RE/PRESENTING LABOR: ECONOMIC DISCOURSE, VALUE, AND ETHICS

A Dissertation

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This dissertation is an attempt to rethink, represent, and reclaim labor for economic and social discourse. In the first essay, I analyze contemporary renditions of labor in nonacademic economic discourses—publications of international institutions—as well as postmodernist narratives to show that labor, rather than being a given category with a single definition, acquires different meanings in different theories, with different theoretical, economic and ethical implications. As it participates in the constitution of a unique discourse that renders certain aspects of reality visible, labor becomes a “particular lens” with which one can understand, ascribe meanings to prevalent economic and social relations, and destabilize, subvert, and transform the status quo by potentiating counter-hegemonic discourses and mobilizing alternative movements.

In the second essay, I argue that there is no labor in the singular in Marx’s writings by tracing the different conceptions he advances throughout his works and their affectivities. That is, the productive activity through which human beings realize their human essence, or the creator of use-values which appears as an eternal condition of human existence, does not exhaust what labor is. Marx privileges another definition of labor—the performer of surplus—with which he elaborates a unique and unprecedented class analysis. However, none of these characteristics is an immediate property, essential quality of labor in and of itself; rather, Marx ascribes
these meanings to labor, thus avoiding the fetishistic inversion he persistently criticized. With this definition, and building upon Amartya Sen’s capabilities approach, I develop a labor theory of ethics in the third essay. I argue each should have the capability to perform surplus, and do so according to their ability; they also should have the capability to appropriate this surplus irrespective of their role in its production, and receive a portion of it in accordance with their needs. To the extent that no one is excluded from participating in, and there is always someone or some group who can join, this surplus economy, the communist ethics I elaborate transcends the capitalist normative framework of “equal rights and equal exchange,” replacing it with a “radical equality.”
Aytul ve Kıvanç'a
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ESSAY 1

ECONOMIC DISCOURSE AND THE PROBLEM OF LABOR

1.1 Introduction

Looking at the precarious and peculiar discursive spaces labor occupies in recent economic and social analyses, as well as nonacademic narratives, one can identify two contending and conflicting tendencies. On the one hand, there are those who dismiss and denounce labor simply as an embarrassing remnant of an essentialist past in which every realm of the social is reduced to and determined by the economy, and/or production; similarly, others bid farewell to this social agent, the working-class, once proclaimed to be the motor of history and celebrated as the revolutionary subject that would emancipate all humanity. For example, referring to recent economic and social changes in industrialized and developing countries, and citing the collapse of “actually exiting socialisms,” the introduction of post-Fordist, flexible production schemes, the feminization of the labor-force, increasing un-

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1 Here, I should mention the complication that arises from what labor itself signifies. I have in mind what labor names as a conceptual category and as a subject in different discourses, or in different levels of these narratives. That is, labor appears as a conceptual “abstraction of the activity” that human beings perform when they produce and create, as well as a social agent, as a “social abstraction of that class of people” who performs this activity (the working class, the proletariat) (Williams 1985, 178). This ambiguity as to what labor is, a concept or a subject, even at a level which does not take into account how differently these might be construed even if one focuses on either one of them, is what I want to play with to argue that labor takes its meaning(s) from the discourses within which it is deployed. As a result, I refer freely to both renditions when I discuss the whereabouts of labor, while keeping in mind this ambiguity and specifying what labor refers to in each discourse.
under-employment, among others, Patrick Joyce (1995a) questions the relevance of labor *qua* the working-class as a social agent and as an analytical category. He argues that the concept of the working-class fails to explain our present reality as well as it did in the past, and that it is high time “to look for new actors and new narratives” (ibid., 11). Consequently, he, along with other historians, calls for a shift in the focus of historical analysis from working-class histories to the “narratives of the self” and intellectual accounts of individuals, concentrating on published “words and fantasies of a few dozen ‘non-representative’ individuals” (Rancière 1989a, x).

In addition, the emergence of “new social movements” and the burgeoning “identity politics,” which have brought environmentalist, gay/lesbian, and women’s movements, as well as NGO-based resistances to the forefront, at times at the expense of labor, are taken to substantiate the assertion that labor *qua* the working-class is no longer a key subject in society. As the participation of organizations that traditionally represented labor in anti-capitalist, anti-globalization/alternative globalization movements that challenge the dominance of neo-liberalism—and of capital, in general—is limited, it seems these oppositional movements are only brought forth and defined by social groups that are constituted around non-labor identities. For example, Hamel et al. (2001) take an inventory of, and attempt to establish global solidarity among, these collective actors, focusing on environmentalist, gay/lesbian, and women’s movements, as well as NGO-based resistances; but, labor, as a viable oppositionary social group, is mentioned just once, and only in passing.

It would seem that labor does not fare better in most “revolutionary thought,” now come to be represented in part by French poststructuralist philosophy (Hardt 1996); labor appears to be relegated to the shadowy realms of this discursive field. For example, to confront the prevailing forms of oppression in society—sexuality, gender, race, and class—Donna Haraway calls for a coalitionary, affinity-based
“socialist-feminist” politics; yet, there seems to be no room for labor in her project (1991, 155). She asserts that (humanist) Marxism deploys labor as its “pre-eminently privileged category” to posit what it perceives to be the fundamental alienation of humanity—the dissociation of labor from what it produces; by means of this concept, this Marxist account reduces existing oppressions, or renders them secondary to, class (ibid., 158-60). Haraway concludes that labor, construed as such, cannot acknowledge multiple and irreducible relations of domination that exist in society; thus, labor, in her account, does not figure as a relevant subject, as a possible participant, in processes of building effective political affinities.

Labor also appears to be pushed out of sight in many economic narratives, particularly with the so-called triumph of global neoliberalism—“the extension of market-based economic integration across all local, regional and national borders” (DeMartino 2000, 1). The hegemony of global neoliberalism is in part achieved by means of, and accompanied by, the International Monetary Foundation (IMF) prescribed economic policies of financial liberalization and “deep integration”—according to which demands that barriers to trade, namely quotas and tariffs, should be lifted, domestic markets should be opened up to allow goods and services to flow freely across national borders (with the notable exception of such a move towards free movement in labor markets)—and with a consequent shift of emphasis from full-employment to trade flows, exchange rates, foreign debt, inflation and interest rates. The academic or disciplinary counterpart of neoliberalism, neoclassical economics, replaces labor with its privileged category, utility, and relegates it only to one—among many—means to generate income and secure a livelihood. Labor is reduced to an undesirable, yet necessary, moment of utility-maximization as a source of income. Labor even loses its proper name, as it is subsumed under capital; now rendered “human capital,” it becomes an asset to be invested in (Bowles and Gintis 1975).
Heterodox economic theories, on the other hand, in their attempts to undermine this neoclassical hegemony, appear to be none too eager to bring labor back in and place it at the center of economic analysis either. To displace that dominance, they either replace utility, for example, with technological coefficients—Sraffian Neo-Ricardianism (Sraffa 1960; Steedman 1977)—or with initial property endowments—Analytical Marxists (Roemer 1986)—or advocate a “social theory of value,” attempting to eliminate arbitrage (Mirowski 1990, 1991). As such, these narratives privilege concepts other than labor within the discursive field of economics.

However, this quick glimpse at a few contemporary discourses in which labor is no longer considered to be an adequate and relevant category that can capture the reality or the irreducible multiplicity of the social, or represent the burgeoning counter-hegemonic movements, does not mean that labor has disappeared in toto, without a trace, from social analysis—after all, labor is present even in those narratives that attempt to silence it. Of course, it is not hard to find discourses in which labor does not figure at all, but this should not come as a surprise to anyone, since it has been the case for a long time. Then again, there is no reason for labor to be omnipresent, appearing everywhere all the time, unless one ascribes an ontological presence to it, or construes it as the essence of all that exists. After all, as Althusser declares, “One cannot see everything from everywhere” all the time (1991, 21; emphasis in the original). Nevertheless, labor, in its various aspects, continues to be featured prominently in current discourses. For example, problems pertaining to labor, such as non-compliance with labor standards, deteriorating work conditions, decreasing job security, mushrooming of sweatshops, persistence of child labor, and

\[\text{2} \] The infamous “transformation problem,” and the subsequent questioning of the labor theory of value has been one of the determinants of this turn away from the concept of labor to which I return to at the end of this essay.
exploitation, usually associated with the emergence of “global workshops” have increasingly been occupying the agendas of not only heterodox economists but also their colleagues in the mainstream, as well as non-governmental organizations. Even more telling, such concerns are raised by international institutions such as the World Bank (WB), under the direction of which the dominance of global neoliberalism is in part shaping up and taking place, the United Nations—in particular, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)—and the International Labour Office (ILO). Yet, one should shy away from overemphasizing this resurgence of interest in labor rights and conditions, as it does not warrant one to proclaim that labor has acquired a privileged status in mainstream discourses.

Nor is it not possible to sustain the argument that labor has completely disappeared from and cannot figure in the poststructuralist theories or from “identity politics” I discuss above; rather, it would be more accurate to state that it occupies a precarious and peculiar discursive space in these theories. Here, rather than being simply rejected, it, for the most part, is subjected to an “all too familiar procedure” in which a particular rendition is pronounced to be the definition of labor in the singular, only to be denounced afterwards (Ruccio 1992). But, there is no reason to equate labor with a particular definition or with a specific social group, especially after the “postmodern turn.” Labor can be, and indeed is, something that remains to be theorized, not assumed as poststructuralist theorists and critics so forcefully argue with respect to other categories; it is not something to be taken as given, but rather something that is discursively constituted. One consequence of this position is that it can become possible for labor to figure in political affinities that Haraway wants to

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3 See, for example, DeMartino (2000), Elliot and Freeman (2001), Stiglitz (2002), and Human Rights Watch’s World Reports (1994-2006).

4 See World Development Reports focusing on poverty (WB 1990), and on the challenges that await workers in a changing world (WB 1995), Human Development Reports (UNDP 1990-2006), and A Future without Child Labor (ILO 2002), among others.
construct, to take its place in “identity politics” among others, once, and if, it is construed in ways that acknowledge the multiplicity and irreducibility of prevalent injustices and oppressions.

In this sense, Joan Scott (1987) provides an example of how poststructuralist theories can be deployed not to denounce, but to theorize, labor within the context of working-class history.\(^5\) She criticizes those who fail to show how language works in the formation of social identities for missing the opportunity to examine the discursive processes through which the working-class is constituted, for falling short of seeing how class constructs and contains a larger social vision through which people establish, interpret and act on their place in society as well as in practical matters of everyday life.\(^6\) Instead of subscribing to a one dimensional conception of language in which words and utterances, taken be another datum to be collected, have stable and shared meanings, Scott has a notion of language that understands the slippery quality of any meaning, its openness to reinterpretation, restatement, and neg(oit)ation (ibid., 7). Accordingly, she argues that the category of working-class builds on and offers a way of thinking about the relational and differentiated structure of all social life, and as such is and should be an object of historical analysis.

This brief survey, limited to an epigrammatic summary of a few contemporary narratives to ascertain its whereabouts shows that, labor occupies different discursive spaces in different discourses. That is, labor acquires its particular meanings within the narratives in which it is construed. As such, labor is not a given, an already known, or a transcendent signified that unilaterally determines, and in turn, is represented by its signifiers; there is no labor in the singular. Rather, labor becomes a

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5 What is come to be known as Amherst School exemplifies this approach within the economic, which I discuss below in the context of the labor theory of value.

6 Scott here refers to Gareth Stedman Jones’s *Languages of Class* (1983), but her critique holds for Joyce as well.
discursive construct to which different and new meanings are attached; there are only labors. However, this multiplicity of meaning does not mean that one is left in an *impasse*, unable to choose between labor’s various conceptions, or to privilege one rendition over the others. On the contrary, a unique discourse, in which particular aspects of reality are rendered visible—while others are being pushed out of sight—is constituted in part by—and is constitutive of—the particular conception of labor that is deployed in that discourse. More importantly, this “particular lens,” or unique imposition—labor construed in a particular way—is effective in producing performative languages with which one not only conceptualizes—ascripts meanings to—prevailing economic and social relations (Ruccio et al. 1996); it also enables new possibilities that undermine, subvert and overthrow “the present state of things”—or simply justify and reproduce the *status quo*.

In this first essay, then, I posit labor as an indeterminate discursive construct that names an arbitrarily drawn textual space within the flux of the social to which new and different meanings are ascribed in accordance with objects under scrutiny; it is deployed to construe a knowledge that is performative as it justifies, or potentiates, projects that would transform “the current state of things.” To substantiate this claim, I analyze a sampling of contemporary narratives, which conceptualize labor differently from each other, with different effects. I start with a discussion of *World Development Reports*, in which the World Bank renames labor as human capital and reduces it to an income-generating capacity. I look at *Human Development Reports*, in which the United Nations Development Programme, despite occasionally theorizing it as an integral part of a valuable and meaningful life, as something that has an intrinsic human value that cannot be reduced to money or measured in time, nevertheless ends up conceiving labor mostly as remunerative employment. I also provide a reading of selected publications of the International Labour Organization, and the Human Rights Watch, in which labor is construed
within the context of human rights. After discussing the critique advanced by the authors who call for “the end of work”—more specifically, the form labor assumes under capitalism, wage-labor—I identify the poststructuralist tendency of reducing labor to an essentialist rendition, only to denounce it, in the works of Jean Baudrilliard. I contrast this position with that of Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, who ascribe an ontological existence to labor. By contrasting these different and conflicting conceptions, I show that labor, far from being an already given or known, is a discursive construct which acquires its meaning within the narrative that in part constitutes and which is deployed for what it renders visible.

By construing labor as a discursive construct, that is, by showing that there are different ways of conceptualizing labor, I rescue this category from its essentialist, foundational status. That is, as a discursive construct, labor no longer appears as the essence, or the creator, of reality; nor is it the sole, or fundamental, aspect of being/existence. As such, I avoid overlooking various, equally relevant, aspects of human experience, and silencing non-laboring identities, by conflating them with—or reducing them to—labor. However, by bringing labor to the front, I am able focus on some of those facets that would otherwise remain hidden—for example, experiences of “laboring bodies,” and subjectivities/identities that are constituted in and through labor, just to name two. That is, the presence or absence of a particular conception of labor—or, of labor itself as such—determines in part how one construes reality, how one defines and judges social relations and outcomes, and how one conceives and enacts alternatives. This effectivity in constituting a specific narrative and enabling political and ethical projects is what distinguishes one conception of labor from another.
1.2 World Development Reports: Labor as Human Capital

The World Bank is one of the prominent international institutions that shape and govern global economies. Alongside the International Monetary Fund, and the US Treasury, it has introduced and enforced the so-called Washington consensus, the structural austerity (adjustment) programs imposed on crisis-ridden economies. This program, which pursues macroeconomic stability by means of contractionary monetary and fiscal policies, and aspires to institutionalize market economies all around the world through capital market liberalization, labor market flexibility, and privatization of the public sector, has been criticized for its narrow-sightedness, especially its belief in “one program fits all.” Also well-documented are the devastating effects of these programs on societies they are forced upon and social upheavals that they cause, Argentina being the latest in a long line of examples. As such, it would seem that the World Bank is ignorant of—if not in part responsible for—workers’ suffering with its emphasis on macroeconomic stability. Yet, the World Bank explicitly worries about the poor in general and workers in particular, and discusses economic and social policies that it believes would improve their life standards. These concerns are exemplified in the World Bank’s *World Development Reports*, particularly in its eighteenth installment titled *Workers in an Integrating World*, which “assesses what a more-market driven and integrated world means for workers” (1995).

In these reports, the World Bank construes labor as an asset, as a form of capital, defining it as “the skills and capabilities embodied in an individual or a work force, in part acquired through improved health and nutrition, education, and

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7 The adherence to this structural adjustment program, the goal of which is to ensure that debts are paid (and/or trade deficits are reduced), is the primary condition for lending, and it signals the credit-worthiness of a country to international lenders.

8 Among the most telling critiques is Joseph Stiglitz’s *Globalization and its Discontents* (2000).
training” (ibid., viii). The capacity to labor is the main—if not the only—asset of many, especially the poor; consequently, labor-time, which is distributed between household and market-based activities, becomes the primary means of securing a livelihood. Productive, efficient use of labor, this most abundant asset of the poor, is one of the most effective ways of achieving rapid and politically sustainable improvements in their quality of life, the other being the widespread provision of basic services to them for capacity building—such as, primary education, health-care, family planning, and nutrition (WB 1990). As such, the World Bank (1995, iii) places work, remunerative employment that is safe, productive and environmentally sound “at the heart of human development”; it is the foundation upon which economic and social progress for the majority is based.

The World Bank emphasizes remunerative work—in addition to the empowerment of the poor so that they can take advantage of opportunities provided in an integrating world economy—as a means to accomplish its most recently articulated mission: fighting poverty and improving the living standards of people in developing countries. Yet, the World Bank is clear that these goals can only be realized by means of market-based, export-driven, labor-demanding growth policies, which would pull the poor out of their poverty with remunerative employment opportunities, and move them “up the ladder” to higher-paid, high productivity jobs in the formal sector (1995). With this conviction comes the blueprint for domestic economic policies that countries should pursue: sound macroeconomic and structural policies (for example, a low and sustainable rate of inflation, an equilibrium exchange rate, and high levels of foreign reserves, among others), a good physical and social infrastructure, a reliable and skilled labor-force, the right to repatriate capital or

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9 The World Bank deploys the neoclassical model of labor-supply, in which the household, as the primary economic agent, decides how to allocate its labor-time given the economic opportunities that it has, choosing who will work in what activities (1995, 23).
income, and social, fiscal and political stability. Such an economic environment in turn would attract the much needed capital, the factor of production without which labor cannot produce. After all, in a “global economy” in which the free mobility of capital is considered as an “indisputable fact of life” by the World Bank, labor would suffer the consequences of capital flight if the governments fail to enact sound policies. Not only would labor remain unemployed; it would also have to face the burden of increased taxes, and/or reduced social services and public investment. As such, the World Bank focuses on explicating the institutional framework most conducive to capitalist economic growth, which should be the most attractive to capital.

The World Bank subsumes labor and economic policies available to national governments to the logic of the market. All that workers can do is to invest in the readily available asset they have through education, training, improved health and nutrition; this also signals which social services the governments should focus on in order to alleviate poverty—mainly, primary education and preventive healthcare. Investments in human capital would give individuals the ability to take advantage of new employment opportunities created within this integrating world economy, while increasing their productivity and enabling them to move up to higher paying jobs. Yet, the World Bank argues, investments in physical and human capital do not necessarily translate into economic growth for which centrally planned economies of Europe and recent failures of East Asian countries provide ample examples (ibid.). After all, individuals might end up with the wrong type, or low quality human capital investments, or their asset might be underutilized in an economy without the corresponding market-driven demand for labor, as has often been the case with

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10 This is exemplified in the hypothetical case provided by the World Bank: a worker in the first-world, who lost his job to a third-world laborer, asks his son to invest in his human capital and to adjust to new job opportunities provided in a global economy (WB 1995).
countries that pursued inappropriate development strategies (central planning, or import-substituting industrialization). Hence, the World Bank’s focus on the priority of a market-driven, labor-demanding pattern of economic growth above all.

Despite this pronounced emphasis, the World Bank’s success in proscribing employment-creating, labor-demanding policies is at best questionable, as the track record of the Washington consensus aptly exemplifies. More poignantly, Joseph E. Stiglitz, the former Senior Vice President and Chief Economist at the World Bank, criticizes these structural adjustment programs for focusing on intermediate objectives, such as inflation rates and budget-surpluses, and ignoring the ultimate goals, namely full-employment, economic growth and improving living standards (2002).\textsuperscript{11} According to Stiglitz, by advocating cyclical fiscal policies (tight monetary and fiscal policies in a recession and/or depression), trade and capital market liberalization, and labor market flexibility, the Washington consensus has ended up enhancing economic volatility without job or enterprise creation (ibid.). In addition, these policies further shift the balance of bargaining power in favor of capital, which in turn results with workers bearing a disproportionate share of the risks involved—in terms of increasing unemployment and plummeting real wages—in this new world economic order: “the mantra of increased labor market flexibility was only a thinly disguised attempt to roll back—under the guise of ‘economic efficiency’—gains that workers had achieved over years and years of bargaining and political activity” (ibid., 13). Given market imperfections—the existence of imperfect competition, bargaining power asymmetries, and pervasive market failures since the market is neither necessarily self-adjusting nor efficient—Stiglitz (2000, 22) advocates institutional arrangements that would adequately reflect the interests and

\textsuperscript{11} Although Stiglitz (2002) exclusively refers to the International Monetary Fund in this essay, I think his critique unequivocally applies to the World Bank, the other creator and “enforcer” of the Washington consensus.
concerns of workers, acknowledge their rights (as summed up in the core labor standards of the International Labour Organization, particularly rights to organize and collective bargaining), and allow stronger labor representation at every level—from the local to the international.¹²

Stiglitz’s advocacy of a “developmental strategy for labor” stems from his conviction that labor is unlike any other factor of production, which is in absolute contrast with standard formulations of neoclassical economics that see “nothing special about labor, nothing to suggest that labor should be treated differently from any factor” (2000, 3). He asserts that the distinctive feature of labor is its “human aspect” (2002, 10; emphasis in the original). This commodity cannot be bought and sold like other factors of production but can only be rented; if workers had the free market choice of selling all their labor at once to a single buyer, which is a possibility within the competitive general equilibrium model à la Debreu, they would be entering into “voluntary slavery contracts” (2000, 6-7).¹³ In addition, labor has to be motivated to perform; unlike other inputs in the production process, the desired behavior is to be elicited from a worker with “the appropriate mix of incentives and monitoring arrangements” (ibid., 4-5). Ultimately, Stiglitz treats labor as a special factor of production and emphasizes its human aspect because he is concerned with the well-being of workers: he sees improving their welfare—their living standards, which takes into account not only their incomes, but also their health and safety,

¹² In addition to these policy suggestions, Stiglitz calls for “strong macroeconomic policies committed to the maintenance of full employment, policies which lead to greater economic stability, and strong safety nets to protect workers against the inevitable fluctuations that remain even with the best of economies” (2002, 20).

¹³ Without this possibility, that is, without complete future labor markets, one cannot have a competitive equilibrium that is Pareto optimal. Stiglitz (2000, 6-7) concludes: “therefore the fundamental [neoclassical] efficiency theorem requires revising constitutional law to allow voluntary slavery contracts!” This, according to Stiglitz, shows the limitations—unrealistic and illegal—of treating labor as any other commodity.
their working conditions and environment, and their democratic participation at the workplace and in the political arena—as an objective in itself.\textsuperscript{14}

Taking the World Bank’s emphasis on remunerative employment at face value, Stiglitz’s critique \textit{would} read as referring to the Washington consensus’s failure to deliver what it promises and does not problematize the way it construes labor: as an asset, as human capital.\textsuperscript{15} Labor, to the extent that it is employed, is still nothing more than an income-generating asset. Its possessor should invest in it, not only to maximize the returns to it but also to make sure that it has not become obsolete—thus can still be productively employed, adapting to the ever-changing demands of the market.\textsuperscript{16} Consequently “labor’ disappears as a fundamental explanatory category and is absorbed into a concept of capital in no way enriched to handle labor’s special character” within this human capital discourse (Bowles and Gintis 1975, 74).

\subsection*{1.3 Human Development Reports: Labor as Productive Employment, Integral in Leading a Fulfilling Life}

The \textit{Human Development Report}, published annually by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) since 1990, denotes a significant shift in the development paradigm. In contrast to “conventional development theories,” and informed by and providing a concrete application of Amartya Sen’s capabilities approach, the UNDP considers human well-being, the quality of human life as the

\textsuperscript{14} I should add that Stiglitz’s discussion of labor’s human aspects is rather underdeveloped, and does not move beyond this simple assertion.

\textsuperscript{15} Stiglitz does not refute that labor is a factor of production, a commodity. What he finds problematic is the treatment of labor as “\textit{any} other factor of production” (Stiglitz, 2002, 10; emphasis added).

\textsuperscript{16} Stiglitz’s conceptualization of labor’s human aspect in terms of a factor of production that requires motivation comes close to Bowles and Gintis’s assertion that labor is “an active agent whose efforts on behalf of its own objectives must be channeled, thwarted, or used to generate profits” (1975, 76).
real end, as a result of which development (economic growth), wealth and income become the means—among many—towards the achievement of this goal.\textsuperscript{17} Human development, for the UNDP, denotes both the process of enlarging people’s choices in life—the formation of capabilities, that is, having the ability to achieve what they deem valuable in leading a meaningful and fulfilling life—and the level of achieved well-being—the use that people make of their acquired capabilities, be it for work, leisure, productive purposes or active participation in cultural, political, and social affairs (UNDP 1990, 10-11). The formation and equal distribution of these universal capabilities is only one aspect of the human development project. It only ensures the equality of opportunity; individuals themselves will choose which capabilities to realize and how this realization will take place. In this sense, human development is about creating the institutional framework that would enable individuals’ equal access to all available capabilities, and ensure the freedom to choose whatever end-states they deem valuable and want to achieve. That is, the development process must be democratic and participatory; people must have the opportunity to develop and put into use their capabilities by getting fully involved in all aspects of their life, by expressing themselves freely and creatively (UNDP 1991, 1). In fact, freedom is so vital for human development that the UNDP values similar human development achievements differently “depending on whether they were accomplished in a democratic or an authoritarian framework” (UNDP 1990, 3). Thus, the UNDP defines development as the creation of “a conducive environment for people, individually and collectively, to develop their full potential and to have a reasonable chance of leading productive and creative lives in accord with their needs and interests” (ibid., 1).

\textsuperscript{17} This, of course, does not mean that the UNDP is “antigrowth”, as some of its critics assert (UNDP 1992, 2; 1995, 121). Rather, the UNDP sees growth as a necessary but not sufficient condition for human development, as it contends that there is no necessary link between the two (ibid.).
The UNDP develops a Human Development Index (HDI) to quantify the achievement of each country in human development. The HDI is an composite index that focuses on three, what the UNDP considers to be essential, elements of human life: longevity (measured in terms of life expectancy at birth), knowledge (literacy), and command over resources needed for a decent living (purchasing-power-adjusted real gross domestic product per capita) (ibid., 12). Although the HDI concentrates on three of the many and changing choices, human development, as a concept, encompasses much broader aspects of human life than its measurement (UNDP 1991, 15). That is, the UNDP defines a non-exhaustive, yet universally applicable, set of functionings without which a human life would be deemed “underdeveloped.” These include, but are not limited to, living a long and healthy life in a conflict-free, safe and secure environment, receiving a good education, having access to resources needed for a decent standard of living (income), fully enjoying political freedoms, guaranteed human rights, and personal self-respect (UNDP 1990). Looking at this admittedly incomplete list of capabilities, it would seem that the UNDP brings forth labor only as a source of income via remunerative employment, the returns to which depend on the level of education and on the skills and know-how attained by that education. As such, it would appear that the UNDP reproduces the human capital approach of the neoclassicals and the WB.

In fact, the UNDP construes labor predominantly as productive and remunerative employment that provides a means to secure people’s livelihood, “which for most means a job” (UNDP 1996, 57). It ascribes such an importance to productive employment that it is pronounced to be the link between economic growth and human development, a link that it considers as tenuous (UNDP 1990, 104). Despite the WB’s and conventional development economists’ belief that economic growth will eventually “trickle down” and necessarily translate into individual well-being, the UNDP shows, by means of cross-country comparisons,
that high levels of income per capita, or rapid periods of GDP growth, do not necessarily bring higher life expectancy, better health, better education (higher literacy levels); nor do they mean that nutritional requirements (daily calorie intake) are met (ibid.). Nor do they inevitably lead to the alleviation of income, gender or regional disparities (ibid., 29-33). The UNDP goes even further and asserts that economic “development has desirable and undesirable effects” depending on the path a country pursues; it may end up in, or fail to solve, rising crime, drug abuse, environmental pollution, family breakup, political turmoil and AIDS (ibid., 36). For the UNDP, the solution to the prevailing gap between economic growth and human development is productive work: “job creation is the main bridge between economic growth and the opportunities of human development” (UNDP 1996, 87).

Yet, according to the UNDP, economic growth does not automatically result in the creation of productive jobs, in full-employment; “a new and disturbing phenomenon, jobless growth” that we face today attests to this, which can be registered by the difference between the employment and the GDP growth rates (UNDP 1993, 3, 35-36). After all, productivity can increase without resulting in any new employment opportunities; it might even lead to an increase in unemployment to the extent that productivity gains are achieved via the elimination of low productivity jobs (UNDP 1996, 90). Developing countries are more prone to jobless growth due to tariff and non-tariff barriers to trade, as well as restrictions imposed on the free movement of labor. That is, free and open competition in areas where the developing countries may have a competitive edge, such as labor-intensive manufactures is prevented as the industrialized countries bend the rules of market to protect their domestic industries (UNDP 1992, 1).\(^\text{18}\) In addition, strict immigration laws block the flow of the unskilled un-/under-employed from the developing to

\(^\text{18}\) One example of such restrictions imposed on labor-intensive exports is the increases in tariffs in conjunction with the level of processing, which in turn lowers the value-added (UNDP 1992, 6).
industrialized countries, where they can secure a livelihood. More disturbingly, the problem is not limited to the lack of job-creation: the UNDP (1995, 35) contends that a global shift towards precarious forms of employment is taking place. Job and wage security are deteriorating as permanent labor-force is increasingly being replaced by temporary or part-time workers, and as subcontracting practices become the rule rather than the exception; consequently, real wages decline, and un-/under-employment rises (UNDP 1994, 24-26). In these times of insecure and precarious employment, the UNDP (1992, 3-6) calls for “vigorous policy action” to create sufficient job opportunities to establish the missing link between economic growth and human development, not to mention to release the mounting pressure of migration from the developing to industrialized countries.

The political implications are clear: ensure that economic growth contributes to human development by creating productive and well-paying employment opportunities, which demands a political commitment to full-employment (UNDP 1996, 7). Among the national policy strategies for the productive employment creation, the UNDP (1992, 53) ascribes the utmost importance to investments in people’s health, education, skill formation, and training, as “what counts for production is not laborers but labor power, and this depends on the “human capital” embodied in the workforce” (emphasis in the original). After all, “the best

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19 This does not mean that there is no immigration from the developing to industrialized countries as those meeting the higher and higher levels of qualifications set by the latter, such as skilled workers, or investors bringing their own capital, are allowed to migrate (UNDP 1992, 55). But, this, at the same time, is brain drain, loss of human capital for the developing countries as they lose a part of their skilled people (ibid.).

20 After all, the UNDP (1993, 3) declares that the main objective of human development strategies must be to generate productive employment.

21 But the policies devoted to skill creation and training should be highly selective. For example, the UNDP (1990, 81) pronounces skill-intensive services, such as modern banking, finance, advertising, communications, business management and public administration, as offering tremendous employment opportunities to developing countries. The phenomenon of the educated unemployed attests to the importance of acquiring relevant skills through educational and training systems (UNDP
foundation of growth is a healthy, well-nourished, well-educated and skilled labor-force” (UNDP 1991, 13). Sustained investment in people not only creates employment opportunities, but also increases their productivity, thus their wages, leading to a faster, employment-led growth (UNDP 1996, 93). Yet, this does not mean that wage-employment is the only productive employment opportunity the UNDP considers; on the contrary, it calls for the encouragement of people’s “entrepreneurial spirit.” Self-employment demands policies that would ensure that people has equitable access to productive assets, such as land, capital, credit, and information; in addition, governments should promote private initiative, strengthen small-scale enterprises and encourage informal sector production, while attempting to improve the productivity and working conditions in the latter without undermining it (UNDP 1993, 1996). If these fall short of generating sufficient productive employment opportunities, the governments are to directly intervene and create job opportunities through labor-intensive public works’ programs as a part of the social safety net (UNDP 1990, 1993, 1996). The UNDP (1993, 3) even advocates redefining the concept of work and of employment. Informed by the fact that people

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1993, 38). At an international level, the UNDP advises the Bretton-Woods Institutions, namely, the WB, and the IMF, to set full-employment as a primary macroeconomic goal in their dealings with the governments of developing countries (1996, 92-93).

22 Such a labor-force will attract foreign investment, thus providing a solution to the capital shortage faced by developing countries. Also necessary is a stable economic and political environment (UNDP 1992, 4). That is, governments should create “an enabling environment—including fair and stable macroeconomic policies, an equitable legal framework, sufficient physical infrastructure and an adequate system of incentives for private investment” (UNDP 1994, 20).

23 Time and again, the UNDP (1993, 3, 36; 1994, 20; 1996, 6) advises the developing countries to pursue “heavily labor-intensive growth policies” by exploiting their comparative advantage in abundance of labor and by encouraging labor-intensive technology. For the UNDP (1991, 3-4), East Asian economies are examples of the broad based and employment-intensive economic growth.

24 That is, governments are to provide an enabling economic and political environment for the private initiative through privatization, development of micro, small and medium size enterprises, and improvement of public sector management, the role of which is to build a sound economic structure and provide social services (UNDP 1990, 64).

25 A version of this is food-for-work schemes—giving food to those taking part in public works schemes, such as infrastructure building or disaster relief projects as payment (UNDP 1991, 64).
still have to work long hours although their productivity is increasingly sharply, the UNDP (ibid., 36; 1994, 20-21) suggests that maybe it is time to consider more innovative and flexible working arrangements, such as job-sharing and/or a shorter work-week. All these policy suggestions are to create more productive employment opportunities, so that the poor and the dispossessed do not drop out of the market place but have access to the means and opportunities that would bring them to the mainstream, and a chance to improve their lives (UNDP 1993, 3).

This does not mean that the UNDP construes labor as human capital, or reduces it to a source of income. On the contrary, the UNDP goes to great lengths to differentiate its conception of human development in general, and labor in particular from the human capital approach. Time and again, it asserts that human development is not and cannot be reduced to human capital formation or human resource development (1990, 11; 1994, 17). According the UNDP, the latter treat people as “merely another productive input on a par with physical capital or natural resources,” conceiving them as means, as instruments for producing commodities and profits (1996, 54). Accordingly, human resource development considers even investments that have a direct bearing on human development, such as investment in health or education, only through its effects on the formation of human capital, valuing them solely by their effect on the economic rate of return; thus this approach can only capture a single dimension of people (ibid.). The UNDP fears that in extreme cases this version of human capital approach can lead to slave-labor camps.

26 The UNDP does not leave those who cannot labor to their fate. On the contrary, it advocates that social security arrangements should be made available to those who may not be able to help themselves—such as, the children, the elderly and disabled or otherwise incapacitated persons (UNDP 1991, 39).

27 Human capital approach ignores certain skills of the labor-force, such as having discipline, pride in one’s work, being flexible, open-minded, and willing to cooperate. Also absent in this literature is the social reproduction of labor, since it is presumed that workers “just appear magically, ready-made for their jobs” (UNDP 1996, 51).
forced and/or child labor, and exploitation of workers by the management (1994, 17). This is not to say that the UNDP is against human capital formation; on the contrary, it accepts the central role of human capital in enhancing human productivity. Nevertheless, human capabilities, such as health and knowledge, are regarded as valuable in their own right, irrespective of their effects on productivity; they are essential components of human well-being (UNDP 1996, 54). That is, the UNDP is just as concerned with human choices that go far beyond economic well-being, with creating the economic and political environment in which people can expand their human capabilities and use them appropriately and freely. After all, “humanity is not an instrument of production, but an end itself;” what is of significance is the quality of human life (1990, 14; 1994, 17).  

To the extent that the UNDP considers productive employment from a quality of life (human development) perspective, it moves beyond the rather limited focus of the human capital approach that concentrates on the economic, remunerative aspects of employment. The UNDP (1996, 57) posits labor—among other functionings—as one of the capabilities that is a necessary part of leading a fulfilling and meaningful life: labor is “a vital component of human development.” Self-employment or wage-employment allows people to participate in, become active agents of, the human development process. It allows them to exercise their skills, realize their human capabilities, achieve personal fulfillment and make their best contribution to society (UNDP 1993, 21-22; cf. 1996). It empowers them

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28 The UNDP (1990, 11) also differentiates human development from human welfare approach, which construes people as beneficiaries rather than participants, and emphasize distributive, rather than productive, policies. In addition, human development is not an application of basic needs approach, which focuses on the provision of a bundle of goods and services, thus ignoring an essential capability, freedom to choose (ibid.). In contrast to these two approaches, human development brings together production and distribution of commodities, as well as the expansion and the use of human capabilities. It also focuses on choices, conceiving human development as a participatory and dynamic process (ibid.).
economically by providing them with income, with purchasing power, socially by offering them a productive role that enhances their self-esteem, dignity, and self-respect, and even politically, if they have a chance to influence the decision-making process in the workplace and beyond (UNDP 1993, 34; UNDP 1996, 87). Once the UNDP construes productive employment not as an end but as a means towards leading a meaningful and fulfilling life, as a form of economic participation that has economic, social and political effects, the nature and quality of work becomes very important. It asserts that for work to enhance human development, it must be creative, safe and secure, meeting people’s choices and aspirations in a satisfactory fashion (UNDP 1996, 91). But these conditions are not automatically met by the market forces as the nature of economic participation can vary from forms of drudgery to creative, productive and independent productive activity (UNDP 1993). Much contemporary work is hard, exploitative and dangerous; people are economically less secure, working harder and under more pressure today—often for the same or lower wages (UNDP 1996, 102). Governments should ensure the quality of work; they should protect workers by regulating working conditions and establishing minimum-wage standards, thus providing them with more job security, more equity, and more leisure (UNDP 1993, 31; 1996, 102). Trade-unions also have a role as a countervailing power that resists less responsible employers who are tempted to exploit their workers—among them, children.

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29 The UNDP (1993, 38-39) provides an example of how participation in the workplace can lead to significant productivity benefits as workers can move among different tasks and take charge of many aspects of production, including material planning and quality control.

30 Societies do vary greatly in the value they place on forms of work; some associate manual work with servitude, whereas others respect it (ibid., 22).

31 Exploitation here means working long hours for low pay, under unhealthy conditions (ibid., 33). The UNDP is particularly disturbed by the exploitation of the children, who, in addition, sacrifice their education and childhood (ibid.).
For the UNDP, productive labor is not limited to remunerative employment in the production of goods and services, mediated via market relations. For example, the UNDP talks of household and community labor as socially reproductive labor, and defines it as the productive activity that reproduces society, enriches family and community relations, maintains cultural relations, and consequently enhances human development (1994, 52). Underlying this is the UNDP’s contention that labor has an intrinsic human value that cannot be reduced to units of money or of time (ibid.). That is, the UNDP, unlike the human capital approach, does not treat labor simply as a productive input; on the contrary, it acknowledges labor to be a crucially important social activity, rather than reducing it to a form of social capital. This is exemplified in the UNDP’s discussion of non-marketed household and community works, which are unrecognized and undervalued due to the restricted definition of economic activity, and the limited notion of value, which is equated with market value (UNDP 1995, 87). These activities, despite being non-marketed and non-monetized have an intrinsic use-value or human value, like the relation, interaction a meal involves that is not captured by its exchange-value (ibid.) 32 Nor is productive labor necessarily an individual activity. The UNDP mentions self-help groups that come together to pool their labor—mostly farmers working on each other’s land, sometimes on a rotating basis preparing each other’s land for the cultivation of various crops—as examples of communal labor (1993, 85). The Naam groups in Burkina Faso, for example, are communities that produce a surplus and invest in

32 In an attempt to render these activities visible and economically meaningful, and to make national income accounting more comprehensive without advocating the monetization of them, the UNDP estimates the value of these unpaid activities by treating them as market transactions at the prevailing wages, which add up to $16 billion, or 70% of global output (1995, 97). The UNDP achieves these numbers by deploying a labor theory of value: it imputes a market value to these non-marketed works by assuming that an hour of non-market work has the same value with an hour of market work, which implies that productivity differences btw market and non-market work are not issue (ibid.; 98).
community development, which share the proceeds after provisions are made for depreciation and for capital for new investment (ibid., 94). These communal forms of labor need not be market-oriented, nor carried out to generate income; the UNDP advocates voluntary community work, such as providing free labor to maintain local services as a way of easing the financial burden of human development (1990, 74; 1991, 7; 1996, 102).

Free, communal voluntary, remunerative, non-marketed, socially reproductive labors... These are the multiple meanings that are ascribed to labor in *Human Development Reports*. Nevertheless, labor as productive activity underlies these different conceptions; that is, labor, despite the different ways it is construed, can be an integral aspect of a meaningful and fulfilling life only if it is productive. Through this productive activity, human beings create the means to secure their livelihood, realize their capabilities and aspirations, express themselves freely and creatively, achieve personal fulfillment and attain self-respect, participate in and contribute to the communities they live in.\(^{33}\) Although the UNDP emphasizes that it is not limited to paid employment, but also includes unpaid activities in the household or in the community, the form this productive labor takes, for the most part, is remunerative employment in its analyses. After all, the UNDP proclaims that well-paying jobs are the most viable means through which the dispossessed can become active participants, rather than remaining passive recipients, of human development process. Thus, despite its occasional references to labor’s other qualities and discussions of the political and social, in addition to the economic, effects of work, the UNDP is more interested in remunerative employment.

\(^{33}\) There are significant overlaps between the ways that the UNDP and humanist renditions of Marxism construe labor. Yet, the UNDP’s emphasis on the role of the market as well as its advocacy of remunerative employment exemplify the differences that these two approaches have.
1.4 International Labour Organization: Labor as Decent Work

The International Labour Organization (ILO), established immediately after World War I in a world “ravaged by war, threatened by revolution and haunted by the misery and poverty of working people,” is founded on the idea that social justice is essential to universal and lasting peace (1999, 1). Achieving social justice and peace, the ILO asserts, demands immediate improvements in prevailing labor conditions that involve “injustice, hardship and privation” to numerous workers as these would prompt social unrest (ibid.). To this end, the ILO has sought to build an internationally recognized legal framework within which “economic processes could generate prosperity with social justice in the life of workers and in the world of work” and adopted international labor standards—in the form of 180 Conventions and 185 Recommendations—covering a wide range of work-related issues, which include but are not limited to, health and safety in the workplace, social security, minimum wage, hours of work, collective bargaining rights, freedom of association, employment promotion, training, conditions of migrant workers, employment of women and child workers, discrimination, and forced labor.

The ILO’s emphasis on social justice is exemplified in four strategic objectives it recently adopted to crystallize its social and political projects in an attempt to reform and modernize itself: promotion of employment, standards and fundamental principles and rights at work, social protection and social dialogue. These four objectives, in turn, converge on the primary goal of the ILO, decent work, which reflects “a universal aspiration of people everywhere” (2001, 4). According to the

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34 The ILO does not limit its social concerns to prevailing labor conditions as its standard setting mandate was broadened to include more general social policy, human and civil rights matters with the incorporation of the Declaration of Philadelphia into its constitution in 1944. See Mehmet et al. (1999).

35 “Decent work agenda” has become the main focus of the ILO, which obliges itself to take “steps to enable the Organization’s programming, budgeting and institutional structures to deliver coherent
ILO, the essence of what people want from work remains constant across cultures and levels of development: “to obtain decent and productive work in conditions of freedom, equity, security and human dignity” (1999, 3; emphasis in the original).

Underlying this emphasis on decent work is the conviction that “work is a defining feature of human existence,” through which people not only sustain their livelihood, meet their own and their families’ needs, but also “affirm their own identity” (ILO 2001, 5-6). This is reflected in the Declaration of Philadelphia, where the ILO considers the “employment of workers in occupations in which they can have the satisfaction of giving the fullest measure of their skill and attainments and make their greatest contribution to the common well-being” as one of its obligations (ibid., 7).

Four strategic objectives adopted by the ILO define ways in which the decent work agenda can be promoted. In order for one to speak of decent work, there has to be sufficient work “in the sense that all should have full access to income-earning opportunities,” to means of decent standard of living (ILO 1999, 13). Employment is at the heart of the ILO’s constitution as it considers promoting the possibility of “work for all” as one of its primary obligations, which in turn demands improvements (investment) in personal capabilities to take advantage of expanding job opportunities (ibid.; 2001). Yet, the goal is not only the promotion of employment per se, but the creation of new jobs of acceptable quality. Although it acknowledges that “a job of acceptable quality” is not given in advance and can take different forms, being performed under different conditions, and generating differing feelings of value and satisfaction, the elaboration of core labor standards is the ILO’s (1999) attempt to provide a universally valid and applicable definition of what this decent work might be.

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programs on decent work” (2001, 2). This recent shift in focus is initiated by Juan Somavia, the current Director-General of the ILO.
The ILO has formulated core labor standards—based on eight conventions that define “the fundamental principles and rights at work”—to set an international legal framework and demands that these be ratified and effectively implemented by all its member states, irrespective of their levels of development. The most basic of these principles pertains to freedom of association, which refers to the right to organize and collective bargaining, and prohibits any anti-union discrimination.\textsuperscript{36} Second is the elimination of all forms of forced or compulsory labor, as no one should be forced to work—for which the said person has not offered himself or herself voluntarily—under the menace of any penalty (ILO 1999). The third calls for the effective abolition of child labor by setting a minimum working age.\textsuperscript{37} Finally, all discrimination with respect to employment and occupation is to be eliminated; that is, equality of opportunity and treatment, as well as equal pay for work of equal value—equal remuneration—is to be established (ibid.). These four fundamental rights are the instruments with which the ILO places a social floor under the global economy; they are “the essential foundation” upon which decent work is to be built (ILO 2001, 27). The ILO sees core labor standards as a guarantee that would enable people to claim freely and receive a “fair” share of the wealth they have helped to create, as a means of improving their quality of work, and achieving social equity (ibid.).

These core labor standards are to cover all those who work, or who are a member of the labor-force. The ILO deliberately uses the term “work,” and not

\textsuperscript{36} Freedom of association is the most basic of the fundamental principles as respect for it is an “obligation implied through membership to the ILO” (1999).

\textsuperscript{37} Though what this minimum age is changes in accordance with the development level of economic and educational facilities, or depends on how work is defined, in a particular country: whether it is “hazardous or light.” Minimum age is set as the age of completion of compulsory schooling, which cannot be less than 15, although if the aforementioned facilities are insufficient can be set at 14. In addition, the age limit in hazardous occupations—which are to be determined by the national authority—is 18, whereas it becomes 13 (or 12, in “less-developed” countries) for light work (ILO 2002).
“employment” or “job” as the former is more inclusive and takes into account all those who are wage-laborers, self-employed, or work at home (2001, 5, ft.7). That is, the ILO concerns itself also with workers “beyond the formal labour market—with unregulated wage workers, the self-employed, homeworkers,” simply put, with those who are in the informal sector (1999, 3-4). Included in the category “worker” are the underemployed and the unemployed, as well (ibid.). The concern with the latter, as well as with workers in the informal sector, or with the working-poor who are inadequately remunerated and protected, signifies the ILO’s emphasis on social protection—one of its four strategic objectives that are crystallized in the concept of decent work. The ILO (1999, 31) construes social protection as the means “to curb the harshness of market forces so as to prevent poverty, help maintain incomes and ensure adequate access to medical care and social services.” Primarily, those who are left outside the labor market should be brought back in through employment policies—creating decent work opportunities mainly by investing in people’s capabilities—which might also include “welfare-to-work” programs that would increase the incentive to work and ease the transition to employment (ibid.). Others who cannot earn a living due to illness, age, or structural problems should receive income transfer payments as minimum social protection. As such, these policies not only meet essential needs of human survival, but also “can bolster stability [by] minimizing social unrest and helping countries adjust more easily to social and political change,” while “contributing to the economy [by] enabling industries and enterprises to restructure and raise efficiency, and enabling workers to accept change more easily” (ibid.).

The fourth strategic objective of the ILO is social dialogue. While tripartism—the ILO is an institution in which the interests of workers, private business, and governments are equally represented—and social dialogue are both objectives in their own right, guaranteeing participation and establishing democratic processes,
they are also means of achieving all three aforementioned strategic objectives of the ILO. Engaging in dialogue, social partners fortify democratic governance, and build vigorous and resilient labor market institutions that contribute to long-term social and economic stability, and peace. A precondition for this, according to the ILO, is to respect freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining.

Labor, within this discourse of decent work, is construed as productive, remunerative, and satisfactory employment, though the ILO curiously shies away from calling it by its proper name and chooses to deploy work instead. As I argue above, employment is at the core of the ILO’s mandate, by means of which decent living standards, social and economic development, and personal fulfillment are to be achieved. The ILO’s emphasis on remunerative employment is further reflected in its attempt to treat voluntary and community work, “caring for others”, as real work, which should be compensated as such, but without eroding “the basic values of solidarity, family responsibility and friendship” (ibid., 35). As such, the ILO wants to situate all work within the confines of a fair labor market in which all performances of labor are justly remunerated; thus, it attempts to establish a “rules-based international system that is fair to all” (2001, 51). This fair labor market, in which commodity owners enter into an exchange relationship respecting the contractually binding rules of the market, is to be based on the fundamental standards and rights at work: it demands fair remuneration (equal pay for equal work) and equal voice (freedom of association, social dialogue), defines who can and should have access to the labor market (abolition of forced and child labor), and takes into consideration those who are left out (social protection, investment in the skills of workers). Thus, the ILO construes labor as a commodity, as an asset that is to be exchanged and

38 This latter aspect is never substantiated in any manner, thus, rendering the ILO’s concern with it nothing more than a mere wishful thinking.
rented out in the labor market, despite its explicit assertion in the Declaration of Philadelphia that “labor is not a commodity.”

1.5 Human Rights Watch: Labor as an Inalienable Human Right

Human Rights Watch (HRW), the second largest international human rights organization after Amnesty International, is dedicated to protecting human rights of all people around the world (Gordon et al. 2000). To this end, the HRW investigates and exposes human rights violations, aspiring to raise the awareness of both the domestic public and the international community and enlist their support, while publishing its findings and recommendations to challenge governments and those in power “to end abusive practices and respect international human rights laws” (HRW 2003). In these publications, the HRW addresses a variety of human rights abuses, which include but are not limited to those pertaining to prison conditions, freedom of expression in general and freedom of expression on the internet, academic freedom, gay and lesbian rights, conditions of refugees, displaced persons and asylum seekers, women’s and children’s rights, and violations caused or exacerbated by the trade and deployment of arms and landmines, and drug trafficking. In addition, the HRW adamantly pursues the protection of workers’ rights, reporting abuses and violations occurring in the workplace or in employment relations, such as discrimination based on caste, gender, nationality or ethnicity, employment and exploitation of child labor, sweatshop working conditions, and barriers to workers’ freedom of association. In doing so, the HRW deploys a strictly legalistic discourse, construing individuals in general, and workers in particular, as bearers of inalienable rights that are bestowed upon them by virtue of their humanity. Consequently, the HRW defines its mission not only as the protection of those rights, but their extension to each and every individual (Gordon et al. 2000). Within this framework, the HRW conceives labor as a right to productive and remunerative employment
through which human beings sustain their livelihood, and which should be performed in accordance with international human and labor rights conventions.

The introduction of a new section on business and human rights in its annual *World Report* as a “thematic initiative/special focus” in 1995, which previously covered subject areas such as prison conditions, gay and lesbian rights, drugs, and international law, exemplifies the HRW’s new-found concern with labor. Initially recognizing the close links between corporate practices and human rights conditions in a global economy, the HRW stressed “that corporations must avoid complicity in governmental human rights abuse,” and urged them “to use their often considerable influence to increase respect for human rights in the course of their business operations” (1996, 362). It cited employment of a known human rights violator in Guatemala by an American oil company, or the role and responsibility of Shell in Nigerian security forces’ use of excessive force against, and execution of a leader of, the indigenous people as examples of business’s complicity in human rights abuses (ibid., 361-3). This limited focus on the effects of business and trade on human rights was expanded in 1996 to take into account labor rights explicitly, as the HRW (1997) acknowledged that presumed positive results—respect for human rights—have not been realized. Consequently, the HRW’s (1999) concern over labor issues has extended to cover fair labor practices, such as ensuring freedom of association, collective bargaining, and the right to strike, ending any type or form of discrimination or harassment of employees in the workplace, eliminating forced and child labor, and addressing minimum standards on health and safety, wages, benefits and overtime work.

The HRW (1997) addresses these issues in detail in case studies it publishes, some of which are subsequently summarized in its annual *World Reports*: accounts of sex discrimination and mistreatment of pregnant workers in export-processing zones along the US-Mexican border and enslavement of millions of child workers
through debt bondage in India are examples of this new found concern. Also
tioned in these reports are the legal actions taken against labor rights violators—
for example, class-action lawsuits against US companies and their subcontractors
manufacturing in the US island territory of Saipan, where workers faced repeated
harassment, physical abuse, and poor working conditions (HRW 2000)—or steps
undertaken to ensure respect for labor rights—the global collective bargaining
agreement signed by Norway’s state-owned Statoil and the International Federation
of Chemical, Energy, Mine and General Workers’ Unions (ICEM), which pledges
adherence to the ILO’s core labor standards (HRW 1999). The HRW, in World
Reports, has also paid particular attention to attempts towards establishing global
guidelines for corporation conduct and assessed their performance; to this end, it has
discussed the “Workplace Code of Conduct” published by the Apparel Industry
Partnership, and the United Nations “Global Compact,” and pointed out their
shortcomings—mainly their voluntary and non-binding ratification, as well as the

Case studies that the HRW publishes provide a detailed analysis of particular
labor rights violations—mainly violations of the ILO’s core labor standards—from an
economic, cultural, social and legal perspective. Consider, for example, bonded child
labor in India—the phenomenon of approximately 15 million children working in
conditions of servitude in order to pay off a debt (1996b). The HRW cites poverty,
ancient traditions of slavery, debt bondage and caste-based discrimination, lack of
employment opportunities and living wages for adults as well as alternative small-
scale loans for the poor, lack of a concerted social welfare scheme, a noncompulsory

39 The HRW estimates that there are 60 to 115 million child labor in India (1996b; Coursen-Neff
2003). Yet, this number depends on how one defines “work.” According to Indian statistics, which do
not consider domestic work as work, the number of working children (between the ages of 5 to 15)
drops to 11.29 million (Coursen-Neff 2003, 18).
and unequal educational system, corruption and indifference among government officials, and societal apathy among the reasons for the persistence of bonded child labor (ibid.; Coursen-Neff 2003). Then, the HRW proceeds to discuss the legal prohibitions against bonded labor in Indian laws, such as the article 23 of the Indian constitution that bans trafficking in human beings and other similar forms of forced labor. For example, Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act of 1976 which strictly outlaws all forms of debt bondage and forced labor, and The Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act of 1986, which does not forbid child labor per se, nor sets a minimum age for the employment of children, but prohibits the employment of children in twenty-five hazardous industries and regulates the hours and conditions of work for child laborers. Finding that the Indian legal framework, while providing extensive legal safeguards against bonded child labor and is in compliance with international human and labor rights standards, still remains powerless and meaningless without the political will to implement them, the HRW (1996b) concludes that the eradication of bonded child labor in India depends on the government's commitment to two imperatives: enforcement of the Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act, and the creation of meaningful alternatives for already bonded child laborers and those at risk of joining their ranks—such as, education, including vocational training and popular education, and rural development.

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40 According to the HRW, “other similar forms of forced labor” was interpreted expansively to include overt physical compulsion and compulsion under threat of legal sanctions, as well as its more subtle forms, including “compulsion arising from hunger and poverty, want and destitution.” Thus, the HRW (1996b) argues that all labor rewarded with less than the minimum wage constitutes forced labor and violates the Constitution of India.

41 This Act defines a child as “a person who has not completed their [sic] fourteenth year of age.” It applies to all workshops except those “wherein any process is carried on by the occupier with the aid of his family,” and thus can be circumvented by the presence of one of employer’s own children or a niece or nephew working alongside the rest of the children. The act is also inapplicable to government-sponsored schools or training programs (HRW 1996b).
The same focus on the compliance of national laws to international standards and their adequate enforcement holds true for the HRW’s other case studies, such as the report on domestic workers and maquiladora workers in Guatemala (Sunderland, 2002). The HRW finds that domestic workers are treated separately in Guatemalan labor legislation, and thus discriminated against because of their occupation: they are denied nationally-recognized rights to eight-hour workday and forty-eight hour workweek, to minimum wage and a written employment contract, in addition to being refused, by and large, the right to employee health care provided under the national social security system (ibid.). On the other hand, the right to freedom of association and collective bargaining has been violated in the maquiladora sector in Guatemala as previous efforts to form labor unions have met with devastating resistance from the industry as a whole—mass dismissals, intimidation, indiscriminate retaliation against all workers, and plant closings—and with government negligence (ibid.).

These case studies are not confined to the Third World as the HRW reports that international core labor standards are violated in the United States, as well. The HRW finds that “agricultural workers, domestic employees, and ‘independent’ contractors who actually work in a dependent relationship with a single employer for years,” those who are inappropriately categorized as supervisors and managers, state and local employees in many states as well as many welfare recipients designated as “trainees” while being employed in workfare programs are excluded from organizing and bargaining protection coverage that the National Labor Relations Act provides (Compa 2000, 37). In addition, employers systematically violate worker’s rights by discriminating against union supporters, replacing strikers permanently, forcing workers to attend captive-audience meetings on work time, “predicting” reprisals—such as workplace closures, firings, wage and benefit cuts, and “other dire consequences”—if workers form and join a trade union, and bargaining in
“bad faith” by making proposals and counter-proposal without any intention of reaching an agreement, while the US government inadequately enforces these internationally recognized labor rights (ibid., 29). The HRW suggests in cases where US laws are in conflict with international labor rights standards, thus placing legal obstacles in the way of workers who seek to exercise their rights to free association, that these laws be amended to comply with the core standards. To the extent that US laws are in compliance with international standards, the government should do everything in its power to effectively enforce them.

The HRW’s approach is “narrowly legalistic,” as it primarily and almost exclusively focuses on the compliance of a country’s laws with internationally recognized human and labor rights conventions, and proposes effective enforcement of these laws through administrative and legal reforms, better monitoring and effectual prosecution (Gordon et al. 2000).42 This signifies the HRW’s presumption that these international conventions are universally acceptable, applicable and neutral as they represent the inalienable rights and interests of all human beings, who are—or should be—equal in front of the law. Underlying this conviction is the belief that every violation of these rights is a dysfunction of, and can be fixed within, the existing system with a top-down legal and administrative approach, rather than grass-roots movements that mobilize those who are oppressed to change this repressive system (ibid.).

Within this framework, a laborer qua human being has inalienable, fundamental legal rights, such as freedom of association and right to collective bargaining, freedom from forced or underage labor or from discrimination; also defined within this legal system are the length of the working-day (work-week), minimum-wage, and health and safety conditions in the workplace. As such, the

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42 My critique of the HRW’s approach draws heavily from Gordon et al. (2000).
underlying premise is that a human being \textit{qua} laborer is the private proprietor of the commodity labor-power who exchanges it for monetary compensation—or should be ideally/potentially, in case there is no exchange mediated via market.

1.6 (Wage-)Labor as a Burden: The End of Work

Construing labor as the most abundant and readily available asset, as a factor of production that is the primary source of income, especially for the poor, international institutions recommend and pursue policies that would create productive and satisfactory—which they for the most part equate with remunerative—employment opportunities. And despite choosing to focus on, or emphasize different aspects of labor, these institutions concur that the most viable way to achieve this goal is the expansion and unhindered functioning of the global capitalist labor market. This however is not to say that international institutions are oblivious to the current state of the global labor market: a race to the bottom both in industrialized and the newly industrializing countries, characterized by flexible and precarious employment—part-time, causal jobs paying minimal wages, and/or occupations with little or no job security carried out in increasingly deteriorating and exploitative work conditions—which is encouraged in part by labor’s unorganized state. Nevertheless, they associate these “realities” with the reallocation of industrial production and manufacturing from developed to developing countries and with the emergence of “global workshops”; consequently, they simply see them as the temporary negative effects of globalization. That is, these institutions treat such “tribulations” as merely resulting from a failure to establish and recognize the economic, institutional and legal framework that they elaborate, and/or a lack of political will to implement the policies that will ensure the smooth functioning of a fair and just labor market. When—or, I should rather say, if—this fair and just labor market is finally established, these institutions contend, there would be no
unfairness, injustice, oppression or exploitation associated with remunerative employment; then, there will be no reason for work not to be extended to all able-bodied adults—at least, to those who need to labor to make a living—or for there not to be full-employment.

On the other hand, construing the form labor takes under capitalism, wage-labor, as a means to an end, an activity over which its performers have no control, but endure only for their wages, and an undesirable yet necessary burden to sustain one’s existence, others call for “the end of work” (Aranowitz and Cutler 1998; Beck 2000; Gorz 1982, 1985, 1989, 1999).43 Evoking the continuous changes in and reorganizations of the production process since the 1970s, they argue workers’ life experiences and the conditions in which they perform labor, for the most part, have not improved; on the contrary, work remains tedious and alienating, with workers are still subordinated in, with little or no control—or influence—over the production process (Aranowitz and DiFazio 1994). In addition, “work under capitalism” and its recent transformations, rather than ensuring the formation of the working-class qua the revolutionary subject, has ended up undermining the power of industrial workers—the presumed avant-garde and the central figure of the revolution in orthodox Marxist accounts—which has led these authors to bid “farewell to the working-class” (Gorz 1982). Inspired by the overall increase in productive capacities due to technological developments, they dissociate the right to sustain one’s existence and wage-laboring as the only option to earning an income; consequently, they argue for the provision of a guaranteed income, and the reduction of the work—minimizing the time devoted to wage-labor (Aranowitz and Cutler 1998; Gorz 1985).44

43 For a summary of these accounts, See Sherhow (2005).
44 In this summary, I inevitably gloss over the nuances and differences among these authors, not to mention overlooking contradictions that might exist within their accounts. For example, Gorz
Although they demand the end of work, these authors do not ask for abolishing all productive or practical activity in toto. What is being questioned is the privileged status ascribed to wage-labor; in this sense, all other forms of activity, especially those which have been rendered as insignificant simply because they are uncompensated, like housework or volunteering, should be considered as equally valuable—to say the very least—as remunerated employment (Beck 2000; Gorz 1989). More importantly, minimization of “compulsory labor”—thus, material production’s inevitability is readily acknowledged—would emancipate human beings from the realm of necessity, and enable them to live their life freely (Aranowitz and Cutler 1998). In this realm of “autonomy,” individuals have the freedom and opportunity to fulfill their potential in and through self-determined, creative activities (Gorz 1982, 1999). As such, work is—to be—reclaimed by ascribing a new meaning to labor: divested of the characteristics it presumes under industrial capitalism, “true” work becomes self-determined labor or autonomous activity “in the sense of self-realization, in the sense of ‘poiesis,’ of the creation of work as oeuvre” (Gorz 1999, 2).

