

# **Marx and the Concept of Historical Time**

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This thesis is being submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of The Centre for Research in Modern European Philosophy, Kingston University, for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

July 2015

## ABSTRACT

The guiding premise of this thesis is that the concept of historical time constitutes a distinct philosophical problem for Karl Marx's work. Marx does not examine the relationship between time and history in his work, rendering the historicist framework of linear, progressive time the overriding framework through which he understands this relationship. However, the larger problem is that, despite this lack, the philosophical originality and critical function of Marx's work is in no small measure *defined* by the contribution it makes towards our understanding of this relationship. Therefore, this thesis argues that it is necessary to construct a concept of historical time out of Marx's work. Methodologically, this begins with an outline of the broad contours of the materialist concept of history in *The German Ideology*, and a temporal reading of the historical act – the creation of the means of human life – on which this concept is based. This reading is then ontologically grounded, first by Martin Heidegger's *Being and Time*, in order to establish how the act as such temporalises, and then by Jean-Paul Sartre's *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, in order to grasp how this temporalisation can be thought in relation to the movement of historical totalisation, which is to say the ongoing totalisation of the time of all human lives. In short, Heidegger and Sartre enable us to secure labour and need – the two concepts upon which the materialist concept of history depends – as the two basic forces upon which historical temporalisation depends. Yet if, as Marx's *Capital* reveals, the specifically capitalist category of 'abstract labour' is the condition of thinking the transhistorical category of 'labour in general', and if abstract labour exists to satisfy capital's need to self-expand, not the human's need to live, then capital – not the human – is the condition of thinking history. Capital and its times give history its intelligibility, such that capitalism is the only standpoint (to date) from which 'history as such', 'history itself', can be conceived. However, the concept of historical time cannot simply register that capital makes the category of history possible. It must also account for the historically changing character of the relationship between time and history, and hence the possibility of social and historical time after capitalism.

For Willow Scout Sharma and Sorrel Locke Sharma

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would first like to thank Peter Osborne, whose work brought me to the Centre for Research in Modern European Philosophy (CRMEP) and whose rigorous supervision guided this thesis from its inception to its final stages. Peter Hallward provided a necessary counterbalance for this thesis, and I thank him for urging me to not lose sight of the political dimensions of Marx's work. I am grateful to the rest of the staff at the CRMEP – Stella Sandford, Catherine Malabou, Eric Alliez, Howard Caygill and Étienne Balibar – whose modules and the discussions therein enriched this thesis greatly. Thanks also to Harry Harootunian, who first sparked my interest in Marx and historical time. His seminars at New York University, over ten years ago now, continue to influence my thinking and have left their mark on this thesis.

I am indebted to the CRMEP, both for the research studentship I received over my first three years, and for the opportunity to work as a research administrator for two years. The material support was indispensable, but so too were the experiences – particularly the teaching – which these responsibilities yielded.

My life and work has benefitted greatly from a number of friends and colleagues at Kingston University over the years, particularly Mauro Senatore, Lucie Mercier, Stefano Pippa, Andrés Sáenz de Sicilia, Iain Campbell, Cas McMenemy, Steve Howard, John Merrick, Hammam Aldouri, Vijak Haddadi, and Will Potter. My family, spread across California, Wisconsin and Vermont, has always been there for me throughout this process. Finally, I would like to thank Katherine Eames, most of all for her steadfast support, patience and encouragement during a difficult final year in St. Ives. This thesis would not have been possible without her.

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# Introduction

## Marx, Time and History

Economy of time. To this all economy ultimately reduces itself.<sup>1</sup>

What does Marx's work tell us about the relationship between time and history? In short, this thesis maintains, quite little and a significant amount at the same time. Quite little, because nowhere in Marx's oeuvre is there a sustained examination of this relationship; a significant amount, because this oeuvre constitutes one of the greatest, if still largely untapped, resources with which to comprehend this relationship in the modern European philosophical tradition more generally. This relationship has of course been examined within Marxism since Marx's time (the work of Walter Benjamin, Louis Althusser, Jean-Paul Sartre and Ernst Bloch being prominent examples<sup>2</sup>), but the fact remains that Marx's contribution to our understanding of this relationship is still largely in the dark. This thesis is an attempt to bring this contribution to light, and to do so through the concept of historical time. Broadly speaking, this is a concept that not only registers the relationship between time and history, but the *historically changing* relationship between time and history. There is no readily identifiable concept of historical time in Marx. He never provides us with anything like – to use Althusser's words – 'an outline for a concept of historical time'. Nonetheless, there is, this thesis argues, a concept of historical time that can be systematically constructed out of Marx's work.

If there is a single work that is the inspiration for this thesis, it is *The German Ideology*<sup>3</sup>. The premise of this thesis is that something like 'a materialist concept of history' exists within

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<sup>1</sup> Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy (Rough Draft)* [1857-8] (hereafter *Grundrisse*), trans. Martin Nicolaus (London and New York: Penguin Books, 1993), 173.

<sup>2</sup> See, in particular, Walter Benjamin, 'On the Concept of History' [1940], trans. Harry Zohn, in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings, Volume 4, 1938-1940*, ed. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 389-400; Louis Althusser, 'The Errors of Classical Economics: an Outline for a Concept of Historical Time', in Louis Althusser and Étienne Balibar, *Reading Capital* [1968], trans. Ben Brewster (London: Verso, 1997), 91-118; Jean-Paul Sartre, *Critique of Dialectical Reason, Volume 1: Theory of Practical Ensembles* [1960] (hereafter *CDR* 1), trans. Alan Sheridan-Smith (London and New York: Verso, 2004); and Ernst Bloch, 'Nonsynchronism and the Obligation to its Dialectics' [1932], trans. Mark Ritter, *New German Critique* 11 (Spring 1977), 22-38. 'Nonsynchronism' is a translation of the German word *Ungleichzeitigkeit*, which is better (and more literally) rendered as 'non-sametimeliness'. This essay is also published in Ernst Bloch, *Heritage of Our Times* [1935], trans. Neville and Stephen Plaice (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 1990).

<sup>3</sup> The English language edition of *The German Ideology* used in this thesis is Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology* [1845-6] (hereafter *GI*), trans. S.W. Ryazanskaya (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1965). When the translation of passages within this and other English language editions of

*The German Ideology*, which is to say that this work provides us with the means of thinking a ‘materialist concept of history’. This position is not without its critics (which would possibly include Marx himself, who famously suggested in his preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* that *The German Ideology* was best left to ‘the gnawing criticism of the mice.’<sup>4</sup>) As Chris Arthur has recently reminded us, the expression ‘a materialist conception of history’ is simply not within the pages of *The German Ideology*.<sup>5</sup> Marx and Engels speak of ‘practical materialists’, a ‘communist materialist’, the ‘materialist outlook’ [*materialistischer Anschauung*], a ‘materialist basis’ of historiography, and even their ‘conception of history’ [*Geschichtsauffassung*], but there is, strictly speaking, no mention of ‘a materialist conception of history’. The actual appearance of the name notwithstanding, this thesis proceeds from the premise that there is a distinctive conception of history – one consistent with ‘the materialist outlook’ – which can be articulated as a concept – a philosophical concept – of history. Hence this thesis ‘agrees’ with Massimiliano Tomba’s assertion that “‘Historical materialism’ as a theory of history or a materialist conception of history does not exist”<sup>6</sup>, *not* because there is no theory of history or materialist conception of history in *The German Ideology*, but because Marx and Engels never use the term ‘historical materialism’ in *The German Ideology*. Indeed, this thesis argues, it is precisely the existence of a materialist concept of history in *The German Ideology* that *destabilises* the codified tradition known as ‘Historical Materialism’. This does not mean that *The German Ideology* presents us with a readymade concept of history. Far from it. As a manuscript, *The German Ideology* is – to put it bluntly – a mess. And this is not simply because it has been organised in various different ways by various different editors throughout history, such that it is dubious to speak of ‘*The German Ideology*’ as such.<sup>7</sup> More importantly, *The German Ideology* is, common to all its historical manifestations, a hodgepodge – a collage – of overlapping political, philosophical, economic and historical insights, characterised by a

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German works are modified, the German edition will be cited first, followed by the English language edition in parentheses.

<sup>4</sup> Karl Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, [1859] (hereafter *Contribution*), trans. S.W. Ryazanskaya (New York: International Publishers, 1970), 22.

<sup>5</sup> See Arthur’s review of Terrell Carver and Daniel Blank’s *Marx and Engels’s “German Ideology” Manuscripts: Presentation and Analysis of the “Feuerbach Chapter”* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), and *A Political History of the Editions of Marx and Engels’s “German Ideology” Manuscripts* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), in the online resource *Marx and Philosophy Review of Books*, <http://marxandphilosophy.org.uk/reviewofbooks/reviews/2015/1846> (accessed 1 July 2015).

<sup>6</sup> Massimiliano Tomba, *Marx’s Temporalities*, trans. Peter D. Thomas and Sara R. Farris (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2013), vii. Tomba continues: “‘Historical materialism’ is not a *passe-partout* for the comprehension of history, but a practical mode of intervention into history.’ Ibid. This argument is misleading, because it implicitly suggests that the *philosophy* of history is essentially indifferent to the ‘practical mode of intervention into history’. It relegates the existence of the materialist concept of history – indeed the concept as such – to ‘*passe-partout*’ comprehension, to pure thought.

<sup>7</sup> On this point, see again Arthur’s review of Carver and Blank’s work in *Marx and Philosophy Review of Books* (see footnote 5).

haphazard mixture of historical and transhistorical claims, which is to say claims specific to a single mode of production (particularly capitalism) and claims meant to be grasped at either the level of all human history to date, or all human history to date and speculatively to come. Added to this is the fact that the reception of *The German Ideology* has always been dominated by the so-called ‘Feuerbach Chapter’ (in most editions the first chapter), obfuscating the fact that the vast majority of the manuscript is actually a critique of the ‘Young Hegelians’ Bruno Bauer and – most notably – Max Stirner. For Gary Browning, this ‘exclusive focus upon the opening section of *The German Ideology*...underrates this devotion of attention towards Stirner and neglects the provenance of parts of the opening section in critical reflection upon Stirner.’<sup>8</sup> This thesis is complicit in Browning’s charge: it concentrates exclusively on the so-called ‘Feuerbach Chapter’. But it does so in such a way which demonstrates that a ‘materialist concept of history’ not only exists in *The German Ideology*, but is of great consequence to the philosophies of history and time alike.

This thesis – particularly Chapter 1 – is therefore undeniably a work of *reconstruction*. It formulates the meaning of certain categories in Marx’s work in ways which Marx did not necessarily do himself. The most notable example here is the formulation of ‘the economic’ as ‘the social production of the means of life’. In other words, human being’s social production of the means of their existence permeates the ‘Feuerbach Chapter’, but nowhere do Marx and Engels – at least explicitly – state that this social production constitutes the meaning of ‘the economic’. However, it is the contention of this thesis that ‘the economic’ must be figured as ‘the social production of the means of life’, because to do so opens up the wealth of social and historical insight that Marx’s works contains. It allows us to approach ‘the economic’ as a rich philosophical concept in its own right, as an *ontological* concept that designates the meaning of ‘human being’ itself. This is, as we will see, the basis from which – to invoke the quotation that frames this introduction – ‘the economic’ and ‘the economy’ can be grasped as indelibly *temporal* categories in ways beyond, but not necessarily in tension with, Marx’s understanding of their temporal bearings. This is also the basis from which certain passages in *The German Ideology* take precedence over others. Of particular note here is the passage containing Marx and Engels’s description of what they call ‘the first historical act’ (which, at the outset, we should point out is a necessarily *ongoing* ‘first historical act’). Indeed, the intelligibility of not only Chapter 1 but the entirety of this thesis hinges on attaching to the first historical act and its temporality a philosophical importance which undoubtedly exceeds what Marx and Engels

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<sup>8</sup> Gary K. Browning, ‘*The German Ideology*: the Theory of History and the History of Theory’, *History of Political Thought* 14:3 (Autumn 1993), 456. According to Browning, *The German Ideology* ‘should be analysed and interpreted as an integral whole’, such that ‘its various sections are intimately related to one another and share a community of purpose and character.’ Ibid. 455.



intended – and surely even imagined – when they wrote *The German Ideology*. Finally, this thesis constitutes a reconstruction of Marx’s work insofar as it prioritises certain categories in his canon over others. It does this not only within the framework of the materialist concept of history but across Marx’s work more generally. Certain categories, first and foremost ‘labour’, ‘need’ and ‘life’, are prioritised over others, namely class and class struggle. This thesis does this not to dismiss the importance of class and class struggle, but to underscore the extent to which the philosophical and historical intelligibility of concepts such as class (and the division of labour from whence classes arise) is ultimately based in the categories of labour and need. Class and class struggle are, as we will learn, ontologically ‘down the line’ from labour and need. One of the basic concerns of this thesis – at least its first half – is to develop what might be called a ‘transhistorical materialist concept of history’. Hence if one wishes to take the line that, famously, ‘the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles’<sup>9</sup>, this thesis argues that this stance can only be philosophically sustained *after* the transhistorical dimensions of Marx’s concepts of labour and need have been established.

This prompts a brief digression on the difference between the ‘transhistorical’ and the ‘historically specific’ in Marx. This is a difference which must first be approached from the standpoint of Marx’s conception of ‘mode of production’. In short, the ‘transhistorical’ is that which is common to all modes of production, although the ‘all’ in this formulation must, as earlier suggested, be differentiated between, on the one hand, all modes of production to date, and, on the other, all modes of production to date and those (speculatively) to come. Categories such as wealth, life, labour, need and, as we will see, time, are in this sense transhistorically valid: they exist, and will exist, in the words of *The German Ideology*, throughout ‘all human existence’ and ‘all history’.<sup>10</sup> In contrast to this, the ‘historically specific’ signifies that which is specific to a particular mode of production, such that capitalism is a ‘historically specific’ form of the production of the means of life and thereby a ‘historically specific’ articulation of the relationship between the forces and relations of production. For this reason, ‘historical specificity’ in Marx should not, at its most basic level, be understood as the difference between 1860s England and 1960s France (this is historicism), but rather as the difference between one mode of production and another. But what must be emphasised here is that – in Marx – the ‘transhistorical’ is *not* an ‘ahistorical’ category: it does *not* represent that which is somehow ‘above’, ‘beyond’ or ‘outside’ of history altogether. The ‘trans’ within Marx’s transhistorical registers that which exists within, throughout and across all human history, not that which is

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<sup>9</sup> Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party* [1848], trans. Samuel Moore (London: Verso, 1998), 34.

<sup>10</sup> Marx and Engels, *GI*, 48. ‘Class’ can be conceived in transhistorical terms, but only on the condition that its transhistoricality ends with the (speculative) chronological end of capitalism.

outside of history. Transhistorical categories such as wealth are therefore not ‘natural’ (in the ordinary sense of the term) categories. This is crucial, because the transhistorical dimensions of Marx’s work are too often overlooked, if not outright dismissed, through invocations of the ‘historical specificity’ of this work. The problem here is that when the ‘historical specificity’ of Marx’s work is invoked without any reference to its relation to the transhistoricality of his work, historicism becomes the tacit framework of history and historical time. Capitalism *is* a historically specific mode of production, but this can only be grasped in *relation* to the concept of history that renders this specificity intelligible. More often than not, those readers of Marx who critically employ the ‘historical specificity’ of his work never establish this relation.<sup>11</sup>

The transhistorical categories of labour and need are important, because they introduce the possibility of constructing a concept of historical time out of Marx’s work. Indeed, if there is a single question that guides this thesis, it is this: *how do we reconstruct Marx’s materialist concept of history as a concept of historical time?* The answer to this question begins with a temporal reading of the materialist concept of history. Specifically, it begins with a temporal reading of the ‘first historical act’ – the social production of the means of life, which is, as we will consider, internally differentiated between the creation of the means of satisfying existing needs and the creation of new needs. And what we will discover with this reading is that the materialist concept of history enables an incipient conception of historical time which deviates from – in fact stands in opposition to – the predominant framework through which historical time is comprehended: historicism, which is to say – after Benjamin – the suffocating confines of ‘homogenous, empty time.’<sup>12</sup> Therefore, one of the premises of this thesis is that a temporal reading of the materialist concept of history – the first but by no means the only step towards developing a concept of historical time in Marx – *de-codifies* the codified tradition known as ‘Historical Materialism’<sup>13</sup>. So-called ‘Historical Materialism’ (again, a term never used by Marx himself) has for too long suffered, at the hands of Marxists and non-Marxists alike, from what Harry Harootunian aptly describes as the ‘narrative and continuist story line that move[s] like a fast-moving express train for a predetermined destination.’<sup>14</sup> A temporal reading of the

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<sup>11</sup> Moishe Postone’s *Time, Labor, and Social Domination: a Reinterpretation of Marx’s Critical Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993) is at the forefront of this problem. Postone repeatedly calls upon the authority of the ‘historically specific’ character of Marx’s work – *ad nauseam* – but he never considers what concept of history renders this character intelligible. Indeed, for Postone, Marx’s ‘historically specific social theory’ is completely at odds with the philosophy of history, such that ‘the historical specificity of the critique of political economy delineates Marx’s final break with his earlier transhistorical understanding of historical materialism and, hence, with notions of the philosophy of history [*Geschichtsphilosophie*].’ Ibid. 140, 258.

<sup>12</sup> Benjamin, ‘On the Concept of History’, 395.

<sup>13</sup> This thesis avoids the use of the term ‘historical materialism’ without the indefinite article ‘a’.

<sup>14</sup> Harry Harootunian, ‘Historical Materialism’s Task in an “Age of Globalization”’, *Radical History Review* 79 (Winter 2001), 95.

materialist concept of history – Chapter 1 – thus uncovers, in the spirit of Benjamin, Althusser, Sartre and Bloch, a distinctly non-linear temporality at the heart of history.

