

Title

## Labour-Power as Commodity: Interrogating a ‘Value theory of Ideology’<sup>1</sup>

### I. Introduction

In today’s world where new styles of disciplinary management (codename: inter-disciplinarily) have only sidelined the humanities, literature being doubly in the shadow, there cannot be any ‘note’ simply on the proper name ‘Marx’, and indeed this conference has qualified it, ‘Marx in the East’. I might further narrow it down to set limits to this paper, and call it ‘Marx’s *Capital* read by a student of literature’, and if I ever tread into any other discipline, that would only be “in terms of [my] fantasy about what kind of social value those other disciplines carry”<sup>2</sup>.

“Value theory of ideology’ is a notion floated by Beverley Best<sup>3</sup> according to whom ideology is about the question of “truth and error”<sup>4</sup>, and is based on her (probably Kantian) formulation of “the perceptual economy of capital”<sup>5</sup>. Best mobilizes her polemic against the work of Jan Rehman, a part of the *Projekt Ideologietheorie* (PIT), who argues that a “renewal” of the “ideology-critique” can be found in the works of Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, and (carried over in a sharpened form in the notes of) Antonio Gramsci, and that this re-turn to the canon might also show a way out of the more recent poststructuralist trends of ‘neutralising’ the notion of ideology (“ideology-theory”), which runs the risk of sliding into a “functionalist theory of legitimacy”<sup>6</sup>. Contra Rehman, Best puts forth a “value theory of ideology” that parts with Rehman’s proposal in at least two key ways. Unlike Rehman, Best does not base her reading of a Marxian theory of ideology on the division between ‘mental’ and ‘manual’ labour, but instead on ‘value’ as the “‘negative’... content” of capital, that “singular substance” which “posits the perceptual economy of capital”<sup>7</sup>. Secondly, she denies any room for the ‘neutral conception’ within the strictly Marxian “perceptual economy of capital”, and consequently argues that ‘ideology’, *if one reads this notion* in the text of *Capital*, and especially in

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<sup>1</sup> *This is a draft copy for conference purposes, not to be cited. Drafting and stylistic errors regretted.*

<sup>2</sup> Spivak in Weed 1989, 78.

<sup>3</sup> Best 2015.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, 109.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 135.

<sup>6</sup> Rehman 2015, 435

<sup>7</sup> Best, 135

Marx's description of different forms of capital (her emphasis is on volume 3) is indeed about the question of "truth and error in general".

I agree with Best that the crux of a value theory of ideology in Marx is rooted in his analysis of the commodification of labour-power, and think that she is correct in pointing out that Rehman has a rather heavy emphasis on Marx's texts written before his major economical works ('critique of political economy'), even if I try to go more cautiously when she proposes that "the eradication of the value form itself is the only means of transforming the ideological field."<sup>8</sup> It also remains unclear, that if, according to Best, the perceptual economy of capital generates "'knowledge' of the social world ... [in and as] the body"<sup>9</sup> of the subject, then how can she also claim that this economy is to be interrogated adequately with a notion of 'ideology' which does not need any intersection with theories that deal with gendered affects or sexual difference. Especially in the context of the "maintenance and reproduction of the working class"<sup>10</sup>, how might one think of a 'theory of ideology' which can cover both the 'economic' and the 'affective' (especially the gendered)? These questions, however, could not be made within the restrictions of this paper (precisely since they are based on a fuller exposition of the arguments taken up in it), just as I cannot engage with Best's rejection of post-structuralism, especially psychoanalysis. The key insight of Best that this paper follows is her insistence on *reading the text* of *Capital* beyond the usual places where one expects to find Marx's theses about ideology (e.g. the chapter on the fetishism of the commodity).<sup>11</sup>

The paper is delineated chiefly in three registers (or 'moments') to be found in Marx's signal text. These three are, the translation of labour-power into commodity, Marx's emphasis on the heterogeneity of 'uses' of different concrete labour, and the key role played by the 'wage-form', through which, within the critique of Marx, living labour is exchanged, not for 'money', but for 'money-capital', i.e. for "a portion of the labour of others which has already been objectified ['dead labour'], ... for a greater quantity of the living labour of others"<sup>12</sup>. One can already see that these

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<sup>8</sup> If she means by 'value' (and indeed it seems to be the case in places) only the specific form *value in general* takes within the given mode of production, then I concur, as will be clear in the my argument. The article by Best has been extremely helpful in writing parts of this paper. I have done little justice to it by not showing my tense engagement with this text. I decided against it, since such a discussion would have demanded a much longer piece.