1.7 Labor as a Sign: Jean Baudrillard and Refusing Labor

For these authors who argue for workers’ “autonomy from work,” it is not labor or production per se that renders work tedious, undesirable and, if possible, something to be avoided, but rather the form it assumes under capitalist command:

(1989) argues that there should be an indissoluble link between the right to work and the right to an income; that is, without undermining each individual’s access to a “standard of living,” each person should “be granted the possibility (the right and the duty) to perform for society the labor-equivalent of what she or he consumes” (ibid., 205; emphasis in the original). Here Gorz does not call for the end of work, which he argues has an emancipatory character as it liberates individuals from the binding reciprocity and obliging bonds of personal relations. Nevertheless, he is adamant about limiting the time devoted to such work—he recommends a 1000-hour work-year—so that individuals can engage in autonomous activities. Although he indissolubly links income with work, in an Appendix in the same text, Gorz also calls for the uncoupling of income from the quantity of labor performed (ibid., 236).
wage-labor. As a result, it is the instrumentalization of production under capitalism they want to abolish, not labor itself, which can become one of the productive, autonomous and self-determined activities through which individuals freely, artistically and creatively express themselves. Jean Baudrillard (1975, 1993), on the other hand, calls for a total refusal of labor in an attempt to move beyond the “productivist discourse” of political economy, which he has persistently criticized, particularly in his early works.45

Baudrillard (1993), writing in the early 1970s, announces “the end of production.” He argues everything—virtue, needs, knowledge, consciousness, love, sexuality, art, culture, labor, just to list a few—has been commodified, which in turn signifies that political economy has expanded to all realms of life; there is no outside, nor anything external to this commodity system. However, Baudrillard continues, this is not to say that the economy has become the predominant—or, the solely determinant—moment in society; on the contrary, everything is divorced from all economistic determination (1975). Baudrillard explains, this commodification—better yet, everything coming under the rule of exchange—is accompanied by “the sign” replacing “the commodity” as the dominant form, as a result of which “the law of the code” supplants “the law of value” as the governing rule of society (ibid.). That is, from the political economy of value, we now move on to the political economy of the sign in which everything is codified: all has become a code, a sign which does not refer to any reality, to anything real, but only to itself (ibid.).

That is, this codification, or the law of the code, is different from and signifies the end of the law of value (equal exchange) (Baudrillard 1993). According to

45 I am not arguing that “autonomy from work” literature is a productivist discourse in which all is reduced to labor/productive activity—everything comes into existence through production; however, their definition of labor as self-determined, creative activity when they reclaim work is reminiscent of the way labor is construed in productivist discourses.
Baudrillard, the law of value has two dimensions that are presumed to be inseparably connected as it has been expounded by the political economists and Marx: first, there is the “referential value,” which indicates the value relation between any term, category, or concept and what it designates—the relationship between a signifier and the signified. In the specific case of political economy this, Baudrillard argues, is the use-value of a commodity, the usefulness of the object. The other is the “relative value”; that is, the value relation between the terms which designate an existent—or simply put, among the signifiers of the system as they relate to one another (ibid.). In political economy’s language, relative value symbolizes exchange value: that, any commodity—each and every element of the economy—can be exchanged with—is related to—any other commodity, as mandated by the law of equal exchange. Within this framework, exchange of commodities functions as a means to facilitate and regulate the exchange of the signified, “the referential content,” that is, use-values (ibid.).

However, Baudrillard argues, this link between the referential and relative value now is completely severed as signifiers no longer designate a signified; that is, in political economy’s terms, use-values no longer refer to objects of use (ibid.).\(^{46}\) To put it differently, in this stage of social order—which might be “hypercapitalism,” or a totally different order according to Baudrillard—there is no longer any “referential value,” nor does exchange take place to access use-values (ibid., 10). Rather, only signs are exchanged with each other; there remains only relative value as only exchange-values, now emancipated from use-values, exchange with each other.

Baudrillard refers to speculative money as exemplifying these changes: dissociated completely from social production, money constantly circulates—exchanges with itself—becoming circulation itself (ibid., 21-22). Now with no use or exchange value,

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\(^{46}\) The dissociation of the signifier from the signified, Baudrillard (1993, 23) argues, is represented by the inconvertibility of currency into gold with the end of the Bretton-Woods system.
and not even mediating any social or productive relation, money simply “floats,” changing hands continuously, simply reproducing itself as a sign without a signified (ibid.). As such, it is “the sign” of the times, in which everything becomes indeterminate—“determinacy is dead”; nothing refers to reality anymore or anything else. Rather, the system becomes nothing but signs’ never-ending self-reference onto themselves, which, in turn, reproduces this system (ibid., 6-9).

Labor and labor-power, Baudrillard argues, is no different: now devoid of any social meaning or historical significance, they are simply signs amongst many others, simply replicating themselves and the meanings they have been assigned by and within the code (ibid., 10-11). In this sense, labor marks the individual as the worker—who is assigned the role of the owner of the commodity labor-power; and as such, it functions as a sign and nothing but a sign (ibid.). Labor as a sign has lost all reference to specific productive activities; all forms of labor become interchangeable since now anyone can perform any particular job. In addition, there remains only one type of labor: service labor, which is not a particular form of productive activity, but merely a “pure and simple presence/occupation, consumption of time, *prestation* of time” (ibid., 17; emphasis in the original).⁴⁷ That is, what matters is not whether labor is productive or unproductive, whether it creates anything of use or produces surplus, but that it performs the role it is ascribed by the code of production, the worker/owner of the commodity labor-power in this social order. As such, labor as obedience to the code, as acceptance of the status that is ascribed to worker, reproduces this social order, absorbing everyone into the system, placing them under the control of the code—“the dominance of capital” (ibid.).

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⁴⁷ Baudrillard (ibid., 18; emphasis in the original) goes further and declares, “in this sense labor can no longer be distinguished from other activities, particularly from its opposing term of free time, which, …is today as much a *service rendered*”; that is, free time, to the extent that it is defined in relation to labor, is firmly grounded in and defined by this social order, by the code of political economy.
Does this mean that labor under capital is treated similarly by Baudrillard and by those who call for the end of work? The way Baudrillard construes labor—as a role, a sign assigned to individuals by the code, by the structure to which they have to obey—is analogous to the depiction of work as an occupation over which human beings have no control over and bear as a compulsion only to sustain their existence. In addition, the privilege and significance ascribed to remunerative employment, to wage-labor in modern discourses is questioned in both accounts. However, this is not to say that “the end of work” means the same thing—or indicates the same project—for these authors: whereas productive, self-determined activity is one possible way for human beings to enjoy, and express themselves in their newly found freedom, Baudrillard finds any form of labor to be firmly embedded within, and reproductive of, the code (system) of political economy. That is, no form of labor—be it artistic or creative activity that has nothing other than itself as its goal, or productive activity that brings use-values into existence—that is not determined and codified by the logic of political economy. Baudrillard (1975, 1993) makes this point most forcefully in his critique of Marx.

Political economy, Baudrillard argues, is founded upon and is itself constitutive of an anthropological model of man. In this account, human beings are construed as subjects embodied with and defined by their concrete needs, which find their expression in the “human purpose of the commodity in the moment of its direct relation of utility for a subject”; and this aspect of the commodity is nothing other than its concrete value, the use-value of the object (Baudrillard 1975, 22). The “presumption” of needs that human beings have to satisfy in order to continue their

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48 This is not to say that needs are given or static; rather, they are ever-changing as human beings themselves change. Keeping up with this constant “progress”—“men’s continual surpassing of himself”—labor becomes the mediating moment of human beings’ coming into being, their “self-labored” birth (Baudrillard 1975, 33).
existence, and these needs’ counterpart in the commodity, use-value, are immediately indicative of the other aspect of this anthropological model: man as a producer. That is, individuals do not find all useful objects that would satisfy their needs readily available in nature, but have to produce them. Production is a process in which human beings transform nature through their labor, shaping it in accordance with the purpose they had in mind. In doing so, not only do they create all that exists in the objective world, including themselves; they also become conscious of their existence, continually recognizing themselves in what they produce—and this is “the mirror of production” (ibid., 19). However, rather than assuming this human nature to be the concrete, given reality that remains independent of but reflected in the discourse, Baudrillard argues it is political economists themselves who produce and code human beings in this manner. In other words, what seemingly remain outside and beyond political economy’s abstraction—human beings defining qualities of needs and labor, even in their incommensurability and difference—are precisely constituted within that narrative.

Baudrillard contends, Marx does not question the idea that there exists a concrete, qualitative reality that is independent of but functions as the basis for the abstract, quantitative narrative of political economy; on the contrary, he simply takes it as given and retains it. Thus, according to Baudrillard, Marx, even in his critique of political economy, remains within the discursive field it determines. More specifically, despite deciphering “the naturalization of the system of exchange value, the market and surplus-value and its forms” in political economy, Marx nevertheless fails to denaturalize this anthropological model of man (1975, 18-19; cf. 66-67). To wit, Marx criticizes classical political economists for equating labor with the form it takes under capitalism, wage-labor, and for eternalizing this particular and historically specific form and rendering it ubiquitous. In this sense, Marx differs from political economists as he translates the idea of a man who incessantly produces
himself anew “into the logic of material production,” which then finds its expression in modes of production as different stages in history (ibid., 33).\(^49\) He nevertheless fails to question their conception of labor as useful, productive activity; in doing so, he ends up reproducing political economy’s presupposition that concrete labor, a human purpose and activity, is behind abstract labor (exchange-value). Consequently, Baudrillard argues, “there can be only labor—quantitative or qualitative” in Marx’s, and political economists’ narratives; that is, all human activities, despite their incommensurability, are reduced to—and construed as a form of—labor (productive activity) (ibid., 26-27). In this sense, Marx simply operates within the confines of the “productivist” discourse of political economy and codes everything that exists in the world—man, labor, value, culture, politics, law, the state, religion, just to mention a few—in a language of production.\(^50\)

As Marx remains within the productivist discursive field of political economy, his revolutionary project ends up being nothing more than a call for the liberation of productive forces from the shackles of capitalism, Baudrillard concludes. That is, it will be the end of the abstraction and alienation associated with capital’s domination, and a return to the “natural” social order in which human beings would freely transform nature in accordance with their human needs. This society would simply be comprised of individuals who are identified with their labor, that is, as they are coded by political economy; as such, it will not challenge, but assist, this capitalist logic. On the contrary, Baudrillard argues, any revolutionary project should reject

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\(^{49}\) Baudrillard (ibid.) argues, Marx universalizes political economy’s production principle by projecting, it onto all non-capitalist economic organizations, thereby rendering production to be governing principle of all societies. Thus, Marx ascribes production/labor as a ubiquity, an eternal and universal necessity, which is not so much different than political economists conception of wage-labor.

\(^{50}\) Baudrillard (1975) finds contemporary Marxists to be reproducing this productivist discourse as well. He cites Althusser (1970; Althusser and Balibar 1973) who conceives theory as something that is produced; Deleuze and Guattari (1983), on the other hand, with their notion of “desiring machines,” conceptualize the unconscious as a factory.
production tout court; only then would this system of political economy would be challenged. In other words, only by remaining outside of the system and refusing to participate in its reproduction, that is, by refusing to be—and to become—labor, one can undermine capitalist domination (Baudrillard 1993, 40).

Thus, Baudrillard construes labor as being indissolubly bound to the logic of political economy and its anthropological model, which he denounces as an inherently productivist code, which not only marks human beings as mere laborers but also subsumes them to capitalist domination. In doing so, he inevitably reproduces the same essentialist narrative; that is, he inadvertently “mirrors” labor, not unlike the political economists and Marx he criticizes. According to Baudrillard, there is nothing wrong with the way political economists and Marx conceptualize labor; they are absolutely accurate in their representations. It is labor itself that is inevitably reductionist—everything comes into existence through, thus can be reduced to their common, essential element, labor—and economic determinist—the primacy of the economy in determining objects (all that exist) and subjects (individuals). Political economists and Marx are only wrong in succumbing to the logic/code of labor, thus ending up reproducing its domination instead of looking for alternatives—such as symbolic exchange, gift, and reciprocity. As such, Baudrillard equates labor with a particular rendition, preemptively inhibiting any attempt to construe it in ways other than this traditional, essentialist conception.

51 In doing so, Baudrillard eventually ends up un(der)theorizing the economy, equating it with a particular conception only to reject it as a proper analytical subject; it is telling that these early texts are subject matters to which he does not return back. This aversion towards theorizing the economic in turn plays un-/consciously into the hands of, stabilizes and uncritically accepts the established hegemonies, such as capital’s dominance.

52 Jean-François Lyotard (1993, 104-9) argues by replacing a capitalist society with a “society of gift and counter-gift,” Baudrillard, just like political economists and Marx before him, ends up idealizing a “primitive society” that does not exist; that is, he conceives a society that would function as an “external reference,” which remains independent of and separate from capitalism. This is a society in which there is a “proper economy” where “desire would be clearly legible” (ibid.).
Thus, one is left in a theoretical *cul-de-sac* as the constitution of antiessentialist, non-determinist theories that discursively privilege labor are hindered. Likewise impeded are the affects of such discursive renditions, such as the constitution of collective agents, of social movements that challenge the powers that be, and potential political projects that confront some of prevailing oppressions, for example, exploitation, or employment of child labor in sweatshops who work for long hours in return for wages that would barely allow them to survive.

### 1.8 Immaterial Labor: Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, and the Ontology of Productive Labor

Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (2000, 22), in order to elaborate what they characterize as a newly emerging “paradigm of power”—Empire, the sovereign political subject that now governs the world—delve into an analysis of its material constituents: “the means and forces of the production of social reality along with the subjectivities that animate it.” Like those authors who argue for the end of capitalist work, Hardt and Negri focus on the recent changes in the production process and welcome the possibilities these open up. Hardt and Negri’s analysis also dovetails with Baudrillard’s to the extent that subjects/individuals are constituted in part by internalizing the mechanisms of discipline and control—the code that marks them as workers in a capitalist society; that is, in both accounts, the law is immanent to and constitutive of subjectivities. However, according to Hardt and Negri, labor does not necessarily nor solely lead to “the real subsumption” of workers’ to the logic of—and control under—capital, which can only be avoided by refusing to—and remaining outside of—work; on the contrary, they find new forms of labor that arise in “postmodern economies” as potent with non-capitalist, non-imperial possibilities.

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53 Another commonality Hardt and Negri have with those who call for “the end of work” is the position and role of the proletariat: equated with the industrial labor, proletariat, they argue, have lost its hegemonic position in working class and/or non-capitalist movements.
That is, Hardt and Negri dissociate themselves from both these accounts—end of capitalist work and refusal of labor—by emphasizing the socially constitutive role, and ontologically productive power, of labor. They categorize this power that is productive of life as “immaterial labor,” a concept they borrow from contemporary Italian Marxist authors; Maurizio Lazzarato’s (1996) work is exemplary of this influential discourse.

Lazzarato (ibid.), looking at the changes in the organization of the labor process and the restructuring of Taylorist and Fordist factory work in the 1970s, registers a “curious paradox”: industrial workers, as they are traditionally construed—white, male, unionized, with little input into or control over the production process, who merely carry out the operations they are assigned—lose their hegemonic role in the working class. However, this loss of identity and power is coupled with “the recognition of the centrality of (an ever increasingly intellectualized) living labor within production”: that is, labor is now transformed into “a labor of control, of handling information, into a decision-making capacity” (ibid., 134). As a result, workers become active agents who are asked to make decisions rather than simply follow commands, thus, assuming a degree of responsibility in the production process. Lazzarato deploys immaterial labor to conceptualize these changes occurring in the organization of labor.

54 This is not to say, Lazzarato (1996) adds, that there is no antagonism between workers and capitalists—class struggle over the organization of work—nor hierarchy or command is completely eliminated. On the contrary, one must become an active subject as required by the new organization of production process, which accords a degree of autonomy and freedom to labor. But, the capitalists do not want to redistribute power, trying hard to keep their control over production intact; they try to achieve this predetermining the content of the labor process. For example, to participate in the production process that is characterized by “cooperation and collective coordination,” workers should be capable of communication; however, in this circuit of information, they are nothing more than “a simple relayer of codification and decodification” (ibid., 135). Lazzarato adds, this subjugation to capital does not take away “the autonomy of the constitution and meaning of immaterial labor” (ibid., 136).
Immaterial labor, for Lazzarato, (ibid., 133) is “the labor that produces the informational and cultural content of the commodity.” The informational content signifies the production and processing of information, and its communication, which increasingly takes place within and through computerized and multimedia networks (ibid.). Cultural content, on the other hand, represents certain activities that would not traditionally count as work—through these activities “cultural and artistic standards, fashions, tastes, consumer norms, and more strategically, public opinion” is defined and formed (ibid.). Thus, immaterial labor does not only produce commodities in the traditional sense of the term, but is also constitutive of subjectivities now; immaterial labor “produces” consumers as well as social relations by creating “the ‘ideological’ and cultural environment of the consumer” (ibid., 138).

It also characterizes the new subject of the production process—a new worker with different skills: to the extent that it produces the informational-cultural content of the commodity, immaterial labor signals the end of the division of labor between mental and manual labor. That is, they not only have to have the manual skills to carry out production, but also the intellectual skills to conceptualize, imagine, and produce the informational and cultural content; in addition, workers also have entrepreneurial skills to manage the social relations they produce, as well as to organize the production process. As such, immaterial labor—“the form of productive activity of every productive subject in postindustrial society”—designates “a kind of intellectual worker” who is also an entrepreneur; this worker is not created by or completely subsumed under capitalism, but only temporarily employed—and “hyper-exploited”—by capital (ibid., 136-40). This independence, in turn, opens up the possibility and potentiates alternatives to the rule of capital.

Hardt and Negri (2000) also start by discussing recent transformations in the production process, and the accompanying changes in the quality and nature of
With the transition to an informational—or, as they construe it at other times, “postmodern capitalist”—economy, providing services, manipulating information and communication replaces industrial factory work as the predominant form of labor; constant interaction with and feedback from consumers/markets that are immediately incorporated into and determines the production process exemplifies this informational economy (Hardt and Negri 2000; Hardt 1999; cf. Lazzarato 1996). The production and exchange of knowledges, information, and services, that is, commodities that not are material, durable or physically existent, gives labor its immaterial character. That is, Hardt and Negri (2000, 290, cf. Hardt 1999, 94) define immaterial labor as labor that produces “a service, a cultural product, knowledge or communication.” In this sense, Hardt and Negri’s definition is similar to, and reiterates certain aspects of, immaterial labor as it has been construed by Lazzarato: labor that produces and communicates the informational content of a good, and labor that perform analytical and symbolic tasks (Hardt and Negri 2000, 293).57

55 Here, one can draw similarities between Hardt and Negri, and “the end of work” literature. According to Hardt and Negri (2000, 260-79) these changes in the production process are in part due to proletariat’s refusal of factory work, and the corresponding subversion of the capitalist division of labor and capitalist command. To this refusal of the disciplinary regime of social factory, capital responds by adopting the new forms of productivity that labor has autonomously developed, and subsuming it under its control; as a result, new technologies are introduced and the production process is transformed (ibid.).

56 Hardt and Negri (ibid., 256) emphatically argues, this does not mean that the industrial working class has “disappeared or even declined in numbers,” but rather has “merely lost its hegemonic position and shifted geographically.” By deploying immaterial labor, they emphasize the informational, communicative and affective labor’s rise to prominence in contemporary economies; that is, immaterial labor replaces industrial labor as the form of labor that characterizes today’s informational economy.

57 Nevertheless, there is still one significant difference between Hardt and Negri, and Lazzarato even at this point. Hardt and Negri (ibid., 290) discusses the emergence of “a fundamental division of labor within the realm of immaterial production.” Not all immaterial labor that produces informational content of commodities involve creative, innovative manipulation of symbols and language; it also involves low-value, low-skill and routine symbolic tasks, “such as data entry and word processing” (ibid.).
Hardt and Negri, on the other hand, emphasize a different aspect of, and add a third dimension to, immaterial labor that has been absent from the Lazzarato's analysis: "labor of the production and manipulation of affects," or affective labor (ibid., 30; Hardt 1999; Negri 1999). Affective labor implies human contact and interaction, which can be actual—as is the case with caring labor—or virtual—exemplified by the entertainment industry (ibid., 292-93; cf. Hardt 1999, 95). What is produced, “a feeling of ease, well-being, satisfaction, excitement, or passion,” is intangible; in this sense, even though affective labor might be “labor in the bodily mode,” thus corporeal, it is immaterial to the extent that its product is not material or durable (Hardt and Negri 2000, 293; cf. Hardt 1999, 96). That is, immaterial labor signifies, for Hardt and Negri, the foundational and increasingly central role that “information, communication, knowledge and affect” come to play in the new, informational economy and social reproduction (Hardt 1999, 93).

More significantly, affective labor is productive of “social networks, forms of community, biopower”; that is, it, along with the other forms of immaterial labor, produces and reproduces social life itself (Hardt and Negri 2000, xiii, 293). As Hardt (1999, 96) puts it, “in the production and reproduction of affects, in those networks of culture and communication, collective subjectivities are produced and sociality is produced.” What this uninhibited power to create—not only collective subjectivities, but also sociality, society, that is, life itself—signifies is the potential for non-capitalist, non-imperial possibilities. The creative powers of immaterial labor is constantly being adopted by, and subsumed under the control of capital, as its exploitative reach tends to expand to every productive activity; as such, it is what creates and sustains the rule of capital. At the same time, immaterial labor is “the fundamental creative activity” of the multitude—or as Hardt and Negri puts it differently, the new proletariat, which now is not only comprised of the industrial working class, but includes all who are exploited by capital—that nevertheless “goes
beyond any obstacle imposed on it and constantly recreates the world” (Hardt and Negri 2000, 402).58 As such, immaterial labor has and represents the potential to undermine, subvert and overthrow the power of capital, which can be realized if its creative, ontologically productive force is reorganized and directed towards new ends and new possibilities.59

1.9 Concluding Remarks: Labor as a Discursive Construct

Juxtaposing these different narratives in which labor has different, even conflicting, meanings—not to mention its reference to a conceptual category in some, and to a subject, to a social agent in others—attests to the fact that there is no labor in the singular. Rather, there are labors, which receive their meanings within discourses that they in part constitute, and in turn, are constituted by. These labors, or labor as such for that matter, do not signify, represent, or refer to a common underlying thing such as the ontological foundation of reality/the social, or to a social group, the subject of history—although labor in particular can, and as some of the narratives I discuss above exemplify, indeed does acquire any one of these meanings in a particular discourse; they are different from, and in a relation of difference with, each other. Labor, far from being an already given or known, always escapes the attempt to fix its meaning and to ascribe a singular identity to it. Emerging as an effect of its constituents that continuously displace and dislocate it, the definition and meaning of labor are never fully given, or fixed. Labor is not a transcendent signified that unilaterally determines, and in turn, is represented by its signifiers;

58 In this sense, Hardt and Negri invoke Deleuze and Guattari’s (1983) desiring production.  
59 Hardt and Negri does not provide an already existing and concrete elaboration of a political alternative to Empire (ibid., 206). Nevertheless, they (ibid., 393-413) discuss three demands that can potentiate the multitude's political power: the right to control one's own movements, or, re-appropriation of control over space—that is, global citizenship for all; a social wage and guaranteed income for all; and the right to re-appropriation—free access to and control over knowledge, information, communication and affects.
rather, it becomes an indeterminate discursive construct to which different and new meanings are attached. It is an arbitrary, yet not random line of demarcation that enables one to establish the contours of a discursive space within, and by means of, which a performative language can be developed. That is, labor is a “theoretical emptiness,” whose meaning is partially fixed by other categories of the discourse that constitute, and which, in turn, are constituted by it. As such, labor becomes the name of a textual space that is not demarcated by fixed boundaries, but always constructed by and within those discourses.

For example, in all of the accounts I elaborate above, labor in a capitalist economy appears as the object of analysis; nevertheless it is construed differently in each narrative. International organizations conceive labor as an income-generating capacity; even then though, they focus on its different aspects, thus define it differently. The World Bank sees labor as human capital, as an asset to be invested in, which, if employed productively, earns a return, receiving what it contributes to the product. The International Labour Organization and Human Rights Watch refer to labor as any form of compensated work for which a legal framework is to be established so that it is performed in a decent, human and “non-exploitative” manner. Finally, the United Nations Development Programme, despite its occasional reference to its non-remunerative aspects, construes labor as a capability mostly to be employed in compensated occupations. As such, in all these accounts, labor appears as a commodity that should be freely exchanged in return for a just remuneration; all that is needed is to elaborate and establish the legal, institutional and economic framework in which individuals can invest in their private property—labor-power—exchange it for its worth—receiving equal value for what they part with—and perform labor in a satisfactory manner under safe and humane conditions.

On the other hand, academic and postmodernist accounts of labor conceive what appears to be the same form of labor, wage-labor in a capitalist economy, very
differently. For example, those who argue for “the end of work” are more interested in the production process itself and the role labor plays in it; thus they analyze the nature and the quality of work in capitalism and conclude that it remains an alienating and tediously repetitive activity over which laborers have no control over. People continue to work, sell their labor-power and become wage-laborers only because it is their sole means to earn an income. Simply dissociating the right to an income from earning it through wage-labor, these authors call for “the end of work”; however this is not an end to creative, self-determined, productive activity as it is still considered to be expressing oneself in her freedom. Baudrillard, on the other hand, argues it is not the form that labor assumes under capitalist economies, but labor itself which marks human beings as *homo faber* and subsumes under the logic of capitalist domination; the only way out of being codified as performers of productive activity, or being constituted as laborers is to refuse labor, and refuse to labor—that is, to move outside of the productivist logic of political economy. Finally, Hardt and Negri embrace this productivist logic and argue that there is no outside to—and all is completely subsumed under—capital’s rule and control; however, the real subsumption of social relations, society, and life itself, also presents the possibility to struggle against, undermine, and overturn this domination. To the extent that immaterial labor produces all that exists autonomously, independent of capital’s control—even though ends up being subsumed under capital’s dominance eventually—it has the potential to become the productive activity of, and collectively performed by, independent, sovereign subjectivities that would found the counter-Empire.

Rendering labor as one category or one subject among many others, positing its discursivity, is to deconstruct the ontological/causal priority previously ascribed to labor, as well as its ubiquity, since it is to assert that labor is not an ontological universal that exists in each and every object as its substance. In doing so, that is, in
rethinking labor as an indeterminate discursive construct, I build upon and participate in the construction of an antiessentialist, yet specifically Marxist, discourse. This approach acknowledges the unfixity of identities, concepts, and totalities, while conceiving them as something to be theorized, not assumed. There is nothing pre-given about anything: nothing is an always-already-established entity that is fixed, and that excludes the constitutive effects of all the others. Everything is an empty location within the social; it is something to be known through the production of a knowledge that fills this “theoretical emptiness,” but, always partially and incompletely (ibid.).

This Marxist discourse, then, is a knowledge production, an attempt to shed light on, and thus render visible, certain aspects of reality through a specific lens, an “entry point,” without claiming to represent its essence, nor aspiring to mirror it in its totality.

At the same time, construing labor as a discursive construct that acquires its meaning(s) within narratives it in part constitutes does not take anything away from its effectivity. Rather, labor becomes “an ‘imposition’ or a particular lens through which a unique sense can be made out” of reality (Ruccio et al. 1996, 56); labor is deployed simply for what it renders visible, or what is pushed out of our vision with its help. What legitimizes this “particular lens” is precisely this “unique sense” produced with it. That is, labor as a discursive construct participates in the

60 This Marxian account posits a particular logic as to how this emptiness is filled: overdetermination. Each identity/totality/event is constituted by, and in turn, participates in the constitution of an entire complex of natural, economic, political and cultural processes (Resnick and Wolff 1987; Gibson-Graham et al. 2000). No definition, identity or category is fixed, or fully defined, but contingent on its overdeterminants. Thus, labor is not the essence from which every other concept emanates and receives its meaning, but becomes precisely the effect of, resulting from, its overdetermining constituents, all the while participating in their constitution. Overdetermination also signifies the effectivity of categories in and on reality, since the production of knowledges (theorizing) is one of the processes that actively constitute that reality (Resnick and Wolff 1987). Thus, thought processes materialize in their effects and change the social totality directly as they are one of the constitutive processes of that totality, and indirectly, by effecting all the other processes as one of their overdeterminants (ibid., 56).
production of performative languages with which one understand, ascribe meanings to prevailing economic and social relations. It takes part in the constitution of discourses which, in our attempts to justify, or destabilize, transform and subvert “the present state of things” by mobilizing counter-hegemonic movements, creating new possibilities, authorizing projects, interpellating subjects, and proliferating identities (Gibson-Graham et al. 2000).

For example, labor as it is defined in the reports of the international institutions is, for the most part, a commodity to be exchanged in the labor market in return for a wage—it is an asset, an income-generating capacity, which is to be employed remuneratively. As such, what these institutions are interested in is nothing more than ensuring the legal, institutional, and economic framework that would be most conducive to creating compensated employment is in place—from the provision of basic services to individuals for capacity building (investment in their human capital), to determining workers’ “inalienable rights.” That is, they specify the conditions of existence for a fair labor market, in which individuals sell their labor-power in return for what appears to be fair and just—simply put, equal—compensation for their contribution to the product, which they produce in presumably satisfactory jobs, by laboring in conditions that would not violate their dignity.

But, as Marx (1977, 270-80) has shown, there is more to this “Eden of innate rights” where exchange takes place and where commodity exchangers legally appear on an equal footing—the fair labor market of the international institutions in which all performances of labor are justly remunerated. As soon as one leaves this realm of exchange and proceeds to “the hidden abode of production,” one enters an antagonistic realm in which buyers of labor-power try to get workers to perform as much labor as possible, thus attempting to maximize the surplus-labor they can
appropriate. In this realm, the individual *qua* the owner of the commodity labor-power becomes the laborer *qua* the producer of surplus, thus rendering this exchange between equals a relation of unequals, an agonism in which the latter is potentially exploited. Consequently, by focusing exclusively on the realm of exchange—by concentrating on who can labor for how long, in return for what, or trying to shift the balance of power between the exchanging parties by calling for freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining, the international institutions never leave the “Eden of innate rights” and descend into the “hidden abode of production”—and construing the worker only as someone who owns and exchanges labor-power, this exploitative relation between unequals is effectively rendered invisible. That is, defining labor as a factor of production merely exchanged for wages equal to its contribution to the product it produces hinders other possible renditions, for example, labor conceptualized from a class perspective, labor as the performer of surplus, which is constitutive of a unique Marxist discourse.

This Marxist theory—admittedly, one version among many—provides an example of the performativity of the language as it intervenes in the economic—and the social analysis in general—with, and as, a counter-hegemonic discourse by

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61 To put it differently, absent from these discourses is the Marxian distinction between labor-power—the capacity of the individual to contribute to the production process—and labor—actual work, the concrete activity supplied in the production process—by means of which one can conceptualize a notion of surplus.

62 This is not to say that the international institutions have no notion of exploitation. As the ILO (2001a, 125) construes it, “exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labor and services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs.”

63 Even though Hardt and Negri denounce capitalist exploitation, their conception is not based on a notion of surplus performing labor. On the contrary, they emphatically argue that it is no longer possible to measure value and lead it back to a labor theory of value (Hardt and Negri 2000; Negri 1999). Rather, Hardt and Negri define exploitation in terms of power relations. Also absent from their analysis is an analysis of class defined in terms of the performance, appropriation and distribution of surplus labor (Resnick and Wolff 2001a). Consequently, capital’s control extends everywhere; ignored are the existence and proliferation of non-capitalist class processes (ibid.).
articulating the social with the entry point of class, defined as the performance, appropriation and distribution of surplus labor (Resnick and Wolff 1987). Informed by an affective commitment to laboring bodies and a partisan desire to reclaim the economic, this non-reductionist class language builds upon a notion of labor (Gibson-Graham et al. 2000)—this time though, not theorizing it as an ontological essence upon which the real is founded, but by construing it as an indeterminate discursive construct, which is privileged as an arbitrary starting point. That is, Marxian class analysis acknowledges that labor is not the necessary concept for a counter-hegemonic discourse; other languages that replace labor/class (the economic) with power (the political), and/or identities (the cultural) to theorize, subvert and destroy “the current state of things” are being elaborated. Moreover, the economic can be theorized with non-class, as well as other class discourses that do not deploy labor. All of these, in one way or another, produce counter-/hegemonic discourses that have different effectivities, one of which might be the disappearance of the category of labor from social analysis. The specificity of Marxist theory in part lies in its deployment of a concept of labor—that creates a surplus, produces more than what is necessary to reproduce itself—to constitute the discursive space of class, which, in turn, constitutes that category, in an attempt to transform reality while filling a theoretical hiatus that comes to exist within contemporary discourses.

Numerous analysis, both individually and collectively, by the members of the AESA School—Jack Amariglio, Antonio Callari, Stephen Cullenberg, Katherine Gibson, Julie Graham, Stephen Resnick, David Ruccio and Richard Wolff, just to name a few—posit questions and provide answers pertaining to the nature of production, (who is producing what, under what conditions and circumstances, in

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64 Hardt and Negri (2000) produce a counter-hegemonic narrative based on a notion of power; Baudrillard’s early works (1975, 1993), with their emphasis on symbolic exchange/gift, can be seen as an example of privileging the cultural.
exchange for what?) appropriation (who should claim the product?) and distribution (who gets what part of the total product in exchange for doing what?) in a given social organization from a class perspective, with a particular focus on discrepancies between the labor performed, and amounts received for that doing, and their re-/distributions. In doing so, many who use and produce this language have alluded to the discursively and politically open, contested nature of labor, and proceed to reconceptualize various economic categories traditionally articulated as essentialist. But, it only remains an allusion within this class discourse; it has not been thoroughly theorized. Against the possibility of essentialist conceptions creeping back in this Marxist theory, and informed by a desire to contest the prevalent meanings ascribed to labor in contemporary discourses, I undo its fixity and elaborate its textuality by providing a deconstructivist reading of Marx’s writings, tracing the different conceptions he advances throughout his œuvre and their effectivities in the second essay of this dissertation.

Before going any further, I want to register the effectivity of this theoretical framework—in which labor is conceived as a discursive construct, and not a signifier mirroring the signified or the essence of all that exists, and privileged merely for its performativity in construing a class discourse—and Marxist notion of labor—labor as the performer of surplus—by discussing their role in elaborating a new, Marxian labor theory of value. I have referred to heterodox economists’ aversion towards deploying labor above; this is in part informed by the debates over the legitimacy of the labor theory of value, which further exemplifies the “problem of labor” in this terrain. As it is traditionally construed, the labor theory of value represents the essential primacy, the ontological status of labor in economics (Bowles and Gintis, 1985; Mandel 1971). Not only is the value of a commodity determined by the technologically determined quantities of labor-time embodied in it—labor creates, or is crystallized in value—but labor also becomes the core of the economic base to
which all “surface phenomena” are subsumed. That is, as labor is equated to, and
deployed interchangeably with, production, it assumes a logical and causal priority,
as a result of which other categories of the economic and their magnitudes, as well as
the superstructure (the political, and the cultural) are derived from this social
substance.

This particular rendition of the labor theory of value has been persistently
criticized. On the one hand, modernist/essentialist critiques within economics have
questioned its accuracy in representing the real functionings of the economy, as a
result of which labor lost its ontological primacy. The mathematical impossibility of
deriving economically meaningful magnitudes (prices, profit) from technologically
given quantities of labor-time embodied in commodities (value, surplus-value)
without additional specifications (invariance conditions) led to the denunciation of
labor theory of value as redundant, internally inconsistent, which, in turn, paved the
way for the claim that labor is a metaphysical concept. On the other, with the
“postmodern turn,” the problem is no longer posited as the accuracy of theory in
mirroring reality, or in terms of its conformity with the “scientific” language of
mathematics. It is declared precisely to be the underlying essentialism of a labor
theory of value, which is pronounced to be ascribing to an economic determinism as
differences among commodities are reduced to a “common thing,” an ontological
essence, labor (Cutler et al. 1977). Furthermore, the reduction of all human activity
to labor/production, it is argued, signifies that the labor theory of value is not only
trapped within, and stabilizes the essentialism (anthropological humanism) of
political economy, but also produces a fetishism of labor (ibid.; Baudrillard 1975). As
a result, the labor theory of value is rejected either as an ideological tool incapable of
producing the “scientific Truth,” or inadequate in “mirroring the Real,” subsumed to,
and only operative for, political purposes, or to be a modernist metanarrative
claiming to represent “the law” that constitutes the economy. By implication, labor,
as one of the basic categories of Marxist theory, is proclaimed to be “incompatible with the contingent logic of the social” (Laclau and Mouffe 1985, 3).

However, as I argue in this essay, this is not the last word on what labor is, or how it can be defined. That is, labor can be relieved from this essentialist rendition, and construed as a discursive construct which acquires its meaning within the narrative in which it is constituted. And the effectivity of this rendition, no longer representing the essence, the creator of reality, or the primacy of the economy, but simply deployed and privileged for the unique sense made out through this particular lens, can be registered in the new light it sheds on the labor theory of value (Wolff et al. 1982, 1984; Callari et al. 1998). Quantities of embodied labor-time no longer have a logical or causal priority in determining the value of a commodity; on the contrary, value, the quantity of socially necessary labor time attached to the commodity in production, given the nature and the functionings of circulation, “is not determined separately from, prior to, or independently of its forms,” for example, of exchange-value, prices, or prices of production, depending on the level, and object, of analysis (Roberts 1996, 203). As such, mathematical and technical problems (for example, the transformation problem, or the necessity to choose only one of the aggregate equalities-total surplus-value is equal to total profits, and total value to total prices of production—and render it as the invariance condition) associated with, and result in the rejection of the labor theory of value, disappear. As a result, one can explain prices, profits, simply those that have traditionally been labeled as “the surface phenomena,” with an accounting schema that allows him/her to see, and construe, the economy from a labor perspective. Moreover, this accounting schema is based upon, and shows, the existence of quantifiable differences between labor done and payments received for that laboring, namely surplus labor, as a result of which exploitation is rendered visible, even under conditions of equal exchange. Also brought to the center of economic analysis are class processes and class relations,
which would not be possible if one does not conceive labor as the performer of surplus. Thus, the labor theory of value is divorced from its essentialist past and becomes an effective analytical tool in theorizing the economy.
ESSAY 2

MARX’S LABORS: A DECONSTRUCTIVE READING

2.1 Introduction

Labor occupies different discursive spaces in contemporary academic and popular discourses, acquiring different meanings. For example, it is defined as human capital, as an income-generating capacity, and as remunerative employment to be performed in a decent, human manner; others, construing it in a completely different manner, conceptualize labor as the creator of all that exists, or as the performer of surplus—as a “super-adequacy onto itself” (Spivak 1988). Juxtaposing these different narratives, labor no longer appears as that which signifies the same essence, nor as a given, already-known category, but becomes one the meaning of which always awaits to be constituted. In other words, what labor is, or what it represents, is constructed differently in different discourses; that is, it is a “particular lens,” an indeterminate discursive construct to which a new and different meaning is ascribed. This discursive construct in turn participates in the production of performative languages with which one can comprehend prevalent economic and social relations, and with which one can destabilize, subvert, and transform “the present state of things” by potentiating and mobilizing counter-hegemonic discourses and movements.

In this second essay, I argue that this multiplicity of meaning and effectivity is not limited to contemporary narratives, but can be found in the works of Karl
Marx—the so-called economic determinist who, considered as the prophet of production, presumably reduced Existence to labor, the essence and defining characteristic of human beings. That is, I show that it is possible to deconstruct—to “reopen the sutures” and to show the presence of different, contending, and, at times, conflicting conceptions—and reconstruct—ascribe a partial and temporary meaning to it from an antiessentialist standpoint, which is informed by, and further articulates a class-analytical perspective—the category of labor in Marx’s narratives.\(^{65}\)

The starting-point for reviewing Marx’s different renditions of labor is, not surprisingly, the essentialist-humanist conceptions he advances, especially in his early works—those he wrote before the “epistemological break”—given the wealth of literature it has generated.\(^{66}\) Marx conceives labor as the productive activity, the mediating moment, through which human beings realize their essence (“species-being”) and objectify themselves. Through their labor, they produce all that exists by transforming objects furnished by nature, reproducing, producing themselves anew, in the process. Labor, construed as such, signifies Marx’s first attempt to break away from German idealism and his substitution of matter for mind; yet, this is not to say that Marx has completely freed himself from neither Hegel, nor a Feuerbachian “contemplative materialism” (Balibar 1995). That is, labor appears as the transcendental, ubiquitous and essential force occupying the center of a Hegelian totality that now traces the stages in coming-into-being not of the Absolute Spirit,

\(^{65}\) I borrow this phrase, “reopening the sutures,” from Diskin and Sandler (1993).

\(^{66}\) Even a trivial summary of this debate is beyond the scope of my dissertation. Suffice it to say, with increasing emphasis on Marx’s early, humanist texts in order to counter the Soviet experience as well as economic determinism and/or mechanical historical materialism that are associated with orthodox Marxist theory, Althusser, with Balibar and others, intervened into the debate by arguing for the existence of an “epistemological break,” with which they designated the discontinuities in Marx’s oeuvre and emphasized his unique class analysis: in contrast to his earlier focus on alienation and humanity’s self-mediated birth, after this break, Marx’s object of analysis becomes class. See Althusser and Balibar (1973), Althusser (1970). Essays in the volume edited by Callari and Ruccio (1996) build upon and extend Althusser’s contributions in a postmodernist vein.
but of human beings who realize their self-mediated birth through their own labor. In addition, by superseding all forms of alienation, humanity will become conscious of this coming-into-being, as they sensuously—by means of their senses—perceive their self-essence in objects they create. Consequently, with this notion of labor, the “young” Marx ascribes to a particular essentialist epistemology, supplementing Hegelian rationalism with Feuerbachian materialism, and ontology, an anthropological humanism, both of which are vividly exemplified in *The Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844* (the *Manuscripts* hereafter) (ibid.).

I am not arguing that this humanist, essentialist conception of labor never appears again in Marx; not only in his “transitional” texts is it possible to observe the remnants of this humanist past, but also in his “mature” works. Nor am I suggesting that instances, even in his “late” works, cannot be found in which it seems that Marx is elaborating other essentialist notions of labor. For example, in the *Theses on Feuerbach*, Marx rejects the “idealist materialism” of the *Manuscripts* that is based on the separation of representation from activity, and object from subject, with a notion of “praxis” that “registers and explodes” the contradictions between these hitherto presumed oppositions (ibid.). Marx, later historicizes this category as “practical activity” by developing the concept of “social relations of production,” which signifies his move away from an already given human essence to the one conceived as “infinite networks of interactions,” condensation of which overdetermines a particular and transitory, thus non-essentialized, human nature at any given point in time—particularly in the *German Ideology* (ibid.). However, in doing so, he construes material production, self-activity, as the fundamental quality, the differentiating characteristic, of being human.

This privilege ascribed to labor and/or production/self-activity, also found in *The Critique of Political Economy*—especially in the “Preface”—which has informed economic determinist renditions of Marx, is arguably epitomized in his *opus*
There, Marx defines labor that creates use-values as something both independent of, and necessary for the existence of all social formations: “labor, then, as the creator of use-values, as useful labor, is a condition of human existence which is independent of all forms of society; it is an eternal natural necessity which mediates that metabolism between man and nature, and therefore human life itself” (Marx 1977, 133). It would seem that Marx now equates labor with material production, universalizing and expanding this inevitable and necessary condition of human existence to all societies throughout history; consequently, “there is, and can only be labor,” signifying the commensurability of all productive activity across space and time (Baudrillard 1975, 28).

In contrast to this ubiquitous and all-encompassing notion, I want to draw attention to the (ever more felt) presence of multiple and different conceptualizations of labor that Marx advances throughout his *oeuvre*, which in turn renders this category indeterminate and informs my assertion that it can be construed as an overdetermined discursive construct. My argument is that, rather than ascribing a causal primacy to labor, thus, fixing and privileging ontologically a particular rendition, the definition above can be read as one way—among many others—Marx construes labor, the meaning of which changes with a change in the object and level of analysis. To be more specific, “the creator of use-values” does not exhaust what labor is in *Capital*—or for that matter, throughout Marx’s works in their totality. Marx, after announcing the ubiquity of labor that is productive of use-values, immediately proceeds with his analysis of the dual character of labor and undoes the fixity of such an all-encompassing conception by juxtaposing two categories that are distinct from and irreducible to one another: abstract labor and concrete labor. This multiplicity is further, and in a different manner, demonstrated when Marx qualifies his references to labor almost always with an adjective, speaking of human, social, private, productive, unproductive, necessary, surplus, useful, and
wasteful labors. That is, there is no labor in the singular for Marx; rather there are labors, which acquire their meanings within discourses that they in part constitute, and in turn, are constituted by. These labors do not signify, represent, or refer to a common, underlying “essence,” Labor, irrespective of how it is defined; they are different from, and in a relation of difference with each other. As such, labor becomes the name of a textual space constructed arbitrarily within Marx’s discourses—one that is not demarcated by fixed boundaries, but always overdetermined by and within those discourses.

In this second essay, then, I posit that there is no always-already-given notion of labor in Marx; on the contrary, there are multiple conceptions of labor, which are interdependent, yet irreducible to one another, and which are construed in accordance with the object and level of analysis. I provide textual evidence to, and elucidate my argument in and through, Marx’s discourses, which in turn becomes an exercise of ascribing meanings to this “empty signifier.” More specifically, I register these different conceptions of labor as they are deployed and developed in Marx’s works, especially in the Manuscripts, the Theses on Feuerbach, The German Ideology, his political texts—especially the Poverty of Philosophy, Wage-Labor and Capital and the Manifesto of the Communist Party—paying particular attention to his “mature” works, the Grundrisse, the Theories of Surplus Value, and Capital.

I identify and juxtapose these different conceptualizations that can be attributed to Marx not merely to celebrate this multiplicity for its own sake, or to simply show that it is possible to construe labor as a discursive construct, now relieved from its essentialist weight; more importantly, each one of these renditions is constituted in and participates in the construction of a particular discourse with differing affectivities/effectivities, potentialities and political projects, which in turn become possible precisely because of what that specific narrative renders visible. That is, defining labor as the productive activity in and through which human beings
express and realize their essences, creating objects or use-values that are necessary to sustain themselves, one cannot but end with a humanist discourse, focusing on the simple labor process and its alienating aspects, and conceiving oppressive, unjust or exploitative socio-economic organizations to be such precisely because they inhibit individuals from becoming truly human, and confining them to inhumane relations and conditions. Or, keeping in mind one of Marx’s self-proclaimed unique contributions to political economy, the dual nature of labor, one can elaborate labor as the performer of surplus, which acquires its meaning within a class discourse that it in part constitutes; as such, with this particular definition of labor one can bring forth and place at the center of current debates the performance, appropriation, distribution and receipt of uncompensated labor, focusing on how these processes are constituted by and in turn condition other economic and non-economic processes and relations that would otherwise remain invisible.

This definition of labor, the performer of surplus, is the one that I discursively privilege, along with the members of what is identified as the AESA school—and, I contend, indeed Marx himself—who build their class-analytic discourse upon this specific notion. In discursively privileging labor as that which produces surplus, I avoid essentializing this particular definition; that is, I readily admit that there are always other ways to construe labor—such as labor as human capital, or as a means of production to be remuneratively employed—and any one of these is just as valid as any other rendition. Also, as a result of the discursive privilege I ascribe to labor, I avoid essentializing labor as such; that is, irrespective of how it is construed, I do not render labor as the fundamental aspect of being, or existence. In this sense, I, without demur, acknowledge that labor is not the only aspect of human experience that one should focus on at the expense of other, equally pertinent facets of social existence.

On the other hand, by discursively privileging labor as the performer of surplus, I am able bring forth some of those aspects that would otherwise remain
invisible. That is, the presence or absence of a particular conception of labor—not to mention labor itself as such—affects how one perceives and understands reality, how one conceives and adjudicates unjust or oppressive social relations and outcomes, and how one construes and enacts just or non-oppressive alternatives in their place. This effectivity in partially constituting a specific narrative, and potentiating political and ethical projects, is what distinguishes one conception of labor from another—or the presence of its absence in a discourse. And this performativity is precisely why I, along with the AESA school, construe and discursively privilege labor as the performer of surplus; with this particular rendition we can focus on the performance, appropriation, distribution and receipt of surplus labor—class processes.⁶⁷ By defining labor as such, and only then, it becomes possible to trace flows of (unpaid) surplus labor from direct producers to its appropriators and recipients, that is, to analyze different class processes that exist in society in a way that relates them to experiences of our “laboring bodies” (Gibson-Graham et al. 2000). More specifically, one can examine how these class processes overdetermine, affect, and, in turn, are shaped by all other nonclass processes, and how subjectivities/identities are in part constituted by the different and temporary class positions that one occupies. Starting from this definition one can also assess whether class relations that prevail are exploitative or not, enact non-exploitative ones in their place, and strive for an economically just society. Simply put, by construing labor as the performer of surplus, one can conceptualize a “surplus-labor economy” in its many facets, which otherwise would have not been possible.

⁶⁷ In contrast, Pierro Sraffa, in *Production of commodities by means of commodities* (1960), dissociates surplus-value producing capacity from labor and ascribes it to any and every commodity. As a result, a surplus economy—and by implication a theory of value and a class analysis—can exist in which it is not the labor, but any other commodity, or a combination of commodities, which performs surplus.
With that in mind, I return to Marx, not only because of my and this postmodernist class discourse’s immense debt to him, whose commitment and desire to render labor visible informs us all, but also his work defines the terms of discussion. As almost everyone who has anything to say on and about labor feels obliged to take a position for or against, but always with respect to Marx, it also enables me to delve, albeit briefly, into secondary texts.68

2.2 Labor in Marxian Literature

Labor has been construed as the sole determinant, the creator of reality in most, but not all, Marxian accounts; it often appears as the universal ontological ground of social life (Gould 1978; Lukács 1978a, 1978b). Reflecting the constant struggle of human beings to subordinate, re-/produce and transform nature, as a result of which they transform themselves as well, labor is conceived as a part, and the defining moment, of forces of production, which, depending on the particular rendition, determines the social in the first or last instance; that is, it becomes the founding moment of social being/reality to which all that exists can be reduced. To put it differently, everything comes into being or is transformed into a new reality through labor; as such, it is the substance, essential force and creator of Being/Existence. In addition, it is one of the defining qualities—if not the primary, or

68 However, with my primary focus on a detailed textual analysis of Marx’s own writings to register different conceptualizations of labor, I do not provide a meticulous analysis or critique of classical Marxian texts that are informed by and built upon essentialist articulations of labor; I discuss these texts to the extent they appear as particular readings of Marx. In this sense throughout my second essay, I briefly discuss Humanist Marxism, which is mostly developed as a critique of, and a reaction to the economic determinism of orthodox Marxism (Braverman 1975; Lukács 1978a, 1978b; Meszaros 1975; Ollman 1976). Interestingly enough, this conception is also deployed as the empirical/realist justification of the ontological privilege ascribed to the category of labor in Marxian economic literature. That is, either conceived from a humanist, or from an economic determinist point of view, or a combination of both, labor is the already given and known “prediscursive before” of every other concept and entity, which signifies the common essentialist epistemological and/or ontological ground these renditions share (Bowles and Gintis 1975, 1985; Cohen 1979, 1988; Dobb 1973; Mandel 1971; Sweezy 1942).
fundamental, one—of being human; defined as purposeful productive activity through which objects provided by nature are shaped in accordance with a conscious plan for the satisfaction of human needs and desires, labor distinguishes human beings from animals, or nature in general, and give them their unique character (Braverman 1975; Engels 1972; Lukaćs 1978a, 1978b).

In mirroring this ontology/reality, labor becomes the fundamental category of social analysis; it is placed at the very center of traditional Marxian discourses as the “scientific” appropriation of the essence of the social in thought (Dobb 1973). Labor is the “prediscursive before” of social analysis; that is, it is outside of, and independent from the discourse it constructs, which, to be the adequate representation of Reality, proper expression of Truth, must place this essence at the center of its analysis, deploying it as Theory’s founding moment (Dussel 2001).

According to this account, labor finds its expression as human productive activity in philosophy with Marx’s inversion of the Hegelian dialectic to reveal “the rational kernel within the mystical shell”, which was “standing on its head” (Marx 1977, 103). Labor theory of value, more precisely, value, signifying labor embodied, coagulated in commodities represents the primacy of labor in economic discourses. Finally, labor becomes the working class, or the proletariat qua the revolutionary subject, “who has nothing to lose but his chains”—that is, the proletariat who is alienated, exploited and whose productive capabilities are hindered in a society divided along class lines, and who as the revolutionary subject will transform the prevailing social order.69 As such, with its singular, unified meaning conceived as purposeful human productive activity, the concept of labor becomes the necessary starting-point for many (although, again, not all) Marxist theories.

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69 Marx, after the failure of 1848 revolutions, replaces proletariat with the category of working-class; for a detailed analysis, see Balibar (1994). Also see, Balibar (1995).
György Lukačs provides the most explicit, nuanced, and, at the same time, contentious elaboration of the ontological significance of labor in his *The Ontology of Social Being*, published posthumously. He applauds Marx for focusing on economic categories of production and reproduction of human life in the *Manuscripts*, thus depicting social existence, for the first time in the history of philosophy, on a materialist basis (Lukačs 1978a, 5). As a result, labor acquires the “central role in man’s coming to be human” in Marx’s materialist social analysis (Lukačs 1978b, 3). Lukačs ascribes this privileged position to labor because only in labor “one can see the genetic leap”—“a qualitative and structural change in being”—from a natural, organic, and purely biological being to a social being (ibid., i-v, 2).

This however is not to say that one can simply deduce all other, more developed modes of social practice (practical activity) from labor, since these “exhibit many departures from labor itself”: that is, although attributes that are unique to human beings originate in labor, they still differ, thus, cannot be derived from it. Nevertheless, essential characteristics of social being which distinguish humans from inorganic and organic nature, such as speech (language), cooperation, division of labor, and freedom, just to name a few, are all “contained in nuce in labor” (ibid., v, 59; cf. Lukačs 1978a, 5).

Through labor, Lukačs argues, human beings achieve a double transformation of nature: they create themselves anew, now as a social being, thus separating themselves from animals and nature—organic and inorganic being, respectively—

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70 I discuss Lukačs not because he is represents those who ascribe an ontological significance to labor; even his students and fellow Hungarian Marxists criticized *The Ontology of Social Being* (Fehér et al. 1983; cf. Joós 1983). Rather, I choose Lukačs because his is one of the most elaborate, detailed and developed analysis as it moves beyond a simple affirmation of the ontological primacy of labor.

71 As Lukačs puts it, “labor is the underlying and hence the simplest and most elementary form of those complexes whose dynamic interaction is what constitutes the specificity of social practice. Precisely for this reason, it is necessary time and again to point out that the specific features of labor should not be transposed directly to the more complicated forms of social practice” Lukačs 1978b, 59).
which they transform into—produce as—use-values to satisfy their needs (1978b). This transformation takes place as a “teleological process” because individuals conceive in their minds, and then posit, affect and realize a change in the material world, leading to a new, socially determined objectivity; only as a result of this teleological process would they rise above their necessary and inevitably natural basis, and become an autonomous, self-created, social human beings (1978b 5-9, 46). However, to succeed in this transformation, that is, in their teleological posittings, human beings must have the correct knowledge of properties of the objects they labor upon, and of natural processes (“causalities”) by means of which they bring about the changes they imagined; only then they will be able to achieve the desired end results—produce what they have set out to create—and their labor would acquire its transformative, distinctively human characteristic (ibid., 12, 41-42). This pursuit of “correct” knowledge requires “reflection” of material reality, which leads to a separation of objects from subjects who depict “these objects with a greater or lesser degree of approximation, by acts of consciousness to make them their mental possession” (ibid., 24). That is, Lukaćs argues, human consciousness comes into being “in, for and by labor”; nevertheless, consciousness remains a precondition for the rise and development of labor to the extent that reflection is an indispensable requirement of human productive activity (ibid., 52).

Consciousness is not the only attribute of human beings, of being human, that originates from labor. As a result of this distancing between subjects and objects as

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72 Teleological process involves the positing of a goal—what is to be achieved at the end of the labor process—and consequently, a goal-positing consciousness (Lukaćs 1978a, 1978b). Lukaćs strictly limits the presence and effectivity of teleology to labor (human practice) (1978b, 8). That is, he rejects any generalized form of teleology in organic or inorganic nature (Lukaćs 1978a, 72-74).

73 According to Lukaćs, “the positing of goals and means,” which leads to self-governed act and effect “changes in nature itself that are impossible coming from nature alone, indeed even inconceivable” distinguishes dialectical materialism from mechanical materialism, which recognizes only nature and its laws as objective reality” (Lukaćs 1978b, 22-23).
well as the necessity of reflection for teleological positing, labor is linked with language and “scientific thought”: only “a correct reflection of the causal relations relevant to the goal of labor” can achieve the desired outcomes, which in turn “perfects acts of reflection and generalizes them, thus providing the kernel of the sciences” (ibid., 15, 52). In addition, reflection that is necessary for the positing of casual relations renders it possible to consider alternatives in the labor process, as well as thinking about alternative processes to mobilize in order to achieve the desired outcome; deciding which goal to posit, choosing the best or most appropriate objects and the means to realize this posited goal—as a result of which “chance” becomes a possibility—is the “ontological genesis of freedom” (ibid., 38-39, 113). Reflection also signifies the mastery of consciousness—knowledge—over instincts and emotions, leading to “genuine humanization” with the rise of morality and ethics; consequently, human beings acquire mastery over their body, which thus appears as the executive organ of the positings conceived by their consciousness (ibid., 42-45, 105-9). With this self-mastery in the labor process, rising above natural, instinctual determination and achieving self-control, human beings are on “the only real path to true human freedom,” on route to producing their species-being, genuine humanity (ibid., 135-6; cf. 1978a, 135-44). Thus, Lukač’s registers the origins, and the possibility of realizing the unique characteristics of being human—such as consciousness, language, knowledge, self-mastery over instincts and emotions, and freedom—in labor; through labor, human beings achieve their self-mediated birth for the first time as a social being.

Moving from ontological considerations of labor to its conceptualization in Marxian economic theories, the labor theory of value, as it is traditionally construed, represents the essential primacy, the ontological status of labor (Bowles and Gintis 1985; Mandel 1971; Sweezy 1942). Not only is the value of a commodity determined by the labor-time that is embodied in it—labor creates, or is “crystallized” in value—
but labor also becomes the core of the economic base to which all “surface phenomena” are subsumed. That is, since labor is deployed as signifying, or interchangeably with, the productive forces, and ultimately, production, it assumes a logical and causal priority, as a result of which other categories of the economic and their magnitudes, as well as the superstructure (the political, and the cultural) are derived from this social substance.

Labor has been brought to the center of historical analysis by the social history project, which is epitomized in and partially burgeoned from E. P. Thompson’s *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963). Contesting traditional narratives’ exclusive focus on political and military events, and on the lives of ruling individuals and elites, social history privileges a different subject, the “common people,” particularly, the laboring masses. Signifying this shift in the object of analysis, and naming the new historical subject, a particular conception of class becomes the focal point and the main explanatory category of this approach. Social history construes class in a structuralist framework, according to which the economy in general, and productive relations in particular, serve as the external and objective referent that causally determines the social, and ascribe individuals an *a priori* class position, which in turn, gives rise to a common experience, and ultimately, to a class-consciousness.74 Thus, class becomes the name of a collective social agent, the “true” subject of history, unified around, and mobilized by, shared interests that are derived from its economic location in society. The project, then, is to produce “histories of

74 This structuralist model is not limited to the positivist and/or economic determinist histories. Even the more sophisticated and complex narratives (Eley and Nield 1995, 2001; Mayfield and Thorne 1992, 1993; Vernon 1994) subscribe to this framework as they start with the *presumption* that classes are already given by their location in economy and/or social structure. For a critique of this structuralist model, see Joyce (1991, 1993, 1994, 1995a, 1995b), Jones (1983), and Rancière (1989a) among others.
class” that register what exactly this experience—the everyday life of classes in its totality, in its economic, political and cultural dimensions—is.  

Before going any further, I should add that this particular rendition of labor, the creator of Existence and the defining characteristic of Being, has been persistently—and I hasten to add, rightfully—criticized in postmodern narratives for its determinism and reductionism. Construing labor in this essentializing way, that is, conceptualizing it as the productive activity by means of which all that exists—including human beings themselves—comes into existence, and to which everything can be reduced to, ends up overlooking various—and equally relevant—aspects of human life. That is, human activities, in their totality, are either considered as a form of labor, or rendered secondary to, or irrelevant when compared with, this essential productive activity. In doing so, one not only ends up ignoring and silencing non-laboring identities, but also reduces other oppressions and injustices that prevail in society to the exploitation and/or alienation of labor. On the other hand, taking this particular definition as what labor is—the only way labor can be construed—some, but not all, postmodern authors themselves essentialize labor only to denounce it afterwards. Rather than reproducing this “all too familiar procedure” and pronouncing one rendition to be the definition of labor in the singular, I construe it as a discursive construct that acquires its meaning in and by the discourse within which it is constituted.

Labor, this fundamental category synthesizing “the three sources of Marxism,” German philosophy, French socialism and British political economy—or to put it differently, labor that finds its ontological priority represented in the primacy of

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75 Also, social historians are interested in how the agency and consciousness of a particular class manifests itself; how, and in what ways, a collective agent expresses its interests in political movements and institutions that presumably embody its will (for example, in political parties, and trade unions). However, among these subjects of history, of particular interest is still the working-class, which becomes the main focus of, and occupies the center stage in, historical analysis.
human productive activity, in the working class as the revolutionary subject and in the labor theory of value—seemingly appears at the center of Marx’s research program for the first time in the *Manuscripts* (Arthur 1986; Lukács 1978a, 1978b). Furthermore, this text serves as the primary narrative for legitimizing humanist-essentialist renditions of labor. Thus, I start my symptomatic reading with the *Manuscripts*.

2.3 Labor as the Sensuous Realization of Man’s Essence: The *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*

Marx’s first critical encounter with classical political economy materializes as the rough draft of a book project which was to appear under the tentative title “A Critique of Politics and Political Economy,” the surviving parts of which were posthumously published as the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*. As a devout disciple of Feuerbach at the time, Marx seeks to register estrangement in different realms of human experience; in the particular case of the *Manuscripts* in his early works, he extends Feuerbach’s critique of religion to the field of political economy. Marx construes the economy as a system of private property—and political economy as the appropriate representation of private property in consciousness—the cause and basis of which, he contends, is alienated labor. The

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76 Does this mean that determinist Marxism also builds upon a different, yet familiar, “trinity formula”—the formula of Classical Political Economy which Marx himself vigorously criticized—by construing productive activity/labor theory of value/working class as the essential core of Marxism (to be more precise, of “scientific knowledge”) in the fields of ontology, economy and politics respectively?

77 Marx had signed a contract with Darmstadt publisher Carl Leske, but the proposed book was never completed; the deal was cancelled in September 1846. Saul K. Padover, in an edited volume of Marx’s letters, gives the title of the book as *Critique of Politics and National Economy* (Marx 1979, 41ft.). As Robert C. Tucker recounts, the *Manuscripts* were first published, incompletely, in Russian in 1927; the first full edition appeared in 1932 in German (Marx and Engels 1978, 66).