At this point, it is vital to outline three deeply intertwined (and admittedly jargonistic) concepts which receive their fullest philosophical exposition in Chapter 2, but which guide this thesis as a whole. The first of these is what, in the existential-phenomenological tradition, is usually referred to as ‘temporalisation’. Broadly speaking, temporalisation means *the active production of a dynamic difference and relation between the past, the present, and the future*. In this regard, if ‘temporality’ signifies a dynamic relation between the past, the present, and the future, temporalisation is the active production of temporality. This is the sense in which, after Martin Heidegger, the movement of existence ‘temporalises itself’ – it *is* the creation of the three primary coordinates of human time. The concept of temporalisation is quite crucial, because it is the philosophical basis upon which the possibility of a temporal reading depends. Insofar as a ‘temporal reading’ of anything – a concept, a practice, a phenomenon, etc. – is sustainable, it must provide an account of temporalisation in order to ground its reading. This dovetails with the previously stated aim of destabilising the dominant temporality of Historical Materialism (the linear, progressive time of historicism). The concept of temporalisation is inherently *critical*: it upends how we (to use a Heideggerian expression) ‘initially and for the most part’ comprehend action, activity, and the act themselves.<sup>15</sup> Temporally speaking, the sense in which Marx’s concept of ‘the economic’ is an inherently *critical* concept – the sense in which ‘the social production of the means of life’ is an inherently critical way of configuring history – comes to light through the concept of temporalisation.

The second concept which guides this thesis is a concept without which history cannot be thought, and is therefore a concept without which we cannot develop a concept of historical time in Marx. This concept is *totalisation*. The problem of totalisation is at the heart of every modern, post-Enlightenment philosophical conception of history (this includes the materialist concept of history). This is because – as Chapter 2 contends – every modern concept of history is, whether it registers it or not, a concept of history structured by the idea that history is *the ongoing totalisation of the time of all human lives*. That is, totalisation is what gives the notion of ‘history’ as a collective singular – as a whole – its intelligibility. As we will see, coming to grips with the concept of totalisation – and this comes out of our analysis of Heidegger and Sartre in Chapter 2 – is predicated on dissociating ourselves from the ordinary understanding

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<sup>15</sup> On rare occasions, ‘temporalisation’ will be employed to denote a temporal reading itself, such that one might ‘temporalise a concept of history’, such that ‘temporalisation’ renders explicit the concept’s implicit temporality, renders explicit the implicit temporalities of the practices and phenomena that this concept registers. However, the vast majority of the use of ‘temporalisation’ in this thesis is faithful to the existential-phenomenological tradition: it denotes the production of temporality by the act itself.

of totalisation. Broadly speaking, totalisation is *not*, as it is often understood to be, a process of unification that is *subsequent* to an existing state of difference. Totalisation is not the adding up of innumerable multiplicities into a single whole. Rather, totalisation is the production of difference, a unification whose unity *is* the process of its differentiation. In this way, a ‘whole’ has unity *precisely because* this unity is the process of its differentiation. Totalisation must be conceived at multiple levels – at the level of the individual, at the level of the social, and at the level of history itself. It is therefore not only necessary to speak of ‘individual totalisation’ (this is the sense in which an individual act totalises the material field of which it is a part), as opposed to ‘social totalisation’ and ‘historical totalisation’, but equally to address the *relation* between these different levels. Whereas, as we will see, Heidegger’s work does not adequately address this relation, Sartre’s work *does*. Specifically, Sartre provides a framework through which ‘historical totalisation’ might be understood as the ongoing totalisation of all individual and social totalisations. To put this within the terms of *The German Ideology*, we might state then that ‘history’ is the ongoing totalisation of each and every ‘first historical act’ (considered from the standpoint of both its individual actors as well as the sociality of the act itself). It is also necessary to state here that there is an *indissociable* relationship between totalisation and temporalisation. In short, the very intelligibility of temporalisation proceeds from totalisation. Totalisation is the material basis from which temporalisation is itself a unification whose unity is the process of its differentiation (in this case the differentiation between the past, the present, and the future). Thus if history is the ongoing totalisation of each and every first historical act, it is likewise the ongoing temporalisation of each and every first historical act. As we will see, the first historical act – the social production of the means of life – provides us with a possible model of historical time, but *only* inasmuch as all first historical acts are themselves totalised and temporalised.

This leads us to the third and final concept, one which indisputably has a Heideggerian and Sartrean provenance, but which is also used by neither Heidegger nor Sartre. This concept is *historicalisation*. At its most basic level, ‘historicalisation’ denotes any individual or social act, process or movement which *produces* history. That is, historicalisation is any individual or social act, process or movement whose totalisation and temporalisation is, on some level, *constitutive* of history. In Marx’s terms, historicalisation registers the production of the means of satisfying existing needs and hence the creation of new needs. Historicalisation is obviously not a concept which Marx uses, but it is, this thesis contends, productively integrated into his work. First and foremost, this is the sense in which labour historicalises: labour – and this is a concern of every chapter of this thesis – *constitutes* history. Labour does not just temporalise. It does not just create time. It historicalises. It creates time that is itself constitutive of history.

In short, historicalisation is the production of historical time. We must clearly differentiate historicalisation from ‘historicisation’: whereas historicalisation is an ontological concept that registers the creation of history itself, historicisation is an epistemological concept inseparable from its origins within historicism. This is the sense in which to ‘historicise’ something is to place it in its particular historical context, its ‘particular time and place’. Historicisation is the meaning of the ‘historical specificity’ of something (such as capitalism). Historicalisation, this thesis argues, is the condition of possibility of historicisation. Historicisation is ontologically grounded by historicalisation.

Two points follow from this conceptual outline. First, it is important to highlight at the outset that the ‘history’ which features in this thesis is, as earlier indicated, a distinctly modern, post-Enlightenment understanding of history. After Reinhart Koselleck, this is history as ‘the collective singular form of *Geschichte*, which since around 1780 can be conceived as history in and for itself in the absence of an associated subject or object.’<sup>16</sup> In Sartre’s words, this is history conceived at the level of ‘*one* human history, with *one* truth and *one* intelligibility.’<sup>17</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, the ‘history’ in this thesis is not, as one might put it, the ‘history of the historians’ (methodologically speaking, the empirical comprehension of history which structures most academic history departments), nor is it the kind of history associated with the theological tradition, which is to say history as the independent otherness of God.

The second point is more substantial. In fact, it is the essential point of the second half of this thesis. This point is a direct response to Sartre’s position, as we will learn, that historical totalisation is a totalisation which does not have a totaliser. In other words, according to Sartre, the ongoing totalisation of all individual and social totalisations exists, but this is a totalisation *without* a totaliser. In opposition to this, the second half of this thesis maintains that one of the philosophical consequences of Marx’s critique of political economy (e.g. from the *Grundrisse* onwards) is that, contrary to Sartre’s position, there *is* a totaliser that totalises and temporalises history. It is capital. This does *not* mean that capital has existed in all human history to date, or will exist in all human history from now, but it does mean that, as the comprehensive subject of the mode of production to which it gives rise, *capital historicalises*, and it does so in such a way that it is *the condition of thinking the materialist concept of history* (if not the modern, post-Enlightenment conception of history more generally). The arguments of Chapters 3 and 4 are thus simultaneously ontological and epistemological. Chapter 3 begins building the case for grasping capital as the condition of thinking history by arguing that, consequent to the fact

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<sup>16</sup> Reinhart Koselleck, *Future’s Past: on the Semantics of Historical Time* [1979], trans. Keith Tribe (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 236.

<sup>17</sup> Sartre, *CDR* 1, 69.

that the specifically capitalist form of labour known as ‘abstract labour’ is the condition of thinking Marx’s transhistorical category of labour (or ‘labour in general’), the totalising and temporalising power of abstract labour is a fundamental dimension of capital’s historicalising power. In the wake of the examination of Marx’s concepts of ‘necessary’ and ‘surplus-labour’ in Chapter 3 (concepts that also owe their intelligibility to abstract labour), Chapter 4 rereads the production-process of capital – the valorisation-process – as the production of historical time, indeed as the production of the kind of historical time upon which every modern concept of history – the materialist concept of history included – depends. The production-process of capital, we will see, is precisely what makes possible our understanding of some of the most basic qualities of history itself: it not only exists ‘it itself and as such’, but its time never stops.

On the surface of things, it may seem ironic – if not problematic – that a thesis about history and historical time in Marx pays little attention to Marx’s actual historical writings. Yet the absence, for instance, of *The Eighteenth Brumaire* or Marx’s later writings on Russia should not be interpreted as indifference towards the ‘real history’ that these writings register. The reason why the philosophical dimensions of *The German Ideology* receive such attention, why these dimensions are subsequently read through Heidegger and Sartre, and finally why the economic writings (the various drafts of *Capital*) are the near-exclusive focus of the latter half of this thesis, is not because Marx’s historical writings are in any sense unimportant, but because the intelligibility of their ‘history’ depends on what Sartre calls the ‘formal structures’ of history (just as these formal structures depend on ‘real history’). The point here is that there can be no appeal to an unadulterated ‘real history’ as a fundamental-ontological baseline from which the formal structures of history are ‘derived’.<sup>18</sup> ‘Real history’ and its formal structures are dialectically dependent on one another.

On the surface of things, this thesis may also come across as indifferent to the politics of historical time. This thesis does not, as earlier suggested, thematise class struggle, nor does it engage what in *The German Ideology* Marx and Engels call ‘the communist consciousness’ – the ‘consciousness of the necessity of a fundamental revolution’ – something which is for them a ‘conclusion’ of ‘the conception of history we have sketched.’<sup>19</sup> Its purpose is rather to investigate, at a philosophically basic level, Marx’s contribution to our understanding of the

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<sup>18</sup> István Mészáros’s critique of Sartre, particularly his *The Work of Sartre: Search for Freedom and the Challenge of History* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2012), comes dangerously close to this position. For all of his appeals to ‘real history’, Mészáros does not *dialecticise* its relation to the formal structures of history. Rather, ‘real history’ functions as a fundamental-ontological baseline for him, from which, it seems, the formal structures are derived. This is rather ironic, insofar as Mészáros places himself directly in line with Heidegger’s ‘fundamental ontology’, albeit in an inverted form. Heidegger is a consistent target of critique across Mészáros’s work.

<sup>19</sup> Marx and Engels, *GI*, 94.

historically changing relationship between time and history. Yet in the end, this understanding is – it cannot but be – a political understanding. As the conclusion to this thesis discusses, the concept of historical time matters not only because it unsettles the authority of historicism and because it establishes capital as the condition of thinking history, but also because it *compels* us to think beyond the historical time of capital, which is to say that it compels us to register the possibility of social and historical time after capitalism. This is the definitive philosophical and political problem of the concept of historical time: if capital makes possible the (modern) category of history, how do we think history beyond capital? To put this another way: what is the difference, and what is the relation, between the historical time of capital and the time of history? This is not a thesis about politics, at least not directly. But it is not thereby indifferent to the politics of historical time.

## Chapter One

### A Materialist Concept of History: a Temporal Reading

Modern political thought has concentrated its attention on history, and has not elaborated a corresponding concept of time. Even historical materialism has until now neglected to elaborate a concept of time that compares with its concept of history.<sup>1</sup>

There are a variety of reasons why the philosophical potential of *The German Ideology* is far from being realised, but perhaps no reason stands out more than the fact that Marx and Engels provide no analysis of the relationship between time, temporality and their materialist concept of history. In other words, they do not consider the intrinsic temporalities of complex practices and phenomena including the social production of the means of life, the creation of new needs, the dialectic of the forces and relations of production, and the division of labour. In Marx, 'the human' is a fundamentally economic and historical being, but how is it thus a fundamentally temporal being? What impact would a temporal reading of Marx's concept of the human have on his materialist anthropology? *The German Ideology* introduces us to the complex relations between the natural, social and historical aspects of human being, yet the ontologically basic relationship between materiality and temporality in Marx is unclear. This relationship must be systematically investigated, such that our understanding of the 'materiality of time' is enriched by the materialist concept of history and Marx's philosophy more generally.<sup>2</sup>

In its extension of the 'new materialism' of the *Theses on Feuerbach*, its transformation of an 'ontology of *praxis*' into an 'ontology of production', *The German Ideology* establishes a new relationship between *praxis* and *poiêsis*.<sup>3</sup> This relationship is, to be precise, doubly new. It is new to the history of philosophy, because it breaks with a tradition of separation between *praxis* and *poiêsis* beginning with Plato and Aristotle and sustained up through Kant's critical philosophy. Yet it is also, and of greater consequence, new to the philosophy of history. *The German Ideology* collapses the barrier between self-transformative action by free humans and

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<sup>1</sup> Giorgio Agamben, 'Time and History: Critique of the Instant and the Continuum', in his *Infancy & History: Essays on the Destruction of Experience* [1978], trans. Liz Heron (London and New York: Verso, 1993), 91. Agamben continues: 'the vulgar representation of time as a precise and homogenous continuum has thus diluted the Marxist concept of history: it has become the hidden breach through which ideology has crept into the citadel of historical materialism.' Ibid. Problematically, 'historical materialism' functions as a self-evident subject in this passage.

<sup>2</sup> Étienne Balibar states that '...Marx's philosophy, whether or not it is in a finished form, sets itself the task of thinking the materiality of time.' Étienne Balibar, *The Philosophy of Marx*, trans. Chris Turner (London and New York: Verso, 1995), 81.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. 35, 40-1.



the necessary production of objects for use, concretises this collapse in its demarcation of ‘the economic’ as the social production of the means of life, and thereby establishes a philosophical basis from which ‘history’ becomes a speculative and experimental concept. The implications of this are diverse and radically open. At a basic level, we must recognise that any historical logic fundamentally structured by the ongoing objectification of human practice must express an unpredictable future, which in turn opens up the meaning – and temporality – of concepts such as ‘historical rationality’, ‘historical change’, ‘historical progress’, ‘historical evolution’, ‘historical development’ and so forth. In consideration of class struggle, for instance, Balibar argues that ‘Marx resorted less and less to pre-existing *models* of explanation and increasingly *constructed a rationality* which had no real precedent...in the incessant transformation of its conditions and forms...class struggle is its own model.’<sup>4</sup> In this way, the importance that Marx attaches to conflict (not only class struggle but more generally the conflict between the forces and relations of production) is not just a political matter: its temporal dynamic philosophically registers the concept of history as necessarily open and incomplete.

The ground of the concept of materialism in *The German Ideology* is *labour*: social and economic activity which is indissociable from and yet irreducible to the organic and inorganic matter that this activity works with and upon. *The German Ideology* thus reinforces what the *Theses on Feuerbach* first introduces: a distinctly *practical*, rather than matter-based, concept of materialism. As the social production of the means of life, labour is the ontological ground of the historical movement between *praxis* and *poiêsis*, between, that is, the realms of freedom and necessity. In short, for Marx, labour historicalises: it *produces history*.<sup>5</sup> The consequences of this are extensive. If labour historicalises, it must also temporalise. Labour must be grasped as an indelibly temporal concept in Marx, not simply because, as an act, it intrinsically creates time, but because it is an act which is directly constitutive of history. History is an essentially temporal process, and hence any concept of history, materialist or otherwise, is an essentially temporal concept, one which cannot be thought in isolation from the philosophy of time. We might suggest then that if *The German Ideology* specifies *praxis* as ‘production’, and if labour is necessary to think the concept of ‘mode of production’, then temporality is a condition of thinking human ontology in Marx. Temporality confirms the philosophical status of ontology in Marx: ‘mode of production’ cannot be registered as an ontological category, and cannot be internalised to the philosophy of history, without systematically investigating the relationship

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid. 96. On the question of progress, see Chapter 4 of Balibar’s *The Philosophy of Marx*: ‘Time and Progress: Another Philosophy of History?’

<sup>5</sup> A transhistorical category, and a condition of thinking Marx’s concept of ‘mode of production’, labour mediates what Marx calls the ‘metabolism’ [*Stoffwechsel*] between humanity and nature.

between labour and temporality in Marx.<sup>6</sup> It is unclear to what extent, if any, Marx saw his intervention into the philosophy and politics of materialism in these terms. To be sure, Marx analyses labour and temporality in conjunction with one another, and yet these analyses, most notably that of the concept of ‘labour-time’ itself, are by and large framed by the temporalities of capital, particularly the quantifiable, durational time of what we will consider in Chapter 3: abstract labour-time. There are helpful passages in the *Grundrisse*, from broadly Aristotelian positions (‘since labour is motion, time is its natural measure’) to critical extensions of Hegel (‘labour is the living, form-giving fire; it is the transitoriness of things, their temporality, as their formation by living time’<sup>7</sup>), but the fact remains that the context of these passages is the temporalities of capital, temporalities which are inseparable from and yet cannot be conflated with the temporalities of history. This much is clear: if labour historicalises, then any attempt to establish the philosophical priority of the concept of historical time must begin by exploring the manifold dimensions of the ontological relationship between labour and temporality. The materialist concept of history in *The German Ideology* must be reread temporally: the human must be rendered temporal in its economic and historical being.

