITIQUE OF POLITICAL ECONOMY” (1858)

*In the original draft of the second and third chapters of A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy, which was eventually published in 1859, Marx dealt with value and the transformation of money into capital. He observed that, unlike in the past, the workers in the bourgeois mode of production were free owners of their labour-power, but that this had become a commodity and the “conditions for the objectification of labour existed as alien property”.*

\* \* \*

The whole reified world of wealth now appears as the body of money in the same way as gold and silver, and it is merely the formal difference between money in the form of money, and money in the form of commodity that makes it capable of equally assuming the one form or the other, and passing from the form of money into the form of commodity. The process of becoming independent already consists in that the exchange value firmly maintains itself as exchange value, whether it exists in the form of money or the form of commodity, and it passes into the form of commodity only in order to valourise itself.

Money is now objectified labour, irrespective of whether it possesses the form of money or of a particular commodity. None of the reified modes of being of labour confronts capital, but each of them appears as a possible mode of its existence which it can assume through a simple change of form, passage from the form of money into the form of commodity. The only opposite of reified labour is unreified labour, and the opposite of objectified labour, subjective labour. Or, the opposite of past labour, which exists in space, is living labour, which exists in time. As the presently existing unreified (and so also not yet objectified) labour, it can be present only as the power, potentiality, ability, as the labour capacity of the living subject. The opposite of capital as the independent, firmly self-sufficient objectified labour is living labour capacity itself, and so the only exchange by means of which money can become capital is the exchange between the possessor of capital and the possessor of the living labour capacity, i.e. the worker.

The exchange value can become independent as exchange value in general only with respect to the use value confronting it as such. Only within the framework of this relationship can exchange value establish

itself as such, as such be posited and function. In money, the exchange value should retain this independence through an abstraction from the use value, and this active abstraction—remaining in opposition to use value—would here in effect appear as the sole method for preserving and augmenting the exchange value as such.

[...]

The condition for the transformation of money into capital is that the owner of the money can exchange money for the alien labour capacity as a commodity. In other words, that within circulation the labour capacity is offered as a commodity for sale, since within the simple circulation the exchangers confront each other only as buyers and sellers. The condition is, therefore, that the worker offers for sale his labour capacity as a to-be-used commodity and, so, is a free worker. The condition is that the worker, first, disposes of his labour capacity as a free proprietor, and treats it as a commodity; to do so he must be a free proprietor of his labour capacity. And second, that he must exchange his labour no longer in the form of another commodity, of objectified labour, but so that the only commodity he has to offer, to sell, is his own living labour capacity contained in his living corporeality, and that, consequently, the conditions for the objectification of his labour, the reified conditions of his labour exist on the other side of circulation as alien property, as commodities located beyond his own self.

That the possessor of money—or money, since the former is for us so far only its personification in the economic process itself—finds the labour capacity on the market, within the limits of circulation, as a commodity, this premiss from which we here proceed and from which the bourgeois society proceeds in its production process is evidently the result of long historical development, the outcome of many economic upheavals, and implies the decline of other modes of production (other social relationships of production) and a determined development of the productive forces of social labour.

### 3 ON THE CRITIQUE OF POLITICAL ECONOMY (MANUSCRIPT 1861–1863)

*In this manuscript—the first he wrote after publication of A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy—Marx dealt with the process of production of capital, sometimes displaying greater precision and analytic power than in the Grundrisse. His main focus was on the transformation of money into capital and on absolute and relative surplus value. In various passages, however, he meticulously described how the worker in bourgeois society is under the command of capital and how the product of his activity becomes an alien power.*

\* \* \*

The actual production process, which occurs as soon as money has been transformed into capital by being exchanged for living labour capacity and ditto for the objective conditions for the realisation of this capacity—the material and means of labour—this production process is a unity of the labour process and the valourisation process, just as its result, the commodity, is a unity of use value and exchange value.

The production process of capital, looked at from its material side, the production of use values, is, first of all, a labour process in general, and as such it displays the general factors which pertain to this process as such under the most varied forms of social production. These factors are determined, namely, by the nature of labour as labour. Historically, in fact, at the start of its formation, we see capital take under its control (subsume under itself) not only the labour process in general but the specific actual labour processes as it finds them available in the existing technology, and in the form in which they have developed on the basis of non-capitalist relations of production. It finds in existence the actual production process—the particular mode of production—and at the beginning it only subsumes it formally, without making any changes in its specific technological character. Only in the course of its development does capital not only formally subsume the labour process but transform it, give the very mode of production a new shape and thus first create the mode of production peculiar to it. But whatever its changed shape may be, as a labour process in general, i.e. as a labour process viewed in abstraction from its historical determinateness, it always contains the general moments of the labour process as such.

This formal subsumption of the labour process, the assumption of control over it by capital, consists in the worker's subjection as worker to the supervision and therefore to the command of capital or the capitalist. Capital becomes command over labour, not in the sense of Adam Smith's statement that wealth is absolutely command over labour, but in the sense that the worker as worker comes under the command of the capitalist. For as soon as he has sold his labour capacity for a definite period of time to the capitalist in return for a wage he must enter into the labour process as a worker, as one of the factors with which capital works.

If the actual labour process is the productive consumption of the use values that enter into it through labour, hence through the activity of the worker himself, it is also just as much the consumption of labour capacity by capital or the capitalist. He employs the worker's labour capacity by having him work. All the factors of the labour process, the material of labour, the means of labour and living labour itself, as the activity, the consumption, of the labour capacity he has bought, belong to him; so the whole labour process belongs to him just as much as if he himself were working with his own material and his own means of labour. But since labour is at the same time the expression of the worker's own life, the manifestation of his own personal skill and capacity—a manifestation which depends on his will and is simultaneously an expression of his will—the capitalist supervises the worker, controls the functioning of labour capacity as an action belonging to him. He will make sure that the material of labour is used for the right purpose: consumed as material of labour. If any material is wasted, it does not enter into the labour process, is not consumed as material of labour. The same is true of the means of labour, when, e.g. the worker wears out their material substance in a manner other than that prescribed by the labour process itself. Lastly, the capitalist will make sure that the worker really works, works the whole time required, and expends necessary labour time only, i.e. does the normal quantity of work over a given time. In all these aspects, the labour process and thereby labour and the worker himself come under the control of capital, under its command. I call this the formal subsumption of the labour process under capital.

[...]

This formal subsumption of the labour process under capital, or the command of the capitalist over the worker, has nothing in common with, e.g. the relation that prevailed in the guild industry of the Middle Ages

between the master and the journeymen and apprentices. It emerges instead, purely and simply, from the fact that productive consumption, or the production process, is at the same time a process of the consumption of labour capacity by capital, that the content and determining purpose of this consumption is nothing but the preservation and increase of the value of capital, and that this preservation and increase can only be attained by the most effective, most exact organisation of the actual labour process, which depends on the will, the hard work, etc., of the worker, and which is therefore taken under the control and supervision of the capitalist will.

One more remark with reference to the production process: money, in order to be transformed into capital, must be transformed into the factors of the labour process—i.e. into commodities which can figure as use values in the labour process; hence it must be transformed into means of consumption for labour capacity—i.e. the worker's means of subsistence—or into the material and means of labour. All commodities, therefore, or all products, which cannot be employed in this manner or are not destined to be thus employed, belong to the consumption fund of society, but not to capital (here we understand under capital the objects wherein capital exists). Nevertheless, as long as these products remain commodities, they are themselves a mode of existence of capital. If capitalist production is presupposed, capital produces all products without exception, and it is entirely irrelevant whether these products are destined for productive consumption or are unable to enter into it, unable therefore to become the body of capital again. But they then remain capital as long as they remain commodities, i.e. are present in circulation. As soon as they are definitively sold, they cease to be capital in this sense. To the extent that capital is not at the stage of the labour process, it must absolutely be on hand in the form of commodity or money (if only perhaps a mere claim on money, etc.). But they cannot enter into the labour process or the production process as use values.

In the same measure as the worker is active as a worker, i.e. externalises his labour capacity, he alienates it, since it has already been alienated by sale as a self-externalising capacity to the money owner before the labour process begins. As labour realises itself—on the one hand, as the form of raw material (as use value and product) and, on the other hand, as exchange value, objectified social labour in general—it is transformed into capital.

[...]

In the production process—in so far as this is a valourisation process and hence a process of the self-valourisation of the preposited value or money—value (i.e. objectified general social labour), past labour, preserves and increases itself, posits surplus value, through exchange, through the relative appropriation of living labour, an exchange mediated by the purchase of labour capacity. It thus appears as value-in-process, and preserving and maintaining itself in the process.

[...]

Value, objectified labour, acquires this relation to living labour only to the extent that it is confronted by labour capacity as such, i.e. to the extent that, conversely, the objective conditions of labour—and hence the conditions for the realisation of labour capacity—confront labour capacity itself in separation and independence, under the control of an alien will. Hence although the means and material of labour are not as such capital, they themselves appear as capital because their independence, their existence as entities in their own right vis-à-vis the worker and therefore labour itself, is rooted in their being. Just as gold and silver appear as money, and are, notionally, directly connected with the social relation of production of which they are the vehicles.

[...]

For labour to be wage labour, for the worker to work as a non-proprietor, for him to sell not commodities but disposition over his own labour capacity—to sell his labour capacity itself in the sole manner in which it can be sold—the conditions for the realisation of his labour must confront him as alienated conditions, as alien powers, conditions under the sway of an alien will, as alien property. Objectified labour, value as such, confronts him as an entity in its own right, as capital, the vehicle of which is the capitalist—hence it also confronts him as the capitalist. What the worker buys is a result, a definite value; the quantity of labour time equal to the quantity contained in his own labour capacity, hence an amount of money necessary to keep him alive qua worker. For what he buys is money, hence merely another form for the exchange value he himself already possesses as labour capacity, and in the same quantity. What the capitalist buys, in contrast, and what the worker sells, is the use value of labour capacity, i.e. labour itself, the power which creates and enhances value. This value-creating and value-enhancing power therefore belongs not to the worker but capital. By incorporating into itself this power, capital comes alive and begins to work “as if its body were by love possessed”.



Living labour thus becomes a means whereby objectified labour is preserved and increased. To the extent that the worker creates wealth, living labour becomes a power of capital; similarly, all development of the productive forces of labour is development of the productive forces of capital. What the worker himself sells—and this is always replaced with an equivalent—is labour capacity itself, a definite value, whose magnitude may oscillate a between wider or narrower limits, but which is always reducible conceptually to a definite amount of the means of subsistence required for the maintenance of labour capacity as such, i.e. so that the worker may continue to live as a worker. Objectified, past labour thereby becomes the sovereign of living, present labour. The relation of subject and object is inverted. If already in the presupposition the objective conditions for the realisation of the worker's labour capacity and therefore for actual labour appear to the worker as alien, independent powers, which relate to living labour rather as the conditions of their own preservation and increase—the tool, the material [of labour] and the means of subsistence only giving themselves up to labour in order to absorb more of it—this inversion is still more pronounced in the result. The objective conditions of labour are themselves the products of labour and to the extent that they are viewed from the angle of exchange value they are nothing but labour time in objective form. In both directions, therefore, the objective conditions of labour are the result of labour itself, they are its own objectification, and it is its own objectification, labour itself as its result, that confronts labour as an alien power, as an independent power; while labour confronts the latter again and again in the same objectlessness, as mere labour capacity.

If the worker needs to work only for half a day in order to live for a whole day, i.e. in order to produce the means of subsistence necessary for his daily maintenance as a worker, the exchange value of his daily labour capacity=half a day's labour. The use value of this capacity, on the other hand, consists not in the labour time needed to preserve and produce, or reproduce, that capacity itself, but in the labour time it can itself work. Its use value therefore consists for example in a day's labour, whereas its exchange value is only half a day's labour. The capitalist buys it at its exchange value, at the labour time required to preserve it; what he receives, in contrast, is the labour time during which it can itself work; hence in the above case a whole day, if he has paid for a half. The size of his profit depends on the length of the period of time for which the worker places his labour capacity at his disposal. But in all

circumstances the relation consists in this, that the worker puts it at his disposal for longer than the amount of labour time necessary for his own reproduction. The capitalist only buys it because it has this use value.