78 I deploy this ideologically charged category, “Man,” to emphasize the humanist theoretical framework that Marx subscribes to in the Manuscripts: a Feuerbachian theoretical humanism. I discuss in detail what this notion of Man designates in the *Manuscripts* below.
moment human beings become conscious of themselves, become aware of who they are—a species which realizes its human essence through productive activity in sensuously perceptible, objective materials provided by their “organic body,” nature, in accordance with what they conceive in their consciousness—they supersede this alienation, as a result of which their labor assumes or re-/appropriates its human character. Ascribing to it the central role in human beings’ coming to be human, Marx construes labor as the essential activity of individuals that distinguishes them from animals and organic nature, and as the ontologically fundamental category of the Manuscripts.

2.3.1 Labor as “the Alienation of Activity, the Activity of Alienation”

Proceeding from the premises of classical political economy and taking this analysis to its logical conclusions, Marx deduces that workers become a commodity whose misery is in inverse proportion to their ability to produce and the volume of their product; in addition, society inevitably splits into two classes, that of property owners and propertyless workers (1975d, 322). These results, as well as the analysis from which they immediately follow, Marx contends, are nevertheless based on an “imaginary primordial condition,” that of private property: although the classical political economists explain the actual and material process that private property passes through and formulates it in the form of general and abstract laws, they fail to

79 Marx registers this misery as such: “the more the worker produces, the less he has to consume; the more values he creates, the more worthless he becomes; the more his product is shaped, the more misshapen the worker; the more civilized his object, the more barbarous the worker; the more powerful the work, the more powerless the worker; the more intelligent the work, the duller the worker and the more he becomes a slave of nature” (1975d, 325). He is all the more poignant when he asserts, “even the need for fresh air ceases to be a need for the worker. Man reverts once more to living in a cave…now polluted by the mephitic and pestilential breath of civilization…light, air, etc.—the simplest animal cleanliness—ceases to be a need for man…it is not only human needs which man lacks—even his animal needs cease to exist [which is exemplified by] the Irishman [who] has only one need left—the need…to eat rotten potatoes, the worst kind of potatoes” (ibid., 359-60; emphases in the original).
explain how these laws arise from the nature and the movement of private property, nor private property itself (ibid.).

In order to avoid classical political economists mistakes—which is the reason, Marx argues, why they cannot explain anything, why they achieve nothing other than assuming what they are supposed to explicate—Marx starts from what he calls “an actual economic fact”: the worker becomes poorer as he creates more commodities, which merely expresses the fact that “the object that labor produces, its product, stands opposed to it as something alien, as a power independent of the producer” (ibid., 323-24, emphases in the original). This, in turn, is only possible because the alienation of labor’s product is the manifestation of estrangement in the act of production, which leads Marx to conclude that estrangement is inherent in the nature of laboring within the private property system. That is, workers estrange themselves while realizing their labor; laboring, production becomes the “alienation of activity, the activity of alienation” (ibid., 326). Alienation of labor results from the externality of labor to the worker; “labor does not belong to his essential being,” which in part is expressed by the fact that it is the property of someone else (ibid.). Thus, labor becomes something forced, which the worker tries to avoid; something in which the worker does not confirm, but, denies his/her essential being. Labor is no longer the satisfaction of a need, but becomes a means to satisfy other needs that are external to it (ibid.).

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80 Thus, Marx speaks of a class struggle in the Manuscripts. Nevertheless, it is vaguely defined in terms of class interests; a class’s particular interests are in opposition to general (social, human) interests. These opposing interests lead to a struggle over distribution, in which workers are pitted against capitalists, and landlords against the whole society. In addition, although capital (and the capitalist) does indeed appear in the Manuscripts, it is of secondary importance with respect to private property, the existence of which, for Marx, is the defining characteristic of the bourgeois society.

81 In addition to estrangement of the object, and of labor, from the subject, Marx discusses two other moments of alienation: Man’s alienation from his species-being and, consequently, his alienation from his fellow Man.
Marx (1975c) conceptualizes labor under private property in terms similar to the *Excerpts from James Mill’s Elements of Political Economy.* Following classical political economy in considering human beings in terms of property ownership (as owners/nonowners of property owners), Marx argues that private property becomes a personal, distinctive, essential mode of existence for these individuals (ibid., 267).

Yet, individuals have to let go of these objects, although their essences are embodied within, and signified by, them; as their privately owned objects cannot satisfy all their needs, they are forced to alienate their properties, a part of their essence, in exchange (ibid., 266-67). This commodity exchange turns individuals into workers—“labor immediately becomes wage-labor”—who earn a living by means of labor, and the act of laboring into something unrelated to the immediate enjoyment of personal needs and the realization of personal abilities (ibid., 268-69). That is, as the market expands and individuals increasingly rely on exchange, the social division of labor is also extended, as a result of which productive activity “becomes increasingly one sided, in which fulfillment of [worker’s] personality, the realization of his natural talents and spiritual goals” becomes totally irrelevant (ibid.). What is produced is imposed by social needs that are alien to workers; production is determined by the needs of individuals with whom producers enter into an exchange relationship, and not by their individual personalities. That is, the product of labor becomes something to which workers are indifferent—estrangement of labor from its subject—as well as a means of exchange that is equivalent to other objects—

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82 Marx’s analysis here, in which he construes individuals as appropriators of their labor’s fruits, who then exchange their possessions (private properties), is not very different from what he calls simple exchange in the *Grundrisse.*

83 Marx contends, the fact that the individual has needs that can only be satisfied with objects that are privately owned by others proves that s/he is a total being; these particular objects—objects other than what s/he owns—compliments his/her essence, which in turn shows that the individual can have an essential relation to them other than that of exclusive ownership (private property) (1975c, 267).
estrangement of labor from its object; it is no longer something in which human beings realize their essential being. Consequently, within the private property system, individuals produce solely to have, to possess, as a result of which they only objectify their immediate, selfish needs to maintain and continue their physical existence as workers (ibid., 274).

After starting from this “economic fact”—estrangement of labor and of its product—and conceptualizing this in terms of “estranged labor,” Marx looks for the expression of this concept in reality. If the product of labor is alienated and does not belong to workers, Marx argues, it must belong to someone else, to another human being. To put it differently, individuals' relationships to themselves are reflected and actualized in their relationship to others objectively; their self-estrangement, the existence of labor’s products as alien or hostile to and independent from workers, at the same time, is their relationship to others as their master. That is, through estranged labor, Marx (1975d, 331) asserts, individuals not only produce their relationship to the object, and to the act of production, but also others' relationship to their production and product, as well as workers’ relationship to others. Thus, workers themselves, through alienated and alienating activity, produce their relationship to labor and to its product, as well as the relationship of capitalists to labor, which leads Marx to conclude that private property is the result, the necessary consequence of, alienated labor and the means through which labor is alienated (ibid., 332).84

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84 Although Marx derives the concept of alienated labor from the movement of private property (from classical political economy itself), as a result of which the latter appears as the cause and basis of the former, he asserts a clear analysis shows just the opposite, “just as the gods were originally not the cause but the effect of the confusion in men’s minds” (1975d, 332, emphasis in the original).
2.3.2 Who is this “Man” anyway?

Behind Marx’s renditions of labor and productive activity in the *Manuscripts* lies a theoretical humanism, the Feuerbachian anthropological model of Man. This Man objectifies his human essence—a combination of needs, powers and senses—in materials furnished by nature—which is his inorganic body, something that provides him with means of subsistence and consequently with which he has to maintain a continuing dialogue—through his productive activity (labor). In and through production, he creates objects that are sensuous realizations of his essential powers, the material concretization of his individuality, his specific character, and uses these objects to satisfy his, as well as other Men’s, needs; they are consumed and enjoyed by means of his human senses. Labor is the fundamental mediation between Man and nature through which his personality becomes objective and sensuously perceptible, thus providing the concrete, sensuous proof of his human essence, his species-being. This does not mean that “material productive activity” is the sole, essential activity of Man; Man is affirmed in thought as well, since, and to the extent, “man makes his life activity itself an object of his will and his consciousness…Conscious life activity directly distinguishes man from animal life activity” (ibid., 328).

This Man, as the goal and end of history, does not exist as such; rather he is in the process of becoming his human self, carrying his “self-mediated birth” in and through labor (ibid., 357; emphasis in the original). In this process, Man not only produces and reproduces himself and the objects of his needs in reality as he conceived them in his consciousness; he also creates new needs and new productive powers corresponding to those needs. As a result, human essence, within a given period and through time, changes; the wealth of human powers and sensitivities are

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85 This anthropological model, centered on a notion of “Man” in turn epitomizes Feuerbach’s sensuous or contemplative materialism, as Balibar labels it. For Feuerbach’s influence on young Marx in particular, and on Young Hegelians in general, see McLellan (1969). Also, see Cornu (1957).
created in Man’s becoming of himself (ibid., 352-53). Thus, when Man becomes Man, a real, sensuous species-being—a feat he will only achieve under communism as “the **positive supersession of private property as human self-estrangement**”—he will not return to the “unnatural simplicity of the poor, unrefined man who has no needs and who has not even reached the stage of private property, let alone gone beyond it” (ibid., 346-48; emphases in the original). On the contrary, Man, by objectifying and realizing his particular, individual essential powers on objects that correspond to these human powers—thus, creating infinite possibilities of real modes of affirmation, of determinateness, thereby cultivating and creating the wealth of human sensitivity—becomes a total Man. That is, with the “supersession of private property,” Man’s “senses and attributes,” all his “relations to the world—seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, feeling, thinking, contemplating, sensing, wanting, acting, loving”—become for the first time, and genuinely, human (ibid., 351-52; emphasis in the original). In the process, Man also creates social senses and modes of appropriation, such as activity in direct association with others, which is concretely realized in the association of “communist workmen”: although French socialist workers gather together with the immediate aim of propaganda, they acquire a new need—the need for society (ibid., 365, emphasis in the original).

### 2.3.3 Labor or Productive Activity?

I am deliberately using labor and productive activity interchangeably when I refer to the activity through which Man realizes his essence by objectifying it in

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86 Marx elaborates three different communisms in the *Manuscripts*. First, communism is the generalization and the completion of private property in which the every individual becomes a worker and the community the universal capitalist (“a community of labor and equality of wages”), followed by communism as the abolition of state, both of which, Marx contends, are still essentially incomplete since they are influenced by private property (1975d, 346-48; emphases in the original). Consequently, Marx refers to them as “crude [forms of] communism,” which will be superseded by communism as the positive supersession of human self-estrangement (ibid.).
sensuously perceptible and material things, even though Marx’s conception of labor in the *Manuscripts* has at times been rendered as “active alienation, the alienation of activity, the activity of alienation,” pure and simple. John M. Maguire registers such a tension between labor and productive activity in the *Manuscripts* (1972, 84). In addition, C. J. Arthur contends that Marx conceives productive activity within alienation—Man’s realization of his human essence within private property—as labor as such (1986). According to Arthur, Marx deploys productive activity—rather than labor—when he refers to the “mediation” between Man and nature; in and through this “first-order mediation,” Man establishes the unity between himself and nature, develops his productive powers and becomes objective to himself, knows—becomes aware, cognizant, of—himself (ibid., 5). Arthur contends, Marx goes on to develop different moments of this fundamental framework by “mapping alienating mediations” onto this ontological relationship between man-productive activity-nature. And this “second order mediation,” Arthur asserts, is “often identified by Marx as ‘labor—not ‘wage-labor,’ or ‘alienated labor’ but ‘labor’ pure and simple.” (ibid., 6, 12).

Admittedly, there is considerable textual evidence of this tension between labor and productive activity in the *Manuscripts*. After all, Marx argues “political economy conceals the estrangement in the nature of labor by ignoring the direct relationship between the worker (labor) and production” (1975d, 325, emphases altered). Or, “labor is external to the worker, i.e. does not belong to his essential being, that he therefore does not confirm himself in his work, but denies himself”

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87 I should add, Arthur (1986) finds this opposition between labor and productive activity to result from Marx’s simplistic ontology. Although Marx occasionally replicates this simple ontology in his later works—for example, in the *German Ideology* and the *Critique of the Gotha Program* in which he argues labor would become life’s prime want in authentic communism—he complicates it with the dialectic of necessity and freedom in the *Grundrisse*, and at times completely abandons it by confining labor to a realm of an inevitable and ubiquitous necessity. I discuss the relationship between labor and freedom in the third essay of my dissertation.
He asserts that what one has within private property is “the production of human activity as labor, as an activity wholly alien to itself, to man and to nature” (ibid., 327, 336). He contends “all human activity up to now has been labor, i.e., industry, self-estranged activity,” which is “man’s coming to be himself within alienation or as an alienated man” (ibid., 354). Consequently, it would seem that Marx clearly distinguishes labor from productive activity, ascribing an entirely negative meaning to the former, whereas the latter assumes all the positive aspects associated with Man and his sensuous realization; thus labor in the Manuscripts one can argue, is the form that productive activity takes under private property, within alienation, which will be superseded when Man becomes himself, realizing his human essence, his species-being.

2.3.4 “Critique” as Marx’s Methodology

Yet, I propose a different reading of “labor” in the Manuscripts, one that derives from and is informed by how Marx construes critical theory in his early works: after all, the self-proclaimed task confronting him—along with the other young Hegelians—is the “ruthless criticism of the existing order” (1975a, 207; emphasis in the original). In his introduction, Marx declares the Manuscripts to be the critique of political economy and of other spheres (the state, law, morals, civil law, etc.) to the extent that these latter are connected with political economy itself, and announces his intention to “publish the critique of law, morals, politics, etc., in a series of separate, independent pamphlets” (1975d, 281). Marx’s early works, almost

88 Marx construes his specific theoretical activity as critique throughout his works (Rancière 1989b, 74). Yet, this does not mean that “critique,” both as an act and as a concept remains unchanged, though an inquiry to even briefly sketch the difference(s) in, and the development of, Marx’s understanding of “critique” is beyond the scope of this dissertation. For an argument that compares the “critique” of the Manuscripts with the “science” of Capital, see Rancière (ibid., 74-180).

89 Marx has also planned to present these independent studies as a connected whole and to provide a critique of the speculative treatment—that is, of Hegelian philosophy—of this material (1975d, 281).
all of which he notably wrote before the *Manuscripts*, can be seen as his pursuit of this task. It is the method of the *Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right. Introduction*, in which, as he later proclaims in the *Manuscripts*, Marx provides “a critique of jurisprudence and political science in the form of a critique of the *Hegelian* philosophy of right” (ibid., 280-81; emphasis in the original). And it appears in a letter to Ruge as the proposed motto for the *Franco-German Yearbooks*, conceived as “the self-clarification (critical philosophy) of the struggles and wishes of the age” (1975a, 209).

In his early works, Marx derives his “critical theory” from Feuerbachian “naturalism or humanism,” which differs from, yet is the synthesis, the “unifying truth” of idealism and materialism (Marx, 1975d, 389). As opposed to crude versions of materialism, which takes objective reality as given, and within which Man only appears as a passive actor, Marx construes him as the re-producer of that nature; in this sense, Marx replaces the Hegelian Absolute Spirit, “absolute self-consciousness,” with Man as the subject of history, who in turn becomes the “active side” in his own becoming (ibid.). Consequently, Marx, with this “positive humanistic and naturalistic criticism,” seeks to register human experience as it is lived in actuality and manifested in reality, observing it through “sense perception,” which he contends

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90 In the *Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right. Introduction*, Marx asserts that his critique, “the criticism of the *German philosophy of the state and law*, which received its most consistent, thorough and complete formulation from *Hegel* is…at once a critical analysis of the modern state and of the reality connected with it and a decisive negation of all previous *forms of political and juridical consciousness in Germany*, whose most refined and universal expression, elevated to the level of a *science*, is precisely the *speculative philosophy of law*” (1975b, 250; emphases in the original).

91 Marx lauds Feuerbach as the only philosopher since Hegel whose writings had been a real theoretical revolution. According to Marx, one of Feuerbach’s greatest achievements is “to have founded *true materialism* and *real science* by making the social relation of ‘man to man’ the basic principle of his theory” (1975d, 381; emphases in the original). The other accomplishments of Feuerbach, for Marx, is to show that philosophy is “religion brought into thought,” and as such another form of estrangement—albeit a necessary step of history, of man’s becoming of himself—and to have opposed to the negation of the negation—still effected by what it negates—the positive that is grounded in itself (ibid.).
should be “the basis of all science” (1975d, 281, 355; emphases in the original). That is, the object of this materialism is “the whole of what is called human history [which] is nothing more than the creation of man through human labor, and the development of nature for man, [which in turn provides] the palpable and incontrovertible proof of his self-mediated birth, of his process of emergence” (ibid., 357; emphasis in the original). Specifically, with this critique Marx aspires to declare—all that is needed of the critical philosopher is nothing more than “a confession,” as he asserts in a letter to Ruge—and “make the world aware” of estrangement, of alienation of Man’s essence, in his process of becoming himself (Marx 1975a, 209). To this end, and following Feuerbach’s critique of religion—which Marx declares to be the prerequisite of all critiques and which has been essentially completed by Feuerbach—Marx seeks to derive alienation as such—the estrangement of Man’s essence from himself and the projection of this essence to, and its appropriation by, something alien to Man—and registers it in different spheres of human experience, be it the political, the theoretical (philosophy) or the

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92 Contemplative materialism is the “sensuous consciousness” of Man who has overcome alienation, appropriated his essential powers and needs, and realized himself as Man (ibid.). Thus, communism, as “the positive supersession of private property as human self-estrangement, and hence the true appropriation of the human essence through and for man...[is] the solution of the riddle of history” and knows itself to be the solution; this movement is at the same time “the comprehended and known movement of its becoming” for Man’s thinking consciousness (ibid., 348, emphases in the original). Consequently, all hitherto “sciences” are but reflections in thought of the current conditions of Man who is en route to becoming himself, and as such cannot but be “thought within alienation”: “man, moving in the realm of estrangement, was only capable of conceiving the general existence of man—religion, or history in its abstract and universal form of politics, art, literature, etc.—as the reality of man’s essential powers and as man’s species activity” (ibid., 354; emphasis in the original). Thus, the consciousness of the age takes the form of Hegel’s Encyclopedia—“the self objectification of philosophical mind, which is the estranged mind of world thinking within its self-estrangement”—or modern political economy—private property becoming conscious of itself, political economy as the consciousness of private property (ibid., 341, 383).
economic (1975b, 243). That is, after Feuerbach renders God as the alienated essence of Man in the theoretical domain (in religion), Marx’s project becomes to find the manifestations of Man’s alienated essence in other realms—such as the state in the political, and private property in the economic. Thus, the project of positive criticism, according to Marx, is the translation of religious, political—and economic will be added later—problems into their self-conscious human form (1975a, 209).

This is all the more clear when Marx asserts:

> It is therefore 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. (1975b, 244-45, emphases in the original)

Marx can find alienation in different spheres, and register estrangement in its various forms, only because he does not ascribe an essential privilege to any one realm of human experience. That is, Marx’s ability to transfer alienation from one realm—that of religion—to another—be it the political or the economic—results from and underlines his theorizing of these different spheres on an equal footing, without attributing primacy to any of them. Thus, Marx can contend that alienation, in its fully developed form, appears in different realms of human experience in different countries, such as the political in France, the economic in England, and the theoretical in Germany. After all, “it is in the very nature of estrangement that each

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93 Marx asserts, “the critic can take his cue from every existing form of theoretical and practical consciousness and from this ideal and final goal implicit in the actual forms of existing reality he can deduce a true reality” (1975a, 208; emphasis in the original).

94 To the extent that “sciences” are the consciousness of the age, religion, political science and political economy represent Man’s alienated essence in thought.

95 This non-prioritization of different spheres of human experience is apparent—and even necessary—when Marx, in the Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right. Introduction, claims that it is possible to have a revolution in Germany (1975b). Although Germany’s development has not reached the advanced stage of economic—the opposition between capital and
sphere imposes upon [Man] a different and contrary standard, one standard for morality, one for political economy, and so on. This is because each of them is a particular estrangement of man and each is centered upon one particular area of estranged essential activity” (1975d, 362). Non-priority of any aspect of human experience is all the more explicit—and indeed necessary—when Marx discusses possible ways to overcome alienation: “the supersession of estrangement always emanates from the form of estrangement which is the dominant power” as a result of which, emancipation would take the form of “self-consciousness” in Germany, “equality” in France and “real, material, practical need” in England (ibid., 364; emphases in the original). Marx puts it differently when he construes equality, the basis and the political foundation of communism, as “nothing but the translation into French, i.e., into political form, of the German ‘Ich=Ich’;” that is, what equality represents in the political is the same as what man as universal self-consciousness signifies in the theoretical (ibid.).

When I argue that Marx does not ascribe an essential primacy to any one realm of human experience, I am fully aware of his assertion in the Manuscripts that “the whole human servitude is involved in the relation of the worker to production, and all relations of servitude are nothing but modifications and consequences of this relation” (ibid., 333). That is, Marx elevates alienation in the economic to encompass all other forms of estrangement as he refers to it as the “alienation of real life” (ibid., 349; emphasis in the original). Thus, private property—the form that human self-estrangement takes in the economic—becomes the material, sensuous, objective expression of estranged human life; it is “the sensuous revelation of the movement of all previous production, i.e. the realization of reality of man” (ibid.). In turn, Marx...
asserts “the positive supersession of private property, as the appropriation of human life, is therefore the positive supersession of all estrangement,” and the return of man from all forms of alienation, be it religion, the family, the state, “to his human—i.e., social—existence” (ibid., 349; emphasis in the original).

This is not to say that different spheres of human experience are secondary and subsumed to the economic; rather, Marx can ascribe an all-encompassing character to economic alienation only because he equates the economic with the objective, material reality. That is, the economic expands and now covers the totality of Man’s relations with nature and with other Men (Rancière 1989b, 81). Better yet, according to Marx, all forms of human activity become, and can be construed as—or reduced to—different modes of productive activity, labor: to the extent that “religion, the family, the state, law, morality, science, art, etc. are only particular modes of production,” they come under the general law of alienated human activity and become particular forms of economic estrangement (1975d, 349). Thus, the economic is not prioritized over other moments of human experience; it is all that exists—it is the sensually perceptible, objective, material reality.

This equation of the economic with sensuous, material reality results from and in turn signifies Marx’s adherence to Feuerbachian “naturalism or humanism”; Marx construes individuals as “objective beings” who realize their essence by manifesting it in material, sensuously perceptible objects (ibid.). As such, Marx distances himself from the “passivity” he associates with materialism—with its sole

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96 In this sense, Marx (1975d, 381) is following Feuerbach, who “have founded true materialism and real science by making the social relation of ‘man to man’ the basic principle of this theory.” However, this is not to say that Marx has already worked out what later becomes one of the distinguishing concepts of his materialist framework: social relations. One should not ignore the difference between what social relations designate in the Manuscripts—interpersonal relations between individuals the essence, the fundamental characteristic of whom is already-given and known, “species-being”—and in, for example, the Theses on Feuerbach—“the ensemble of social relations” as temporarily defining what the essence of a human being is in that instance.
focus on objective reality as it exists, thus construing human beings as passive elements of nature. He, on the other hand, stresses sensuous objective reality in order to distinguish himself from, and to criticize, Hegel as well as the Young Hegelian movement for whom thought (mind) represents ultimate being and sensuous objects exist only as the antithesis of thought. Marx’s assertion that economic estrangement takes place in real sensuous life, as opposed to religious estrangement which occurs in thought, in the sphere of consciousness—thus, he argues, private property can embrace the alienating aspects of religion—exemplifies his attempt to distance himself from idealism, from the “speculative” philosophy of Hegel, and of the Young Hegelians (ibid.). As a result, Marx maintains the supersession of economic estrangement also embodies the supersession of religious estrangement, making it “necessary … for the whole revolutionary movement to find both its empirical and theoretical basis in the movement of private property or, to be exact, of the economy” (ibid., 348).

The all-encompassing character of economic alienation, of estranged labor, in turn provides Marx with a theoretical shortcut regarding the privileged class, the vanguard of emancipatory praxis that will free society from all forms of servitude: “emancipation of society from private property, etc., from servitude is expressed in the political form of the emancipation of the workers…In their emancipation is contained universal human emancipation…[since] the whole of human servitude is involved in the relation of the worker to production, and all relations of servitude are nothing but modifications and consequences of this relation” (ibid., 333; emphases in the original). This is not to say that all emancipatory praxis is necessarily going to

97 Marx, in the Manuscripts, substantiates the emancipatory role he has ascribed to the proletariat in his earlier works. In the Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right. Introduction, he argues, “the positive possibility of German emancipation [is] in the formation of a class with radical chains…a class which is the dissolution of all classes…which has a universal character because of its universal suffering and which lays claim to no particular right because the wrong it suffers is not a particular
be in the economic; as Marx hastens to add, “clearly, the nature of the movement [i.e., supersession of estrangement] in different countries initially depends on whether the actual and acknowledged life of the people has its being more in consciousness or in the external world, in ideal or in real life” (ibid., 349; emphasis in the original). Marx’s acknowledgement of the possibility of emancipatory politics in different realms, in accordance with the dominant form of estrangement, once again emphasizes his non-prioritizing of any one sphere of human experience.

2.3.5 Labor as Man’s Productive Activity

I have taken this lengthy detour to elaborate Marx’s project in his early works—and that of “positive criticism” à la Feuerbach—as giving estrangement a conceptual form and registering its appearance in different, yet non-prioritized, spheres of human experience. My aim is to show that labor is not alienated human productive activity per se, but appears as such only when it is construed “within labor,” within the private property system, thus, in its reflection in political economy, as well (ibid., 327). Labor, conceived as “active alienation, the alienation of activity, the activity of alienation” is the labor of the worker, and as such cannot be located but at the level of political economy: “political economy regards the proletarian, i.e. he who lives without capital and ground rent [but] from labor alone, and from one-sided, abstract labor at that, as nothing more than a worker,” and not

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98 Marx, when discussing the manifestation of estrangement in the act of production, refers to “the relationship of the worker to his own activity as something which is alien and does not belong to him,” which he construes as “the relationship of labor to the act of production within labor” (1975d, 327; emphasis in the original).
This is why Marx claims, “labor is external to the worker,” and not to Man: just as genuine human functions, such as “eating, drinking, procreating, etc.,” can become animal functions “when abstracted from the other aspects of human activity and turned into final and exclusive ends,” labor takes different meanings depending on whether it is conceptualized within estrangement or not (ibid., 326-27; emphasis altered).

As soon as Marx leaves the sphere of private property, of political economy, to discuss Man in his totality, labor becomes the activity in which Man realizes his essence; consequently, he conceptualizes alienating productive activity not as labor per se, but qualifies it with the adjectives estranged or alienated. Thus, Marx can equate labor with “life activity, productive life,” or refer to the alienation of labor’s product as the estrangement of the product of Man’s species-being (ibid., 328, 330). Or, he can criticize Hegel for adopting the standpoint of modern political economy and construing labor as the self-confirming essence of man: Hegel “sees only the positive and not the negative side of labor” (ibid., 386). Hegel is not alone as Marx himself mostly focuses on the negative aspects of labor in the Manuscripts; he elaborates its positive side in the Excerpts from James Mill’s Elements of Political Economy, where he asserts that when Man produces as a human being:

My labor would be the free expression and hence the enjoyment of life …Moreover, in my labor the specific character of my individuality would be affirmed because it would be my individual life. Labor would be authentic, active, property. (1975c, 278; emphases in the original)

99 That is, within the system of private property. After all, “political economy can be regarded as…a product of the real energy and movement of private property (it is the independent movement of private property become conscious for itself)” (ibid., 341; emphasis in the original).

100 Here, Marx also discusses the negative aspects of labor: “in the framework of private property it is the alienation of life since I work in order to live, in order to procure for myself the means of life. My life is not life…in the framework of private property my individuality has been alienated to the point where I loathe this activity, it is torture for me. It is in fact no more than the appearance of activity and for that reason it is only a forced labor imposed on me not through an inner necessity but through an external arbitrary need” (1975c, 278; emphases in the original).
To recapitulate, the presence or absence of a tension in the *Manuscripts* between productive activity and labor, or whether Marx construes labor as alienated and alienating productive activity and nothing more, depends on the way one reads the following sentence: “we have considered the act of estrangement of practical human activity, of labor” (1975d, 327). In my view, what labor means in that phrase depends on whether Marx conceives it within the system of private property, or as Man’s sensuous objectification after he has superseded this estrangement; it refers to “the act of estrangement” in the former, and to “practical human activity” in the latter. Consequently, I argue that Marx does not ascribe a negative meaning *per se* to “labor,” and deploys the adjectives alienated and estranged, or uses wage-labor, when he conceptualizes labor within private property, within alienation.

I want to call attention to another, albeit implicit, tension present in this text; a contradiction, it seems, of which even Marx himself was not necessarily conscious when he was writing the *Manuscripts*. This unrecognized tension is between the Feuerbachian sensuous materialism that Marx unquestioningly deploys and his tentative, unwitting first steps towards a new, unique and unprecedented materialism, which when fully developed will allow him to “move beyond the traditional opposition between philosophy’s two camps”—that of Hegelian idealism, and contemplative materialism (Balibar 1995, 15). As Marx equates all human activity with production, with labor, as he expands the economic, which now becomes social reality, or all that exists, he starts to shift the emphasis from sensuousness to materialism within Feuerbachian materialism. That is, actual, real objects are no longer to be taken as given, and considered material only if, and to the extent that, they are objects of sense perception; rather, they are to be construed as things that are produced. I hasten to add that I am not trying to argue that Marx starts to elaborate a new materialism in the *Manuscripts*; instead, Marx introduces certain concepts (labor, productive activity) and refers to—even though he does not
explicitly and extensively focus on—particular objects of analysis (social relations) that do not completely fit into—and in turn if theorized, or conceptualized differently, might start to unsettle—Feuerbachian sensuous materialism.

Still, Marx remains a disciple of Feuerbach in the Manuscripts, applauding him for founding "true materialism and real science"; he declares his adherence to contemplative materialism by asserting that sense perception, “in the dual form of sensuous consciousness and sensuous need,” must be the basis of all science (ibid., 355, 381; emphases in the original).\textsuperscript{101} His “break” from Feuerbach, which is precisely over how to construe materialism, is to come in the “Theses on Feuerbach.”

2.4 “Theses on Feuerbach”: Praxis as the Basis of Materialism

Sometime in March 1845, Marx, after co-authoring the Holy Family with Engels—a critique of the Young Hegelians in which they remain staunch disciples of Feuerbach—interrupts the composition of the Manuscripts and sketches the Theses on Feuerbach (Theses hereafter), “a series of aphorisms...formulas set down on paper to be remembered and provide constant inspiration” (Balibar 1995, 13).\textsuperscript{102} With the Theses, Marx brings the implicit tension of the Manuscripts—between his adherence to a passive sense perception of the material world and his bourgeoning emphasis on productive activity through which this objectivity is created—to the forefront; moreover, he moves beyond the traditional opposition between Hegelian idealism

\textsuperscript{101} Yet, Marx adds that the basic principle of “true materialism and real science” is “the social relation of ‘man to man’,” which once again signals this tension. Balibar contends that “the epistemological break,” Marx’s growing distance from the earlier theoretical humanism, is “contemporaneous with the emergence of the concept of ‘social relation’” (1995, 6). At the expense of repeating myself, this is not to argue that the introduction, or the presence of a concept within a discourse would simply, or necessarily, transform this discourse or would found a new discourse; nor does it mean that what this concept represents or means is always-already-given.

\textsuperscript{102} In a letter to Engels dated 24 April 1867 Marx writes, “I even came across The Holy Family again here...I was pleasantly surprised to find that we have no need to feel ashamed of the piece, although the Feuerbach cult now makes a most comical impression upon me” (Marx and Engels 1975, 42:360).
and Feuerbachian contemplative materialism, two predominant theoretical positions in German philosophy at the time. Abandoning the “phenomenological analysis” of alienation—in the particular instance of the Manuscripts with its naturalistic and humanistic vision, the estrangement of human labor in the form of wage labor which is to be superseded when Man reconciles with his labor and nature, and realizes his species-being—he starts to elaborate a unique, distinctively new materialism in the Theses (ibid.). Rather than following in the footsteps of the “old materialism” and simply observing “matter” empirically, sensuously, or contemplating the objective, material reality as it is given, Marx focuses on who brings “matter” into existence and how they do so. With this new emphasis on the subjective, active side of materialism, what labor signifies for Marx also changes: now construing labor as “practical, human-sensuous activity,” he renders it as (one of) the site(s)—in the Theses, it is rather ambiguous whether this is a or the site—in which the essence of human beings is determined (Marx 1975e, 422-23; emphasis in the original). That is, labor is no longer the productive activity through which the species-being of Man is sensuously manifested; nor does it realize the essence of the isolated, abstract, and

103 Cf. Balibar (1995); also see Althusser (1970).

104 Balibar contends that old materialisms have an idealist element; they impose and valorize an order in the world when they “substitute matter for mind as the organizing principle” (1995, 24). German idealism, on the other hand, is also “a philosophy of subjectivity as it refers the order of the world and of ‘representation’ back to the activity of a subject who creates or, as Kantian language has it, ‘constitutes’ them” (ibid.; emphasis in the original). That is, “just as traditional materialism conceals an idealist foundation (representation, contemplation) so modern idealism in reality conceals a materialist foundation in the function it attributes to the acting subject” (ibid., 25). What Marx on the other hand does is to dissociate representation and subjectivity and allow the category of practical activity—the constitution of the external world and the formation or transformation of the self—to emerge in its own right (ibid.).

105 Praxis, “practical, human-sensuous activity,” the concept first and foremost signifies Marx’s “epistemological break”—the change in Marx’s object of analysis and problematic—not only appears in his early works, in particular, in the Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right. Introduction, and the Manuscripts, but is a category that Feuerbach also deploys. The presence of a concept, this time of “praxis”, does not necessarily prove the continuity of Marx’s discourse, or his indebtedness to Feuerbach forever; rather, it signifies that concepts acquire their meanings within the discourse in which they are deployed, and thus, can signify different things in different narratives.
idealized human being. Rather, as Marx elaborates human essence as a condensation of social relations, labor becomes—one among other forms of—“practical activity” in which these relations, and these individuals are constantly formed and transformed.

### 2.4.1 Praxis: The Subjective, Active Side of Materialism

Marx distances himself from Feuerbach—thus, also from his own works to date—with a novel concept of human essence in the *Theses*. Criticizing Feuerbach for comprehending human essence “only as ‘genus’, as an internal, dumb generality,” which in turn attests to his abstraction “from the historical process” and presupposition of “an abstract—*isolated*—individual,” Marx, in the sixth thesis, asserts that this essence is “no abstraction inherent in each single individual,” but “the ensemble of the social relations” (ibid., 423; emphasis in the original). Thus, Marx no longer conceives human essence as that which precedes, and finds its expression in, individuals, nor as that common thing abstracted from their essential reality, but as their interpersonal relations at any given moment; that is, individuals mutually constitute “what they have in common, the ‘genus’…at each moment, in multiple forms” (Balibar 1995, 29-30). Failing to recognize this, Marx contends in the sixth and seventh theses, is the reason why Feuerbach does not see human essence as “a social product…[of] a particular form of society” (ibid.).

This emphasis on inter-individual relations—better yet, on the “transindividual” to use Balibar’s phrase—that are constituted by their continuous

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106 According to Balibar, Marx advances several definitions of human nature/essence throughout his works based on this definition of human essence, as the ensemble of social relations, each of which revolves “around the relation between *labor* and *consciousness*” (1995, 28; emphases in the original).

107 Balibar labels those who ascribe to the former philosophical position as “realists”, and the latter as “nominalists” (ibid., 29). In addition, Balibar argues, Marx distances himself from “the individualists” who understand essence “in-itself,” and from “the organicists” who emphasize the whole as determining the particular essence with this emphasis on social relations. Marx’s use of the term “ensemble”, with its French connotations, and not the German “whole” or “totality” signifies precisely this rejection of the organicist position for Balibar (ibid., 30).
and ever-changing interactions does not mean that all human beings are on an equal
footing; nor do they embody the same essence (ibid., 30). As opposed to Feuerbach,
who starts out “from the fact of religious self-alienation” and resolves “the religious
world into its secular basis” without explaining how this separation takes place,
Marx, in the fourth thesis, asserts that this detachment “can only be explained by the
cleavages and self-contradictions within this secular basis” (Marx 1975e, 422). That
is, the projection of “worldly” human essence into the heavenly realm of religion,
which is exactly how Feuerbach construes religious alienation, does not result from
illusions of consciousness or individual imagination, but from splits or divisions
reigning in society (Balibar 1995, 15). Yet, it is not enough for Marx to register these
“cleavages” and contradictions; what is required is to change them through
revolutionary practice (Marx 1975e, 422-23).

Marx, in the first thesis, proclaims “the chief defect of all hitherto existing
materialism (that of Feuerbach included) is that the thing, reality, sensuousness, is
conceived only in the form of the object or of contemplation, but not as sensuous
human activity, practice, not subjectively” (ibid., 421; emphases in the original).
Materialists up until then—including Marx himself—had only been interested in the
objective, sensuously perceptible, material world, without theorizing how this
objectivity comes into being, or how it can be changed through human activity.108
After all, they argue, human emancipation—alienation superseded in all its forms
and Man’s essence realized—would be achieved through contemplation, in thought,
by merely becoming conscious of Man’s self-mediated birth. But, counters Marx in
the Theses, it is no longer a matter of critical philosophers’ educating the masses, or
becoming—making the latter cognizant of the fact that critical philosophy is—the
consciousness of the revolutionary class, but to change the circumstances and the

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108 See footnote 96.
relations individuals find themselves in: he states in the second thesis, “man must prove the truth, i.e., the reality and power, the this-sidedness of his thinking in practice” (1975e, 422). Or as Marx contends in the third thesis, “circumstances” that human beings find themselves in can only be changed through self activity, through “revolutionary practice” (ibid.; emphasis in the original). He is all the more explicit in the eleventh thesis: “the philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it” (ibid., 423).

Despite all his references to “practice,” Marx, in the Theses, does not explicitly refer to labor or to productive activity, and praxis, defined as the material, objective, practical activity should not necessarily be equated with, or reduced to, either one; given the epigrammatic, aphoristic nature of the Theses, and the fact that Marx did not elaborate the relationship between these two categories at all, it would simply be a presumption to do so. Nevertheless, Marx, with Engels, would

109 With the second thesis, Marx also refutes his earlier assertion “just as philosophy finds its material weapons in the proletariat, so the proletariat finds its intellectual weapons in philosophy,” or that “the head of this emancipation is philosophy, its heart the proletariat” (1975b, 257; emphases in the original). Along these lines, he states “the educator must himself be educated” so that s/he will realize that “it is men who change circumstances” (ibid.).

110 What this revolutionary activity entails, or what makes it revolutionary, Marx does not detail. In the Theses Marx does not implement a program or “a plan for the reorganization of society,” Balibar argues, nor does he provide a utopian vision of the future derived from philosophical and sociological theories (1995, 21-22).

111 However, if I were to speculate by taking into account Marx’s conceptualization of human essence as an ensemble of social relations, and his specific emphasis on revolutionary activity (revolutionizing practice), it is a possibility to confine labor or production strictly to the realm of the economy, and construe praxis, productive activity as the more general term that is inclusive of the former. As such, it is possible to conceive labor as one form of practical activity that shapes and transforms individuals’ relationship with nature as well as their relations with one another—thus, human essence and nature at any point in time. At the other extreme, it is quite possible to equate praxis with labor (production): as such, all human activity becomes labor, that is, praxis. As a result, there would be no productive activity that can be reduced to labor, as every human act would simply labor. Consequently, the case can be made that Marx does not essentialize labor, or production, as the practice to which all other forms of activity are to be reduced, either because it represents a limited sphere of human action, or there is nothing other than labor.
explicitly carry out this reduction in the *German Ideology* by transforming praxis into “the historical and sociological concept of production” (Balibar 1995).

2.5 The *German Ideology*: Production as the Basis of Materialist Conception of History

It is with the *German Ideology* that Marx and his collaborator Engels settle “accounts with [their] former philosophical conscience,” as Marx later recalls in the introduction to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (Marx 1970, 22). They unequivocally leave behind the speculative philosophy of the Young Hegelians, as well as Feuerbachian sensuous, contemplative materialism, with this critique of post-Hegelian philosophy. In this highly polemical, unfinished and unpublished work—one that is “left to the gnawing criticism of the mice,” as Marx (ibid.) later puts it in the *Contribution*—they detail a materialist analysis of history that is centered upon the notion of production for the first time. History is no longer the different phases that the Absolute Idea passes through in its coming-into-being, nor is it Man’s self-mediated birth as species-being (his-story); it is rather the genesis and development of social groups as determined by their material production—by how individuals produce their means of existence. But, production, referring to all human activity that forms and transforms both nature and human beings, is not limited to the material world only in its analytical reach; on the contrary, Marx and Engels extend this notion to the world of ideas to explain how ideologies are produced (Balibar 1995). Thus, they place *productive activity*, both in its mental and manual form, at the center of their materialist conception of history.¹¹²

¹¹² My reading of the *German Ideology* borrows heavily from and builds upon Balibar (1995); however I deploy his framework—the division of labor as the guiding threat of the *German Ideology*, the importance of Stirner for the particular manner Marx and Engels conceptualize materialism, science and ideology, just to highlight two of the more salient points—to analyze and interpret how Marx and Engels construe labor. In this sense, this section is an extension of, and still differs from,
2.5.1 The Critique of Ideology

Although they see their fight against “these mental developments, these glorified and ineffective trivialities” of “local importance”—yet necessary, for “they take root and have to be combated”—Marx and Engels (1975, 5:38; emphasis in the original) devote an extensive part of the *German Ideology* to a minute analysis of various, then-contemporary German philosophers.\(^\text{114}\) Meticulously scrutinizing the works of Young Hegelians, in particular Max Stirner, and to a lesser extent Bruno Bauer, and the “true socialists,” in addition to Feuerbach, Marx and Engels criticize them from the new materialist perspective that they in part develop in and through this very critique.\(^\text{115}\) Marx and Engels’s fundamental objection is that the Young Hegelians subsume reality to philosophy, construing the real, material world as a product of, and dominated by, the world of ideas, by consciousness. That is, “the relations of men, all their doings, their chains and their limitations are products of their consciousness” for German ideologues who believe that “men have always formed wrong ideas about themselves, about what they are and what they ought to

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\(^{113}\) Balibar’s influential and imaginative rendition of Marx’s works, which nevertheless provides the context for my analysis.

\(^{114}\) I am consciously using productive activity rather than labor since Marx and Engels (1975 vol. 5) refer to the latter as the “negative form of self-activity” and calls for its abolition; they contend labor will be transformed into “self-activity” in communist society. Below I discuss in detail this negativity they ascribe to labor is a direct consequence of the central role they assign to another category in the *German Ideology*, the division of labor.

\(^{115}\) This reference to the local effect of their critique immediately differentiates the *German Ideology* from Marx’s early works, in which he argues the universal emancipation in different countries would be determined by the dominant form of alienation that is prevalent there. It also emphasizes their materialist outlook—universal freedom will be achieved when its material conditions are present, and when the proletariat transforms the material production. It also signals the determinism of the *German Ideology* as thought (the superstructure) has limited effect over matter (the base).

\(^{115}\) Balibar (1995) argues Max Stirner is the primary figure in the *German Ideology*; not only Marx and Engels devote a substantial section of the manuscript to criticize him, but the transformation of praxis into the concept of production is a direct result of the challenge that Stirner posited. I discuss the importance of Stirner in detail below. In addition to their critique of post-Hegelian philosophers, Marx and Engels (1975, 5:455-57) also criticize those who consider English and French socialist literatures not as the expression and the products of a real movement, but of pure thought, and proceed to elaborate “true socialism” within the philosophical confines of German ideology.
“be” and should be relieved from the weight of their fixed ideas; thus, all that is needed to free humanity from its chains and to overcome its limitations is to change their present consciousness (ibid., 23-30). But this would amount to nothing more than a different interpretation of the existing world; irrespective of different forms that this emancipatory consciousness might take, be it, for example “human, critical or egoistic consciousness,” it will not effect, let alone undermine, real relations of domination (ibid., 30).

This is precisely where Feuerbach fails as well: to the extent that he focuses on Man’s—in the abstract—sensuous contemplation of the objective world, ignoring its creation by men’s productive activities, he is still a German philosopher, remaining in the realm of ideology. Feuerbach does not “conceive the sensuous world as the total living sensuous activity of the individuals composing it”; he takes it as something given eternally, and not as “an historical product, the result of the activity of a whole succession of generations, each standing on the shoulders of the preceding one, developing its industry and its intercourse, modifying its social system according to the changed needs” (ibid., 39). Nor does he see real, historical men determined by the existing social conditions they find themselves in as well as by the changes they bring about to those conditions through their defining characteristic, “sensuous activity,” but arrives at Man, abstractly conceived as the “object of the senses” (ibid., 39-41). Thus Feuerbach, just like other German ideologues, does not

116 It is telling this quotation is usually taken to be referring to Marx and Engels’s scientific interpretation of reality as opposed to false consciousness of the Young Hegelians, which in turn presumably legitimizes the scientificity of Marxian theory. In such a reading, Marx’s interminable emphasis on “revolutionary practice” in the Theses is ignored; particularly his second thesis, “man must prove the truth, i.e., the reality and power, the this-sidedness of his thinking in practice” is disregarded (Marx 1975e, 422).

117 In this sense, Marx and Engels’s critique of Feuerbach in the German Ideology is a follow-up and an extension of the Theses.

118 In other words, “it has not occurred to any one of these philosophers to inquire into the connection of German philosophy with German reality, the relation of their criticism to their own material surroundings” (Marx and Engels 1975, 5:30).
deal with the present conditions of life, but can only offer a new and different interpretation, a change in consciousness to deliver mankind. This confirms that criticizing the existing material conditions is only of interest “for the practical materialist, i.e. the communist,” who wants to revolutionize the existing world, “change existing things found in existence” by transforming industry (the production process) and the social structure (intercourse) related to it (ibid., 38–41; emphases in the original).\footnote{Thus, in a sense, Marx and Engels follow up on and concretize the eleventh thesis.}

2.5.2 History is Material Production

Marx and Engels start their materialist analysis of history from “real, actual men,” observing the “life-process of definite individuals…not as they may appear in their own or other people’s imagination, but as they actually are”; with this emphasis on empirical observation of actually existing individuals, they leave the mystification, speculation of German philosophers behind (ibid., 35; emphasis in the original). They infer “the first premise of all human existence, and therefore of all history…[is] that men must be in a position to live in order to be able to ‘make history’” (ibid., 41).\footnote{Marx and Engels put it differently: “the first premise of all human history is, of course, the existence of living human individuals” (ibid., 31).} In order to sustain their physical existence, individuals have to produce their material life, the means to satisfy their needs—that is, “before everything else eating and drinking, housing, clothing and various other things” (ibid., 41–42).\footnote{Marx and Engels reiterates the necessity of production for human existence: “so much is this activity, this unceasing sensuous labor and creation, this production, the basis of the whole sensuous world as it now exists, that, were it interrupted only for a year, Feuerbach would not only find an enormous change in the natural world, but would very soon find that the whole world of men and his own perceptive faculty, nay his own existence, were missing” (ibid., 40).} By producing their means of subsistence, which is the “first historical act” according to Marx and Engels, men “themselves distinguish themselves from animals”, although it is possible to register this difference, just like the German
ideologues do, “by consciousness, by religion, or anything you like” (ibid.; my emphasis). Thus, material production becomes the *differentia specifica* of human beings, of *being* human. Just as human history becomes the history of production: “‘history of humanity’ must always be studied and treated in relation to the history of industry and exchange” (ibid., 43).

Yet, this is not a return to the abstract, ahistorical Man of German philosophy since “history is nothing but the succession of the separate generations, each of which uses the materials, the capital funds, the productive forces handed down to it by all preceding generations” (ibid., 50).122 These individuals, subjects of history, do not exist or produce in a vacuum. On the contrary, Marx and Engels hasten to stress, they “work under definite material limits, presuppositions and conditions independent of their will”; that is, the way they produce is determined by the nature of what they have to produce as well as the materials, the means of production and productive forces they find in existence, bequeathed to them by those all preceding generations (ibid., 31, 50). Their production is a “definite form of activity…a definite mode of life”: “what they are, therefore coincides with their production, both with what they produce and *how* they produce” (ibid., 31-32; emphases in the original).123

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122 According to Balibar, Marx leaves the realm of philosophy in the *Theses* by construing subject as practice, thus allowing “practical activity to emerge on its own right,” dissociating it from representation (1995, 23-27). Or rather attempts to leave, as his success is questionable: he installs “the materialism/idealism dilemma…at the heart of the theory of proletariat and its privileged historical role,” which brings philosophy back in by setting up “the permanent possibility of *representing the proletariat to itself as a subject*” in the idealist sense of the term” (ibid., emphasis in the original).

However, Marx and Engels (1975, 5:40) definitely returns back to philosophy, as Balibar finds “‘production’ as well as ‘praxis’” to be susceptible for presenting another name for human essence. And they are well aware of this possibility: “this sum of productive forces, capital funds and social forms of intercourse, which every individual and generation finds in existence as something given, is the real basis of what the philosophers have conceived as ‘substance’ and ‘essence of man’” (ibid., 54).

123 As such, rather than coming up with just another philosophical interpretation, only replacing one privileged category, be it the substance, the self-consciousness, the species, the unique, or Man, with another ahistorical and abstract concept, Marx and Engels historicize production, that is, delve
With this accent on what, more importantly on how, individuals produce, Marx and Engels focus on “definite social and political relations” these men enter into, and as a result of, the production process, which constitute a part of what they refer to as “intercourse” (ibid., 32-35). That is, their conception of history does not only rely on “expounding the real process of production—starting from the material production of life itself,” but also demands “the form of intercourse connected with this and created by this mode of production, i.e. civil society in its various stages as the basis of all history” to be comprehended (ibid., 50). History thus becomes the analysis of ever-changing interactions, interrelations, and interdependences of individuals and social groups. Marx and Engels examine the constitution and dissolution of social groups—becoming bigger and less natural in the course of history—and their relative positions with respect to each other, starting with “patriarchalism” and “slavery” (tribes, ancient communities), “feudalism” (estates, guilds, orders), and finally “classes” (bourgeoisie, and the “world-historically” existing, the universal class, the proletariat) (ibid., 32-35, 49; cf. Balibar 1995, 37). These social groups, defined as “so many different forms of ownership,” of property, in turn represent “the various stages of development in the division of labor”; the current phase in the division of labor, they state, “determines also the

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124 “Intercourse” rather refers to all relations that individuals enter into as individuals or as a member of a social group. C.J. Arthur, in a footnote to his edition of the *German Ideology*, argues intercourse covers a wide range of relations among individuals, social groups and entire nations, both “material and spiritual”—although “the intercourse of men with each other in the production process, is the basis of every other form of intercourse”; he adds, intercourse is the predecessor of another Marxian concept, “relations of production” (Marx and Engels, 1970, 42-43ft). According to Balibar, Marx and Engels brings forth the productive and communicative aspects of relations among individuals by deploying intercourse (1995, 47).
relations of individuals to one another with reference to the material, instrument, and product of labor” (Marx and Engels 1975, 5:32).

2.5.3 History as Various Stages in the Division of Labor

Accordingly, the division of labor becomes the “guiding thread” of Marx and Engels’s materialist analysis of history in the German Ideology; they focus on the genesis, development and dissolution of different social groups—both historically and logically, Balibar contends—where different stages in this division correspond to a certain mode of production and exchange, or more properly, to a certain intercourse (Balibar 1995, 36). The division of labor, the first form of which is simply to be found in the sexual act, develops “spontaneously or naturally” from differences in physical and mental abilities, differentiation of and increase in needs, both of which presuppose and result from an increase in population (Marx and Engels 1975, 5:32, 44). How far a society’s productive forces have developed is manifested “by the degree to which this division is carried” (ibid., 32).

On the other hand, Marx and Engels maintain that the division of labor necessarily means that “intellectual and material activity—enjoyment and labor, production and consumption—devolve on different individuals”; that is, it results in “the unequal distribution, both quantitative and qualitative, of labor and its products, hence property” (ibid., 45-46). Thus evolves the separation between those who are direct producers (from wife and children in the family, to slaves in tribes, ancient communities and ancient states, to “enserfed small peasantry,” serfs, and journeymen in feudalism, and finally, to the proletariat) and those who enjoy the fruits of others’

125 I choose to use social group, rather than a more familiar, Marxian term, class to emphasize their definitional difference. Social group refers to a form of ownership, or its lack thereof, which in turn signifies a particular stage in the division of labor, whereas class is defined in terms of the different positions one occupies in a “surplus-labor” economy.

126 In addition to these possible causes, the division of labor might simply develop accidentally (Marx and Engels, 1975, 5:44).
labor (the husband, chieftains and the members of the community and propertied citizens of the state in antiquity, landed nobility, clergy and guild masters in feudalism, and the bourgeoisie) (ibid., 33-35, 46). In addition, those who produce within a division of labor that has come into existence “naturally,” and not voluntarily, are restricted to “a particular, exclusive sphere of activity, which is forced upon him and from which he cannot escape. He is a hunter, a fisherman, a herdsman, or a critical critic, and must remain so if he does not want to lose his means of livelihood,” no matter what form this division might have taken (ibid., 47).

2.5.4 Division of Labor and Ideology

A corollary of individuals’ restriction to a limited realm of activity is that there exists “a division of material and mental labor” with which Marx and Engels explain how ideology—as opposed to true, scientific knowledge—is produced and how this consciousness can indeed can end up being freed from the material basis that it reflects. Starting from the materialist premise according to which people not only produce their material life but also their conceptions and ideas, Marx and Engels construe ideology, mental products of men—“the phantoms formed in the human brain”—as developing from, and being of necessity “sublimates of, their material life-process” (ibid., 36). Initially, the production of their consciousness as well as their mental creations—among others, “the language of politics, laws, morality, religion, metaphysics”—are “directly interwoven with the material activity and the material intercourse of men”; but, with the separation of mental and material labor, “consciousness can really flatter itself that it is something other than consciousness of

127 Marx and Engels register this opposition between individuals and social groups in another form, conceived in terms of interests. They argue that division of labor also implies that different individuals have conflicting interests; moreover, these personal interests are in contradiction with the common interest as well (ibid., 46).

128 With the separation of material and mental labor, the division of labor is fully developed (ibid., 47).
existing practice, that it really represents something without representing something real”, existing independently, emancipated from the material world (ibid., 45; emphasis in the original). Thus, a particular interest, or idea, belonging to a prior form of intercourse which has been already ousted and has become “independent of the individuals” not only can remain intact, but also might possess “a power in the illusory community (state, law)”; on the other hand, it is also possible that “consciousness can sometimes appear further advanced than the contemporary empirical relationships” (ibid., 83).

Marx and Engels do not merely follow the familiar base-superstructure framework in their analysis of ideology, simply tying consciousness to “real life-processes”—and this is not just to reiterate that consciousness can eventually become separated, and achieve a relative independence, from its material basis. More importantly, they deploy ideology to bring forth the question of the power of ideas and of abstraction—a real power as ideology seizes forces and circumstances—and consider this problem from a particular class perspective, “not in terms of ‘class consciousness’ (an expression which never appears), but by according existence to

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129 An example of this separation—of theoretical expression from material interests which it represents—Marx and Engels find in Kant: “The characteristic form which French liberalism, based on real class interests, assumed in Germany we find again in Kant. Neither he, nor the German middle class, whose whitewashing spokesman he was, noticed that these theoretical ideas of the bourgeoisie had as their basis material interests and a will that was conditioned and determined by the material relations of production…he made the materially motivated determinations of the will of the French bourgeois into pure self-determinations of ‘free will’, of the will in and for itself, of the human will, and so converted it into purely ideological conceptual determinations and moral postulates” (ibid., 195; emphases in the original).

130 Consequently, Marx and Engels argue that the communist consciousness, which is “the consciousness of the necessity of a fundamental revolution” embodied by the proletariat, can also “arise among the other classes too through the contemplation of the situation of this class” (ibid., 52). Here, they also move away from a materialist determinism in proletariat’s coming into being. It is not of great significance if a country’s industry is not fully developed for proletariat to exist; “the competition with industrially more advanced countries, brought about by the expansion of international intercourse,” that is competition with the English industry, brings into view the latent proletariat in Germany (ibid., 75).
classes on the dual plane of division of labor and consciousness, and therefore also making of the division of society into classes a condition or structure of thought” (Balibar 1995, 44; emphasis in the original). What this signifies is the existence of “ruling ideas,” dominant and oppressive ideologies: those who possess the means of material production also control the means of mental production, regulating “the production and distribution of the ideas of their age,” thus rendering “the class which is the ruling material force of society…at the same time its ruling intellectual force” (Marx and Engels 1975, 5:59; emphases in the original). Consequently, “the ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas,” which are “nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relationships, the dominant material relationships grasped as ideas” (ibid.). As such, Marx and Engels thoroughly link the realm of ideas to material production, criticize the young Hegelians in particular, and ideologues in general, for being nothing more than mouthpieces of the ruling class, for providing the ideological conditions of existence for these oppressive and dominant social relations; in addition, they establish—rather, announce—the accuracy of their materialist framework, which, reflecting the bourgeoning

\[ \text{131} \] Nevertheless, it is important to note once again that Marx and Engels construe class in terms of division of labor, which they define as different forms of private property, and not advance a definition based on surplus-labor.

\[ \text{132} \] This is not to say that the ruled do not have their own ideas, or consciousness; it rather states, “the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to” the dominant ideology (ibid., 59). Nor does it mean that the ruling class is a unified whole, each member of which is actively participating in the production of this ideology or sharing the same interests; there is a division of labor—mental and material labor is separated—within the ruling class “so that inside this class one part appears as the thinkers of the class (its active, conceptive ideologists, who make the perfecting of the illusion of the class about itself their chief source of livelihood), while the others’ attitude to these ideas and illusions is more passive and receptive, because they are in reality the active members of this class and have less time to make up illusions and ideas about themselves” (ibid.). Marx and Engels add there even might develop an opposition and hostility between these two groups—those who perform the material labor and those who are mental laborers—within the ruling class as a result of this division of labor, without ever endangering its dominance or its rule (ibid.).
productive forces, not only enables this critique but also points in the direction of and ultimately guarantees the success of the proletarian revolution.

This is not to say Marx and Engels take their account to be enough or even effective in abolishing these oppressive relations. That is, they do not ascribe an absolute autonomy to consciousness, despite acknowledging the possibility of ideology’s (consciousness’) separation from the material basis; on the contrary, they assert ideologies, which completely disregard actual conditions, thus invert the reality, as well as ideas in general, are nevertheless based on “the historical life-process” (ibid., 36). In addition, consciousness in general, and the dominant ideology in particular, can only be altered when people change the production process and the intercourse related with it (ibid.). This implies the struggle against and liberation from the rule of a class, as well as its ideology, can only be achieved in the real world and by real means: they insist “liberation’ is an historical and not a mental act, and it is brought about by historical conditions, the development of industry, commerce, agriculture, the conditions of intercourse,” and not simply by contemplation, or in thought (ibid.). Thus, Marx and Engels closely link the conditions of existence of this struggle against the ruling class with the material base, with the production process: “in the development of productive forces there comes a stage when productive forces and the means of intercourse” conflict with each other

\[133\] Even this inversion itself, Marx and Engels link to the material basis: “If in all ideology men and their circumstances appear upside-down as in a camera obscura, this phenomenon arises just as much from their historical life-process as the inversion of objects on the retina does from their physical life-process” (ibid., 36).

\[134\] Marx and Engels register ideology’s dependence on “the material basis” differently, in terms of its contradiction with the existing relations: “even if this theory, theology, philosophy, ethics, etc. comes into contradiction with the existing relations, this can only occur because existing social relations have come into contradiction with existing forces of production” (ibid., 45).

\[135\] Marx and Engels put it differently: “slavery cannot be abolished without the steam-engine and the mule and spinning-jenny, serfdom cannot be abolished without improved agriculture, and that, in general, people cannot be liberated as long as they are unable to obtain food and drink, housing and clothing in adequate quality and quantity” (ibid., 38).
This contradiction arises when what initially appeared as conditions of production eventually hinder the further development of productive forces: “an earlier form of intercourse, which has become a fetter, is replaced by a new one corresponding to the more developed productive forces and, hence, to the advanced mode of the self-activity of individuals—a form which in its turn becomes a fetter and is then replaced by another” (ibid., 82). However, emancipation does not come mechanically, merely a result of changes in the material basis, but needs a historical subject; with the development of contradictions, Marx and Engels argue, a class, which bears all the burdens of society without enjoying its advantages, is called forth and comes forward (ibid., 52). Thus, the success of this final uprising depends on the presence of the revolution’s material conditions, namely, the development of the “existing productive forces” to such an extent that “individuals have acquired the capacity to enjoy this all sided production of the whole earth (the creations of man),” and on the existence of a “revolutionary mass,” the proletariat, which revolts against “the very production of life till then, the total activity on which it is based” (ibid., 49, 54).

2.5.5 Labor as the Negative Form of Self-Activity

I have referred in passing to Marx and Engels's contention that the division of labor necessarily means intellectual and material labor would devolve on different individuals/groups and leads to the unequal distribution of its products. They derive private property, which initially evolved out of “the necessity of accumulation,” from the division of labor, which in turn “implies from the outset the division of the conditions of labor, of tools and materials, and thus the fragmentation of accumulated capital among different owners, and thus, also, the fragmentation

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136 In different words, “all collisions in history have their origin, according to our view, in the contradiction between the productive forces and the form of intercourse” (ibid., 74).
between capital and labor, and the different forms of property itself” (ibid., 85-86; emphasis in the original). What this signifies is that productive forces are separated from and appear alongside those who actually possess them, becoming others’ private property; Marx and Engels conclude that individuals from whom these forces are wrested are thus robbed of all real life-content (ibid.). However, there is still a link—and it is the only one under these circumstances—that connects these individuals “with the productive forces and with their own existence”: labor (ibid.). Despite being “the condition of their existence,” labor nevertheless “has lost all semblance of self-activity” and only refers to and represents a particular sphere of activity under this regime of division of labor; it is “now the only possible but….negative form of self-activity” (ibid., 87). Consequently, labor appears as something extraneous and forced upon individuals; still remaining separated from each other, thus under the rule of the division of labor, they cannot escape from or have any control over it—nor would they want to escape, as their individual existence merely depends on their employment as laborers (ibid., 79). No conceivable social organization that does not alter the current circumstances would provide such control either; as a result, “the proletarians, if they are to assert themselves as individuals, have to abolish the hitherto prevailing condition of their existence (which has, moreover, been that of all society up to the present), namely, labor” (ibid., 80).