The removal of a fixed distinction between *praxis* and *poiêsis* in *The German Ideology* is sustained by a unique philosophy of history. As Balibar puts it, ‘there is never any effective freedom which is not also a material transformation, which is not registered historically in *exteriority*. But nor is there any work which is not a transformation of self, as though human beings could change their conditions of existence whilst maintaining an invariant “essence”.’<sup>8</sup> In Marx, after 1845, ‘materialism’ must already be a *historical* materialism if it is to have any meaning as a practical and social materialism. To be sure, temporality is introduced by Marx’s practical materialism in the *Theses on Feuerbach*, inasmuch as ‘sensuous human activity’ is an implicitly temporal concept. At the same time, the temporality of practice is not redeemed by these theses. This redemption is left to *The German Ideology*, wherein the temporality of practice is grounded by the historicalising concept of *need*. Because it historically grounds the materialism of the *Theses on Feuerbach*, *The German Ideology* introduces a distinct historical temporality to labour as practice immanent to need. Does *The German Ideology* enable us to

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<sup>6</sup> William Haver’s contention that ‘...in Marx, the mode of production *is* ontology. There is nothing outside a mode of production...’ is *only* sustainable from the standpoint of the philosophy of time. William Haver, ‘For a Communist Ontology,’ in *The Politics of Culture: Around the Work of Naoki Sakai*, ed. Richard Calichman and John Namjun Kim (London and New York: Routledge, 2010), 107.

<sup>7</sup> Marx, *Grundrisse*, 205, 361. The latter quotation reworks Hegel’s position in the *Logic* that ‘matter is that which is indifferent to form.’ See G.W.F. Hegel, *The Science of Logic* [1812], trans. A.V. Miller (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1969), 451. Still, it is unclear in this passage if the human is itself included within the realm of ‘things’. Minus such inclusion, the indifference between ‘living time’ and the ‘temporality of things’ cannot be historicised.

<sup>8</sup> Balibar, *The Philosophy of Marx*, 40.

read materiality *as* temporality in Marx? This remains to be seen.<sup>9</sup> As Althusser puts it, we are still far from clearing up ‘the confusion that surrounds the concept of history.’<sup>10</sup> To invoke Marx, the unexplored interchange [*Austausch*] between materiality and temporality heightens the need to address the following questions: what are the philosophical outcomes of a temporal reading of Marx’s practical, social, and historical materialism? What interpretive possibilities are introduced? If Marx’s materialism is in fact a ‘new’ materialism, does it thereby introduce a new temporality? That is, does this materialism affect a new configuration between the past, the present and the future? If *The German Ideology* subjects the materialism of the *Theses on Feuerbach* to a historical logic, is a new historical temporality thereby produced? What light do these questions shed on the relationship between time and history, if indeed the concept of one poses a problem for the philosophy of the other?<sup>11</sup> These questions mark the beginning of the central problem of this thesis: how do we critically reconstruct Marx’s materialist concept of history as a concept of historical time?

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<sup>9</sup> Haver goes so far as to claim that ‘for Marx, materiality and temporality are the same thing.’ Haver, ‘For a Communist Ontology’, 114. However, the problem of history is noticeably absent from his analysis. This reading hinges on developing a concept of materiality [*Materialität*] that simply put does not exist in Marx’s corpus. This concept would emerge from – and yet would need to ontologically ground – Marx’s critical reconstruction of materialism [*Materialismus*] in the *Theses on Feuerbach* as a dynamisation of the subject-object relation in modern (post-Kantian) epistemology.

<sup>10</sup> Althusser, ‘The Errors of Classical Economics: an Outline for a Concept of Historical Time’, 93.

<sup>11</sup> Peter Osborne, ‘Marx and the philosophy of time’, *Radical Philosophy* 147 (January/February 2008), 15.

## 1.1 A Practical Materialism: the *Theses on Feuerbach*

The chief defect of all hitherto existing materialism (that of Feuerbach included) is that objectivity [*der Gegenstand*], actuality, sensuousness, is grasped only in the form of the *object* [*Objekt*] or of intuition [*Anschauung*], but not as *sensuous human activity, praxis*, not subjectively. Hence, in opposition to materialism, the *active* side was developed abstractly by idealism, which naturally does not know actual, sensuous activity as such. Feuerbach wants sensuous objects, really distinguished from thought-objects, but he does not comprehend human activity itself as *objective* activity [*gegenständliche Tätigkeit*]. . . therefore he does not comprehend the significance of “revolutionary”, of “practical-critical” activity.<sup>12</sup>

The materialist concept of history must initially be approached from the standpoint of Marx’s critical reconstruction of the concept of materialism. Written in Brussels during the spring of 1845, Marx’s eleven *Theses on Feuerbach* (hereafter *Theses*) reject the notion that a sensible object of appearance [*Gegenstand*], and thus actuality and sensuousness, are captured only by intuition or only as an object of knowledge [*Objekt*]. The first thesis (above) directly targets the ‘old’ or substantialist (which is to say, matter-based) materialism, which is polemically and reductively assigned to Feuerbach, so as to create space for a ‘new’ or practical (which is to say, human-based) materialism. At a basic level, the chief defect of existing materialism is, according to Marx, that it is pre-Kantian: it has no viable concept of the subject. At the same time, and of equal philosophical importance, Marx critiques the character of Kant’s subjective constitution of objectivity [*Objektivität*] on which Feuerbach’s materialism relies. The *Theses* are a critical extension of the subject-object relation of modern epistemology as inaugurated by Kant: an extension, because they constitute the first materialism of the subject within the Kantian tradition; critical, because they reject the sensuously passive and hence ideally active character of the subject-object relation in Kant’s transcendental logic. In his declaration that objectivity, sensibility and actuality are not comprehended subjectively by existing discourses of materialism, Marx not only dismisses the old metaphysics of matter in these discourses, but confronts the very dynamic of subjectivity in Kant. The transformation of a sensible object of appearance [*Gegenstand*] presented to consciousness by intuition into an object of knowledge [*Objekt*] is a movement – from actual passivity to ideal activity – which defines the subject in Kant. It is a movement that authorises the universality and necessity of the pure concepts of

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<sup>12</sup> Karl Marx, *Thesen über Feuerbach* [1845] (hereafter *TüF*), in Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Marx Engels Werke* (hereafter *MEW*), Band 3 (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1978), 5 (Karl Marx, *Theses on Feuerbach* (hereafter *ToF*), in Karl Marx, *Early Writings*, trans. Rodney Livingstone and Gregor Benton (London and New York: Penguin Books, 1992), 421-22).

the understanding. To suggest, as Marx does, that objectivity, sensibility and actuality are not grasped subjectively by all hitherto existing materialism is to suggest, against Kant, that the subject can be nothing else than sensuous human activity itself, nothing else than practice.<sup>13</sup> As Balibar asserts, in the wake of the *Theses*, ‘...the only true subject is the practical subject or the subject of practice or, better still, that *the subject is nothing other than practice* which has always already begun and continues indefinitely.’<sup>14</sup>

There are two outcomes which emerge from this practical materialism, one explicit and one implicit, each relying on the other and constituting a tension in relation to the other. First, as an explicit epistemological critique of an epistemological discourse, Marx’s *Theses* actively dialecticise the subject-object relation, such that sensuous human activity destabilises any self-sufficient barrier between the subject and the object, or between the ‘knower’ and the ‘known’. It is in this context that Wal Suchting contends that subject and object are not pre-constituted before practice, but rather ‘constituted *within*’ it.<sup>15</sup> Second, Marx’s speculative redefinition of the subject as practice generates a (still implicit and underdetermined) claim on behalf of the ontological basis of this epistemological discourse. In this regard, the subject and the object, be they defined as the representative capacity of the human [*Gemüt*]<sup>16</sup> and that which stands against it [*Gegenstand*], or dialectically rendered as sensuous activity on either pole, become in Marx epistemological derivations of an ontologically basic practice. In his transformation of a distinctly epistemological problematic, Marx enables the creation of a concept of practice which moves dialectically and unevenly between epistemology and ontology. If this concept grounds the subject-object relation of modern epistemology, the ‘is’ and the ‘practice’ within Balibar’s formulation ‘the subject is practice’ not only function as the copula and the predicate of a philosophical proposition, but, after Hegel, represent dialectical moments of a speculative absolute identity which is not a substantial but rather, as we will now see, a relational ontology.

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<sup>13</sup> *Praxis* implicitly stands in as the meaning of ‘practice’ in the *Theses*. Marx never outlines a concept of ‘practice’ as epistemologically or ontologically distinct from *praxis*, in the *Theses* or elsewhere, but it is possible to suggest that the movement from an ontology of *praxis* to an ontology of production – that is, the movement from the *Theses* to *The German Ideology* – marks the development of a historical-ontological concept of practice within which the differentiation of practice from *praxis*, and the inseparability of *praxis* and *poiêsis*, is established. After *The German Ideology*, practice is not just ontologically basic to the subject-object relation of modern epistemology, as is offered by the *Theses*, but *historically*-ontologically basic to the *praxis-poiêsis* relation as well. It is Marx’s specification of practice as labour, as the social production of the means of life, that secures the removal of the separation between *praxis* and *poiêsis*.

<sup>14</sup> Balibar, *The Philosophy of Marx*, 25.

<sup>15</sup> W.A. Suchting, *Marx and Philosophy: Three Studies* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1986), 57.

<sup>16</sup> *Gemüt* is a notoriously difficult concept to translate. In Kant, as elsewhere, it signifies the human mind, soul, consciousness, spirit, disposition and body. What is evident is that *Gemüt* is a concept that exceeds the summation of its constituent parts, including the human [*Mensch*] and the understanding [*Verstand*]. ‘The representative capacity of the human’ is a clunky placeholder, but preferable to reductive and exclusive translations such as ‘the mind’.

Consider Marx's sixth thesis on Feuerbach:

Feuerbach resolves [*auflösen*] the religious essence into the *human* essence. But the human essence is no abstraction inhabiting each single individual. In its actuality it is the ensemble [*das Ensemble*] of social relations. Feuerbach, who does not enter into a critique of this actual essence, is hence compelled: (1) to abstract from the historical process and to fix the religious sentiment [*Gemüt*] as something by itself and to presuppose an abstract – *isolated* – human individual; (2) essence, therefore, can be comprehended only as 'genus', as an internal, mute generality which *naturally* unites the many individuals.<sup>17</sup>

The first thesis does not consider the meaning of 'the human' in its redefinition of objective activity as sensuous human activity. The sixth thesis, on the other hand, directly confronts the question of human essence in a fashion that confirms the status of Marx's materialism as new. What grounds this confirmation, such that a new concept of the human and a new concept of essence emerge – and emerge, moreover, as conceptually dependent on one another – is the fact that Marx explicitly poses this question at the level of actuality [*Wirklichkeit*].<sup>18</sup> Marx's concept of the human is not new because this human is actual: to make this claim is to forget Marx and Feuerbach's indebtedness to Hegel's position in the *Logic* that subjectivity resides in the concrete fullness of abstraction within consciousness. Rather, this is a conceptually new human because the actuality is here unequivocally *social*. Human actuality is, from the outset, an ensemble of social relations. Marx deliberately utilises the French term 'ensemble' in order to denote a fluid, open and indeterminate unity which evades, contra Hegel, the 'hierarchical completeness associated, philosophically, with the German terms for totality (*Totalität*) and whole (*Ganze*).'<sup>19</sup> Far from introducing the human as a substance with inherent attributes, the sixth thesis implies that it is how such attributes are relationally produced and distributed that constitutes its essential character. In this manner, the subject in Marx resides in [*inwohnendes*] the practical unity of the ensemble of social relations. The sixth thesis presents, although it by no means explicitly develops, the possibility of a historical, or better, historicalising, subject, one that prioritises social relations over their relata, and one that remains abstract so long as abstraction is not philosophically and politically actualised within isolated human individuals. Thus the equivalence which Feuerbach establishes between 'genus-essence' [*Gattungswesen*]

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<sup>17</sup> Marx, *TüF*, 6 (*ToF*, 423). Marx's claim that Feuerbach resolves the religious essence into the human essence is, to be fair, highly unfair to the complex relationship Feuerbach establishes between theology and anthropology in *The Essence of Christianity* (1841).

<sup>18</sup> Balibar, *The Philosophy of Marx*, 28-9.

<sup>19</sup> Peter Osborne, *How to Read Marx* (London: Granta Books, 2005), 30.

and ‘nature-essence’ in *The Essence of Christianity* is for Marx predicated on the abstraction from a sensuously passive, and consequently unnatural, human, despite the fact that Feuerbach is quite concerned with the re-appropriation of human nature as a collective social and political project. The *Theses* profoundly rework the philosophical contours of essence. They introduce the possibility of granting a historical logic to the relationship between the categories of genus-species-individual, and that between universal-particular-individual, relationships that largely take the form of unilateral movement in one direction or the other (nominalism or realism). It is the spectre of such a historical logic – unrecognised by Marx in the *Theses* – that potentially reconfigures the predominant framework through which essence is thought, let alone lived.<sup>20</sup> The sixth thesis prefigures, to give two examples, essence ‘lying in’ existence in Heidegger’s phenomenological ontology of Dasein in *Being and Time* (1927), and the ‘crisis’ of relations between art and individual artworks in Adorno’s *Aesthetic Theory* (1970).

The *Theses* obviously disrupt the philosophy of time in Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason*. For Kant, time is the *a priori* condition of all appearances in general (all objects of the senses), a necessary representation which immediately grounds inner sensible intuition (the domain of the soul) and mediately grounds outer sensible intuition (the appearance of things as *a priori* determined by relations of space).<sup>21</sup> Time is thus the pure form of sensible intuition; synthetic *a priori* judgements and the understanding cannot be realised without it. The basic lesson of the transcendental aesthetic is that time is only empirically real *because* it is transcendently ideal: there is no objectivity to time from the standpoint of what Kant calls the ‘thing in itself’: ‘time is...merely a subjective condition of our intuition...and in itself, outside the subject, is nothing.’<sup>22</sup> Kant develops this position further in the schematism of the pure concepts of the understanding (the categories). In the analytic of principles, schematism is the procedural field of time that mediates the subsumption of all appearances and all objects under the categories, that regulates the application of the categories to the manifold. This ‘third thing’, which Kant designates as a ‘transcendental time-determination’, is a pure mediating representation which stands ‘in homogeneity with’ – which harmonises – the relationship between the sensible and intellectual dimensions of the *Gemüt*.<sup>23</sup> In the ‘A’ (or 1781) deduction of the categories, Kant emphasises schemata as the product of the imagination and synthesising faculty of the *Gemüt*, *a priori* determinations of time that realise the understanding by restricting it. In other words,

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<sup>20</sup> However, one could claim that the priority of existence over essence is actually already explicit in Feuerbach, which complicates matters, historico-philosophically. This would involve a larger appraisal of Marx’s (in some respects misleading) critique of Feuerbach in the *Theses*.

<sup>21</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* [1781, 1787] (hereafter *CPR*), trans. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), A34/B51, 163-64.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.* A35/B52, 164.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.* A139/B178, 272.

the concepts of the pure understanding are capable of relation and have significance *because* they temporalise, and they temporalise *because* their application is necessarily limited to finite appearances of time and space. Thus when Heidegger reads schematism as the ‘sensibilisation of concepts’<sup>24</sup>, he simultaneously understands it to be temporalisation *by* concepts.

This summary is provided in order to underscore the fact that Kant’s philosophy of time is *not* a means with which to undertake a temporal reading of the materialist concept of history. Epistemologically, insofar as it extends the subject-object relation in Kant, Marx’s grasping of the object of appearance *as* sensuous human activity, which is grasped, further, *by* sensuous human activity, and therefore by the open unity of the ensemble of social relations, effectively precludes the use of Kant’s schematism, because, ontologically, a subject which is practice *is* the place of this transcendental time-determination. As the subject in Marx, sensuous human activity *is* the performance of the temporal function of the imagination in Kant, and it thereby precludes the separation of this function from the manifold of intuition. Simply put, it makes no sense to suggest that Marx’s concept of practice (and thus history) is temporally intelligible through Kant’s schemata. We must add, moreover, that this is true on Kant’s own terms. From the standpoint of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, ‘practice’ is not only not present in the table of categories (it is not one of the ‘ancestral concepts’ [*Stammbegriffe*] of the pure understanding), but it is also not a ‘predicable’ concept (derivative concepts that owe their intelligibility to the categories).<sup>25</sup> In sum, for Kant, practice is *not* an epistemological concept. Its conceptual status is rather presented in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Critique – the *Critique of Practical Reason* – wherein it comprises the practical ‘deployment’ of reason. Hence Marx’s rejection in the *Theses* of any systematic distinction between a transcendental aesthetic and transcendental analytic, between sensibility and conceptuality, is in a sense *confirmed* by the impossibility, for Kant, of affording practice the power of temporalisation by way of the schematism of the categories. If practice is in some manner the persistence of the real in time and the condition of possibility of thinking temporal succession, the schema of substance<sup>26</sup> cannot secure this for us. More fundamentally, if, as it is possible to argue, practice is constitutive of the entire scope or ‘field of time’ [*Zeitbereich*] itself, the schema of modality<sup>27</sup> cannot secure the significance [*Bedeutung*] of this.

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<sup>24</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics* [1929], trans. James S. Churchill (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1965), 102. Given his overall project, it is not surprising that in his reading of schematism Heidegger proclaims that ‘...these eleven pages of the *Critique of Pure Reason* form the heart of the whole work’, and moreover that ‘...transcendental schematism determines the essence of ontological knowledge.’ Ibid. 94, 110.

<sup>25</sup> See Kant, *CPR*, A82/B108, 213.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid. A144/B184, 275.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid. A146/B185, 276.