Capital and wage labour only express two factors of the same relation. Money cannot become capital without being exchanged for labour capacity as a commodity sold by the worker himself; therefore without finding this specific commodity available on the market. On the other hand, labour can only appear as wage labour once the specific conditions of its realisation, its own objective conditions, confront it as powers in their own right, alien property, value-being-for-itself and holding fast to itself, in short as capital. Hence if capital from its material side—or in terms of the use values in which it exists—can only consist of the objective conditions of labour itself, the means of subsistence and means of production (the latter in part material of labour, in part means of labour), from its formal side these objective conditions must confront labour as alienated, as independent powers, as value—objectified labour—which relates to living labour as the mere means of its own preservation and increase.

Wage labour—or the wage system—(the wage as the price of labour) is therefore a necessary social form of labour for capitalist production, just as capital, potentiated value, is a necessary social form the objective conditions of labour must have for labour to be wage labour.

[...]

The fact that the worker, placed face to face with money, offers his labour capacity for sale as a commodity implies:

1. That the conditions of labour, the objective conditions of labour, confront him as alien powers, alienated conditions. Alien property. This also implies, among other things, the earth as landed property, it implies that the earth confronts him as alien property. Mere labour capacity.
2. That he is related as a person both to the conditions of labour, which have been alienated from him, and to his own labour capacity; that he therefore disposes of the latter as proprietor and does not himself belong among the objective conditions of labour, i.e. is not himself possessed by others as an instrument of labour. Free worker.
3. That the objective conditions of his labour themselves confront him as merely objectified labour, i.e. as value, as money and commodities; as objectified labour which only exchanges with living labour to preserve and increase itself, to valorise itself, to turn into more money, and

for which the worker exchanges his labour capacity in order to gain possession of a part of it, to the extent that it consists of his own means of subsistence. Hence in this relation the objective conditions of labour appear only as value, which has become more independent, holds onto itself and aims only at increasing itself.

The whole content of the relation, and the mode of appearance of the conditions of the worker's labour alienated from labour, are therefore present in their pure economic form, without any political, religious or other trimmings. It is a pure money-relation, capitalist and worker, objectified labour and living labour capacity. Not master and servant, priest and layman, feudal lord and vassal, master craftsman and journeyman, etc. In all states of society the class that rules (or the classes) is always the one that has possession of the objective conditions of labour, and the repositories of those conditions, in so far as they do work, do so not as workers but as proprietors, and the serving class is always the one that is either itself, as labour capacity, a possession of the proprietors (slavery), or disposes only over its labour capacity (even if, as e.g. in India, Egypt, etc., it possesses land, the proprietor of which is however the king, or a caste, etc.). But all these forms are distinguished from capital by this relation being veiled in them, by appearing as a relation of masters to servants, of free men to slaves, of demigods to ordinary mortals, etc., and existing in the consciousness of both sides as a relation of this kind. In capital alone are all political, religious and other ideal trimmings stripped from this relation. It is reduced—in the consciousness of both sides—to a relation of mere purchase and sale. The conditions of labour confront labour nakedly as such, and they confront it as objectified labour, value, money, which knows itself as mere form of labour and only exchanges with labour in order to preserve and increase itself as objectified labour. The relation therefore emerges in its purity as a mere relation of production—a purely economic relation. And where relations of domination develop again on this basis, it is known that they proceed purely from the relation in which the buyer, the representative of the conditions of labour, confronts the seller, the owner of labour capacity.

[...]

As use value, labour exists only for capital, and is the use value of capital itself, i.e. the mediating activity through which it valorises itself. Therefore labour does not exist as a use value for the worker, it is not

a force productive of wealth for him, in the sense of a means or activity of enrichment. A use value for capital, labour is a mere exchange value for the worker, an available exchange value. It is posited as such in the act of exchange with capital, through its sale for money. The use value of a thing does not concern the seller as such, only its buyer. The labour (capacity) which the worker sells as a use value to capital is for the worker his exchange value, which he wishes to realise, but which is already determined (like the prices of commodities in general) before this act of exchange, and presupposed to it as a condition. The exchange value of labour capacity, the realisation of which occurs in the process of the exchange with capital, is therefore presupposed, determined in advance, and only undergoes formal modification (through conversion into money). It is not determined by the use value of labour. For the worker himself labour only has use value in so far as it is exchange value, not in so far as it produces exchange value. For capital it only has exchange value in so far as it is use value. It is a use value, as distinct from its exchange value, not for the worker himself, but only for capital. The worker therefore exchanges labour as a simple, previously determined exchange value, determined by a past process—he exchanges labour as itself objectified labour, only in so far as this is a definite quantity of labour; hence only in so far as its equivalent is already measured, given. Capital obtains it through exchange as living labour, as the general productive force of wealth; activity which increases wealth. It is clear, therefore, that the worker cannot enrich himself through this exchange, since in exchange for the available value magnitude of his labour capacity he surrenders its creative power like Esau his birthright for a mess of pottage. Rather, he has to impoverish himself, because the creative power of his labour becomes established as the power of capital, as an alien power confronting him. He divests himself of labour as the force productive of wealth; capital appropriates it, as such. The separation of labour from property in the product of labour, of labour from wealth, is thus posited in this very act of exchange. What appears paradoxical as result is already implied by the presupposition itself. Thus the productivity of the worker's labour comes to confront him as an alien power; as indeed does his labour in general, in so far as it is actual labour, not a capacity but motion. Capital, inversely, valorises itself through the appropriation of alien labour. At least, the possibility of valorisation is thereby posited, as a result of the exchange between capital and labour. The relation is first realised in the act of production itself (where capital really consumes the

alien labour). Just as labour capacity, as a presupposed exchange value, is exchanged for an equivalent in money, so the latter is again exchanged for an equivalent in commodities, which are consumed. In this process of exchange, labour is not productive; it becomes so only for capital. It can take out of circulation only what it has thrown in, a predetermined quantity of commodities, which are as little its own product as they are its own value. Thus all advances of civilisation, in other words every increase in the productive forces of society—the productive forces of labour itself—enrich not the worker, but the capitalist. Hence they only magnify the power ruling over labour, only increase the productive power of capital—the objective power over labour. The transformation of labour into capital is in itself the result of the act of exchange between capital and labour. This transformation is posited only in the production process itself.

[...]

The combination—co-operation, as it appears in the division of labour, no longer as the parallel existence of the same functions or their temporary subdivision, but as the separation of a totality of functions into their constituent elements, and the unification of these different components—now has a twofold existence: it exists on the one hand, if we look at the production process itself, in the workshop as a whole, which, as a total mechanism of this kind (although in fact it is nothing other than the manifestation of the workers' co-operation, their social mode of action in the production process) confronts the workers as an external power, dominating and enveloping them, in fact as the power of capital itself and a form of its existence, under which they are individually subsumed, and to which their social relation of production belongs. On the other hand, it exists in the finished product, which is in turn a commodity belonging to the capitalist.

For the worker himself no combination of activities takes place. The combination is rather a combination of the one-sided functions under which every worker or number of workers is subsumed, group by group. His function is one-sided, abstract, partial. The totality which is formed from this is based precisely on his merely partial existence and isolation in his separate function. It is therefore a combination of which he forms a part, but it depends on the fact that his labour is not combined. The workers form the building blocks of this combination. However, the combination is not a relation that belongs to them, nor is it subsumed under them as a united group [...]. Here the capitalist mode of production has already seized upon the substance of labour and transformed it. The subsumption of the worker under capital is no longer merely formal:

the fact that he works for someone else, under alien command and alien supervision. Nor is the situation any longer merely as it was in the case of simple co-operation, where the worker co-operates with many others, performing the same work with them at the same time, while his work as such remains unchanged and a merely temporary connection is created, a contiguity, which by the nature of things may easily be dissolved and which in most cases of simple co-operation takes place only for specific, limited periods, to satisfy exceptional requirements, as with harvesting, road-building, etc. Nor is it like manufacture in its simplest form, where the main thing is the simultaneous exploitation of many workers and a saving on fixed capital, etc., and where the worker only formally becomes a part of a whole, whose head is the capitalist, but in which he is not further affected—as a producer—by the fact that many other workers are doing the same thing alongside him, also making boots, etc. With the transformation of his labour capacity into what is merely a function of part of the complete mechanism, the whole of which forms the workshop, he has altogether ceased to be the producer of a commodity. He is only the producer of a one-sided operation, which in general produces something solely in connection with the whole of the mechanism that forms the workshop. He is thus a living constituent of the workshop, and has himself become an accessory to capital through the manner of his work, since his skill can only be exercised in a workshop, only as a link in a mechanism which confronts him as the presence of capital. Originally he had to sell to the capitalist, instead of the commodity, the labour that produced the commodity, because he was not in possession of the objective conditions for the realisation of his labour capacity. Now he has to sell it because his labour capacity only continues to be labour capacity in so far as it is sold to capital. Thus he is now subsumed under capitalist production, has now fallen under the control of capital, no longer just because he lacks the means of labour, but because of his very labour capacity, the nature and manner of his labour; now capital has in its hands no longer just the objective conditions, but the social conditions of subjective labour, the conditions under which his labour continues to be labour at all.

The increase of productive power which arises from the division of labour, this social mode of existence of labour, is therefore not only capital's, instead of the worker's, productive power. The social form of the workers' combined labours is the existence of capital over against the worker; combination confronts him as a paramount destiny to which he has fallen victim through the reduction of his labour capacity to an

entirely one-sided function, which is nothing apart from the mechanism as a whole, and therefore depends entirely upon it. He has himself become a mere detail.

Dugald Stewart calls the workers subordinated to the division of labour “living automatons ... employed in the details of the work”, while the “employer will be always on the stretch to economise time and labour”. Dugald Stewart cites maxims from classical antiquity relating to the division of labour within society. “We are everything and nothing”. “We can do something of everything, but nothing as a whole”. “He knew many crafts, but he knew all of them badly” (this from the *Margites*, cited in the *Second Alcibiades*, one of the spurious dialogues of Plato).

[...]

The different means whereby capital creates relative surplus value, raises the productive forces, and increases the mass of products, are all social forms of labour; but they appear, even within production, rather as social forms of capital—modes of capital’s existence. So that one not only sees how capital produces, but how capital is itself produced—its own genesis. It then also emerges that this particular form of the social relation of production, the form through which past labour becomes capital, corresponds to a particular stage of development of the material production process, to particular material conditions of production, which are themselves first created historically, conditions of production whose point of departure naturally belongs to a pre-capitalist stage of social production; their formation and development coincide with the genesis of capital itself, until the movement of production starts to take place on the capitalist basis now obtained, from which point there occurs simply an expansion and reproduction of those conditions of production. Moreover, this genesis of capital appears at the same time as a process of divestiture of labour, of alienation, whereby its own social forms are presented as alien powers. Also, in view of the mass of people required by capitalist production, capital appears as a social form, not as a form of the labour of the independent individual.

## 4 THEORIES OF SURPLUS VALUE (1862–1863)

*In the manuscripts he devoted to the study of surplus value, Marx examined with great accuracy the ways in which the major economists had treated this problem. At the same time, he repeatedly set out the reasons why “the participants in capitalist production live in a bewitched world and their own relationships appear to them as properties of things, as properties of the material elements of production”. He also insisted that alienation was not a natural but a social phenomenon, which “expresses a specifically social relation”.*

\* \* \*

As far as the productivity of capital in relation to use value is concerned, this is construed by Smith, Ricardo and others, and by political economists in general, as meaning nothing else than that products of previous useful work serve anew as means of production, as objects of labour, instruments of labour and means of subsistence for the workers. The objective conditions of labour do not face the worker, as in the primitive stages, as mere natural objects (as such, they are never capital), but as natural objects already transformed by human activity. But in this sense the word “capital” is quite superfluous and meaningless. Wheat is nourishing not because it is capital but because it is wheat. The use value of wool derives from the fact that it is wool, not capital. In the same way, the action of steam-powered machinery has nothing in common with its existence as capital. It would do the same work if it were not “capital” and if it belonged, not to the factory owner, but to the workers. All these things serve in the real labour process because of the relationship which exists between them as use values—not as exchange values and still less as capital—and the labour which sets them in motion. Their productivity in the real labour process, or rather the productivity of the labour materialised in them, is due to their nature as objective conditions of real labour and not to their social existence as alienated, independent conditions which confront the worker and are embodied in the capitalist, the master over living labour.