<sup>9</sup> Best 113n26.

<sup>10</sup> Marx 1976, 718.

<sup>11</sup> The affirmative encounter with the text of Best is not staged in this paper, see the note above.

<sup>12</sup> Marx 1976, 730. I have used three translations of *Capital*, volume 1 in this paper, somewhat using the comparative blinds of these translations to peep into the original, they are, Marx 1976 (translation by Fowkes), the classic translation by Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling, and the bilingual edition by Hans G. Ehrbar (*Das Kapital, Volume I*, fourth edition, accessed in link: <http://content.csbs.utah.edu/~ehrbar/cap1.pdf>.)

anticipate a long arc of arguments which cannot be contained in a short presentation. The task gets more complicated if the voluminous available literature on these topics, to which one must attend, is considered. This paper therefore is written in the form of a ‘groundwork’, articulating provisional ‘theses’ rather than assured propositions.

## II. The Argument: Value

Marx’s development of the argument in *Capital*, vol. 1 is well-known. In ‘chapter one’ the “double-edged nature (*“Zwieschlächtige Natur”*, more on this below) of the ‘commodity-form’ is explained, as the analysis tries to grasp at the ‘hinge’ which can turn this fetish-like form around. At this point, it seems that ‘value’, itself “contentless” (*inhaltlos*)<sup>13</sup> is that hinge, negotiating between the concrete and the socially necessary labour, in its urge to take up a ‘form’. How can something which is originally *content*-less, desire not content, but form? This already gives one a glimpse into Marx’s method which is a *new materialism*. Value gets a ‘form’ by getting its content in ‘social labour’, form and content together is thus a third thing which makes both possible. Marx calls the ‘commodity’ “sensuous but non-sensuous, sensuously supersensible thing”<sup>14</sup>. This proposition is as much about the ‘value *as such*’ as it is about the commodity. Value as potentiality is neither form nor content, but can be called a form-ability, a condition of immanence. I will elaborate on this below.

Marx’s analysis is then carried forward to the proceeding chapters through the discussion, first of ‘money’, and then of capital itself. However, it is ultimately in ‘chapter 6’ that the crux on which the hinge turns is found, namely, the ‘sell and purchase of labour-power’. It is a hinge, as all the ‘differences’ here converge, mobilizing a methodological crisis, because this ‘moment’ also pre-comprehends that the capitalist mode of production (CMP) is always already in operation, necessitating the discussion of the ‘*so-called* primitive accumulation’. In-between, the reader is exasperated to encounter a series of complex and interlocked forms, all piling pressure on this one nervous knot. For example, the ‘wage-form’ is achieved through a forced sublation (which is not really a sublation, even if it functions as such<sup>15</sup>) of a heterogeneous difference between ‘money’ and

<sup>13</sup> “Preface to the First Edition”, translated by Fowkes as ‘slight in content’, Marx 1976, 90. Spivak has repeatedly mentioned this, that value is “contentless” in Marx (for example, see Spivak 2012, 257).

<sup>14</sup> Marx 1976, 163-164, interpretative translation and paraphrase Jacques Derrida’s, see Derrida 1994, 189.

<sup>15</sup> One can use any of the rhetorical hinges Marx so abundantly uses, ‘so called’, ‘apparent’, or ‘as if’ to qualify this.

‘money-capital’, in turn cathecting the place of that key moment of heterogeneity, the exchange of living labour for already objectified labour.

Either way one looks at it, these forms of appearance are held by two fictitious moments, accounting for the two hinges that both secure the appearances of capital, and threaten to unhinge it:

(a) That there is such a thing as primitive accumulation (accounting for the methodological problem of ‘origin’, *on which this paper has little to say*).