Kant's critical philosophy cannot explain the temporalising power of practice (at least as Marx reconceives practice in the *Theses*), and thus is not a philosophical basis of a temporal reading of the materialist concept of history. But what of Hegel? Is it possible to take a cue from the preface to Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* and to claim, first, that the concept must incarnate itself in existence, become a phenomenon which can only exist through time and in space, and, second, to suggest that existence must make itself adequate to the concept? Hegel makes this assertion in his differentiation of philosophy from mathematics, in his dissociation of philosophy from the unessential, lifeless purpose of mathematics registered by the concept of magnitude. For Hegel, as against pure and applied mathematics alike, time in philosophy 'is the existent concept itself [*der daseiende Begriff selbst*].'<sup>28</sup> Yet to extend this function and scope of *the Concept* [*der Begriff*] in Hegel to the materialist concept of history in *The German Ideology* is to overstep the bounds of what kind of 'concept' this concept of history is. It is to attribute an ontological (temporalising) power to what in *The German Ideology* is the *thought* of something (in this case, 'history'), as against the attribution of this power to what is being thought (for instance, 'history' as practice immanent to human need). In other words, it is one thing to state that the materialist concept of history registers (or rather, as this thesis seeks to do, can be *made* to register) that time and space are actively *produced* by what is being thought by this concept<sup>29</sup>, but it is quite another to declare, as Hegel effectively does, that it is *because of the concept itself that there is time and space*. In other words, Hegel's 'concept' is *not* the same kind of 'concept' that the materialist concept of history is. There are two different kinds of 'concept' at work here, such that Hegel's concept *actually* incarnates itself in existence and compels this existence to become adequate to it. It would seem (at least for now<sup>30</sup>), then, that Hegel's concept is not what we need: to extend the temporalising power of this concept to the materialist concept of history does not, like Kant's schematism, provide us with the basis that we are after. There are things to be gleaned from Hegel's *Phenomenology* (the constitution of

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<sup>28</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit* [1807], trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 27. 'Time is the concept itself, that *there is*.' Ibid. 487. For Hegel, this is the standpoint of absolute *knowing* [*absolute Wissen*], the pure movement of self-consciousness knowing itself as self-consciousness. Time as the concept itself is a standpoint which can only ever be taken in an open historical present. Hegel does not speak of absolute knowing as a closed or achieved content. There is, in other words, no such thing for Hegel as 'absolute knowledge'.

<sup>29</sup> This dovetails with Haver's argument (in specific reference to Marx's analysis of the circulation of money in the *Grundrisse*) that 'it is not merely that circulation occurs within the putatively *a priori* coordinates of time and space; it is more radically the case that circulation *as such*...determines the fact *that there is* time and space.' Haver, 'For a Communist Ontology', 113-14.

<sup>30</sup> *However*, and this is the task of Chapters 3 & 4, one *can* make the case, as much of the literature in so-called 'Systematic Dialectics' has done, that Marx's concept of 'capital' registers capital as *the* concept (in the Hegelian sense). The same cannot be said of 'history': it is not this kind of concept, but rather the *name* of something which, as we will later examine, capital is the condition of thinking.

movement as negativity in 'labour' first and foremost amongst them), yet we must, at least for now, proceed with a temporal reading of the materialist concept of history without an adequate understanding of the inherently temporalising power of sensuous human activity itself.

## 1.2 A Materialist Concept of History: *The German Ideology*

We now turn to *The German Ideology*. In ‘Opposition of the Materialist and Idealist Outlook’, the initial section wherein the contours of the materialist concept of history are outlined, Marx and Engels establish the ‘first premise of all human history’ through three postulates:

- (1) The first premise of all human history is...the existence of living human individuals. Thus the first fact to be established is the physical organisation of these individuals and their consequent relation to the rest of nature...
- (2) Humans can be distinguished from animals by consciousness, by religion or anything else you like. They themselves begin to distinguish themselves from animals as soon as they begin to *produce* their means of life [*ihre Lebensmittel zu produzieren*], a step which is conditioned by their physical organisation. By producing their means of life humans are indirectly producing their material life...
- (3) The way in which humans produce their means of life depends first of all on the nature of the means of life they actually find in existence and have to reproduce. This mode of production must not be considered simply as being the reproduction of the physical existence of the individuals. Rather it is a definite form of activity of these individuals, a definite form of expressing their life, a definite *mode of life* on their part. As individuals express their life, so they are. What they are, therefore, coincides with their production, both with *what* they produce and with *how* they produce. Thus what individuals are depends on the material conditions of their production.<sup>31</sup>

*The German Ideology* adds a distinct historical logic to the new materialism of the *Theses*. It also, as we will now consider, adds a distinct historical logic to the philosophical anthropology of the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*<sup>32</sup> (hereafter *1844 Manuscripts*) and the *Excerpts from James Mill’s Elements of Political Economy*.<sup>33</sup> The materialist concept of history in *The German Ideology* is predicated upon a materialist concept of anthropology: for

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<sup>31</sup> Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Die deutsche Ideologie* (hereafter *DI*), in Marx and Engels, *MEW*, Band 3 (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1978) 20-1 (*GI*, 42). In addition to its colloquial meaning as victuals, *Lebensmittel* can be translated as ‘means of subsistence’, ‘means of existence’ and ‘means of life’. ‘Means of subsistence’ is the predominant and weakest choice, as it exclusively emphasises ‘the reproduction of the physical existence of...individuals’, a dimension in which Marx’s concept of ‘life’ [*Leben*] is necessarily grounded, but which it also profoundly expands.

<sup>32</sup> See Karl Marx, *The Economic & Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* [1844] (hereafter *EPM*), trans. Martin Mulligan (New York: International Publishers, 1964). The German edition cited in this thesis is Karl Marx, *Ökonomisch-philosophische Manuskripte aus dem Jahre 1844* (hereafter *OPM*), in Marx and Engels, *MEW*, Band 40 (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1968).

<sup>33</sup> See Karl Marx, *Excerpts from James Mill’s Elements of Political Economy* [1844] (hereafter *JM*), in Marx, *Early Writings*, 259-78. The German edition cited in this thesis is Karl Marx, *Auszüge aus James Mills Buch Éléments d’économie politique* (hereafter *AJM*), in Marx and Engels, *MEW*, Band 40 (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1968).

Marx, ‘the human’ is a kinetic, economic being, which means that it is the very activity of the social production of the means of life. At first glance, this concept of the human does not seem to represent much of a departure from the *1844 Manuscripts* nor the notebooks on James Mill. In these writings, ‘the human’ and ‘the social’ are already always tightly interwoven concepts, later condensed in the sixth thesis of the *Theses*. By 1844, the human has already been figured as an indelibly social being: both an individual in relation to and interchange [*Austausch*] with other individuals *and* that very relation and interchange itself.<sup>34</sup> As Marx says across his 1844 writings: ‘the individual *is the social being*...the human’s individual and generic life are not *different*’, ‘social being...is no abstract, universal power standing over against the individual, but is the essence of every individual...’, and ‘my *own* existence *is* social activity.’<sup>35</sup> In what sense, then, does *The German Ideology* critically transform the 1844 writings? In what sense does it (retroactively) provide these writings with a historical logic?

We might begin by considering the concept of nature in relation to the ‘first premise of all human history’. The human being does not make its own history alongside a self-sufficient nature, a nature in itself and as such. More radically, the first premise of all human history is the premise of history *per se*: the notion of a ‘history of nature’ in isolation from the ‘existence of living human individuals’ is, for Marx, nonsensical. As he puts it: ‘We know only a single science, the science of history. One can look at history from two sides and divide it into the history of nature and the history of humanity. The two sides are, however, *inseparable*; the history of nature and the history of humans are dependent on each other *so long as humankind exists*.’<sup>36</sup> And further: ‘...nature, the nature that preceded human history, is not by any means the nature in which Feuerbach lives, it is nature which today no longer exists anywhere...and which, therefore, does not exist for Feuerbach.’<sup>37</sup> Should humankind cease to exist, that would not mean that other forms of organic and inorganic matter would also not exist. Marx’s claim,

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<sup>34</sup> After Andrew Chitty, I translate *Austausch* as ‘interchange’ rather than ‘exchange’ [*Tausch*]. The former has a more expansive meaning than the latter: for Marx, *Tausch* denotes the exchange of private property, or what Chitty refers to as ‘conditional exchange’. See Andrew Chitty, ‘The Early Marx on Needs’, *Radical Philosophy* 64 (Summer 1993), 30, ft. 13.

<sup>35</sup> Marx, *OPM*, 538-39; Marx, *AJM*, 451; Marx, *OPM*, 538 (respectively, *EPM*, 138; *JM*, 265; *EPM*, 137). ‘The human, much as it may therefore be a *particular* individual (and it is precisely its particularity which makes it an individual and an actual *individual* social being), is just as much the *totality*, the ideal totality, the subjective existence of thought and experienced society for itself; just as it exists also in actuality as the intuition and the actual enjoyment of social existence, and as a totality of the human manifestation of life.’ Marx, *OPM*, 539 (*EPM*, 138).

<sup>36</sup> This passage in *The German Ideology* is famous, in part, because it was crossed out in a final revision of the manuscript. This particular translation appears in Osborne, *How to Read Marx*, 38. Emphasis added. A slightly different translation of this passage also appears in a footnote in Alfred Sohn-Rethel, *Intellectual and Manual Labour: a Critique of Epistemology* [1970], trans. Martin Sohn-Rethel (Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press, 1977), 18.

<sup>37</sup> Marx and Engels, *GI*, 63.

rather, is that these other forms of matter would be neither historical nor natural: ‘history’ and ‘nature’ alike come to an end with the end of the human being. It is evident that, for Marx, the ‘existence of living human individuals’ is inextricably tied to nature. But what is missing from the *1844 Manuscripts* and the notebooks on James Mill, and what is emphasised from the very outset of *The German Ideology*, is (to rework the *1844 Manuscripts*) the existence of humans as natural-historical beings and nature as a human-historical means of life, which is to say a human-historical ‘matter, ... object, and... instrument of life activity.’<sup>38</sup> *The German Ideology* clearly continues the emphasis the *1844 Manuscripts* place upon humanity’s metabolism with nature. At the same time, this shared emphasis is critically enriched in *The German Ideology*, because it is framed by a decisive historical logic which structures human universality *qua* the objectification of its labour. This opens up the possibility of conceiving nature as an ongoing extension of the human, such that nature becomes humanity’s *historical* ‘inorganic body’. The explicit association between labour, universality and nature in the works from 1844 finds its historical-ontological ground in *The German Ideology*. Whilst the temporal consequences of this remain to be developed, we might suggest that the materialist concept of history can be grasped as a continual cross-fertilisation between the temporality of human activity and that of nature, or, in the language of the ‘materialist method’, as an ‘intercourse’ [*Verkehr*] between the inseparable temporalities of the natural-human and those of human-nature.

Marx’s differentiation of the human from the animal originates with the notion that the human actively produces its means of life, whilst the existence of the animal does not exceed the means it discovers. For Marx, the animal does not produce its means of life, therefore its reproduction is wholly dependent on the discovery of that which it cannot produce, and, thus, of that which it is not and cannot be. Strictly speaking, Marx’s animal is ontologically static: it has no history, nor does it have temporality. This dovetails with Kate Soper’s assertion that ‘all animals reproduce themselves, only human beings hitherto have reproduced themselves in the form of an ever-expanding social and objectively existing patrimony.’<sup>39</sup> The animal has no capacity to be more than itself. That which it was, that which it is, and that which it is not yet collapse into one another, rendering the three dimensions of human time meaningless in relation to the animal. To put it another way, the human produces its own temporality, whilst the animal does not. The only temporality to which the human and the animal alike are subject

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<sup>38</sup> Marx, *OPM*, 516 (*EPM*, 112).

<sup>39</sup> Kate Soper, *On Human Needs: Open and Closed Theories in a Marxist perspective* (Brighton: Harvester Press; Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press, 1981), 46. As Marx and Engels state in *The German Ideology*: ‘...the production, as well as the satisfaction...of needs is a historical process, which is not found in the case of a sheep or dog...although sheep and dogs in their present form certainly, but *malgré eux*, are products of a historical process.’ Quoted in *ibid*.

to is a particular temporality of nature: a cosmological time marked by a succession of instants, indifferent to the physiological life and death of all organisms.<sup>40</sup> The animal is not a social, an economic, nor a historical being: ‘the animal does not enter into “relations” with anything, it does not enter into any relation at all. For the animal, *its relation to others does not exist as a relation.*’<sup>41</sup> In some regards, there is precedence to this differentiation between the human and the animal in *The German Ideology*. The *1844 Manuscripts* declare that the animal ‘produces one-sidedly...produces only itself,’ whereas the human ‘produces universally...reproduces the whole of nature.’<sup>42</sup> Here, as elsewhere, labour distinguishes the human from the animal. As is well-known, Marx’s philosophical anthropology before *The German Ideology* is rooted in a deeply Romantic, positive depiction of labour. Labour is the human’s life-activity, its act of self-creation and self-actualisation, its becoming-for-itself, the practice that constitutes its existence and through which its essence, the meaning of human being, is intelligible. In the *1844 Manuscripts*, the object of labour – both material and spiritual – is the objectification of the human as the living genus, the materialisation of human activity in what Marx variously characterises as ‘true’, ‘inner’ or ‘human’ property.<sup>43</sup> The object of labour is universal because it can be made, and used, by any social individual. Equally, the universality of genus-activity is actualised within each activity itself: each object that is produced by human labour becomes the representative of a particular species to which it belongs.<sup>44</sup> That is, the human’s existence as a genus-being [*Gattungswesen*] – qua universal and consciously free being – bestows upon those objects that it creates (itself and other things) the status of species-being. For Marx, *this* concept of labour is what differentiates the human from the animal.

At the same time, the 1844 writings do not thematise the idea that labour historicalises, that the production of the means of life is ‘a *definite* form of activity of...individuals, a *definite* form of expressing their life, a *definite* mode of life on their part.’<sup>45</sup> How does *The German Ideology* establish the creation of the *means* of life as a historical dynamic? *How is the concept of ‘life’ in Marx a distinctly historical concept?* How does the production of the means of life – the economic – constitute the elementary content of Marx’s philosophy of history?

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<sup>40</sup> Osborne, *How to Read Marx*, 40.

<sup>41</sup> Marx and Engels, *GI*, 51. Emphasis added.

<sup>42</sup> Marx, *EPM*, 113.

<sup>43</sup> As Chitty reminds us, Marx’s concept of ‘true’, ‘inner’ or ‘human’ property and its differentiation from ‘outer’ or ‘private’ property, derives from Hegel’s conception of property as the objectification of free will in *The Philosophy of Right* (§41) and its opposition to ‘possession’ (§45). Possession is particular, whilst property is rational, and thereby universal (§49). See Chitty, ‘The Early Marx on Needs’, 30, ft. 19. This dovetails with the difference between ‘interchange’ [*Austausch*] as opposed to ‘exchange’ [*Tausch*].

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.* 24.

<sup>45</sup> Marx and Engels, *GI*, 42. Emphasis added. A bit later: ‘...*definite* individuals who are productively active in a *definite* way enter into...*definite* social and political relations.’ *Ibid.* 46. Emphasis added.

At this point, it is instructive to consider three additional points made in a passage from *The German Ideology* which elaborate on the ‘first premise of all human history’:

- (1) ...[We] must begin by stating the first premise of all human existence and, therefore, of all history, the premise, namely, that humans must be in a position to live in order to be able to “make history”. But life involves before everything else eating and drinking, a habitation, clothing and many other things. The first historical act is thus the creation of the means to satisfy these needs, the production of material life itself. And indeed this is a historical act, a fundamental condition of all history, which today, as thousands of years ago, must daily and hourly be fulfilled merely in order to sustain human life...
- (2) The second point is that the satisfaction of the first need, the action of satisfying and the instrument of satisfaction which has been acquired, leads to new needs; and this creation of new needs is the first historical act...
- (3) The third relation which, from the very outset, enters into historical development, is that humans, who daily remake their own life, begin to make other humans, to reproduce [*fortzupflanzen*] their kind: the relation between man and woman, parents and children, the *family*...

These three aspects of social activity are not of course to be taken as three different stages, but just as three sides or, to make it clear to the Germans, three “moments”, which have existed simultaneously since the dawn of history and the first humans, and which still assert themselves in history today.<sup>46</sup>

The long passage quoted here introduces a transhistorical concept of life grounded in basic physiological needs: food, drink, habitation, clothing and so on. Obviously, the need to sustain human life at its most elemental level never disappears, no matter how sophisticated economic activity becomes. The new needs that are created via the satisfaction of these first needs never leave the domain of the basic sustenance of the human, even as they are not readily identifiable as basic components of human life. In other words, new needs always bear *some* relation to human survival: the social production of the means of life can never be disassociated from the social production of the means of subsistence, even as the expression of human life exceeds, as Marx and Engels convey it in the earlier passage, ‘the reproduction of the physical existence of...individuals’. In short, *The German Ideology* operates with a radically expanded concept of subsistence registered by the concept of life. But a difficulty arises in these passages: the social production of the means of life includes two ‘first historical acts’. How do we address this apparent tension?

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<sup>46</sup> Marx and Engels, *DI*, 28-9 (*GI*, 48-50).