[...]

In his investigations into the productivity of capital, Hodgskin is remiss in that he does not distinguish between how far it is a question of producing use values or exchange values.

Further—but this has historical justification—he takes capital as it is defined by the economists. On the one hand (insofar as it operates in the



real process of production) as a merely physical condition of labour, and therefore of importance only as a material element of labour, and (in the process of the production of value) nothing more than the quantity of labour measured by time, that is, nothing different from this quantity of labour itself. On the other hand, although in fact, insofar as it appears in the real process of production, it is a mere name for, and rechristening of, labour itself, it is represented as the power dominating and engendering labour, as the basis of the productivity of labour and as wealth alien to labour. And this without any intermediate links.

[...]

Accumulation merely presents as a continuous process what in primitive accumulation appears as a distinct historical process, as the process of the emergence of capital and as a transition from one mode of production to another.

The economists, caught as they are in the toils of the notions proper to the agents of the capitalist mode of production, advance a double quid pro quo, each side of which depends on the other.

On the one hand, they transform capital from a relationship into a thing, a stock of commodities (already forgetting that commodities themselves are not things) which, insofar as they serve as conditions of production for new labour, are called capital and, with regard to their mode of reproduction, are called circulating capital.

On the other hand, they transform things into capital, that is, they consider the social relationship which is represented in them and through them as an attribute which belongs to the thing as such as soon as it enters as an element into the labour process or the technological process.

[On the one hand,] the concentration in the hands of non-workers of raw materials and of the disposition over the means of subsistence, i.e. the powers dominating labour, the preliminary condition for the division of labour (later on, the division of labour increases not only concentration, but also the amount [available for] concentration by increasing the productivity of labour), in other words the preliminary accumulation of capital as the condition for the division of labour therefore means for them the augmentation or concentration (they do not differentiate between the two) of means of subsistence and means of labour.

On the other hand, these necessities and means of labour would not operate as objective conditions of production if these things did not possess the attribute of being capital, if the product of labour, the condition of labour, did not absorb labour itself; [if] past labour did not absorb

living labour, and if these things did not belong to themselves or by proxy to the capitalist instead of to the worker.

As if the division of labour was not just as possible if its conditions belonged to the associated workers (although historically it could not at first appear in this form, but can only achieve it as a result of capitalist production) and were regarded by the latter as their own products and the material elements of their own activity, which they are by their very nature.

Furthermore, because in the capitalist mode of production capital appropriates the surplus product of the worker, consequently, because it has appropriated the products of labour and these now confront the worker in the form of capital, it is clear that the conversion of the surplus product into conditions of labour can only be initiated by the capitalist and only in the form that he turns the products of labour—which he has appropriated without any equivalent—into means of production of new labour performed without receiving an equivalent. Consequently, the extension of reproduction appears as the transformation of profit into capital and as a saving by the capitalist who, instead of consuming the surplus product which he has acquired gratis, converts it anew into a means of exploitation, but is able to do this only insofar as he converts the surplus product again into productive capital; this entails the conversion of surplus product into means of labour. As a result, the economists conclude that the surplus product cannot serve as an element of new production if it has not been transformed previously from the product of the worker into the property of his employer in order to serve as capital once again and to repeat the old process of exploitation

[...]

Since the economists identify past labour with capital—past labour being understood in this case not only in the sense of concrete labour embodied in the product, but also in the sense of social labour, materialised labour time—it is understandable that they, the Pindars of capital, emphasise the objective elements of production and overestimate their importance as against the subjective element, living, immediate labour. For them, labour only becomes efficacious when it becomes capital and confronts, itself, the passive element confronting its active counterpart. The producer is therefore controlled by the product, the subject by the object, labour which is being embodied by labour embodied in an object, etc. In all these conceptions, past labour appears not merely as an objective factor of living labour, subsumed by it, but vice versa; not as an

element of the power of living labour, but as a power over this labour. The economists ascribe a false importance to the material factors of labour compared with labour itself in order to have also a technological justification for the specific social form, i.e. the capitalist form, in which the relationship of labour to the conditions of labour is turned conditions of labour, but the conditions of labour which make use of the worker. It is for this reason that Hodgskin asserts on the contrary that this physical factor, that is, the entire material wealth, is quite unimportant compared with the living process of production and that, in fact, this wealth has no value in itself, but only insofar as it is a factor in the living production process. In doing so, he underestimates somewhat the value which the labour of the past has for the labour of the present, but in opposing economic fetishism this is quite all right.

If in capitalist production—hence in political economy, its theoretical expression—past labour were met with only as a pedestal, etc., created by labour itself, then such a controversial issue would not have arisen. It only exists because in the real life of capitalist production, as well as in its theory, materialised labour appears as a contradiction to itself, to living labour. In exactly the same way in religious reasoning, the product of thought not only claims but exercises domination over thought itself.

[...]

Taking it all in all the “storing up” of means of subsistence for the workers by the capitalists comes to this.

1. Commodity production presupposes that articles of consumption which one does not produce oneself are available on the market as commodities, or that in general, commodities are produced as commodities.
2. The majority of the commodities consumed by the worker in the final form in which they confront him as commodities, are in fact products of simultaneous labour (they are therefore by no means stored up by the capitalist).
3. In capitalist production, the means of labour and the means of subsistence produced by the worker himself confront him as capital, the one as constant, the other as variable capital; these, the worker's conditions of production, appear as the property of the capitalist; their transfer from the worker to the capitalist and the partial return of the worker's product to the worker, or of the value of his product to the worker, is called the “storing up” of circulating capital for the

worker. These means of subsistence which the worker must always consume before his product is finished, become “circulating capital” because he [the worker], instead of buying them direct or paying for them with the value either of his past or his future product, must first of all receive a draft (money) on it; a draft moreover which the capitalist is entitled to issue only thanks to the worker’s past, present or future product.

[...]

The capitalist mode of production disappears with the form of alienation which the various aspects of social labour bear to one another and which is represented in capital. This is the conclusion arrived at by Hodgskin.

The primitive accumulation of capital. Includes the centralisation of the conditions of labour. It means that the conditions of labour acquire an independent existence in relation to the worker and to labour itself. This historical act is the historical genesis of capital, the historical process of separation which transforms the conditions of labour into capital and labour into wage labour. This provides the basis for capitalist production.

Accumulation of capital on the basis of capital itself, and therefore also on the basis of the relationship of capital and wage labour, reproduces the separation and the independent existence of material wealth as against labour on an ever-increasing scale.

Concentration of capital. Accumulation of large amounts of capital by the destruction of the smaller capitals. Attraction. Decapitalisation of the intermediate links between capital and labour. This is only the last degree and the final form of the process which transforms the conditions of labour into capital, then reproduces capital and the separate capitals on a larger scale and finally separates from their owners the various capitals which have come into existence at many points of society, and centralises them in the hands of big capitalists. It is in this extreme form of the contradiction and conflict that production—even though in alienated form—is transformed into social production. There is social labour, and in the real labour process the instruments of production are used in common. As function arises 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 rise of bourgeois society, became mere outdated and inappropriate privileges and who therefore rushed headlong to destruction.

[...]

It can already be noted in the first description of accumulation, i.e. of the conversion of surplus value into capital, that the entire surplus labour takes the form of capital (constant and variable) and of surplus labour (profit, interest, rent). For this conversion reveals that surplus labour itself assumes the form of capital and that the unpaid labour of the worker confronts him as the totality of the objective conditions of labour. In this form it confronts him as alien property with the result that the capital which is antecedent to his labour, appears to be independent of it. [It appears] as a ready-made value of a given magnitude, whose value the worker merely has to augment. It is never the product of his past labour (nor any circumstances which, independently of the particular labour process into which the past labour of his enters, affect or increase its value) which, or the replacement of which, appears as exploitation, but it is always merely the manner and the rate in which his present labour is exploited. As long as the individual capitalist continues to operate on the same scale of production (or on an expanding one), the replacement of capital appears as an operation which does not affect the worker, since, if the means of production belonged to the worker, he would likewise have to replace them out of the gross product in order to continue reproduction on the same scale or on an expanded scale (and the latter too is necessary because of the natural increase of population). But this affects the worker in three respects. (1) The perpetuation of the means of production as property alien to him, as capital, perpetuates his condition as wage worker and hence his fate of always having to work part of his labour time for a third person for nothing. (2) The extension of these means of production, alias accumulation of capital, increases the extent and the size of the classes who live on the surplus labour of the worker; it worsens his position relatively by augmenting the relative wealth of the capitalist and his co-partners, by further increasing his relative surplus labour through the division of labour, etc., and reduces that part of the gross product which is used to pay wages; finally, since the conditions of labour confront the individual worker in an ever more gigantic form and

increasingly as social forces, the chance of his taking possession of them himself as is the case in small-scale industry, disappears.

[...]

The difference lies in the fact that [in one case] his product appears as wages; that in this case, the worker's product (i.e. the part of the product produced by the worker which makes up the labour fund) (1) appears as the revenue of others; (2) that then, however, it is not expended as revenue, and not spent on labour by means of which revenue is directly consumed, but, 3) that it confronts the worker as capital which returns to him this portion of the product, in exchange not merely for an equivalent but for more labour than the product he receives contains. Thus his product appears in the first place as revenue of others, secondly, as something which is "saved" from revenue in order to be employed in the purchase of labour with a view to profit; in other words it is employed as capital.

[...]

The form of revenue and the sources of revenue are the most fetishistic expression of the relations of capitalist production. It is their form of existence as it appears on the surface, divorced from the hidden connections and the intermediate connecting links. Thus the land becomes the source of rent, capital the source of profit and labour the source of wages. The distorted form in which the real inversion is expressed is naturally reproduced in the views of the agents of this mode of production. It is a kind of fiction without fantasy, a religion of the vulgar.

[...]

The complete objectification, inversion and derangement of capital as interest-bearing capital—in which, however, the inner nature of capitalist production, [its] derangement, merely appears in its most palpable form—is capital which yields "compound interest". It appears as a Moloch demanding the whole world as a sacrifice belonging to it of right, whose legitimate demands, arising from its very nature, are however never met and are always frustrated by a mysterious fate [...]. In the real production process of capital, each particular movement of money expresses an aspect of reproduction, whether it be the conversion of money into labour, the conversion of the finished commodity into money (the end of the act of production) or the reconversion of the money into commodities (renewal of the production process, recommencement of reproduction). The movement of money when it is lent as capital, that is, when it is not converted into capital but enters into circulation as capital, expresses

nothing more than the transfer of the same money from one person to another. The property rights remain with the lender, but the possession is transferred to the industrial capitalist. For the lender, however, the conversion of the money into capital begins at the moment when he spends it as capital instead of spending it as money, i.e. when he hands it over to the industrial capitalist [...]. True, the other person converts it into capital, but this is an operation beyond that in which the lender and the borrower are involved. This development is effaced, is not visible, is not directly included in it. Instead of the real conversion of money into capital, there appears only the empty form of this process. Just as in the case of labour-power, the use value of money here becomes that of creating exchange value, more exchange value than it itself contains. It is lent as self-expanding value, as a commodity, but a commodity which, precisely because of this quality, differs from commodities as such and therefore also possesses a specific form of alienation.

[...]