And (b) that human labour is “super-adequate to itself”<sup>16</sup>, at least within an anthropocentric itinerary of sociability oriented around a practical-material predication of the human subject. This latter point, which Spivak never fails to make in her continuing engagement with Marx, is the one this text concentrates on. I must add that one can call these ‘fictitious’ both positively, in the sense of the insertion of the ethical, as in Spivak<sup>17</sup>, or simply as methodological mistake, as in Laclau and Mouffe<sup>18</sup>.

### III. *Motley mosaic: Heterogeneity of ‘use’*

Spivak argues that in the Marxian textuality of value, ‘use-value’ of human labour-power remains “both outside and inside the system of value-determinations”<sup>19</sup>. More concretely, she has read Marx’s category of the “total or expanded form” of value in these terms. It is the third form in Marx’s logico-biographical account of the ‘value-form’, inserted most significantly in the chapter on ‘commodity’. As the value-form ‘develops’ from an “accidental” actor in simple exchange, to the most supple “universal equivalent” in the money-form, in the transitory “total or expanded” form, which Marx calls “defective”, no general equivalent has yet arisen. Marx writes that “it is a motley mosaic of disparate and unconnected expressions of value” in which “the relative form of value of each commodity is an endless series of expressions of value” drawing every other commodity to its comparative measure.<sup>20</sup> Spivak reminds that Marx called this form ‘defective’ because “In the Western European mid-nineteenth century [he...] felt that the most appropriate object of investigation [should be...] the most logical form of value (general [form] and then money

<sup>16</sup> See “Scattered Speculations on the Question of Value” by Spivak in Spivak 1987, hereafter SSQV.

<sup>17</sup> SSQV.

<sup>18</sup> See Laclau and Mouffe 2001, 78.

<sup>19</sup> SSQV, 162.

<sup>20</sup> Marx 1976, 156.

[form])”<sup>21</sup>. She adds “it might be appropriate to understand the unpaid or low paid labour the source of which is the woman in the south, through the Marxian category, ‘expanded or total value’”. Before becoming the ‘general’ value-form, where the abstraction is fully released, Marx says, the affective un-coded or partially coded labour remains “a motley mosaic”, a constant resistance, which can also be thought as the struggle of the affective against the economic (in the narrow sense).

In the spirit of this argument, I wonder in parenthesis what Spivak would have written if she was attentive to the fact that the four developmental stages of the ‘value-form’ *did not* have the ‘money-form’ as their end-point in the first (German) edition of *Capital*, the one that was published 150 years ago from today (and not the second edition, from 1873). So also in the spirit of this conference, which commemorates really the first 1867 edition, I wonder what if Spivak confronted the textual trace that in this edition the highest fourth form was the ‘general equivalent form’, and there was, in fact, another transitional form inserted *after* the ‘expanded’ form, a form which Marx omits from the second edition. In this form, called ‘reversed or reciprocal’, Marx proposes yet another intermediate type of value in which each unique commodity may play the general equivalent for its *own* infinite series of the motley-mosaic (thus some have called it an ‘inversion’ of the ‘total and expanded form’<sup>22</sup>). It is the form in which the disparate use-values actually take up the possibility of forming, *as if*, parallel hinges of turning, say, *as if* a system based on the centrality of the use of the “unpaid domestic work of women, mostly in the fringes of capitalism” holding the reign of the transcendental. Indeed logical im-possibility, not necessarily of any real practical significance, and yet, turned on the same logic of the ‘as if’, on which so many of the arguments mobilized in *Capital*, and indeed so many formal ruses of the capitalist circuit turns. And tellingly, Marx calls this form, the “universal relative form”<sup>23</sup>. Even as he clearly thinks this as a heuristic tool to better understand the money-form, what praxis falls between the ‘universal equivalent’ money that can be the perfect tool for capital’s auto-affection, and the form that makes *relativity itself* universal, a total break-down of auto-affection across the heterogeneity of use? Marx calls the commodity “prosaic”<sup>24</sup>. Can there be a prose of the universal relative form, of the many uses of concrete human labour, instead of the rhythmic auto-eroticism of universal equivalence of the money-capital?