The answer to this begins with the multifaceted evolution of the transhistorical concept of need [*Bedürfnis*] in the *1844 Manuscripts*. In this text, the social human is specified by the production and consumption of social objects. For Marx, the human being's relation to these objects is one of appropriation: the human re-appropriates the objectification of its own life-activity, and thereby produces a return of itself to itself as a totality. This is the '*manifestation of...human reality*.'<sup>47</sup> As the bearers of human beings' essential powers, objects affirm, and indeed give pleasure, to human sensuousness. As opposed to the *Theses*, an orthodox meaning of sensuousness (via Hegel and Feuerbach) is being invoked here, drawing on Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* and pointing to the human as an irretrievably receptive, passive and suffering being. In the *1844 Manuscripts*, as an objective and sensuous being, the human is not merely a suffering [*leidendes*], but a passionate [*leidenschaftliches*], being, insofar as it feels its self-manifestation qua labour as an affirmation of its essence. These feelings are not mere matters of cognition, but, for Marx, ontologically basic forces which determine the whole being of the human. The interchange of human activities and products cultivates [*Bildung*] and mediates human sensuousness: '...not only the five senses but also the so-called mental senses – the practical senses (will, love, etc.) – in a word, *human* sense – the human nature of the senses – comes to be by virtue of its object, by virtue of *humanised* nature.'<sup>48</sup> This manifold expansion of the meaning of the senses goes hand-in-hand with Marx's expansion of the philosophical scope of the object, labour and nature. The power [*Kraft*] behind this manifold expansion, this conceptual interdependence between the object, labour, nature and the senses, and hence this essential wealth of human being, is sociality itself: 'the *social* character is the general character of the whole movement.'<sup>49</sup>

In the *1844 Manuscripts*, Marx's conception of need is the fullest and most developed representation of this expansive human: 'the *wealthy* human is simultaneously the human *in-need-of* a totality of human life-expression; it is the human in whom its own realisation exists as inner necessity, as *need* [*Not*].'<sup>50</sup> To be 'in-need-of a totality of human life-expression' is to be in-need-of the sheer diversity and refinement of the objectification of consciously free

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<sup>47</sup> Marx, *EPM*, 139.

<sup>48</sup> Marx, *OPM*, 542 (*EPM*, 137). '...*established* society produces humans in the entire wealth of their being – produces *wealthy* humans *profoundly endowed with all the senses* – as their enduring actuality.' Ibid. This *established* society [*gewordne Gesellschaft*] is for Marx the meaning of communism.

<sup>49</sup> Marx, *EPM*, 137.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid. 144. This is a modified transcription of Chitty's translation of this passage in the *1844 Manuscripts*, with 'human' replacing 'man' and 'it/its' replacing 'he/his'. Chitty's translation is vastly superior to others because it highlights Marx's use of *Bedürfnis* as well as *Not*. The meaning of the latter revolves between 'exigency', 'necessity' and 'distress'. See Chitty, 'The Early Marx on Needs,' 26, 30 ft. 6. Marx's use of *Not* in relation to *Bedürfnis* in this passage fills out the relation between human sensuousness and needs in the *1844 Manuscripts*.



human life-activity as genus-activity.<sup>51</sup> It is, as Andrew Chitty contends, the fact that ‘human beings express themselves through the creation of universal objects, and so the need for human life-expression is the need to create such objects for other human beings, i.e. to create objects that can in principle satisfy the needs of any human being...’<sup>52</sup> – and we might add: for human beings to *consume* universal objects created by other human beings. In this way, human needs are defined by particular individuals’ needs for one another, the need to be social in the sense of the ‘interchange’ of individuals’ activities and products. But there is another dimension to need here as well. Bearing in mind that Marx’s conception of the human is both an individual already in relation to other individuals *and that very relation itself*, the totality of human life-expression that the human needs is not reducible to an aggregate production and consumption of universal objects, but is equally the very interdependency between objectification (human property), essential activity (labour) and cultivated pleasure (sensuousness) itself. In the *1844 Manuscripts*, the human’s need to be a social relation is at once the source of its individuation, without which the unencumbered, consciously free refinement and diversification of needs cannot proceed. When, at a much later date, Marx states that in the future past of communism ‘...labour has become not only the means of life, but life’s first need...’<sup>53</sup>, this is a speculative call for an indissociable social and individual life, wherein the production of new needs is the reproduction of the human as equally a ‘wealthy’ social relation and particular individual. For Marx, it is because of need that there are individuals, which is to say that *need constitutes the ontological basis of the sociality of human individuation* (there is no division of labour without need: the division of labour ontologically proceeds *from* human need).

As with the concept of nature and the differentiation of the human from the animal, *The German Ideology* is in some respects continuous with this understanding of need in the *1844 Manuscripts*. Need is the ontologically basic meaning of life in both texts. Whilst *The German Ideology* is not premised upon an affirmation of life or a confirmation of an authentic human-nature – a discourse shot through the 1844 texts<sup>54</sup> – it nonetheless remains squarely within the bounds of the Romantic expression of the ways and means of life. It is difficult to identify a discourse more fundamental to *The German Ideology* than the production of the means of life.

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<sup>51</sup> For an overview of Marx’s concept of need, see Philip J. Kain, *Marx and Modern Political Theory: from Hobbes to Contemporary Feminism* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 1993), 185-86.

<sup>52</sup> Chitty, ‘The Early Marx on Needs’, 26.

<sup>53</sup> Karl Marx, *Kritik des Gothaer Programms* [1875], in Marx and Engels, *MEW*, Band 19 (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1987), 21 (Karl Marx, *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, in *The Marx-Engels Reader, Second Edition*, ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1978), 531). The German reads as follows: ‘...nachdem die Arbeit nicht nur Mittel zum Leben, sondern selbst das erste Lebensbedürfnis geworden...’.

<sup>54</sup> See, in particular, Marx’s fictional ‘conversation’ with another ‘fully human being’ in his notebooks on James Mill: Marx, *AJM*, 462-63 (*JM*, 277-78).

Yet, in nearly every other respect, Marx's subsumption of need under a historical logic marks a break with the 1844 texts in ways far more consequential than the retroactive transformation of concepts such as nature and the human into historical concepts. 'Need' has not just become structured by a historical logic, but more crucially *structures that very logic itself*. The concept of need in *The German Ideology* is a vital dimension of the very meaning of historicalisation: insofar as labour historicalises, this cannot be comprehended apart from the production of the means to satisfy existing needs and the creation of new needs. Put differently, it is *The German Ideology* which philosophically enables 'labour' to be registered as an economic and historical concept, and history to be irretrievably tied to subsistence-level needs. When Marx and Engels speak of the material production of life itself, 'both of one's own in labour and of fresh life in procreation,'<sup>55</sup> they are explicitly referencing the basic need of the human to subsist. This is a radical focussing and concretising of the *1844 Manuscripts*, whereby the 'totality of human life-expression' becomes permanently connected and ultimately reducible to material life as such. However, this is not necessarily a limitation of the scope of the *1844 Manuscripts*. There is no reason to believe in the wake of *The German Ideology* that the human cannot be rendered in-need-of this totality, but only that this totality is permanently grounded in the recognition that the human 'must be in a position to live'. This is the reason why Marx and Engels bemoan the fact that:

In the whole conception of history up to the present this actual basis of history has either been totally neglected or else considered as a minor matter quite irrelevant to the course of history. Hence history must always be written according to an extraneous standard; the actual production of life seems to be primeval history, whilst the truly historical appears to be separated from ordinary life, something extra-superterrestrial [*Extra-Überweltliche*]. With this the relation of humans to nature is excluded from history and hence the antithesis of nature and history is created.<sup>56</sup>

The philosophy of history which Marx and Engels criticise in this passage is premised upon a fetishised conception – and, one might add, a de-historicalising temporality – of nature, which becomes the exclusive domain of the actual production of life, and which erases, as previously mentioned, humans as natural-historical beings and nature as a human-historical means of life. This philosophy of history is ideologically opposed to the conceptual status which Marx and Engels give to a 'mode of production' [*produktionsweise*], a concept which expresses history as a definite form of the production and reproduction of human life.

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<sup>55</sup> Marx and Engels, *GI*, 50.

<sup>56</sup> Marx and Engels, *DI*, 39 (*GI*, 59).

This brings us to the third ‘moment’ of history, to the place occupied by the biological reproduction of the human – the propagation of the human as a living organism – in relation to the materialist concept of history more generally. On the one hand, this reproduction is a philosophical problem for Marx, because the social materialism begun in the *Theses* and given historicalising power in *The German Ideology* is indifferent to the matter of this reproduction, which is to say – above all else – the procreative capacities of the human body. On the other hand, the meaning of history in *The German Ideology* is simultaneously the acknowledgement and perpetuation of this indifference. In this work, social activity is historical activity precisely because ‘life’ ontologically proceeds from the social needs of *living* human beings, not from the biological genesis of human life itself. Life is first and foremost a *social* category in Marx, such that need and labour – the two fundamental expressions of human sociality – provide life with its historical intelligibility. The point here is not to downplay the importance of biological reproduction, but rather to indicate that this third moment is only ‘historical’ by virtue of the fact that it is internal to the social production of the means of human life (here the ‘means’ are ‘fresh lives’ themselves). Framed, as it is, by a relational ontology, the moment of biological reproduction also introduces another tenet of Marx’s philosophy of history: the production of the means of life is inseparable from the *kind* of relations that structure this production. In the case of biological reproduction, Marx and Engels characterise these relations as the relations between man and woman, parents and children, the family, and so on, relations that raise the question of whether ‘the economic’ in Marx is a sexed ontological category of the human, and thus a sexed category of history. The philosophical and political significance of this question is not realised by the obvious answer (the economic is *undeniably* a sexed category in Marx), but rather by the potential formation of a materialist feminism made possible by this answer. In *The German Ideology* and elsewhere, there is no evidence to suggest that Marx thinks ‘sex’ as anything else than biologically given (that is to say that individual human bodies are sexed prior to their socialisation), a testament – rich with irony – to the remarkable ideological power of the dominant concept of sex which, suffice to say, excises nature from history and undercuts the social core of Marx’s concept of the human. From the standpoint of the philosophy of sex, *The German Ideology* is complicit in its critique of ‘self-sufficient philosophy’ as being blind to ‘the practical activity, the practical process of the development of humans.’<sup>57</sup> Yet it is also essential to state that *The German Ideology* potentially fosters a critical theory of sex, wherein ‘sex’ is not a fetishised ‘natural’ given but a *social relation* which the production of the means of life reproduces and upon which it depends. Christine Delphy’s work on the relation between

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<sup>57</sup> Marx and Engels, *DI*, 27 (*GI*, 48).

materialism and oppression is the crucial point of departure here. For her, sex is a category of domination, a social relation of oppression wherein biological reproduction is the historically exploitative domain of social life as a woman. In this reading of Marx's materialism, historical oppression is 'the fundamental reality, the point of departure.'<sup>58</sup>

It is difficult to overstate how pivotal the concept of *means* [*Mittel*] is to the materialist concept of history. This importance emerges with the first of the two first historical acts: the creation of the means to satisfy existing needs (not the satisfaction of those needs themselves). This emphasis on means returns us to the apparent tension between the two first historical acts that constitute history. The second first historical act, the creation of new needs, must now be examined in relation to the first first historical act, the creation of the means to satisfy existing needs. The issue here is not the content of new needs, but the way in which these needs – qua new – constitute a historical logic more generally. Marx and Engels are not confusing matters by identifying two first historical acts, but in fact consider the creation of the means to satisfy existing needs and the creation of new needs as *two different expressions of one and the same historical act*.<sup>59</sup> In this sense, 'means' and 'the new' are conceptually indissociable in Marx.<sup>60</sup> The production of the means of life, not life per se, unites existing and new needs, whilst not collapsing the difference between the domain of the existing and that of the new. What follows from this is an unmistakable – if underdeveloped – historical logic. A dynamic and open 'first historical act' gives rise to a concept of history that is implicitly alien to any fixed opposition between the existing and the new. The notion of historical change is consequently destabilised. Establishing the difference and relation between one historical act and another, demarcating the end of one historical act and the beginning of another, becomes unsettled in the sense that

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<sup>58</sup> 'Marxism is...materialist. To this extent it can be used by feminism. Insofar as materialism concerns oppression, and inversely if we accept that to start from oppression defines among other things a materialist approach, "a feminist science...wants to reach an explanation of the oppression; to do this it must start with it (and)...it will tend inevitably towards a materialist theory of history"...materialism is not one possible tool, amongst others, for oppressed groups; it is *the* tool precisely in so far as it is the only theory of history for which oppression is the fundamental reality, the point of departure.' Christine Delphy, 'A Materialist Feminism is Possible', trans. Diana Leonard, *Feminist Review* 4 (1980), 87. The quotation embedded within this passage is a self-quotation by Delphy, from 'Pour un féminisme matérialiste', *L'Arc* 61 (1976).

<sup>59</sup> As Peter Osborne states, 'Marx's grammar is confusing (the manuscript never received its final revision), but there is only one act at issue here. The "production of the means to satisfy existing needs" and the "creation of new needs" refer to two aspects of the same act, since the production of new means to satisfy existing needs creates a (hitherto non-existent) need for these means.' Osborne, *How to Read Marx*, 41. For an additional explanation of this 'confusion', see Soper, *On Human Needs*, 46.

<sup>60</sup> This conceptual inseparability critically enriches Marx's understanding of the human as a 'genus-being' [*Gattungswesen*] in the *1844 Manuscripts*. If the movement of *Gattungswesen* is the movement of humans becoming more than themselves, if it denotes the movement whereby humans become 'more-than-human' [*Übermensch*], then *The German Ideology* effectively stipulates that this movement is based in the historical and historicalising movement which is the creation of new needs.

it is impossible to claim that there is such a thing as ‘after’ the social production of the means of life. This impossibility is underpinned by the concept of means, which, like Marx’s concept of ‘productive force’, can (at least in part) be grasped as an objectification of a social relation orientated towards an end, in fact *the* end (teleologically speaking), which is nothing else than life itself. The materialist concept of history is structured by a dialectic between existing and new needs, which is, moreover, a necessarily open dialectic, because the end (chronologically speaking) of the first historical act is, strictly speaking, unintelligible. Thus the question arises: is there a historical temporality to be disinterred from this?

Marx and Engels never offer a temporal reading of the first historical act, but it is useful to make two broad observations. First, a dialectical interplay between the present and the past is signalled by the premise that the new resides within the means of satisfying existing needs. The domain of the past, or existing needs, all the way down to the basic need to eat, drink and sleep, cannot be thought apart from the means to satisfy such needs. Nor is the domain of the present, the production of these means, intelligible in isolation from the content of what they satisfy. There is no chronological succession here: one moment (the existence of a need) is not subsequently followed by another (the creation of the means to satisfy this need). Rather, *the domain of the present is the dialectic between the creation of the means to satisfy existing needs and the creation of new needs*. That is, the present is a dialectic unto itself, and it actively creates the past as an existing need. The relationship between the present and the past is thus a dialectical relationship between a dialectical present and a non-dialectical past. This is an interplay between the present and the past which clearly prioritises the present over the past, because the production of the means of life is the production of both new *and* existing needs. Existing needs and the production of the means to satisfy them may codetermine one another, but this relationship would be essentially static – it would have no temporality – were it not for these means. In Marx, the priority of the historical present – the priority of the actual – is indebted to the concept of means. This leads to the second observation. The future of the first historical act gives direction to the dialectic of the present and the past. The future by no means predetermines this dialectic, but it does guide the present’s ongoing creation and negation of the existence of the past, which is to say the ongoing expansion and satisfaction of social needs within the present. Yet – quite crucially – the future does *not* lie in waiting. The domain of the future is *not* the waiting overcoming of the present in the same way that the present actually overcomes the past. It is *not* the speculative formal repetition of an actual dialectic played out between the present and the past. To take this stance would be to relegate the future, and with it the temporality of the first historical act more generally, to a historicist framework wherein the future becomes ‘a moment which has yet to arrive’. Rather, the future is wholly immanent

to the present's transcendence of the past. Better yet: *the present's dialectical transcendence of the past is the past's future* (the present is the future of the past). Taken together, these two observations give shape to the twofold temporality of the first historical act.<sup>61</sup>

The question now is: do the other decisive aspects of the materialist concept of history reframe, modify and expand this temporality of the first historical act? Do these aspects add a new dimension to this temporal reading of the materialist concept of history? Marx's concept of need is undoubtedly a cornerstone of his transhistorical concept of wealth [*Reichtum*], such that the dialecticisation of need in *The German Ideology* provides wealth with its overriding structure of historical measure. In Marx, following Hegel, to dialecticise is to historicalise: the economic is a category of the philosophy of history *because* the social production of the means of life is internally – and dialectically so – differentiated between the creation of the means to satisfy existing needs and the creation of new needs. To dialecticise is also to temporalise: if 'time' is the name of the abstract unity of the past, the present and the future, temporalisation is the active production of the dynamic relations between these coordinates *because* practice and labour are – from the very outset – dialectical concepts in Marx. However, need does not, unto itself, exhaust the philosophical scope of the economic. The creation of the means of life is of course the social creation of the means of life, such that the kinds of relations that govern this creation also govern the temporal and historical intelligibility of 'means' and 'life' alike. Additionally, despite the fact that the means of life have now been investigated in relation to need, it is crucial to expand on the philosophical character of these means, such that they and the needs they satisfy can be understood as *productive forces* [*Produktivkräfte*]. This must be done if, on some level, 'history' for Marx is the dialectical correspondence [*Entsprechung*] of the economic subject to itself, if, in other words, it is the ongoing creation of new needs and the expansion of productive forces corresponding to this creation. Simply put, we have arrived at the essential contradiction between productive forces and the 'form', 'means' and 'relations of intercourse' [*Verkehrsform, Verkehrsmittel, Verkehrsverhältnisse*, respectively], each of

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<sup>61</sup> Biological reproduction can be made to fit within the framework of this twofold temporality. As regards the relationship between biological, social and historical time in Marx, it is worthwhile perhaps to rework the famous passage from the Introduction to the 'B' (or 1787) edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, and to suggest that '...although all social and historical time commences **with** biological time, ...it does not on that account all arise **from** biological time' (cf. '...although all our cognition commences **with** experience, ...it does not on that account all arise **from** experience' Kant, *CPR*, B 1-2, 136.) This move fundamentally *inverts* Kant: it imposes the *a posteriori* – or social and historical time in Marx – on Kant's *a priori*, whilst holding on to the necessary and universal character exclusive to this *a priori*. The same manoeuvre is made in the next chapter, in relation to Heidegger's practical philosophy.

which prefigure the place of the ‘relations of production’ [*Produktionsverhältnisse*] in Marx’s philosophy of history more generally.<sup>62</sup>

This arrival first necessitates a brief digression on the relationship between *The German Ideology* and an ongoing point of contention within Marx and Marxism alike. This is an issue which proceeds from the fact that *The German Ideology*, not Marx’s well-known 1859 preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (hereafter *Contribution*), first outlines the contradiction between the forces and relations of production at the level of the philosophy of history. *The German Ideology*, on the whole, affords a richer and more complex reading of the philosophical contours of ‘the economic’ than the *Contribution*. But it also functions as a foundation for the much maligned ‘base-superstructure’ model announced by the preface to the *Contribution*,<sup>63</sup> even as this model does not openly figure in *The German Ideology*.<sup>64</sup> There is an ‘economic basis’ in *The German Ideology*, synonymous with ‘material life itself’, which for Marx and Engels is the ‘actual basis of history’ and which might provisionally be defined as ‘the totality of the relations of production which correspond to a determinate level of the forces of production’. And it is certainly possible to interpret this basis as (implicitly) yielding a superstructure [*Überbau*] within which historical consciousness is dynamically embedded.<sup>65</sup> Yet there are other factors which need to be considered in relation to this model, factors which, when engaged, mitigate – and arguably put to rest – charges that Marx’s philosophy of history is underpinned by a mechanistic ‘economic determinism’ and vulgar historicism. One of these is the manner in which there is already always a political dimension to the economic basis in Marx, upsetting any fixed distinction between the ‘economic’ and the ‘political’ as such within his corpus. Consider, for instance, Marx’s analysis of the genesis of capitalist ground-rent, in

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<sup>62</sup> ‘Relations of production’ is not established as a concept in *The German Ideology*, but Marx and Engels already speak of the contradiction between ‘forms of intercourse’ and productive forces as the ‘origin’ of ‘all collisions in history’. See Marx and Engels, *GI*, 89.