As a result of the conversion of profit into average profit, the establishment of the general rate of profit and, in connection with it and determined by it, the conversion of values into cost-prices, the profit of the individual capital becomes different from the surplus value produced by the individual capital in its particular sphere of production, and different, moreover, not only in the way it is expressed—i.e. rate of profit as distinct from rate of surplus value—but it becomes substantially different, that is, in this context, quantitatively different. Profit does not merely seem to be different, but is now in fact different from surplus value not only with regard to the individual capital but also with regard to the total capital in a particular sphere of production. Capitals of equal magnitude yield equal profits; in other words, profit is proportional to the size of the capital. Or profit is determined by the amount of capital advanced. The relation of profit to the organic composition of capital is completely obliterated and no longer recognisable in all these formulae. On the other hand, it is quite obvious that capitals of the same magnitude which set in motion very different amounts of labour, thus commanding very different amounts of surplus labour and consequently producing very different amounts of surplus value, yield the same amount of profit. Indeed, the basis itself—the determination of the value of commodities by the labour time embodied in them—appears to be invalidated as a result of the conversion of values into cost-prices.

In this quite alienated form of profit and in the same measure as the form of profit hides its inner core, capital more and more acquires a material form, is transformed more and more from a relationship into a thing, but a thing which embodies, which has absorbed, the social relationship, a thing which has acquired a fictitious life and independent existence in relation to itself, a natural–supernatural entity; in this form of capital and profit it appears superficially as a ready-made precondition. It is the form of its reality, or rather its real form of existence. And it is the form in which it exists in the consciousness and is reflected in the imagination of its representatives, the capitalists.

[...]

Interest represents part of surplus value; it is merely a portion of profit which is separated and classified under a special name, the portion which accrues to the person who merely owns the capital, the portion he intercepts. But this merely quantitative division is turned into a qualitative division which transforms both parts in such a way that not even a trace of their original essence seems to remain. This is first of all confirmed by the fact that interest does not appear as a division which makes no difference to production, and takes place only “occasionally” when the industrialist operates with someone else’s capital. Even when he operates with his own capital his profit is split into interest and industrial profit, thereby transforming the mere quantitative division into a qualitative one which does not depend on the accidental circumstance whether the industrialist owns or does not own his capital; the qualitative division arises out of the nature of capital and of capitalist production itself. There exist not simply two portions of profit distributed to two different persons, but two separate categories of profit which are related in different ways to capital and consequently to different determinate aspects of capital. Apart from the reasons mentioned earlier, this assumption of an independent existence is established all the more easily since interest-bearing capital appears on the scene as a historic form before industrial capital and continues to exist alongside it in its old form and it is only in the course of the development of industrial capital that the latter subordinates it to capitalist production by turning it into a special form of industrial capital.

The mere quantitative division thus becomes a qualitative one. Capital is itself divided. Insofar as it is a prerequisite of capitalist production, insofar, therefore, as it expresses a specific social relation, the alienated form of the conditions of labour, it is realised in interest. It realises its character as capital in interest. On the other hand, insofar as it operates



in the process, this process appears as something separate from its specific capitalist character, from its specific social determination—as mere labour process in general. Therefore, insofar as the capitalist plays any part in it, he does so not as a capitalist—for this aspect of his character is allowed for in interest—but as a functionary of the labour process in general, as a worker, and his wages take the form of industrial profit. It is a special type of labour—labour of superintendence—but after all types of labour in general differ from one another.

Thus the nature of surplus value, the essence of capital and the character of capitalist production are not only completely obliterated in these two forms of surplus value, they are turned into their opposites. But even insofar as the character and form of capital are complete [it is] nonsensical [if] presented without any intermediate links and expressed as the subjectification of objects, the objectification of subjects, as the reversal of cause and effect, the religious quid pro quo, the pure form of capital expressed in the formula  $M—M'$ . The ossification of relations, their presentation as the relation of men to things having a definite social character is here likewise brought out in quite a different manner from that of the simple mystification of commodities and the more complicated mystification of money. The transubstantiation, the fetishism, is complete.

Thus interest in itself expresses precisely the existence of the conditions of labour as capital in their social contradiction and in their transformation into personal forces which confront labour and dominate labour. It sums up the alienated character of the conditions of labour in relation to the activity of the subject. It represents the ownership of capital or mere capital property as the means for appropriating the products of other people's labour, as the control over other people's labour. But it presents this character of capital as something belonging to it apart from the production process itself and by no means as resulting from the specific determinate form of the production process itself. Interest presents capital not in opposition to labour, but, on the contrary, as having no relation to labour, and merely as a relation of one capitalist to another; consequently, as a category which is quite extrinsic to, and independent of, the relation of capital to labour. The division of the profit among the capitalists does not affect the worker. Thus interest, the form of profit which is the special expression of the contradictory character of capital, is an expression in which this contradiction is completely obliterated and explicitly left out of account. Apart from expressing the capacity of money, commodities, etc., to expand their own value, interest, insofar as it presents surplus value as

something deriving from money, commodities, etc., as their natural fruit, is therefore merely a manifestation of the mystification of capital in its most extreme form; insofar as it at all represents a social relation as such, it expresses merely relations between capitalists, and by no means relations between capital and labour.

On the other hand, the existence of this form of interest gives the other part of profit the qualitative form of industrial profit, of wages for the labour of the industrial capitalist not in his capacity as capitalist, but as a worker (industrialist). The particular functions which the capitalist as such has to perform in the labour process and which are incumbent precisely on him as distinct from the workers, are represented as mere labour functions. He produces surplus value not because he works as a capitalist, but because he, the capitalist, also works. It is just as if a king, who, as king, has nominal command of the army, were to be assumed to command the army not because he, as the owner of the kingship, commands, plays the role of commander-in-chief, but on the contrary that he is king because he commands, exercises the function of commander-in-chief. If thus one part of surplus value, i.e. interest, is completely separated from the process of exploitation, then the other part, that is, industrial profit, emerges as its direct opposite, not as appropriation of other people's labour, but as the creation of value by one's own labour. This part of surplus value is therefore no longer surplus value, but its opposite, an equivalent given for labour performed. Since the alienated character of capital, its opposition to labour, is displayed outside the exploitation process, that is, outside the sphere where the real action of this alienation takes place, all the contradictory features are eliminated from this process itself. Consequently, real exploitation, the sphere where these contradictory features are put into practice and where they manifest themselves in reality, appears as its exact opposite, as a substantially different kind of labour, which belongs however to the same socially determined form of labour—wage labour—to the same category of labour. The work of the exploiter is identified here with the labour which is exploited

[...]

If no surplus value were produced, then of course together with surplus value the part of it which is called interest would also cease to exist, and so would the part which is called rent; the anticipation of surplus value would likewise come to an end, in other words, it would no longer constitute a part of the costs of production in the shape of the price of commodities. The existing value entering into the production process

would not emerge from it as capital at all, and accordingly, could not enter into the reproduction process as capital, nor be lent out as capital. It is thus the continuous reproduction of the same relations—the relations which postulate capitalist production—that not only causes them to appear as the social forms and results of this process, but at the same time as its continual prerequisites. But they are these only as prerequisites continually posited, created, produced by the process itself. This reproduction is therefore not conscious reproduction; on the contrary, it only manifests itself in the continuous existence of these relations as prerequisites and as conditions dominating the production process. The parts, for example, into which the commodity value can be divided are turned into its component parts which confront one another as independent parts, and they are consequently also independent in relation to their unity, which on the contrary appears to be a compound of these parts. The bourgeois sees that the product continually becomes the condition of production. But he does not perceive that the production relations themselves, the social forms in which he produces and which he regards as given, natural relations, are the continuous product—and only for that reason the continuous prerequisite—of this specific social mode of production. The different relations and aspects not only become independent and assume a heterogeneous mode of existence, apparently independent of one another, but they seem to be the direct properties of things; they assume a material shape.

Thus the participants in capitalist production live in a bewitched world and their own relationships appear to them as properties of things, as properties of the material elements of production. It is however in the last, most derivative forms—forms in which the intermediate stage has not only become invisible but has been turned into its direct opposite—that the various aspects of capital appear as the real agencies and direct representatives of production. Interest-bearing capital is personified in the moneyed capitalist, industrial capital in the industrial capitalist, rent-bearing capital in the landlord as the owner of the land, and lastly, labour in the wage-worker. They enter into the competitive struggle and into the real process of production as these rigid forms, personified in independent personalities that appear at the same time to be mere representatives of personified things. Competition presupposes this externalisation. These forms conform to its nature and have come into being in the natural evolution of competition, and on the surface competition appears to be

simply the movement of this inverted world. Insofar as the inner connection asserts itself in this movement, it appears as a mysterious law. The best proof is political economy itself, a science which seeks to rediscover the hidden connection. Everything enters into competition in this last, most externalised form. The market price, for example, appears to be the dominant factor here, just as the rate of interest, rent, wages, industrial profit appear to be the constituents of value, and the price of land and the price of capital appear as given items with which one operates.

[...]

The worker in capitalist production does not own the means of production, [he owns] neither the land he cultivates nor the tools with which he works. This alienation of the conditions of production corresponds here, however, to a real change in the mode of production itself. The tool becomes a machine, and the worker works in the workshop, etc. The mode of production no longer tolerates the dispersal of the means of production connected with small property, just as it does not tolerate the dispersal of the workers themselves. In capitalist production, usury can no longer separate the conditions of production from the workers, from the producers, because they have already been separated from them.



## CHAPTER 4

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# *Capital* and Its Preparatory Manuscripts

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M. Musto, *Karl Marx's Writings on Alienation,*  
Marx, Engels, and Marxisms,

[https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-60781-4\\_4](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-60781-4_4)

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## I ECONOMIC MANUSCRIPTS (1863–1865)

*Scattered among the preparatory manuscripts for Capital, Volume one, are a number of pages in which Marx returned to the theme of alienation. The separation between the workers and the means of production—a prerequisite for the buying and selling of labour-power—reaches the point where “the conditions of labour appear before the worker as autonomous persons”. In capitalism not only is living labour transformed into objectified labour but living labour itself is thereby transformed into capital.*

\* \* \*

First, purchase and sale of labour-power, an act that occurs in the sphere of circulation, but the capitalist production process as a whole not only concerns one aspect and precondition but is also its constant result. This purchase and sale of labour-power assumes the separation of the objective conditions of labour—means of subsistence and means of production—from the living labour-power itself, so that the latter [is] the only property of which the worker disposes, and the only commodity he has to sell. The separation goes so far that the conditions of labour confront the worker as autonomous persons, since the capitalist as owner of them is only their personification, in opposition to the worker as the mere owner of labour-power. This separation and autonomisation is a prerequisite for the purchase and sale of labour-power to go ahead, and hence in general for living labour to be assimilated to dead labour as its self-perpetuation and self-reproduction, its self-valorisation therefore. Without the exchange of variable capital for labour-power there is no self-valorisation of the total capital and therefore no formation of capital or no metamorphosis of means of production and means of subsistence into capital. The second aspect is now the actual process of production, that is, the actual consumption of the labour-power purchased by the owner of the money or the commodities.

In the actual process of production, the objective conditions of labour—the material and means of labour—serve not only for the objectification of living labour but for the objectification of more labour than was contained in the variable capital. Thus, they serve as means of absorption and extortion of the surplus labour that presents itself in the surplus value (and surplus product). If we look more closely at the two aspects—first, the exchange of labour-power for variable capital, and second, the actual

process of production (in which living labour is incorporated qua agent into capital)—then the whole process appears as one in which (1) less objectified labour is exchanged for more living labour, insofar as what the capitalist actually obtains for the wage is living labour; and (2) the objective forms in which capital directly appears in the labour process [are] the means of production (so, again objectified labour) as means for the extortion and absorption of that living labour—the whole being a process that unfolds between objectified and living labour, a process that not only transforms living into objectified labour, but at the same time transforms the objectified labour into capital, hence also living labour into capital. It is therefore a process in which not only the commodity but surplus value—and therefore capital—is produced.

The means of production appear here not only as means for the realisation of labour but just as much as means of exploiting another's labour.