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137 This is another example of Marx’s break from Feuerbach, the Young Hegelians as well as his own early works; private property is no longer a result of alienation as Marx has argued in the Manuscripts.

138 Another consequence of being limited to a particular sphere of activity, Marx and Engels register as “estrangement, to use a to use a term which will be comprehensible to the philosophers”: “as long, therefore, as activity is not voluntarily, but naturally, divided, man’s own deed becomes an alien power opposed to him” (ibid., 47). They add “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” (ibid., 47-48). Nevertheless, what alienation—for the lack of a better term or the sign of Marx and Engels’s desire to remain “comprehensible to the philosophers”—signifies is different from the meaning it had in Marx’s early works as they construe it in accordance with their materialist outlook. Cf. Althusser (1970), and Althusser and Balibar (1973).
All previous revolutions are marked by their failure to abolish labor: “the mode of activity always remained unchanged and it was only a question of a different distribution of this activity, a new distribution of labor to other persons” (ibid., 52). All that individuals achieved as a result of these different and ever-expanding distributions has been the appropriation of “a crude instrument of production,” transformed into their private property; consequently, their self-activity, bound to this crude instrument and to “a limited intercourse” has remained “subordinate to the division of labor” and has not developed fully, in its totality (ibid., 80).139 The latest example has been the “fugitive serfs” who sought after and arrived at free labor, the chance and ability to perform this “negative form of self-activity,” without effecting their restriction to a particular sphere; thus, Marx and Engels state, “it is not a matter of freeing labor but of abolishing it” (ibid., 205).140 So the communist revolution is to be “directed against the preceding mode of activity [and] does away with labor” (ibid., 52; emphasis in the original).

The end of labor, for Marx and Engels, entails the appropriation of “the existing totality of productive forces” (ibid., 87). The only class that can achieve such a complete appropriation is the one that cannot claim ownership of even a single instrument of production, the proletariat, “which, ousted from the society, is forced into the most decided antagonism to all other classes” due to this lack of property (ibid., 52).141 As such, the proletarians are not constrained by a crude means of

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139 This “one-sidedness” of their self-activity “only becomes evident when the contradiction [between productive forces and the form of intercourse] enters on the scene”; before then, self-activity, better yet labor, despite being subsumed to and determined by the division of labor, appears to correspond to the conditions of their production, and to their reality (Marx and Engels 1975, 5:82).

140 Free labor, which for Marx and Engels is “the free competition of workers among themselves”, has simply served as the basis of modern society, as the foundation upon which the bourgeoisie rule is erected (ibid., 205).

141 I am tempted to add, those who do not own anything “other than labor-power”, although this would simply be introducing a foreign element to Marx and Engels’s analysis in the German Ideology, projecting a concept much later developed and in part determined a uniquely Marxian discourse. See Althusser (1970), and Althusser and Balibar (1973) for a critique of this projection.
production, nor restricted to a limited realm of self-activity—in fact, they are “completely shut-off from all self-activity”; therein lies the possibility, nay the necessity if they were to “merely safeguard their existence,” of their appropriation of productive forces in their totality (ibid., 87).

With this appropriation, individuals cast off all their natural limitations and develop their personal capacities in full, which in turn correspond to the existing material instruments of production. That is, they become complete individuals who no longer have “one exclusive sphere of activity but each can become accomplished in any branch he wishes…thus mak[ing] it possible for me to do one thing today and another tomorrow, to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticize after dinner, just as I have in mind, without ever becoming hunter, fisherman, herdsman or critic” (ibid., 47, 87-88). Consequently, individuals

142 In the German Ideology, Marx and Engels construe the proletariat not so much as a particular class, but as a “non-class, the formation of which immediately precedes the dissolution of all classes” (Balibar 1995, 54; emphasis in the original). Classes come into existence as separate individuals, with particular and common interests, carry on a common battle against another class; these particular interests result from and is determined by the division of labor—private property or labor, as Marx and Engels equate these three (Marx and Engels 1975, 5:77). As a side note, this of course is not to say that the class does not achieve an existence independent from individuals who “find their conditions of existence predetermined, and have their position in life and hence their personal development assigned to them by their class, becoming subsumed under it” (ibid.). Proletariat, on the other hand, has no particular class interest to assert against the ruling class since it is the class without any property; it is “a mass situated virtually beyond the condition of class, the particularity of that mass being denied in its very conditions of existence” (Balibar 1995, 51; emphasis in the original). Thus, the proletariat represents “universal” interests, and as such becomes the universal class, better yet, “the dissolution of all classes” including itself; it is the end of the class-divided and class-ruled society; hence, Marx and Engels’s emphasis on (complete) individuals as the subjects of post-revolutionary society.

143 Here, Marx and Engels (1975, 5:51, 88) unequivocally distance themselves from the Young Hegelians in general, and Feuerbach in particular. German philosophers, starting from these complete individuals who are no longer subject to the division of labor, thus who become the subjects of and shaped by the communist revolution, conceive them as the ideal Man. Thus, these ideologues construe the whole historic process in which different generations of individuals, determined by and in turn determined the production process, thereby changing who they are, “in speculative-idealistic, i.e., fantastic terms as ‘self-generation of the species’ (society as the subject), and thereby the consecutive series of interrelated individuals connected with each other can be conceived as a single individual, which accomplishes the mystery of generating itself” (ibid., 51). In addition, Marx and
transform labor into and achieve “a complete and no longer restricted self-activity” (ibid., 87). However, this freedom, not only from a particular form of labor, but even from a specific form of self-activity, is only possible with the establishment of a genuine community, under communism: “only within community has each individual the means of cultivating his gifts in all directions; hence personal freedom becomes possible only within the community” (ibid., 78).

With the appropriation of productive forces in their totality, the hitherto existing separation between self-activity and production of means of subsistence also ends: “only at this stage does self-activity coincide with material life” (ibid., 87-88). That is, Marx and Engels effectively remove the separation between free, desirable and enjoyable action in which individuals realize and transform themselves (praxis), perceived as the “right” of the privileged, and material production necessary to sustain human existence (poiēsis), left to the ruled; now, all work, being a “material transformation,” realized objectively, “in exteriority”, is at the same time “a transformation of the self” (Balibar 1995, 40-41; emphasis in the original). Does this mean Marx and Engels at last identify labor with self-activity, deploying both categories interchangeably when referring to individuals’ practices once they appropriate the totality of the productive forces?

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Engels account for the “alienation literature” with, and criticize it for, this ideological inversion: “the whole process was thus conceived as a process of the self-estrangement of ‘man’, and this was essentially due to the fact that the average individual of the later stage was always foisted on to the earlier stage, and the consciousness of a later age on to the individuals of an earlier. Through this inversion, which from the first disregards the actual conditions, it was possible to transform the whole of history into an evolutionary process of consciousness” (ibid., 88-89).

144 This separation is a result of the delegation of these practices to different persons, thus a consequence of the division of labor. It also leads to the perception that material production is a subordinate form of self-activity; but this “imagined” subordination rather comes into existence “on account the narrowness of the individuals themselves” (ibid., 87-88).

145 On the dissociation of pleasure and work up until the proletarian revolution, see Marx and Engels (ibid., 417-18).
2.5.6 Liberation as the Abolition of Labor—Or is it to Abolish the Division of Labor?

As numerous quotations above attest, Marx and Engels construe labor as “the negative form of self-activity” in the German Ideology, explicitly and repeatedly calling for its abolition—I would add, more clearly and consistently than Marx ever does in the Manuscripts, if one were to argue that he defines labor only as “active alienation, the alienation of activity and the activity of alienation” there (1975d, 326). It would seem difficult to maintain an argument similar to the one I advance regarding Marx’s treatment of labor in the Manuscripts: that this negativity they ascribe to labor depends on the level of their discourse, determined by the object of their analysis, bourgeois society, and would change—they would construe it positively, equating it with self-activity—at a different discursive level, with a different analytical object, and/or with the coming of a communist society. Not only do they not finish their lone reference that can exemplify such an argument, in which they call labor as “the modern form of activity under the rule of…” but they go even further and cross it out (ibid., 52).

C. J. Arthur, in his editorial introduction to an abridged edition of the German Ideology, states “if one was to single out the most fundamental idea in the German Ideology, which is discovered in the 1844 Manuscripts and is assumed by Capital, it would be that man produces himself through labor” (Arthur 1970, 21; emphasis in the original). He later rescinds this position arguing that Marx, in his aforementioned works rather construes labor as an alienating activity, which would become “productive activity” with the supersession of this alienation (1986).

Only once, in their critique of “true socialists”, do Marx and Engels (1975, 5:225) refer to labor as “free activity,” which is for the communists the creative manifestation of life arising from the free development of all abilities of individuals. When one of these “true socialists”, Rudolph Matthäi, argues labor as a free, enjoyable activity is the basis of the organization of labor, Marx and Engels criticize him for failing to see that “this state of affairs has not yet been reached” as his statement “labor should and must become a free activity ‘which is enjoyable’” attests (ibid., 483; emphasis in the original). Nevertheless, they acknowledge the possibility of “labor as an enjoyable activity”, which could only be achieved by the organization of labor, by proletarians’ collective action (ibid.).

If I were to speculate how Marx and Engels would have finished that sentence, “the communist revolution is directed against the preceding mode of activity, does away with labor, the modern form of activity under the rule of…” it would be the bourgeois, the division of labor, or private property, deployed altogether or interchangeably.
Nevertheless, I argue that they define labor in relation to the “guiding thread” of the *German Ideology*. What Marx and Engels strive for—and achieve, when they refer to labor as “the negative form of self-activity”—is to emphasize that individuals are restricted to a particular form of activity, to limited self-activity, which in turn is simply a corollary and consequence of the division of labor. For that reason, despite calling for the end of labor on different occasions, they time and again reiterate the necessity of the abolition of the division of labor (cf. ibid., 45, 47, 86, 90). This is all the more clear in the way they posit how individuals can attain complete self-activity, thus in fact do away with labor: appropriate the productive forces in their totality, which relieves them from the limited activity they are restricted to and in effect abolishes the division of labor. This appropriation abolishes private property, too, as Marx and Engels see “different forms of ownership” of property as “the various stages of development in the division of labor” (ibid., 32). Thus they contend, “in the appropriation by the proletarians, a mass of instruments of production must be made subject to each individual, and property to all”; “with the appropriation of the total productive forces by the united individuals, private property comes to an end” (ibid., 88). Accordingly, I maintain what Marx and Engels call for is not the abolition of labor *per se*, but first and foremost, the abolition of the division of labor. Its abolition is the *only* way to achieve self-activity, and labor is abolished *if and only if* the division of labor, and by implication, private property comes to an end.

In addition, I think it can be claimed, albeit speculatively, that Marx and Engels’s new materialist outlook would prohibit them from defining labor as “the negative form of self-activity” *tout court*. As materialists they do not, “like the idealistic view of history, in every period look for a category, but [remain] constantly on the real *ground* of history,” explaining the formation of concepts, categories and ideas from material practices (ibid., 53; emphasis in the original). This statement indicates that their own conception of labor is shaped by the prevalent laboring
mode at that stage of production, which as they unequivocally show has been the restriction of individuals, thus of their labor, to a particular realm of activity, merely a result of the division of labor. With its abolition, what is at the same time the appropriation of the totality of the productive forces, a new era of production, a different form of material practices begins, which in turn might effect the way Marx and Engels construe labor.

2.5.7 The German Ideology: An Answer to Stirner

This determining primacy Marx and Engels ascribe to productive activity is at the same time an answer to the challenge posed by Stirner, who rejects all universal concepts as mere abstractions, as fictions “substituting itself for real individuals”, deployed to dominate their multiplicity and uniqueness, the only natural reality (Balibar 1995, 34-36). Stirner thus directly confronts Marx, as his denouncing of all universalities defies the universal subject, the proletariat, and its historic role. By replacing the rather ambiguous notion of praxis with “the historical and sociological concept of production,” Marx and Engels provide a twofold answer to Stirner’s critique (ibid., 35). Individuals produce all that exists through their practical activities: with this “ontology of production,” Marx and Engels render all ideas to be mere products of individuals’ personal, or collective, mental labor (ibid.). Also, this ontology provides—better yet, itself is—the criterion with which they can assess

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149 At least partially, I would add. Marx and Engels’s negative take on labor on the other hand is partly determined by the socialist discourses of their day. A German communist magazine they quote exemplifies this: “what is today called labor is only a miserably small part of the vast, mighty process of production; for religion and morality honor with the name of labor only the kind of production that is repulsive and dangerous, and in addition they venture to embellish such labor with all kinds of maxims—as it were words of blessing (or witchcraft)—‘labor in the sweat of thy brow’ as a test imposed by God; ‘labor sweetens life’ for encouragement, etc. The morality of the world in which we live takes very good care not to apply the term work to the pleasing and free aspects of human intercourse. These aspects are reviled by morality, although they too constitute production. Morality eagerly reviles them as vanity, vain pleasure, sensuality. Communism has exposed this hypocritical preaching, this miserable morality” (ibid., 216; emphases in the original).

150 In this section, I heavily draw from Balibar (1995).
whether a universal category, a statement, or a theory, despite being an abstraction, is a real knowledge or simply the inversion of reality, that is, ideology (ibid.). Thus ensuring the universal and historical role of the proletariat—because the material conditions dictate it—and in the process, the “real knowledge” status of their theory, Marx and Engels proceed with their newly developed materialist outlook, which would provide the theoretical framework for their political writings in the ensuing period of revolutionary upheavals in Europe.

2.6 Political Writings of 1847-1850: (Wage-)Labor as a Commodity

Subsequent to their collaboration on *The German Ideology*, a manuscript that was never finished, Marx and Engels intervene in the European (especially the German) political arena that was overflowing with revolutionary fervor, energetically partaking in communist and proletarian movements such as the German Workers Association in Brussels, Cologne Workers Society, and the Communist League (Fernbach 1974a). Not surprisingly, they devote a substantial part of their writings of this period, which for the most part they compose separately, to daily political agitation and propaganda in newspaper columns. In their journalistic work, articles appearing mostly in the *Deutsche–Brüsseler-Zeitung* and the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* they edited, Marx and Engels try to shape revolutionary movements in accordance with their new materialist outlook and direct them towards communism.¹⁵¹ Three publications from this period—*The Poverty of Philosophy* (1847), *Wage-Labor and Capital*, based on lectures delivered in 1847 and partly published in 1849, and the *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (1848)—despite being immediate interventions into proletarian and/or revolutionary politics, are at

¹⁵¹ Accordingly, Marx and Engels, in the *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, advocate cooperation with the non-proletarian movements, even with the bourgeoisie “whenever [they] act in a revolutionary way,” which would realize the inevitable and necessary steps in the unfolding of history (Marx 1974, 97-98). Their journalistic work can be read in this light.
the same time expositions and further refinements of their materialist theoretical framework.  

A significant difference to note in these publications is the status Marx confers on the division of labor, which no longer has the primary explanatory role—along with private property—that it had in the *German Ideology*. No longer the “guiding thread” of his analysis, Marx simply defines the division of labor as just another relation of production; one that is like—and no different from—any other social relation, for example, money (Marx 1975f, 145). This demotion is in part due to the way Proudhon deploys this category to deduce exchange value; Marx criticizes him, in a manner not very different from his previous critiques of German ideologues, for presupposing the division of labor, for taking it as an abstract and universal category that is already given and known (ibid., 111-12). In contrast, Marx emphasizes how the division of labor changes in different periods, acquiring a specific and distinct character as a result of numerous influences peculiar to that

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152 The *Poverty of Philosophy* is a polemic against Joseph Proudhon, who was becoming a leading figure among socialists and communists, and his *The Philosophy of Misery*. The *Manifesto of the Communist Party* is a statement of the principles of the hitherto secret and clandestine organization, the Communist League, which mandated Marx and Engels to compose it. *Wage-Labor and Capital* is part of the 1847 lectures Marx gave to the German Workers’ Society in Brussels, which were later published in the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* in 1849. Marx’s preparatory notes for the remainder lectures are published under the editorial title, “Wages,” in the 6th volume of the *Collected Works* (Marx and Engels 1975, 6:415-37).

153 The editors to the 6th volume of Marx and Engels’s *Collected Works* brand *The Philosophy of Poverty* as “Marx’s public debut as an economist” in their introduction (ibid., xvii-xviii).

154 Ali Rattansi, on the other hand, argues that Marx continues to conflate class and division of labor, proclaiming that the latter retaining its privileged status (1982). He concedes *The Poverty of Philosophy* “contains no clear argument about the abolition of labor,” finds however “the need for such transcendence [to be] implicit throughout the book” (ibid., 96).

155 According to Marx (1975f, 111-12), Proudhon starts from isolated individuals who have various needs, but limited ability to produce the objects required to satisfy those, which in turn necessitates the division of labor and brings forth exchange, thus, exchange-value. Marx (ibid., 119) on the other hand argues, “needs arise directly from production or from a state of affairs based on production…the need for lawyers suppose a given civil law which is but the expression of a certain development of property, that is to say, of production.”
society in question (ibid., 179). The primary determinant in this division is however the means of production, instruments that are available to the laborer: “labor is organized, is divided differently according to the instruments it disposes over. The hand-mill presupposes a different division of labor from the steam-mill” (ibid., 183).

Marx’s emphasis on the means of production in turn signifies what replaces the division of labor as the key explanatory category; better yet, it denotes the concept moving to center stage in his materialist framework since it is already present in *The German Ideology*, forces of production. “In acquiring new productive forces men change their mode of production; and in changing their mode of production, in changing the way of earning their living, they change all their social relations. The hand-mill gives you society with the feudal lord; the steam-mill society with the industrial capitalist” (ibid., 165). That is, what society—“the social relations” constituted by “the relations of production in their totality…at a definite stage of historical development, a society with peculiar, distinctive characteristics”—is determined by are “the material means of production,” the productive forces (Marx 1976, 28-29; emphases in the original). Modes of exchange, manners and conditions under which producers “exchange their activities and share in the total act of production,” simply put, their social relations, depend on the form of productive forces; “change the latter, the former will change in consequence” (Marx 1975f, 143; cf. Marx 1976, 28-29). Thus, it would seem that Marx reduces his materialist analysis to a mere empirical observation of production as determined and represented by instruments corresponding to the productive forces available at a point in time, and derives social relations from these.\(^{156}\)

\(^{156}\) Marx once again exemplifies the primacy of the means of production when discussing the reasons why different “ideas, categories, and principles” are manifested in different epochs, such as the principle of authority in the 11\(^{th}\) century, and the principle of individualism in the 18\(^{th}\) century (ibid., 170). He argues “we are necessarily forced to examine minutely how men were like in the 11\(^{th}\) century, what they were like in the 18\(^{th}\) century, what were their needs, their productive forces, their
Nevertheless, his actual historical analysis in these political writings focuses not so much on the production process itself, other than the occasional reference to the primacy of the productive forces, but on relations occurring at the level of exchange. This might not be so unexpected, or is hardly surprising, as Marx, now with Engels, recounts in the Manifesto the rise of the bourgeoisie “as a long course of development, of a series of revolutions in the modes of production and of exchange” (1974, 69; emphasis added).

Their account of “revolutions” that have taken place in production since feudalism also exemplifies this emphasis on exchange. These transformations in production, starting from a feudal guild system, evolving to manufacturing and eventually ending with modern industry based on steam-power and machinery, result from “the growing wants of the new markets” opened with “the discovery of America, the rounding of the Cape” and incessantly grew with colonization and maritime trade, with access to “the East Indian and Chinese markets” (ibid., 68-69).

This is of great significance as it unequivocally undermines any “mechanistic” conception of materialism—at times despite Marx himself in these political writings, I hasten to add—which reduces history to a mere succession of productive forces, or simply derives society from relations of production. Rather, not only relations, but also means and forces, of production are transformed as a result of changes at the level of exchange, created anew with the expansion of available markets for exploitation, ending in the establishment of the world-market.

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157 Engels (1974, 65), in his Preface to the English Edition of 1888 of the Manifesto reiterates this emphasis on exchange: the fundamental premise of the Manifesto is “that in every historical epoch, the prevailing mode of economic production and exchange, and the social organization of necessarily following from it, form the basis upon which it is built up, and from which alone can be explained, the political and intellectual history of that epoch.”

158 This is indeed precisely how Marx (1975f, 185) summarizes the rise of manufacturing industry in The Poverty of Property; in which he only adds another historical condition, “the creation of a large number of persons being deprived of their sources of income” as a result of “the transformation of the fields into pastures and to the progress in agriculture which necessitated fewer hands for the tillage of the soil.”
The rise of manufacturing also leads to a change in the division of labor: whereas under feudalism it ensures production would only take place in a guild that is specifically designated for this purpose, but within which any further division is non-existent, now, with the concentration of instruments and workers under one roof, it becomes a “division of labor in each single workshop” (ibid., 69; cf. Marx, 1975f, 178-90). Thus, Marx, both separately and with Engels, begins to differentiate between a division of labor in society and division of labor in the workshop (cf. Rattansi 1982). This distinction is noteworthy because while the former leads to specialization and “craft-idiocy,” that is, ending with artisans who might become the proprietors of their own labor, thus still clinging to and reproducing the system of private property, the latter, upon which modern industry is built, carries with it what Marx considered to be a revolutionary kernel as it creates proletarians with no specific quality or property, but a latent need and potential to abolish the present state of things (Marx 1975f, 190).

However, this intensive division of labor, this specialization as “the adaptation of a special worker to a very simple task,” along with the extensive use of machinery, affects individuals precisely in their relations to their productive activity: “the work of the proletarians has lost all individual character, and consequently, all charm for the workman” (Marx and Engels 1974, 74). The worker “becomes transformed into a simple and monotonous force of production, with neither physical nor mental

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159 Marx (ibid., 186) reiterates this development in *The Poverty of Philosophy*: “the accumulation and concentration of instruments and workers preceded the development of the division of labor inside the workshop. Manufacture consisted much more in the bringing together of many workers and many crafts in one place, in one room under the command of one capital, than in the analysis of labor and the adaptation of a special worker to a very simple task…But once the men and the instruments had been brought together, the division of labor, such as it had existed in the form of the guilds, was reproduced, necessarily reflected inside the workshop.”

160 Marx (1976, 40-41; emphases in the original) talks of another positive aspect of division of labor: “the productive forces of labor is increased above all by a greater division of labor and by a more general introduction and constant improvement of machinery” which in turn renders worker’s labor more fruitful.
elasticity”; simply put, “labor becomes more unsatisfactory, more repulsive” (Marx 1976, 44-45; emphasis in the original). As such, Marx reverts back to a theme of his earlier works, considering labor, in its qualitative aspects, as a burden to be endured in its current form. On the other hand, this subordination to—becoming an appendage of—the machine, and “the extreme division of labor” in turn reduces worker’s productive activity to simple labor, thus allowing “the mere quantity of labor [to function] as a measure of value regardless of quality” (Marx 1975f, 127; cf. 1974, 74).

With this reference to value measured in labor time, Marx publicly becomes a proponent of the labor theory of value, which would be a part of his analyses for the rest of his life. Later, criticizing the way classical political economy construes this theory, he would elaborate a different formulation leading to his “discovery,” which in turn signifies one of his unique contribution to political economy, embodied in and represented by the concept of surplus-value. Nevertheless, in these political writings, Marx for the most part agrees with classical political economy, particularly with Ricardo, who “clearly and precisely” demonstrates “the scientific expression of the economic relations of present-day society,” and who shows how value is constituted by “the real movement of bourgeois production” (Marx 1975f, 120-23, 138). In Ricardo’s “scientific exposition,” what the labor theory of value reveals for Marx is “inevitably the formula of the present enslavement of the worker” who has

161 The exceptions to the “law of value,” the qualifications that Marx registers to the labor theory of value indicate that he is indeed a Ricardian at this point in time. For example, he agrees with Ricardo that “the value of money is not determined by the labor time its substance embodies, but by the law of supply and demand only” (Marx 1975f, 150; emphasis in the original). In another instance, he argues “the price of the product obtained by the greatest amount of labor… regulates the price of all other commodities of the same kind” (ibid., 197). He even finds Ricardo’s analysis of rent to be accurate, but criticizes him for eternalizing this social relationship (ibid., 202-5). However, as I discuss below, he argues that the labor theory of value would hold only accidentally, when supply and demand coincides, a point he has already made in the Excerpts from James Mill’s Elements of Political Economy (1975c). In contrast, oscillations of a commodity’s price, as a result of discrepancies between supply and demand, Marx considers to be the rule.
to sell his/her labor in order to survive, to keep alive (ibid., 125). That is, this theory simply registers the existence and the conditions of “the proletariat, the modern working class...a class of laborers, who live only so long as they find work” (Marx and Engels 1974, 74). But, there is an essential condition placed on workers; they can “find work only so long as their labor increases capital” (ibid., my emphasis). Thus, Marx, and Engels, advance a new definition of labor, one that is quite different, not only from those conceptualizations in his (and their) previous works, but also from the one construed in relation to the division of labor and charged with negative meanings—to wit, monotonous, unsatisfactory and repulsive—in these very writings: “labor [is] the productive activity of the laborer, the creative force by which the worker not only replaces what he consumes, but also gives the accumulated labor a greater value than it previously possessed” (Marx 1976, 31; emphasis in the original). They formulate this definition differently, “living labor serves accumulated labor as the means of preserving and multiplying its exchange value”, “it is this noble reproductive power that the laborer surrenders to the capitalist in exchange for means of subsistence received” (ibid., 30-31; my emphasis).

The formation and augmentation of capital, that is, the preservation of and increase in its exchange value, in turn are “the essential conditions for the existence and the sway of the bourgeois class” (Marx and Engels 1974, 79). Thus, Marx and Engels conceive the relationship between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie in terms

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162 Marx reiterates in *Wage-Labor and Capital* labor, “this life-activity [the worker] 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” (1976, 19).

163 In addition, Marx construes labor as worker’s “life-activity,” pure and simple; he does not refer to it as “the alienation of activity, activity of alienation,” or as “the negative form of self-activity” as he does in the *Manuscripts* and *The German Ideology* respectively. Now, labor simply “is the active expression of the laborer’s own life” (ibid., 19). Although “the worker does not count the labor itself as a part of his life,” and life for him begins when this activity ceases” as long as he has to sell it as a commodity, Marx still refers to it as his life activity (ibid.).
of this wage-labor and capital relation. Wage-labor is the condition of capital; “the existence of a class which possesses nothing but the ability to work is a necessary presupposition of capital” (Marx 1976, 30). However, their relationship is not unilateral: “wage-labor presupposes capital. They condition each other; each brings the other into existence…capital and wage-labor are two sides of the same relationship” (Marx 1976, 32-33; emphasis in the original). This mutual conditioning and presupposition, this dependence on each other simply to exist, does not however mean that this relationship is harmonious. On the contrary, it is an antagonistic relation: “the interests of capitals and the interests of wage-labor are diametrically opposed to each other” (ibid., 39; emphasis in the original). This antagonism is not specific to bourgeois society, either; “production” itself is founded on antagonisms since the dawn of civilization, starting with “antagonism of orders, estates, classes, and finally on the antagonism of accumulated labor and actual labor” (Marx 1975f, 132). This latest antagonism finds its expression in—a very Ricardian theme—the distribution of wealth: “the rise and fall of profits and wages expresses merely the proportion in which capitalists and workers share in the product” (ibid., 207). That is, wages and profits stand opposed to each other: “the share of (profit) increases in

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164 Marx labels labor in its commodity form as wage-labor (1976; Marx and Engels, 1974). However he does not use wage-labor exclusively when referring to commodified labor; rather he deploys labor and wage-labor interchangeably in these works.

165 Marx sees this antagonism as the moving force of—and in—history: “No antagonism, no progress…till now the productive forces have been developed by virtue of this system of class antagonisms” (1975f, 132). It is, in fact, what history is as Marx and Engels proclaim in the opening sentence of the Manifesto “the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles” (1974, 67).

166 Given Ricardo’s own rendition of an antagonism between landlords (rent) and capitalists (profit), which is based on his assumption that wages are given at a subsistence level, it is Marx’s political ingenuity, and an effective submission of theory to praxis—one only needs to remember the second thesis on Feuerbach, “man must prove the truth, i.e., the reality and power, the this-sidedness of his thinking in practice”—that he shifts the antimony to an opposition between the capitalist and the proletariat (1975e, 422).
the same proportion in which the share of labor (wages) falls, and vice versa” (Marx 1976, 37; emphasis in the original).

However, this is not to say that Marx actually registers the antagonism between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie in the production process, despite his explicit claim to be doing so in *The Poverty of Philosophy*; that the only explicit discussion of this antagonism he provides in these political writings is over the distribution of wealth is a telling, but not the only, example. That is, despite all his references to production, which do not go further than an assertion of the primary role of productive forces and means of production, and to deriving social relations from these, Marx’s analysis of capital (and of wage-labor) remains at the level of exchange. All that “noble productive power” of labor achieves is “the formation and augmentation of capital,” which “preserves itself and multiplies by exchange with direct, living labor” (ibid., 30; emphasis altered). That is, labor “creates capital, i.e., that kind of property that exploits wage-labor, and which cannot increase except upon condition of begetting a new supply of wage-labor for fresh exploitation” (Marx and Engels 1974, 79–81; my emphasis). This supply in turn is nothing more than workers selling their sole commodity, their labor, that is, their own selves piecemeal (ibid., 130; 1975f; 1975g, 415, 436; 1976, 18, 26).

Labor *qua* commodity, wage-labor, is just like any other commodity available on the market; consequently, labor, 167

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167 Rattansi argues, “despite the commitment to a labor theory of value, already evident in the *Poverty of Philosophy*, Marx’s analysis at this stage is theoretically located at the level of exchange relations: capitalism is indicted for transforming labor into a commodity like any other, to be bought and sold at the mercy of market forces, while competition is identified as the central dynamic of capitalist development and as the greatest divisive force within the working class itself” (1982, 101). Nicolaus (1974b) goes further and registers the differences between Marx’s earlier and later writings on a shift of focus from exchange relations in the former to relations of production in the latter (cf. Rattansi, 1982). Although Marx does indeed base his analysis at the level of exchange when he discusses the wage-labor-capital relationship, this does not mean that he ignores production completely, as his references to forces, instruments and relations of production attest to.

168 Of course, this is not to say that labor has always been a commodity: “labor was not always wage-labor, *i.e., free labor*” (Marx 1976, 19; emphasis in the original).
and by corollary its owner faces, and is subsumed under, market forces. Labor’s price, the worker’s wage, is determined by supply and demand, which in turn represents the essential force of the market, competition: the price of a commodity is determined by competition between sellers each of which tries to undersell the other, between buyers whose demand leads to a rise in prices, and among these two groups (Marx and Engels 1974, 73-74; Marx 1976, 19-24). Of course, this constant struggle, competition, leads to constant price fluctuations which center around the cost of production of a commodity; this, in turn, is “tantamount to the determination of price by the labor time requisite to the production of a commodity” (Marx 1976, 25). However, Marx is quick to qualify this by reasserting the role of supply and demand: it is “the variations in demand and supply…[this] fluctuating movement alone that makes labor time the measure of value” (1975f, 134-35; emphasis in the original). Even more significantly, Marx and Engels (1974, 79) base the existence of wage-labor, of labor as a commodity, to competition: “wage-labor rests exclusively on competition between laborers.”

What all this emphasis on competition in particular, and on market forces pertaining to the realm of exchange in general, signifies is that Marx, separately or with Engels, has not begun to analyze the production process proper. That is, he has

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169 The only difference between a commodity and labor as commodity is that the latter is “of a more evanescent nature than other commodities” as it cannot be accumulated, and thus cannot be increased or decreased in supply with the same ease as with other commodities (Marx 1975g, 423-24; emphasis in the original).

170 For the essential role that competition has in these works, see also Marx (1975, 119, 135-36).

171 Marx repeats the role of competition in Wage-Labor and Capital: “The determination of price by the cost of production is not to be understood in the sense of the bourgeois economists. The economists say that the average price of commodities equals the cost of production: that is the law. The anarchic movement, in which the rise is compensated for by a fall and the fall by a rise, they regard as an accident. We might just as well consider the fluctuations as the law, and the determination of the price by cost of production as an accident…In the totality of this disorderly movement is to be found its order. In the total course of this industrial anarchy, in this circular movement, competition balances, as it were, the one extravagance by the other” (Marx 1976, 24-25; emphasis altered).
not started to elaborate how this increase in exchange value, this greater value comes into existence, not yet. It would have to wait the bloody repressions of the 1848 upheavals across Europe, events that lead Marx to question the revolutionary political framework—culminating in the Manifesto—he has elaborated so far, his settlement in London as a refugee, and his return to his studies of political economy with a different research program (cf. Balibar 1995).

**2.7 Grundrisse: (Living) Labor as the Capacity to Produce Surplus**

After the 1848 revolutions faltered and counter-revolutionary movements prevailed as governments across Europe established repressive, reactionary regimes, Marx's faith in the immanence—but not the certainty—of a proletarian revolution is shaken (Balibar 1995). So is his belief in the political strategy—the tactics of “permanent revolution,” the proletariat revolution immediately following the bourgeois one—but more importantly in the theoretical model—that he, with Engels, has begun to elaborate in the German Ideology and detailed in the Manifesto—with which he registers and explains this immanence (Fernbach 1973b). On the other hand, Marx “the scientist who cannot botch his results” and ignore historical evidence, realities that contradict—if not flat out refute—the

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172 Although as late as March-April, 1850, Marx, with Engels, still announce the coming of another revolutionary outbreak due to an overproduction crisis in the Neue Rheinische Zeitung Revue, they quickly retract it by September 1850, declaring this period to be a one of economic prosperity (Marx and Engels 1974a, 281-318; cf. Mandel 1973).

173 This is not to say that Marx completely gives up this theoretical framework based on the antagonism between relations of production and productive forces. Despite providing a richer, more complex and detailed class analysis—with intra-divisions among the bourgeoisie (financial, industrial, petty) and among the proletariat (industrial, lumpen), and the existence of peasants, small land owners as a separate class—when compared with his earlier political writings, one can find him deploying this analytical model—the February revolution cannot but be a bourgeoisie one, simply because the struggle has not reached its “highly developed form,” “the struggle between industrial wage laborer against the industrial bourgeoisie”—in The Class Struggles in France: 1848 to 1850 (1974b). I am not suggesting that this model completely disappears from Marx's discourses; rather, I draw attention to and focus on his increasing engagement with classical political economy and the effects of this engagement. See footnote 176 below.
validity of his theory, is at the same time a revolutionary who would not simply give up and bow down when faced with “reverses of fortunes,” or accept the prevailing oppressive circumstances as they are (Balibar 1995). That is, he simply cannot cease “the ruthless criticism of all that exists”; but more importantly, he cannot give up the self-professed (or self-imposed) resolve of not only interpreting but also “changing the world.” Thus, he returns once again to the project of criticizing political economy with the aim of laying bare the mechanisms, and the contradictory nature, of capitalism, which would gradually lead to and end in its inevitable collapse (ibid.).

To this end, Marx vigorously reads and critically assesses a wealth of works of political economy he finds readily available in the British Museum, after being forced to immigrate to England as he became a political *persona non grata* in continental Europe in the immediate aftermath of the failed revolutionary upheavals; his studies would continue until July 1857 (Mandel 1973). With the arrival of the economic crisis of 1857-58 that he has long awaited and predicted, Marx proceeds to compose the *Grundrisse*. As he puts it in a letter to Lasalle dated 21 December 1857, “the present commercial crisis has induced me to devote myself now to a close study of the fundamental features of the economy” (Marx cited in Mandel 1973, 79ft.).

Marx still construes the economic crisis as an expression of the contradictory nature of the bourgeois economy; but a significant and decisive change happens precisely in the way he registers what these contradictions are, or the forms they take. Until then, Marx had argued that the *fundamental contradiction* was to be

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174 This, despite Marx declaring as early as 2 April 1851, “I have got so far that I could be finished with the whole of economic shit in five weeks…work out the economy at home and pitch into another science in the Museum” in a letter to Engels (Marx and Engels 1975, 38:325). He continues, “This is beginning to bore me. Fundamentally this science has made no progress since A. Smith and D. Ricardo, although so much has been done in the way of particular and often super-delicate investigations” (ibid.).

175 Mandel cites three instances—1852, 1853 and 1855—where Marx predicts, albeit incorrectly, an upcoming economic crisis during this period in his *New York Tribune* columns (Mandel 1973, 74).
found between the relations of production and productive forces, which in turn would be the motor of historical change as it provides the conditions of existence of a successful revolution. For example, still subscribing to this theoretical framework, Marx and Engels retract their earlier prediction of an impending crisis of overproduction and the possibility of a proletarian revolution as a result, arguing that “while this general prosperity lasts, enabling the productive forces of bourgeois society to develop to the full extent possible within the bourgeois system, there can be no question of a real revolution…[which] is only possible at a time when two factors come into conflict: the modern productive forces and the bourgeois forms of production” (1974b, 131; emphases in the original).

Although infrequently, Marx does indeed deploy these categories in the *Grundrisse*, as well; however, only rarely does he explicitly refer to productive forces and to an even lesser extent, to relations of production. He generally mentions productive forces when discussing how their development affects the relation between necessary and surplus labor, and devalues—due to increasing productivity—previously created values as a result of which the possibility of an economic crisis emerges (Marx 1973, 443-46). Or, how capital is not the absolute form, but a necessary condition for the development of the forces of production; although these forces are developed in and through capital’s realization, he argues, this process “makes one-sided, limits, etc. the main force of production, the human being himself, and has the tendency in general to restrict the forces of production” at the same time (ibid., 415, 422; emphasis in the original).

Only in his historical analysis of noncapitalist economies, whose “dissolution mean[s] the dissolution of relations of production…[which is] only possible with a definite degree of development of the material (and hence also the intellectual) forces of production,” does he return back to the theoretical model of his political
writings (ibid., 502). Rather, Marx starts to register contradictions “inherent” in capitalism with categories of classical political economy that, prior to the *Grundrisse*, have been at best of secondary importance in his analysis—not *his* categories, as he has not “criticized,” but taken them as given, simply as they are elaborated by the classicals—if they were present at all: money, commodity, value, exchange-value, price, but more importantly, capital. This shift of emphasis in turn should not overshadow—or, better, it indicates—an even more important and significant change in Marx’s discourse, one with immense theoretical consequences: he undertakes a thorough analysis of what he has briefly hinted at in *Wage-Labor and Capital*, in which he defines wage-labor as that which preserves and increases the exchange-value of capital. The study of the capital-labor relationship—to be precise, how labor sustains and augments capital—takes him from the “surface phenomena” of market forces and equal exchange into the shadowy realm of production, thus allowing him

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176 This is not to say that the contradiction between relations of production and productive forces completely disappears from Marx’s discourse. In *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, which is published in 1859 after he composed the *Grundrisse*, Marx states the general conclusion and guiding principles of his studies as such: “In the social production of their existence, men inevitably enter into definite relations, which are independent of their will, namely relations of production appropriate to a given stage in the development of their material forces of production…At a certain stage of development, the material productive forces of society come into conflict with the existing relations of production or—this merely expresses the same thing in legal terms—with the property relations within the framework of which they have operated hitherto. From forms of development of the productive forces these relations turn into their fetters. Then begins an era of social revolution” (Marx 1970, 20-21). Rather, my point is to emphasize a change in the way Marx registers contradictions in the bourgeois economic system he analyzes.

177 It is possible to construe these multiple sites of contradiction as merely representations of the fundamental contradiction between the productive forces and the relations of production, as it finds its expression in the former. However, such an argument would be imposing a “continuity” to Marx’s discourses, which in turn leads to an under-appreciation of his theoretical and analytical richness. What I pursue in this essay is rather the differences, the discontinuities in Marx’s categories and his discourses. In addition, such a reduction would ignore the analytical importance Marx ascribes to the notion of “form,” which he emphatically distinguishes from “content”—here, categories of classical political economy being the form, and the fundamental contradiction between the forces and relations of production the content. Form is not a simple representation, appearance, or phenomenal expression of the content; rather form and content mutually constitute each other.
to develop the concept of surplus-value, and in the process, elaborate new definitions of labor accordingly.\(^\text{178}\)

2.7.1 Money as Capital in Simple Exchange

Marx starts the *Grundrisse* with a critique of Proudhon and his followers, in particular arguing against their proposition to replace money proper with labor money (chits representing a particular amount of labor-time); he questions the possibility of revolutionizing the existing relations of production and distribution simply by changing the instrument, and/or organization, of circulation (ibid., 122).\(^\text{179}\)

This seemingly innocuous question takes Marx into an analysis of the different functions of money in the bourgeois economy, which in turn leads to a minute study of exchange-value, and commodity exchange in general: defining it as the “material representative of general wealth, as individualized exchange value,” Marx posits money as “the direct object, aim and product of general labor, the labor of all individuals” (ibid., 224; emphasis in the original). He concludes, labor which produces exchange value with the sole aim of possessing its general representative, money, “must therefore be wage labor” (ibid.; emphasis in the original). But, more

\(^{178}\) The role that Marx ascribes to “competition” in the *Grundrisse* exemplifies this change in analytical focus from exchange (circulation) to production. As I argue above, Marx, in his political writings, perceives this category as the fundamental market force. Now, competition merely realizes the inner laws of capital; “competition generally, this essential locomotive force of the bourgeois economy, does not establish its laws, but is rather their executor” (Marx 1973, 552; cf. 752).

Competition among different capitals, with the redistribution of surplus value, leads to the average rate of profit; however it has no effect on the amount of surplus value produced in the production process (ibid., 760). There also exists a competition between workers, which forces them to perform surplus labor time. However this surplus can sometimes exist only from the workers’ perspective, since the surplus labor time, although present in the product, might be unexchangable, unrealizable, thus non-existent (ibid., 533). Hence, the “surface phenomenon” of competition is no longer the essential force in capitalism; rather, its role and importance is shaped by and in turn affects the production process.

\(^{179}\) This is, technically, not the case. Marx does not start the first notebook with “the Chapter on Money” in which his analysis of Proudhonist labor money takes place, but with a critique of two political economists, Bastiat and Carey (Nicolaus 1973).
importantly, this becomes the necessary, yet not sufficient, condition of the bourgeois economy, characterized in part by, and based on, commodity exchange. “It is the elementary precondition of bourgeois society that labor should directly produce exchange value, i.e. money; and similarly, that money should directly purchase labor,” which in turn provides Marx with “wage labor on one side, and capital on the other” (ibid., 225; emphases in the original). With this analysis, Marx not only concludes that labor money will not eliminate the inherent contradictions that money proper embodies—as he puts it succinctly, “one form of wage labor may correct the abuses of another, but no form of wage labor can correct the abuse of wage labor itself”—but also delves into the capital-labor relationship (ibid., 123).

This excursion into the analysis of money and simple exchange, however, is not a matter of pure chance, or simply a result of a polemic against Proudhon and “those socialists…who want to depict socialism as the realization of the ideals of bourgeois society articulated by the French revolution” (ibid., 248; emphasis in the original). On the contrary, it is necessary to start “not with labor, but with value, and, precisely, exchange value in an already developed movement of circulation” to develop the concept of capital (ibid., 259). “Money [is] the first form in which capital appears”; yet, this mere form does not give Marx the specificity of capital, which he defines as “exchange value posited as the unity of commodity and money” (ibid., 266). That is, capital is exchange value that preserves itself within and by means of circulation, without becoming “substanceless”—that is, it is always being embodied

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180 That is, wage labor and capital are “only other forms of developed exchange value and money” (Marx 1973, 225). In other words, these “simple forms of exchange and of money latently contain the opposition between labor and capital” (ibid., 247).

181 Marx puts the money-capital relation differently, “capital comes initially from circulation, and, moreover, its point of departure is money…[which] is at the same time the first concept of capital, and the first form in which it appears” (ibid., 253).
in the form of a commodity—nor losing its specific form as money—commodities constantly and without interruption returning to the money-form—in the process: “it therefore always remains money and always commodity” (ibid., 260-1). However, capital defined in this manner, as money as capital, comes out of circulation either as a commodity, as an object of a real need that is to be consumed, thus losing its form as capital; or it leaves circulation in the form of money without the exchange value it represents being augmented (ibid., 263). To put it differently, this circulation will be nothing more than “the simple movement of exchange values,” and as such can never realize capital proper: to the extent that “the repetition of the process from either of the points, money or commodity, is not posited within the conditions of exchange…circulation…does not carry within itself the principle of self-renewal,” but remains simply “the phenomenon of a process taking place behind it” (ibid., 254-45, emphases in the original). This process occurring “in the depths” of the bourgeois society, beneath the “surface phenomenon” of simple exchange, however, still has the latter as one of its conditions: money as capital has to exchange itself for a commodity “which itself, in its particularity, expresses the generality of exchange value” (ibid., 247, 262). That is, for money as capital “to become real,” to become capital as such, it must yield itself to, and be consumed by, labor; it must become labor’s material not only to renew itself as a definite, given amount of objectified labor-time, but also to increase its value (ibid., 263). Only then can money as capital go beyond “a simple positing of equivalents” in exchange—beyond simply reproducing itself anew as it preserves its identity and quantum as an exchange value—and multiply itself by “losing its rigidity…[as] a tangible thing” and becoming “a process in whose various moment it is always capital” (ibid., 258, 263; emphases in the original).\(^\text{182}\)

\(^{182}\) Marx registers the difference of this process from simple exchange by elaborating how labor as
Defining capital as the exchange value that posits itself as exchange value, which thus only exists and realizes itself by increasing its value through its exchange with and consumption by labor, Marx proceeds to his analysis of the relationship between labor and capital (ibid., 263).

2.7.2 Labor as not-Capital

Marx starts by specifying the characteristics of this relation, exchange between the worker and the capitalist, which at first appears merely as simple exchange. Just like any other exchange relation, “exchange value and use-value are brought into relation; the one side (capital) initially stands opposite the other side as exchange value, and the other (labor) stands opposite capital as use-value” (ibid., 267-68; emphasis in the original). In addition, this is assumed to be an exchange of equivalents; each side, in the commodity it receives (money for the laborer, “labor” for the capitalist), obtains exactly the same amount of value that it parts with—measured in terms of labor time (ibid., 274-47, 281-82). However, the exchange

well as money (exchange-value) changes: “at the same time, labor has changed its relation to its objectivity; it, too, has returned to itself. But the nature of the return is this, that labor objectified in exchange value posits living labor as a means of reproducing it, whereas originally exchange value appeared merely as a product of labor” (ibid., 263).

183 I am deliberately using “labor” instead of “labor capacity” when referring to the commodity the laborer sells, since Marx at this point in the Grundrisse has not made this distinction explicit. For example, he argues, “the worker sells his commodity, labor, which has a use-value, and, as commodity, also a price, like all other commodities, for a specific sum of exchange values, specific sum of money, which capital concedes to him” (ibid., 274; emphasis altered). Or, he asserts, “labor must exist as pure use-value, which is offered as a commodity by its possessor” (ibid., 289; emphasis altered). However, this distinction is already conceptually—but not as a concept—present in Marx’s discourse to the extent that he differentiates between the exchange value the laborer receives and the use-value the capitalist obtains—disposition over labor (ibid., 281-82). He conceptualizes this distinction more clearly—still without its concept—when he asserts, the worker “exchanges value-positing activity for a predetermined activity, regardless of the result of this activity” (ibid., 323). After his analysis of capital’s realization process, he consistently uses “living labor capacity” to denote the commodity that the worker possesses and exchanges (ibid., 415, cf. 422, 448-62). This all the more clear when he refers to labor capacity as distinct from living labor in his critique of Ricardo, who, failing to register this difference, and thus allowing capitalist to exchange for living labor directly, cannot resolve the “antinomy in his system that a certain quantity of living labor does not = the commodity which it creates, in which it objectifies itself, although the value of the commodity = to the amount of labor contained in it” (ibid., 561).
between the worker and the capitalist is more than a mere simple exchange, and I am not only referring to the use-value the worker provides—his disposition over labor, restricted to a specific skill and limited in time—“is not materialized in a product, does not exist apart from him at all, thus exists not really, but only in potentiality, as his capacity” (ibid., 266, 282). First, both sides go through an “essential,” substantial change in comparison to their appearance in simple exchange; “money which stands opposite use-value…is no longer money in its character as such, but money as capital. The use-value or commodity which confronts capital or the posited exchange value is no longer the commodity as such as it appeared in opposition to money, where its specific form was as irrelevant as its content, and which appeared only as a completely undefined substance” (ibid., 269-70; emphases in the original). On the contrary, there is—better yet, there can only be one—use-value that capital qua capital seeks and obtains: it is “the productive force which maintains and multiplies capital, thereby becomes the productive force of capital, a force belonging to capital itself” (ibid., 274).

To distinguish exchange between labor and capital from simple exchange, to emphasize its specificity, Marx argues both sides of this relation cannot but exchange with each other. This is necessarily so because he defines, conceptualizes, labor and capital precisely within this relation. First, he asserts capital, which, by definition exists to the extent that “it preserves itself as a self-validated exchange value…only

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184 Thus, Marx renders exchange different from itself by introducing a “second process” to the capital-labor exchange, one which is distinct from the sale of “labor” in return for a specific sum of money—the first process. He registers this difference as such: “the use-value of that which is exchanged for money appears as a particular economic relation, and the specific utilization of that which is exchanged for money forms the ultimate aim of both processes. Therefore, this is already a distinction of form between exchange of capital and labor, and simple exchange—two different processes…in the exchange between capital and labor, the first act is exchange, falls entirely within ordinary circulation; the second is a process qualitatively different from exchange, and only by misuse could it have been called any sort of exchange at all. It stands directly opposite exchange; [it is] essentially [a] different category” (ibid., 274-75; emphases in the original). This second process that Marx speaks of is the production process.
by *constantly multiplying* itself” would do so if and only if it “does not lose its value-quality, as for example does money when it is exchanged for a particular commodity” (ibid., 270; emphases in the original). Thus, capital has to exchange with and obtain a use-value that would “preserve or increase it”; that is, “the only use-value, i.e. usefulness, which can stand opposite capital as such is that which increases, multiplies and hence preserves it as capital” (ibid., 271). Second, to the extent that capital is not a particular use-value (commodity)—since, if it were, it would necessarily disappear as it is either consumed, or decays as a result of natural processes if unconsumed, thus no longer can be capital by definition—but all commodities, the opposite of capital in this relation cannot be any particular commodity (ibid.). What capital, as the totality of all use-values, is, is not their physical attributes or material characteristics—which make them use-values that are different from each other—but “their communal substance as *commodities*,” their quality of having/being exchange values; this common substance is nothing more than “*objectified labor*” (ibid., 271-72; emphases in the original). After rendering capital as objectified labor, Marx asserts:

> The only thing distinct from *objectified* labor is *non-objectified* labor, labor which is still objectifying itself, labor as subjectivity. Or, *objectified* labor, i.e. labor which is *present in space*, can also be opposed, as *past labor*, to labor which is *present in time*. If it is to be present in time, alive, then it can be present only as the *living subject*, in which it exists as capacity, as possibility; hence as *worker*. The only use-value, therefore, which can form the opposite pole to capital is *labor*. (ibid., 272; emphases in the original)

Labor as the use-value standing in opposition to capital, on the other hand, exists only as a potentiality, which becomes “a reality only when it is solicited by capital”; “as soon as it has obtained motion from capital, this use-value exists as worker’s specific, productive activity…[as] his vitality itself, directed towards a specific purpose and hence expressing itself in a specific form” (ibid., 267; my emphasis).
Thus, labor and capital, in their being, to exist as labor and capital, must exchange with each other.

Rather than conceiving it as a logical derivation—or an exercise in Hegelian dialectics—I construe this mutually constitutive relation between capital as objectified labor and labor as it exists within the body of the worker as a capacity, a potentiality waiting to be activated, as the relationship in and by means of which Marx defines these key concepts at this level of his discourse. That is, neither capital nor labor exists outside, and independently from, their interrelation: “the use-value which confronts capital as posited exchange value is labor. Capital exchanges itself, or exists in this role, only in connection with non-capital, the negation of capital, without which it is not capital; the real not capital is labor” (ibid., 274; emphasis altered). Marx puts this definitional and necessary relation differently; “capital is only capital as not-labor…as capital it can posit itself only by positing labor as not-capital, as pure use-value” (ibid., 288). As such, both labor and capital stand opposite each other in this exchange relation; they appear as “independent forms relative to…[and] specifically different” from each other (ibid., 266; emphasis in the original). That is, to the extent that “labor is presupposed by capital as its contradiction and as its contradictory being, and such as it, in turn presupposes capital,” they are mutually exclusive and distinct from each other; thus, Marx defines labor in relation to, but independent from capital, and vice versa (ibid., 296; emphasis in the original).

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185 See Uchida (1988) for such a reading. Uchida finds a “profound and systematic” relation between the Grundrisse and Hegel’s Logic.

186 Marx (1973, 266) asserts this opposition as a presupposition in the sense that he has not derived it, but simply presumed as the starting point of his analysis. After capital realizes itself as self-expanding value and reenters into circulation to begin this process anew, this opposition becomes a moment created within, thus no longer external to, capital or its realization process (ibid., 450-62).

187 Marx refers to “labor which stands opposite capital [as] alien labor, and [to] the capital which stands opposite labor [as] alien capital” (ibid.; emphases in the original). His use of the adjective,
2.7.3 Labor as the Use-Value of Capital

This is not to say that Marx construes labor standing in opposition to capital—labor as not-capital—as the only form of labor; rather, he delineates this labor in a specific manner, immediately qualifying it with the adjective “productive” as he describes it as “value-creating, productive labor” (ibid., 272; emphasis in the original). That is, what capital obtains in, and as a result of, its exchange with labor is a specific use-value, or labor with a particular quality: it is labor as “value-positing activity,” as “the general possibility of wealth as subject and as activity” (ibid., 296, cf. 274, 323; emphasis in the original).

Labor, defined as such, construed as “a power productive of wealth...or the activity of gaining wealth,” that is, in its specificity as this use-value, simply does not exist for the worker: “labor, such as it exists for itself in the worker in opposition to capital, that is, labor in its immediate being, separated from capital, is not productive” (ibid., 308; emphases in the original). In addition, Marx asserts, labor is “a mere exchange value for the worker” and a use-value only for capital—more precisely, it is “the use-value of capital”—which is “posited as such in the act of exchange with capital” (ibid., 297, 305; emphases in the original). On the other hand, labor as the subjective possibility of wealth, “as the living source of value”—which Marx derives by defining labor as not-objectified labor, not-value in

“alien,” is to specify the “specific difference” of both labor and capital from each other within this relationship, and not a reference to his earlier works in which alienation is a fundamental concept.

Marx here defines wealth in a specific manner; following classical political economists, he construes it in its bourgeois form, as (accumulated) value. He provides a different conception “when the limited bourgeois form is stripped away”: “what is wealth other than the universality of individual needs, capacities, pleasures, productive forces etc., created through universal exchange? The full development of human mastery over the forces of nature, those of so-called nature as well as of humanity's own nature? The absolute working-out of his creative potentialities, with no presupposition other than the previous historic development, which makes this totality of development, i.e. the development of all human powers as such the end in itself, not as measured on a predetermined yardstick? Where he does not reproduce himself in one specificity, but produces his totality? Strives not to remain something he has become, but is in the absolute movement of becoming?” (ibid., 488; emphasis in the original). Below, I discuss another definition that Marx develops; wealth now conceived in terms of available disposable time, which is applicable to both capitalist and post-capitalist societies.
its opposition to objectified labor, capital—in turn is labor’s absolute poverty, its exclusion from objective wealth, thus its existence as “not-raw-material, not-instrument of labor, not-raw product,” its separation from any form of property (ibid., 295-96). This, Marx asserts, is a condition of existence for the exchange between labor and capital.

However, here Marx conflates two moments that are, strictly speaking, independent of each other. Labor, construed as not-objectified labor, necessarily has to be not-raw-material, not-instrument of labor, and not-raw product; it is how labor is differentially defined within the production process, and only as such can it be independent from, yet in relation to, capital. On the other hand, for labor-capital exchange to take place, it is necessary that labor does not own raw materials, or any means or instruments of production; without this condition of existence, workers would not be inclined to sell (exchange) their capacity to labor, as they would have no reason not to produce for themselves, appropriate, and exchange the fruits of their labor.

Marx details the conditions of existence of capital-labor exchange in the context of non-capitalist economies and their dissolution.\(^{189}\) Wage-labor, as “one of

\(^{189}\) Marx discusses the dissolution of various forms of economic/social organizations in which the workers have been proprietors (ibid., 497). He accounts four instances: “(1) Dissolution of the relation to the earth—land and soil—as natural condition of production—to which he relates as to his own inorganic being; the workshop of his forces, and the domain of his will…the original form of this property is therefore itself direct common property (oriental form, modified in the Slavonic…foundation in classical and Germanic property). (2) Dissolution of the relations in which he appears as proprietor of the instrument. Just as the above form of landed property presupposes a real community, so does this property of the worker in the instrument presuppose a particular form of the development of manufactures, namely craft, artisan work; bound up with it, the guild-corporation system etc…Here labor itself still half artistic, half end-in-itself etc…Attainment of particular skill in the work also secures possession of instrument etc. etc…Medieval cities. Labor still as his own; definite self-sufficient development of one-sided abilities etc. (3) Included in both is the fact that he has the means of consumption in his possession before production, which are necessary for him to live as producer—i.e. during production, before its completion…(4) Dissolution likewise at the same time of the relations in which the workers themselves, the living labor capacities themselves, still belong directly among the objective conditions of production, and are appropriated as such—i.e. are slaves or
the historic preconditions for capital, is free labor”; that is, workers should be the sole possessors and have complete control over the disposition of their labor capacity, relating to the totality of it as their private property (ibid., 465, 471). Also, they should sell “nothing more than a specific, particular measure of force expenditure” for a limited time, and not the totality of this capacity; otherwise, they would simply be slaves (ibid., 464). The freedom to sell their labor capacity is at the same time “the separation of free labor from the objective conditions of its realization—from the means of labor and the material for labor”—as well as from its means of existence, the necessary goods to preserve the living labor capacity in its subjective existence (ibid., 463, 471). This in turn demands that there should be a large enough accumulation of use-values that would sustain workers, to maintain them as living labor capacities, as well as providing them with the instruments of labor and raw materials necessary for the production process (ibid., 463). In addition, the production process itself should not have use-values as its aim, furnishing producers with their life-necessaries for immediate consumption; rather, the goal is to produce exchange values, mediated through a fully developed circulation (ibid.). Last and related to this, there needs to be a subjectivity “who regards the positing of value, self-realization, moneymaking, as the ultimate purpose,” that is the presence of capital personified in the capitalist (ibid., 464).

### 2.7.4 Living Labor as “The Living, Form Giving Fire”

This exchange between labor and capital is a necessary, yet not sufficient, condition for the existence of capital as capital. To the extent capital is defined, as Marx does, as a process of self-realization, it will not be enough if capital preserves its value; to exist as capital, it also has to expand itself. And this self-expansion can only take place in the “hidden abode of production,” in which labor acquires a different

serfs” (ibid., 497-98; emphasis in the original). Although Marx conceives it to be strictly a historical analysis, he oscillates from a historical study to a definitional—or logical—derivation.
meaning as well as a new adjective.190 “The process of the realization of capital proceeds,” however, “by means of and within the simple production process, by putting living labor into its natural relation with its moments of material being” first (ibid., 364; my emphasis).191 In the simple production process, capital relates to labor—better yet, objectified labor, to “living” labor—in the forms of raw material—as “the formless matter…for the form-positing, purposive activity of labor”—and instrument of labor, with and by means of which labor conducts its activity (ibid., 298–99). That is, capital sheds its defining quality, its formal character, its form as a self-realizing value, and enters into the production process only as “an object” to be

190 Marx conception of “production” and its relation with other economic processes, circulation, distribution and consumption is far from a simple “productivist” framework, in which production is the essential determinant. Although these processes are “the members of a totality, distinctions within a unity,” Marx argues, “production predominates…over the other moments as well…a definite production thus determines a definite consumption, distribution and exchange as well as definite relations between these moments” (ibid., 99). However, he adds these other moments in turn determine production: “production does indeed have its determinants and preconditions which form its moments” (ibid., 97). Each moment of the totality mutually constitute, determine each other: “mutual interaction takes place between the different moments” (ibid., 100).

191 This is not to say that Marx has not deployed the category, “living labor,” prior to his analysis of the simple production process; on the contrary, when elaborating the exchange relation between capital and labor, he construes them, at times, as objectified and living labor respectively. However in almost all of those instances, Marx is referring to labor in its productive capacity, “existing as a process and as action,” rather than in its simple exchange relation or opposition to capital (ibid., 298). For example, when discussing the labor-money scheme of Prudhonists, he points to the inevitability of its constant depreciation; as “living labor constantly becomes more productive” it necessarily depreciates “the labor time objectified in products” (ibid., 135). On three more occasions, before he begins the analysis of simple production, Marx refers to living labor, and in each case in relation to the production process; the use of prior labor’s product “as means for direct, living labor,” as instruments of production, exchange value positing “living labor as a means of reproducing itself,” and finally, living labor as it is separated from property, “from all means and objects of labor,” existing as a productive capacity (ibid., 258, 263). More importantly, he has not explicitly distinguished between “living labor” and “living labor capacity” at this point in his discourse—or between “labor” and “labor power” as he later conceptualizes them: thus, one cannot expect him to deploy different concepts when referring to different aspects of labor—labor in the exchange process and labor in the production process. With this distinction in mind I posit Marx attaches a new adjective, “living,” to labor when referring to it within the production process, or to specify labor’s becoming the use-value of—not for, as is the case in exchange—capital, to bring forth its specific difference from objectified labor (capital appearing as the means of production).
In the simple production process, objectified labor becomes the material of living labor, which realizes itself in this “formless matter” by transforming it in accordance with a purpose—“a transformation which, as purpose, determines labor and its purposive activation” (ibid., 360). Thus, labor becomes “the living, form giving fire; it is the transitoriness of things, their temporality, as their formation by living time” (ibid., 361).

However, labor defined as such, construed as purposeful activity, I argue, is not the “true,” “real” labor, which once freed from alienating, oppressive, exploitative relations, returns to, or finally becomes, its “natural” self—productive activity through which human beings objectify, realize their essence; it is only one of the definitions of labor—among others—that Marx elaborates in the *Grundrisse* and throughout his works. Nor is it the one with which, or in relation to, he conceptualizes capital. As Marx makes clear, this process, in which capital takes part as a particular substance, thus not capital as such, “in which all relation to exchange value, to objectified labor, and to labor itself as the use-value of capital—and hence all relation to capital itself—is extinguished” does not appear as capital’s realization process, but simply as production in general (ibid., 303). As such, this process not only is prior to and independent of capital—even from simple value—but also universal: “labor process posited prior to value…owing to its abstractness, its pure materiality, is common to all forms of production” (ibid., 304; emphasis in the

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192 However, Marx contends, “it will be seen even within the production process itself this *extinguishing of the formal character* [of capital] is merely a semblance” (ibid., 304; emphasis in the original). He shows this to be only a “semblance” in his analysis of the “realization” process of capital—or what he later calls, “valorization” process—in which labor, in and through the simple production process, preserves the value of capital “embodied” in the means of production, while augmenting capital with newly created value, surplus value (ibid., cf. 401-3).
On the other hand, precisely because of its commonality and abstractness, or its non-specificity with respect to capital, labor as purposive activity is “without historical character,” and thus of secondary importance at this instance to Marx’s class-historic analysis, only to be taken into account economically to the extent it is a necessary—but not sufficient—moment in capital’s existence (ibid.).