<sup>63</sup> The relevant passage in the *Contribution* is: ‘In the social production of their lives, humans inevitably enter into definite, necessary relations, which are independent of their will, namely, relations of production corresponding to a determinate stage of development of their material forces of production. The totality [*Gesamtheit*] of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real basis on which there arises a legal and political superstructure and to which there correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the general process of social, political and intellectual life. It is not the consciousness of humans that determines their being, but their social being that determines their consciousness.’ Karl Marx, *Zur Kritik der Politischen Ökonomie* [1859] (hereafter *KPÖ*), in Marx and Engels, *MEW*, Band 13 (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1961), 8-9 (Marx, *Contribution*, 20-1).

<sup>64</sup> It is important to point out that this model barely emerges after the *Contribution*. It appears only once in the first volume of *Capital*, in a footnote at that. See Karl Marx, *Capital: a Critique of Political Economy, Vol. 1: the Process of Production of Capital* [1867] (hereafter *Capital 1*), trans. Ben Fowkes (London and New York: Penguin Books, 1976), 175, ft. 35.

<sup>65</sup> Various passages in *The German Ideology* anticipate the preface to the *Contribution*, most notably: ‘Life is not determined by consciousness, but consciousness by life.’ Marx and Engels, *GI*, 47.

which he declares that ‘the specific economic form in which unpaid surplus-labour is pumped out of the direct producers determines the relation of domination and bondage, as this grows directly out of production itself and in turn reacts back on it [production] *in determining it*.’<sup>66</sup> This passage is of course specific to a particular mode of production, but it nonetheless directs our attention to the viable possibility of reading the base-superstructure model as immanently co-constitutive, such that each ‘level’ mutually determines one another. This reading eases the philosophical rigidity in proclamations such as ‘life determines consciousness, consciousness does not determine life’. As Raymond Williams argues, we have to ‘revalue “determination”’ in this model ‘towards the setting of limits and the exertion of pressure, and away from a predicted, prefigured and controlled content’, in order to move the superstructure away from a unilaterally ‘reflected, reproduced or specifically dependent content.’<sup>67</sup> For Gramsci, this is the fashion in which ideology already always permeates every facet of the base, including the development of ‘organic’ and ‘conjunctural’ movement within the base.<sup>68</sup> These interventions foster, internal to the philosophy of history, the possibility of a new reading of Marx’s relation to Hegel, one grounded in an understanding of life which does much more than simply ‘invert’ consciousness.<sup>69</sup> This mutual constitution need not, as Althusser warns against, smuggle in an idealist dialectic, because it would be consistent with the idea that the economic is – but *only* ‘in the last instance’ – the ontological ground of history. Engels’s 1890 letter to Joseph Bloch sums this up quite nicely: ‘According to the materialist conception of history, the determining moment in history *in the last instance* is the production and reproduction of actual life. More than this neither Marx nor I have ever asserted. Therefore, if somebody twists this into saying

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<sup>66</sup> Karl Marx, *Das Kapital: Kritik der politischen Ökonomie, Dritter Band: Der Gesamtprozeß der kapitalistischen Produktion* [1894], herausgegeben von Friedrich Engels (hereafter *Kapital* 3), in Marx and Engels, *MEW*, Band 25 (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1964), 799 (Karl Marx, *Capital: a Critique of Political Economy, Vol. 3: the Process of Capitalist Production as a Whole* (hereafter *Capital* 3), ed. Friedrich Engels, trans. David Fernbach (London and New York: Penguin Books, 1991), 927. Emphasis added. See also Louis Althusser, ‘Is it Simple to be a Marxist in Philosophy?’ [1975], *Essays in Self-Criticism*, ed. and trans. Grahame Lock (Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press, 1998), 176.

<sup>67</sup> Raymond Williams, ‘Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory’, *New Left Review* I/82 (November/December 1973), 6.

<sup>68</sup> Antonio Gramsci, ‘Analysis of Situations. Relations of Force’ [1931-1934], in *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, ed. and trans. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (New York: International Publishers, 1999), 180.

<sup>69</sup> An underappreciated contribution to this reading, which in many ways is more sophisticated than Marx’s well-known critiques of Hegel, is Herbert Marcuse, *Hegel’s Ontology and the Theory of Historicity* [1932], trans. Seyla Benhabib (Cambridge and London: MIT Press, 1989). In the shadow of Marx and Heidegger, this work is a systematic attempt to establish the philosophical basis of history within life, qua the ‘motility’ [*Bewegtheit*] of being, by way of a critical reconstruction of Hegel’s *Logic*, the *Early Theological Writings* and the *Phenomenology*.



that the economic moment is the *only* determining one, he transforms that proposition into a meaningless, abstract, senseless phrase.<sup>70</sup>

Setting aside this digression, we must now address, albeit at a broad level of abstraction, the relationship between the temporality of the first historical act and the dialectic of the forces and relations of production. In other words, what is the temporal relation between the dialectic of the creation of the means to satisfy existing needs and the creation of new needs, on the one hand, and the dialectic of the forces and relations of production, on the other? The answer to this question begins with a short account of what productive forces are. Along with needs and time<sup>71</sup>, productive forces fill out Marx's category of wealth ('wealth', for Marx, is a particular *relation* between needs, productive forces and time.<sup>72</sup>) Accordingly, the scope of a productive force is expansive. It takes in, although it is not exhausted by, what David Harvey describes as 'the *power* to transform and appropriate nature through human labour.'<sup>73</sup> Productive forces encompass, but are irreducible to, the means of production [*Produktionsmittel*]: e.g. the tools, instruments, technologies and machineries of production (this includes, it is important to add, human bodies).<sup>74</sup> Socialised matter – both organic and inorganic matter – is a productive force, and this register informs, to take the most notable example, Marx's extensive analyses of the relationship between land and production. Conceptually, it is important to indicate that in *The German Ideology* and elsewhere, forces/powers [*Kräfte*] should be conceived as ontologically basic to 'means' [*Mitteln*], although our understanding of the relationship between 'productive forces' and the broader philosophical literature on forces/powers remains largely in the dark.<sup>75</sup> It would seem, at the very least, that Marx's 'productive force' is indebted to the work of Kant, Hegel and particularly Leibniz, whose internalisation of motion and force within matter points towards a necessary condition of Marx's critical reconstruction of materialism more broadly.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Friedrich Engels, letter to Joseph Bloch (in Königsberg) on 21 September 1890, quoted in Althusser, 'Is it Simple to be a Marxist in Philosophy?', 176. Translation modified: see Marx and Engels, *MEW*, Band 37 (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1967), 463. For Althusser, '...to talk about the determination by the economy *in the last instance* is to mark oneself off from every mechanistic conception of determinism and to adopt a dialectical position.' Althusser, 'Is it Simple to be a Marxist in Philosophy?', 177.

<sup>71</sup> The essential relation between time and wealth is addressed in Chapter 3. As we will later see, 'the whole development of wealth rests on the creation of disposable time.' Marx, *Grundrisse*, 398.

<sup>72</sup> Osborne, 'Marx and the philosophy of time', 21.

<sup>73</sup> David Harvey, *The Limits to Capital* [1982] (London and New York: Verso, 1999), 101.) Alex Callinicos defines productive forces as 'the methods of labour and thereby its social productivity.' Alex Callinicos, *Making History: Agency, Structure, and Change in Social Theory* (Leiden/Boston/Cologne: Brill, 2004), 42-4.

<sup>74</sup> 'Means of production' also include the *objective conditions* without which social production cannot occur (e.g. office buildings, factories, fields, and so forth).

<sup>75</sup> To my knowledge, there is no work in the Anglophone secondary literature that looks at this relation.

<sup>76</sup> Drawing on an unpublished manuscript by Gareth Stedman Jones, Patrick Riley states (without providing any further analysis) that '...Leibniz's notion of "force" and forces (*Kräfte*) may be the remote ancestor of Marx's "forces of production".' Patrick Riley, *Leibniz's Universal Jurisprudence*:

From the standpoint of classical political economy, Adam Smith and Friedrich List undeniably influence Marx's conception of labour as a productive force. On the whole, the complex and multidimensional meaning of a productive force in Marx might be attributed to the fact that, in its dialectical relationship with a relation of production, it constitutes a *purely social* power that simultaneously arises from labour and is that through which labour actualises itself. This accounts for why, to take another example, Marx and Engels insist that the mode of social co-operation amongst individuals in the production of their means of life 'is itself a "productive force"'.<sup>77</sup> At the same time, the dialectic between the forces and relations of production cannot be collapsed, if indeed, as Marx and Engels repeatedly state in *The German Ideology*, existing relations of production become 'fetters' to the expansion of productive forces, such that this ongoing conflict gives direction to history. What, if any, temporality can be gleaned from this, and what relation does this temporality have to the social production of the means of life (the temporality of the first historical act)? These questions are, at a transhistorical level, difficult, if not impossible, to answer, not simply because the temporality of a relation of production is only intelligible at the level of different modes of production (the temporal relation between the worker and the capitalist is, of course, not the same as that between the feudal serf and his lord), but also because the significance of the expansion of productive forces is not something which is *unto itself* temporally intelligible (unless, that is, one is satisfied, as Marx often seems to be, with the historicist framework of linear, progressive time being the implicit framework for our understanding of this expansion<sup>78</sup>). Even if, for Marx, a 'force' is a more ontologically expansive category than a 'means', such that forces are ontologically basic to means, it is the creation of the means of life, expressing as it does the temporality inherent *in an act*, that must anchor our (provisional) temporal understanding of history. There is no reason to suggest that the dialectic of the forces and relations of production could not be rendered as reinforcing the temporality of the dialectic of the present and the past previously analysed, thereby reinforcing the relative priority of the historical present over the historical past (the dialectic of the forces and relations of production is *internal* to the historical present), but this is something that can only be done at the level of a specific mode of production (this is not our current task<sup>79</sup>).

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*Justice as the Charity of the Wise* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), 272. Marx expresses his admiration for Leibniz in a letter to Engels on 10 May 1870. See Marx and Engels, *MEW*, Band 32 (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1974), 504.

<sup>77</sup> Marx and Engels, *GI*, 50.

<sup>78</sup> Even if one tacitly accepts the historicist model of linear, progressive time, does the materialist concept of history not dictate that there is no historical temporality when there is no expansion of productive forces, that it is possible that stretches of chronological time can become 'stagnant' to the extent that they are void of historical time, outside of history itself?

<sup>79</sup> Chapter 4 investigates in more detail the essential correspondence between the creation of new needs and the expansion of productive forces.

What about the division of labour and class? This question clearly intersects with the dialectic of the forces and relations of production, but it must also be explored in its own right. In *The German Ideology*, there are certainly passages that register the idea that the division of labour and the resultant creation of classes is ‘one of the chief forces of history up till now.’<sup>80</sup> Indeed, as previously argued, if need constitutes the ontological basis of the sociality of human individuation, then we might follow this up by stating that the division of labour and class *are the (to date) fundamental historical expressions of this*. Ontologically this is true because this individuation first manifests itself through the division of labour<sup>81</sup>, and epistemologically this is true because the very thought of this as ‘historical’ – in fact the very thought of ‘history’ as opposed to its ‘actual act of genesis’<sup>82</sup> – relies on the existence of a ruling class, without which ‘the division between *material and spiritual labour*’ cannot appear.<sup>83</sup> It is crucial to note here that this is a division between material [*materiellen*] and spiritual (or ‘intellectual’) [*geistigen*] labour, *not* a division between manual and mental labour. In *The German Ideology* (or for that matter anywhere else), Marx does not speak of ‘a division between manual and mental labour’. Material labour – the ‘actual basis’ of history – is not reducible to manual labour [*manuelle Arbeit*], nor is mental labour the same thing as spiritual/intellectual labour, since mental labour is inseparable from material labour (even the harshest manual drudgery still involves cognitive activity). However, as regards spiritual/intellectual labour, it is precisely the opposite: it *must* be dissociated from material labour, in order for history to be thought. It is thus misleading to translate ‘*materiellen und geistigen Arbeit*’ as ‘manual and mental labour’: to do so closes the door on the ongoing constitution of the open relationship between history and materiality. To take a contemporary example: the service industries in so-called ‘cognitive capitalism’ would not be material labour were this translation to capture the meaning of the division between *materiellen und geistigen Arbeit*. Service labour – which like all labour necessarily has *some* manual dimension – *is* material labour. Within capitalism, there is no such thing as ‘immaterial labour’<sup>84</sup> except that which is spiritual labour, and only the bourgeoisie can be comprehended

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<sup>80</sup> Marx and Engels, *GI*, 65.

<sup>81</sup> What else but the social division of labour *first* differentiates one ‘individual’ from another?

<sup>82</sup> ‘The entire movement of history is, therefore, both its *actual* act of genesis (the birth act of its empirical existence) and also for its thinking consciousness the *comprehended* and *known* process of its *becoming*.’ Marx, *EPM*, 135. Chapter 4 will problematise the transhistoricality of this argument.

<sup>83</sup> The ‘division of labour only becomes truly such from the moment when a division between *material and spiritual labour* appears.’ Marx and Engels, *DI*, 31 (*GI*, 51). Emphasis added. The German reads as follows: ‘*Die Teilung der Arbeit wird erst wirklich Teilung von dem Augenblicke an, wo eine Teilung der materiellen und geistigen Arbeit eintritt.*’

<sup>84</sup> For Negri, ‘we live today in a society increasingly characterised by the hegemony of immaterial labour.’ Quoted in Tomba, *Marx’s Temporalities*, 145, ft. 243. More often than not, assertions such as these (thus the concept of ‘immaterial labour’) points to a basic misunderstanding of Marx, whereby matter, not sensuous human activity or labour, is the assumed ground of Marx’s concept of materialism.

as ‘immaterial labourers’ because they personify the thought (they are not the actual genesis) of history. Hence class is of vital importance to the materialist concept of history: it is a central condition of its thought. As Balibar puts it, ‘Marx...[extends] the scheme of the division of labour to its fullest extent...’, whereby he ‘accord[s] existence to classes on the dual plane of the division of labour and consciousness, and therefore *also* [makes]...the division of society into classes a condition or a structure of thought.’<sup>85</sup>

We should, however, raise two points of caution here. First, whilst the division of labour and class can be understood as ‘chief forces of history’ (to date), they should not be understood as ontologically originary forces of history in the same way that labour and need can and must. The importance of the division of labour and class is unquestionable, but from the standpoint of the basic intelligibility of ‘history’, they are both logically and ontologically ‘down the line’ from labour and need.<sup>86</sup> Second, we should be quite careful about how the division of labour and class are figured *transhistorically*. Whereas it is possible to consider the division of labour as truly transhistorical, from an original sexual division of labour implied by the third moment of history to some kind of technical division of labour under the conscious and rational control of the producers after capitalism, the same cannot be said of class: the social production of the means of life within communism cannot, of course, be conceived of as a ‘class act’.<sup>87</sup> We also need to be careful about over-ontologising the division of labour and class, which is to say not extending their meaning at the level of a specific mode of production (particularly capitalism) to history as a whole (for example, the ‘exclusive ownership of the means of production’ is a specifically capitalist feature of class formation, whereas something like ‘the differentiation and grouping of humans in relation to the surplus product’ might be understood as valid within all history to date). *However* – and this point guides us into Chapter 2 – the division of labour and class register a fundamental question that this thesis cannot ignore, but that Marx does not provide us with the means of answering. Simply put: how do we comprehend the relationship between individual, social and historical temporalities? The division of labour and class may be the historical expressions of the sociality of human individuation (‘the individual’ may first actualise itself through the division of labour and classes), but this does not explain how an individual act temporalises, nor does it explain how the temporalities thereby produced relate

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<sup>85</sup> Balibar, *The Philosophy of Marx*, 46, 44.