## 2 CAPITAL, VOLUME ONE, UNPUBLISHED CHAPTER VI (1863–1864)

*In this manuscript, first published posthumously in 1933, Marx went deeper still into the problematic of alienation, linking his economic and political analysis more closely to each other: “the rule of the capitalist over the worker is nothing but the rule of the independent conditions of labour over the worker, conditions that have made themselves independent of him”. In capitalist society, through the conversion of the social productive forces of labour into material properties of capital, there is a real “personification of things and the reification of persons”.*

\* \* \*

It is not the worker who makes use of the means of production, but the means of production that make use of the worker. Living labour does not realise itself in objective labour which thereby becomes its objective organ, but instead objective labour maintains and fortifies itself by drawing off living labour; it is thus that it becomes value valourising itself, capital and functions as such. The means of production thus become no more than leeches drawing off as large an amount of living labour as they can. Living labour for its part ceases to be anything more than a means by which to increase, and thereby capitalise, already existing values. [...] It is precisely for this reason that the means of production appear eminently as the effective form of capital confronting living labour. And they now manifest themselves moreover as the rule of past, dead labour over the living. It is precisely as value-creating that living labour is continually being absorbed into the valourisation process of objectified labour. In terms of effort, of the expenditure of his life’s energy, work is the personal activity of the worker. But as something which creates value, as something involved in the process of objectifying labour, the worker’s labour becomes one of the modes of existence of capital, it is incorporated into capital as soon as it enters the production process. This power which maintains old values and creates new ones is therefore the power of capital, and that process is accordingly the process of its self-valourisation. Consequently, it spells the impoverishment of the worker who creates value as value alien to himself.

Within the framework of capitalist production this ability of objectified labour to transform itself into capital, i.e. to transform the means of production into the means of controlling and exploiting living labour,



appears as something utterly appropriate to them (just as within that framework it is potentially bound up with it), as inseparable from them and hence as a quality attributable to them as things, as use values, as means of production. These appear, therefore, intrinsically as capital and hence as capital which expresses a specific relationship of production, a specific social relationship in which the owners of the conditions of production treat living labour-power as a thing, just as value had appeared to be the attribute of a thing and the economic definition of the thing as a commodity appeared to be an aspect of its thinghood, just as the social form conferred on labour in the shape of money presented itself as the characteristics of a thing.

[...]

In fact the rule of the capitalist over the worker is nothing but the rule of the independent conditions of labour over the worker, conditions that have made themselves independent of him. (These embrace not only the objective conditions of the process of production—the means of production—but also the objective prerequisites for the sustenance and effectiveness of labour-power, i.e. its means of subsistence.) And this is the case even though this relationship comes into existence only in the course of the actual process of production, which, as we have seen, is in essence the process of creating surplus value (including the maintenance of the old value), the process of valourising the capital invested.

In circulation the capitalist and the worker confront each other only as the vendors of commodities, but owing to the specific, opposed nature of the commodities they sell to each other, the worker necessarily enters the process of production as a component of the use value, the real existence, of capital, its existence as value. And this remains true even though that relationship only constitutes itself within the process of production, and the capitalist, who exists only as a potential purchaser of labour, becomes a real capitalist only when the worker, who can be turned into a wage labourer only through the sale of his capacity for labour, really does submit to the commands of capital. The functions fulfilled by the capitalist are no more than the functions of capital—viz. the valourisation of value by absorbing living labour—executed consciously and willingly. The capitalist functions only as personified capital, capital as a person, just as the worker is no more than labour personified. That labour is for him just effort and torment, whereas it belongs to the capitalist as a substance that creates and increases wealth, and in fact it is an element

of capital, incorporated into it in the production process as its living, variable component. Hence the rule of the capitalist over the worker is the rule of things over man, of dead labour over the living, of the product over the producer. For the commodities that become the instruments of rule over the workers (merely as the instruments of the rule of capital itself) are mere consequences of the process of production; they are its products.

Thus at the level of material production, of the life process in the realm of the social—for that is what the process of production is—we find the same situation that we find in religion at the ideological level, namely the inversion of subject into object and vice versa. Viewed historically this inversion is the indispensable transition without which wealth as such, i.e. the relentless productive forces of social labour, which alone can form the material base of a free human society, could not possibly be created by force at the expense of the majority. This antagonistic stage cannot be avoided, anymore than it is possible for man to avoid the stage in which his spiritual energies are given a religious definition as powers independent of himself. What we are confronted by here is the alienation of man from his own labour.

To that extent the worker stands on a higher plane than the capitalist from the outset, since the latter has his roots in the process of alienation and finds absolute satisfaction in it whereas right from the start the worker is a victim who confronts it as a rebel and experiences it as a process of enslavement.

At the same time the process of production is a real labour process and to the extent to which that is the case and the capitalist has a definite function to perform within it as supervisor and director, his activity acquires a specific, many-sided content. But the labour process itself is no more than the instrument of the valourisation process, just as the use value of the product is nothing but a repository of its exchange value. The self-valourisation of capital—the creation of surplus value—is therefore the determining, dominating and overriding purpose of the capitalist; it is the absolute motive and content of his activity. And in fact it is no more than the rationalised motive and aim of the hoarder—a highly impoverished and abstract content which makes it plain that the capitalist is just as enslaved by the relationships of capitalism as is his opposite pole, the worker, albeit in a quite different manner.

[...]

We have seen that the capitalist must transform his money not only into labour-power, but into the material factors of the labour process, i.e. the means of production. However, if we think of the whole of capital as standing on one side, i.e. the totality of the purchasers of labour-power, and if we think of the totality of the vendors of labour-power, the totality of workers on the other, then we find that the worker is compelled to sell not a commodity but his own labour-power as a commodity. This is because he finds on the other side, opposed to him and confronting him as alien property, all the means of production, all the material conditions of work together with all the means of subsistence, money and means of production. In other words, all material wealth confronts the worker as the property of the commodity possessors. What is proposed here is that he works as a non-proprietor and that the conditions of his labour confront him as alien property. [...] Man can only live by producing his own means of subsistence, and he can produce these only if he is in possession of the means of production, of the material conditions of labour. It is obvious from the very outset that the worker who is denuded of the means of production is thereby deprived of the means of subsistence, just as, conversely, a man deprived of the means of subsistence is in no position to create the means of production. Thus even in the first process, what stamps money or commodities as capital from the outset, even before they have been really transformed into capital, is neither their money nature nor their commodity nature, nor the material use value of these commodities as means of production or subsistence, but the circumstance that this money and this commodity, these means of production and these means of subsistence confront labour-power, stripped of all material wealth, as autonomous powers, personified in their owners. The objective conditions essential to the realisation of labour are alienated from the worker and become manifest as fetishes endowed with a will and a soul of their own. Commodities, in short, appear as the purchasers of persons.

The buyer of labour-power is nothing but the personification of objectified labour which cedes a part of itself to the worker in the form of the means of subsistence in order to annex the living labour-power for the benefit of the remaining portion, so as to keep itself intact and even to grow beyond its original size by virtue of this annexation.

It is not the worker who buys the means of production and subsistence, but the means of production that buy the worker to incorporate him into the means of production.

[...]

Material wealth transforms itself into capital simply and solely because the worker sells his labour-power in order to live. The articles which are the material conditions of labour, i.e. the means of production, and the articles which are the precondition for the survival of the worker himself, i.e. the means of subsistence, both become capital only because of the phenomenon of wage labour.

Capital is not a thing, any more than money is a thing. In capital, as in money, certain specific social relations of production between people appear as relations of things to people, or else certain social relations appear as the natural of properties of things in society. Without a class dependent on wages, the moment individuals confront each other as free persons, there can be no production of surplus value; without the production of surplus value there can be no capitalist production, and hence no capital and no capitalist! Capital and wage labour (it is thus we designate the labour of the worker who sells his own labour-power) only express two aspects of the self-same relationship. Money cannot become capital unless it is exchanged for labour-power, a commodity sold by the worker himself. Conversely, work can only be wage labour when its own material conditions confront it as autonomous powers, alien property, value existing for itself and maintaining itself, in short as capital. If capital in its material aspect, i.e. in the use values in which it has its being, must depend for its existence on the material conditions of labour, these material conditions must equally, on the formal side, confront labour as alien, autonomous powers, as value—objectified labour—which treats living labour as a mere means whereby to maintain and increase itself. Thus wage labour, the wages system, is a social form of work indispensable to capitalist production, just as capital, i.e. potentiated value, is an indispensable social form which must be assumed by the material conditions of labour in order for the latter to be wage labour.

Wage labour is then a necessary condition for the formation of capital and remains the essential prerequisite of capitalist production. Therefore, although the primary process, the exchange of money for labour-power or the sale of labour-power, does not as such enter the immediate process of production, it does enter into the production of the relationship as a whole.

As we have seen, the first process, the sale and purchase of labour-power, presupposes that the means of production and subsistence have become autonomous objects confronting the worker, i.e. it presupposes the personification of the means of production and subsistence which, as

purchasers, negotiate a contract with the workers as vendors. When we leave this process which is enacted in the market place, in the sphere of circulation, and proceed directly to the immediate process of production, we find that it is primarily a labour process.

In the labour process the worker enters as worker into a normal active relationship with the means of production determined by the nature and the purpose of the work itself. He takes possession of the means of production and handles them simply as the means and materials of his work. The autonomous nature of these means of production, the way they hold fast to their independence and display a mind of their own, their separation from labour—all this is now abolished in practice. The material conditions of labour now enter into a normal unity with labour itself; they form the material, the organs requisite for its creative activity. The worker treats the hide he is tanning simply as the object of his creative activity, and not as capital. He does not tan the hide for the capitalist. If we consider production just as a labour process, the worker consumes the means of production as the mere means of subsistence of labour. But production is also a process of valourisation, and here the capitalist devours the labour-power of the worker, or appropriates his living labour as the lifeblood of capitalism. Raw materials and the object of labour in general exist only to absorb the work of others, and the instrument of labour serves only as a conductor, an agency, for this process of absorption. By incorporating living labour-power into the material constituents of capital, the latter becomes an animated monster and it starts to act “as if consumed by love”.<sup>1</sup>

[...]

The social productive forces of labour, or the productive forces of directly social, socialised (i.e. collective) labour come into being through co-operation, division of labour within the workshop, the use of machinery and in general the transformation of production by the conscious use of the sciences, of mechanics, chemistry, etc., for specific ends, technology, etc., and similarly, through the enormous increase of scale corresponding to such developments (for it is only socialised labour that is capable of applying the general products of human development, such as mathematics, to the immediate processes of production; and,

<sup>1</sup>Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Faust*, Part I, Auerbach's Cellar, line 2141.

conversely, progress in these sciences presupposes a certain level of material production). This entire development of the productive forces of socialised labour (in contrast to the more or less isolated labour of individuals), and together with it the use of science (the general product of social development), in the immediate process of production, takes the form of the productive power of capital. It does not appear as the productive power of labour, or even of that part of it that is identical with capital. And least of all does it appear as the productive power either of the individual worker or the workers joined together in the process of production.

The mystification implicit in the relations of capital as a whole is greatly intensified here, far beyond the point it had reached or could have reached in the merely formal subsumption of labour under capital. On the other hand, we here find a striking illustration of the historic significance of capitalist production in its specific form—the transmutation of the immediate process of production itself and the development of the social forces of production of labour.

It has been shown how not merely at the level of ideas, but also in reality, the social character of his labour confronts the worker as something not merely alien, but hostile and antagonistic; when it appears before him objectified and personified in capital.

If the production of absolute surplus value was the material expression of the formal subsumption of labour under capital, then the production of relative surplus value may be viewed as its real subsumption.

[...]

The form based on absolute surplus value is what I call the formal subsumption of labour under capital. I do so because it is only formally distinct from earlier modes of production on whose foundations it arises spontaneously (or is introduced), either when the producer is self-employed or when the immediate producers are forced to deliver surplus labour to others. All that changes is that compulsion is applied, i.e. the method by which surplus labour is extorted. The essential features of formal subsumption are:

1. The pure money relationship between the man who appropriates the surplus labour and the man who yields it up: subordination in this case arises from the specific content of the sale there is not a subordination underlying it in which the producer stands in a relation to the exploiter of his labour which is determined not just by money (the relationship of one commodity owner to another), but, let us say,

by political constraints. What brings the seller into a relationship of dependency is solely the fact that the buyer is the owner of the conditions of labour. There is no fixed political and social relationship of supremacy and subordination.