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<sup>21</sup> Spivak 1993, 84.

<sup>22</sup> See Fuchs 2014, 42-43.

<sup>23</sup> “The Commodity, Chapter One, Volume One, of the first edition of *Capital*” by Karl Marx in Dragstedt 1976, 26.

<sup>24</sup> See below.

#### IV. Money and Money-Capital

One must keep in mind that wherever Marx is seemingly going against the money-form, he is actually after the money put forward after an already completed cycle of capitalist production, and thus, *not* money, *but* ‘money-capital’. It is the form-ability of capital, an ability which it usurps from human labour power (money-capital is nothing but a forced proxy for already objectified labour). For example, Marx writes in *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (1859) that “Money is not a symbol, just as the existence of a use-value in the form of a commodity is no symbol,” but a “prosaically real, and by no means imaginary mystification.”<sup>25</sup> Therefore, the mystification itself is real, that is, the ability to take up ‘form’, indicating a certain suturing of reality which may work within a specific field of the immanent, a field that has foreclosed any possibility of questioning its transcendental logic.

I want to make a strict distinction here between the ‘transcendental’ and the ‘transcendent’, “a celebrated but obscure distinction”<sup>26</sup> that Kant makes in his first *Critique*. In short, the ‘transcendent’ is a certain employment of the principles of pure reason in which the bounds of cognition and experience are over-reached. Kant opposes such usage to a ‘transcendental’ use which necessitates the idea of the *a priori*, or the conditions of the production of the *possible* experience. In this sense, the immanent is actually a field structured by *transcendental* principles which does not need to appeal to anything *transcendent* beyond the system to constitute itself.<sup>27</sup> In gist, Kant uses the terms ‘transcendental’, and ‘immanent’ almost with same valence, as opposed to the term ‘transcendent’. To question the sustaining logic of any *immanent* field, one does not need to appeal to anything transcendent, but one indeed must de-transcendentalize the frame’s constitutive logic, its immanence itself; more precisely, its ability to run through different forms in its different moments. It is this *ability* of the CMP, *not* of money, but of capital to posit itself as ‘money-capital’ in the place of objectified labour which can then cathect the place of living labour as ‘wage’, and the immanent as well as bourgeois laws that encode such violent transformations, which constitute Marx’s object of critique. For example he writes that,

<sup>25</sup> Accessed in the link: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1859/critique-pol-economy/ch01.htm>

<sup>26</sup> See Bennington 2000.

<sup>27</sup> “Let us call the principles [*Grundsätze*] whose application keeps altogether within the limits of possible experience immanent principles, and those that are to fly beyond these limits transcendent principles. But by transcendent principles I do not mean the transcendental use or misuse of the categories...” (*CPR*, B352-353/A296, in Kant 1996). Bennington explains this when he writes that “What Kant calls transcendental illusion is the tendency to take the transcendental transcendently or, as he says ... to make transcendent use of the transcendental” (Bennington, 86-87).



the use-value supplied by the worker to the capitalist is not in fact his labour-power but its *function*, a specific *form* of useful labour, such as tailoring, cobbling, spinning, etc. That this same labour is, on the other hand, the universal value-creating element, and thus possesses a property by virtue of which it differs from all other commodities, is something which falls outside **the frame of reference of the everyday consciousness**.<sup>28</sup>

What is this frame of everyday reference? Is this frame a specific one, or the one which is at the crux of all en-framings of the given? How does one de-transcendentalize it? To do that, does one need only to question the ‘law’ in the narrow sense, or does it also necessitate accessing the immanent law of the circuit of production itself? These questions construe the overarching philosophical argument that I would like to mobilize about the ‘ideological’, needing a much detailed discussion than this paper can hold.