<sup>86</sup> There is a material basis to history that is structured by human need and the labour that creates the means of satisfying this need. It is *because* of this basis that the division of labour and classes become intelligible.

<sup>87</sup> Marx and Engels never develop a conceptual relationship between class and the first historical act in *The German Ideology*, and for good reason: whilst it might be suggested that the first historical act has, on some level, been structured by class relations until now, class cannot have a conceptual place *within* this act, even if it is (to date) a condition of thinking this act.

to social and historical temporalities. Stated differently, *The German Ideology* establishes the ontological primacy of social and historical being through the categories of labour and need, but it does not address the complicated relationship between individual, social and historical temporalities that these categories implicitly register. This is a question that a temporal reading of the materialist concept of history cannot avoid. It is a question that cuts to the heart of what, as previously argued, Kant and Hegel do not provide: the philosophical ground of this reading, which is to say an account of why and how the act itself temporalises. This question not only compels us to look beyond Marx. It also introduces something without which the concept of historical time cannot be thought: historical totalisation.

## Chapter Two

### Totalisation, Temporalisation and History: Heidegger and Sartre

It remains the case that the totalisation differs from the totality in that the latter *is* totalised while the former totalises itself. In this sense, it is obvious that to totalise *itself* means to temporalise *itself*.<sup>1</sup>

The human is a social being inasmuch as it is historically constituted as multiple individuals in relation to one another and those very relations themselves.<sup>2</sup> History and the human are inseparable concepts in Marx, thus the temporal reading of the materialist concept of history must also be understood as the temporal reading of the human which creates and is created by this history. This understanding is mediated by the transhistorical concept of labour in general. As the social production of the means of life, which is a dialectical production of the means of life, labour is an ontological domain of temporalisation because it constitutes the movement of negation. As in Hegel, the dialectical movement of negation is in Marx the first and most evident register of an active difference between the past, the present and the future. But is the historical status of negation thereby secured? Is negation thereby the movement of historical temporalisation? *The German Ideology* offers a particular dialectic as a possible foundation of historical time: the dialectic of the creation of the means to satisfy existing needs and the creation of new needs. And it is through negation that the three temporal coordinates within this dialectic first becomes intelligible, such that there is futurity immanent to the present's transcendence of the past. But in what sense is historical temporalisation about more than negation? In other words, with what, or rather through what, must negation be thought in order to reconstruct the materialist concept of history as a concept of historical time?

The proposition of this chapter is that a concept of historical time cannot be constructed out of the materialist concept of history until dialectical negation is put in relation to *historical totalisation*, which is to say *the totalisation of the time of all human lives*. Whether it is openly acknowledged, left unstated or disavowed, this totalisation is the overarching intelligibility

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<sup>1</sup> Sartre, *CDR* 1, 53.

<sup>2</sup> The 'social' is not just direct communal relations. As Marx states: 'Social activity...exist[s] by no means *only* in the form of some *directly* communal activity...when I am active *scientifically*...when I am engaged in activity which I can seldom perform in direct community with others, then I am *social*, because I am active as a *human*. Not only is the material of my activity given to me as a social product – as is even the language in which the thinker is active – my *own* existence *is* social activity, and therefore that which I make of myself, I make of myself for society and with the consciousness of myself as a social being.' Marx, *OPM*, 538 (*EPM*, 137).

and narrative of every post-Enlightenment conception of history from the mid-eighteenth century onwards. Within the modern philosophy of history, this is the sense in which the human is 'historical' because history is the development of the time of the human species *as a whole*. Marx does not thematise this totalisation in relation to the materialist concept of history. 'World history' and the 'world-historical' figure in *The German Ideology* (primarily in relation to alienation and its speculative end in communism), but they are tautologically defined by Marx and Engels<sup>3</sup>, and the extent to which they function as totalising concepts is unclear. The world market is depicted as an integral dimension of the production of world history 'for the first time'<sup>4</sup>, but its relation to the social production of the means of life is not established, and it is clearly a phenomenon specific to capitalism.<sup>5</sup> As with Marx's eleventh thesis on Feuerbach<sup>6</sup>, these concepts invoke the ordinary conception of 'world', a conception which (at least on the surface) is much more about space than it is about time. Therefore, the 'ongoing totalisation of the time of the human'<sup>7</sup> is a philosophical problem for the materialist concept of history, because the relationship between totalisation and negation within this concept remains undeveloped. What is this relationship? Namely, how is totalisation a kind of temporalisation itself, indissociable from and yet irreducible to the movement of negation?

These are crucial questions, if only because the consequence of not tying the movement of totalisation to temporalisation is the overdetermination of historical time in Marx by the other predominant thread of the post-Enlightenment conception of history: the idea that *the human is subject to change over time*. Totalisation is a condition of thinking this conception of history, because totalisation is a condition of thinking the objects – the totality of time and the totality of history – in, through and across which this conception of change is understood to occur. After Koselleck, this is history as 'the collective singular form of *Geschichte*, which since around 1780 can be conceived as history in and for itself in the absence of an associated subject or object.'<sup>8</sup> In Marx, this is the idea that social relations and the individuals which constitute these relations are subject to change over time, and moreover that the ways in which social relations change over time differs from how individuals change over time, and in fact determines how individuals change over time. In *The German Ideology* and elsewhere, Marx

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<sup>3</sup> 'The proletariat can...only exist *world-historically*, just as communism, its activity, can only have a "world-historical" existence. World-historical existence of individuals means [the] existence of individuals which is directly linked up with world history.' Marx and Engels, *GI*, 56.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* 78.

<sup>5</sup> 'The tendency to create the *world market* is directly given in the concept of capital itself.' Marx, *Grundrisse*, 408.

<sup>6</sup> 'The philosophers have only *interpreted* the world, in various ways; the point is to *change* it.' Marx, *ToF*, 423.

<sup>7</sup> Osborne, 'Marx and the philosophy of time', 16.

<sup>8</sup> Koselleck, *Future's Past: on the Semantics of Historical Time*, 236.

frequently invokes this historicist conception of historical time, because he implicitly treats historical time as the medium in which change within and between modes of production occurs. As the previous chapter demonstrates, the social production of the means of life bears a nonlinear temporal structure, but, this chapter maintains, Marx's failure to examine this production in relation to totalisation unavoidably relegates historical change and historical difference within the materialist concept of history to a historicism which might be summed up as 'the change and difference between one specific time and place and another'. However, the totalisation of history does not thereby constitute an appeal to the 'synchronic' as against the 'diachronic'. And this is not, as Althusser has it, because the synchronic is an instant within 'the ideological conception of a continuous-homogenous time', from which the diachronic becomes 'successive contingent presents in the time continuum.'<sup>9</sup> Rather, synchrony and diachrony are in origin *ahistorical* concepts which emerge from structuralist linguistics – qua the *atemporal* succession of semiological systems – and are thus ill-suited to thinking the essential relation between totalisation, temporalisation and the materialist concept of history.<sup>10</sup> Many questions arise: in what sense does totalisation register a non-historicist understanding of historical change and historical difference? In other words, in what sense does totalisation register an understanding of historical time as constituted by its own historicity, which is to say by different modes of production themselves? More basically, what is the relationship between totalisation and historicalisation?

In order to address these questions – questions which will be carried over into Chapters 3 and 4 – it is necessary to systematically investigate the relationship between totalisation and temporalisation, and to do so at the level of the *phenomenological present* which 'contains the totality of the temporal spectrum within itself' and which 'alone gives direction to history.'<sup>11</sup> This present is not the Aristotelian instant within the divisible continuity of movement, but rather the present in the sense of the Augustinian 'threefold present' of memory, attention and expectation, the present, that is to say, in the sense of the durational 'thick present' of Edmund Husserl's phenomenology of time consciousness, a constitutive present which must both be established in its own right and materialised as a historical present<sup>12</sup> (the prioritised present of

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<sup>9</sup> Althusser, 'The Errors of Classical Economics: an Outline for a Concept of Historical Time', 96.

<sup>10</sup> See, in particular, Peter Osborne, *The Politics of Time: Modernity and Avant-Garde* (London: Verso, 1995), 27-8. On this point, Osborne's work is indebted to Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 55-6. As we will learn, Sartre makes use of the 'synchronic' and the 'diachronic' throughout both volumes of the *Critique*, unintentionally smuggling in a historicism to his account.

<sup>11</sup> Osborne, *The Politics of Time: Modernity and Avant-Garde*, 49, 140.

<sup>12</sup> See Harry Harootunian, 'Remembering the Historical Present', *Critical Inquiry* 33 (Spring 2007), 477. For an analysis of the phenomenological present in Husserl, see Paul Ricœur, *Time and Narrative*,



the first historical act). Whilst the phenomenological present is not reducible to individual action, individual action is nonetheless ontologically prioritised within this present because, this chapter maintains, individual action is the first standpoint from which totalisation and its relation to temporalisation becomes intelligible. Consequently, individual action is the initial standpoint from which the existential structure of temporalisation renders the totalisation of history unavoidable.<sup>13</sup> Herein lies the crucial importance of Heidegger's *Being and Time*. His phenomenological ontology of Dasein (literally 'being-there') comprises the first two sections of this chapter because one of the main objectives of this ontology is to secure this priority of individual action through Dasein's relationship to its death. For Heidegger, both the awaiting and the anticipation of this existential death are indelibly individual acts which ground the fact that 'temporality temporalises' as the ontological meaning of 'care', which, as we will learn, is the ontological meaning of Dasein as a structural whole.<sup>14</sup> As we will examine, this being-towards-death (albeit only in its 'authentic' mode) is the 'hidden basis' of Dasein's historical being, its 'historicality' [*Geschichtlichkeit*].<sup>15</sup>

The first volume of Sartre's *Critique of Dialectical Reason* (hereafter *Critique*) is the focus of the final section of this chapter. An existential reading of the relationship between the new materialism of *praxis* in the *Theses on Feuerbach* and the historical materialism of need in *The German Ideology*, the *Critique* systematically reconstructs dialectics as the very movement of totalisation. For Sartre, individual *praxis* not only ontologically grounds this reconstruction, but so too the practical identity between totalisation and temporalisation, because it is individual *praxis* wherein the conceptual difference between 'totalisation' and 'totality' is first revealed. This is the sense in which totalisation is a ceaselessly developing activity of synthetic unification<sup>16</sup>, whereas a totality is the exteriorised product of this activity, that which has been cut off from the totalising process of its production (which it nonetheless contains sedimented within itself). However – in Heidegger and Sartre alike – this process of unification should not be understood as subsequent to an existing state of difference. As with the previous chapter (one moment, the existence of a need, is not subsequently followed by another, the creation of the means to satisfy that need), there is no chronological succession

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*Volume 3* [1985], trans. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1988), 23-44.

<sup>13</sup> Osborne, *The Politics of Time: Modernity and Avant-Garde*, X.

<sup>14</sup> For Heidegger, care [*Sorge*] is the totalised manifold of existence, which he formally defines as follows: 'the being of Dasein means ahead-of-itself-being-already-in (the world) as being-alongside (entities encountered within-the-world).' Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* [1927] (hereafter *BT*), trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper Collins, 1962), 237. Heidegger establishes temporality as the ontological meaning of care in §65 of *Being and Time*.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.* 438.

<sup>16</sup> Sartre, *CDR* 1, 46.

here. Rather, following Heidegger, to whom Derrida's concept of *différance* is also indebted, totalisation *is* the production of difference, a unification whose unity *is* the process of its differentiation. For Sartre, this understanding of unification grounds the practical identity between totalisation and temporalisation, such that temporalisation is, as previously stated, the production of the very difference between the past, the present and the future.<sup>17</sup> The relationship between totalisation and temporalisation is thus a relationship of dependence: the totalising structure of individual *praxis* totalises precisely because it produces temporal difference. The totalising structure of individual *praxis* is predicated on temporalisation, just as the temporalising structure of individual *praxis* is predicated on totalisation. For Sartre, this dependence grounds the primary (ontological) and secondary (epistemological) intelligibility of history. It also, as we will see, enables the construction of a concept of historicalisation.

Existential temporalisation is the subversive core of a phenomenological ontology of human being, because it upends how we (to use a Heideggerian expression) 'initially and for the most part' understand action [*Aktion, Handeln*], activity [*Aktivität, Tätigkeit*] and the act [*Akt, Tat*] themselves. In this sense, existential temporalisation intervenes into existing claims made on behalf of the originary character of *The German Ideology*. It intervenes, to give two examples, into Althusser's assertion that *The German Ideology* represents an 'epistemological break' and 'state of rupture' in Marx's work<sup>18</sup>, as well as Georges Labica's contention that *The German Ideology* is a groundbreaking 'construction site' for a 'scraping operation' and 'settling of accounts' with Marx's predecessors, his contemporaries and himself.<sup>19</sup> However, against Labica's outright reduction of all philosophy to ideology, there is a distinct possibility that philosophical discourses on temporalisation might in fact *enrich* the materialist concept of history, and that this concept of history might in turn enrich these discourses, such that it forces these discourses to reckon with '...men and women, not in any fantastic isolation and fixation, but in their actual, empirically perceptible process of development under definite conditions.'<sup>20</sup> *The German Ideology* may convey a desire, as Althusser puts it, to 'purely and

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<sup>17</sup> In a certain sense, the *Critique* allows us to grasp the difference between totalisation and totality as analogous to the difference between temporalisation and time, such that time is the exteriorised product of temporalisation, cut off from its own temporalising process, and subject to inertia. This dovetails with the doubled meaning of the German *Gegenwart* as both presence and the present, and points to one dimension of Sartre's indebtedness to Heidegger (who invokes this doubled meaning across his corpus). In addition to Sartre, Althusser relies on Heidegger on this point. See Althusser, 'The Errors of Classical Economics: an Outline for a Concept of Historical Time', 95.

<sup>18</sup> Louis Althusser, *For Marx* [1965], trans. Ben Brewster (London: Verso, 1996), 33, 36.

<sup>19</sup> Georges Labica, *Marxism and the Status of Philosophy* [1976], trans. Kate Soper and Martin Ryle (Brighton: The Harvester Press, 1980), 165-72.

<sup>20</sup> Marx and Engels, *DI*, 27 (*GI*, 47-8).

simply abolish'<sup>21</sup> philosophy, but this desire not only 'hardly means that there is no philosophy at work in *The German Ideology*'<sup>22</sup>, but, we might add, hardly means that there need not be more philosophy put to work within *The German Ideology*. Marx's emancipatory project need not converge with Labica's militant (but not necessarily radical) grasp of Marx's materialism as 'situating all philosophy, whether idealist or materialist, in its true place, namely in *ideology*', as rendering the notion of a Marxist philosophy 'absurd'.<sup>23</sup> The philosophy within Marxist philosophy need not be that philosophy (e.g. classical German idealism) in opposition to which Althusser, Labica and Marx articulate the 'science of history'.<sup>24</sup> Herbert Marcuse's notion of 'concrete philosophy' is a useful example of this. For Marcuse, philosophy is 'the concrete distress of human existence'<sup>25</sup> which makes visible, and demands that we overcome, our contemporary historical situation. This philosophy, what Marcuse calls 'philosophising' – philosophy as a concrete mode of human existence – is a far cry from the abstract thought from which Althusser, Labica and Marx seek to dissociate themselves, and with which they are arguably preoccupied, to the point where they dismiss, to name the most prominent figure, the practical and concrete dimensions of Hegel's thought. To invoke Engels, perhaps it is not an 'exit from philosophy' which is warranted, but an exit from the exit from philosophy. As Balibar points out, *this* exit is not a simple return to the inside of philosophy unburdened by history.<sup>26</sup> It is an exit marked by a dialectic between philosophy and Marx's own foreign land (history), a foreign land which is itself a dialectic between philosophy and non-philosophy.

Yet individual action cannot be the only standpoint from which totalisation and its relation to temporalisation is intelligible. What historical totalisation compels us examine – a question which is suppressed by Heidegger, underdetermined by Sartre and simply unasked by Marx – is the ongoing constitution of complex relationships between individual, social and historical temporalities. Take, as one example, Marx's conception of the 'social individual'. For Marx, this individual is already and entirely determined by society<sup>27</sup>, such that the social

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<sup>21</sup> Louis Althusser, 'The Historical Task of Marxist Philosophy', in Louis Althusser, *The Humanist Controversy and Other Writings* [1966-7], ed. François Matheron, trans. G.M. Goshgarian (New York and London: Verso, 2003), 174.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Labica, *Marxism and the Status of Philosophy*, 280, 365.

<sup>24</sup> Each in his own way, Althusser, Labica and Marx fail to critically appropriate the place of 'non-philosophy' within Feuerbach's *Preliminary Theses on the Reform of Philosophy* [1842], a place which qualifies the decisiveness and originality of their respective formulations of a science of history.

<sup>25</sup> Herbert Marcuse, 'On Concrete Philosophy' [1929], trans. Matthew Erlin, in Herbert Marcuse, *Heideggerian Marxism*, ed. John Abromeit and Richard Wolin (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005), 36. Marcuse's 'concrete distress' derives from Kierkegaard's stance that 'qualitative pressure' must be placed on philosophy in order to exist in the public realm, as only the public realm realises the immense concrete difficulties of social and historical existence, of 'existing-with-one-another'.

<sup>26</sup> Balibar, *The Philosophy of Marx*, 40, 119.