This subsumed character of simple production process, Marx puts differently: “but to the extent that labor steps into this relation, this relation does not exist for itself, but for capital; labor itself has become already a moment of capital” (ibid., 364). That is, what is of interest to Marx in the Grundrisse is an analysis of capital—which is specific to a particular form of economic organization—and not labor as the necessary and ubiquitous purposeful activity through which human beings produce useful objects to satisfy their needs, which as such remains independent of and is not determined by the specificity of any society.

2.7.5 Labor as the Producer of Surplus-Value

The “economically relevant” question is not to discuss labor in its human, philosophical, yet ahistoric aspects, but rather, as Marx puts it in his critique of Ricardo, to account for how surplus-value is created. He seeks and provides the

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193 I hasten to add, Marx qualifies this generality in his “Introduction” to the Grundrisse. After acknowledging “all epochs of production,” his object of analysis, “have common traits, common characteristics,” he immediately adds, “but the so-called general preconditions of all production are nothing more than these abstract moments with which no real historical stage of production can be grasped”; thus, he suggests that “their essential difference” should not be forgotten (ibid., 83-88; emphasis in the original). I discuss this “generality/particularity” relation with respect to the concept of labor below.

194 As such, production in general, “common to all social conditions…is without historic character, [but], human, if you like” (ibid., 320; emphasis in the original). Consequently, Marx plans to analyze it in the first chapter, which would precede “exchange value” (ibid., 298). As such, this is an ahistoric, “philosophical,” and not an economic, analysis, as Marx labels it in his critique of Adam Smith who conceives labor in relation to “giving up a portion of his tranquility, his freedom and his happiness” (ibid., cf. 606-21). I return to this philosophical notion when I discuss Marx’s conception of labor in a communist society.
answer “precisely [in] the specific nature of the relation of capital and labor, or the specific and distinct character of capital...the relation between objectified and living labor in its living moment...the positing of surplus labor” (ibid., 553). The notion of surplus-value is key to Marx’s definition of capital, which “in its formal specificity is a process of self-realization”; it is self-preserving and self-expanding value (ibid., 310-11; cf. 401-2; emphasis in the original). That is, capital exists merely if, and to the extent that, it maintains and increases its value by creating/appropriating surplus-value. Capital conserves its prior value simply because living labor preserves the object it works on as a use-value; this, it achieves by rendering the product of previous labor “the raw material of new labor...[by positing it] as material objectivity of purposeful living labor,” thus protecting it from “uselessness and decay” in simple production process (ibid., 361-63). The conservation of the quality of previous labor, of use-value, which is “a natural property of [worker’s] laboring capacity,” or the “natural animating power of labor,” is at the same time “the preservation of the quantity of labor already objectified” in that particular use-value (ibid., 356-63). Thus, what Marx has so far is capital as self-preserving value, thus, not capital at all. Surplus-value, on the other hand, comes into being if and only if the labor time objectified in the product is greater than what was present in the original components of capital, “the sum of the values which were materialized in the specific material elements of the process, i.e. raw material, instrument of labor (including the merely instrumental commodities), and labor itself” (ibid., 312, 321). The question

195 This is not to dismiss philosophy as secondary, or render it a superstructural phenomenon with respect to the economy; that is, I am not arguing for an “economic reductionism,” or “determinism.” Labor construed philosophically is different from the one that is conceptualized from an economic—rather, class analytic—perspective; each renders different “realities” visible, with different theoretical, political and social effectivities. What I assert, on the other hand, is that it is not labor construed philosophically, labor as purposive activity, but labor economically defined—as the performer of surplus—that acquires its meaning within, and in turn gives specificity to, Marx’s class analysis.
than becomes: where does the surplus-value that capital receives/appropriates comes from and what is its source?

Capital, in its exchange for the means of production, exchanges one type of objectified labor for another; more precisely, it gives up and obtains in return equivalent amounts of value (labor-time). Only in its exchange with labor does it receive “something qualitatively different; a given amount of objectified labor for an amount of living labor” (ibid., 321). On the other hand, what the worker exchanges is the “value-positing activity” for a predetermined value, regardless of the result of this activity” (ibid., 323; cf. 274; my emphasis). Living labor as the value-positing activity, or labor “as the living source of value,” can however create surplus-value only if it works for a longer time than what is necessary for the reproduction of the worker as a living labor capacity, that is, if it produces more than the labor time objectified in what it receives from capital in their exchange relation; in other words, if it creates “value in excess of the equivalent” (ibid., 324). That is, labor in its relation to—or as posited by—capital, as the value-positing activity, becomes living labor that has the potential, the capacity, to elongate its performance above and beyond the time necessary for the laborer’s self-reproduction in capital’s production and realization process; as such Marx ascribes a new quality, that of producer of surplus-value, performer of surplus labor time, to living labor. This attribute of labor exists only potentially, merely as a possibility; that is, labor does not necessarily, but in most cases is forced to, produce surplus. As Marx puts it, this potential of satisfying one’s own need “only by simultaneously satisfying the need of and providing a surplus above that for another individual” has hitherto realized itself “because one individual or class of individuals is forced to work more than required for the satisfaction of its need” (ibid., 401-2ft; emphasis in the original).

196 Forcing others to produce surplus is most apparent in and takes a “brutal” form under slavery (Marx 1973, 402ft). In “despotism,” the surplus, in the forms of tribute and common labor “belongs to
hand, this does not mean labor performs surplus only when it is compelled to do so; pre-capitalist communes based on “self-sustaining peasants” who have access to the land and the instruments of labor only as members of this commune, in turn produce and use the surplus to reproduce this social organization, or even defend it as their surplus time, at times, “belongs to the commune…in the form of military service” (ibid., 476).

Surplus-value, through the appropriation of which capital as self-expanding value comes into being, affects and changes labor, capital and their relationship. First, in order to increase the surplus-value it creates, capital tries to increase consumption by expanding to new markets—the quantitative expansion of existing commodities—which in turn propagates existing needs to new people and produces new needs, as well as discovering/creating new use-values (ibid., 408). This

197 This, of course, if capital succeeds in realizing the surplus value—which is by no means necessary. As capital takes the form of a commodity, thereby losing the form of money (the form in which it exists as value, and this value is now only ideally posited as price), it has to go through the circulation process (ibid., 403-5). Thus, it has to exist as a use-value, as “an object of consumption”: “it is an exchange value only in so far it is at the same time a use-value” (ibid., 404; emphasis in the original). Therein lies the possibility that capital’s self-realization process might come to a halt: “as a commodity, capital now shares the fate of commodities in general; it is a matter of accident whether or not it is exchanged for money, whether its price is realized or not” (ibid., 403; emphases in the original). Thus the realization of surplus value, and by implication, the existence of capital becomes “accidental” and dependent on the circulation process. Marx posits a second condition, “there has to be an equivalent” for the surplus value created to be realized, “since circulation was presupposed at the outset as a constant magnitude—as having a given volume—but since, on the other hand, capital has created a new value in the production process, it seems indeed as if no equivalent were available for it” (ibid., 404-5). Though this second “condition” need not be a necessary one, as value of a commodity, or the sum of values might be less, for example as a result of an increase in labor’s productivity. This however does not necessarily mean that surplus value is not realized, or would be less than before.

198 Capital achieves this expansion and creation of new needs and use-values through “the exploration of the earth in all directions, to discover new things of use as well as new useful qualities of the old; such as new qualities of them as raw materials etc.; the development, hence, of the natural
expansion, and the creation of new needs, implies “the cultivation of all the qualities of the social human being...as rich as possible in needs...rich in qualities and relations...[who] in order to take gratification in a many-sided way...must be capable of many pleasures, hence cultured to a high degree”; thus, what Marx construes as “capital’s civilizing effect” changes and improves “human nature” (ibid., 409). It also leads to “the creation of new branches of production,” which “is not merely the division of labor, but is rather the creation, separate from a given production, of labor with a new use-value; the development of a constantly expanding and more comprehensive system of different kinds of labor, different kinds of production, to which a constantly expanding and constantly enriched system of needs corresponds” (ibid.). That is, as capital tries to increase the surplus-value it appropriates by supplementing the existing commodities with new, qualitatively different use-values, the “qualitative differences within labor” in turn expands, and labor becomes “more diverse, more internally differentiated” (ibid., 408). This labor, the productive powers of which is increasing infinitely as a result, “appears no longer as labor, but as the full development of activity itself”; yet, Marx is quick to add, to the extent that capital prevails, the productive power of labor is, and can only exist as, the productive power of capital (ibid., 325, 341).

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199 Marx puts the emergence of the social individual as a result of capitals “infinite urge to wealth” differently: “Capital's ceaseless striving towards the general form of wealth...creates the material elements for the development of the rich individuality which is as all-sided in its production as in its consumption...because a historically created need has taken the place of the natural one. This is why capital is productive; i.e. an essential relation for the development of the social productive forces” (ibid., 325; emphasis in the original). However, this productive and civilizing role of capital is only temporary, that is, it has its historical limits: “it ceases to exist as such only where the development of these productive forces themselves encounters its barrier in capital itself” (ibid.).
If successful in realizing the surplus-value, capital has “to begin its course as capital anew” in order to sustain itself, simply to continue to exist as capital; that is, it has to exchange once again for the particular use-values—means of production and living labor capacity—that are necessary for the production and realization processes, which in turn affects the capital and labor relationship (ibid., 448). To the extent that surplus-value, the newly created and realized value, becomes the starting point of this process, what appears as “external presuppositions” to capital’s self-realization—external in the sense that they are not emerging from and explained by capital’s “inner essence”—are now “a moment of its motion” (ibid., 450; emphasis in the original). That is, what Marx initially presumes as given to analyze the exchange relation between capital-labor, as well as capital’s production and realization processes, now, with his introduction of “surplus capital”—surplus-value created and realized beginning its own self-expansion to become capital proper—becomes an internal—mutually constituting and constituted—moment of his object of analysis, capital. Consequently, “the objective conditions of surplus labor,” the means of subsistence and means of production that capital provides labor with for the production process, no longer appear as “alien to living labor…as an act of capital”

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200 However, this is not to say that capital’s drive towards self-expansion is an ontological trait; it is not capital’s inherent essence. To the extent that capital exists only as self-expanding value, I construe this “urge” to be a definitional, and not an essential, characteristic of capital. As Marx contends, capital can step out of—or destroyed within—this self-realization process at any time. Also, capital, just like labor, is a category produced in and participates in the construction of a “knowledge”; not a true representation, a real reflection, a mirror image of what exists out there, in reality.

201 Marx construes surplus capital as such: “in surplus capital, all moments are products of alien labor—alien surplus labor transformed into capital…while capital thus appears as the product of labor, so does the product of labor likewise appear as capital; no longer as a simple product, nor as an exchangeable commodity, but as capital; objectified labor as mastery, command over living labor” (ibid., 453; emphases in the original).
but rather “as the product, result, objective form, external existence of surplus labor,” and by implication of labor itself (ibid., 452; emphasis in the original).

This instance of the “absolute divorce, separation…of the objective conditions of labor from the living labor capacity” in turn signifies the separation between property and labor in general; thus, it is labor, and not capital, which posits its own propertylessness by creating not only wealth (capital), “but also the relation of this wealth as an independent, self-sufficient wealth” to labor itself (ibid.). This complete separation between property and living labor, in addition, finds its personification in the worker and the capitalist: “the alien quality of the objective conditions of labor vis-à-vis living labor capacity…goes so far that these conditions confront the person of the worker in the person of the capitalist—as personification with its own will and interest…as the reality of other juridical persons, as the absolute realm of their will…personified in the capitalist” (ibid.; emphases in the original). Finally, labor produces its relation to laboring: “living labor itself appears as alien vis-à-vis living labor capacity” (ibid., 463; emphasis in the original).

Marx summarizes the effects of surplus capital’s emergence and existence as capital: “this absolute separation between property and labor, between living labor capacity and the conditions of its realization, between objectified and living labor, between value and value-creating activity—hence also the alien quality of the content of labor for the worker himself—this divorce now likewise appears as a

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202 However, living labor can continue to perform if and only if it produces surplus labor for capital. Capital “posits surplus labor, then, as the condition of the necessary [labor]”; “as soon as it cannot posit value, it does not posit necessary labor” (ibid., 421).

203 Marx puts it differently: “the result of the process of production and realization is, above all, the reproduction and new production of the relation of capital and labor itself, of capitalist and worker. And more particularly, within this process the worker produces himself as labor capacity, as well as the capital confronting him, while at the same time the capitalist produces himself as capital as well as the living labor capacity confronting him. Each reproduces itself, by reproducing its other, its negation. The capitalist produces labor as alien; labor produces the product as alien. The capitalist produces the worker, and the worker the capitalist” (ibid., 458; emphases in the original).
product of labor itself, as objectification of its own moments” and not “as an act of
capital” (ibid.). This in turn changes the initial relation between capital and labor—
rather as Marx specifies it here, between “not-surplus capital” and “labor capacity”:
labor reproduces the part of capital which it receives as its means of subsistence as
well as maintaining—preserving the value of—means of production, thus positing it
“for the first time as capital in the production process,” better yet, as “indestructible
wealth” (ibid., 455-56; emphasis in the original). Consequently, no longer do
property owners, appearing as the sole proprietors of their labor’s fruits, engage in
simple exchange in which equal values change hands; Marx contends, “the relation
of exchange has thus dropped away entirely, or is a mere semblance” (ibid., 458;
emphasis in the original). On the contrary, “every moment of surplus capital,
material, instrument, necessaries, resolves into alien labor, which the capitalist does
not appropriate by means of exchange for existing values, but has appropriated
without exchange” (ibid., 456, cf. 460; emphases in the original).204 All of these—
labor’s poverty, its separation from the means of subsistence and objective conditions
of labor, its dependence on and subordination to capital, and its relation to
productive activity—result from, and will continue to be reproduced on a larger scale
as a consequence of, labor’s inability to appropriate its own surplus: “the value
creating possibility, the realization which lies as a possibility within him, now

204 In other words, “property—previous, or objectified, alien labor—appears as the only condition for
further appropriation of present or living alien labor. In so far as surplus capital I was created by
means of a simple exchange between objectified labor and living labor capacity—an exchange entirely
based on the laws of the exchange of equivalents as measured by the quantity of labor or labor time
contained in them—and in so far as the legal expression of this exchange presupposed nothing other
than everyone’s right of property over his own products, and of free disposition over them—but in so
far as the relation of surplus capital II to I is therefore a consequence of this first relation—we see that,
by a peculiar logic, the right of property undergoes a dialectical inversion, so that on the side of capital
it becomes the right to an alien product, or the right of property over alien labor, the right to
appropriate alien labor without an equivalent, and, on the side of labor capacity, it becomes the duty
to relate to one’s own labor or to one’s own product as to alien property” (ibid., 457-58; emphases in
the original).
likewise exists as surplus-value, surplus product, in a word as capital, as master over living labor capability, as value endowed with its own might and will, confronting him in his abstract, objectless, purely subjective poverty” (ibid., 453). Therein also lies the possibility of breaking this vicious cycle in which labor produces and reproduces capital anew, a point to which Marx returns in the section on machinery, where he discusses the characteristics of labor in post-capitalist societies.

2.7.7 Surplus-Value and the Twofold Character of Labor: Marx’s Unique Discovery

The concept of surplus-value, as the general form of profit, interest, and rent, is the category with which Marx distances himself and differentiates his discourse from classical political economy. He criticizes Ricardo, who for Marx, along with Adam Smith, is the most reputable and sophisticated representative of the classicals, for failing to distinguish between surplus-value and profit (ibid., 552-23). This, in turn, signifies Marx’s other professed—rather, correctly recognized and acknowledged accordingly—“contribution” to political economy: his distinction between the use-value, “living labor,” and the exchange value of the workers’ sole property, their “living labor capacity,” the concept that Marx gives to this commodity that they exchange with capital.

Labor capacity is not = to the living labor which it can do, = to the quantity of labor which it can get done—this is its use-value. It is equal to the quantity of labor by means of which it must itself be produced and can be reproduced.

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205 Marx is explicit about what differentiates him from classical political economists and gives his discourse its specific character: in a letter to Engels, dated 24 August 1867, he contends “the treatment of surplus-value regardless of its particular forms as profit, interest, ground rent, etc.” as one of the best points in his book (Marx and Engels 1975, 42:407; emphasis in the original). The book in question is Capital.

206 In the same letter to Engels, Marx specifies “the twofold character of labor, according to whether it is expressed in use-value or exchange value (all understanding of the facts depends upon this, it is emphasized immediately, in the first chapter)” as his other contribution (ibid.; emphasis in the original). Here, Marx is talking about Capital, but it is equally relevant for the Grundrisse.
The product is thus in fact exchanged not for living labor, but for objectified labor, labor objectified in labor capacity. Living labor itself is a use-value possessed by the exchange value [labor capacity,] which the possessor of the product [,the capitalist,] has acquired in trade, and whether he has acquired less or more of this living labor than he has spent in the form of the product [,wages,] for labor capacity depends on the amount of living labor paid to the worker in the product...if living labor and stored-up labor were exchanged for one another as exchange values...then there would exist neither value of labor, nor wages, nor capital, nor wage labor...All of these are based on the fact that living labor appears as a use-value and living labor capacity as an exchange value opposite the labor stored up in capital. (ibid., 576-77; emphases in the original)

Failing to ascertain this difference, both Smith and Ricardo at times conceive value as being determined by labor, at others "by the price of labor," its exchange value, the amount of labor time that it receives from capital, thus never providing a satisfactory answer to the simple question, how can living labor create more value than it is exchanged for, how can it produce surplus-value? Put differently, none of the classical political economists manages to theorize how living labor objectifies itself in commodities whose collective value equals "the amount of labor contained in" them, yet this total value might still be more than the value the workers obtain for the commodity they possess (ibid., 551, 561). This failure, Marx contends, might end up with an inability, like Smith, to understand and conceptualize key concepts of

207 Marx puts it differently: "what is exchanged for wages is labor capacity, and this does not figure in production at all, but only in the use made of it—labor. Labor appears as the instrument of the production of value because it is not paid for, hence not represented by wages. As the activity which creates use-values, it likewise has nothing to do with itself as paid labor...It has reproduced a saleable labor capacity for the capitalist, so that in this regard even the worker's consumption takes place in the service of the capitalist. He does not pay for labor itself at all, only for labor capacity. This he can do, however, only if this capacity is set to work." (Marx 1973, 593-94; emphasis in the original). One thing that might be significant is that Marx explicitly gives a concept to the commodity that the workers possess when he moves beyond the simple, mutually defining opposition between labor and capital—he is now deploying certain categories of classical political economy, such as wages. Keeping in mind the methodology he lays out in the Introduction to the Grundrisse, in which he calls for "the conception of a whole...as a rich totality of many determinations and relations," this category, living labor capacity, might precisely be the result of Marx's move towards a more "concrete" totality, construed with the introduction of new determinations and relations (ibid., 100-2).
political economy, such as wage labor—particularly, “wage labor in its specific character as form in antithesis to capital”—thus leading to Smith’s failure to theorize capital, causing him inadvertently to conclude that “labor should actually have its own product for wages,” which however would result in capital’s disappearance (ibid., 330). This Smith then remedies by presupposing “in the clumsiest fashion,” “profit and rent as original elements of the cost of production…in order to get a surplus-value out of the capitalist production process” without ever managing to explain them (ibid.).

2.7.8 Labor as a Need

But Marx does not limit his critique of Smith to the confusion of labor as productive of value—wage labor, in its specific character in opposition to capital—with labor as a “use-value, as productivity for-itself, as human natural force in general” (ibid.; emphasis in the original). Despite referring to it as a “philosophical view,” he also takes issue with Smith’s assertion that “equal quantities of labor must at all times and in all places have the same value for the worker…[because] he must give up the identical portion of his tranquility, his freedom, and his happiness” (Smith cited in Marx 1973, 610-11; Marx’s emphases). In contrast to Smith’s conception of labor as a “curse,” Marx posits it as a “need”: individuals also need “a normal portion of work and the suspension of tranquility” (ibid., 611). In this process, individuals attain the goals posited by themselves; thus, labor becomes a “liberating activity,” “real freedom,” a process of an individual’s self-realization, the objectification of the subject (ibid.). This “really free working” is achieved only if the “social character” of labor (and of its product) is directly “posited” and not in any way mediated (ibid., 612).\textsuperscript{208} Marx adds, when this labor is “of a scientific and at the same

\textsuperscript{208} This is not say this social character is not attained in a simple commodity-exchange, or capitalist economy. Commodity exchange, by means of which individuals realize their needs, mediates this sociality; “thus, whatever, the particular material form of the product he creates or helps to create,
time general character, not merely human exertion as a specifically harnessed natural force, but exertion as subject, which appears in the production process not in a merely natural, spontaneous form, but as an activity regulating all the forces of nature” it would then be free labor, liberating activity (ibid., 612). As “attractive work,” however, labor does not become “mere fun, mere amusement”; on the contrary, it demands “the most damned seriousness, the most intense exertion” (ibid., 611). After these brief “philosophical” remarks, Marx proceeds to consider Smith’s conception of labor as a sacrifice from an economic perspective and asserts that the workers’ “emotional relation” to their activity, whether it holds “fun or displeasure” for them, does not create anything, and thus has no bearing on the determination of value, nor would it even mean that the value of labor would be constant (ibid., 613-14). The only relevance that Smith’s rendition has is that “labor, in its historic forms as slave-labor, serf-labor, and wage-labor” has always appeared as repulsive (ibid., 611).

2.7.9 Labor as General, Social Labor

However, this is not the end of Marx’s analysis and conception of labor independent of capital; he also considers it in relation to, but nevertheless outside of, this “economic” moment, particularly when he discusses the forms labor would take in a post-capitalist economy.

With capital’s “constant drive” towards self-realization and self-expansion, large-scale industry develops, as a result of which machinery, this “accumulation of knowledge and of skill, of the general productive forces of the social brain,” becomes the dominant moment, and the most adequate form of fixed capital in the production what he has bought with his labor is not a specific and particular product, but rather a specific share of the communal production” (ibid., 172). Likewise, labor still acquires its general character, however only through exchange; in contrast, “the labor of the individual is posited from the outset as social labor” in a communist economy (ibid., 171-72).
process (ibid., 694). That is, appropriating productive, wealth-creating effects, first and foremost, of the division of labor, and then, of “the analysis and application of mechanical laws, arising directly out of science,” capital renders “general social knowledge…a direct force of production” (ibid., 704, 707; emphasis in the original). Consequently, the character and role of labor in the production process changes: “labor 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” (ibid., 705). As such, machinery determines and regulates worker’s activity, reducing it to a mere, pure abstraction; “he steps to the side of the production process instead of being its chief actor,” turning “living labor into a mere living accessory of this machinery” (ibid., 693, 705). As a result, the production process ceases “to be a labor process in the sense of a process dominated by labor as its governing unity” (ibid., 693). Labor, in all of its productive powers, is transformed into and absorbed by capital; likewise, the labor process has become “a mere moment of the realization process of capital” (ibid., 693, 700).

Capital’s absorption of labor into itself—“as though its body were by love possessed”—nevertheless does not mean that it finally achieves its complete and utter dominance over labor (Goethe cited in Marx, ibid., 704). On the contrary, capital’s move towards its most adequate form, machinery, and by means of this, towards the total and absolute subsumption of labor, is inherently contradictory. One effect of machinery is to reduce “direct labor” both quantitatively—a smaller portion of labor is dedicated to laboring—and qualitatively, as general scientific labor—“application

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209 Although, machinery appears “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,” Marx asserts it nevertheless does not correspond to the concept of capital (ibid., 694; emphases in the original). To the extent that fixed capital is condemned to an existence as a specific use-value, it is in contradiction with its conceptual being as self-expanding value, which demands that it be indifferent to every specific form of use-value, thus necessarily implying, “circulating capital” is the adequate form of capital (ibid.).
of natural sciences” and its technological consequences to the production process—and social labor—“the general productive force arising from social combination”—replaces it (ibid., 700). This is the same direct labor—rather, “the mass of direct labor time,” the quantity of labor time employed during the production process—that capital posits as the determinant factor in the production of wealth based on, and measured by, value (ibid., 700, 704). Thus, Marx argues, with machinery becoming increasingly the dominant moment in production, direct labor would cease to be source of wealth, and labor time would no longer the measure, nor exchange value, of use-values; “production based on exchange value breaks down” (ibid., 705).

“Capital thus works towards its own dissolution,” Marx concludes, to the extent that the production process increasingly becomes mechanized, and as a result, the number of direct producers, as well as the “direct labor time” they devote to production, decreases significantly; the creation of wealth, the immense accumulation of commodities, now “depends rather on the general state of science and on the progress of technology, or the application of this science to production,” which reduces labor to a mere supervision of the machinery’s functioning (ibid., 704-5).

To the extent that direct labor as such ceases to be the basis of production, resuming more of a supervisory and regulatory character as a result of the development of large-scale industry based on machinery, “the miserable foundation on which the present wealth is based, the theft of alien labor time” becomes transparent (ibid., 705; quotation altered, emphasis in the original). Also revealed is the immediate “communal, social character—its character as objectification of general labor and satisfaction of the general need”—of labor, as opposed to individual direct labor which acquires this social character through the mediation of exchange; thus, “the labor of the individual in its direct presence…[becomes] social labor” (ibid., 709; emphasis in the original). More importantly, the meaning of wealth
changes as a result of this transformation in the role of workers, and of their labor in the production process to which they now participate as “social individuals” whose knowledge of and mastery over nature, “the general intellect,” becomes the general productive power and “a direct force of production” (ibid., 705-6). “Real wealth is the developed productive power of all individuals. The measure of wealth is then not any longer, in any way, labor time, but rather disposable time” (ibid., 708; my emphasis). That is, “real” wealth, the conditions of existence of which are laid out by large-scale industry, is “the creation of a large quantity of disposable time” so that individuals have the opportunity to develop their productive powers—“hence those of society also”—to its fullest extent, “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” (ibid., 706-8). This however, is not to say that necessary labor simply vanishes; rather, now “measured by the needs of the social individual,” it is to be reduced to a minimum as a result of the increasing productivity (ibid., 708).

With this new definition of wealth as disposable time, Marx announces significant changes in the qualitative aspects of labor without elaborating them in detail. However, these transformations are intimately linked with his new conceptual framework, necessary and surplus labor-time. Although Marx insists “labor cannot become play” to emphasize the unbridgeable and inevitable chasm he sees between the realms of necessity and freedom, the performance of necessary labor (direct labor) itself goes through a transformation and should no longer be considered in “the abstract antithesis to free time in which it appears from the

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210 Nevertheless Marx he remains rather ambiguous in defining what labor will look like in the future—better yet, his remarks are inscrutable as he is not anticipating, nor providing a blueprint regarding, its nature, its defining characteristic. His remarks are limited to declaring that the production process in which the individual performs as a different subject “is then both discipline, as regards the human being in the process of becoming; and, at the same time, practice, experimental science, materially creative and objectifying science, as regards the human being who has become, in whose head exists the accumulated knowledge of society” (ibid., 712).
perspective of bourgeois economy” (ibid., 712). This in part results from the fact that everyone has free time above and beyond necessary labor: free time, “as idle time and time for higher activity” in turn renders its possessor a different subject, who partakes in the production process, in the production of material necessaries, as this different subject (ibid.).

Marx warns, one should not consider disposable time as surplus labor time in its antithetical relation to necessary labor, however; that is, it should not become “not-labor time, free time, for a few” as hitherto has been the case (ibid., 708). Thus, disposable time cannot be founded on “the surplus labor of the mass [as] the condition for the development of general wealth,” on “the positing of an individual’s entire time, as labor time and his degradation therefore to a mere worker, subsumption under labor”; as a corollary, “the non-labor of the few” ceases to be the condition for “the development of the general powers of the human head” (ibid., 705, 708; emphases in the original). This non-labor, “minus-labor, relative idleness (or not-productive labor at best)” —to put it differently, the availability of disposable time devoted to “the production of science, art, etc.” only to some, and not to others—is possible only because the surplus labor performed—and surplus time, or surplus wealth created—by labor is appropriated by capital, and distributed to, shared with, other classes who are simply “living from the surplus product” (ibid., 401ft; emphasis in the original). The only way that disposable time would become the new wealth, and be available to every individual, is if this surplus is appropriated

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211 Marx, it seems, is referring to the division of labor model he has elaborated in The German Ideology, in which he differentiates between material and mental labor. With a difference, I would argue, as he is now construing this division in terms of the separation of the producers of surplus value, and the appropriators and recipients of it.

212 Marx recounts “paupers, flunkeys, lickspittles, etc…in short the whole train of retainers” as well as “the servant class which lives not from capital but from revenue”—including those who perform necessary, yet unproductive labor, labor that does not create surplus value—as the classes with which capital shares the surplus value (ibid., 401ft).
by its producers: “the mass of workers must themselves appropriate their own surplus labor” (ibid., 708).

2.7.10 Labor as an Abstract Category

In the *Grundrisse*, Marx advances related, yet quite different, definitions of labor: labor as not-capital and labor having a use-value—labor as potentially value-creating activity—only for capital in its exchange relation with capital; living labor as purposeful productive activity, as the creator of use-values in the simple production process; labor as the use-value of capital—labor as the activity that produces value—in capital’s realization process; labor as the producer of surplus-value in particular, or labor as the performer of surplus in general; labor as supervision, as the living accessory of machinery, and labor as social labor in its immediacy.

It is possible to reduce this multiplicity to a singularity—to labor as such—by overlooking or pushing to the background certain aspects, characteristics that Marx elaborates, which then can be posited as the representation of labor in its essence—a possibility that time and again has been actualized in Marxian discourses. For example, labor is construed as the producer of use-values (the economy) and the material activity through which human beings realize and objectify their essence, species-being (the philosophy); the rest of the characteristics I list above—and Marx details in the *Grundrisse*, and throughout his works—that do not fit into this schematic conception, are pushed aside as mere obstructions, alienating, oppressive, exploitative moments that need to be superseded in Man’s or Communism’s coming into being.\(^\text{213}\) And it would seem this is what Marx has in mind in the *Grundrisse* as well—if not this particular conception of labor *per se*, than that there is, and should

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be, a single definition of labor which would be valid in and applicable for “the analysis of all forms of society” (ibid., 108).

“Labor seems a quite simple category. The conception of labor in this general form—as labor as such—is also immeasurably old” (ibid., 103). Thus, Marx begins a new example as he is trying to work his way through the relationship between simple—in the sense of abstract, hence more or less universally applicable—and more concrete—“concentration of many determinations,” including those simple, abstract—categories; in particular, he is trying to determine whether or not simpler economic categories, such as money, exchange value, or labor, historically or naturally precede “more concrete” ones, such as capital or the society considered “politico-economically,” what he refers to as “population” (ibid., 101-2).  

Immediately, the question for Marx becomes to what extent this “simple abstraction” in its generality, labor in general as “wealth-creating activity” to be precise, is universally applicable to, and valid in, all economies (ibid., 104). He has no objection to the definition of labor advanced by classical political economists as he proclaims not only “the category, labor, but labor in reality has here become the means of creating wealth in general, and has ceased to be organically linked with particular individuals in any specific form” (ibid.). Likewise, he applauds Adam Smith for the “immense step” he has taken by throwing out “every limiting specification” on labor, thus discovering “the abstract expression for the simplest and

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214 Marx concludes, “it would therefore be unfeasible and wrong to let the economic categories follow one another in the same sequence as that in which they were historically decisive. Their sequence is determined, rather, by their relation to one another in modern bourgeois society, which is precisely the opposite of that which seems to be their natural order or which corresponds to historical development. The point is not the historic position of the economic relations in the succession of different forms of society…Rather, their order within modern bourgeois society” (Marx 1973, 107-8). Thus, Marx starts his analysis of capital not with the “simple and immeasurably old category,” labor, but rather with exchange value, and its material and general representative, money (ibid., 224).
ancient relation in which human beings—*in whatever form of society*—play the role of producers” (ibid.; my emphasis).

But, Marx acknowledges, there are historical conditions that enable political economists to develop this category as such; to put it differently, the conception of labor as the activity that creates wealth-in-general necessarily demands the existence of a particular form of society, and a specific attitude towards labor. Individuals should be indifferent towards specific types of labor, which in turn “presupposes a very developed totality of real kinds of labor, of which no single one is any longer predominant” as was the case in feudalism with labor mainly taking the form of agricultural activity, and craft (artisanal) labor in guilds (ibid.). In addition, workers should not be tied down to a particular form of labor—like, for example, serfs—but rather live “in a form of society in which individuals can with ease transfer from one labor to another, and where the specific kind is a matter of chance for them, hence of indifference” (ibid.). Thus, Marx concludes, this “simplest abstraction,” conceptualized as “labor as such,” “labor pure and simple,” “which modern economics places at the head of its discussions, and which expresses *an immeasurably ancient relation valid in all forms of society*, nevertheless achieves practical truth as an abstraction only as a category of the most modern society,” bourgeois society (ibid., 105; my emphasis).

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215 One thing to note here is that when Marx agrees with Adam Smith in construing labor as “the means of creating wealth in general,” he also accepts implicitly a particular conception of *wealth* itself (ibid., 104). Although he derives wealth from labor as “wealth creating activity” in its “abstract universality,” defining it as “past, objectified labor,” a different notion of wealth—such as the one he elaborates in the section on machinery, wealth as disposable time—would lead to, and be constituted by, a different definition of labor—labor as artistic, scientific activity.

216 Marx argues, “bourgeois society is the most developed and the most complex historic organization of production. The categories that express its relations, the comprehension of its structure, thereby also allows insights into the structure and the relations of production of all the vanished social formations out of whose ruins and elements it built itself up” (ibid., 105).
Marx, however, immediately qualifies the generality he ascribes to labor, or to any of the “abstract” categories that express the relations of bourgeois society, by means of which it is comprehended: “this example of labor shows strikingly how even the most abstract categories, despite their validity—precisely because of their abstractness—for all epochs, are nevertheless, in the specific character of this abstraction, themselves likewise a product of historic relations, and possess their full validity only for and within these relations” (ibid.; my emphasis). He is all the more clear when he asserts, “the categories of bourgeois economics possess a truth for all other forms of society… but always with an essential difference” (ibid., cf. 85; my emphasis). If one ignores this “essential difference” for the sake of bringing forth the “common characteristics,” “common elements” that objects of analyses have—in Marx’s case, “material production” in general, and its bourgeois form, “capital” in particular—one would end up with “the obvious, trite notion,” such as “in production the members of society appropriate (create, shape) the products of nature in accord with human needs,” which is nothing more than Marx’s defining labor as the producer of use-values differently (ibid., 85–88). This is not to disregard these general characteristics—or that labor can be conceived as wealth-creating activity—but to emphasize the specific differences that each object of analysis has, which is shaped by and in turn determines these generalities; as Marx puts it, “the so-called general preconditions of all production are nothing more than these abstract moments with which no real historical stage of production can be grasped” (ibid., 88; emphasis in the original). Thus, it is not production in its general aspects that Marx is interested in, or focuses on, but production in its particularity: “all production is appropriation of nature on the part of an individual within and through a specific form of society” (ibid., 87; my emphasis). Consequently, what labor is changes with the object of analysis, a particular form of society that has a particular economy—particular economic or class relations.
Marx concretizes this methodological point with a discussion of labor in pre-capitalist societies. As I argue above, he shows the form that labor takes under capitalism, wage labor, is necessarily free labor: free in the sense that workers are its sole proprietor and exchange their labor only for a well-defined period of time, as well as that they are free from the objective conditions of its realization—the means and materials of labor. In contrast, in ancient communities, individuals can perform labor only if they are members of the clan or the community; only through their membership in the commune can they access the objective conditions of labor—land as “the means and object of labor and the means of life for the subject”—and produce (ibid., 474). The aim of production, of labor—both in its necessary and surplus forms—is to reproduce the community itself, and not only to produce use-values (ibid., 493). Thus, a commune member does not appear “merely as laboring individual,” but also has “an objective mode of existence in his ownership of the land, an existence presupposed to his activity, and not merely as a result of it” (ibid., 485; emphasis in the original).

This nevertheless only qualifies, and I hasten to add does not in any way refute, the generality, the universal applicability to different economies of labor as an activity that creates wealth—defined in terms of necessities to sustain human life. However, it shows that one cannot conceptualize the specificity of any particular economy with this definition. In addition, the preceding argument does not necessarily validate my contention that Marx advances interrelated yet distinct definitions of labor in his analysis of capital. But, Marx’s discussion of the

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217 Although “a necessary and logical result of property founded on community and labor in the community,” slaves, to the extent they are “classified as an inorganic condition of production along with other natural beings” do not perform labor through this community (ibid., 489, 496; emphasis in the original). This is not to say that they do not labor as such; rather, the conditions of existence for slave’s labor, as well as the characteristics of it, is different from both “communal labor” and “wage labor.”
methodology of political economy and his specifications regarding “the scientifically correct method” does substantiate my argument. Marx conceives the object of analysis, the “conception of a whole...as a rich totality of many determinations and relations” (ibid., 100). However, one cannot simply begin to analyze this “whole”—“the real and the concrete”—in its totality, which would end with a “chaotic conception”; rather the starting point should be “the simplest, abstract determinations,” which would “lead towards a reproduction of concrete by way of thought” (ibid., 100-1). With “the method of rising from the abstract to the concrete...thought appropriates the concrete, reproduces it as the concrete in mind”; thus, “the concrete in thought” appears as “the concentration of many determinations” (ibid., 101).

I do not construe Marx's move “from abstract to concrete” to arrive at “the concrete in thought” as “a rich totality of many determinations and relations” as a sequential method of theorizing—a Hegelian logical deduction, starting with the most abstract from which the concrete is to be derived through mediating, intermediary, moments—or a progressive one—with the move from an abstract category to the concrete, one is closer to “reality.” As he repeatedly emphasizes, even the most abstract categories do not exist independently of their “concrete,” the object of analysis; thus, his definition of production as the “appropriation of nature on the part of an individual within and through a specific form of society” (ibid., 87). Or, his insistence on how even the simplest economic categories—he is referring, in

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219 This is not Marx’s return to a Hegelian idealist philosophy, however: the reproduction of the concrete in thought “is by no means the process by which the concrete itself comes into being...the real subject retains its existence its autonomous existence outside the head just as before; namely as long as the head’s conduct is merely speculative, merely theoretical” (Marx 1973, 101-2).

220 Although Marx himself might be subscribing to a notion of such progression, which I discuss in the context of Marx’s position regarding the scientific status of classical political economy, of his discourse and his concept of “commodity fetishism.”
particular, to exchange-value—presuppose “population, moreover a population producing in specific relations; as well as a certain kind of family, or commune, or state, etc.,” thus, emphasizing not only its economic, but also political, and social conditions of existence (ibid.). 

Rather, at a given moment in his analysis, Marx registers and conceptualizes “the determinations and relations”—the totality of which would give him the concrete in thought—by deploying these categories, which in turn acquire their meanings precisely in and through these determinations and relations, within this totality. As “the determinations and relations” change, so do the meanings attached to the categories, and vice versa. To put it differently, Marx is gazing at the totality of his object from a certain perspective, with a “particular lens,” which in turn allows him to theorize certain aspects of this totality as the “concentration of many determinations”; as his gaze shifts, so does his conception of the totality—consequently, the totality itself—and the categories with which he explains, conceptualizes it. Thus, labor can be not-capital when Marx is determining which category can be defined in relation to, yet as completely distinct from, capital, as its opposite; he can conceive it as value-creating activity, when it is in an exchange relation with capital as a use-value; as a philosophical category, he can construe it as the producer of use-values; or he can conceptualize it as the performer of surplus labor with which he elaborates a theory of class.

Despite his relentless criticism of and self-acknowledged differences from classical political economists—surplus-value as the general form of profit, interest, and rent; the dual nature of labor, the distinction between living labor and living

\[\text{221} \text{ Although Marx intends this as an ontological statement pertaining to exchange value—or economic categories in general as they “really” exist—“as an abstract, one-sided relation within an already given, concrete, living whole,” which “as a category, by contrast…leads an antediluvian existence,” I think it is valid discursively as well (ibid., 101). For it to be not applicable as such, one would have to ignore Marx’s assertion that this is a thought process, appropriation and reproduction of the object of analysis taking place in thought.}\]
labor capacity—Marx nevertheless perceives classical political economy, especially as it is developed by Adam Smith and David Ricardo, to be “scientific” in form; his acceptance of their definition of labor as wealth-creating activity, as the proper conception of labor as such, is a testament to this. In *Capital*, Marx further differentiates his discourse from classical political economy by elaborating a new concept, “commodity fetishism,” as a result of which one can question the “scientific” nature of the category labor construed as value creating activity.

### 2.8 *Capital*: Labor as an Abstraction

Marx published *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* in 1859 as part of the first installment of his proposed six-part project on political economy. Ernest Mandel lauds it for containing “most of Marx’s specific contributions to the development of economic theory”; more specifically, Mandel argues, Marx brings “his theory of value to completion” by differentiating between concrete labor—the producer of use-values—and abstract labor—“the creator of exchange value” (Mandel 1973, 79-82). Maurice Dobb is less enthusiastic in his praise; he refers to it as “an overture” to *Capital*, which, rather than presenting “the central *motifs* of that *opus* which it anticipated,” simply serves as its “opening bars” (Dobb 1970, 5; emphases in the original). The relation and continuity between the *Contribution* and *Capital* are rather tenuous; despite having the concise and most explicit exposition of the “methodology of historical materialism”—in which Marx details the relationship between productive forces and relations of production as well

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222 In the “Preface” to the *Contribution*, Marx states, “I examine the system of bourgeois economy in the following order: capital, landed property, wage-labor, the State, foreign trade, world market” (1970, 19; emphasis in the original). He proposes the exact same outline in a letter to Lasalle, dated 22 February 1858 (Marx and Engels 1975, 40:270). For a detailed study of how Marx changes the outlines regarding his work on political economy—from an ambitious six book project with an additional general introduction, to three volumes devoted simply to an analysis of capital, with a fourth book on the history of classical political economy—see Rosdolsky (1977).
as between the economic base and legal, political, cultural and ideological 
superstructure—and presenting particular aspects of Marx’s hitherto economic 

studies—a substantial discussion of “commodity fetishism,” which appeared first in 
the *Grundrisse* as an epigrammatic remark, and is to be elaborated fully in *Capital*, 
can be found here, in addition to the dual character of labor—what he left out of the 
*Contribution* is more significant (Marx 1970, 30, 34-35, 49).223

Marx devotes the *Contribution* to an analysis of the commodity; however, in 
contrast to Mandel’s claim—that Marx has finally brought his labor theory of value 
to a “completion”—it is notable that Marx does not distinguish clearly between the 
value and exchange-value of a commodity, deploying the latter for the most part. 
Marx analyzes money in detail, discussing how it comes into existence as a necessary 
result of, and the different roles it plays in, the exchange process (“circulation”); he 
also provides a brief history of value theories as developed by classical political 
economists. However, Marx excludes what would have been the third chapter of the 
*Contribution*, a proposed section on “Capital in General,” in which, according to his 
initial outline, he planned to examine the production and circulation processes of 
is, despite the subtitles “Book One: Capital,” and “Part One: Capital in General” he 
gave to the *Contribution*, one of his unique contributions to political economy, a 
discussion of surplus/surplus-value, is only present in its absence; consequently it 
lacks the inspiring originality, intellectual breadth and analytical richness of the 

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223 Another important conclusion of his studies, one that should not be overlooked, that Marx 
refers to anticipately in the *Contribution* is that the “exchange value” and the “market-price”—what 
he calls “price of production” starting with the *Theories of Surplus Value*—differ from, and do not 
coincide with, each other (Marx 1970, 62, 91ft.; cf. 1975, 185). This distinction becomes significant in 

224 The reason behind this is absence is Marx’s (fear of) persecution as a communist émigré, which 
he details in a letter to Weydemeyer, dated 1 February 1859: “you will understand the political 
motives that led me to hold back the third chapter on “Capital” until I have again become established” 
(Marx and Engels 1975, 40:376; emphasis in the original).
Grundrisse or Capital. It was met with utter silence, not the least due “to its abstract nature,” as Engels complained even before its publication (Mandel 1973, 80). Almost another decade has to pass before Marx brings his opus magnum, Capital, to light.

2.8.1 Labor as an Eternal Natural Necessity

Marx starts Capital with a detailed analysis of the “elementary form” of bourgeois wealth, the commodity; he calls it the “economic-cell form” in which the products of labor present themselves in bourgeois society (Marx 1977, 90, 125; 1970, 27; 1975h 183, 190-91). They are use-values—“usefulness of a thing,” constituting

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225 Regarding his other unique contribution, the dual nature of labor, Marx inexplicably credits classical political economy for its elaboration in the Contribution: “the decisive outcome of the research carried on for over a century and a half by classical political economy, beginning with William Petty in Britain and Boisguillebert in France, and ending with Ricardo in Britain and Sismondi in France, is an analysis of the aspects of the commodity into two forms of labor—use-value is reduced to concrete labor or purposive productive activity, exchange-value to labor-time or homogeneous social labor” (Marx 1970, 52). Yet, Marx distinguishes himself from the classicals to the extent that the latter fail in clearly and consistently distinguishing these two forms of labor, as they, time and again, confuse one with the other. In addition, the classicals, with the exception of Steuart, perceive the bourgeois form of labor as eternally existing (Marx 1970, 58).

226 With the exceptions of I. I. Kaufman, whose review of the Contribution Marx cites extensively in the “Postface to the Second Edition” to Capital, and Engels who wrote in Das Volk a two-part review that focuses on Marx’s methodology, there was no reaction. In an endnote, the editors of the Collected Works also mention I. K. Babst, a Russian professor, who used the Contribution in his lectures on political economy (Marx and Engels 1975, 29:542). Marx was quite aware of the Contribution’s abstractness; he consciously tries to “popularize” and render Capital more accessible to mass audience, and he makes his efforts public in his “Preface to the First Edition” (Marx 1977, 89-93). The first chapter, “The Commodity” however remains “difficult” to such an extent that Althusser suggests skipping it altogether (Althusser and Balibar, 1970). Marx on the other hand asserts, “with the exception of the section on the form of value, therefore this volume cannot stand accused on the score of difficulty” (Marx 1977, 90).

227 This notion of commodity that Marx starts his analysis with, the commodity as an autonomous article serving as “the precondition of capitalist production” is different from the commodity that emerges as the result of that process (ibid., 954, 966; emphasis in the original). In the latter case, each commodity contains an aliquot part of the surplus value generated by capital, thus representing that part of the working day that the capitalist appropriates for free (ibid., 965; emphasis in the original; cf. 1968, 264). In addition, “it is no longer the labor expended on the individual particular commodity (in most cases, it can no longer be calculated, and may be greater in the case of one commodity than in that of another) but a proportional part of the total labor—i.e., the average of
“the material content of wealth, whatever its social form may be”; they also have the specific “bourgeois” function of being the “material bearers” of exchange-value (Marx 1977, 126; cf. Marx 1963, 156; Marx, 1971 144-45). At first, appearing as “something accidental and purely relative,” the exchange values of commodities nevertheless have to be reducible to an element that is common to both, yet different from either one, of them for exchange to take place successfully and continuously; as such, exchange value is necessarily a “form of appearance of a content distinguishable from it” (Marx 1970, 126-28; cf. 1975h 198, 207). This “third thing” however cannot be any of the “natural” properties of commodities which make them unique and different from one another—qualities that render them specific use-values, or products of particular, useful, concrete labors; only one quality remains, being products of abstract, general human labor (Marx 1977, 128). Commodities are thus reduced to a “phantom-like objectivity,” crystallized expenditures of human labor-power, “congealed quantities of homogenous human labor” irrespective of the form in which it is expended; “as crystals of this social substance, which is common to them all, they are values,” and this value is measured by the duration of labor, the socially necessary labor-time that is required to produce a use-value given the normal conditions of production and the average degree of skill and intensity that is prevalent in a society at a given time (ibid., 128-29).

This dual character of the commodity, of having a use-value and being a value at the same time, reflects the “dual nature of labor.” Labor, as the creator of use-values, is a specific productive activity that brings distinctive, specific objects of use into being, which represent and are manifestations of, qualitatively different forms of useful labor; it is a concrete mode of laboring which assimilates “particular natural materials to particular human requirements,” serving as “the necessary mediation”
between human needs and nature (ibid., 133, 156). As such, Marx construes useful labor as a universal, ubiquitous and asocial requirement, if not a compulsion, that human beings have to realize incessantly to continue their existence: “labor, then, as the creator of use-values, as useful labor, is a condition of human existence which is independent of all forms of society; it is an eternal natural necessity which mediates the metabolism between man and nature, and therefore human life itself” (ibid.; cf. ibid., 998, 1022; Marx 1970, 36).

Marx further details, rather poetically, labor’s ubiquity for human existence—its interminable necessity makes it the eternally essential mediating process between human beings and nature—in his analysis of the labor process in its “simple and abstract elements” (Marx 1977, 283-92). Simply put, in its generality, “man’s activity” alters the object (nature) in accordance with the intention he had by means of the instruments of labor (ibid., 283). That is, an individual objectively realizes a preconceived end result, already existing ideally in his mind, by affecting a change in the material he is working on; this object becomes a thing of use as it is “bathed in the fire of labor, appropriated as part of its organism, and infused with vital energy for the performance of the functions appropriate to their concept and to their vocation in the process” (ibid., 283, 287-89). This “purpose he is conscious of” not only “determines the mode of his activity with the rigidity of a law [to which] he must subordinate his will” but also differentiates man from animals; to the extent that labor is a conscious, and not an instinctive activity, it acquires an “exclusively human characteristic” (ibid., 284).228 The conscious purpose that drives and determines his activity is in turn shaped by his perceived needs; as the individual adapts and appropriates the nature in a form adequate to his needs, he changes the external, as well as his own, nature, while developing existing potentialities in both

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228 Marx (1977, 284) explicates this by contrasting an architect who fully constructs what he is about to build first in his mind with the bee’s or spider’s instinctive creation.
and subjecting them to his powers (ibid., 283). Thus, Marx introduces a dynamic, ever-changing element to the labor process; however, this “dialectic” does not take away from the universal and eternal necessity of labor. On the contrary, the labor process in which “living labor must seize on things, awaken them from the dead, change them from merely possible into real and effective use-values,” Marx sees as “the universal condition for the metabolic interaction between man and nature, the everlasting nature-imposed condition of human existence, and it is therefore independent of every form of that existence, or rather it is common to all forms of society in which human beings live” (ibid., 289-90).

Here, once again, Marx reverts back to a theme that has seemingly survived various changes, breaks and discontinuities in his discourse intact —albeit, it can be argued, only as a residual—appearing time and again throughout his works: an abstract rendition of labor that is independent of and prior to any society/economy in which it is performed. Nevertheless, his own “methodology,” as he elaborates and

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229 It must be kept in mind that Marx in fact warns against conceiving labor as a universal, eternal and necessary condition of human existence, as a result of which labor as the creator of use-values becomes the determining, defining characteristic of human beings: use-values can exist au naturel, without labor producing them (ibid., 131). In addition, he places useful labor on an equal footing with nature: there is always a “material substratum” which is a necessary condition of production—and thus source—of material wealth (use-values) (ibid., 133-34; cf. Marx 1975). However, Marx goes further in the Contribution and at one point separates, use-value from useful labor completely: “in considering bread as a use-value, we are concerned with its properties as an article of food and by no means with the labor of the farmer, miller, baker, etc. Even if the labor required were reduced by 95 per cent as a result of some invention, the usefulness of a loaf of bread would remain quite unaffected. It would lose not a single particle of its exchange value even if it dropped ready made from the sky” (Marx 1970, 36; my emphasis). Admittedly, Marx freely moves between the two forms that labor assumes: abstract labor or useful labor.

230 Labor as the mediating moment between man and nature through which man objectively materializes what he has conceived ideally, is the defining, essential quality of being human, is the basis for humanist renditions of labor. As such, useful labor, and its alienation in capitalist society, is construed as one of the common and continuous themes in Marx; that is, this is the general ontological model of productive activity/labor that Marx deploys throughout his works. However, this conception is fundamentally different from the humanist-essentialist one found in Marx’s early works—in particular, in the Manuscripts: any explicit reference to a notion of human essence, to species-being that is realized in sensuously perceptible objects, is absent. This qualification, though, does not take away from the universal and eternal pertinence Marx ascribes to useful labor.
then applies it in the *Grundrisse* and *Capital*, modifies, if not contradicts, such an all-encompassing universality.

### 2.8.2 Useful Labor Overdetermined

Even at this most abstract level, it is impossible to think of useful labor independently of use-value and consumption, or outside the context of their particular relationship within which Marx construes them; each one of them is contingent on and overdetermines the others, and vice versa. First, the object acquires its usefulness—rather, realizes actually what only existed potentially—in the act of consumption, by being consumed, which, in turn, determines labor’s quality of being the useful activity that creates this use-value. On the other hand, this article, one that is transformed through productive activity—if it is labored on at all, since useful objects do exist *au naturel*—has to be perceived as a use-value for it to be consumed, and for labor to become the creator of use-value. That is, to the extent that an object is not naturally or by definition a use-value, but becomes (and unbecomes) one by acquiring or losing its usefulness, by passing in and out of its “use-value phase” (à la Appadurai’s “commodity phase”), so does the activity that produces it un-/becomes labor-the-creator-of-use-value. If the object is not considered to be a use-value, as a result of which the productive activity that created it would fail to qualify as useful labor. As Marx puts it, “if the thing is useless, so is the labor contained in it; the labor does not count as labor, and therefore creates no value” (1977, 131; cf, Marx 1970, 42). In addition, to the extent that an object is consumed differently in different circumstances, which in part would depend on the level of “development of human nature”—the changing needs, faculties and senses of individuals—it becomes and acquires different use-values; consequently, the “same”

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231 According to Appadurai (1996), no object by its nature is a commodity, but rather becomes and unbecomes one as a result of the exchange process, which he refers to as its commodity phase.
productive activity becomes different from itself. Thus, useful labor does not precede and act as the cause or determining moment of use-value, or of consumption; rather they depend upon, and mutually condition, each other.

As Marx’s discourse unfolds as “the concentration of many determinations,” he brings into the analysis other economic, cultural and political relations and processes, which he had temporarily assumed as given, theorizing them with the introduction of other concepts, which, in turn, participate in the constitution of the concept of labor-the-creator-of-use-value. Thus, although Marx contends that useful labor is equally common to and independent of all social forms this productive activity might take, he nevertheless qualifies this generality by immediately adding that—the existence and the specificity of—their useful qualities depend on the particular society. That is, the meanings of use-value and useful labor change once Marx construes them within a more “concrete” totality, in a specific society; this particular socio-economic organization is a commodity economy in the first two chapters of *Capital*. Consequently, what use-value and useful labor are is determined by and in turn participate in the determination of value, exchange value, and the other aspect of labor, abstract labor as the substance of value, among others.

In a commodity economy, in order for a commodity to be a use-value, and as a result, for the labor that produced it to be useful, it must be capable of satisfying the needs of others—the commodity has no use-value for the owner; that is, the act of exchange becomes a necessary, yet not sufficient, condition for use-values and useful labor to exist. This is simply because an individuals’ own labor is useless for them in its immediacy and acquires this quality *if and when* the commodity it produces becomes a use-value for someone else, and an object of and in exchange; that is, the usefulness of labor exists only for a person other than its performer, and only then,
by implication, for its owner (Marx 1977, 179-80; Marx 1970, 42-43). In this sense, both commodities—“exchange value does not exist unless [there are] at least two of them”—must “stand the test of being use-values” for exchange to take place (ibid.). In addition, these two commodities have to be in a value-relation in which the natural form of one expresses the value-form of the other; that is, both owners must abstract from all qualitative characteristics and reduce them to being products of human labor in the abstract, thus to values—embodiments of equal amounts of crystallized quantities of homogenous, abstract human labor (Marx 144; cf. Marx 1975h, 183, 207). Thus, individuals in the exchange relation should also have a certain consciousness, a particular subjectivity, which Marx conceptualizes as “commodity fetishism”: exchanging parties should assume an economic rationality to be able to objectify and quantify their belongings, and calculate their values, as well as acknowledging each other as proprietors on an equal footing (Amariglio and Callari 1993). Moreover, private property laws should be established and enforced via legal institutions to guarantee the smooth functioning of exchange (ibid.; Marx 1977, 178). As a result, in a commodity economy, labor-the-creator-of-use-values is and would be different from what it is, say, in a feudal or capitalist economy, as in each case it is the condensation of different economic, cultural, political and natural processes.

2.8.3 Useful Labor in Capitalist Production

When he proclaims labor as an eternal natural necessity, Marx is analyzing the labor process in “its simple and abstract elements”: he is only interested in “man and his labor on one side, and nature and its materials on the other” (Marx 1977, 290). That is, at this level of abstraction, human beings produce their objects,

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232 In this sense, commodities should be “products of mutually independent acts of labor, performed in isolation,” which renders an extensive social division of labor a necessity for commodity exchange (Marx 1977, 132).
perform their labor in isolation, independently of others. More specifically, Marx has not considered “the worker in his relation with other workers” yet (ibid.). This relation comes into focus at the historical and conceptual “starting point of capitalist production,” as “a large number of workers working together, at the same time, in one place (or, if you like, in the same field of labor) in order to produce the same sort of commodity under the command of the same capitalist” (ibid., 439). Although initially there are no qualitative changes in the labor process but just an extension of production to a larger scale, this spatial concentration of workers eventually leads to cooperation—the form of labor “when numerous workers work together side by side in accordance with a plan, whether in the same process, or in different but connected processes”—which not only increases individuals’ productive powers, but also “creates a new and intrinsically a collective productive power” (ibid., 443). With the further extension and intensification of cooperation due to the emergent division of labor in manufacture, and finally with the introduction of machinery and rise of large-scale industry, individual workers are unified in a “single productive body,” establishing the “collective worker,” which operates “with the certainty of a force of nature, and working with the regularity of a machine” (ibid., 444-69). Consequently, as individual workers become “special organs of a single working organism,” they can no longer produce objects independent of others, as an isolated individual; on the contrary, only the collective worker is productive of use-values, and the individual can be productive only within this collective and not individually (ibid., 466, 643-44). Thus, the simple and abstract model of an individual—“man”—appropriating nature and transforming it through his labor in accordance with his conscious plans in order to satisfy his needs is no longer applicable to the labor-process—and Marx has not considered the valorization process yet—once cooperation becomes one of its defining characteristics.
This is not to say that the valorization process has no effect on the labor process; on the contrary, these changes in the labor process correspond to, and in part are brought about by, changes in the valorization process, which in turn is determined by transformations in the former. After all, the labor process and the valorization process in which capital continuously reproduces itself are not two distinct and temporally/spatially separate processes, but rather the production process considered from two different points of view (ibid., 991).

Considered in terms of its valorization aspect, cooperation in production results from the “formal subsumption of labor under capital”: capital does not bring about any changes to, but rather only “takes over an existing labor process,” which corresponds to a certain mode of laboring with labor’s productive powers developed to a particular level (ibid., 1021, emphasis in the original). The only difference now is the labor process takes place under the command, direction, and supervision of the capitalist, as a result of which “the work may become more intensive, its duration may be expended, it may become more continuous or orderly…but in themselves, these changes do not affect the character of the actual labor process, the actual mode of working” (ibid.). The compulsion of the workers to perform surplus labor, which already existed in slavery and feudalism takes only a different, “purely economic” form; stripped of “every patriarchal, political or even religious cloak,” the expropriation of surplus labor now takes place merely with the mediation of a purely financial relation, the purchase and sale of a commodity, labor power (ibid., 1026-27; emphasis in the original). However, under these conditions, the capitalists can only achieve their goal of extracting surplus-value by elongating the working day; as such, they can only produce absolute surplus-value.

On the other hand, capitalists devise other methods of expropriating surplus-value from workers: simply by reducing the individual value of the commodity they produce below its social value—“the socially necessary labor time objectified in the
product”—they are able to generate relative surplus-value (ibid., 1023-24). The production of relative surplus-value transforms “the nature of the labor process and its actual conditions,” bringing about a revolution technologically, and leading to the emergence of “a specifically capitalist form of production” to which now correspond new relations of production, especially between the wage-laborer and the capitalist (ibid., 1024, 1034-5; emphases in the original). These transformations in turn signify the change in the form of labor’s subsumption under capital: “if the production of absolute surplus-value was material expression of the formal subsumption of labor under capital, then the production of relative surplus-value may be viewed as its real subsumption” (ibid., 1025). Thus, “the productive forces of directly social, socialized (i.e. collective) labor” which comes into being as a result of “cooperation, division of labor within the workshop, the use of machinery, and in general the transformation of production by the conscious use of the sciences…[and] technology” results in part from, and ends with, the production of relative surplus-value, or labor’s real subsumption to capital (ibid., 1024; emphasis in the original). That is, collective labor, “aggregate labor-power,” increasingly replaces the individual, isolated, and independent workers, and becomes the subject—as Marx puts it, “the real lever”—of the production process—both labor and valorization processes—with the real subsumption of labor (ibid., 1039-40; emphasis in the original).

Before proceeding to a discussion of abstract labor as the substance of value, I hasten to add that I am not arguing that use-value has no place in Marx’s discourse, dismissed in toto, which, by implication, would mean that useful labor is limited to an insignificant analytical role as well. On the contrary, as Marx unequivocally

233 Here, Marx defines the expropriation of relative surplus value in a different manner. Generally, when the necessities to reproduce labor-power are produced in less labor-time than previously so that a greater portion of the workday can be devoted to surplus production without necessarily elongating it, relative surplus value is produced, according to Marx.
shows in his “Notes on Wagner,” use-value and useful labor are necessary, but not
sufficient, categories for the analysis of the commodity, commodity economy and
more importantly, for a class discourse (Marx 1975h; cf. Marx 1977, 979-80). My
point is that, lest useful labor as the defining quality of being human, and/or as the
mediating moment in the process of Man’s becoming himself as a species-being, be
indeed thought as the ontologico-ethical reference point with which he assesses and
criticizes capitalism in particular, and any alienating action, relation, process or
society in general, Marx asserts that he has just presented the labor process “in its
simple and abstract elements,” and as such has not taken into account how the labor
process itself unmistakably changes once labor is subordinated to capital (the “real
subsumption of labor under capital”), nor considered “the worker in his relationship
with other workers,” let alone with the appropriators of the surplus. And these,
social relations that pertain to the production, appropriation, distribution and receipt
of the surplus, that designates the prevailing class processes—and not useful aspects
of what is produced, or the useful labor that produced it—are what he is specifically
interested in. As Marx puts in this simple reminder: “the taste of porridge does not
tell us who grew the oats, and the process we have presented does not reveal the
conditions under which it takes place, whether it is happening under the slave-
owner’s brutal lash or the anxious eye of the capitalist,” which brings him to the
second aspect of the commodity, and necessarily, of labor: abstract labor with which
he traces the flow of uncompensated labor from its performers to its appropriators
and to those who receive that surplus (Marx 1977, 290).