#### V. Zwieschlächtigkeit: *The ‘hinge’ of the commodity*

In the chapter on “The Transformation of the Value of Labour-Power into Wages”, Marx writes that it is an “an absurd tautology” to measure the value of a certain amount of social labour by the labour contained in the end-product, because “if the worker were able to endow it with an independent existence, he would be selling a commodity, and not labour” (675)<sup>29</sup>. This wry turn of the phrase indicates the crux of the symptomatic nature of labour-power. It both *is*, and *is not* a commodity. The encounter between labour and itself is not only tautological, but absurd. This absurdity, however, is at work through a certain spatio-temporal distancing (we can say with the deconstructive hindsight, ‘*differance*’) i.e. “a direct exchange of money, i.e. of objectified labour, with living labour”<sup>30</sup>. This is not a neat contradiction, but rather an irreducible heterogeneity, an impossible encounter *which capital must make appear* respectably lawful, and thus *as if* philosophically sustainable as contradiction, *as if*, to sublimate it. This erasure of heterogeneity, and its *encoding* as sublated (*aufgehoben*) that a certain Hegelianism can read, is ideology *par se*. Not a mere erasure, but the taming of the trace of *differance*, and the production of a world readable through the logic of sublation. No wonder that for the Marx of ‘volume 3’, ‘finance capital’ is the

<sup>28</sup> Stress added, Marx 1976, 681.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, 675.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, 676.

“mother of every insane form”<sup>31</sup>, as this form has apparently erased the heterogeneous moment of the exchange of living for dead labour *entirely*.

But what might really happen if one follows the heterogeneity to its extreme limit, Marx makes some startling suggestions,

a direct exchange of money, i.e. of objectified labour, with living labour would either supersede the law of value, which only begins to develop freely on the basis of capitalist production, or supersede capitalist production itself, which rests directly on wage-labour.<sup>32</sup>

Two scenarios, two formal possibilities, *not presentable together* without the conditional (either/or). That is, this ‘exchange’ *either* leads to capitalism, at the expense of sublating the heterogeneous by forcing the surplus into the form of the money-capital; *or*, the law of value (equivalence) prevails, and the ‘surplus’ breaks the given immanent frame for another en-framing. A “self-destructive contradiction” says Marx, which “cannot be in any way even enunciated or formulated as a law”<sup>33</sup>. I suggest that we read ‘law’ here not only as legality in the narrow sense, but also as the ‘law of sublation’, that neat work of the transcendental. “It is *no use* deducing the exchange of more labour against less from the *differences in form* in each case, one piece of labour being objectified, the other living”<sup>34</sup>, says Marx. No use even employing the simple arithmetical logic, for its immanent law is always already broken at the level of bourgeois law. No use then, mending this brokenness with the philosophy of neat contradiction *post festum*.

Marx then asks the key question, “But what is the cost of production ... of the *worker*, i.e. the cost of producing or reproducing the worker himself?”<sup>35</sup> In my fancy as a student of literature, I do not only see a dramatic pause marked by those ‘dots’ (I believe it is an ‘em-dash’ in original German, followed by the ‘name’ ‘worker’ also marked in italics), but a graphic mark of heterogeneity. The author sees the absurdity of this question, and yet, it is on this that the entire system, even its disciplinary comprehension turns. Where political economy turns on itself, Marx sees a hinge, or a ‘turning’ which also is a turning-away from the turn that capitalist ‘capital’ desires, the turnover of surplus-value from each proceeding cycle. “Therefore what they called the ‘value of labour’ [in English in original]”, goes the momentous declaration, “is in fact the value of labour-power”<sup>36</sup>.

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<sup>31</sup> Marx 1981, 596.

<sup>32</sup> Marx 1976, 676

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Stress added, *ibid*.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid, 678.



As Spivak writes, “the *Umdrehung* or turning around of political economy is the embattled (*Zwieschlächtig*) commodity-character of socialized labor.”<sup>37</sup> The German term that she wilfully mis-translates as ‘embattled’, *Zwieschlächtig*, is usually translated as ‘twofoldness’. In a recent lecture she translates this same word yet differently, “The centrifugality or *Zwieschlächtigkeit* of the commodity, [which is Marx’s]... own specific discovery”.<sup>38</sup> The *Zwieschlächtigkeit* of the commodity which Spivak mentions in these two occasions is another of those hinges that I think points to possible de-transcendentalization of the given. As a type-case, let us quickly run through some uses of this hinging metaphor in *Capital* vol. 1.