2. This is implicit in the first relationship—for were it not for this the worker would not have his labour-power to sell: it is that his objective conditions of labour (the means of production) and the subjective conditions of labour (the means of subsistence) confront him as capital, as the monopoly of the buyer of his labour-power. The more completely these conditions of labour are mobilised against him as alien property, the more effectively the formal relationship between capital and wage labour is established, i.e. the more effectively the formal subsumption of labour under capital is accomplished, and this in turn is the premise and precondition of its real subsumption.

[...]

With the formal subsumption of labour under capital the compulsion to perform surplus labour, and to create the leisure time necessary for development independently of material production, differs only in form from what had obtained under the earlier mode of production. (Even though, be it noted, this compulsion implies also the necessity of forming needs, and creating the means of satisfying them, and of supplying quantities of produce well in excess of the traditional requirements of the worker.) But this formal change is one which increases the continuity and intensity of labour; it is more favourable to the development of versatility among the workers, and hence to increasing diversity in modes of working and ways of earning a living. Lastly, it dissolves the relationship between the owners of the conditions of labour and the workers into a relationship of sale and purchase, a purely financial relationship. In consequence the process of exploitation is stripped of every patriarchal, political or even religious cloak. It remains true, of course, that the relations of production themselves create a new relation of supremacy and subordination (and this also has a political expression). But the more capitalist production sticks fast in this formal relationship, the less the relationship itself will evolve, since for the most part it is based on small capitalists who differ only slightly from the workers in their education and their activities.

The variations which can occur in the relation of supremacy and subordination without affecting the mode of production can be seen best where rural and domestic secondary industries, undertaken primarily to

satisfy the needs of individual families, are transformed into autonomous branches of capitalist industry.

The distinction between labour formally subsumed under capital and previous modes of labour become more apparent, the greater the increase in the volume of capital employed by the individual capitalist, i.e. the greater the increase in the number of workers employed by him at any one time. Only with a certain minimum capital does the capitalist cease to be a worker himself and [begin] to concern himself entirely with directing work and organising sales. And the real subsumption of labour under capital, i.e. capitalist production proper, begins only when capital sums of a certain magnitude have directly taken over control of production, either because the merchant turns into an industrial capitalist, or because larger industrial capitalists have established themselves on the basis of the formal subsumption.

If supremacy and subordination come to take the place of slavery, serfdom, vassallage and other patriarchal forms of subjection, the change is purely one of form. The form becomes freer, because it is objective in nature, voluntary in appearance, purely economic.

[...]

In contrast to the slave, this labour becomes more productive because more intensive, since the slave works only under the spur of external fear but not for his existence which is guaranteed even though it does not belong to him. The free worker, however, is impelled by his wants. The consciousness (or better: the idea) of free self-determination, of liberty, makes a much better worker of the one than of the other, as does the related feeling (sense) of responsibility; since he, like any seller of wares, is responsible for the goods he delivers and for the quality which he must provide, he must strive to ensure that he is not driven from the field by other sellers of the same type as himself. The continuity in the relations of slave and slave-owner is based on the fact that the slave is kept in his situation by direct compulsion. The free worker, however, must maintain his own position, since his existence and that of his family depends on his ability continuously to renew the sale of his labour-power to the capitalist.

[...]

The slave is the property of a particular master; the worker must indeed sell himself to capital, but not to a particular capitalist, and so within certain limitations he may choose to sell himself to whomever he wishes; and he may also change his master. The effect of all these differences is to make the free worker's work more intensive, more continuous, more



flexible and skilled than that of the slave, quite apart from the fact that they fit him for quite a different historical role.

[...]

Since—within the process of production—living labour has already been absorbed into capital, all the social productive forces of labour appear as the productive forces of capital, as intrinsic attributes of capital, just as in the case of money, the creative power of labour had seemed to possess the qualities of a thing. What was true of money is even truer of capital because:

1. Although labour is an expression of labour-power, although it represents the effort of the individual worker, and so belongs to him (it is the substance with which he pays the capitalist for what he receives from him), it nevertheless objectifies itself in the product and so belongs to the capitalist. Even worse, the social configuration in which the individual workers exist, and within which they function only as the particular organs of the total labour-power that makes up the workshop as a whole, does not belong to them either. On the contrary, it confronts them as a capitalist arrangement that is imposed on them;
2. These social productive forces of labour, or productive forces of social labour, came into being historically only with the advent of the specifically capitalist mode of production. That is to say, they appeared as something intrinsic to the relations of capitalism and inseparable from them;
3. With the development of the capitalist mode of production the objective condition of labour take on a different form owing to the scale on which, and the economy with which, they are employed (quite apart from the form of the machinery itself). As they develop they become increasingly concentrated; they represent social wealth and, to put the matter in a nutshell, their scope and their effect is that of the conditions of production of labour socially combined. And quite apart from the combination of labour, the social character of the conditions of labour—and this includes machinery and capital fixe of every kind—appears to be entirely autonomous and independent of the worker. It appears to be a mode of existence of capital itself, and therefore as something ordered by capitalists without reference to the workers. Like the social character of their own labour, but to a far greater extent, the social character with which the conditions of production

are endowed, as the conditions of production of the combined labour of the community, appears as capitalistic, as something independent of the workers and intrinsic to the conditions of production themselves.

*ad* (3) we would at once add the following rider which to some extent anticipates later discussion:

Profits as distinct from surplus value can rise as a result of the economic use of collective conditions of labour, such as saving in overheads, for example heating, lighting, etc. The fact that the value of the prime mover does not increase at the same rate as its power: economies in the price of raw materials, recycling of waste, reduction in administrative costs, or in storage costs as the result of mass production, etc.—all these relative savings accruing to constant capital and coinciding with the absolute growth in its value are based on the fact that these means of production, i.e. both the means and the materials of labour, are used collectively. This collective use in its turn is based on the absolute premise of the co-operation of an agglomeration of workers. It is itself, therefore, only the objective expression of the social character of labour and the social forces of production arising from it, just as the particular form assumed by these conditions, the machinery for instance, cannot possibly be used other than for work on a co-operative basis. To the worker who enters into these relations, however, they appear as given conditions, independent of himself; they are the forms of capital. In consequence, all these economies (and the resultant growth in profits and reductions in the price of goods) seem to be something quite separate from the surplus labour of the worker. They appear to be the direct act and achievement of the capitalist, who functions here as the personification of the social character of labour, of the workshop as a whole.

In the same way, science, which is in fact the general intellectual product of the social process, also appears to be the direct offshoot of capital (since its application to the material process of production takes place in isolation from the knowledge and abilities of the individual worker). And since society is marked by the exploitation of labour by capitalist development appears to be the productive force of capital as opposed to labour. It therefore appears to be the development of capital, and all the more so since, for the great majority, it is a process with which the drawing off of labour-power keeps pace.

The capitalist himself wields power only inasmuch as he is the personification of capital. (It is for this reason that he always appears in a dual role in Italian book-keeping. For instance, as the debtor of his own capital.)

As regards capital in the context of the formal mode of subsumption, its productivity consists in the first instance only in the compulsion to perform surplus labour. This compulsion is one which it shares with earlier modes of production, but in capitalism it is more favourable for production.

Even if we consider just the formal relation, the general form of capitalist production, which is common to both its more and its less advanced forms, we see that the means of production, the material conditions of labour, are not subject to the worker, but he to them. Capital employs labour. This in itself exhibits the relationship in its simple form and entails the personification of things and the reification of persons.

The relationship becomes more complicated, however, and apparently more mysterious, with the emergence of the specifically capitalist mode of production. Here we find that it is not only such things—the products of labour, both use values and exchange values—that rise up on their hind legs and face the worker and confront him as “Capital”. But even the social form of labour appears as a form of development of capital, and hence the productive forces of social labour so developed appear as the productive forces of capitalism. *Vis-à-vis* labour such social forces are in fact “capitalised”. In fact collective unity in co-operation, combination in the division of labour, the use of the forces of nature and the sciences, of the products of labour, as machinery—all these confront the individual workers as something alien, objective, ready-made, existing without their intervention, and frequently even hostile to them. They all appear quite simply as the prevailing forms of the instruments of labour. As objects they are independent of the workers whom they dominate. Though the workshop is to a degree the product of the workers’ combination, its entire intelligence and will seem to be incorporated in the capitalist or his understrappers, and the workers find themselves confronted by the functions of the capital that lives in the capitalist.

The social forms of their own labour—both subjectively and objectively—or, in other words, the forms of their own social labour, are utterly independent of the individual workers. Subsumed under capital the workers become components of these social formations, but these social formations do not belong to them and so rise up against them as the forms of capital itself, as if they belonged to capital, as if they arose

from it and were integrated within it, in opposition to the isolated labour-power of the workers. And this entire process is progressively intensified as their labour-power is itself modified by these forms to such an extent that it is rendered impotent even when it exists autonomously. In other words its independent productive capacities are destroyed once it finds itself outside the framework of capitalism. And on the other hand, with the development of machinery there is a sense in which the conditions of labour come to dominate labour even technologically and, at the same time, they replace it, suppress it and render it superfluous in its independent forms. In this process, then, the social characteristics of their labour come to confront the workers so to speak in a capitalised form; thus machinery is an instance of the way in which the visible products of labour take on the appearance of its masters. The same transformation may be observed in the forces of nature and science, the products of the general development of history in its abstract quintessence. They too confront the workers as the powers of capital. They become separated effectively from the skill and the knowledge of the individual worker; and even though ultimately they are themselves the products of labour, they appear as an integral part of capital wherever they intervene in the labour process. The capitalist who puts a machine to work does not need to understand it. But the science realised in the machine becomes manifest to the workers in the form of capital. And in fact every such application of social labour to science, the forces of nature and the products of labour on a large-scale, appears as no more than the means for the exploitation of labour, as the means of appropriating surplus labour, and hence it seems to deploy forces distinct from labour and integral to capital. Of course, capital makes use of these means only in order to exploit labour, but if it is to exploit it, it must apply them to production itself. And so the development of the social productive forces of labour and the conditions of that development come to appear as the achievement of capital, an achievement which the individual worker endures passively, and which progresses at his expense.

Since capital consists of commodities, it appears in twofold form:

1. Exchange-value (money), but value valourising itself. Value that creates value, grows as value, receives an increment simply because it is value. This resolves itself into the exchange of a given quantity of objectified labour for a larger amount of living labour.

2. Use value, and here capital conforms to the specific nature of the labour process. And precisely here it is not limited to the materials or means of labour to which labour belongs, which have absorbed labour. But along with labour it has also appropriated its network of social relations and the level of development of the means of labour corresponding to them. Capitalist production is the first to develop the conditions of the labour process, both its objective and subjective ones, on a large-scale—it tears them from the hands of the individual independent worker, but develops them as powers that control the individual worker and are alien to him.

In this way capital becomes a highly mysterious thing.

The conditions of labour pile up in front of the worker as social forces, and they assume a capitalised form.

Thus capital appears productive:

1. As the compulsion to surplus labour. Now if labour is productive it is precisely as the agent that performs this surplus labour, as the result of the difference between the actual value of labour-power and its valourisation.
2. As the personification and representative, the reified form of the “social productive forces of labour” or the productive forces of social labour. How the law of capitalist production—the creation of surplus value, etc.—achieves this has already been discussed. It takes the form of a compulsion which the capitalists impose upon the workers and on each other: in reality, then, it is the law of capital as enforced against both. Labour as a social and natural force does not develop within the valourisation process as such, but within the actual labour process. It presents itself therefore as a set of attributes that are intrinsic to capital as a thing, as its use value. Productive labour—as something productive of value—continues to confront capital as the labour of the individual workers, irrespective of the social combinations these workers may enter into the process of production. Therefore, whereas capital always represents the social productivity of labour *vis-à-vis* the workers, productive labour itself never represents more than the labour of the individual worker *vis-a-vis* capital.