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234 As Marx puts in the Contribution, use-values “do not express the social relations of
production”—to be precise, class relations: “From the taste of wheat it is not possible to tell who
produced it, a Russian serf, a French peasant or an English capitalist” (Marx 1970, 28).
2.8.4 Abstract Labor as the Substance of Value

Just as commodities possess a dual nature, having use-values and being values/exchange-values, so does labor have a dual character: it is not only useful labor, producing use-values but it also “finds its expression in value” (ibid., 132). These two forms of labor have no common qualities—better yet, they are mutually exclusive: labor that is productive of value “no longer possesses the same characteristics as when it is the creator of use-values” (ibid.). As values, commodities are necessarily embodiments of the same social substance, “objective expressions of homogenous labor”; leaving aside “the determinate quality of productive activity” and disregarding the uniqueness and the particularity of useful labors, all that is left of commodities is nothing more than homogeneous and undifferentiated expenditures of average human labor power, of “human labor in general,” without regard to the form in which it is expended (ibid., 132-34).

What is significant here is not that Marx conceptualizes labor as the source of value—to be more precise, it is not that he designates the expenditure of human labor power as the substance of value. After all, he credits the classical political economists, in particular, Adam Smith, for examining labor in its value-producing capacity. Their only shortcoming—at least, in this context—is that they have not carried out the analysis of the “dual nature of labor” decidedly and consistently; this failure Marx registers in their sole focus on one aspect of labor, or confusion and conflation of one with the other (Marx 1963, 1968, 1971; cf. Marx 1970). Rather,

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235 However, this is not to say that exchange value is of secondary importance; on the contrary, it is the necessary form of appearance of value, as commodities’ “objective character as values…can only appear in the social relation between commodity and commodity” (Marx 1977, 138-39). To the extent that “a commodity appears as the twofold thing it really is as soon its value possesses its own particular form of manifestation, which is distinct from its natural form” it is impossible to think of value independent from exchange value conceptually, although these two are distinct concepts (ibid., 152-53).
what is significant is how Marx arrives at the definition of labor as the source of value, and the conditions of existence he posits for such a conceptualization.

Instead of starting with, and deriving value from, a pre-existing, and pre-conceived notion of labor—abstract human labor—Marx argues that this characteristic of labor cannot be thought independently of the value—exchange—relation in which the relative form of value is articulated: “the expression of equivalence between different sorts of commodities…brings to view the specific character of value-creating labor, by actually reducing different kinds of labor embodied in different kinds of commodity to their common quality of being human labor in general” (Marx 1977, 142). That is, commodity exchange demands that different objects are reduced to, and construed as, possessing a commonality in order for them be commensurable: thus, “only in so far as abstraction is made from their particular qualities, only in so far as both possess the same quality of being human labor” can one ascribe the attribute, value-producing, to different useful labors (ibid., 136; my emphasis).

This abstraction is not universal and ubiquitous across societies, but comes into existence in, and in part as a result of, a particular form of economic organization.\textsuperscript{236} That is, labor is construed as—and acquires the quality of being—the creator of values “only in a society where the commodity-form is the universal form of the product of labor, hence the dominant social relation is the relation between men as possessors of commodities”; for example, this is why Aristotle, who has lived in society based on slave labor, could not develop a concept of value, nor the concept of human labor adequately (ibid., 151-2).\textsuperscript{237} However, it is not enough to have a

\textsuperscript{236} Sohn-Rethel (1978) analyzes the abstraction involved in commodity exchange and construes it the basis of “universal,” “scientific” knowledge. I discuss this point in detail below.

\textsuperscript{237} The Physiocrats, in a related manner, fail to conceptualize abstract human labor in its generality as the source of value, for whom only a specific form of labor is productive (Marx 1963; cf. Marx 1970). According to the Physiocrats, “industrial labor” adds value to the product, not through its
predominantly commodified economy, in which independent individuals produce, exchange and consume what they possess, but they also must perceive one another as commodity owners on an equal footing; Marx contends it is not possible to decipher “the secret of the expression of value” without “the equality and equivalence of all kinds of labor because and in so far as they are human labor in general...and the concept of human equality had already acquired the permanence of a fixed popular opinion” (ibid., 152; my emphasis). That is, a specific consciousness is necessary for, and in part constitutes, the commodity economy in which labor acquires its quality and meaning as the producer-of-value. Marx designates these conditions and particularly this subjectivity with the concept of “commodity fetishism.”

2.8.5 Commodity Fetishism and Abstract Labor

The commodity, which initially appears to be a very simple and obvious thing, Marx finds to abound with “metaphysical niceties and theological subtleties”; it represents the fetishism that attaches itself to the products of labor when they assume the form of a commodity (ibid., 163-65). What he has in mind, at first glance, seems simply to be a “mystification”: what are, in reality, interpersonal relations assume the “fantastic form” of relations between objects in a commodity economy—the objectification and reification of human relations—and the “false consciousness” related with this—the non-recognition of this inversion by individuals who partake in this economy. That is, social relations formed between labor, but through its costs of production, means of subsistence the worker consumes (Marx 1963, 46-47). Instead, they privilege agricultural labor as the source of original value, thus of surplus value (ibid.).

As Amariglio and Callari (1993, 188) put it in their seminal essay, “to the extent that it attempts to join the analysis of commodity production and circulation with the discussion of ‘ideology,’ commodity fetishism does discuss the peculiar subjectivity typical of capitalist social formations.”

For a brief history of various conceptualizations of fetishism, and “Marx’s appropriation” of this category, see Pietz (1993).

See, Amariglio and Callari (1993) for a list of the representatives, and a summary, of this “naive” rendition of commodity fetishism. They criticize such a reading as “reductionist” and
producers and their private labors appear not as “direct social relations between persons in their work, but rather as material relations [dinglich] between persons and social relations between things” (Marx 1977, 165-66). Marx further details what this transference of the subjective relations onto objective ones entails: “the equality of the kinds of human labor takes on a physical form in the equal objectivity of the products of labor as values, the measure of the expenditure of human labor-power by its duration takes on the form of the magnitude of value of the products of labor; and finally the relationships between producers, within which the social characteristics of their labors are manifested, take on the form of a social relation between the products of labor” (ibid., 164). And individuals participating in this commodity economy do not recognize these transferences/inversions and perceive their interpersonal relations, in a “mystified,” “enigmatic” form, as relations between their material possessions: as a result, “the definite social relations between men themselves…assume here, for them, the fantastic form of a relation between things” (ibid., 165).

Commodity fetishism, or “the enigmatic character of the product of labor,” Marx contends, arises precisely from the form these objects assume, the commodity, “and is therefore inseparable from the production of commodities”; thus, it is the result of “the peculiar social character of the labor which produce them” (ibid., 164-65). That is, Marx relates commodity fetishism and the mystification he associates it with to the form labor assumes in a commodity economy. However, this is not to say that Marx derives commodity fetishism causally from a given, pre-conceived notion of labor, even if labor takes on this form only in a particular social and economic

“economic determinist,” as the origin (essence) of this objectification is derived from and found in “the supposedly universal relations described by law of value” (ibid., 195). Consequently, commodity fetishism becomes a theory of “false consciousness” to the extent that individuals are unable to recognize their true social nature (ibid., 196). For a recent example of such a reading, see Holloway (2002), who construes alienation and fetishism as the different sides of the same oppression inherent in capitalism.
organization—one which is based on an extensive and comprehensive commodity exchange. On the contrary, as I argue above, labor acquires this particular social character, its quality of being productive of value—that is, it becomes abstract labor—precisely within a commodified economy. As Marx puts it, “only when exchange has already acquired a sufficient extension and importance to allow useful things to be produced for the purpose of being exchanged,” only when “products of labor acquired a socially uniform objectivity” as material bearers of value as a result of, in and through exchange, then “the labor of the individual producer acquires a twofold social character” (ibid., 166; quotation altered). That is, in addition to being—rather, becoming—a definite useful labor by satisfying a specific social need, it also must count as the equal of—and this is possible only in so far it exchanges with—every other useful labor in its particularity (ibid.). Individuals as owners of commodities, as performers of useful labor, can only realize their labor’s usefulness—being “an element of the total labor” of society—as well as their own needs, by exchanging their products; in order to do so, they have to reduce this multiplicity of different labors/use-values to a singularity, universally common element, abstract labor/value. And Marx himself registers and arrives at this equality between different kinds of useful labor, and derives abstract human labor as the substance of value by emulating commodity owners in their abstraction; he contends “only if we abstract from their real inequality, if we reduce them to the characteristic they have in common, that of being the expenditure of human labor-power, of human labor in the abstract” can commodities be exchanged and only then can they “acquire a socially uniform objectivity as values” (ibid.).

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241 In addition, Labor—in the singular—as the creator of use-values is not independent from a commodity—fetishized—economy, which I discuss in detail below. That is, the dual nature of labor, construed in this particular manner, cannot be thought outside of commodity fetishism.

242 Sohn-Rethel argues, “Marx's analysis [of the commodity] must be viewed as a real abstraction,” and as such, must be distinguished from “thought abstraction” (1978, 20-21; emphasis in the original).
It is important to note that Marx is in fact construing this *abstraction* from the particularity of useful labors to deduce the universally common element embodied in commodities, thus the notion of abstract human labor itself, as a necessary yet not sufficient—nor as I argue below, defining—characteristic of commodity fetishism, and not only its “reification” in commodities—as he puts it, “the semblance of objectivity possessed by the social characteristics of labor”—associated with it: “the specific social character of private labors carried on independently of each other consists in their equality as human labor, and, in the product, assumes the form of existence of value” (ibid., 167; my emphases).\(^{243}\) This in turn implies that abstract labor/value is the form that labor/product assumes in a commodity economy; as such, they are only valid in and applicable to this socio-economic organization. For example, in feudalism, since the social relations of production are characterized by personal dependence, “there is no need for labor and its product to assume a fantastic form different from their reality”; thus, Marx contends, “the natural form of labor, its particularity—and not, as in a society based on commodity production, its universality—is here its immediate social form,” since economic transactions in this social organization take the form of in kind payments and services in most cases (ibid., 170; my emphasis). Similarly, collective labor, either as it comes into being in

\(^{243}\) As Marx puts in the *Contribution*, “universal labor-time itself is an *abstraction* which, as such, does not exist for commodities” (1970, 45; my emphasis). That is, this is not a natural, inherent quality of the object; rather the thing acquires this characteristic, embodying abstract labor measured in universal labor time, within a network of social relations, a commodity economy.
the family, or in “an association of free men...expending their many different forms of labor power in full self-awareness as one single social labor force” renders not only social relations that exist between individual members of these communities transparent, but the measurement of labor-power expenditures by their duration as well (ibid., 171-72). That is, where feudal, independent/ancient or collective labor prevails, “the social relations between individuals in the performance of their labor”—and specifically in the production, appropriation and distribution of their surplus—are not mediated by objects, or through exchange; rather, these social relations are “transparent in their simplicity, in production as well as in distribution” to the participants of these economic processes, thus, do not appear in a fetishistic form (ibid.).

Before going any further, I should make it clear that Marx does not construe these “non-fetishized” economic—specifically, class—relations as the ideal state of affairs, as he insists that ascertaining their transparency is irrespective of “whatever we may think...of the different roles in which men confront each other” in these societies (ibid., 170). Nor are they independent, and do not participate in the overdetermination of other social, and quite possibly fetishistic, relations, which are still condensations of different confluences of cultural, political, natural and economic processes which constitute, and in part are constituted by, them (Amariglio and Callari 1993). That is, people still face each other in different and probably fetishized non-economic roles, which are partly determined by and in turn

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244 Marx states labor time to be an integral concern for all societies, irrespective of their class relations: “in all situations, the labor time it costs to produce the means of subsistence must necessarily concern mankind” (1977, 164). Thus, Marx sees an accounting scheme, based on measuring labor time, to be equally valid in non-commodity economies: “labor-time, even if exchange value is eliminated, always remains the creative substance of wealth and the measure of its cost of its production” (1971, 257; emphasis in the original). However, Marx continues, “free time, disposable time, is wealth itself” (ibid.; emphasis in the original).

245 This is not to say that there is no fetishistic inversion, for example, in feudalism; I discuss this below how the lord/serf relation is fetishized. See Žižek (1989).
determine their performance of labor, and the appropriation, distribution and receipt of their products. For example, such is the “fetishized” political relation between the lord and the serf in feudalism—the corvée labor that serfs expend in service to lords, who receive this labor without a return only because they are the lords; or the tithe they owe to the priest is precisely a result of these fetishized subject positions they occupy, or that are ascribed to them in part as a result of the prevailing cultural processes. Nevertheless, these serfs, Marx asserts, have a clear understanding that these in kind payments they make are expenditures of their personal labor; however, due to the nature of the relationship and/or form of the payment itself, they expend their labor-power in its particularity, as particular useful labors, which do not have to assume the form of a commodity, donning a mystifying veil in the process. Only commodity owners and producers “treat their products as commodities, hence as values, [and] bring their individual, private labors into relation with each other as homogeneous labor in this material [sachlich] form” (ibid., 172; quotation altered).

2.8.6 Commodity Fetishism: Abstraction with Fetishistic Inversion

Thus, Marx does not simply construe commodity fetishism as the objectification/reification of human relations, or as the mere “false consciousness”—individuals simply failing to recognize that relations between material objects are actually replacing/representing their interpersonal relations. What, then, does this

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246 This is not an ontological claim regarding the “universality—the historical eternity and all pervasiveness—of labor and economy” as is the case with economic determinist discourses (Amariglio and Callari 1993, 194). These essentialist discourses treat “allocation of labor” as an existential problem that each society must solve in order to exist and reproduce itself; as a result, Marx’s chooses labor simply because it reflects the “‘real,’ forever existing, and necessary basis for a society to meet its material demands” (ibid.). Following Amariglio and Callari, I think it is possible to read Marx’s emphasis on labor as a discursive privileging, a theoretical choice, rather than an ontological claim, to construe a “class” analysis (ibid.). See also Gibson-Graham et al. (2000) for such a reading; their privileging this class story is informed by a commitment to “laboring bodies.”

247 I. I. Rubin (1972), on the other hand, contends that commodity fetishism is solely about “reification,” with which Marx analyzes the real functioning of the “commodity capitalist economy”. The objectification/reification of social relations as relations between things is necessary for capitalism
misunderstanding of or a failure to comprehend the “real” nature of social relations entail (Žižek 1989)? Žižek maintains the “misrecognition” in fetishism rather
“concerns the relations between a structured network and one of its elements: what is really a structural effect, an effect of the network of relations between elements, appears as an immediate property of one of the elements, as if this property also belongs to it outside its relation with other elements” (ibid., 24). This “inversion” is the defining aspect of fetishism in its generality, and as such is not limited to relations of the commodity economy. For example, in feudalism, being a lord/king, just like being a serf, is the condensation and effect of a totality of social relations—economic, cultural, political and natural processes—as a result of which an individual is designated as the lord/king while another acquires the identity, or occupies the subject position, of the serf. However, for the participants of this relationship, being a lord/king or a serf appears to be an inherent, “natural,” and essential property of that particular person: that is, a king is a king because he, *in his very essence, by his nature, is a king*. This misrecognition, perceiving a quality of an object/subject as its inherent aspect rather than a characteristic that results from a particular network of relationships, is precisely what fetishism entails (ibid., 25).

In a commodity economy, on the other hand, the site of fetishization shifts as “relations between things,” between commodities, rather than interpersonal relations, are “misrecognized.” What are qualities associated with, and result from, social relations between commodity owners appear as genuine aspects of the objects they possess: as Marx puts it, “the mysterious character of the commodity-form consists therefore simply in the fact that the commodity reflects the social characteristics of men’s own labor as objective characteristics of the products of labor

to function properly; Marx’s achievement lies in his treatment of “material categories as reflections of productive relations among people,” thus, seeing the internal connections of these relations and the essence of capitalism (ibid.). Marx’s emphasis on reification, and acknowledgement of its necessity is the sign of his materialist, scientific analysis, unlike his earlier, “utopian” critiques of capitalism, based on the notion of alienation of human relations (ibid.).
themselves, as the social–natural properties of these things” (1977, 164-65). More precisely, the value of a commodity, which depends on and finds its expression only in exchange, appears as a natural attribute of this object, independent of its relation to—as Žižek quotes Marx, independent of its “reflexive determination” by—the other commodity it exchanges with, or more generally, separate from its expression in the universal equivalent, money (Žižek 1987, 23-26).248 That is, objects, in addition to their particular and unique qualities—those that determine them as use-values—become values when they take the form of a commodity; but this value that is common to these objects—the form expenditures of labor powers assume in a commodity economy—is perceived to be an inherent property of and “embodied” in them (ibid., 31).249 It is important to note that this so far is merely an abstraction, a reduction to a common element, which is a necessary condition for the universality and comprehensiveness of the discourse/analysis.250 However, fetishistic inversion

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248 Žižek makes it clear that in commodity fetishism, the misrecognition is not in the knowing, but in the doing. Commodity owners/exchangers know very well that Value is not a real substance, natural attribute of the object, but in their every day lives, act as if it were: “they know very well how things really are, but still they are doing it as they did not know” (Žižek 1989, 32). What they do not know is that their social reality itself, their activity is guided by an…fetishistic illusion” (ibid.). However, this not-knowing is essential for exchange to take place: “exchange is possible only on the condition that the individuals partaking in it are not aware of its proper logic; otherwise this reality would dissolve itself” (ibid., 21). Žižek contends this is “probably the fundamental dimension of ideology,” or more precisely, of ideological fantasy (ibid.).

249 R. P. Wolff argues, there is a “linguistic oddity” in Marx’s analysis in the first chapter of *Capital*: Marx does not say that commodities have values, but rather are values, by means of which he is able to argue that commodities, “qua commodities are not natural objects at all” (Wolff 1989, 178; cf. Marx 1977, 128). I take this as stating that it is not possible to think the commodity independently of value, and vice versa.

250 This abstraction from particularity to arrive at universality, the reduction of heterogeneous uniqueness to homogenous common elements, provides a necessary condition of existence of commodity fetishism. However, this does not mean that abstraction, which is a requirement to arrive at universality, or universal knowledge, necessarily leads to fetishism. But, abstraction is not all that commodity fetishism entails: it is at the same time an “abstraction” and a “speculative inversion” (Žižek 1989, 17-18, 31). And it is rather the “speculative inversion” that is significant here. For example, as I detail above, Marx derives the concept of value as a residual left after he necessarily abstracts from all the qualitative characteristics of the object, which in addition is in an exchange relation with another commodity. However, if this is a necessary, yet not sufficient condition of
entails that these common elements (values) are not only abstracted from but also
construed as the Universal (the Value), which then is seen as embodied, manifesting
itself, in these commodities: “the abstract Universal, the Value, appears as a real
substance which successfully incarnates itself in a series of concrete objects”
(ibid.). As such, commodity fetishists ignore that things have value only within,
and as a part of, a network of relations—objects become commodities within and as a
result of exchange—and perceive this quality to be a universal and ahistorical aspect
of the objects themselves.

However, is this precisely not how Marx analyzes commodities in the first
chapter of Capital? Does this mean that Marx’s derivation of the concept of abstract
labor in particular, let alone his analysis of value and commodity in general, suffers
from this fetishistic inversion? And is this fetishism not similar to the “speculative
inversion,” precisely the method for which Marx has vehemently criticized Hegel
and young Hegelians in his early works?

2.8.7 Form or Content? Surplus or Surplus-Value?

Before proceeding further, I hasten to add that my account of the commodity
fetishism and the inversion it entails is significantly different from Žižek’s. By
construing values as really existing properties of particular objects, Žižek conflates,
and does not adequately distinguish between, the expenditure of labor power, which

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251 Žižek (1989) registers the fetishistic misrecognition not in individuals’ “confusion” of common
particularity with the universal embodiment. It is, once again, not in the knowing, but in the doing.
According to Žižek, individuals are aware that the Value does not embody itself in commodities;
however they act as if it did (ibid.).
is measured by its duration, labor-time, and value, the form that this expenditure takes in a commodified economy. This is exemplified in his assertion, “Value in itself does not exist, there are just individual things, which, among other properties, have value” (ibid., 32; my emphasis). Individual things, in addition to other properties they have as use-values, also are objects created by expending labor-power, if and to the extent that they are products of concrete, particular, useful labors; after all, “a thing can be a use-value without being a value...if its utility to man is not mediated through labor” (Marx 1977, 131).

If commodities do not have, but rather are values, as Robert P. Wolff argues, that is, if it is impossible to think the commodity independently of value, and vice versa, having a value is not and cannot be a property of individual objects as Žižek contends; that is, these things simply do not have value outside of the exchange relation (Wolff 1989, 178; cf. Marx 1977, 128). This is in line with Marx’s argument that, when abstracted from its use-value, all the “sensuous characteristics” of the object are extinguished (Marx 1977, 128).

Failing to distinguish value from the expenditure of human labor-power is to overlook Marx’s distinction between “form” and “content”—which makes Žižek’s conflation all the more surprising as he compellingly argues that Marx, avoiding the fetishistic fascination with the content that is supposedly hidden behind the form, is interested in “the ‘secret’ of this form itself” (Žižek 1989, 11; emphasis in the original). More importantly, this is symptomatic of a more significant conflation of form and

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252 I am deliberately using expenditures of labor powers in the plural, as opposed to simply deploying “human labor power” to avoid any “fetishistic inversion.” Useful labors can and indeed do appear—and be reduced to the element that they have in common—as the expenditure of labor power; however, this does not necessarily mean that it is human labor power that creates use-values. I discuss this point in more detail, below. Marx however is not so careful in this respect; suggesting that “tailoring and weaving” as “productive expenditure of brains, nerves, muscles, hands etc. in the physiological sense are two different forms of expenditure of human labor power,” he fetishizes human labor power (Marx 1977, 134). Also, see Wolff (1989) for this point.

253 This, of course is not to say that value does not have an objective existence—a “phantom-like objectivity” as Marx puts it; on the contrary, Marx's analysis of commodity fetishism revolves around and explains this objectivity (cf. Balibar 1995).
content: surplus-value with surplus as such, which becomes all the more evident in Žižek’s critique of Marx’s conception of ideology.

According to Žižek, Marx criticizes idealist/Hegelian philosophers as well as classical political economists—ideologues, in short—for their “false eternalizations and/or universalizations”; that is, ideology, in this Marxian account, proceeds with an abstraction from historically contingent moments, such as bourgeois individuals populating the Eden of equality and freedom—which also includes the freedom to exploit/be exploited, precisely an inequality and the “symptom” of bourgeois society—to arrive at an ahistoristical and eternal universality—Man as such with his universal rights, which are to be equally extended to every human being and thus supposedly eliminating any inequality, oppression, and exploitation that might have existed (ibid., 49-50).\textsuperscript{254} However, Žižek argues, this criticism makes Marx susceptible to “\textit{over-rapid historicization},” as a result of which he fails to take into account the “hard, real kernel” that “returns as the same through diverse historicizations/symbolizations” (ibid., 50; emphasis in the original).\textsuperscript{255} This “oversight” leads Žižek to conclude that Marx never successfully came to terms with his own finding, the concept of surplus-value, or the paradoxes it contains (ibid., 50-53). Reading Marx’s assertion, “the limit of capital is capital itself,” as a declaration of

\textsuperscript{254} Žižek argues, there exists a fundamental difference between Marxian and Lacanian conceptions of ideology and, related with this, in their respective accounts of fetishism. While Marx construes ideology as a “partial perception” of the totality of social relations—and fetishism becomes that which conceals this totality—in the Lacanian perspective, “\textit{ideology rather designates a totality set on effacing the traces of its own impossibility},” as a result of which, fetish hides “the lack around which the symbolic network is articulated” (Žižek 1989, 49; emphasis in the original). That is, whereas Marxian accounts of ideology are ultimately based on a notion of “false consciousness” that misses/only partially registers the totality of social relations—and Marxist theory is the beholder of the Truth, as it is the scientific knowledge of this totality/reality—in the Lacanian rendition one sees ideology as structuring the social reality itself. In other words, for the latter, “the ideological fantasy is the support of reality” (ibid.).

\textsuperscript{255} This “hard kernel” is the Lacanian object-cause of desire, or, \textit{objet petit a}. Although it eludes symbolization, it is the necessary condition, better yet, the object-cause of ideological fantasy, and of symbolic reality (ibid.).
the ubiquitously contradictory nature of capitalism, which can only exist if and to the extent that it constantly transforms “its limit, its very impotence [into] the source of its power,” Žižek conceives surplus-value as the cause of capitalism’s permanent development, as the driving force of capitalist production (ibid., 50). Thus, Žižek concludes, not only is it the case that surplus-value does not and cannot exist independently of capital, but also that it leads capitalism to constantly and ceaselessly revolutionize its material conditions of existence (ibid., 52). Marx, on the other hand, ignores—rather acts, in a truly ideological fashion, as if he does not know—that capital necessarily, by its very nature has this unceasing drive towards surplus-value, and as a result, overlooks its permanent ability to overcome any barriers to its development/existence; rather, he contends the dialectics of forces of production and productive relations—as capitalist relations of production become obstacles in and against the development of productive forces—will eventually lead to the collapse of capitalism and paving the way to communism (ibid., 52-53).

Žižek conceives surplus-value and the forces/relations of production dialectic as elements of the same Marxist discourse; I find the relation between these two to be rather tenuous and one which needs to be carefully established, rather than presumed, even though it is quite possible—yet not necessary—to read them as mutually exclusive, as distinct elements of two different Marxian discourses. But,

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256 For a critique of similar, traditional Marxist, analyses which construe surplus value/profit as the fundamental drive of the capitalist firm see, Resnick and Wolff (1987). Also see Amariglio and Ruccio (1998) for an extension of this critique to capitalist competition.

257 Žižek argues, “Lacan modeled his notion of surplus-enjoyment on the Marxian notion of surplus-value” (1989, 50). Consequently, he draws a homology between Lacanian surplus enjoyment and surplus value: “it is not a surplus which simply attaches itself to some ‘normal,’ fundamental enjoyment, because enjoyment as such emerges only in this surplus, because it is constitutively an ‘excess.’ If we subtract the surplus we lose enjoyment itself, just as capitalism, which can survive only by incessantly revolutionizing its own material conditions, ceases to exist if it ‘stays the same,’ if it achieves an internal balance. This is then the homology between surplus-value—the cause which sets in motion the capitalist process of production—and surplus-enjoyment, the object cause of desire” (ibid. 52-53).
more importantly, Žižek overlooks a critical distinction that is decisive in and defines—overdetermines—Marx’s analysis, and conflates surplus—to be more precise, surplus labor—with the form that this content takes in capitalism, surplus-value. That is, although Žižek quite appropriately argues it is impossible to think capital without surplus-value, this does not necessarily mean that surplus does not exist independently of capital; if this were the case, then, there would be no Marxian class analysis, nor any non-capitalist class society, as ancient, feudal, and communist class processes would simply not exist. Rather, surplus-value is one of the forms of a content that becomes different from itself in these forms; this content, for Marx, is surplus labor. It takes different forms that are socially contingent as it is overdetermined by economic, political and cultural processes; surplus labor defines in part—is the definition of—the class relations that exist in diverse socio-economic organizations. “Overlooking” this decisive distinction between content and form, one cannot be but confined to an everlasting, ubiquitous capitalism as long as there exists surplus.

2.8.8 Absolute Fruit and Abstract Labor

As I argue above, Marx distanced himself from Hegel as early as 1843 with his *Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right. Introduction*, and from the young Hegelians by 1844, with the *Manuscripts*. The *Holy Family* he co-authored with Engels is, at

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258 For a critique of conceptualizing capitalism as the all powerful, prevalent economic organization from a different perspective, see Gibson-Graham (1996). For a seminal analysis and definition of different class processes, see Resnick and Wolff (1987). For elaborations in this class-analytic framework, see, Fraad et al. (1994) and Gibson-Graham et al. (2000b, 2001).

259 For an inspired and original way out of this Žižekian bind, see Özselçuk and Madra (2005). Defining communism as “a starting point, a principle, an axiom that asserts that no one can have exclusive rights over the dispatching of the surplus,” they avoid “the desire (for surplus qua lost object)” as well as the “deadly drive (for the expansion of value)” (ibid., 93; emphasis in the original).

260 To my knowledge R. P. Wolff (1989) is the first to draw this analogy between “absolute fruit” with which Marx criticizes young Hegelians in the *Holy Family* and “abstract labor”; this section borrows heavily from him, including this title. However, as it becomes clear below, my analysis and conclusions differ significantly. Also see Wolff (1988).
first sight, yet another polemic against Hegel and the young Hegelians—in particular, Bruno and Edgar Bauer. What is interesting in this polemical work, however, is Marx’s elaboration of the Hegelian idealist procedure in its generality; the young Hegelians, just like their master, abstract from the sensuously observable reality to arrive at the concept, which then becomes, as a result of their speculative inversion, the Absolute, Transcendental Subject that manifests itself in this corporeal world as a result of their speculative inversion. That is, Marx ascertains, what is contingent, particular and specific to time and place is nothing more than the embodiment, manifestation and unfolding of the Universal for Hegelians (Wolff 1989).

Marx is highly critical of this speculative procedure, and in the *Holy Family*, unequivocally illustrates the absurdity of this method by humorously deriving the concept of “the Fruit”:

If from real apples, pears, strawberries and almonds I form the general idea “Fruit,” if I go further and imagine that my abstract idea “Fruit,” derived from real fruit, is an entity existing outside me, is indeed the true essence of the pear, the apple, etc., then in the *language of speculative* philosophy—I am declaring that “Fruit” is the “Substance” of the pear, the apple, the almond, etc. I am saying, therefore, that to be a pear is not essential to the pear, that to be an apple is not essential to the apple; that what is essential to these things is not their real existence, perceptible to the senses, but the essence that I have abstracted from them and then foisted on them, the essence of my idea—“Fruit.” I therefore declare apples, pears, almonds, etc., to be mere forms of existence, *modi*, of “Fruit.” My finite understanding supported by my senses does of course distinguish an apple from a pear and a pear from an almond, but my speculative reason declares these sensuous differences inessential and irrelevant. It sees in the apple *the same* as in the pear, and in the pear the same as in the almond, namely “Fruit.” Particular real fruits are no more than semblances whose true essence is *the substance*—“Fruit.”…[For] the speculative philosopher…“the Fruit” is not dead, undifferentiated, motionless, but a living, self-differentiating, moving essence…The different ordinary fruits are different manifestations of the life of the “one Fruit”; they are crystallizations of “the Fruit” itself…[and] “the Fruit” presents itself as a pear, “the Fruit” presents itself as an apple, “the Fruit” presents itself as an almond; and the differences which distinguish
apples, pears and almonds from one another are the self-differentiations of “the Fruit” and, make the particular fruits different members of the life-process of “the Fruit” (Marx and Engels 1975, 4:57-59; emphases in the original)\textsuperscript{261}

According to Robert Paul Wolff (1989) this is precisely how Marx derives the concepts of value and abstract labor in \textit{Capital}, twenty some years later after deriding speculative philosophers. To repeat Marx’s analysis of the commodity in the first chapter of \textit{Capital}—exchange values of a commodity, although representing diverse proportions in which it would be traded with all other commodities at a given point in time, is rather the form of appearance of a content: the value of this commodity. Marx arrives at value by abstracting from each and every useful quality that a particular object has, which then is only left with a residual: being products of human labor. This leftover, however, does not—better yet, \textit{cannot}—refer to concrete forms of useful labor, simply because particularity cannot establish commensurability; rather, it has to be a universally common element in commodities, “the same kind of labor, human labor in the abstract” (Marx 1977, 128).

Marx exemplifies this point by arguing that tailoring and weaving, although qualitatively different productive activities, are nevertheless “two different forms of the expenditure of human labor power,” and as such, can be considered as being productive of value (ibid., 134).

So far, all Marx has done is “philosophical or conceptual abstraction,” which is necessary to “bring many particular concrete instances under one general heading”\textsuperscript{261}

\textsuperscript{261} Marx details a similar argument in the first chapter of the first edition of \textit{Capital} as well: “this inversion through which what is sensible and concrete counts only as a phenomenal form of what is abstract and universal, contrary to the real state of things where the abstract and the universal count only as a property of the concrete—such an inversion is characteristic of the expression of value, and it is this inversion which, at the same time, makes the understanding of this expression so difficult. If I say: Roman law and the German law are both laws, it is something which goes by itself. But if, on the contrary, I say: \textit{THE} Law, this abstract thing, realizes itself in Roman law and in German law, i.e. in these concrete laws, the interconnection becomes mystical (Marx cited in Žižek, 1989, 32; emphases in the original).
(Wolff 1989, 177). However, Wolff calls attention to what he perceives to be a subtle shift in Marx’s analysis, from abstraction to Hegelian speculation, or speculative inversion as Žižek conceptualizes it. The analysis of the commodity in the first chapter of *Capital* Wolff finds to abound with and to exemplify this inversion; for example, when Marx posits, “a use-value, or useful article, therefore, has value because abstract human labor is *objectified* [vergegenständlich] or *materialized* in it” (Marx 1977, 129; my emphasis). Or Marx construes the value of a commodity as the social substance *crystallized* in and common to all commodities, and defines it as the abstract human labor that is socially necessary to produce that particular commodity (ibid.). The same inversion is all the more clear when he argues “the many specific, concrete, and useful kinds of labor contained in the physical commodities now count as the same number of particular forms of *realization or manifestation of human labor in general*” when he derives “the particular equivalent form of the commodity” (ibid., 156; my emphasis). Is this abstract human labor that realizes and manifests itself in commodities any different from the true essence, the real substance, “the *Absolute Subject*” of Hegelian idealist philosophy? To put it differently, is the Abstract Human Labor, or Value, any different from the Absolute Fruit that crystallizes itself in “different ordinary fruits,” that presents itself at times as an apple, and at others, as a pear, an almond (Marx and Engels 1975, vol.4)?

This is not to say that Marx is not aware of the absurdity of this method, as he makes clear in his analysis of the commodity fetishism: “if I state that coats and boots stand in a relation to linen because the latter is the *universal incarnation of abstract human labor*, the absurdity of the statement is self-evident” (Marx 1977, 169; emphasis in the original). However, he insists that this absurd form in which products of particular labors relate to one other (and to the universal equivalent, money) is “socially valid, and therefore objective, for the relations of production belonging to this historically determined mode of social production, i.e. commodity
production”; so are the theoretical categories—categories of bourgeois economics—that purportedly “reflect” the relations of this socioeconomic organization (ibid.). Wolff takes this as a sign that Marx, despite acknowledging the absurdity of fetishistic inversion, does indeed persistently deploy it throughout *Capital*; he explains Marx’s insistence in this admittedly absurd language as his desire to register the “manifestly inverted,” “the objectively crazy (or contradictory) nature of capitalist reality” (Wolff 1989, 180). This “ironic voice,” assuming the character of, and expressing, the Hegelian speculative discourse, is necessary to register the irrationality of the capitalist socio-economic organization, as well as the absurdity of the social theory that professes to represent this society (ibid., 186).

In contrast to Wolff, I contend Marx does not return to Hegelian philosophy, deploying its speculative inversion; that is, with the exception of occasional and inadvertent “slips”—the obvious example being when he asserts that different useful labors count as “particular forms of realization or manifestation of human labor in general”—he carefully avoids this speculative narrative. For example, Wolff refers to Marx who argues, when commodities exchange, “their exchange-value manifests itself as something totally independent of their use-value” (Marx cited in Wolff 1989, 177). However, Marx is quite clear about not becoming a fetishist—treating a quality that results from a network of relations as an inherent, natural aspect of the object itself—as he explicitly emphasizes this manifestation only occurs *within and as a result of* the exchange relation (Marx 1977, 128-29). In addition, Marx’s analysis does not refer to a subject/subject-cause in reference to the commodity exchange process; his deliberate use of passive sentences, without specifying a subject, exemplifies this.262 That is, he does not say, for example, useful objects have value because

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262 One thing to note here is the differences in different translations of *Capital*. For example, in the International Publishers’ edition of 1967, translated by S. Moore and E. Aveling that R. P. Wolff cites, Marx asserts, “the common substance that *manifests* itself in the exchange-value of commodities,
abstract human labor materializes or embodies itself in them; rather, commodities are values because “they are merely congealed quantities of homogenous human labor…[because] human labor-power has been expended to produce them, human labor is accumulated in them” (Marx 1977, 128).

Marx’s aversion to this fetishistic discourse becomes all the more lucid in the subtle transformation in his discussion of the commodity: his argument shifts from particular labors as the producers of use-values to a process without a subject/subject-cause. He argues, once we abstract from the sensuous characteristics of the object, from its useful aspects, the object is no longer the product of any “particular kind of productive labor” (ibid.). That is, although Marx maintains particular useful labors produce different use-values, he does not carry on his analysis in a similar vein and argue that the commodity, as the body/repository of value, is the product of abstract human labor. Rather, as he abstracts from different concrete forms of labor, he contends, “these useful labor can no longer be distinguished from each other, but are all together reduced to the same kind of human labor, human labor in the abstract” (ibid.). Thus, abstract human labor does not exist as such, creating, manifesting itself in, commodities; it is simply the result of an abstraction entailed in the social relations that comprise commodity exchange. As Marx puts it, individuals do not bring “the products of their labor into relation with each other as values because they see these objects merely as the material integuments of homogenous human labor. The reverse is true: by equating their different products to each other in exchange as whenever they are exchanged, is their value” (Marx cited in Wolff, 1989, 177; my emphasis). This same sentence reads in the 1977 Penguin/Vintage edition, translated by Ben Fowkes as, “The common factor in the exchange relation, or in the exchange-value of the commodity, is therefore its value” (Marx 1977, 128). This difference in translations is significant: while the former quotation substantiates Wolff’s argument, Marx deploying the speculative inversion of Hegel, the same cannot be said of the latter, Fowkes translation.
values, they equate their different kinds of labor as human labor” (Marx 1977, 166). He is even clearer in the *Contribution*:

Universal labor-time itself is an abstraction which, as such, does not exist for commodities. But the different kinds of individual labor represented in these particular use-values, in fact, become labor in general, and in this way social labor, only by actually being exchanged for one another in quantities which are proportional to the labor-time contained in them. Social labor-time exists in these commodities in a latent state, so to speak, and becomes evident only in the course of their exchange. The point of departure is not the labor of individuals considered as social labor, but on the contrary the particular kinds of labor of private individuals, i.e., labor which proves that it is universal social labor only by the supersession of its original character in the exchange process. *Universal social labor is consequently not a ready-made prerequisite but an emerging result.* (Marx 1970, 45; my emphases)

That is, abstract human labor comes into being, and acquires its universal character, as a result of exchange relations among individuals, as well as the abstraction involved in these relations (Sohn-Rethel 1978); it is not—and Marx does not ascribe it the role of—the Transcendental Subject, which re-/incarnates, manifests and realizes itself in various objects. Consequently, Marx does not deploy the fetishistic inversion characteristic of speculative discourses; on the contrary, he unequivocally distances himself from Hegelian philosophers, as well as the classical political economists.264

263 Žižek correctly argues the fetishism is not in the knowing—not because individuals see their possessions as material manifestations of homogenous human labor—but in the acting—they equate their products, thus their particular labors, in the act of exchange (1989). Also see Sohn-Rethel (1978). In this sense, Žižek is right in stating that the bourgeois individual is not a “Hegelian idealist,” but an “Anglo-Saxon nominalist” who sees the Universal to be a property of the Particular—that is, they construe value an aspect of really existing things (1989). Marx explicates, “Everybody understands more or less clearly that the relations of commodities as exchange values are really relations of people to the productive activities of one another” (Marx 1970, 34-35). Also see footnote 175. 264 Even if it were the case that Marx deployed the Hegelian speculative method, his insistence on the absurdity of construing values as universal incarnations of abstract human labor in particular, and his analysis of commodity fetishism in general is his warning against, and provides the theoretical framework with which to avoid such “fetishistic inversions.”
2.8.9 Fetishizing Useful Labor

I take Marx’s aversion to and criticism of inversion—probably the only constant “content” throughout his writings which nevertheless takes different forms—to be a warning against fetishizing, and equally applicable to his analysis of, useful labor.\textsuperscript{265} Surprisingly, Marx himself cannot avoid a fetishistic inversion he so vehemently criticized, precisely when he construes useful labor as an eternal, natural necessity,” or when he depicts the labor process in “its simple and abstract elements” in \textit{Capital}.\textsuperscript{266} This is simply because Marx inverts labor speculatively when he is abstracting from particularity (useful labors) in order to attain universality (useful labor); more precisely, he renders fetishistic inversion an inherent aspect of abstraction in those instances when he discusses useful labor in particular and the labor process in its generality.

To repeat, Marx defines useful labor as an eternal, natural necessity of human existence through which individuals mediate their relationship with nature and other human beings when he is discussing different aspects of the commodity—having a use-value and exchange value, and being a value—which in turn correspond to the dual nature of labor (Marx 1977, 128-32). He starts from two different objects,

\textsuperscript{265} This is not to say Marx’s \textit{oeuvre} is one incessant critique of speculative inversion, starting with Hegelian idealists and ending with classical political economy. Beginning with the \textit{Holy Family}, and culminating in the \textit{German Ideology}, Marx identifies speculative inversion as the method of ideology; in doing so, he places it in opposition to “historical materialism,” which is the knowledge, truth of the proletariat who are without illusions about reality, thus remain fundamentally external to the world of ideology (Balibar, 1995, 54). Marx questions his position as a result of the “events of 1848-50” and acknowledges that proletarians’ consciousness can be and indeed is determined by ideology (ibid., 55). In addition, his difficulties in defining classical political economy as an ideology, which he considered to be “scientific in form” led him to suppress the notion of ideology, which he replaces with the concept of commodity fetishism (ibid., 55-56). That is, although a critique of speculative inversion is common to these works, the forms this critique takes, thus the critique itself is, different from one another, constituted differently in each case.

\textsuperscript{266} I hasten to add, one should not jump to the conclusion that Marx is a fetishist, since such a conclusion can only be reached by ignoring—and the textual evidence for it can only be found at the expense of—the immediate qualifications that Marx attaches to his fetishistic assertions, which I discuss above.
coat and linen, which as use-values, are products of specific kinds of productive activity—tailoring and weaving; their existence as different use-values, and the possibility of their exchange, depend on their being “products of qualitatively different forms of useful labor” (ibid., 132). However, there is a subtle shift in Marx’s discourse here; he refers to tailoring and weaving not as distinct useful labors, but as qualitatively different forms of useful labor. That is, although he is not explicit—nor necessarily conscious—about it, Marx has abstracted from the heterogeneity of useful labors, from particular productive activities that are appropriate for the production of specific things of use, to attain the concept of useful labor. Failing to identify this abstraction, he then takes the short step to fetishistically invert useful labor, rendering the quality of producing use-values to be inherent in, and a natural aspect of, this productive activity; thus, labor becomes the mediating moment between man and nature, and as such is the eternal, natural condition of all human existence.

Marx’s “misrecognition” is that he does not register that useful labor in itself is, and can only be construed as, an abstraction from the heterogeneity of particular useful labors; in other words, useful labors, in the plural, are the particularity/heterogeneity from which the universality/homogeneity of the useful labor, in the singular, is to be derived. However, when Marx abstracts from particular useful labors in his analysis, he does not do so to arrive at useful labor, but rather at abstract human labor. To put it differently, he sets up the concrete-abstract relation as one that is between use-value and value, which then becomes the reflection of—and, in turn, itself is founded upon—the relation between labor-as-the-creator-of-use-values and labor-that-produces-values.267 To the extent that Marx fails to specify or acknowledge the intermediary step of abstracting from the useful labor and expenditures of labor power measured by its duration, or labor time/value. Although value and use-value are interdependent, their relation is not one of particularity/universality.

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267 Rather there are two such relations; useful labors/useful labor and expenditures of labor power measured by its duration, or labor time/value. Although value and use-value are interdependent, their relation is not one of particularity/universality.
particularity to derive universality, he renders this Universal, Useful Labor, to be eternal and ubiquitous, independent from everything else, even the relations that ascribe to it its defining quality, being productive of use-values. Consequently, he treats useful labors as if they were the particular forms, representations, even embodiments of what is common to them, Useful Labor.

2.8.10 Man as a Laboring and Exchanging Individual: Fetishizing the Individual

This “oversight” and Marx’s subsequent fetishization of useful labor in his opus magnum is taken as providing the textual support for humanist renditions of labor (Arthur 1986; Braverman 1975; Engels 1972; Gould 1978; Lukaćs 1980a, 1980b; Meszaros, 1975; Ollman 1976; Wood 2004). To summarize these accounts, productive activity/labor is considered to be the mediating moment between human beings and nature through which they materialize what they have conceived ideally, in their minds, on objects provided by nature and transformed by previous labor to satisfy their needs, and to reproduce themselves. Labor is both an activity of self-realization—a teleological, intentional, meditated activity through which human beings objectify, thus, recognizes themselves, realize and develop capacities in sensuously perceptible objects—and of self-creation—these individuals do not have a fixed, eternal human nature, but comes to be what they are, create themselves through their labor at any given point in time in the process of becoming human/species-beings. As such, labor is “the distinctive activity of human beings”; it is the defining quality, fundamental characteristic of being human (Gould 1978, 41).

268 This is, of course, a highly simplified summary of these humanist renditions of labor, and as such only focus on the most general, abstract model that is common to these accounts. That is, I do not pay specific attention, thus do not fully appreciate, the nuances in these texts. For example, as I argue above, C. J. Arthur (1986) distinguishes between productive activity and labor, stating that the
This humanist rendition of labor is informed by, and in turn, elaborates a particular notion of the individual, “Man,” which, not coincidentally, is the subject of the labor process when Marx analyzes it in its simple and abstract elements. Although a dynamic element, a move from the abstract to the concrete, is generally introduced simply by acknowledging that this individual is socially situated—determined by and in turn changing the specific forms of social relations that he finds himself in, and consequently his own human nature, what “man” is, at any given instance—he is independent of, prior to, and serves as the starting point of these discourses; “Man,” conceived as such, provides the abstract, general ontological model for these humanist accounts, as well as—so they contend—of Marx’s analysis.²⁶⁹ Interestingly enough, “Man” conceived in this manner, as an independent, solitary individual, who exists as a separate, distinct entity in relation to, and with, other individuals—who are exactly like him in their independence—and nature, have a great deal in common with the socioeconomic agent in, the subject of, the commodity economy (Amariglio and Callari 1993).

Commodity fetishism, according to Amariglio and Callari, is Marx’s theory of the subject with which he analyzes “the social constitution of the individual” as a condensation of manifold economic, cultural, and political processes in a commodity economy (ibid.). That is, the concept of the individual summarizes “the specific social conditions” required for commodity exchange to take place; more specifically, with the notion of commodity fetishism, Marx summarizes “the qualities of individuality” who construe what in reality is an exchange of unequal quantities of labor-time as an

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²⁶⁹ See, for example, Gould (1978, 43-44) who after considering “the concept of objectification in terms of the abstract relation of an agent to an object,” contends that Marx concretizes “the relation of humanity to nature”; accordingly she argues, “although production as objectification may be described in terms of a general model, concretely it always appears in differential forms.”
exchange of equivalents (ibid., 204, 208).\footnote{270} Amariglio and Callari designate the characteristics “that define the self-identity and behavior of these individuals” who participate in exchange as “economic rationality, equality and private proprietorship,” which in turn involves “objectification, quantification and calculation” (ibid., 208-12).\footnote{271} The idea of objectification presumes a “a consciousness of difference”; thus, in commodity exchange, “individuals are agents that perceive differences not only among one another but also between themselves and the products they produce, possess or consume” (ibid., 209). That is, an individual perceives others as different from but equal to himself/herself, and to the extent that they produce, own and consume commodities that are their exclusive possessions; this distance and separation from one another is a condition for, and in turn, partly determines the subject of and in exchange relation (ibid.). Consequently, they conceive themselves—and are constituted as—“‘selves’ distanced and differentiated from ‘others’,” likewise, they conceive things with useful qualities/use-values—in short, “nature”—as objects that are “separate and distinct from themselves” (ibid., 208-9). This process of objectification is how individuals in commodity exchange in part construe their self-identity—how the concept of the individual, as an independent, exclusive “self,” is constituted.

These “selves distanced and differentiated from others,” which in part constituted by commodity exchange and the consciousness/subjectivity that makes this exchange relation possible, correspond to and inform the notion of man/the

\footnote{270}{As such, individuals’ consciousness is not determined by commodity exchange—an economic determinism in which the economic base determines the superstructure—but rather is a condition of existence of this exchange (Amariglio and Callari 1993, 208).}

\footnote{271}{Here, I only discuss “objectification” in detail as it pertains directly to the humanist conception of labor. To summarize the other aspects of commodity fetishism within the context of economic rationality: individuals quantify these objects of use by assigning numbers to them, and “construct a set of procedures by which the calculation of these objects is conducted” (ibid., 209; emphasis in the original).}
individual associated with the humanist conception of labor. Marx designates this commonality, the overlap between the laboring and the exchanging subject, by construing commodities as “products of mutually independent acts of labor, performed in isolation” (Marx 1977, 132; my emphasis). That is, construing the attribute of producing/creating useful objects to satisfy their needs and reproduce themselves, which also realizes/materializes the species-essence of human beings in sensuous things in the process of man's self-mediated birth, as the natural characteristic, immediate property and inherent quality of labor itself, and not “an effect of its relation with other elements”—this fetishistic depiction of labor—is in part possible because of objectification, which is an aspect of commodity exchange. In this sense, just like the fetishization of intersubjective and interobjective relations—as exemplified by the lord/serf relation in feudalism, and commodity exchange in a commodified economy, respectively—humanist discourses fetishize the relationship between the subject (man) and the object (nature)—and the mediating moment, that is, labor.

2.8.11 Productive Labor as the Performer of Surplus: Avoiding Commodity Fetishism

It is important to note, once again, that Marx does not construe useful labor, or the labor process in its simple and abstract elements, as the basic and fundamental model for his analysis; and this is so not because he amends this “essential” framework in accordance with changes in the prevalent productive forces or the dominant social relations. On the contrary, he qualifies the universality and

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272 I hasten to add, this is not to say that one can derive this rendition of labor/man from the economic relations of exchange; rather, my point is that once objectification is in effect, one of the conditions of existence of fetishizing labor is in place.

273 Such a qualification would be of no effect in terms of fetishizing or speculatively inverting labor, as it would not alter this ontological model in its essence, essentially.
eternity he ascribes to labor at once; more precisely he “inverts” his fetishistic inversion—labor as “purposeful activity aimed at production of use-values…is the universal condition for the metabolic interaction between man and nature, the everlasting nature-imposed condition of human existence, and it is therefore independent of every form of that existence”—by immediately referring to it as an abstraction—it is “rather common to all forms of society in which human beings live” (Marx 1977, 290). That is, Marx is essentializing and fetishizing labor simply when he construes it as “independent of every form of human existence,” since its quality of producing use-values only then appears to be in its very nature, as its precise essence; however, when Marx refers to labor as a commonality in—by abstracting from—each and every form of socio-economic organization, the quality that renders it useful not only becomes its aspect merely in a network of social relations, but the possibility of this labor taking different forms, thus becoming different from itself, even in its commonality, arises.

On the other hand, if useful labor were to be taken as the basis of Marx’s analysis, his essential model, it should be kept in mind it is not the only aspect of the simple labor process that can be abstracted from and universalized. As Marx compellingly shows, so are the means of production, or as Marx calls them, “objective conditions of labor”; they are “necessary feature[s] of the human labor process as such, irrespective of the form” they have assumed (ibid, 981). Although Marx acknowledges the existence of these common elements of the labor process, he repeatedly warns against solely, primarily, or even remotely, focusing on them; he relentlessly criticizes classical political economists for concentrating on “features common to all process of production, while neglecting their specific differentiae…by

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274 In this sense, Marx is inverting “what is standing on its head…in order to discover the rational kernel within the mystical shell”—inverting Hegel, his speculative inversion, along with the fetishistic one of political economists (Marx 1977, 103).
abstracting from the distinctions,” as a result of which they establish an identity between the material objects and capital, labor and wage-labor, and gold and money (ibid., 982; emphasis in the original).\textsuperscript{275} This is exactly the way bourgeois economists fetishize capital—which is a social relation, or better yet, the condensation of social relations—and turn it into an eternal and universal condition of production, simply by equating it with the form it manifests itself in—in this case, means of production. Or as Marx puts it decidedly, this is how “the objective conditions essential to the realization of labor are \textit{alienated} from the worker and become manifest as \textit{fetishes} endowed with a will and a soul of their own” (ibid., 998; emphases in the original).\textsuperscript{276}

Lest it be thought that Marx limits his critique of fetishistic inversion to the forms that elements of the labor process assume within capitalism, his analysis of productive labor in “Results of the Immediate Process of Production” unequivocally shows that it can be equally valid for useful labor (ibid., 1038-49).\textsuperscript{277} There, he registers a “bourgeois obtuseness” in the manner classical political economists conceptualize productive labor, according to whom, “all labor is productive if it produces, if it results in a product or some other use-value or in anything at all” (ibid., 1039). Marx contends this definition is a result of and exemplifies “the fetishism peculiar to the capitalist mode of production from which it arises. This consists in regarding \textit{economic} categories such as being a \textit{commodity} or \textit{productive} labor as qualities inherent in the material incarnations of these formal determinations or categories” (ibid., 1046).\textsuperscript{278} That is, conceiving labor as productive

\textsuperscript{275} As Marx puts it, “it is the same logic that infers that because money is gold, gold is intrinsically money; that because wage labor is labor, all labor is necessarily wage labor” (1977, 982).

\textsuperscript{276} By invoking the alienation of the objective conditions of labor, Marx refers to the private ownership of these means of production by non-laborers; direct laborers cannot access these objects necessary in the labor process unless they sell their labor-power to their proprietors.

\textsuperscript{277} Marx left this section out of the first volume of \textit{Capital} and subsequent editions; it appears for the first time in English as an appendix in the 1977 edition (Mandel in Marx, 1977, 943-47).

\textsuperscript{278} This is only one of the three sources of “the desire to define \textit{productive} and \textit{unproductive} labor in terms of their \textit{material} content”: the other two Marx designates as, labor is considered as
if and when it produces use-values or materializes itself in useful objects, and construing this quality to be its inherent, natural and eternal characteristic, just like the humanist discourses do, would be nothing more than fetishizing labor.

In contrast to the classical political economists, Marx looks at “productive labor” from the standpoint of capitalist production and not from the labor process in its simple and abstract elements (ibid., 1038). He distinguishes between productive and unproductive labor by ascertaining whether this particular labor-power exchanges for money as money, or for money as capital; that is, whether it creates surplus-value or not (ibid., 1047). For example, individuals can simply buy the cloth and hire a tailor’s assistant “for his services” to produce a pair of trousers, or they can buy the same pair from the merchant tailor; in both cases, individuals purchase and consume a use-value, thus their money does not become capital (ibid., 1046). In addition, the labor that the tailor’s assistant performs in its qualitative aspects, the useful labor with which s/he produces the trousers, remains the same irrespective of whether s/he is hired by the individual, or by the merchant (ibid.). However, only in one case is the assistant’s labor “productive,” and only in that case does there exist an exploitative class relation: when the assistant produces for the merchant tailor, s/he performs labor for an amount of time that is above and beyond the labor time that is necessary to reproduce himself/herself, which is represented by the wages s/he receives (ibid., 1047).

So far, what Marx has described is just another example of an exchange between the wage-laborer and the capitalist, which is a condition for and ends in surplus labor being extracted from the former by the latter in the form of surplus-value. However, Marx does not stop there, adding, “the fact that this transaction,”—

productive only if it results in a material product in the labor process as such, and the difference that exists “between labor engaged on articles essential to reproduction and labor concerned purely with luxuries” and that affects the formation of wealth in the real process of reproduction (ibid., 1046; emphases in the original).
the tailor’s assistant “performing 12 hours’ of work and is paid only for 6…[thus] he does 6 hours’ of work for nothing”—is “embodied in the action of making trousers only *conceals* its real nature” (ibid.; emphasis in the original). That is, solely focusing on the use-value itself, or on the useful labor that produces this object, “conceals” and leads to the “misrecognition” of the class aspect that this production might entail; better yet, fixating on the labor process in its generality might become a “mystifying veil” that obscures the performance and extraction of surplus, as it is now hidden beneath the material content, the usefulness of the product, and the purposeful activity that produces it.

This is not to say that any attempt to define labor as purposeful activity that is productive of use-values is in and of itself fetishistic; once again, if this aspect is not seen as a condensation of a multitude of social relations, but rather is perceived to be a characteristic of labor as such, *only then* does it become a fetishistic inversion. For example, tailoring and weaving are particular purposeful activities through which useful objects are produced; however, when one abstracts from their specificity that renders them unique and construes them as the manifestation of the necessary, inevitable and ubiquitous Useful Labor, labor as purposeful activity would be speculatively inverted and fetishized. In addition, I am not arguing that Marx does not have a universally applicable notion of productive/useful labor: when considered within the simple labor process, it is productive if it produces a use-value, materializes itself in an object (ibid., 133, 283-93). However, Marx avoids fetishistizing, speculatively inverting labor by situating it within the context of a particular society, and in the case of productive labor, within specific class relations.

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279 However, Marx is very cautious in “Results of the Immediate Process of Production” about this definition: “looked at from the standpoint of the labor process, labor *seemed* productive if it realized itself in a product, or rather a commodity” (ibid., 1038; emphasis altered). His choice of the verb, “seem,” is evocative of his reference to mystification involved in commodity fetishism.
This, he specifies by emphasizing that one has to ask the “right” questions: consequently, the question for him is not so much “what is productive labor as such?” but “what is productive labor? and what is a productive worker from the standpoint of capitalism?” (ibid., 1039; emphasis in the original).280

2.9 Concluding Remarks: Which Labor?

I have discussed in detail the various conceptualizations of labor Marx advances throughout his oeuvre to substantiate my argument that there is no Labor as such; rather, Marx (alone and with Engels) elaborates different definitions by ascribing a new and particularly distinct meaning to labor in accordance with his discourse. To be more specific, what labor designates, I argue, changes with the theoretical framework he deploys, his object and level of analysis, and whom he sides with or argues against. Consequently, Marx’s labors are irreducible to one another; thus, they remain in a relation of difference with each other. To summarize these different conceptualizations—the Feuerbachian humanist framework of his early works, which sets him apart from Hegel and the Young Hegelians—as epitomized in the Manuscripts—in part shapes his conception of labor as the mediating moment through which human beings come into being—a self-mediated birth—which nevertheless appears, under the regime of private property, as “the activity of alienation, alienation of activity”: that is, for the “young” Marx, labor becomes—returns to itself as—the productive activity through which human beings realize their essence, “species-being,” in sensuously perceptible objects that also sustain their lives only with the supersession of alienation. This particular conception of labor gives way to another notion, labor as (a form of) praxis or revolutionary, practical activity in the Theses on Feuerbach, which Marx further specifies as “self-activity” in

280 This is reminiscent of Marx’s criticism of young Hegelians: “not only in its [i.e., German criticism] answers, even in its questions there was a mystification” (Marx and Engels 1975, 5:28). Althusser (1970) makes this point forcefully.
the *German Ideology*: however, the *differentia specifica* of being human, productive-activity, assumes the “negative form of self-activity” under a division of labor that confines these individuals to a limited realm of production. This labor, he argues, would be transformed into genuine human activity only with the abolition of division of labor/private property, that is, with the appropriation of productive forces as well as the means of production. Despite rendering productive forces—along with the relations of production—the essential category of his political writings of the 1845-48 period by ascribing an ontological significance to it, Marx does not yet delve into an analysis of the production or the valorization processes and construes labor, one of the forces of production, as a commodity, just like any other commodity, exchanged in the market.

With the *Grundrisse*, one can see Marx tentatively yet unequivocally elaborating one of his unique contributions to political economy, the dual nature of labor—labor as creator of useful objects and labor as the producer of values, which in turn attest to a potential capacity to perform surplus. However, this is not the sole conception of labor in these manuscripts: Marx also construes labor as the Other of capital—living labor capacity as the commodity exchanged with and employed by capital as the activity that can produce value and surplus-value—labor subsumed to machinery, and labor as social labor in its immediacy. Finally, Marx further refines and elucidates the “dual nature of labor” in *Capital*, as a result of which these attributes do not appear as inherent, natural and essential qualities of labor itself. Thus, I conclude, there is no Labor in the singular for Marx, representing, signifying an essence, or a signified that is always-already-given and known; rather, there are labors to which a different and new meaning is ascribed in accordance with the discourse it is deployed in and in part it constitutes.

Does undoing the long presumed unity and fixity of labor by elaborating and juxtaposing its different conceptualizations within Marx’s *oeuvre* mean that we are
merely left with numerous, conflicting and contradictory, yet equally valid
definitions, all of which are attributable to—representing what labor means for—Marx? My answer is an emphatic *yes*: that all of these renditions belong to Marx, and one is as valid as the next one. That is, to the extent there is no one, single definition that is derived from and in turn signifies the universal ontological ground, thus, no reference point with which to adjudicate, guarantee or confirm the adequacy, validity, or “realness” of the way Marx construes labor, each one of these definitions can equally be taken as—and indeed *are*—Marx’s. However, I hasten to categorically add, this is not to say that, simply because these conceptualizations are equally valid one cannot privilege a particular conception over others for what this specific notion allows one to see and conceive, and the political projects it potentiates; after all, “one cannot see everything from everywhere” as Althusser argues. That is, if one, as Marx does, starts with labor as “self-activity” through which human beings realize their creative powers, thus differentiate themselves from animals and nature as social beings—or “species-being” as Marx, following Feuerbach, puts it—this notion inevitably leads him to focus on the qualitative aspects of the simple labor process. For example, Marx, in the *Manuscripts*, discusses the conditions under which labor becomes “the activity of alienation, alienation of activity,” and how it would be superseded with the (political) emancipation of workers from the rule of private property, which contains within itself the universal human emancipation. Marx construes this supersession of human self-estrangement as individuals’ return to their human, social existence, which in turn signifies the end (goal) of history, the founding of genuine communism (Marx 1975d).