In the chapter of commodity, at the very beginning, we read, “Initially the commodity appeared to us as an object with a dual character [*als ein Zwieschlächtiges*], possessing both use-value and exchange-value”<sup>39</sup>. Later on, it turns out that labour also has a “twofold nature [*Zwieschlächtige Natur*]”, concrete and social, which, as he will explain further on, capital exploits as the *difference* between the living and already objectified labour. Here, Marx shows the irreducibility of the ‘use’ of concrete labour to social labour that produces, as he says a “contradictory movement”, because even if “an increase in the quantity of use-values constitutes an increase in material wealth... nevertheless, an increase in the amount of material wealth may correspond to a simultaneous fall in the magnitude of its value.” The very crux of the confusion or the appearance that value can be generated only in circulation seems already to be anticipated in the very first chapter, on commodity. This “self-opposed movement”<sup>40</sup> (“*gegensätzliche Bewegung*”, which becomes ‘contradictory’ in Fowkes’ translation, that might puts one off the scent of heterogeneity) is necessitated by the fact that the two-fold nature of labour is also a ‘hinge’, ~~কাজ~~. It is a hinge because not only that the two sides are opposed, but that concrete labour and abstract social labour cannot move without each other, making ‘value’ that vanishing middle which does not simply represent one as the other, but stages a heterogeneous transformation<sup>41</sup>, no framing can contain both and still remain en-framed. Then in ‘chapter 13’, the reader ultimately finds the twofold nature of the “process of production... on the one hand a social labour process for the creation of a product, and on the other hand capital’s process of valorization... purely despotic.”<sup>42</sup> Production itself, as a social process, can be *read* in two ways. One the hand, (a) it can be said that the capitalist hides

<sup>37</sup> Spivak 2012, 206.

<sup>38</sup> Spivak, “Global Marx”, accessed in the link: <http://blogs.law.columbia.edu/uprising1313/gayatri-chakravorty-spivak-global-marx/> (Spivak 2017).

<sup>39</sup> Marx 1976, 131.

<sup>40</sup> Translation by Ehrbar.

<sup>41</sup> See Spivak’s detailed distinction between transformation and representation in the Marxian textuality of value in SSQV.

<sup>42</sup> Marx, 1976, 451.

surplus-extraction through the appearance of the good work of creating socially necessary use-value in the form of commodities, and yet, behind the back of this capitalist content, **(b)** the possibility of the social (expropriated social labour, the “rational spectral”<sup>43</sup>) does invaginate the CMP, a content behind the content, which really is nothing but a more unrestricted version of the appearance in the first place. It seems then, that it is not about finding something hidden behind the form, but to open the form up beyond its restricted economy, not to an impossible plenitude of a general economy<sup>44</sup>, but to the “possible impossibility”<sup>45</sup> of a more just economy of the restricted (which remains, however, incalculable from within the given economy). It is this ‘other’ economy (or other economies) which the hinges persistently turn to, each capitalist cycle piles up such traces of a more unrestricted, ‘centrifugal’ turn. As Best puts it, a “possibly utopian, possibly dystopian, or simply different, place and time ‘beyond ideology’ is an indelible part of the awkward, embarrassing, sometimes precarious, and always messy commitment to history, even if it presently resists representation and has no obligation to ever arrive.”<sup>46</sup>

## VI. Consequences

I must hurry to a conclusion here, better called ‘consequences,’ rehearsing at least three of them.

**A.** Spivak’s argument about the resistance of the ‘motley mosaic’ of *use* which can be mobilized to understand the heterogeneity of the migrant and gendered labour at the fringes of CMP. The ‘defective’ in Marx’s description.

**B.** The idea that money-capital provides a hinge through which Capital appears to sublate the constitutive yet centrifugal heterogeneity of ‘use’, i.e. the wage-form<sup>47</sup>.

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<sup>43</sup> Spivak’s phrase, in Spivak 2017.

<sup>44</sup> See “From Restricted to General Economy: A Hegelianism without Reserve,” in Derrida 2001. Slavoj Žižek (1989) has written on this with the psychoanalytic hindsight, I would prefer that only with the Derridian corrective.