[...]

Therefore, it is not only true to say that labour produces on a constantly increasing scale the conditions of labour in opposition to itself in the form of capital, but equally, capital produces on a steadily increasing scale the productive wage labourers it requires. Labour produces the conditions of its production in the form of capital, and capital produces labour, i.e. the wage labour, as the means towards its own realisation, as capital. Capitalist production is not merely the reproduction of the relationship: it is its reproduction on a steadily increasing scale. And just as the social productive forces of labour develop in step with the capitalist mode of production, so to the heaped-up wealth confronting the worker grows apace and confronts him as capital, as wealth that controls him. The world of wealth expands and faces him as an alien world dominating him, and as it does so his subjective poverty, his need and dependence grow larger in proportion. His deprivation and its plenitude match each other exactly. And at the same time, there is a corresponding increase in the mass of this living means of production of capital: the labouring proletariat.

The growth of capital and the increase in the proletariat appear, therefore, as interconnected—if opposed—products of the same process.

[...]

This destroys the last vestiges of the illusion, so typical of the relationship when considered superficially, that in the circulation process, in the market-place, two equally matched commodity owners confront each other, and that they, like all other commodity owners, are distinguishable only by the material content of their goods, by the specific use value of the goods they desire to sell each other. Or in other words, the original relation remains intact, but survives only as the illusory reflection of the capitalist relation underlying it.

[...]

This dispels the illusion that we are concerned here merely with relations between commodity owners. This constant sale and purchase of labour-power, and the constant entrance of the commodity produced by the worker himself as buyer of his labour-power and as constant capital, appear merely as forms which mediate his subjugation by capital. Living labour is no more than the means of maintaining and increasing the objective labour and making it independent of him.

This form of mediation is intrinsic to this mode of production. It perpetuates the relation between capital as the buyer and the worker as the seller of labour. It is a form, however, which can be distinguished

only formally from other more direct forms of the enslavement of labour and the ownership of it as perpetrated by the owners of the means of production. Through the mediation, of this sale and purchase it disguises the real transaction, and the perpetual dependence which is constantly renewed, by presenting it as nothing more than a financial relationship. Not only are the conditions of this commerce constantly reproduced, but the object which the one must sell and which the other uses in order to buy are themselves the result of the process. The constant renewal of the relationship of sale and purchase merely ensures the perpetuation of the specific relationship of dependency, endowing it with the deceptive illusion of a transaction, of a contract between equally free and equally matched commodity owners. This initial relationship itself now appears as an integral feature of the rule of objectified labour over living labour that is created in capitalist production.

It follows that two widely held views are in error:

There are firstly those who consider that wage labour, the sale of labour to the capitalist and hence the wage form, is something only superficially characteristic of capitalist production. It is, however, one of the essential mediating forms of capitalist relations of production, and one constantly reproduced by those relations themselves. Secondly, there are those who regard this superficial relation, this essential formality, this deceptive appearance of capitalist relations as its true essence. They therefore imagine that they can give a true account of those relations by classifying both workers and capitalists as commodity owners. They thereby gloss over the essential nature of the relationship, extinguishing its *differentia specifica*.

For capitalist relations to establish themselves at all presupposes that a certain historical level of social production has been attained. Even within the framework of an earlier mode of production certain needs and certain means of communication and production must have developed which go beyond the old relations of production and coerce them into the capitalist mould. But for the time being they need to be developed only to the point that permits the formal subsumption of labour under capital. On the basis of that change, however, specific changes in the mode of production are introduced which create new forces of production, and these in turn influence the mode of production so that new real conditions come into being.

Thus a complete economic revolution is brought about. On the one hand, it creates the real conditions for the domination of labour by capital, perfecting the process and providing it with the appropriate framework.

On the other hand, by evolving conditions of production and communication and productive forces of labour antagonistic to the workers involved in them, this revolution creates the real premises of a new mode of production, one that abolishes the contradictory form of capitalism. It thereby creates the material basis of a newly shaped social process and hence of a new social formation.



## 3 CAPITAL, VOLUME ONE (1867)

*In Capital, Volume One, a new formulation for alienation took shape: that is, commodity fetishism, the phenomenon through which human beings are ruled over by the objects they have created and live in a world where “the definite social relation between men themselves assumes [...] the fantastic form of a relation between things”.*

\* \* \*

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 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. In the same way, the impression made by a thing on the optic nerve is perceived not as a subjective excitation of that nerve but as the objective form of a thing outside the eye. In the act of seeing, of course, light is really transmitted from one thing, the external object, to another thing, the eye. It is a physical relation between physical things. As against this, the commodity form, and the value-relation of the products of labour within which it appears, have absolutely no connection with the physical nature of the commodity and the material relations arising out of this. It is nothing but the definite social relation between men themselves which assumes here, for them, the fantastic form of a relation between things. In order, therefore, to find an analogy we must take flight into the misty realm of religion. There the products of the human brain appear as autonomous figures endowed with a life of their own, which enter into relations both with each other and with the human race. So it is in the world of commodities with the products of men’s hands. I call this the fetishism which attaches itself to the products of labour as soon as they are produced as commodities, and is therefore inseparable from the production of commodities.

[...]

This fetishism of the world of commodities arises from the peculiar social character of the labour which produces them.

Objects of utility become commodities only because they are the products of the labour of private individuals who work independently of each other. The sum total of the labour of all 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 relations between persons and social relations between things.

It is only by being exchanged that the products of labour acquire a socially uniform objectivity as values, which is distinct from their sensuously varied objectivity as articles of utility. This division of the product of labour into a useful thing and a thing possessing value appears in practice only when exchange has already acquired a sufficient extension and importance to allow useful things to be produced for the purpose of being exchanged, so that their character as values has already to be taken into consideration during production. From this moment on, the labour of the individual producer acquires a twofold social character.

[...]

Value, therefore, does not have its description branded on its forehead; it rather transforms every product of labour into a social hieroglyphic. Later on, men try to decipher the hieroglyphic, to get behind the secret of their own social product: for the characteristic which objects of utility have of being values is as much men's social product as is their language. The belated scientific discovery that the products of labour, in so far as they are values, are merely the material expressions of the human labour expended to produce them, marks an epoch in the history of mankind's development, but by no means banishes the semblance of objectivity possessed by the social characteristics of labour. Something which is only valid for this particular form of production, the production of commodities, namely the fact that the specific social character of private labours carried on independently of each other consists in their equality as human labour, and, in the product, assumes the form of the existence of value, appears to those caught up in the relations of commodity production (and

this is true both before and after the abovementioned scientific discovery) to be just as ultimately valid as the fact that the scientific dissection of the air into its component parts left the atmosphere itself unaltered in its physical configuration.

[...]

The value character of the products of labour becomes firmly established only when they act as magnitudes of value. These magnitudes vary continually, independently of the will, foreknowledge and actions of the exchangers. Their own movement within society has for them the form of a movement made by things, and these things, far from being under their control, in fact control them. [...] The determination of the magnitude of value by labour time is therefore a secret hidden under the apparent movements in the relative values of commodities. Its discovery destroys the semblance of the merely accidental determination of the magnitude of the value of the products of labour, but by no means abolishes that determination's material form.

Reflection on the forms of human life, hence also scientific analysis of those forms, takes a course directly opposite to their real development. Reflection begins *post festum*, and therefore with the results of the process of development ready to hand. The forms which stamp products as commodities and which are therefore the preliminary requirements for the circulation of commodities, already possess the fixed quality of natural forms of social life before man seeks to give an account, not of their historical character, for in his eyes they are immutable, but of their content and meaning. Consequently, it was solely the analysis of the prices of commodities which led to the determination of the magnitude of value, and solely the common expression of all commodities in money which led to the establishment of their character as values. It is however precisely this finished form of the world of commodities—the money form—which conceals the social character of private labour and the social relations between the individual workers, by making those relations appear as relations between material objects, instead of revealing them plainly. If I state that coats or boots stand in a relation to linen because the latter is the universal incarnation of abstract human labour, the absurdity of the statement is self-evident. Nevertheless, when the producers of coats and boots bring these commodities into a relation with linen, or with gold or silver (and this makes no difference here), as the universal equivalent, the relation between their own private labour and the collective labour of society appears to them in exactly this absurd form.

The categories of bourgeois economics consist precisely of forms of this kind. They are forms of thought which are socially valid, and therefore objective, for the relations of production belonging to this historically determined mode of social production, i.e. commodity production. The whole mystery of commodities, all the magic and necromancy that surrounds the products of labour on the basis of commodity production, vanishes therefore as soon as we come to other forms of production.

As political economists are fond of Robinson Crusoe stories, let us first look at Robinson on his island. Undemanding though he is by nature, he still has needs to satisfy, and must therefore perform useful labours of various kinds: he must make tools, knock together furniture, tame llamas, fish, hunt and so on. [...] All the relations between Robinson and these objects that form his self-created wealth are here so simple and transparent [...] And yet those relations contain all the essential determinants of value.

Let us now transport ourselves from Robinson's island, bathed in light, to medieval Europe, shrouded in darkness. Here, instead of the independent man, we find everyone dependent—serfs and lords, vassals and suzerains, laymen and clerics. Personal dependence characterises the social relations of material production as much as it does the other spheres of life based on that production. But precisely because relations of personal dependence form the given social foundation, there is no need for labour and its products to assume a fantastic form different from their reality. They take the shape, in the transactions of society, of services in kind and payments in kind. The natural form of labour, its particularity—and not, as in a society based on commodity production, its universality—is here its immediate social form. The *corvée* can be measured by time just as well as the labour which produces commodities, but every serf knows that what he expends in the service of his lord is a specific quantity of his own personal labour-power. The tithe owed to the priest is more clearly apparent than his blessing. Whatever we may think, then, of the different roles in which men confront each other in such a society, the social relations between individuals in the performance of their labour appear at all events as their own personal relations, and are not disguised as social relations between things, between the products of labour.

[...]

Let us finally imagine, for a change, an association of free men, working with the means of production held in common, and expending their many different forms of labour-power in full self-awareness as one single social labour force. All the characteristics of Robinson's labour are repeated

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

For a society of commodity producers, whose general social relation of production consists in the fact that they treat their products as commodities, hence as values, and in this material form bring their individual, private labours into relation with each other as homogeneous human labour, Christianity with its religious cult of man in the abstract, more particularly in its bourgeois development, i.e. in Protestantism, Deism, etc., is the most fitting form of religion. In the ancient Asiatic, Classical-antique, and other such modes of production, the transformation of the product into a commodity, and therefore men's existence as producers of commodities, plays a subordinate role, which however increases in importance as these communities approach nearer and nearer to the stage of their dissolution. Trading nations, properly so called, exist only in the interstices of the ancient world, like the gods of Epicurus in the *inter-mundia*, or Jews in the pores of Polish society. Those ancient social organisms of production are much more simple and transparent than those of bourgeois society. But they are founded either on the immaturity of man as an individual, when he has not yet torn himself loose from the umbilical cord of his natural species-connection with other men, or on

direct relations of dominance and servitude. They are conditioned by a low stage of development of the productive powers of labour and correspondingly limited relations between men within the process of creating and reproducing their material life, hence also limited relations between man and nature. These real limitations are reflected in the ancient worship of nature, and in other elements of tribal religions. The religious reflections of the real world can, in any case, vanish only when the practical relations of everyday life between man and man, and man and nature, generally present themselves to him in a transparent and rational form. The veil is not removed from the countenance of the social life process, i.e. the process of material production, until it becomes production by freely associated men, and stands under their conscious and planned control. This, however, requires that society possess a material foundation, or a series of material conditions of existence, which in their turn are the natural and spontaneous product of a long and tormented historical development.

Political economy has indeed analysed value and its magnitude, however incompletely, and has uncovered the content concealed within these forms. But it has never once asked the question why this content has assumed that particular form, that is to say, why labour is expressed in value, and why the measurement of labour by its duration is expressed in the magnitude of the value of the product. These formulas, which bear the unmistakable stamp of belonging to a social formation in which the process of production has mastery over man, instead of the opposite, appear to the political economists' bourgeois consciousness to be as much a self-evident and nature-imposed necessity as productive labour itself. Hence the pre-bourgeois forms of the social organisation of production are treated by political economy in much the same way as the Fathers of the Church treated pre-Christian religions.