Marx seemingly conceives labor in similar terms in the *German Ideology*; labor once again appears as the “negative form of self-activity” that would be *transformed*—that is, no longer appearing as labor—into genuine, human self-activity with the proletariat abolishing private property; however, such a reading
would completely ignore the specificity of the latter work he co-authored with Engels, and its difference from the *Manuscripts*, which can be registered in the former’s guiding thread—the division of labor. In the *Manuscripts*, Marx, as a Feuerbachian sensuous materialist, recounts the self-mediated birth of the abstract, idealized Man through his labor. In the *German Ideology*, on the other hand, Marx announces his “materialist” conception of history, which focuses on social groups and the production of their material existence; consequently, he conceives history as a succession of different forms of productive activity, which are characterized by the prevalent division of labor. Marx argues, all hitherto existing societies have been oppressive and only with the abolition of the division of labor would individuals be freed—freed from being confined to a limited position within, and to a restricted productive activity as a result of, the division of labor; only by appropriating the totality of productive forces and means of production, that is with the abolition of division of labor, would human beings become emancipated, and self-activity a possibility. As such, although Marx refers to labor as the form that productive activity assumes before the founding of communism in both accounts, the manner he conceives what precisely is wrong with these societies, or with labor, and how these would be superseded or abolished, that is, how a communist society would be founded in which—or whether—labor would become self-activity—of “Man,” or “men,” and who this Man is or who these men are—differs in each narrative.

However, neither one of these conceptualizations is the one that Marx specifically or primarily deploys in his latter writings; as I discuss above, the concept that Marx privileges is given by and in turn partially determines the focal point of his discourse in those works—class, defined as the performance, appropriation, and distribution of surplus. To recapitulate, to be able to perceive the performance of unpaid labor by direct producers, and the expropriation by and transfer of that surplus to those who do not participate in the valorization process productively, one
must look beyond labor’s useful aspects—productive activity that creates objects of use; without this change in focus, one simply cannot see the prevalent class processes as they would simply be concealed, and, thus, remain unrecognized. Accordingly, Marx elaborates and focuses on labor-as-the-producer-of-value, which, if it continues—or is compelled—to work beyond that time it reproduces what is necessary to sustain itself, simply becomes the performer of surplus labor.

This does not mean useful labor, the other aspect Marx refers to with the “dual nature of labor,” is irrelevant to class analysis; on the contrary, as Marx pertinently emphasizes, “nothing can be a value without being an object of utility. If the thing is useless, so is the labor contained in it; the labor does not count as labor, and therefore creates no value” (Marx 1977, 131). That is, for value, and by implication for surplus-value to even exist, this value, the socially necessary labor time with which this object is produced, needs to be “attached” to a use-value; and this use-value, simply because, or, to the extent, it “embodies” value must be created through useful labor: after all, “a thing can be a use-value without being a value” (ibid.). Nevertheless, useful labor (and use-value) remains necessary but not sufficient for developing this unique class perspective; not only does it refer to an aspect of the simple labor process that is common to all forms of production—a commonality deduced by abstracting from the particularities that make these “modes of production” unique—but it also does not shed any light on or enable one to construe what Marx conceives as the differentia specifica of these productive activities—the class processes that characterize them. In order to see these class relations, it is necessary to start from labor as a value-producing capacity, thus, labor as the potential performer of surplus.

Neither one of these characteristics that Marx ascribes to labor, I argue, is a natural, inherent or essential attribute of labor; rather, labor acquires these qualities within Marx’s discourse. For example, labor becomes a value producing capacity once
Marx abstracts from all concrete and natural properties of commodities—any quality that renders them a unique and particular use-value—to arrive at value, which means that objects *qua* commodities are not products of concrete, useful labors; as a result of this abstraction, he is only left with a “phantom-like objectivity,” congealed quantities of homogeneous human labor, that is, expenditures of human labor-power independent of the specific form this productive activity takes (ibid., 128). As such, labor the producer of value is an abstraction, the building block of an accounting scheme with which Marx can trace the flow of uncompensated labor from direct producers to appropriators, and finally to those who receive this surplus. And this surplus comes into existence not because labor has the natural gift or given ability to produce it, but rather because it has the capacity—and in the capital/wage-labor relationship, it is forced—to continue with, to elongate production beyond that time during which it creates the necessaries for its subsistence.

On the other hand, the other characteristic Marx designates in the “dual nature of labor,” labor that produces use-values is an *abstraction*, as well—an abstraction from concrete, particular useful labors, such as tailoring and weaving; and this is so, despite Marx’s claim to the contrary, exemplified when he declares it to be an “eternal natural necessity” (ibid., 133). And finally, Marx’s persistent aversion to speculatively inverting and thus fetishizing concepts, categories, and relations is a constant and unwavering reminder against naturalizing these qualities that he ascribes to labor. As such, the dual nature of labor, that is, labor as the creator of use-values and labor as the producer of values do not reflect what labor actually, in reality, is; in this sense, Marx need not construe or privilege labor ontologically. Rather, I read Marx as *discursively* privileging labor precisely because labor conceptualized as such renders class processes visible, enables a particular class discourse with which one can intervene into theoretical debates and potentiates projects that strive for non-exploitative class relations.
This is not to say that class can only be conceptualized in terms of surplus labor; that is, class can be—and has been—defined in ways other than the production, appropriation, distribution, and receipt of surplus that is performed by labor. For example, construing class in terms of the wealth/property one possesses or the income one receives are two such possibilities; that is, by ranking individuals or families according to their wealth/income, one can determine their class belonging or class position. The upper/middle/lower classes—and any subdivision among them—the rich and the poor, even the percentile distribution of population according to their income/wealth...these various conceptions appear what Amariglio and Ruccio (1999) identify as “everyday economics.” However, absent is any pertinent consideration of labor in these renditions of class. That is, the only relevant issue is how much income/wealth one has and how one fares compared to all the rest; how people come to possess their wealth or earn their income is of secondary importance—although the job one has or the position one occupies in the social division of labor, and the class they belong to is implicitly linked. In addition, one dominant form of economic organization is presumed to exist: a free-market (capitalist) economy to which everyone can participate on an equal footing irrespective of their class positions. Finally, class construed as such cannot render (capitalist) exploitation visible, as everyone appears to receive—their income is determined by—which they contribute to the social output.

Class can also be construed as a relation of power, which, in turn, determines individuals’ identities; those who possess this power, the “ruling” classes—capitalists—dominate those who lack it, the working-class, with the help of those who partake in the subordination of the latter, such as the managerial class. In this sense, individuals’ positions in the labor process are immediately linked to, and define their class belongings. Although, it is possible to identify a form of capitalist exploitation within this framework—some having power over, and dominate,
others—it is conflated with, or reduced to, a form of power relation/oppression. In addition, capitalism appears as the dominant economic form, with little or no space for non-capitalist alternatives—the latter can only come into existence when the dominated assume the power they lack or overthrow their oppressors.

By defining class in terms of surplus labor, on the other hand, Marx and the AESA school construe the economy and envision alternatives differently: they focus on class processes, conceived as the production and appropriation of surplus (fundamental class processes), and its distribution from appropriators to recipients (subsumed class processes) (Resnick and Wolff 1987). As such, this class discourse differs from other class narratives. For example, unlike class as wealth/income, class as surplus labor immediately allows one to bring forth and focus on labor’s experiences, including its exploitation: who, under what conditions, in return for what performs surplus labor, who appropriates the surplus created and who are its recipients, that is who gets a share for providing the conditions of existence of these class processes, or for no reason at all. With this definition, one can also differentiate class from power, and, exploitation from relations of domination or oppression; as such, the relationship between these two forms of injustice becomes something to be analyzed, not assumed. In addition, unlike class as power and class as wealth/income in which the subject, for the most part, is presumed to have a single identity, Marxian class analysis is interested in one’s “class becoming” (Gibson-Graham et al. 2000); that is, in the latter account, depending on how one participates in fundamental and subsumed class processes, one simultaneously can occupy multiple class positions, thus having multiple class identities. Finally, the coexistence of multiple class processes at any point in time undoes the “capitalocentrism” of other class narratives (Gibson-Graham 1996); more importantly, it attests to the fact that noncapitalist and non-exploitative economic alternatives already exist in contemporary societies.
These are some of the affects of conceiving labor as the performer of surplus; in the third essay of my dissertation, I attempt to concretize the effectivity of construing labor as such by elaborating a labor theory of ethics.
3.1 Introduction

Looking at the presence or absence of labor in contemporary discourses, it is possible to ascertain the particular and peculiar discursive spaces this once important, if not privileged, category of alternative-to-theoretical-orthodoxies, heterodox narratives—not to mention a key agent in revolutionary and/or counter-hegemonic social movements—occupies. Juxtaposing these contentious and conflicting accounts, labor no longer represents an essence, nor does it appear as the signifier reflecting a signified; on the contrary, it becomes a discursive construct the meanings of which, rather than being always-already-known, are constituted differently in different discourses that it in part constitutes. That is, there is no labor in the singular, signifying or referring to a common underlying “thing”; there are labors, which are different from, and in a relation of difference with, each other.

Lest it be thought that by tracing these different, contending, and, at times, conflicting notions of labor one inevitably ends up with an apolitical “anything goes,” a political quietism occasionally attributed to and associated with certain postmodernist accounts, I would both agree and disagree with such a claim. I agree, as I do not seek a supposedly real and true definition of labor that adequately signifies, reflects, or represents the Essence, the Truth, the founding moment of
Reality. However, I hasten to add, this is not to say that one is limited only to “story-telling,” juxtaposing one discourse to another to no effect at all; in this sense, I disagree and argue that “not anything goes.” A particular conception of labor is necessary but not sufficient for the elaboration of a specific discourse that allows one to see and focus on particular aspects of a reality/particular realities, produce effects/affectivities, and enable ethical and political projects that are different than those construed with a different—or those that have no—notion of labor. In this third essay, I concretize and substantiate this performativity by elaborating a “labor theory of ethics.”

I start by discussing what I have designated as “the problem of labor,” the presence or absence of this category within the realm of economic justice; after a brief review of the predominant economic theory, neoclassical economics, which for the most part explicitly repudiates any engagement with or allusion to normative matters, I argue that not only does it have a normative criterion, Pareto optimality, but also it is possible to extend its reach to issues pertaining to labor. On the other hand, labor construed in a completely different manner—as living labor in its subjective existence—figures as the founding moment of the ethics elaborated by the prominent Marxist liberation theologian Enrique Dussel. Juxtaposing these two renditions from almost the opposite ends of the ideological spectrum is enough to assert that labor has not disappeared, but still occupies a particular discursive space within the realm of economic justice.

However, as labor becomes the essence of all that exists in his rendition, Dussel simply cannot circumvent “the problem with labor”—construing labor in an essentializing way, thus silencing and/or rendering invisible multiple and irreducible aspects of human life, social identities, and antagonisms. To avoid such pitfalls, I situate labor within a broader framework of economic justice: Nobel laureate Amartya K. Sen’s capabilities approach. I summarize how labor is construed within
this approach and argue Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum touch on, yet do not extensively discuss, what labor as a capability signifies; both authors for the most part construe it merely as compensated employment, or wage-labor, and analyze it within the context of “freedom of employment,” while Nussbaum additionally demands that work must be performed in a manner that does not inhibit human beings’ capability to think and act, thus in accordance with their human dignity.

I particularly pay attention to a recent effort by Levine and Rizvi (2005), whose definition of labor—more precisely, work *qua* creative activity as a capability—allows me to elaborate the common ground that can be found between those who privilege useful labor as it appears in Marx’s analysis of the simple labor process—including the alienation literature—and the capabilities approach.

However, I contend that all these accounts miss an important aspect of human well-being and a vital capability, labor as the performer of surplus; consequently, they fail to account for, and they exclude human beings from participating in, a “surplus economy” (Community Economies Collective 2001). What is more, they neglect to elaborate a “class justice,” a necessary but not sufficient condition towards attaining an economically just society, which can be situated within the capabilities framework. In doing so, I borrow from and build upon the bourgeoning postmodern Marxist literature on economic justice and ethics, in particular the analysis of exploitation by Theodore Burczak (1996/97), Stephen Cullenberg (1992, 1998), George DeMartino (2000, 2003), and Stephen Resnick and Richard Wolff (1988, 2001b, 2002). Although I incorporate labor as a *capability* to produce surplus into their class analysis, this is not to say that class justice is necessarily confined to the realm of production; rather, the terrain of economic justice expands to include the interdependent, yet distinct, moments of appropriation and distribution of this surplus. In elaborating class justice, I dissociate it from the capitalist normative framework based on “equal rights and equal exchange,” and advocate a “radical
equality” in which no one is excluded. I finish by summarizing the affectivities of construing labor as a capability to perform surplus; in particular, I show how such a conceptualization, despite being “of” the bourgeois theoretical and ideological horizon of equal exchange—as it is represented by, first, classical political economy, and, later, neoclassical economics—nevertheless can also be “other than” how it is construed in that framework. As such, labor as a capability to perform surplus undoes this capitalist ethics by providing the starting point of a different and unique—Marxian—ethics aimed to achieve class justice.

3.2 Labor and Normative Matters

Returning to the question with which I began, “has labor simply disappeared?” and now focusing on the terrain of economic justice, the answer is, once again, negative. That is, labor—however defined is of no consequence at this initial point—does figure into the normative accounts of economic theories for the most part; if this presence is not explicit, then one can still extend the implicit or proclaimed normative criteria, and deduce its application, to labor. For example, the predominant economic discourse, neoclassical economics, has dealt with issues of equality, fairness, and justice in a rather peculiar way, denouncing any attempt to develop an explicitly ethical stance as futile; or, when compelled to respond to critiques of its underlying premises, it immediately confines those criticisms to a discursive terrain labeled with a pejorative adjective, “normative” economics. This aversion to normative matters derives from and can be attributed to its self-professed claim to “scientific analysis” reflecting the Truth of the Economy, ultimately of Human Nature, which in turn is reflected in the founding “rationality” assumption.

281 Aversion towards normative matters remains for the most part implicit, only explicitly discussed by neoclassical economists who either try to reconcile markets/efficiency with ethics/justice, or who register the shortcomings of the neoclassical framework and introduce alternatives. See, for example, Broome (1999), Buchanan (1985), Sen (1987a).
Individuals—are assumed to—make decisions in accordance with their preferences, their desires, given the alternatives they have. Neoclassical economics takes these choices merely as given, as a datum which is not subject to any value judgment, or normative assessment as long as, to the extent that, better yet, since these decisions are “rational”: individuals prefer an outcome from which they would benefit the most since they are (taken to be) utility-maximizing, pleasure-seeking machines (Amariglio and Ruccio 2002; Ruccio and Amariglio 2003). That is, there can only be one type of—acceptable—behavior, and consequently the rational becomes, or simply is, the ethical for neoclassicals. As a corollary, the rationality assumption paves the way for attributing any form of injustice or unfairness, better yet, inefficiency as neoclassical economics construes it, to deviations from this ideal, such as the irrationality of individuals and/or market imperfections/government interventions.

Thus, neoclassical economics not only justifies the current state of things—after all, any and every result we face is nothing but a consequence of our own doing/choice—but also makes an even stronger claim: the status quo, insofar as it results from the rational decisions of individuals, is the best possible, most desirable economic outcome given individuals’ preferences. And this assertion—which also reflects and provides the basis for its championing of the invisible hand of the market—in turn signifies what can be considered as neoclassical economics’ own normative criterion with which it adjudicates economic outcomes: Pareto optimality. A social or economic outcome is considered to be Pareto optimal if a state is better or more desirable than another if at least one individual is better off in the former than s/he is in the latter, provided that all others achieve at least their previous individual levels of subjective satisfaction. As such, Pareto optimality provides the criterion with which neoclassical economics assesses social outcomes; however, this evaluation
solely focuses on a professedly value-free notion, *efficiency*, as a result of which issues pertaining to fairness and justice seemingly remain insignificant.\textsuperscript{282}

So far, there has been no mention of labor; still, this is not to say that the hegemonic economic discourse completely ignores labor when it comes to normative matters. That is, neoclassicism has, if only implicitly, performative and distributive criteria that pertain to labor. For example, according to the theory of marginal productivity, labor, as one of the factors of production, has the “right” over some portion of, and should receive what it contributes to, the final product. In addition, a neoclassical performative criterion, albeit a negative one, can be derived from the foundation of Paretian welfarism: utilitarianism. Accordingly, the supply of labor is the result of the utility-maximizing decision of individuals who choose between two sources of utility, income—which can be earned by laboring and at the expense of leisure—and leisure itself. As a result, the performance of labor figures in as a necessary burden, as the inevitable suffering individuals must endure in order to enjoy the fruits of their labor in the form of income; it is a source of disutility in a world of utility maximization, an ineluctable step towards acquiring the objects of utility.

On the other end of the theoretical/political spectrum, it is possible to find normative accounts in which labor figures as the sole, unique and essential, normative ground from which the criterion/criteria to assess economic and social outcomes are derived, and which in turn provide the possibility of criticizing neoclassical economics and its take on normative matters. Enrique Dussel (2001) provides a recent example of such a stance. He asserts that Marx construes living labor—in opposition to and distinct from objectified labor—that is, labor in its

\textsuperscript{282} DeMartino (2000) provides an elegant and illuminating summary of neoclassical economics’ position on normative matters. Also see Buchanan (1985, 13) for “arguments for and against the market on grounds of Paretian efficiency.”
subjective existence, embodied in the “immediate corporeality” of a person as the sole “creative source” of all that exists (ibid.). That is, living labor is prior to and independent of Existence; it is the temporal and logical presupposition of “Being” in the sense that labor initially, in the beginning, has nothing outside itself (ibid.; cf. Dussel 1997). Moreover, it does not produce, but rather creates the totality; thus, it is not placed within but remains outside of that totality it brings into existence. As such, it also serves as the “absolute point of departure” for Marx’s dialectical discourse and is the generative category of all his categories: for example, “departing from living labor,” Marx develops the concept of capital by “unfolding all the moments of ‘objectified labor’” (Dussel 2001, 21-22).

More significantly, living labor provides Marx with a transcendental ethical reference point from which he can criticize Being and morality in all the forms that they exist (ibid., 24). That is, to the extent it remains outside of and independent from any social totality that it brings into existence—be it a bourgeois, Aztec, feudal, or a socialist society and their different “effective” moralities—living labor, precisely because of this exteriority, serves as the transontological—in the sense that it is beyond and exterior to Being—foundation of Marx’s transcendental ethical critique. Consequently, Marx’s specific project, according to Dussel, becomes a critique of the economy as it actually exists—based on and reflected in the totality of capital—and the “bourgeois economic science,” neoclassical economics—which, with its normative criterion of Pareto optimality reflects the morality associated with capitalist economic and social organization—from the ethical reference point of living labor.

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283 In an earlier, unpublished paper, Dussel (1997, 7) asserts, the “living personal corporeality, its empirical materiality” is the starting and arriving point of Marx’s “ethic materialism”. In doing so, Marx is inspired by Schelling, turning the latter’s creationist theory into “critical economy,” as a result of which Marx distances himself from Hegelian ontology (ibid., 6).
Juxtaposing these two conflicting and contending normative accounts portrays vividly the problem of labor: an essentialist conception of labor serves as the foundation of Dussel’s ethical stance, which is the same totalizing category that has informed poststructuralist criticisms that I discussed in detail in the first essay. To put it differently, Dussel construes living labor as a universal basis—not to mention that it is the already-existing, pre-Being—to establish the unquestionable and ever-applicable normative criteria that is independent of time, place, and context. Consequently, he essentializes one aspect of human existence, with which he then defines the ethical norms that should inform social arrangements as well as human behavior in each and every society, independent of historical differences and cultural diversity that these might have. In addition, with this transcendental notion of labor, Dussel reintroduces the controversy pertaining to the very possibility of a Marxist ethical principle that serves as an overarching rule of law, as a last court of appeal, which he does not mention and deal with.

In contrast, I readily acknowledge this “problem with labor”; that is, I do not take labor as an ahistorical ethical ground, a universal foundation from which morally obliging and rationally necessary principles are derived in the terrain of economic justice, a stance that Cornel West emphatically argues against (West 1991). More generally, I refute the existence of an objective basis awaiting to be discovered

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284 DeMartino, designating such a position as “moral objectivism,” advances several criticisms (2000, 128-51). First, specifying such an objective and incontrovertible foundation is predicated on nothing more than a presumption that it indeed does exist, which cannot be proven. Also, even if one presumes that different cultures would agree on the existence of this basis, it is highly contestable that they will agree on what exactly it is, or that there will be an accord on the moral code that is deduced from this foundation. Consequently, one will be forced to privilege one of these contending and incompatible codes along with its underlying objective basis to subsume others, but such a move would be blind to what other cultures deem as normatively valuable, or morally obliging. Moreover, this move tends towards cultural imperialism; it leads to the imposition of a set of ethic codes over alternative normative accounts, as the former is non-negotiable, and cannot be comprised.

285 See Peffer (1990) for a detailed summary of the debate over the possibility of a Marxian theory of justice. For an argument against such a rendition, see West (1991).
for establishing ethical norms, and acknowledge that normative criteria are indeed socially embedded and/or discursively constituted. Accordingly, there exists, at least potentially, distinct and most likely incompatible moralities and ethical systems, which are relevant only for particular societies at particular times; this, in turn, implies that they are continuously changing with the ever-changing circumstances. However, this does not mean that every and any normative account should be accepted without demur to evaluate an economic or social outcome; such relativism might not only render invisible some, or all prevailing inequalities, injustices and oppressions, but also could restrict the field of action against these outcomes, thus, leading inevitably to a political quietism. If one succumbs to this absolute relativism, then, the neoclassical narrative, for example, in which labor is present only as a burden, as an unpleasant yet necessary capacity for remunerative employment to be suffered in order to secure a livelihood, would remain unquestioned and unchallenged; or, one has to concur that “anything goes,” as each and every way labor is conceptualized or any normative criteria pertaining to it—even, if it so happens, its absolute absence from normative accounts—would become equally acceptable within the terrain of economic justice.

Simply put, I contend this “either essentialism or relativism” cul de sac is simply a false opposition. As I argued in the previous two essays, it is quite possible to elaborate labor in such a manner that it is relieved from its foundationalist weight so that it no longer represents an ontological essence that is causally prioritized, but rather acquires its meaning through the narratives within which it is construed. This, in turn opens up the category, labor, to multiple, contending and even conflicting conceptualizations, to one of which—as I discuss in detail below, labor as the performer of surplus—I nevertheless ascribe a discursive privilege merely and solely because of its performativity in constituting that particular normative account. That is, conceiving labor as an arbitrary starting point that is discursively constructed and
privileged enables me to elaborate a “labor theory of ethics” that should be judged by and advocated for its effectivity—what it renders visible and construes as desirable, just social outcomes.

3.3 The Capabilities Approach

Amartya Sen provides another answer to this impasse (between absolutist and relativist approaches to normative matters) with his capabilities approach; while acknowledging, if not celebrating, cross-cultural differences, a feat that escapes those pursuing the fundamental basis of human existence to ground their ethics or morality, he also manages to elaborate a normative framework that is universally applicable in its non-exclusivity, thus, not succumbing to the political quietism usually associated with cultural relativism. Sen starts with what he calls the most primitive, underlying notion of his framework: functionings, which he defines as a combination of an individual’s doings and beings that s/he can manage to do or be, and has a reason to value in leading a fulfilling life (Sen 1987b, 1993). Based on relatively this simple notion, Sen develops the concept of “capabilities”—to which he increasingly refers to as a “freedom,” more precisely, as having the freedom to do or be in his later writings—as the alternative sets, different combinations of functionings that one can (choose to) achieve, depending on his/her mental and physical capacities, and economic, social and cultural circumstances (Sen 1987b, 1993, 1999; cf. DeMartino 2000).\(^{286}\)

With these basic categories, Sen construes the evaluative space of economic justice, which then becomes the focal point of his approach. Individual opportunities and successes are to be valued within this space and, as Sen makes clear, his project is

\(^{286}\) For a critique of Sen’s increasing emphasis on freedom as “the dominant value” in assessing well-being instead of the pluralistic characterization allowed by capabilities, see Gasper and van Staveren (2003). They discuss the “overextension and underelaboration” of this category by Sen and emphasize the importance of other values besides freedom (ibid.).
the recognition of the intrinsic relevance and centrality of this terrain of capabilities (freedoms). That is, specifying the actual objects and states of being that are of value to individuals, or the evaluative criteria with which one would determine or assess these, is of secondary importance as Sen explicitly refuses to posit a single, objective ethical principle, which, he believes, would prohibit his approach from taking other plausible routes in accordance with different individual valuations. Accordingly, he calls for the equal distribution of, and access to, capabilities for each and every individual. Nevertheless, this does not mean that Sen presumes everyone will or should aspire to, or achieve the same specific goals, or attain the same functionings; on the contrary, he is very clear that individuals should be able to choose and achieve whatever end-states they wish to attain and deem valuable. Thus, while working toward social justice by demanding the equalization of human capabilities, Sen leaves open the determination of what is valuable and important to those whose lives will be affected. However, this would precisely require that each should have the capacity and the ability, better yet, have the freedom, to do so, which in turn would quite possibly necessitate an unequal distribution of resources favoring those individuals who lack certain capabilities in order to enable them to acquire these capabilities.

That is, by demanding the equalization of capabilities for all human beings, Sen not only develops a universally applicable normative principle while remaining faithful to self-determination and self-valuation, but also opens the possibility for active intervention. Even though both individuals and the public as a whole can determine those capabilities they find necessary to pursue a fulfilling life, this nevertheless would be a possibility only if they do have access to all the capabilities and this might only become an option as a result of an institutional and/or

287 In this sense, capabilities approach exemplifies Laclau and Mouffe’s "empty signifier"; see Safri and Düzenli (2004) for an elaboration of this point.
governmental involvement; in this sense, capabilities approach is a politically enabling project. For example, one can define a set of “basic” or “important” functionings that should be realized to achieve a fulfilling and meaningful life, and Sen, on different occasions, advances various capabilities’ lists. These capabilities comprise, but are not limited to, adequate nutrition, avoiding preventable morbidity and premature mortality, being adequately clothed and sheltered, being able to move around to be educated, and other functionings that are deemed necessary for a person to live a decent life, such as “taking part in the life of the community, being able to appear in public without shame, and so on” (Sen 1992, 110; cf. Sen 1987b, 2004).

However, to the extent that these capability sets and the means to achieve them are not derived from an objective or universal basis, they are open to negotiation and compromise, and, most importantly for Sen, they are to be shaped by individuals’ goals, desires and ambitions. In this sense, Sen respects diverse aspirations of human beings and different communities by recognizing that they might have and value distinct sets of functionings, that they might rank differently those functionings they share, and that they might achieve those valued end-states through different means. For example, a society might value the capacity to live a long and healthy life—though this functioning can be ranked differently as another might prefer spiritual contentment—but this goal can be attained through diverse

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288 Nussbaum (1992, 221) identifies a threshold of human existence “beneath which a life will be so impoverished that it will not be human at all,” which comprises of basic biological needs, such as nutrition and shelter, as well as opportunities for humor and play, and affiliation with other human beings. Likewise, the three components of Human Development Index of the UNDP (1990), namely, life expectancy at birth (longevity), educational attainment, and income as a measure of command over resources to enjoy a decent standard of living, can be considered as another set of “basic functionings.” For an exhaustive inventory of “capabilities lists,” see Alkire (2002, 78-84).

289 As Sen (2004, 78) puts it in a recent interview, “What I am against is the fixing of a cemented list of capabilities, which is absolutely complete (nothing could be added to it) and totally fixed (it could not respond to public reasoning and to the formation of social values).”
health care systems and alternative institutional arrangements (DeMartino 2000, 146-47). Consequently, what Sen wants to achieve—and to a great extent has succeeded in doing—is to change the terms of the debate, redefining how one conceives and judges what it means to lead a good, meaningful and fulfilling life; once capabilities are acknowledged to be the universally relevant normative space for elaborating, even adjudicating theories of justice, one then can focus on specifying those capabilities, which, if not achieved or realized, would lead to unjust social outcomes.

### 3.4 Labor in the Capabilities Approach

One of these aspects of leading a meaningful life that Sen occasionally discusses—although he does not explicitly designate it as a capability *per se*—relates to and in turn signifies his conception of labor, which he uses interchangeably with work, and in some occasions, with employment (Sen 1992, 1996, 1997, 1999, 2000). What he has in mind when referring to labor or work, however, is not necessarily or always limited to paid employment. On the contrary, Sen celebrates the all-inclusive manner in which the ILO defines who should count as a worker and which activities its decent work initiative would cover: the ILO believes, and Sen concurs, that the reach of decent work objective should extend to “*all* workers, wherever and in whatever sector they work,” encompassing not only those working in the organized sector, “but also unregulated wage-workers, the self-employed, and the homeworkers” (Sen 2000, 120; emphasis in the original). Nevertheless, despite his appreciation of an all-inclusive conception of work, Sen stresses the “freedom of employment” as a significant capability in leading a meaningful life, and elaborates in detail the positive individual and societal effects of wage-labor.

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290 Here, I refer to DeMartino, rather than Sen himself, as Sen, to my knowledge, has not discussed in detail, or exemplified concretely how individuals might have and value distinct sets of functionings, how they might rank those, or what possible routes they might take to realize them.
Emphasizing the importance of, yet moving beyond a mere focus on, the remunerative aspects of employment, Sen asserts, “the role of work in human life is not confined to just earning an income,” an argument, he contends, Marx extensively elaborates (Sen 1997, 171, ft.2). After all, if the income that a person has is all that matters, then there would be no difference between earning that income through paid employment or receiving it via unemployment benefits, a conflation that Sen vehemently opposes (ibid., 156). Accordingly, Sen delves into the “recognition aspect” of employment: human beings want to engage in something that is worthwhile and can be a “source of pride” or a “factor in self-esteem and in esteem by others” (Sen 1996, 446). In addition, employment provides individuals with the “opportunity of having a fulfilling occupation,” and thus can be an important aspect of a meaningful and satisfying life; in this sense, lack of employment is a “loss of freedom” since the unemployed do not “exercise much freedom of decision,” and are excluded from “social activities, such as participation in the life of community” (Sen 1997, 155, 161). Finally, Sen argues individuals lose not only their productive skills but also their cognitive abilities, confidence, self-respect, sense of control, and self-reliance when they are unemployed, which in turn causes intense psychological suffering and mental agony with feelings of shame, dejection, dependency and unproductiveness, as well as affecting their physical health with increases in ailments and morbidity; what is more, unemployment disrupts their familial and social lives, reinforcing social exclusion and worsening racial and gender problems (ibid.; cf. Sen 1996; 1999, 94-96). As a result, Sen conceives being unemployed as a significant obstacle in leading a fulfilling life.\footnote{However, Sen does not extend the importance of employment to all individuals, arguing, “to a member of ‘the leisured class’ the fact that one does not work for one’s living may be, in fact, a source of pride” (1996, 446). This of course does not necessarily mean that this leisured class should remain as such.}
However, being employed is not in and of itself sufficient to guarantee a meaningful and satisfactory life, an issue that Sen addresses by discussing the qualitative aspects of work. He emphasizes that individuals should be employed in a job that is appropriate for them and/or commensurate with their skills and training; only then, would they feel fulfilled in their field of work (Sen 1996, 446). Thus, to be able to choose the particular field of employment one desires and/or (feels) is best suited to becomes significant; Sen argues, market-based wage-labor provides this “freedom of employment” by enabling individuals to seek jobs appropriate to their skills, and designates it as a significant aspect of a fulfilling life that is to be sought by those who have to make a living through their most significant, if not only, endowment, labor-power (Sen 1999). Sen stresses the importance of this freedom by contrasting wage-labor, based on a voluntarily signed contract and “unrestrained physical movement” of laborers, to forced or bonded labor, child labor, and slavery, in all of which the freedom of employment is absent, and which, in turn, signifies a “major deprivation” (ibid., 113).292

In this vein, Sen finds the absence of freedom to seek employment outside the household to be “a serious violation of women’s liberty and gender equality” with dire individual and social consequences (ibid., 115). He argues the ability of women earning an income by working in remunerative jobs outside the house renders their contribution to the family prosperity more visible, and in turn, gives her more voice, enabling her agency in making decisions regarding the well-being of the family.293

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292 Sen asserts Marx has criticized “the unfreedom of precapitalist labor arrangements,” and “saw the emergence of freedom of employment as momentous progress” (1999, 29, 113). This remark, of course, focuses only on the freedom of laborers to sell their labor power in a capitalist economic organization, but fails to account another aspect of wage labor that Marx emphatically stresses: that laborers are forced to have the freedom to sell their labor power as they are freed from the means of production, to which I return below. This “unfreedom” is implicit in Sen’s analysis, who sees labor power as the most abundant, if not the only, asset that laborers have (ibid., 162-63).

293 In addition to earning an independent income and seeking remunerative employment outside home, Sen lists “having ownership rights and to have literacy and be educated participants in
Sen asserts “freedom in one area (that of being able to work outside the household)” not only contributes to “the reduction of women’s relative—and absolute—deprivation,” but also “seems to help to foster freedom in others (in enhancing freedom from hunger, illness and relative deprivation),” leading to improvements in the overall societal well-being (ibid., 191-94). Thus, he concludes, wage-labor, having the freedom to sell one’s labor-power in the market is a significant opportunity and capability in pursuing a fulfilling life, especially for women, which in turn, positively affects each and every individual.

Sen’s “freedom of employment” is not the only manner labor is conceptualized in the capabilities approach; for example, Martha Nussbaum, one of the most prominent advocates of the capabilities approach, posits it as one of the central human capabilities that in part defines what a dignified human existence means and as such should be guaranteed to each and every individual. Nussbaum finds Sen’s pronounced aversion towards specifying basic and fundamental capabilities that should be universally applicable to be perplexing; there exists a tension, she argues, between Sen’s discussions “of health, education, political and civil liberties, and the free choice of occupation” in which he seemingly proceeds as if “certain specific capabilities are absolutely central and nonnegotiable,” and his unwillingness to explicitly designate them as such (Nussbaum 2003, 43-44).

Nussbaum, on the contrary, endorses a specific list of “central human capabilities,” which she considers to be necessary but not sufficient requirements to live a life with and in human dignity (Nussbaum 1992, 2000, 2003).294 In one of her latest lists, she decisions with and outside the family” as other aspects that positively affect women’s agency, thus, helping not only women themselves, but all human beings in their pursuit of a fulfilling life (Sen 1999, 191).

294 Although Nussbaum has a well-defined list of central capabilities, this does not mean that she considers it to be complete; on the contrary, she considers this list to be “open-ended and subject to ongoing revision and rethinking, in the way that any society’s account of its most fundamental entitlements is always subject to supplementation (or deletion)” (2003, 42). In addition, this list can be realized in multiple ways: as Nussbaum puts it, “the items on the list ought to be specified in a
specifies ten fundamental capabilities, one of which is “control over one’s environment”: as a part of this capability, Nussbaum advocates for “having [the] right to seek employment on an equal basis with others…[and] in work, being able to work as a human being, exercising practical reason, and entering into meaningful relationships of mutual recognition with other workers” (2003, 42). Thus, Nussbaum agrees with Sen over the significance of “freedom of employment” as a key aspect of pursuing a meaningful human life, further specifying that this job should be performed in a dignified manner.

Nussbaum (2000) extends her discussion of labor, albeit briefly, to ascertain the particular qualities that work should necessarily have for it to be considered as a human capability. She contends, work only becomes “a truly human mode of functioning” if the individuals do not merely function as a cog in the machine but participate in the labor process as a thinking being, and, if they perform this work “with and toward others” in a manner in which their human dignity is recognized and affirmed (ibid., 82). However, Nussbaum’s aim in specifying the characteristics that make work humane is merely to emphasize two other capabilities that are of somewhat abstract and general way, precisely in order to leave room for the activities of specifying and deliberating by citizens and their legislatures and courts that all democratic nations contain” (ibid.). In this sense, her list of central human capabilities does not suffer from what Sen designates as being “absolutely complete (nothing can be added to it) and totally fixed” (Sen 2004, 78). However, this is not to say that differences between Sen and Nussbaum are trivial: as Sen makes it clear, “the problem is not with listing important capabilities, but with insisting on one predetermined canonical list of capabilities, chosen by theorists without any general social discussion or public reasoning. To have such a fixed list, emanating entirely from pure theory, is to deny the possibility of fruitful public participation on what should be included and why” (ibid., 77).

295 Nussbaum (2003, 42) divides “To Control Over One’s Environment,” into its two aspects: “Political,” which demands individuals are “being able to participate effectively in political choices that govern one’s life,” “having the right of political participation, [and] protections of free speech and association.” In its “material” aspects, Nussbaum (ibid.) specifies, “Being able to hold property (both land and movable goods), and having property rights on an equal basis with others,” and “having the freedom from unwarranted search and seizure” in addition to the ones that directly pertain to labor. This grouping is slightly different than her previous lists: for example, Nussbaum (1992) does not mention work at all, whereas she categorizes “the quality of being able to work as a human being” under another capability, “affiliation” (cf. 2000, 78-79).
special importance “since they both organize and suffuse all the others, making their pursuit truly human”: practical reason and affiliation (ibid.). Human beings are dignified free persons who conceive, plan, critically reflect and shape their lives in cooperation, reciprocity and affiliation with others; they should pursue these humane qualities in their occupation as well, while governments should strive to provide the conditions to achieve them (ibid., 72).\footnote{According to Nussbaum, this emphasis of doing things in a human, and not an animal, way is to be found both in Aristotle and in Marx (2000, 72).} If individuals’ jobs allow them to achieve practical reason and affiliation with each other, that is, when their participation in their work becomes truly dignified, Nussbaum concludes, labor will become one of the basic and fundamental human capabilities (ibid.).

3.5 Work \textit{qua} Creative Activity as a Capability

Both Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum, two leading figures of the capabilities approach, designate work (labor) as one of the capabilities in leading a fulfilling, human life and elaborate, to a certain degree, the specifics of what this capability entails. This relative ambiguity is quite understandable and is to be expected since Sen’s primary goal, as I argue above, is the acceptance of the broader analytical framework of capabilities approach as the normative terrain within which the justness of social outcomes should be judged; likewise, Nussbaum’s main project is to articulate the basic human capabilities that are necessary, but in no way sufficient, to live a dignified human life. Nevertheless, both Sen and Nussbaum, in their different ways, open up the discursive and normative space in which it is possible to further specify what labor as a capability can and should mean.

David Levine and S. Abu Turab Rizvi (2005) provide one such example of situating a particular conception of labor within the capabilities approach by conceiving creative work as a capability that is necessary to live a genuinely human
Levine and Rizvi start from a particular notion of modern society, one that is “organized around the ideal of freedom” and individual rights, and one that places individuals’ autonomy and self-determination above all ideals, or norms of justice (2005, viii-ix, 48). In this “ideal” and “just” society, they argue, one cannot predetermine what a “meaningful and worthwhile life” entails, but its determination should be left to individuals themselves; nevertheless, this does not prohibit Levine and Rizvi from considering “the capacity and opportunity to discover and create” to be precisely in accordance with (their emphasis on) individual self-determination and freedom (ibid., viii). This capacity to create relates to the capabilities approach as it signifies the doings one can value and achieve in a society organized around the ideal of freedom, which in turn leads Levine and Rizvi to an analysis of the “kind of work suitable to a free person, and to those factors that might impede individuals from finding and doing such work” (ibid., 8-9).

Levine and Rizvi focus on work because they perceive “doing [can be] an expression of being” under ideal circumstances; that is, individuals can express their identity in work—better yet, they can identify with, and attain their identity in, their occupation—if this work allows them to be free (achieve freedom), which is only possible if their jobs have the quality of being an act of “self-determination in a concrete, particular life activity” (ibid., 64-65, 84). And the fundamental aspect that renders doings to be expressions of being, or, to put it differently, the essential quality that establishes a connection between identity and work, is creativity: “creativity in work is the quality that makes work appropriate to individual self-

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297 Levine and Rizvi’s (2005) primary goal is to elaborate a new definition of poverty, one that is different from wealth or income based conceptualizations. Accordingly, they consider those who do not have the opportunity or the capacity to live creatively, have an occupation in which they can be creatively employed, as living in poverty (ibid.).
determination,” which in turn implies, only creative work is “appropriate to living the life of a free person” (ibid., 9, 65).

For work to be creative, workers necessarily have to exercise their capacity to think, thus imagine what they are about to do; only if work can engage workers’ minds can it incorporate freedom, thus, become creative work that is suitable for the self-determining, free individual (ibid., 83). That is, the workers should envision “an idea of the world” they will create—“and in doing so, we create ourselves”—which distinguishes creative work from instinctive or impulsive activities (ibid., 66, 73-76). However, simply contemplating an idea in their minds would not be enough to be creative; rather, the product should acquire an existence outside “workers’ subjective- and self-experience” and become a reality for others, thus also becoming real for the workers themselves as a result (ibid., 74-77). This creative thinking in turn can be realized if the workers have “the knowledge and the ability to put that knowledge to practical use” in their doings, that is, if they possess the necessary skills to achieve what they have conceptualized in their mind (ibid., 82-83). Consequently, creative work requires the acquisition of a particular capacity to do something—a skill—and the opportunity to realize this skill—access to the necessary means and materials (ibid., 75).

In this sense, for individuals to freely exercise their skills, that is, for the work they do to incorporate and to be an expression of human creativity, they should be able to find a vocation that is appropriate to their character/personality. To put it differently, workers should freely choose their occupation in accordance with their personalities and skills, and not be ascribed an already determined position within the social division of labor as it had been the case with “traditional” societies; only

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298 Levine and Rizvi (ibid., 8) base their account of creative work on “Winnicott’s notion of creativity and of creative living,” as Winnicott develops these themes in the field of early child development.
then, would their work be an expression of their personality, their identity (ibid., 85-86). Thus, finding work in which individuals can creatively realize their skills by producing what they have conceived in their minds becomes a capability for living a genuinely human, fulfilling life. Levine and Rizvi concludes, the lack of ability or capacity to express their personality in their creative work will lead to a life that is lived in poverty. Consequently, what is needed to alleviate poverty is “to facilitate the development of specific capabilities, and then to secure an environment in which those capabilities can be exercised as far as that is possible” (ibid., 9).

### 3.6 Can Creative Activity be the Marxian Useful Labor *qua* Productive Activity?

With this particular notion of work *qua* creative activity as a capability, Levine and Rizvi elaborate what Nussbaum mentioned only in passing—being able to work as a dignified human being—and incorporate labor, construed in its qualitative aspects, into the capabilities approach. Their project is quite intriguing as it dovetails with a particular conception of labor that can be attributed to Marx, and which finds its most vociferous expression in the “humanist Marxist” literature: labor as productive activity in the simple labor process, or simply, labor as the producer of use values, freed from oppressive/alienating social relations. In this sense, Levine and Rizvi accomplish a feat that has not been achieved—or pursued so far—by those who construe useful labor as the productive, self-activity—and the defining quality—of human beings, and situate this humanist notion that is often associated with Marx within the capabilities approach.\(^\text{300}\)

\(^{299}\) However, according to Levine and Rizvi, this is not to say each and every individual will acquire the capability for creativity as some workers will still not be able to possess or make use this capacity; those workers simply will not be able to experience work as an act of creativity in which they actualize their skills, but only as an a burden they have to endure for the sake of earning an income (ibid., 9).

\(^{300}\) As I discuss in detail below, George DeMartino (2003), in his seminal essay “Realizing Class Justice” elaborates a class theory of justice—one that is based on a notion of labor as the performer of
This is not so surprising as Levine and Rizvi find a great deal of commonality between their depiction of creative work and Marx's definition of useful labor as the self-realizing activity, which he extensively elaborates in his early writings, or when he analyzes the “simple labor process” in his mature works (Marx 1975d, 1977). Focusing on what Marx labels as labor in its “exclusively human form”—since for Marx, they contend, work remains the antithesis of freedom, and individuals can be free only when they are not working—Levine and Rizvi (2005, 79-82) construe it as the mediation between idea and realization, or subject and object; that is, labor is exactly what they designate as the creative act. To reiterate, according to Levine and Rizvi, individuals conceptualize what they are going to create, which gives this activity the quality of being a creative and not instinctive or impulsive act, and materialize what they have imagined in objects that have an existence outside of workers’ minds. Marx, on the other hand, construes labor that is productive of use-values as the purposeful activity through which human beings actualize what they have conceived ideally, in their mind, which differentiates this act from animals which can only construct instinctively (Marx 1977, 283-84). However, this is not surplus and not labor as the producers of use values—and situates it within the broader framework of capabilities equality as advocated by Sen.

Nevertheless, Levine and Rizvi do not see their conceptualization of creative work as being exactly the same with what they perceive as Marx’s notion of labor. On the contrary, they find Marx’s account of the labor process to be rather “ambiguous” (2005, 80-81). They register this ambiguity in Marx’s rendition of labor in *Capital* as an activity in which laborers’ “imagination does not play any significant role” and their will is subordinated to something other than their consciousness and/or desires (ibid.). However, this is less of a contradiction than it initially appears to be simply because, Levine and Rizvi argue, what Marx is discussing is the condition of labor in earlier phases of capitalist development (ibid., 9). And with current trends, skilled work is beginning to be the norm, rather than the exception, which renders Marx’s critique increasingly invalid (ibid.).
to say that all labor would be a creative act in which individuals can realize their skills and affirm their selves; as Marx has argued, according to Levine and Rizvi, the subordination of the labor process to the “overriding aim of profit maximization” ends with a kind of work over which laborers have no control (ibid., 124-25). That is, as individuals work for another person, they are confined to “repetitious, boring, and machine-like activities” and do not have the opportunity to express and realize their identity/subjectivity; simply put, to the extent that they cannot exercise their imagination or skills and do not have any freedom in their work, their labor has become alienated labor (ibid., 9, 78-82). The implications of this alienation within the capabilities approach is, when individuals are performing alienated labor they are not engaging in creative work, that is, they are not leading a fulfilling, dignified life; in other words, they are unable to realize their capabilities, and thus are confined to an existence in an unequal and unjust society. Or, as Levine and Rizvi put it, those individuals who cannot avoid alienated labor—and there are no guarantees that every human being will be freed from such work—are restricted to a life of poverty.

Nevertheless, there are significant differences between Levine and Rizvi’s notion of creative work and what can be referred to as the humanist rendition of labor, useful labor as productive activity. Levine and Rizvi confine their conceptualization of work to its everyday sense, construing it as being employed in a particular job, having a vocation, or being able to choose the place one will occupy within the social division of labor in accordance with their personality and skills (ibid., 86). On the other hand, within Marx’s humanist rendition of labor, or rather, attention is forced to be” (Marx 1977, 284). According to Levine and Rizvi (2005) this contradicts with their notion of freedom/creative activity.

303 This is not to say that this conceptual difference over how to construe labor is the only difference that exists between Levine and Rizvi, and Marx (or humanist Marxists). To refer to just one such dissimilarity, Levine and Rizvi (ibid., 74) see private property to be a necessary, essential and defining aspect modern society, whereas Marx, as well as humanist Marxists in general consider it to precisely be the result (expression and embodiment) of alienation.

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humanist renditions of Marx, labor can expand to cover each and every human act, since labor as productive activity can be construed as the ubiquitous mediating moment between the Subject (human beings) and objects (Nature) through which all that exists, including the individuals themselves, come into being and are continuously reproduced anew. That is, labor can be designated as each and every productive/creative act in and through which human beings realize their essence—personality, or individual identity as Levine and Rizvi would have it—in sensuously perceptible things, which in turn, satisfy their needs, thus, ensuring their existence. Thus, any form of creative work, rather than simply an occupation, would be the phenomenon or appearance of this ubiquitous labor through which the essence of the Subject of History, human beings qua homo faber is materialized.

However, this possible discrepancy between Levine and Rizvi and the humanist Marxist account does not mean that useful labor, construed as the omnipresent mediating moment in human beings’ coming into existence—their self-mediated birth by means of and through labor—necessarily remains outside of a capability-centered normative framework; on the contrary, as the general term representing each and every human productive activity, labor can be firmly grounded within the capabilities approach. The capabilities approach, to reiterate, focuses on “doings” and beings” that an individual has reason to value in pursuing and leading a fulfilling life. Consequently, one can render labor as all the “doings” that human beings value and have the ability to achieve—that is, doing is labor. What is more, some, if not all, of the “beings,” the states of existence that individuals

304 This conceptualization in which labor designates both the alienated, as well as the genuinely human, activity is only one possible rendition among many; below, I discuss in detail those accounts in which labor is confined solely to the realm of necessity, thus remaining as alienated/alienating activity as opposed to self-determining, self-realizing productive activity, in the realm of freedom.

305 In this sense, it is significant that “doings” is a synonym of “activity,” which in turn is usually, but not always, equated with “labor” in the humanist Marxist literature.
have the capacity to be, can be seen as attained by means of and through their own labor.\textsuperscript{306}

For example, it is possible to read Marx’s depiction of productive activity after the division of labor is abolished, or, what amounts to the same, with the founding of the communist society in the \textit{German Ideology}, as exemplifying the equation of capabilities to useful labor.\textsuperscript{307} According to Marx, those who produce within a natural—as opposed to a voluntary—division of labor are restricted to “a particular, exclusive sphere of activity, which is forced upon him and from which he cannot escape. He is a hunter, a fisherman, a herdsman, or a critical critic, and must remain so if he does not want to lose his means of livelihood” (Marx and Engels 1975, 5:47).\textsuperscript{308} Consequently, labor loses “all semblance to self-activity” and appears as something extraneous that is forced upon individuals from which they cannot escape, or have any control over—nor would they want to escape, as their individual existence merely depends on their employment as laborers (ibid., 79, 87). The division of labor would be abolished, Marx contends, when individuals appropriate “the existing totality of productive forces”—to be more specific, it is the proletariat cut off from private property as well as any means of self-realization who does the

\textsuperscript{306} I hasten to add this interpretation in which labor is equated with doing is one among possible renditions of labor within the capabilities approach—and at one extreme of the spectrum of such probable elaborations as it equates doings with, if not reduces them to, labor. Below, I advance another conceptualization of labor, labor as a capability to produce surplus, within the capabilities approach; these differing definitions of a particular capability results from the fundamental openness of Sen’s framework.

\textsuperscript{307} To be clear, despite its negative connotations, division of labor is a necessary moment in the development of the forces of production, thus, by implication, for a communist society, for Marx and Engels (1976).

\textsuperscript{308} Marx puts it differently in the \textit{Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844}: “as a consequence of this division of labor, on the one hand, and the accumulation of capitals, on the other, the worker becomes more and more uniformly dependent on labor, and on a particular, very one-sided and machine-like type of labor…he is depressed, therefore, both intellectually and physically to the level of a machine, and from being a man becomes an abstract activity and a stomach” (Marx 1975d, 285).
appropriating; then, and only then, will they not be confined to one exclusive sphere of activity but have the capacity and freedom to creatively express themselves (ibid., 87). Marx epitomizes this possibility as such: it is “possible for me to do one thing today and another tomorrow, to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticize after dinner, just as I have in mind, without ever becoming hunter, fisherman, herdsman or critic” (ibid., 87-88). That is, for Marx it will not be enough to freely choose the work in which individuals can be creative, realizing their imagination and skills in jobs they have control over à la Levine and Rizvi, since it is quite possible that a particular individual might be creatively employed, yet not have any other viable option of employment, nor any other skills; as Amartya Sen makes clear, in such circumstances, capabilities equality, or justice, has not been achieved due to a lack of freedom of choice. Thus, the abolition of the division of labor, that is, individuals appropriating existing productive forces in their totality along with the means of production, is a necessary, but not sufficient condition of capabilities justice that Sen so forcefully advocates, namely, every human being having the capacity and opportunity to do or be whatever s/he deems valuable in pursuit of a meaningful and fulfilling life. Consequently, not as it is practiced in a particular occupation, but only as the totality of all possible productive activities, would labor become a capability according to this humanist rendition.

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309 This appropriation involves two moments. On the one hand, the proletariat acquires the totality of productive capabilities, that is, they can occupy each and every position within division of labor; on the other hand, they appropriate the means of production as well, thus abolish private property.

310 To put it differently, such a limited focus on actual employment and not the viable opportunities one has would limit the capabilities approach to functionings, doings and beings that are achieved by an individual, which take the place of the capabilities set that human beings can achieve if they choose to do so.
3.7 Labor and Freedom: Are They Mutually Exclusive?

Given different, and at times, contradictory, definitions Marx advances throughout his works, it becomes an issue whether labor is indeed the self-realizing productive activity in a communist, free society for Marx. Simply put, the problem I want to address before going any further is whether labor can be equated with self-activity, or if these two Marxian categories are mutually exclusive. That is, is labor the only form that productive activity assumes under alienation/private property/capitalism that is to be superseded with the abolition of this/these oppressive social relations—or of labor itself as Marx occasionally puts it—which eventually, yet inevitably leads to genuine self-activity?

Whether or not labor can be conceptualized as self-activity within a Marxian framework might seem to be a trivial issue at first sight; even if what Marx designates with labor is that form of productive activity that is confined to oppressive and/or unjust socio-economic organizations—at this point, irrespective of how he construes the precise nature of this oppression or injustice—it can be argued that this should not affect the inevitability and importance of self-realizing activity in a free society. However, would this not mean then one simply cannot construe labor as a capability? That is, to the extent Sen defines capability as having the freedom to choose the doings and beings that one values in leading a fulfilling life, how can labor be considered as one of those capabilities, since it would be, by its very definition, limited to a world of injustice, unfreedom and oppression?\textsuperscript{311} In this sense, whether labor can be construed as the self-realizing activity, and does not contradict

\textsuperscript{311} Sen increasingly uses “freedom” when referring to what he has designated as capabilities previously, which becomes evident in his \textit{Development as Freedom} (1999). For a critique of Sen’s emphasis on freedom see Gasper and van Staveren (2003). Also see footnote 288.
or undermine the freedoms that serves as the foundation of a society where
capabilities justice is achieved, becomes an important issue.\textsuperscript{312}

Even a hasty and superficial glance at Marx’s writings, one that is not limited
to either his early or mature works, but encompasses his \textit{oeuvre} in its totality, gives
the impression that it is indeed possible to substantiate this mutual exclusivity
between labor and self-activity; his occasional depiction of labor as being inevitably
confined to the realm of necessity, as well as his articulation, at times, of the process
through which human beings freely express themselves strictly as “self-activity” in
explicit contradistinction to labor, provides textual support for being reserved in
calling labor as a form of free activity, thus, a capability. For example, in the
\textit{Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844}, Marx argues “production…is
active alienation, the alienation of activity, activity of alienation” under the regime
of private property; to the extent private property is “the estrangement of the object
of labor,” Marx finds it to be merely a summary of “the estrangement, the alienation
in the activity of labor” (Marx 1975d, 326). Based on this conceptualization, it is
possible to contend productive activity becomes free, self-realizing activity only with
the supersession of private property, that is, with the abolition of labor itself (Arthur
1986, 136).

In the \textit{German Ideology} Marx still contends that labor, which provides the
sole means of existence for the proletarians who do not possess anything else to
sustain their lives, is the foundation of a society that is based on private
proprietorship; as such, “labor, the only connection which still links them with the
productive forces and with their own existence, has lost all semblance of self-activity

\textsuperscript{312} This question regarding whether labor can be free activity, thus a capability is strictly a matter
within a humanist framework. That is, it is intimately connected with—overdetermined by—the
particular notion of labor that is deployed. As it becomes clear below, when I define labor \textit{qua} the
performer of surplus as a capability, this issue of freedom takes on a completely different meaning.
and only sustains their life by stunting it” (Marx and Engels 1975, 4:87).

Consequently, only with the abolition of labor, that is, with the appropriation of the totality of productive powers (including the means of production) by the proletariat would they, as well as all other members of the society, truly become individuals who have control over their productive activity and their lives; only then, would labor be _transformed_ into self-activity, the dichotomy between self-activity and material production would vanish, and individuals for the first time would develop all their capacities that are appropriate for the existing instruments of production (ibid., 79-80, 87). That is, Marx, it would seem, conceives labor as the productive activity eternally and inevitably embedded within a natural division of labor, thus, intimately linked with private property; labor only becomes genuinely and truly human when it is transformed—thus, when it loses its proper name and becomes something else—into self-activity.

In his mature works, Marx does not return to a discussion of the abolition of labor; nevertheless this does not necessarily mean that the perceived dichotomy existing between labor and free, self-activity has completely vanished from Marx’s analysis. For example, in the third volume of _Capital_, Marx changes the terms of the debate and posits this opposition as one between the realms of necessity and of freedom (1981). Referring to the inevitability and eternality of re-/producing the necessities of life that would sustain human existence irrespective of the specific “form of society” and particular “modes of production,” Marx construes material production, now presumably equated with labor, as the realm of necessity (ibid., 959). This “realm of natural necessity” is not given or static but expands as individuals’ needs become more extensive; however, this does not mean that the burden of necessity exacerbates as a result, since human beings’ productive capacities, and the productive forces overall, improve correspondingly with the development of individuals. In addition, as this increasingly “socialized 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, [thus] accomplishing it with the least expenditure of energy and in conditions most worthy and appropriate for their human nature,” the burden of material production is eased to some degree (ibid.). Nevertheless, neither the development of individuals nor their control over material production translates into the abolition of the realm of necessity, which nevertheless remains as the indispensable and essential basis of the realm of freedom; as Marx puts it, “the realm of freedom really begins only where labor determined by necessity and external expediency ends,” and only then “the development of human powers as an in itself” begins (ibid.). Thus, it would seem Marx does indeed construe labor as humanity’s necessary and unavoidable burden, which in turn would imply that it, construed as such within this humanist Marxian theoretical framework, cannot be a conceived as a capability.

However, such a conclusion would indeed be a hasty one, ignoring the ambiguity, ambivalence, and even contradictions in the manner Marx conceptualizes the category of labor throughout his *oeuvre*—and I hasten to add, this multiplicity can be registered remaining within a humanist framework in which labor and/or productive activity continue to be the essential and distinct quality of being human, thus, without mentioning his unique contribution to classical political economy, labor as the performer of surplus, to which I return to in detail below. For example, Christopher J. Arthur registers three separate solutions to “the question of the relationship between free activity and material production,” the first being the one that Marx advances in the third volume of *Capital*, articulating labor as the curse of humanity by conceptualizing the realm of necessity as being permanent and
inevitable, as well as distinct from the realm of freedom (Arthur 1986, 137).

Another possibility is to return to the “convictions” of his early works, particularly exemplified in the *Manuscripts*, and to assert that labor acquires its alienating, unfree qualities as a result of private property and the division of labor, becoming genuinely human self-activity with their abolition. This is exemplified as late as the *Critique of the Gotha Program*, in which Marx argues labor would become “life’s prime want” with the founding of “a higher phase of communist society,” which would be characterized by the freeing of individuals from their enslaving subordination to the division of labor, among other things (Marx 1978, 531). As such, labor only becomes a capability once it is freed from the particular sphere of activity to which it

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313 Arthur finds one possible resolution to this dichotomy: “all one can hope for is the possible abolition of labor through total automation (a tendency anticipated by Marx in his *Grundrisse*)” (1986, 137).

314 My account differs from Arthur’s: he contends Marx in the *Manuscripts* works with a very simple dichotomy: accordingly, labor is alienated activity, which when abolished would be replaced by productive activity (ibid.). He argues Marx gives up this opposition by equating labor with material production (the realm of necessity) in his later works. On the contrary, I assert labor is alienated activity under private property/division of labor, which acquires its genuinely human characteristic and becomes productive activity with the abolition of those alienating/oppressive conditions. That is, it is not labor that Marx calls for the abolition of, but rather the conditions or relations that are sources of its alienating characteristics. In this sense, Arthur’s claim that Marx returns “unblushingly to the original perspective” of his early works in the *Critique of the Gotha Program* by declaring labor to be “life’s prime want” contradicts his prior conviction, “alienating activity is often identified by Marx as ‘labor’—not ‘wage-labor’ or ‘alienated labor’ but ‘labor’ pure and simple” (ibid., 12; emphasis in the original).

315 As Arthur puts it, this is emblematic of Marx’s “return unblushingly to the original perspective” he has elaborated in his early works, rendering productive activity identical with self-realization and “self-enjoyment” (ibid., 136-37). For example, Marx asserts in the *German Ideology*, “only at this stage,” that is, only with the abolition of division of labor, which corresponds to the foundation of a communist society, “does self-activity coincide with material life” (Marx and Engels 1975, 4: 88). However, these two statements can be equated if one presumes that labor now designates material production in Marx’s texts; not surprisingly, Arthur argues “material production [is] labor in the revised terminology” (1986, 136). In this sense, Arthur does not take into account how labor acquires its meaning within the discourse that Marx deploys it; that is, according to Arthur, labor in and of itself refers to and reflects its signified, rather than being a constituted and constitutive signifier.
is confined; as a result, individuals fully develop all their productive capacities, freely choosing any self-activity they might deem meaningful and fulfilling.

Finally, there are instances where it seems Marx refutes both the mutual exclusivity of and potential identity between labor and self-activity, arriving at a synthesis that is exemplified in the *Grundrisse* (Arthur 1986). In contrast to Adam Smith’s insistence on conceiving labor as a curse, a sacrifice of individual tranquility, freedom, and happiness irrespective of the socio-economic organization in which this performance takes place, Marx emphasizes the historic character of such oppressive, externally forced labor (Marx 1973, 611-14). Consequently, Marx argues, it is possible for labor to become “attractive work, the individual’s self-realization,” which nevertheless does not mean that it has become mere fun, amusement or play; on the contrary, it still demands seriousness and discipline that is imposed from within, by the laboring subjects, and not without (ibid.; cf. Arthur 1986, 137). In this sense, labor is still confined to the realm of necessity, and remains distinct from, but not in opposition to a “higher form of activity,” which, despite affecting the subject of “the direct production process” as well as the material production process itself, nevertheless continue to be limited to the realm of freedom, now designated as “free time” (Marx 1973, 712). Arthur (1986, 138) concludes, Marx, by introducing this dynamic and “dialectical” framework, effectively rejects “the supposed antithesis between free activity and materially determined production,” now emphasizing their social constitutedness, the analysis of which becomes “the task of historical materialism.” Consequently, material production, free activity, and their relationship are no longer given abstractly, but signify the open-ended and continuously reproduced “dialectic of freedom and necessity,” thus rendering labor as the productive activity that is “conditioned by existing wants and productive powers [which] also realizes both in itself, and in its grounding of other practices, human creativity and liberation” (ibid., 138-39). That is, in this third scenario that can be
attributed to Marx, labor is not a capability by definition, or becomes one only by shedding its alienating and oppressive aspects, and/or acquiring the quality of being an expression of freedom with the founding of a communist society, nor does it inevitably remain confined to the realm of necessity; rather, it becomes and unbecomes a capability in its relation to—and provides the conditions of existence of—the realms of freedom and necessity.