<sup>45</sup> Derrida’s term. See Derrida 2007.

<sup>46</sup> Best, 133.

<sup>47</sup> I must add here that Labour power as commodity (LPAC) is a contentious issue in Marxian scholarship. In the recent past, Laclau and Mouffe, in their influential work *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* have called it a ‘fiction’. Criticism of this position, in turn, can be found in Sandler and Diskin who insist that “there are no commodities whose use-value is automatically effective from the moment of purchase”, even if “when attention is restricted to the political process of agency”, labour-power does indeed come to be “radically different” (see “Post-Marxism and Class” by Jonathan Diskin and Blair Sandler in Callari, Cullenberg, and Biewener 1995). Taking an affirmative distance from both of these positions, this paper argues that the difference of labour-power is inserted in the very conceptual figuring of ‘commodity’ making it a category open to the intervention of praxis, and that in their strictly analytical understanding, Laclau and Mouffe are

This initiates the long and complex debate on ‘free’ and ‘unfree’ labour<sup>48</sup>. Especially in the case of ‘global south’ in general, and India in particular, the question remains, if “[d]ebt bondage is the most prevalent form of bondage... [and is] often the ground of unfavourable wage contract, adverse control of labour and labour conditions, and [if in this context] law makes little sense”<sup>49</sup>, then what use might a ‘value theory of ideology’ have, if one considers that the very crux of (the Marxian textuality of) ‘value’ is based on the assumption that a specific form of (bourgeois democratic) equality has become common prejudice? This paper has tried to address (admittedly not enough) this immense issue, and it might be possible to tentatively suggest that once ‘money-capital’ has created an *appearance* of sublating the heterogeneous moment (of the exchange of living for already objectified labour), the equality of individuals before the law, or a lawfully drawn ‘contract’ between free agents does not matter anymore. That is, as long as ‘money’ has acquired the ability to always already act as a perverse mirror of equality between itself and money-capital, it can ideologically effect a “prosaically real” sublation of all really existing in-equality in terms of mere legal redress. The different styles of exploitation can then be based on the auto-affecting ability of the money-capital. To say that legal reform does not concern the Marxian critique, or conversely, to oppose this view in terms of altogether rejecting Marx’s critique would both be incorrect. What instead must be recognized is that: **(a.)** legality in the narrow sense is tied to the law of the transcendental in Marx’s critique, and **(b.)** even if the former is not the proper object of the Marxian critique (at least in volume one), the de-transcendentalization that Marx proposes also cannot leave mere legality behind. Another centrifugal fuse! The question of resistance, then, is more of how to persistently interrupt the value-form from going to this final “automatic fetish” (Marx’s words<sup>50</sup>) through the motley mosaic of the heterogeneous concrete labour.

C. Marx makes it meticulously clear that capital creates value by making labour-power “*function*” as capital, “In place of the value of the labour-power, which is what figures in the capital advance, we have the living, value creating labour-power that actually *functions* as productive capital” (Marx puts the stress on ‘functions’).<sup>51</sup> Capital replaces its own desire for self-presence and propriety with the anthropocentric organic force of super-adequation, human-labour power’s own itinerary of propriety, its substratum of reproducible human life. This is why the Marxian critique inhabits a strange predicament; it must necessarily come into play only once individuation and equality has

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only withdrawing this deconstructive lever which might have provided a better understanding of the heterogeneity of practical politics.

<sup>48</sup> Noteworthy is the protracted one between Jairus Banaji and Tom Brass.

<sup>49</sup> See Samaddar 2008.

<sup>50</sup> Marx 1981, 516.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid, 120.

become a ‘common prejudice’, as Marx concedes “Some such assumption was at least necessary”<sup>52</sup>. Strictly in this sense, Derrida is mistaken in thinking that Marx is working for a “predeconstructive ... ontology of presence”<sup>53</sup>. Human labour-power-present-to-itself as social is essentialist only in another, incalculably immanent frame, even if in the prevalent one, it remains a radical empiricism.

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

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