The degree to which some economists are misled by the fetishism attached to the world of commodities, or by the objective appearance of the social characteristics of labour, is shown, among other things, by the dull and tedious dispute over the part played by nature in the formation of exchange value.

[...]

The social division of labour makes the nature of his labour as one-sided as his needs are many-sided. [...] Perhaps a particular operation, although yesterday it still formed one out of the many operations conducted by one producer in creating a given commodity, may today

tear itself out of this framework, establish itself as an independent branch of labour, and send its part of the product to market as an independent commodity. [...] The owners of commodities therefore find out that the same division of labour which turns them into independent private producers also makes the social process of production and the relations of the individual producers to each other within that process independent of the producers themselves; they also find out that the independence of the individuals from each other has as its counterpart and supplement a system of all-round material dependence.

[...]

The capitalist, instead of buying the labour-power of one man, buys that of 100, and enters into separate contracts with 100 unconnected men instead of with one. He can set the 100 men to work, without letting them co-operate. He pays them the value of 100 independent labour-powers, but he does not pay for the combined labour-power of the 100. Being independent of each other, the workers are isolated. They enter into relations with the capitalist, but not with each other. Their co-operation only begins with the labour process, but by then they have ceased to belong to themselves. On entering the labour process they are incorporated into capital. As co-operators, as members of a working organism, they merely form a particular mode of existence of capital. Hence the productive power developed by the worker socially is the productive power of capital. The socially productive power of labour develops as a free gift to capital whenever the workers are placed under certain conditions, and it is capital which places them under these conditions. Because this power costs capital nothing, while on the other hand it is not developed by the worker until his labour itself belongs to capital, it appears as a power which capital possesses by its nature—a productive power inherent in capital.

[...]

On the one hand, the production process incessantly converts material wealth into capital, into the capitalist's means of enjoyment and his means of valourisation. On the other hand, the worker always leaves the process in the same state as he entered it—a personal source of wealth, but deprived of any means of making that wealth a reality for himself. Since, before he enters the process, his own labour has already been alienated from him, appropriated by the capitalist, and incorporated with capital, it now, in the course of the process, constantly objectifies itself so that it becomes a product alien to him. Since the process of production is

also the process of the consumption of labour-power by the capitalist, the worker's product is not only constantly converted into commodities, but also into capital, i.e. into value that sucks up the worker's value-creating power, means of subsistence that actually purchase human beings, and means of production that employ the people who are doing the producing. Therefore the worker himself constantly produces objective wealth, in the form of capital, an alien power that dominates and exploits him; and the capitalist just as constantly produces labour-power, in the form of a subjective source of wealth which is abstract, exists merely in the physical body of the worker, and is separated from its own means of objectification and realisation; in short, the capitalist produces the worker as a wage labourer. This incessant reproduction, this perpetuation of the worker, is the absolutely necessary condition for capitalist production.

[...]

Within the capitalist system all methods for raising the social productivity of labour are put into effect at the cost of the individual worker; that all means for the development of production undergo a dialectical inversion so that they become means of domination and exploitation of the producers; they distort the worker into a fragment of a man, they degrade him to the level of an appendage of a machine, they destroy the actual content of his labour by turning it into a torment; they alienate from him the intellectual potentialities of the labour process in the same proportion as science is incorporated in it as an independent power; they deform the conditions under which he works, subject him during the labour process to a despotism the more hateful for its meanness; they transform his lifetime into working time, and drag his wife and child beneath the wheels of the juggernaut of capital. But all methods for the production of surplus value are at the same time methods of accumulation, and every extension of accumulation becomes, conversely, a means for the development of those methods. It follows therefore that in proportion as capital accumulates, the situation of the worker, be his payment high or low, must grow worse. Finally, the law which always holds the relative surplus population or industrial reserve army in equilibrium with the extent and energy of accumulation rivets the worker to capital more firmly than the wedges of Hephaestus held Prometheus to the rock. It makes an accumulation of misery a necessary condition, corresponding to the accumulation of wealth.



## 4 CAPITAL, VOLUME THREE (1864–1875)

*The manuscripts for Capital, Volume Three, posthumously published by Engels, contain a number of passages in which Marx addressed once again the problematic of alienation. He described it here in terms of a “state of complete indifference, externality and alienation” in which the worker is placed vis-à-vis “the conditions of realisation of his own labour” in capitalist society.*

\* \* \*

This economy in the use of means of production, this method of attaining a certain result with the least possible expense, appears as a power inherent in capital and a method specific to and characteristic of the capitalist mode of production.

This way of conceiving things is all the less surprising in that it corresponds to the semblance of the matter and that the capital relation actually does conceal the inner connection in the state of complete indifference, externality and alienation in which it places the worker vis-a-vis the conditions of realisation of his own labour.

[...]

The worker actually treats the social character of his work, its combination with the work of others for a common goal, as a power that is alien to him; the conditions in which this combination is realised are for him the property of another, and he would be completely indifferent to the wastage of this property if he were not himself constrained to economise on it.

[...]

A further aspect, moreover, is that, since production on a large-scale developed first in the capitalist form, the profit-mania and competition which compel commodities to be produced as cheaply as possible give economy in the use of constant capital the appearance of something peculiar to the capitalist mode of production and therefore make it seem a function of the capitalist.

Just as the capitalist mode of production promotes on the one hand the development of the productive forces of social labour, so on the other hand does it promote economy in the use of constant capital.

Yet there is more to this than the alienation and indifference that the worker, as the bearer of living labour, has towards the economical, i.e.

rational and frugal use of his conditions of labour. The contradictory and antithetical character of the capitalist mode of production leads it to count the squandering of the life and health of the worker, and the depression of his conditions of existence, as itself an economy in the use of constant capital, and hence a means for raising the rate of profit.

Since the worker spends the greater part of his life in the production process, the conditions of this process are to a great extent conditions of his active life process itself, his conditions of life, and economy in these conditions of life is a method of increasing the profit rate. In just the same way, [...] overwork, the transformation of the worker into a beast of burden, is a method of accelerating the self-valourisation of capital, the production of surplus value. This economy extends to crowding workers into confined and unhealthy premises, a practice which in capitalist parlance is called saving on buildings; squeezing dangerous machines into the same premises and dispensing with means of protection against these dangers; neglect of precautionary measures in those production processes whose very nature is harmful to health or involves risk, as in mining, etc. Not to speak of the absence of all provisions that would make the production process humane, comfortable or simply bearable for the worker. From the standpoint of the capitalist this would be a senseless and purposeless waste.

[...]

Capital appears as a mysterious and self-creating source of interest, of its own increase. The thing (money, commodity, value) is now already capital simply as a thing; the result of the overall reproduction process appears as a property devolving on a thing in itself; it is up to the possessor of money, i.e. of commodities in their ever-exchangeable form, whether he wants to spend this money as money or hire it out as capital. In interest bearing capital, therefore, this automatic fetish is elaborated into its pure form, self-valourising value, money breeding money, and in this form it no longer bears any marks of its origin. The social relation is consummated in the relationship of a thing, money, to itself. Instead of the actual transformation of money into capital, we have here only the form of this devoid of content. As in the case of labour-power, here the use value of money is that of creating value, a greater value than is contained in itself. Money as such is already potentially self-valourising value, and it is as such that it is lent, this being the form of sale for this particular commodity. Thus, it becomes as completely the property of money to create value, to yield interest, as it is the property of a pear tree to bear pears. And it is as

this interest-bearing thing that the money-lender sells his money. Nor is that all. The actually functioning capital, as we have seen, presents itself in such a way that it Yields interest not as functioning capital, but rather as capital in itself, as money capital.

There is still a further distortion. There is still a further distortion. While interest is simply one part of the profit, i.e. the surplus value, extorted from the worker by the functioning capitalist, it now appears conversely as if interest is the specific fruit of capital, the original thing, while profit, now transformed into the form of profit of enterprise, appears as a mere accessory and trimming added in the reproduction process. The fetish character of capital and the representation of this capital fetish is now complete. In M-M' we have the irrational form of capital, the misrepresentation and objectification of the relations of production, in its highest power: the interest-bearing form, the simple form of capital, in which it is taken as logically anterior to its own reproduction process; the ability of money or a commodity to valorise its own value independent of reproduction—the capital mystification in the most flagrant form.

For vulgar economics, which seeks to present capital as an independent source of wealth, of value creation, this form is of course a godsend, a form in which the source of profit is no longer recognisable and in which the result of the capitalist production process—separate from the process itself—obtains an autonomous existence.

[...]

Capital profit (or better still capital interest), land-ground-rent, labour wages, this economic trinity as the connection between the components of value and wealth in general and its sources, completes the mystification of the capitalist mode of production, the reification of social relations, and the immediate coalescence of the material relations of production with their historical and social specificity: the bewitched, distorted and upside-down world haunted by *Monsieur le Capital* and *Madame la Terre*, who are at the same time social characters and mere things. It is the great merit of classical economics to have dissolved this false appearance and deception, this autonomisation and ossification of the different social elements of wealth vis-a-vis one another, this personification of things and reification of the relations of production, this religion of everyday life, by reducing interest to a part of profit and rent to the surplus above the average profit, so that they both coincide in surplus value; by presenting the circulation process as simply a metamorphosis of forms,

and finally in the immediate process of production reducing the value and surplus-value of commodities to labour. Yet even its best representatives remained more or less trapped in the world of illusion their criticism had dissolved, and nothing else is possible from the bourgeois standpoint; they all fell therefore more or less into inconsistencies, half-truths and unresolved contradictions. It is also quite natural, on the other hand, that the actual agents of production themselves feel completely at home in these estranged and irrational forms of capital interest, land-rent, labour wages, for these are precisely the configurations of appearance in which they move, and with which they are daily involved. It is equally natural, therefore, that vulgar economics, which is nothing more than a didactic and more or less doctrinaire translation of the everyday notions of the actual agents of production, giving them a certain comprehensible arrangement, finds the natural basis of its fatuous self-importance established beyond all doubt precisely in this trinity, in which the entire inner connection is obliterated. This formula also corresponds to the self-interest of the dominant classes, since it preaches the natural necessity and perpetual justification of their sources of income and erects this into a dogma.

[...]

In earlier forms of society, this economic mystification comes in principally in connection with money and interest-bearing capital. It is excluded by the very nature of the case, firstly, where production is predominantly for use value, for the producers' own needs; secondly, where, as in Antiquity and the Middle Ages, slavery or serfdom forms the broad basis of social production. In the latter case, the dominance of the conditions of production over the producers is concealed by the visible relations of domination and servitude, which appear as direct mainsprings of the production process. In the primitive communities where an indigenous communism prevails, and even in the urban communities of Antiquity, it is the actual community and its conditions that presents itself as the basis of production, the reproduction of this community being production's final purpose. Even in the guild system of the Middle Ages, neither capital nor labour appear unrestrained; their connections are determined by the system of corporations and the relationships this involves, as well as by the corresponding ideas of professional obligation, craftsmanship, etc.

[...]

The realm of freedom really begins only where labour determined by necessity and external expediency ends; it lies by its very nature beyond

the sphere of material production proper. Just as the savage must wrestle with nature to satisfy his needs, to maintain and reproduce his life, so must civilised man, and he must do so in all forms of society and under all possible modes of production. This realm of natural necessity expands with his development, because his needs do too; but the productive forces to satisfy these expand at the same time. Freedom, in this sphere, can consist only in this, that socialised man, the associated producers, govern the human metabolism with nature in a rational way, bringing it under their collective control instead of being dominated by it as a blind power; accomplishing it with the least expenditure of energy and in conditions most worthy and appropriate for their human nature. But this always remains a realm of necessity. The true realm of freedom, the development of human powers as an end in itself, begins beyond it, though it can only flourish with this realm of necessity as its basis. The reduction of the working day is the basic prerequisite.



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