3.8 Labor as the “Freedom for Employment” is a Freedom to be Exploited

So far, I have summarized various renditions of labor within the capabilities approach: labor is construed either as a “freedom of remunerative employment” in pursuit of sustaining one’s livelihood, and/or as creative work/self-realizing activity through which individuals materialize what they have conceived ideally—a possibility only if one’s occupation is appropriate for one’s skills. For example, Sen and Nussbaum discuss individuals’—and in particular women’s—freedom to sell their labor-power in the market; entering into a well-defined contract—amount of compensation for, and conditions and the duration of, work are determined, at least ideally—they argue, waged-labor can provide the conditions of existence for the realization of their other, related capabilities/freedoms. On the other hand, they suggest—if not acknowledge and celebrate as explicitly as Levine and Rizvi do—a wage-relation mediated through markets would provide the best chance for finding an occupation corresponding—or best-suited—to individuals’ abilities and skills. Such a focus admittedly brings significant aspects of human existence to the forefront of social analysis; it nevertheless remains silent on and blind to another, equally important facet of economic life: exploitation.

316 Of course, there is no reason why waged-work would at the same time be non-alienating labor, and vice versa; nor is there any necessity that they are mutually exclusive.
This is not to say that exploitation is *in toto* absent from the capabilities approach; given these authors’ emphasis on a meaningful and dignified human life, it is possible to argue that they would consider any occupation that cannot be deemed as “decent work” in accordance with the standards set by the International Labour Organization (ILO) to be exploitative.\(^{317}\) That is, any violation of the “fundamental standards and rights at work” can be considered as exploitation: if there is no fair remuneration—no equal pay for equal work—or equal voice—no freedom of association or social dialogue—or if forced and child labor, and discrimination against certain social groups, who consequently cannot or do not have the ability to enjoy all the fruits of wage-employment, still persists—no social protection, or investment in the skills and employability of workers—then these occupations can be construed as exploitative.\(^{318}\) However, in a fair labor market that guarantees adherence to fundamental standards and rights, none of these exploitative relations would persist; this is precisely why the ILO (2001, 51) seeks to define the legal framework of a “rules-based international system that is fair to all.”

Marx refers to this fair and ideal market as “the Eden of the innate rights of man”—where “Freedom, Equality, Property, and Bentham,” that is, pursuit of self-interest, prevails. First, commodity exchangers—those who sell their labor-power and their employers—appear free to the extent that they exchange out of their own will, freely, and without facing any compulsion what they possess (Marx 1977, 280). They appear on an equal footing before the law, as owners of private property over

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\(^{317}\) The ILO (2001, 125) has a very specific definition of what exploitation is: any form of occupation that includes, “at a minimum, the exploitation or the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labor and services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs.”

\(^{318}\) I discuss the ILO’s decent work initiative in detail in the first essay of my dissertation. In addition, the ILO is not the only international organization that is averse to exploitation; the United Nations Development Programme is also worried about exploitation, construing it as working long hours for low pay, under unhealthy conditions (UNDP 1993, 33). The UNDP—and one can include the Human Rights Watch—is particularly disturbed by the exploitation of the children.
which they have sole control; and their perception of equality is reinforced as a result of exchange, as commodities of equal value are—believed to be—changing hands (ibid.). Finally, they part with their property because of their private, self-interests, without worrying about others and their needs (ibid.).

What can be included in Marx’s list is that, on the “surface,” that is, on this market/exchange level, a worker can—at least ideally do—have additional inalienable and fundamental rights, such as the freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining, the freedom from forced or underage labor, or from discrimination. In addition, the length of the workday—or, as has been the case in the United States, the work-week—and health and safety conditions can be well-defined, and a minimum wage can be set; and adherence to these conditions can be fully enforced. Nevertheless, Marx argues, this freedom to sell one’s labor-power is based on another freedom; individuals would only be willing to part with their labor-power if they are also *freed* from the means of production (ibid., 273). To put it differently, Sen’s “freedom of remunerative employment” is nothing other than an *unfreedom*, since the workers are forced—and have no other choice than—to sell their labor-power in order to sustain their existence.\(^319\)

But, as Marx unequivocally shows, this—the dependence of what appears to be an equal and free exchange to an unfreedom—is not the only problem in this “Eden of innate rights.” According to Marx, the exchange between capitalists and wage-laborers takes place if and only if it immediately becomes its other, an unequal exchange; that is, if capitalists get more in return than what they part with. To register this inequality, Marx leaves the market—the realm of “presumed” equal

\(^{319}\) This, of course, is not to say that the only commodity that laborers possess is their labor-power; on the contrary, they can occupy subject positions other than being wage-laborers. But as workers, by definition they have to sell their labor-power; otherwise, they simply would not appear opposite—as the other of the—the capitalist, that is, as a wage-laborer. See Cohen (1979) for a discussion of what this being “forced” to sell one’s labor power entails.
and proceeds to “the hidden abode of production,” and finds an
antagonistic realm in which buyers (sellers) of labor-power try to get as much (give
as little) labor as possible, thus attempting to maximize (minimize) the surplus-labor
they appropriate (perform). As a result, the individual who has appeared in the
market as the owner of the commodity, labor-power, becomes laborer *qua* the
producer of surplus in this “hidden” place, thus rendering the exchange between
equals a relation of unequals, an agonism in which the possibility of exploitation
arises. In this sense, fair labor market is nothing more than a “veil” that hides an
exploitative relation, rendering the exchange of unequals invisible; there, the wages
workers receive, despite appearing to compensate them in full, only represents a
portion of the value their labor creates. As Marx poignantly argues:

> The wage-form thus extinguishes every trace of the division of the working
day into necessary labor and surplus labor, into paid labor and unpaid labor…we may therefore understand the decisive importance of the
transformation of the value and price of labor-power into form of wages, or
into the value and price of labor itself. All the notions of justice held by both
the worker and the capitalist, all the mystifications of the capitalist mode of
production, *all capitalism’s illusions about freedom*, all apologetic tricks of
vulgar economics have as their basis the form of appearance discussed above
[price of labor-power appearing as the price of labor, F.E.D], which makes the
actual relation invisible, and indeed presents to the eye the precise opposite of
that relation. (ibid., 680; my emphasis)

Consequently, trying to control who, at what age can have a job, or amending certain
inequalities by eliminating forced labor or by allowing freedom of association and
the right to collective bargaining, even curbing, to some degree, the extent to which
labor can be exploited by setting a minimum wage and limiting the length of the
workday, will at best ensure the fairness of exchange in the market; however, it will
not be enough to remedy another injustice: appropriation of the surplus by those
who do not partake in its production, that is, exploitation. As such, the freedom to
remunerative employment is nothing more than a freedom to be exploited.
3.9 Exploitation in a Marxian Framework

In order to articulate capitalist exploitation, Marx distinguishes between the value of labor-power—the commodity that laborers possess and exchange for money—and the value that living labor—the use-value of labor-power—can create during the working day—labor “embodied” in objects that workers’ produce. To put it differently, the remuneration that (under the assumptions of volume 1 of *Capital*) workers receive, the value of their labor-power, corresponds to and is reproduced during a part of the working day; Marx designates it as the necessary or paid labor. However, to the extent that the value labor-power creates depends “not on its own value, but on the length of time it is in action,” workers can—and indeed are compelled to, when they sell their labor-power to the capitalist—continue with the production process above and beyond this paid portion of the workday, thus, performing uncompensated, surplus-labor (ibid., 679). With this accounting scheme—dividing the working day into portions in which necessary (paid), and surplus (unpaid) labor is performed—Marx construes exploitation as wage-laborers’ performance of uncompensated labor that is appropriated by capitalists’ who do not partake in its production.

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321 This embodied labor is not a fixed, constant and never-changing magnitude; on the contrary, it continuously changes as a result of changes in the productivity of labor. That is, “the value of a commodity is not determined by the quantity of labor actually objectified in it, but by the quantity of living labor necessary to produce it,” or the socially necessary labor-time, at any given point in time (Marx 1977, 676-77).

322 Cullenberg argues, the “exclusive appropriation” of uncompensated labor—the Marxian definition of exploitation—can take place because of “unequal access to productive assets; unequal
Construed as such, capitalist exploitation is a violation of “the law of equal exchange”: wage-laborers do not receive what they part with, whereas capitalists get “something for nothing.” This unequal exchange, in turn, signifies that the “equal rights” of the market in particular, and capitalist ethics associated with this equality in general, are based on an exclusion (Özselçuk and Madra 2005; Madra 2006). In this capitalist economy, all, including the capitalists, exchange something for something else: workers part with their labor-power that can be employed productively—performing surplus-labor—or unproductively in return for wages; capitalists exchange their money to hire labor-power in addition to other means of production; and others receive something in return for providing the conditions of existence of the production process.\footnote{323 Here, I am referring only to those exchange relations that directly or indirectly pertain to the production of surplus-value; although other class, and non-class, exchange relations do exist in any society, I list only those that pertain to capitalist exploitation.} In this sense, all are participating in the market—or, to put in Marxian terms, in the distribution and receipt of the surplus. This “all-inclusive” exchange relation however is not replicated in other realms of the economy. To be more specific, capitalists—and they are the only ones who—do not perform any labor, productive or unproductive, for their share in the surplus; that is, they are excluded from the production process. In addition, they are accorded the exclusive right of appropriating the surplus, which results in the “unequal exchange” between wage-laborers and the capitalists. As such, “equality” in this capitalist framework results in the inequality in—the exclusion of some from—the performance and appropriation of surplus-labor.

Marx founds his analysis of capitalist exploitation on a particular conception of labor; he defines living labor as “the specific use-value” labor-power “possesses,”
which is “a source not only of value, but of more value than it has itself”; that is, he renders labor as a capacity to perform surplus (ibid., 301).\textsuperscript{324} However, this capacity is not a natural or given attribute of labor. On the contrary, only if “the process of creating value” is continued beyond the reproduction of the value that the workers receive for their commodity—or more generally, labor is performed above and beyond what is necessary to sustain the laborers’ existence—surplus, and surplus performing labor, becomes a possibility: “if the process is not carried beyond the point where the value paid by the capitalist for the labor-power is replaced by an exact equivalent, it is simply a process of creating value; but if it is continued beyond that point, it becomes a process of valorization,” a process in which value self-expands and becomes capital (ibid., 302).\textsuperscript{325} Another possibility Marx discusses for the production of more surplus is to reduce the length of the workday that is devoted to the reproduction of laborers, rather than elongating the workday itself. This does not necessarily mean that “the quality of life” for laborers deteriorates, or the value of their labor-power has decreased; rather, the necessities are reproduced in a smaller portion of the workday as a result of increasing productivity. As such, the capacity to produce surplus simply results from the extension of the workday and/or the reduction of the portion devoted to the reproduction of the labor-power/work-force.

Before proceeding any further, I hasten to add, this is not to say that exploitation only takes place in a capitalist economy; on the contrary, non-capitalist exploitation exists when laborers perform labor beyond what is necessary for

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\textsuperscript{324} Although Marx argues labor as the “universal value-creating element...is something which falls outside the frame of reference of the everyday consciousness,” he is not alone in ascribing this quality to labor (ibid, 681). That is, he is following classical political economists in conceptualizing labor as that which can create value, despite their failure to clearly and consistently articulate it as such. Marx (1963, 1968, 1971), in the \emph{Theories of Surplus Value}, traces classical political economists different and at times contradictory renditions of labor as the source of value.
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\textsuperscript{325} For a detailed analysis of why performing surplus cannot be a natural, inherent and given quality of labor, see the second essay of my dissertation.
\end{flushright}
sustaining their existence, and when that surplus is appropriated by those who have not participated in its production. Accordingly, performers of surplus do not appropriate what they produce in its totality in feudalism or slavery either.\textsuperscript{326} What distinguishes these two “modes of production” from a capitalist economy is the forms class processes assume in these economies: who, under what conditions produce the surplus, who appropriates it, how this expropriation is justified, and who receives a portion of the surplus in return for doing what. One way—among others—that Marx registers this difference is the temporal and spatial separation of the performance of surplus from the production of the necessities in feudalism (ibid., 680).\textsuperscript{327} Another difference that Marx discusses is that the performance of surplus labor and its appropriation by non-performers are not “masked” or mediated by commodity exchange in feudalism; however this is not to say that surplus is “pumped out” from direct producers in an undisguised manner. Rather, this exploitative economic relation is veiled and justified by various economic (but, nonclass) conditions—laborers tied to land, producing in a subsistence economy with limited monetization, among others—political—the relationship between the serf and the king, who perceive these positions as reflections of their human nature and accept them as their personal characteristics—and cultural conditions—religion that legitimizes these roles as the natural order mandated by God.\textsuperscript{328} Exploitation exists—not only in capitalist, but also in most non-capitalist economies, and as such its prevalence is irrespective of different class processes that prevail and characterize the economy—

\textsuperscript{326} Satya Gabriel (1990) construes ancient (independent) class process in which individuals appropriate their own surplus as “self-exploitation.”

\textsuperscript{327} Marx also distinguishes between capitalism and slavery: even when slaves are performing necessary labor with which they produce their means of subsistence, it appears as if they are producing for the slave-owner (1977, 680).

\textsuperscript{328} This, of course, is not an exhaustive list of non-class processes that in part characterize feudalism.
simply because labor has the potential to produce surplus without necessarily having the ability to appropriate it.

### 3.10 Labor *qua* the Performer of Surplus as a Capability and Class Justice

Informed by and sharing Marx’s desire to bring forth the economic relations that are exploitative to the center of social analysis, enact non-exploitative ones in their place, *and* imagine an ethics—and a community organized around this ethics—that is unaffected by and independent from the capitalist normative framework of “equal rights for all,” I define labor as a capability to produce surplus; that is, labor means having the ability, freedom, and willingness to perform labor over and above the time required to reproduce the laborer’s/laborers’ existence. As I argue above, only with such a definition can one begin to disclose important aspects of human existence in which unjust relations might prevail and which hitherto have been overlooked in most normative accounts, particularly the capabilities approach.\(^{329}\) In particular, I shed light on an injustice that laborers persistently experience by elaborating a discourse that focuses on an otherwise hidden unjust economic relationship. This “affective” discourse, in turn, is politically effective precisely because—and to the extent that—it is an intervention into the economic *status quo*. It is an attempt to enact economic relations that are unexploitative—which might already be coexisting alongside exploitative ones (cf. Gibson-Graham et. al 2001; DeMartino 2003). But more importantly, as I discuss in detail below, this particular

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\(^{329}\) In this sense, I read Cohen (1979) as acknowledging the necessity of construing labor as a capacity to produce surplus to register the existence of exploitation. Cohen argues that one does not need the labor theory of value in order to analyze exploitation (ibid., 338). Although he contends that workers create things *with* value—“workers alone create products”—rather than “value” itself, he defines exploitation as workers receiving less value than the value of what they create, which, in turn, is received by the capitalist; thus, his definition of exploitation is based on a notion of surplus producing labor (ibid., 356).
conception of labor allows us to relate to the labor we perform in a different way, and provides the starting point for a unique ethical project (cf. Madra 2006).

By construing labor as a capability to perform surplus, I highlight an aspect of economic life—exploitation—in its capitalist and noncapitalist forms, which if not remedied would inhibit the pursuit of a meaningful and fulfilling life that Sen designates as the ultimate goal of the capabilities approach. On the other hand, by situating labor within the capabilities approach, I avoid what I designate as the “problem with labor”: essentializing labor as the fundamental quality, the defining characteristic, of being human, which in turn provides the temporally and spatially ubiquitous reference point with which economic and social outcomes are to be assessed. In this sense, I do not conceive exploitation—the appropriation of the surplus by those who do not produce it—as the most significant form of injustice to which others—multiple and irreducible forms of domination, oppression, or injustice—can be reduced. Rather, I acknowledge that it is one among many injustices that prevail in the society; what is more, although the enactment of non-exploitative economic relations will surely have an effect on existing social relations, thus, affecting other injustices, it is not clear, and cannot be anticipated, what exactly this effect would be. Nevertheless, this does not undermine the significance of, or the necessity for, abolishing exploitation: if it continues to exist there can be no capabilities justice. Thus, construing labor *qua* the performer of surplus as a capability is a necessary but not sufficient condition for capabilities equality.

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330 As Cullenberg (1998, 66) puts it: “a society stripped of the shackles of exploitation may still be characterized by gross inequalities of income, extremely hierarchical workplace relations, lack of electoral democracy, and environmental degradation of the worst kind—what one might call a hideous form of communism.” By the same token, it is possible to imagine a “benevolent capitalism” in which workers collectively own the means of production and there exists “nonhierarchical relations within the firm, an equal remuneration for workers, managers, and corporate executives, and a general environmental and social concern for the community in which the firm exists” (Cullenberg 1992, 70). Nevertheless, such a “benevolent capitalism” would still be an exploitative economic organization.
However, defining labor in its surplus-performing capacity is only the starting point for rendering exploitation visible and for envisioning alternatives; that is, this capability, in and of itself, will not be enough to determine whether exploitation exists, nor by itself will it be sufficient to eliminate this injustice. After all, both in capitalist and noncapitalist exploitative economic relations labor is indeed present as an ability to, and actually does, perform surplus. Thus, this conceptualization of labor should necessarily be coupled with another capability: the ability—better yet, the freedom—to participate in the appropriation of the surplus that the laborers perform. Only with the acknowledgement of these independent, yet interrelated capabilities as relevant “functionings” that one has reason to value in leading a fulfilling and meaningful life will it be possible to achieve non-exploitative relations; only then the possibility of capabilities equality and economic justice would arise.

Yet, construing the ability to perform and appropriate surplus as capabilities, despite ensuring that there is no longer exploitation, immediately demands the posing of additional questions: who should produce the surplus—will everyone be required to not only perform labor, but to do so above and beyond what is necessary to reproduce themselves?—who should appropriate it—will it be limited to only those who perform surplus labor, or will others participate in its appropriation? In addition, once this surplus is produced and appropriated in a non-exploitative manner, who, and according to which criteria, should distribute it—for example, will it be distributed according to a strict norm of equality, contribution to the surplus, or one’s needs?—and who should receive it—will those who do not perform any surplus, or even labor be receiving a cut of the social surplus?—become relevant and unavoidable issues. As such, the notion of surplus-performing labor opens up three different, yet interrelated, realms in which one can trace this surplus—production, appropriation, and distribution; only by taking into account all these sites in which
surplus appears and passes through, that is, by elaborating the contours of a surplus-labor economy, can one begin to conceptualize this capabilities justice.

3.10.1 Productive Justice

Given their interest in and commitment to abolishing exploitation to which I return below, postmodern Marxists almost exclusively focus on appropriative justice (Burczak 1996/97, 1998; Cullenberg 1992, 1998; Resnick and Wolff 1988, 2001b, 2002). That is, what they are interested in, for the most part, is “who as the performer of surplus labor should appropriate—or should not be excluded from the appropriation of—this surplus”? As a result, issues pertaining to productive justice are discussed in relation to, subsumed under, and immediately linked with appropriation.

Labor is characterized in three different forms in this account: “fundamental class labor”—labor of those who produce the surplus—“subsumed class labor”—labor of those who provide the conditions of existence for the production of that surplus, without themselves directly participating in that process—and those who simply do not participate in this surplus-labor economy at all, although they might indeed perform non-class labor (cf. Resnick and Wolff 1987, 1988; Cullenberg 1998). Consequently, the criterion for productive class justice—questions as to who, under what conditions, working for how long, should produce the surplus?—remains implicit at best, or not thoroughly theorized within this postmodern class analysis.

331 For example, Cullenberg (1992, 69), looking at “the everyday working of a capitalist enterprise,” construes necessary labor as involving “a mutual appropriation”—in which the commodity exchanging parties, the capitalist and the wage-laborer mutually alienate their own private property while appropriating what the other parts with—“whereas surplus labor involves an exclusive appropriation”—the capitalist exclusively appropriates the surplus that is produced, thus excluding the laborers from this economic site.

332 This of course is not to say all do labor; there can be those who simply do not perform any labor at all.

333 Resnick and Wolff (1988) discuss “a classless society” from a Marxian, class-analytic perspective. In such a classless economic organization, the distinction between necessary and surplus
One exception is George DeMartino (2003), who elaborated in detail normative criteria for class justice—in the realms of production, appropriation and distribution—and situated them within the broader framework of capabilities equality. DeMartino, taking his cue from (half of) Marx’s oft-quoted motto from the *Critique of the Gotha Program*—“from each according to his ability”—construes productive class justice as “fairness in the allocation of the work of producing social surplus”; accordingly, he argues, those with the greatest ability should make the greatest contribution to the production of social surplus (ibid., 11-13). This is not to say, DeMartino hastens to add, any arrangement—for example, coercion—that ensures the realization of this normative principle would be acceptable from a class justice perspective; on the contrary, he emphasizes the cultivation of “a spirit of genuine voluntarism in labor performance” that builds upon and is intimately linked with a sense of obligation, responsibility and participation in a community (ibid., 11-12).

However, DeMartino’s discussion of possible arrangements in the performance of surplus, and his rejection of coercion as being unjust, does not exhaust all possible concerns regarding this productive criterion. Given that the surplus is performed with the elongation of the workday above and beyond the time during which the necessities that sustain direct laborers are produced, how those labor disappears: *all* human labor—not only labor performed in the production of directly consumable goods and their means of production, but also in the planning and distribution of those goods and services, as well as in political administration, aesthetic creation, cultural production, and their dissemination—becomes necessary. (ibid., 34). They argue, “who does what kind of work for how long and in what way would depend on the needs and wants of all concerned, *excluding* any need or want to produce or procure a surplus” (ibid.; emphasis in the original). Consequently, in a classless society, the ability, willingness and freedom to perform surplus no longer exists; as such it can no longer be a capability. In this classless society, there would be the systematic rotation of work tasks such that there exists no technical division of labor, mass education for re-skilling of the workers, and an ethic for equality in relations of production and its fruits; as a result, Resnick and Wolff argue, politics becomes the direct means to decide what, how and for whom to produce (ibid., 34-35).

334 As such, the aggregate material wealth of the society would be greater than those instances in which labor obligations are distributed according to other criteria—such as equal contribution from all able-bodied members of the community (DeMartino 2003, 11).
who have the capability to produce (more) surplus come to have that ability becomes an issue. More specifically, can this capacity to produce greater surplus result from the minimization of the working day in which direct laborers reproduce their existence, and/or from curbing laborers’ needs “so as to reduce their claim on social expenditures and resources and thereby allow a greater share for others,” as DeMartino (ibid., 13) rightfully worries? Or how is it possible to normatively assess a situation in which this ability to produce more surplus results from laborers' conscious and voluntary elongation of their workday, thus becoming absolute-surplus producers in the process?

These issues indicate the inevitable interrelatedness of the productive and distributive criteria of class justice, as well as the need to constantly negotiate what realizing productive justice would precisely entail. Or, to put it differently, it is a stern warning against the pursuit of a single normative criterion at the expense of others, as DeMartino emphasizes. In this sense, decisions pertaining to each and every aspect of surplus production should be temporary, negotiable, and open to contestation, shaped in part by the particular circumstances that surplus-performing laborers face. However, I prioritize relative over absolute surplus, especially when producers are negotiating a choice between these two forms of surplus production (Safri and Düzenli 2004). That is, quantitative improvements in the production of the surplus should result from increases in the productivity of labor; consequently, laborers would be able to reproduce and sustain their existence in a shorter period of

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335 This section draws upon Safri and Düzenli (2004).
336 In this sense would having a lower value of labor power not also legitimize the “Third-Worldization” of the production process, where third world producers create more social surplus than their first world counterparts? When Third-Worldization of production takes place under the aegis of neoliberalism, DeMartino (2003) rightfully indicts it as a violation of appropriative and distributive moments of class justice. However, in a situation where the global community decides on such a course under a capabilities approach, how would our normative judgment of such a situation change?
time, thus devoting a relatively bigger portion of the workday to the production of surplus without elongating the workday and/or curbing their needs.

Another aspect that DeMartino does not explicitly address when he elaborates his criterion for productive class justice is whether surplus labor should be performed individually or collectively. This is to be expected since productive class justice in and of itself is not a sufficient criterion to achieve class justice; depending on the productive, appropriative and distributive class processes that prevail in a particular economic organization, the outcome can be deemed unjust if the community fails to realize any one of the criteria that pertain to these realms (DeMartino 2003, 10).

And more significantly, given the necessity to consider the moments of production and appropriation of surplus simultaneously to assess whether exploitation exists or not from this class perspective, it is not surprising that DeMartino does not distinguish between individual and collective performance of surplus. To be more specific, to the extent that DeMartino deems an outcome to be non-exploitative if the direct producer/producers of surplus is not excluded from its appropriation, the issue of a choice between individual or collective labor does not arise. However, assuming that the appropriative and distributive normative criteria are realized, I prioritize performance of surplus labor in a collective, rather than an individual,

337 DeMartino (ibid., 10-11) discusses two such cases: an impoverished slave society in which the social output is distributed in an egalitarian manner would still be unjust to the extent that appropriative justice—the direct producers of surplus, slaves, are excluded from appropriation—is not realized. Likewise, a society in which independent producers—self-employed individuals who appropriate their own surplus-labor—perform labor with equal intensity and for the same amount of time, but receive unequal amounts of surplus due to differences in property ownership and/or differential skills would be deemed as unjust. Both of these economies fail at least in realizing one aspect of the class justice.

338 DeMartino construes productive class justice—“those with the greatest abilities to produce surplus in fact make the greatest contributions”—as entailing “primarily a normative obligation on the part of the individuals to their communities rather than vice versa” (ibid., 11; my emphasis). In this sense, it can be argued that DeMartino is not interested in how the individual and collective identities/subjectivities are constituted within the labor and valorization—among many other—processes, but presumes that they are already given.
manner. In doing so, I follow Marx who attributes the unprecedented material wealth produced in capitalism—measurable both as “the immense accumulation of commodities,” and of surplus-value—in part to the introduction of machinery, large-scale industry and cooperation, as a result of, and in which collective labor—or as Marx puts, “social labor”—becomes the prominent actor of the production process (Marx 1973, 1977). As such, he directly links collective laboring to the increased ability to produce surplus, and expects the performance of surplus collectively to continue, at least for some time, even after the abolition of exploitative class relations, which in turn would provide the abundant material basis of a communist society (ibid.).

In addition, I privilege collective, rather than individual, performance of surplus to emphasize its effects on, and the changes it brings forth in, the simple labor process—the production process through which use-values are created. I discussed in detail Marx’s elaboration, especially in *Capital*, of how the valorization process—in which surplus labor is performed and surplus-value is created—transforms, and in turn is affected by the changes in the simple labor process. To summarize, as a result of cooperation in the labor process, “a new and intrinsically a collective productive power” comes into being, and individual workers are unified in a “single productive body”; they no longer produce objects as an isolated individual, independent of others, but only as the collective worker (Marx 1977, 444-69). In

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339 DeMartino finds his definition of productive class justice to be echoing Marx’s view “that communism would remove the fetters on productive rationality associated with exploitative class processes, and thereby generate unprecedented wealth” (ibid., 11-12).

340 This is not to say that the performance of surplus labor, both individually or collectively, would indefinitely or necessarily continue; Marx considered his elaboration of “the *abolition of all classes* and [the establishment of] a *classless society*” to be as one of his contributions to classical political economy (Marx and Engels 1975, 39:65; emphases in the original). Resnick and Wolff conceptualizes this “classless society” as one in which “no division between necessary and surplus exists…and all human labor…is necessary labor” (1988, 33-34; emphasis in the original).

341 Here, it is possible to draw an analogy between Marx’s collective labor and Deleuze and Guattari’s (1983) “desiring-machines”; and this not only because surplus labor “flows” from this
this sense, collectivity in the labor process undoes the “fetishization of labor”; that is, the simple and abstract humanist account of individuals appropriating nature and transforming it through their labor in accordance with their conscious plan in order to satisfy their needs, and realizing their essence in this creative process, is no longer applicable to the labor process, once cooperation becomes its defining characteristics.\textsuperscript{342}

More importantly, laboring collectively provides an opportunity for ever-changing and temporary associations in the labor process; this would demand and consequently be a realization of Sen’s capabilities equality. That is, to the extent their productive capabilities are equalized, individual laborers can change the position they occupy in the labor process as they wish; they can participate in production according to what they imagine as a fulfilling productive life. In addition, to the extent this productive capabilities equality is realized, the so-called “alienating” aspects of labor disappear, as individual laborers no longer have to tediously repeat the same activity, but can freely occupy different positions in the production process. Marx’s call for a society in which human beings will “hunt in the morning, fish in

\begin{footnote}
I carry out a detailed analysis of “fetishism” in general, and the “fetishization of labor” in particular, both in humanist Marxist accounts, and by Marx himself in the second essay.
\end{footnote}
the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticize after dinner…without ever becoming hunter, fisherman, shepherd, or critic” accordingly can be read as an expression of the states that individual laborers pass to and from as they collectively labor (Marx and Engels 1975, 4:47).

However, this does not mean that DeMartino’s productive class justice—those who have the capability to produce the most surplus should collectively contribute the most—necessarily translates into or necessitates that individual laborers would be occupying temporary and/or their preferred positions in the labor process, and vice versa. Nor does it mean that at each and every instance a temporary relationship between labor as a capability to produce surplus and labor as a creative, meaningful or fulfilling activity cannot be negotiated. For example, an individual’s desired place in the laboring collectivity—the particular useful labor that she performs—does not necessarily ensure that the collective subject would be contributing to social surplus what it potentially can; as a result of laborers’ preferred division of labor, it might be the case that it no longer performs surplus labor in the most productive manner. However, to the extent that productivity relates to relative surplus-value production—more objects of use created during a given labor-time, thus reducing the period devoted to the production of necessities—it is still possible for this collectivity to sustain their contribution to the social surplus by elongating their workday and/or reducing their claim to necessities, thus becoming performers of absolute surplus.343

What this possibility signifies is that decisions pertaining to different aspects of the production process—the simple labor and the surplus-production processes—

343 One thing to note here is that the criterion for productive class justice—those with the greatest ability to contribute the most to social surplus—does not demand that laborers perform the maximum surplus they are capable of; rather they perform in accordance with their ability. As such, even though the potential surplus that can be produced might not be realized as a result of the desired division of labor, it is still possible to get the same contribution to social surplus from the laborers who now work longer hours and/or claim less resources.
become temporary, negotiable, and open to contestation. They would change in accordance with the various ways that productive capabilities—both as the performance of surplus-labor and useful labors—and social desires are articulated. As such, rather than “essentializing the principle of contribution according to ability” by ignoring the many ways it can be achieved, “the legitimacy of the principle itself” becomes what is important in this account of class justice (DeMartino 2003, 12; emphasis in the original). The openness to different arrangements in the realization of this normative principle—specifically, the possibility that laborers participate in the production process in accordance with their desires, skills, and capabilities—should not, however, blur what the focus of productive class justice is: the performance of surplus, rather than the simple labor process itself. With that in mind, I argue that productive class justice would be achieved if each has the capability to perform surplus, and contribute to the social surplus in accordance with their ability.

3.10.2 Appropriative Justice

The fruits of production, both as social surplus and the objects of use this surplus is “attached” to, have to be appropriated in order to become available for use; without appropriation, neither surplus nor use-values would exist. As I allude to above, I construe appropriation of surplus as a capability, a freedom that must be extended to those who perform surplus labor. Only then would the injustice of

344 DeMartino finds sole emphasis on the principle itself, without taking into account the different ways it can be realized, to attest to the discredited principles of “actually existing socialism” (2003, 12). However, as DeMartino convincingly shows that this principle of “contribution according to ability,” is not limited to Marxist theoretical and political projects: “diverse contemporary theoretical perspectives,” despite their different justifications—for example, neoclassical economics advocate it as a matter of efficiency, whereas for Marxists, it is a matter of matter of justice—in fact render this principle as their productive normative criteria (ibid.).

345 This criterion is slightly different from DeMartino’s principle: I emphasize each, rather than all, should have this capability to suggest that there is always someone or some collective who can choose to participate in the surplus production. See below for the significance of this distinction.
exploitation be abolished, and one aspect of leading a fulfilling and meaningful life would be realized. The realization of this capability does away with what Ellerman (1992; cf. Burczak 1996/97) calls “the fundamental myth of capitalist property rights”—only those who are the owners of capital have the right to appropriate—without necessarily specifying exactly who, for doing what, should be accorded appropriative rights. To be more specific, whether this capability should be extended to those who do not perform surplus labor themselves, even though they provide the conditions of existence for its production, both directly—for example, technicians who ensure that the machinery functions properly in production, accountants who keeps the books, or even the owners of means of production who rent them out—and indirectly—such as those who supply health-care services for immediate producers, or those who provide education—or even to others who have no contribution to the surplus, becomes an issue (Cullenberg 1992, 1998; DeMartino 2003).

Stephen Resnick and Richard Wolff (1988, 2001b, 2002) argue that those who directly and collectively perform surplus-labor, *and only those*, should have the appropriative rights, as a collectivity, over that surplus. This appropriative criterion ensures “a morality of fairness and equity,” as no individual or community receives something without participating in its production (Resnick and Wolff 1988, 21) differentiates between two types of communist class process: one in which all adult individuals participate collectively in the appropriation of surplus, while only some perform that surplus. They discuss a second type of communism in which only “those particular individuals who perform surplus labor collectively appropriate it” (ibid.). Although both processes are “communist by virtue of [being] communal appropriation” of the surplus, Resnick and Wolff (2001b, 2002) privilege the second definition of communism.

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346 Cullenberg (1998, 72) criticizes Ellerman (1992) and Burczak (1996/97) for imputing appropriation rights to those who are responsible for production. He puts them to the task of “explaining why owners of capital who (directly or through rental agreements) provide material inputs to production should be excluded from appropriation.” However, those who rent out the means of production can be owners of capital, that is, capitalists, *only if* they are the sole appropriators of the surplus-value; otherwise, they would simply be participating in a simple exchange as commodity owners.

347 Resnick and Wolff (1988, 21) differentiates between two types of communist class process: one in which all adult individuals participate collectively in the appropriation of surplus, while only some perform that surplus. They discuss a second type of communism in which only “those particular individuals who perform surplus labor collectively appropriate it” (ibid.). Although both processes are “communist by virtue of [being] communal appropriation” of the surplus, Resnick and Wolff (2001b, 2002) privilege the second definition of communism.
2001b, 265); only then would the injustice of exploitation, someone or some group appropriating—becoming the initial recipients of—the surplus without participating in its production, be abolished. Thus, Resnick and Wolff tie the capability to appropriate surplus to the capability to perform surplus-labor, rendering the latter a necessary condition of the former. So does Theodore Burczak (1996/97), who, deploying Ellerman’s labor theory of property, imputes appropriative rights to those who actively participate in the labor process. His account differs from Resnick and Wolff’s on two accounts: he attributes the whole product—including the surplus and the liabilities incurred during the production process—to laboring subjects, and justifies his appropriative criterion with a Lockean notion of responsibility—labor as the sole responsible agent of, and in, production.

On the other hand, Stephen Cullenberg (1992, 1998) dissociates these two moments and argues that those who labor should not be excluded from appropriation. Criticizing what he perceives as the “general myth of property rights”—“the belief that a property right over any productive asset automatically entails an ownership of the residual or surplus produced in part by that property”—Cullenberg (1998, 71) refutes the idea that labor is the unique input that is responsible for the product à la Burczak/Ellerman/Locke; thus, it should not have an inalienable, natural right to its fruits. What is more, he does not find linking productive responsibility to appropriative rights to be providing any guide in

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348 In this sense, designating exploitation as someone or some group receiving “something for nothing” is not accurate. That is, receiving a portion of the surplus for doing nothing would not necessarily be unjust in this class justice framework; as I discuss below, distributive class justice rather insists that some—for example, the elderly, the sick, the children—should receive the surplus, even though they do not partake in its performance. Exploitation is unjust because someone appropriates, is the initial recipient, of surplus without participating in its production, whereas surplus producers are excluded from its appropriation.

349 See Burczak (1998) for a response to Cullenberg’s critique.
determining who is responsible for the product and who is not (ibid., 73). After all, Cullenberg points out, not only those who directly labor, but also those who provide the conditions of existence for production, both within the firm, and more broadly, in the community, can be seen as responsible for the product—including the surplus—and as such could be assigned appropriative rights (ibid., 72-73). However, Cullenberg is not interested in ascertaining exactly who the responsible parties are; rather, he argues for “a just social arrangement that does not exclude the doers of labor from appropriation” (ibid., 73). Thus, Cullenberg leaves open who, other than “the doers of labor,” should be considered as rightful appropriators of the product.

George DeMartino (2003, 18)—like Cullenberg—advocates what he refers to as a “weak definition of appropriative justice.” Rather than limiting appropriative rights to productive laborers—irrespective of whether they are defined only as those who directly perform surplus à la Resnick and Wolff (1987), or those who provide the conditions of existence, thus indirectly contributing to surplus production are included—DeMartino argues that those who directly produce the surplus not to be excluded from its appropriation (ibid.). As such, this weak definition “purposely leaves open the question of who besides direct surplus producers should be granted appropriation rights” (ibid, 19; emphasis in the original). That is, when productive laborers are the sole appropriators of the surplus they produce, or when the entire community is accorded appropriative rights because it is considered to be indirectly responsible for production—or any other constituency in between these two extremes—appropriative class justice would be realized (ibid., 19).

DeMartino does not stop at this purposely ambiguous weak definition as rights are still linked to responsibility; after all, some still might be excluded from

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350 Cullenberg (1998), when discussing appropriative rights, refers to the appropriation of the whole product; this particular emphasis, simply because he is responding to Burzak (1996/97), is signified in his use of, “doers of labor,” and not performers of surplus-labor.
having appropriative rights for not participating in production in any way. In contrast, he completely dissociates the production of surplus from its appropriation, and argues for the extension of appropriative rights to all members of the society irrespective of their position in the performance of the surplus; failing to do so would be the violation of capabilities equality.\footnote{DeMartino fully embeds the three moments of class justice within the capabilities approach; as a result, he demands “not just formal participation rights but meaningful democratic decisionmaking over surplus production, appropriation, and distribution” (2003, 21-22).}

I follow DeMartino in separating productive and appropriative moments of class justice, and in situating the latter principle within the capabilities approach.\footnote{DeMartino argues Marxian class analysis and the capabilities approach would enrich one another. Construing capabilities equality as all members of the society having “equal substantive ability to participate meaningfully in all vital decisions of that affect the community,” he provides a Marxian elaboration of it: inclusion of decisions pertaining to class (ibid., 21). In turn, capabilities approach directs him towards an “expansive interpretation of the weak definition of appropriative justice” so that all, irrespective of their position in the production of surplus, also have this substantive freedom (ibid.; emphasis in the original). However, in this account, DeMartino defines only appropriation, and not surplus-performing labor, as a capability.} And I agree with DeMartino that the criterion for appropriative class justice should be interpreted as a “non-exception”—there should be no exceptions as to who can appropriate; thus access to this capability is fully detached from responsibility in, or contribution to, production (ibid., 21). That is, no one should be excluded from appropriation because they do not directly or indirectly partake in the performance of surplus, since such an exclusion would mean that not each member of the society has the capability and the substantive freedom of appropriating the surplus. However, “non-exception” does not necessarily mean that all members of the community are accorded this capability, in the sense that the list of appropriators, at least potentially, could be completed.\footnote{As I argue below, this criterion that demands “non-exception” does not mean that it is “all-inclusive”; whereas in the former, adding another element to the list is always a possibility, the latter, despite claiming to account for all, can only exist to the extent that it has an constituent that is excluded (Madra 2006).} Here, I differ from DeMartino—and in doing so I align myself with the argument that appropriative justice is based on capabilities and not on the performance of surplus labor.

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353 As I argue below, this criterion that demands “non-exception” does not mean that it is “all-inclusive”; whereas in the former, adding another element to the list is always a possibility, the latter, despite claiming to account for all, can only exist to the extent that it has an constituent that is excluded (Madra 2006).
so, I follow Yahya M. Madra (2006)—and argue that *each*, rather than *all*, without exception, should have the capability to appropriate the surplus. In doing so, I emphasize that, since there are and should be no necessary exceptions, someone or some group can choose to claim appropriative rights; that is, there is and “will always be ‘another one’” who could appropriate, thus the list of appropriators—or any list for that matter—is never exhaustive (ibid., 219). The difference between these two renditions is subtle, yet important; it signifies and is constitutive of a different and distinct—a communist—normative framework that is elegantly articulated by Madra (ibid.), to which I return below.

3.10.3 Distributive Justice

With the appropriation of surplus questions as to who, for doing what should receive how much of this surplus arises; here, Marx’s discussion of possible distributive patterns in a communist society in the *Critique of the Gotha Program* can provide a guiding thread (Marx 1978). Criticizing the call for “a fair distribution of the undiminished proceeds of labor” advocated in the Gotha program as being nothing more than “mere phrases,” Marx goes on to discuss what would be deducted from the social surplus in order to sustain and reproduce the society, and what would remain for individual consumption (ibid., 528-29). Funds should be reserved not only to reproduce but also to expand the productive capacities of the society, which include the “satisfaction of common needs,” such as health and educational services, among others; in addition, payments for administrative costs and funds as insurances against unexpected accidents should be taken into account (ibid., 529). To the extent that the purpose of distribution is to reproduce and transform the society in this framework, those who are unable to work, such as the elderly, the sick, and the
children, also should receive a portion of the social surplus. After these necessary deductions, the remainder would be left for the private consumption of “the individual producers of the co-operative society” (ibid.).

More importantly, Marx argues that the call for a “fair distribution” in the Gotha program is influenced by and derived from a normative framework that is based on “exchange of equals,” and more generally, “equal rights” (ibid., 529-30). According to this “fair” distributive scheme, individual producers would receive—all have the equal right to—what they have contributed to the social surplus—all receive something equal to, or after the necessary deductions, in proportion to the labor they have supplied (ibid., 530). However, Marx argues, this “equal right”—to each according to her contribution—is “an unequal right for unequal labor” (ibid.; emphasis in the original). To the extent that different individuals have different productive capacities, thus being able to labor with diverse intensities for unequal durations, their contribution to, and by implication, their share in the surplus would be unequal (ibid.). In addition, one might—and should Marx adds—receive more than another even if both have performed labor equally, simply because there are non-laborers who are dependent on them; as such, this ethical framework of “equal rights” for all does not and cannot hold. Not only because the distributive criterion of equal share in the surplus for equal contribution ends up being unequal distribution for unequal labor. More importantly, to the extent that one’s share in social surplus is linked to their responsibility in production, this distributive criterion is based on

354 It is important to note that not only in this communist society, which is still influenced by the capitalist notion of equality, but also in a capitalist society itself, there exist arrangements to provide a portion of the social product to those who do not perform labor: “official poor relief” that Marx (1978, 529) discusses, the healthcare, or the social security system (Madra 2006) can be seen as examples of such “unequal” rights.

355 In a similar vein, Resnick and Wolff (1987) trace the flow of surplus from appropriators to recipients with a notion of subsumed class process; they argue, collectively produced and appropriated surplus should be distributed to those who provide the conditions of existence for this communist fundamental class process to secure its reproduction (1988, 20).
exclusion—non-laborers, despite getting a portion of the “social consumption fund,” are the exception of this distributive rule, since they receive something for doing nothing.\(^\text{356}\) This “exception” in turn gives “to each according to contribution” a capitalist—or bourgeois, as Marx puts it—characteristic.

Marx provides a different distributive criterion that is not “tainted” by the capitalist ethics of equal rights and equal exchange: “to each according to his needs” (ibid., 531).\(^\text{357}\) With this principle, the moments of contribution and distribution are completely dissociated from one another: that is, performing surplus-labor and/or providing the conditions of existence for its production no longer serves as a justification for receiving a share of that surplus.\(^\text{358}\) As such, this distributive criterion implies an obligation \textit{to} each member of the society and establishes a “morality of relatedness and community” (Resnick and Wolff 2001b, 265; cf. DeMartino 2003). In addition, it does away with the distribution scheme that is based on the exchange of equals—getting an equal in return for what one parts with: rather, the share of each in the social product, destined for their consumption, is based on their distinct and unique needs (DeMartino, 2003). Thus, this criterion is a call for a \textit{radical equality}, one that is different from the equality associated with “equal rights and equal exchange”: there are no exceptions to who can receive the surplus—“to each”—and each member of the community has access to the resources they need (Madra 2006).

\(^\text{356}\) This is not to say that they should be excluded and not receive a share of the social product because they do not contribute. However, this also does not mean that those who do not labor would receive a cut of the social product only within an “equal rights” framework. As Marx shows, another distributive criterion, which is unaffected by a “capitalist logic” is possible.

\(^\text{357}\) DeMartino (2003, 13) interprets this principle as, “those with greatest needs should receive the greatest shares”; as such, he argues, this distributive criterion would provide individuals with relatively equal capabilities.

\(^\text{358}\) I am not arguing that production and distribution are or should be treated as independent economic moments: as Marx convincingly shows, they are closely interrelated, mutually constituting one another (1973). Only what is produced can be distributed; and only as a result of distribution, production can begin anew. My point, rather, is that the criteria pertaining to the productive and distributive class justice are independent from one another in this Marxian ethics.
As a result, those who have not participated in the production, and/or in the appropriation of the surplus are not excluded from this distributive moment; but more importantly, the idea that there is always someone else who can make a claim on the surplus is acknowledged with this criterion.

3.11 From the “Logic of Exclusion” to a “Logic of Non-Exception”

In elaborating the normative principles of class justice, I particularly emphasize that each—rather than all, or some—should have these capabilities pertaining to the performance, appropriation, and distribution of the surplus. As I mention in passing above, my purpose is to adhere to and concretize a unique Marxian ethics that transcends its capitalist counterpart—one that is characterized by a specific notion of “equality,” but more importantly, by its “logic of exclusion” (ibid.). This capitalist normative framework can be exemplified with a discussion of exploitation, the exclusion of some—the performers of surplus labor—from the appropriation of surplus (ibid.; cf. Özselçuk and Madra 2005). To put it differently, exploitation occurs when some—appropriators of surplus, not only the board of directors in a capitalist enterprise, but also a feudal lord, or a slave-owner—who do not participate in the production of, or labor for their share in, the surplus have exclusive appropriative rights. In this sense, exploitation is problematic and unjust because it violates “the bourgeois” notion of justice: despite all appearances of equal exchange between equals in a capitalist economy, exploitation signifies that not all are equal—not all have appropriative rights—or receive the equal of what they part with.

It is possible to remedy this injustice by according appropriative rights to only those who perform surplus-labor—“exclusive appropriation” of Burczak, and Resnick

359 Madra (2006), and Özselçuk and Madra (2005) focus on capitalist exploitation; nevertheless, their analysis can be expanded to include all exploitative economic relationships.
and Wolff—or by calling for the non-exclusion of surplus producers from the moment of appropriation—“inclusive appropriation” of Cullenberg and DeMartino.\textsuperscript{360} Although exploitation would cease to exist in both cases, these accounts nevertheless operate within a capitalist normative and ideological framework that is based on “a logic of exception,” as Madra (2006) aptly shows.\textsuperscript{361}

That is, to the extent that these accounts focus on ascertaining who is responsible for the performance of surplus—either as direct producers, or as providers of its conditions of existence—to determine who should have appropriative rights, they would still be influenced by the capitalist ethics of equality and its “logic of exception.”\textsuperscript{362} To put it differently, as appropriative rights are accorded only in return for something, one does not avoid the logic of exclusion, even when all who provide the conditions of existence for the production of surplus—and, at the limit, this can be \textit{every member of the community}—let alone only those who directly perform it, are allowed to appropriate. Consequently, any appropriative principle

\begin{quote}
360 To be clear, exclusive appropriation is only applicable to what Resnick and Wolff (1988) label as “type II communism.” They also discuss another communist economic organization in which all appropriate the surplus while only some perform it; in this case, this society would be organized around a principle of inclusive appropriation (ibid.).

361 This of course is not to say that Marxist should not be interested in exploitation à la Roemer (1986). On the contrary, exploitation is unjust, and as such should be exposed and abolished; however, it can be rendered visible and can be remedied within a framework in which notions of equality and ownership according to contribution prevails. However, a communist ethics that is not the “inverse” of, nor conditioned by bourgeois/capitalist ethics, but stands on its own, and in which exploitation does not exist, as Madra (2006) shows.

362 Madra (ibid., 211) criticizes Marxian accounts of exploitation and their normative principles of “exclusive/inclusive appropriation” for ascribing to an ontology that takes the “originary unity of transcendental subject”—either the individual or the society/community—as its founding moment. Consequently, their project—abolishing exploitation—is a return to, rehabilitation and reconstitution of this subject (ibid.). In this sense, they are trying to remedy the wrongs of the bourgeois society, only to make it true to itself, to its founding ethical principles. Madra construes communism as a different ontological project; “giving up all fantasies of wholeness, harmonious reconciliation, and the ultimate telos of an ideal order that puts an end to the immediate disorder of injustice” (ibid., 219). It assumes there is always another that can join this totality, which in turn means that the society cannot be constituted as a closed, unified totality. It is different from the capitalist ontology, in which society is constituted as and functions as a closed totality, only if there is an exception to its constitutive law; as such, this ontological project also fails to constitute the society as a totality.
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construed within this normative framework would demand the exclusion of those who have nothing to do with the production of the surplus—even if all were responsible for its production.

Madra suggests, a communist ethics should refuse to have any exceptions regarding who should perform, appropriate, distribute and receive surplus; it should also reject to “be the exception” to and in those instances—for example, demanding/granting appropriative rights only to surplus-producers (ibid., 219–20; emphasis in the original). What is more, as there are no exceptions, there can always be someone or some group who can participate in any or all of these processes (ibid., 219).

As such, this class justice is the pursuit of a radical equality—each is to participate in the surplus economy in all of its aspects—and informs the normative principles I elaborate for the realization of class justice: each should contribute according to their ability in the production of the surplus—those who have the greatest ability contributes the most to surplus, thus realizing their productive capability—each should have the capability of appropriating the surplus—as a result, exploitation becomes a non-issue—and each should receive according to their needs—get a portion of the surplus so that they can have relatively equal “capability sets” to pursue what they deem as a meaningful and fulfilling life.

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363 According to Madra (ibid., 217), the acknowledgement of the existence of “some other constituency that can join” in the performance and appropriation of surplus is the distinct and defining attribute of this communist logic. The logic of “communist not-all” fails “to constitute itself as a closed and systemic totality for there will always be another element that can be added to the list.” As such, communism fails to “domesticate the real of class antagonism,” unable to resolve once and for all the issues pertaining to surplus-economy: who should produce the surplus, how much and for whom it should be produced and how it should be used (ibid., 217–18). However this not to say that capitalism, with its logic of exception, is successful in solving these questions: the “capitalist-all” logic articulates the social as “a closed and systemic totality…[only] if there is an exception,” which signifies its failure to constitute itself as such (ibid., 217).
3.12 Class Justice or Capabilities Equality?

The radical equality of class justice is similar to Sen’s—but not Nussbaum’s—capabilities equality. As I summarize above, Sen’s primary aim is to redefine the contours of the normative framework within which individual states and social outcomes are evaluated; he proposes capabilities—doings and beings that an individual have the freedom to achieve, if they so choose, to live a meaningful and fulfilling life—as the relevant evaluative space in which economic justice is to be realized. However, Sen persistently shies away from specifying any basic and fundamental capabilities that should be universally available for all, refusing to define, even minimally, what a “dignified human living” should look like à la Nussbaum. Rather, he calls for the equal distribution of, and access to, each capability so that each has the ability to achieve those end-states they wish to attain and deem valuable. As such, Sen’s capabilities approach can be read as demanding “equal efficacy without exception,” just like class justice does (cf. DeMartino 2003); that is, there are no exceptions to who should have access to each capability. In addition, the capability list is not constituted as a closed and complete totality; to the extent that there is always another capability that can be deemed necessary or valuable for a meaningful, fulfilling and dignified life, the list of capabilities is never all-inclusive.\(^{364}\)

However, there is at least one fundamental difference between these two approaches that simply cannot be overlooked: Sen explicitly focuses on the individual and ignores communities/collective identities. That is, the subject of the capabilities approach, for Sen, is the individual, even more, the capitalist individual. Even though it can be argued that he does not presume an already-fully-constituted

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\(^{364}\) In this sense, Nussbaum’s list(s) of basic and fundamental capabilities violates the principle of radical equality that the capabilities approach can potentiate, since such a list will always exclude someone or some constituency and what they consider to be a capability.
individual, or an idealized-though-yet-not-fulfilled identity, but rather starts from a subject in the process of coming into being with her acquisition of new capabilities and/or with the realization of different capabilities at any given moment, Sen still operates within an individualistic framework. On the other hand, this is not to say that there is no room for collective subjectivities in a capabilities framework; for example, as I discuss in detail above, the production process can exemplify how a collectivity can come into being temporarily, dissolve itself, and create itself anew. That is, a collective constituent is formed as the subject of the simple labor process—a laboring subject to which individuals participate as the performers of particular useful labors—and/or as the performer of the surplus; in this collectivity, not only do persons realize their capabilities, thus confirming their individual existence, but also transform that very—if not acquire a new—identity. This collectivity is not a “‘common being,’ the expression of a common agency grounded in a unidimensional space” of the production process that Callari and Ruccio (2003, 21) associate with the economistic and reductionist conception of social agency and identity. That is, this is not a community of homogenized human beings qua producers, or, a society of *homer faber* (ibid.). To begin with, individuals, collectivities, or the society, are not equated with, defined by, or reduced to, their laboring activity; rather, not only this is a temporary and possibly ever-changing laboring collective, but also production is only one aspect of their life, now considered in its totality as various doings and beings that these subjects value. In addition, to the extent that class justice could only be achieved if capabilities equality is realized simultaneously in three economic sites—production, appropriation and distribution—two other aspects of human life is immediately brought forward in which other collectivities and, at the limit, a community itself is constituted. As such, the juxtaposition of three different moments of the economy is an immediate reminder against, and unequivocal rejection of, any essential, fundamental
privileging of production, or labor. Finally, operating within the broader framework of capabilities equality demands—better yet, necessitates—that different and multiple agencies, identities and subjectivities are acknowledged; after all, only a few capabilities are identified with this notion of class justice. In this sense, collective subjects or the community, rather than appearing as a “common being,” the identity and agency of which is determined and expressed in a unidimensional social space as Callari and Ruccio (ibid.) rightfully criticizes, becomes a “being in common,” constituted, among other sites, in the performance, appropriation and distribution of the surplus.\textsuperscript{365}

3.13 Concluding Remarks: The Affects of Labor as a Capability to Perform Surplus

In order to ascertain whether labor has disappeared from contemporary narratives or not (“the problem of labor”), I sought to register the particular discursive spaces—if any—labor occupies in various—academic or non-academic, mainstream or heterodox—discourses. I read these multiple conceptualizations as an indication that labor is not an always-already known, a representation of a given existant or a “signified,” but something constructed differently in different narratives, which, in turn, resolves “the problem with labor”—ascribing a fundamental and/or ontological primacy to labor as a result of which all that exist can be reduced to and/or derived from this essence. Once these different renditions are juxtaposed, and their adequacy or legitimacy in defining what labor is, or can be, are readily acknowledged—otherwise, one of these definitions would signify Labor—the issue becomes whether one should even bother with referring to labor; after all, how could one choose between different conceptions if all represents labor—or equally

\textsuperscript{365} Following Jean-Luc Nancy’s (1991) distinction, Callari and Ruccio (2003, 21) reinterpret “community” as a “being in common,” rather than a “common being”: as a result, they argue, “community can be conceived in multiplicity and difference, negotiated and constructed in and through diverse subjectivities, in an open social space.” See also Ruccio (1992).
fails to do so? I argued that a unique discourse, one that renders particular aspects of human life visible, is constituted in part by the particular conception of labor it deploys; this narrative, in turn, enables ethical and political projects that otherwise would not be possible.

Looking at various ways in which labor is construed in the realm of economic justice, I registered the affectivity of these particular conceptions in this third essay: for example, in the capabilities approach labor is defined, for the most part, as a freedom to remunerative employment, performed in a dignified and creative manner. Accordingly, laborers’ ability to sell their labor-power freely in the labor-market is considered to be a decisive and necessary step towards the realization of capabilities equality—and in the case of Nussbaum, one of the basic and fundamental capabilities would be satisfied; in addition, this freedom would also “trickle down” and enable the achievement of other capabilities, such as, freedom of movement, and having a say in their and their families’ life, just to mention two of those (Sen 1992, 1996, 1997, 1999; Nussbaum 1992, 2000, 2003). Freedom of employment, mediated by the market, also provides the best mechanism for finding the occupation that is best suited for laborers’ skills, thus, allowing them the best chance to produce creatively and avoid uninspiring and tedious work (Levine and Rizvi 2005). Thus, once labor is defined as a freedom to remunerative and creative employment, establishing a free labor-market, and the elimination of any and all obstacles that would inhibit individuals from choosing/finding compensated jobs in accordance with their abilities become the policy recommendation of the capabilities approach.

With this definition of labor, the capabilities approach is confined to a capitalist normative framework that is based on a particular notion of “equality”—more precisely, equal rights and equal exchange—with its accompanying “logic of
exclusion.” That is, all individuals should have the right to pursue remunerative employment, which, when mediated through the market, would result in the exchange of equals—both parties of the exchange relation are assumed to receive an equal to what they part with. However, as Marx poignantly shows, this exchange of equals taking place at the “Eden of innate rights” becomes its opposite, an unequal exchange, when one moves to the “hidden abode of production.” To wit, labor produces more value during the production process than what it receives in exchange; and as capitalists are the only ones who are accorded appropriative rights, the difference is received—at least initially—by them. In this sense, the equality at the market level is based on an exclusion: capitalists—the board of directors, to be more specific—are the only ones who do not have to give up something to receive something in return; they, despite being the only nonlaborers in its production, have the exclusive right to appropriate the surplus (Özselçuk and Madra 2005, Madra 2006). Consequently, considering remunerative employment as a capability and demanding all to have this freedom is in effect to demand all to have the freedom to be exploited; as such, an important obstacle towards leading a meaningful and fulfilling life, an injustice in the economic relations, is rendered invisible in the capabilities approach simply because of the way labor is defined.

To register this injustice, Marx starts with classical political economists’ definition of labor, labor as the producer of value; if it is forced to—or voluntarily does—elongate the workday beyond the time necessary for the reproduction of its own existence, labor becomes the performer of surplus. Thus, Marx subtly redefines labor as the capacity to produce surplus; as such, this Marxian labor becomes “both of and other than” bourgeois labor as it is construed within a capitalist theoretical

\[\text{366 This is not to say that capabilities approach itself is founded on this capitalist logic; on the contrary, as I argue above, Sen seeks a radical equality, which is analogous to the non-exclusiveness of the communist ethics.}\]
horizon—a factor of production that receives what it contributes to the product. Following Marx’s reconceptualization, one can register an injustice that would otherwise remain hidden and unrecognized—exploitation; also one can indict the capitalist ethics of equal rights for all and equal exchange, as it immediately becomes its other—exclusive rights for some and unequal exchange.

However, labor construed as the performer of surplus not only leads to a critique of the capitalist normative framework; that is, it is not only a negative ethical and political project that this definition of labor enables. On the contrary, labor-the-surplus-producer can also—though not necessarily—potentiate a unique ethics, one that transcends and supersedes the bourgeois ethics as it is organized around a principle other than “a logic of exclusion.” In this sense, labor as a capability to perform surplus becomes the focal point of the “labor theory of ethics,” a theory of class justice, I elaborate.

The idea that labor can perform surplus undermines the capitalist conception of equality, which presumes that there is always an equal return to what is parted with—be it the contribution to the product in the production process, or objects of use or of value changing hands in exchange. In contrast, when labor produces surplus, something, which until then was only a latent possibility, and for which there was no equivalent, comes into existence according to the Marxian accounting scheme. However, I hasten to add, capitalist ethics is only potentially disrupted with this definition of labor as the producer of surplus, if one also avoids its “logic of exclusion” in conceptualizing class justice. Consequently, I deploy a “logic of non-exclusion”—there is no one who does not participate in, and there is always another

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367 I borrow being “both of and other than” from Callari (2002), who conceives “gift” as that which is in relation to, however different from—thus irreducible to—“exchange.” As such, gift constantly disturbs the suturing of the social as an economy of exchanges/reciprocity, and enables political and ethical interventions. See Amariglio (2002) for an argument that “exchange” itself is as unsutured as gift is.
constituency who could join, a surplus economy (Madra 2006)—and articulate the normative criteria pertaining to the three moments of this surplus economy—production, appropriation and distribution—accordingly to elaborate a unique Marxian ethics.

I argue productive class justice would be realized if each has the capability to produce surplus and realize it in accordance with their ability. This would signify individuals’ and collectively laboring subjects’ obligation and commitment to a community and/or communal subjectivity, which is, in part, brought to existence, constituted and sustained by the surplus-labor thus performed. However, this is not a community of *homo faber*, in which all is reduced to a laboring subjectivity. Rather, it is one—a temporary and ever-changing one—among many other, non-laboring identities that individuals and collectivities have.

Once the surplus is performed, the issue becomes who should appropriate, be the first recipients of it, since if the surplus-producers are excluded from its appropriation, this would be an exploitative, thus, an unjust economic relation. Appropriative class justice would be realized, and exploitation would be eliminated, when those who perform surplus-labor are the sole appropriators of the surplus, or, at least, are not excluded from its appropriation. However, to the extent that someone or some group acquires—or not excluded from having—appropriative rights because they are identified as being responsible for the surplus—be it the direct performers of surplus-labor, or anyone else who indirectly participate in its production, which, at the limit, can be the whole society—appropriation would be a right granted in return for their efforts; consequently, this normative principle can be stated as “appropriate according to contribution.” Consequently, one would still be subscribing to the capitalist “logic of exclusion,” since those who do not contribute to the production would be excluded. In contrast, arguing that each should participate to each process of the surplus-labor economy, I construe appropriative class justice as
each, irrespective of their position regarding the production of the surplus, should have the capability to appropriate the surplus—thus, separating these two moments of class process completely from one another. Finally, distributive class justice would be realized when each receives a portion of the surplus according to their needs.

When the three criteria of class justice are taken together, all construed in accordance with a logic of non-exclusion, the capitalist normative framework of equal rights and equal exchange is replaced with a radical equality: there is no one who is excluded from participating, and there is always someone or some group who would join, to this surplus economy in each of its aspects. There is no longer equal exchange, or, for that matter, exchange of something for something else; that is, one does not receive an equal for what one parts with, nor does one acquire anything for doing something. Each perform surplus in accordance with their ability, producing something in return for nothing. There are no longer rights associated with responsibility or ownership; that is, one does not appropriate or is given a cut of the surplus because one participates in the production of surplus. Rather, each has the capability to appropriate and receive a portion of the surplus simply because they are not excluded from this surplus economy, from being a part of a community.

This communist ethics, formulated by Marx as “from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs,” is based on a notion of surplus, which, in turn, is intimately linked with a particular rendition of labor: labor as the performer of surplus. As I have argued throughout my dissertation, this particular definition is one among many others—even in Marx’s own oeuvre—which in part constitutes different narratives with different affectivities—what those discourses render visible and what political and ethical projects they potentiate. However, as I tried to elucidate in detail in this essay, without this specific definition, one simply cannot render exploitation visible, nor can one elaborate a unique Marxian ethics.
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