<sup>27</sup> Marx, *Grundrisse*, 248.

relation – not the individual – is the basic constituent of society. And yet, he also suggests that this individual is ‘the great pillar of production and of wealth.’<sup>28</sup> At the level of the materialist concept of history, it is unclear how this ‘social individual’ should be read, in no small part because Marx’s analyses of social individuality and the social individual are completely tied to his critique of political economy (e.g. to capitalism). At best, we can only suggest that the materialist concept of history schematises the development of the social individual at the level of different modes of production. The point here is that it would be inadequate, and actually misleading, to temporally read the ‘social individual’ exclusively from the standpoint of its individuality. Yet this standpoint remains the privileged point of departure in the philosophy of time. The simple fact is that existing discourses on temporalisation are principally tied to the individual as the crux of that which is implicitly temporal. The individual may be a social or collective individual, as it is (to varying degrees) in Heidegger and Sartre, but the individual is to date the predominant basis of temporalisation within the modern European philosophical tradition more generally. As Sartre articulates it (this sentence comes right after the quotation that frames this chapter): ‘Indeed, as I have shown elsewhere, *the only* conceivable temporality is that of a totalisation as an individual process.’<sup>29</sup> There is no prevailing philosophy of time which *begins* its account of temporalisation from either the standpoint of the sociality or the historicity of the act. The philosophical tradition that we have inherited resists the possibility of theorising temporalisation from any other basis than that of the individual. The philosophy of time needs to think temporalisation from an origin other than individual *praxis*, as in Sartre, and other than the ‘in each case mineness’ of death, as in Heidegger. In order to be properly systematic, this philosophy must register the social and the historical as implicitly temporal in their own right, from which the complex relationship between individual, social and historical temporalities can be investigated in their reciprocal – and asymmetric – determination. The individual is this chapter’s necessary point of departure, but we must also insist that a concept of historical time can only be constructed out of Marx’s work when and if ‘temporalisation’ itself is conceived in direct relation to historicalisation. The meaning and consequences of this will remain unknown until the concept of historicalisation is investigated in its own right. The final section of this chapter, on Sartre’s *Critique*, begins this exploration.

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid. 705.

<sup>29</sup> Sartre, *CDR* 1, 53. Emphasis added. The ‘as I have shown elsewhere’ is a self-reference to Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology* [1943], trans. Hazel Estella Barnes (London and New York: Routledge Classics, 2003), 130-193.

## 2.1 Marx and Heidegger: a Framework for Dialogue

There is no immediate nor obvious relationship between Heidegger's existential analytic of Dasein and Marx's conception of the human. Unlike Sartre's existential reading of individual *praxis*, the very possibility of reading Heidegger and Marx in relation to one another must first be established before Heidegger's analysis of Dasein's totalising being-towards-death is brought into relation with Marx's philosophy of history. There is no reconfiguration of materialism as human practice in Heidegger, nor even an identifiable concept of materialism as such. Nonetheless, *the project of Being and Time* is to explicate human action as implicitly temporal, to produce an existential analytic (Dasein) whereby time becomes the horizon for understanding human action. It is difficult to overstate the decisiveness, originality and critical function of this analytic. It engenders a philosophy of time which has no counterpart in the modern European tradition because it is unrivalled in its attempt to generate and sustain a framework for grasping, after Kant, the entire field of time [*Zeitbegriff*] itself. Heidegger's concept of 'originary temporality' is, as William Blattner puts it, 'a manifold of nonsuccessive phenomena' which aspires to 'explain ordinary time'<sup>30</sup>, or what Heidegger generally refers to as 'the vulgar conception of time'. The fact that *Being and Time* attempts this explanation is unprecedented, and it is as consequential to the philosophy of time as are the particular merits and limits of the work itself. Every philosophy of time after Heidegger, particularly the anti-Heideggerian philosophy of time, remains (and not simply in a chronological sense) a post-Heideggerian philosophy. Heidegger is therefore an unavoidable route, and, this thesis argues, an undeniable asset, to the concept of historical time. Hence before we tackle the relationship between totalisation and temporalisation, we need to consider the ways in which Heidegger's existential analytic of Dasein dovetails with Marx's concept of the human. What dimensions of *Being and Time* resonate with Marx's work more generally?

*Being and Time* disrupts any fixed distinction between theory and practice, between a 'first philosophy' (*prōtē philosophia* [πρώτη φιλοσοφία], which is for Aristotle metaphysics) and a practical philosophy, and therefore between thinking and action. In Heidegger, Reiner Schürmann argues, '...action itself, and not only its theory, loses its foundation or *archē*,' and by extension, 'action deprived of *archē* [is] the condition of the thought which deconstructs the *archē*.'<sup>31</sup> The essence of Dasein lies in its 'to be' [*Zu-sein*], but this being (or 'be-ing',

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<sup>30</sup> William D. Blattner, *Heidegger's Temporal Idealism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 26.

<sup>31</sup> Reiner Schürmann, *Heidegger on Being and Acting: From Principles to Anarchy* [1982], trans. Christine-Marie Gros (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 1, 7. Schürmann is undeniably a deconstructionist, and thus reads Heidegger's professed 'dismantling' and 'destruction' of the history of ontology in Derridean terms.

from the German *seiend*, the gerund of the infinitive *sein*) is not a static ‘presence-at-hand’ registered by categories of existents (ontological ‘whats’), but is rather the movement and motion of an entity inclined and orientated towards a ‘there’.<sup>32</sup> In *Being and Time*, Dasein is reciprocally figured as a form of kinetic thinking and thinking kinesis, and hence it rejects the division between sensibility and conceptuality as authorised by Kant’s transcendental logic, in addition to the function of the *cogito* in Descartes’s philosophy of self-consciousness. Exceeding Kant’s critiques, Dasein gives us categories and existentials, ontological ‘hows’ or dynamic states of Dasein’s fluid character which (Heidegger claims) collectively constitute the sense or ‘meaning of being’ [*Seinssinn*] as such. The where of Dasein’s existence is what Heidegger names ‘the world’, but this world is not an ontical totality of entities we passively find ourselves in, but is rather the ‘wherein’ of Dasein’s act of understanding, an act already in the process of making itself and already in the process of exceeding itself.<sup>33</sup> Significance makes up the structure or ‘worldhood’ of this world and gives this act of understanding its phenomenological intelligibility. In Heidegger, ‘understanding’ is not a cognitive act but an existential ability-to-be [*Seinkönnen*]. More precisely, understanding is an existential constituted by projection upon possibilities, without which there is no world. Dasein cannot be without already always being an understanding ability-to-be in a world.

Heidegger’s notion of world is structured by a complex relationship to the necessity and universality of *a priori* synthetic judgements in Kant.<sup>34</sup> On one level, Heidegger is faithful to Kant, even as he expands and recodes the divisions within Kant’s transcendental logic through his own framework of ontological difference (the difference, that is to say, between being and entity). As Heidegger states: ‘...in the problem of *a priori* synthetic judgements still another type of synthesis is concerned which must bring something forth about the entity not first derived from it through experience. This bringing forth of the determination of the being of the entity is a precursory act of reference to the entity. This pure ‘reference-to...’ (synthesis) first constitutes the direction and the horizon within which the entity is first capable of being experienced in the empirical synthesis.’<sup>35</sup> And yet, *Being and Time* makes clear – even if it is not explicitly stated by Heidegger – that an internal difference within one of the coordinates of ontological difference creates a tension with the function of ontological difference as the condition of possibility of *a priori* synthetic judgements. This is because the existence of a

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<sup>32</sup> Heidegger, *BT*, 67.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.* 119.

<sup>34</sup> Most basically, Heidegger suggests that ‘Kant reduces the problem of the possibility of ontology to the question: “How are *a priori* synthetic judgements possible?”’ Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, 18.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.* 20. ‘Entity’ used in lieu of Churchill’s translation of ‘*Seiendes*’ as ‘essent’.

particular entity (more specifically, the understanding ability-to-be of Dasein) is itself the condition of the intelligibility of the being of any entity. Dasein is an ‘ontically distinctive’ entity because ‘it is ontological.’<sup>36</sup> It is an entity whose very being makes being ‘an issue’ for it, and this being towards which it comports itself is what Heidegger formally designates as ‘existence’. Dasein’s existence (which in Heidegger is the ontological meaning of experience) is the condition of possibility of *a priori* synthetic judgements, be they existential (‘precursory acts of reference’) or cognitive judgements. Specifically, being-in-the-world is this condition: ‘...being-in-the-world is a state of Dasein which is necessary *a priori*.’<sup>37</sup> Consequently, Heidegger’s concept of world significantly modifies the contours of purity in Kant, such that (1) existence, the essential being of Dasein, can be ontologically disclosed as originary only if no cognition is, to borrow Kant’s term in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, first ‘intermixed’; and (2) cognition is absolutely dependent on empirical acts and experiences within the world. In this regard, Heidegger’s stated desire to enact a transition from ‘pre-ontology’ to ‘fundamental ontology’ in *Being and Time* engenders the possibility, to repeat a manoeuvre in the previous chapter<sup>38</sup>, of reconstructing a decisive passage from the introduction to the ‘B’ edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason* in the following manner: ‘...although all our existence commences **with** cognition, ...it does not on that account all arise **from** cognition.’<sup>39</sup> As with Marx and Engels’s first historical act, Heidegger’s ‘world’ imposes the *a posteriori*, which is to say experience and the empirical, on Kant’s *a priori* whilst holding on to the necessary and universal character exclusive to this *a priori*. This is, in Marx and Heidegger alike, a distinctly temporal exclusivity. In Marx, this is the sense in which the ‘creation of fresh life’ – as one domain of the biological – wholly depends on social and historical time for its intelligibility. In Heidegger, this is how the temporal character of the ‘earlier’, the ‘in advance’, the ‘prior’, the ‘beforehand’, etc. must be read<sup>40</sup>, along with the temporality of necessity and universality more generally: ‘in each case’ through facticity and finitude. The key issue here is that Dasein registers a basic tension within ontology itself: the *a priori* is conceivable only when Dasein as an existential analytic preconditions Dasein as a self-understanding (‘existentiell’) entity,

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<sup>36</sup> Heidegger, *BT*, 32.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.* 79.

<sup>38</sup> See footnote 62 in Chapter 1.

<sup>39</sup> Once again: ‘But although all our cognition commences **with** experience, yet it does not on that account all arise **from** experience.’ Kant, *CPR*, B 1-2, 136.

<sup>40</sup> ‘Can the *a priori* which in the tradition of ontology is held to be a characteristic of the determination of being be explained by asserting that the ‘earlier’ which it implies ‘naturally’ has nothing to do with ‘time’? Certainly, it has nothing to do with the ‘time’ recognized by the ordinary comprehension of time. But is this ‘earlier’ positively determined thereby, and is this annoying temporal character pushed aside? Or does it not reappear as a new and more difficult problem?’ Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, 249.

and yet only this self-understanding, only Dasein's ontical affairs, secures being-in-the-world as the necessary and universal makeup of the *a priori*. The importance that Heidegger attaches to the world is beyond dispute: '...Dasein, insofar as it *is*, has always submitted itself already to a "world" which it encounters, and this *submission* belongs essentially to its being.'<sup>41</sup>

We must now address the question of the relationship between Dasein and individual human beings (entities), because this question grounds any attempt to develop a 'framework for dialogue'<sup>42</sup> between Dasein and Marx's conception of the human more generally. This framework is, this thesis argues, a vital (and to date unexplored) aspect of what Heidegger in his 1949 'Letter on Humanism' calls 'the historical in being', that dimension of being within which, for Heidegger, a 'productive dialogue' between phenomenology and existentialism, on the one hand, and Marxism, on the other, 'first becomes possible.'<sup>43</sup> The crux of the matter – the condition of this framework – is the possible conjunction (but by no means unity) between the individuation of Dasein in *Being and Time* and the social individuation of the human in Marx. The problem of individuation is at the heart of *Being and Time*: from the outset, Dasein is not just nor immediately presented as an individual.<sup>44</sup> A pivotal part of the contribution that 'being-in-the-world' makes to the philosophy of the subject is its irreducibility to individual human entities. However, this is *not* to accept the terms of Heidegger's understanding of this contribution, i.e. the notion that being-in-the-world is a new kind of subjectivity because it completely evades the 'common, subjectivistic concept of "subject".'<sup>45</sup> On one level, Dasein

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<sup>41</sup> Heidegger, *BT*, 120-21. 'The world is therefore something "wherein" Dasein as an entity already *was*.' Ibid. 106. As Macquarrie and Robinson note, Heidegger's use of *angewiesen* ('submitted') and *Angewiesenheit* ('submission') in this passage simultaneously means to assign, to allot, to depend on and to be at the mercy of something. Ibid. 121.

<sup>42</sup> See David Schweickart, 'Heidegger and Marx: A Framework for Dialogue', in *Heidegger: The Man and the Thinker*, ed. Thomas Sheehan (New Brunswick and London: Transaction Publishers, 1996), 229-43. Whilst individual labour does not figure in his account, Schweickart persuasively analyses how Heidegger's critique of Marxism as a humanist (which for Heidegger = metaphysical) discourse in his 'Letter on Humanism' enriches our understanding of liberatory *praxis*.

<sup>43</sup> Martin Heidegger, 'Letter on "Humanism"' [1949], trans. Frank A. Capuzzi, in Martin Heidegger, *Pathmarks* [1967], ed. William McNeill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 259. For Heidegger, since 'estrangement attains an essential dimension of history' in Marx, 'the Marxist view of history is superior to that of other historical accounts.' Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Consider the following passage: 'Being and the structure of being lie beyond every entity and every possible character which an entity may possess. *Being is the transcendens pure and simple*. And the transcendence of Dasein's being is distinctive in that it implies the possibility and the necessity of the most radical *individuation*.' Heidegger, *BT*, 62.

<sup>45</sup> Martin Heidegger, *The Metaphysical Foundations of Logic* [1928], trans. Michael Heim (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 195. See as well Einar Øverenget, *Seeing the Self: Heidegger on Subjectivity* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1998), 103. In the Leibniz lectures, Heidegger problematically reads the transcendental subject in Kant, and the *a priori* which it activates, as 'worldless', so as to clear space for 'being-in-the-world...[to] fundamentally transform the concept[s] of subjectivity and...the subjective.' Heidegger, *The Metaphysical Foundations of Logic*, 195.



is *not* a substantial (present-at-hand), thinking ‘I-thing’ [*Ichding*] outfitted with a body; it is not a (conventionally rendered) Cartesian subject. But on another level, it *must* be this subject. It must, on Heidegger’s own terms, be this concept of the individual consistent with the (so to speak) common, individualistic concept of the ‘individual’. As we will see, this need not be a problem for *Being and Time*, even if Heidegger creates it as one. Being-in-the-world is not an ‘originary existentiale’ in isolation from ‘world-historical happening’ [*weltgeschichtliches Geschehen*], but Heidegger precludes the possibility that the ontological structure of this happening might (and on his own terms need) structure the *Seinsfrage* itself (the question of the meaning of being in general). The issue here, first of all, is that the ontological structure of world-historical happening (in Marx and Heidegger alike) constitutes the existence of the isolated and alienated – which is to say the ‘common’ – individual.

Akin to Wilhelm Dilthey’s ‘life-nexus’, what is pre-given in *Being and Time* is Dasein’s being-in-the-world, *not* its individualised existence (for its part, the pre-givenness of Husserl’s ‘lifeworld’ in *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology* (1936) derives from Heidegger’s ‘world’). Being-in-the-world is ontologically prior to the individual; it is only from being-in-the-world that Dasein as an individual entity first becomes possible. In Heidegger, to render Dasein as a pre-existing individual is to render it as originally present-at-hand, a fallacy that reverberates with Lukács’s position in *History and Class Consciousness* (1923) that the ‘individual subject’ is quite simply the product of the generalised reification of social relations.<sup>46</sup> In fact, much of the scholarship in the American analytical tradition also maintains that Dasein cannot be reduced to discrete human entities, that there is, in other words, no ‘separate and unique Dasein for each person.’<sup>47</sup> In his analysis of the ‘who’ of everyday Dasein, Charles Guignon emphasises Heidegger’s claim that Dasein is ‘not the egotistical person, not the ontically isolated individual.’<sup>48</sup> For Guignon, ‘in the description of everyday being-in-the-world, what emerges is a picture of Dasein which is closer to Dilthey’s

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<sup>46</sup> Highlighting §10 and §83 in *Being and Time*, where Heidegger explicitly discusses the reification of consciousness, Lucien Goldmann provocatively suggests that *Being and Time* is a direct (and yet unacknowledged) response to Lukács’s *History and Class Consciousness*. Lucien Goldmann, *Lukács and Heidegger: Towards a New Philosophy* [1973], trans. William Q. Boelhower (London and Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977), 27-39. Goldmann’s understanding of Heidegger is suspect, but it is certainly possible that Heidegger’s derivation of the ‘present-at-hand’ from the ‘ready-to-hand’ could be cross-read with Lukács’s account of reification as yielded by the instrumental rationality of capitalist social relations.

<sup>47</sup> John Haugeland, ‘Truth and Finitude: Heidegger’s Transcendental Existentialism’, in *Heidegger, Authenticity, and Modernity: Essays in Honour of Hubert L. Dreyfus, Vol. 1*, ed. Mark A. Wrathall and Jeff Malpas (Cambridge and London: MIT Press, 2000), 46.

<sup>48</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Metaphysische Anfangsgründe der Logik im Ausgang von Leibniz* [1928], in Martin Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe, Abteilung 2: Vorlesungen 1923-1944, Band 26* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1978), 172.

conception of “objective mind” than it is to the Cartesian subject or a monad...there is no plural for “Dasein”, and Heidegger seldom speaks of “*a* Dasein”. “Dasein” is not a “count noun” that ranges over particular individuals, but is more like a “mass noun”. It captures the idea of a “clearing” of intelligibility which can more properly be understood as a cultural totality than as a collection of individuals.<sup>49</sup> Carol White maintains that Dasein is first and foremost the entity we all are: it is what we share in common. This is the sense in which the individual is, following Marx, the bearer – the personification – of Dasein. The relationship between Dasein and the human is ‘graphically ontological’: ‘we are the entity through whom what it is “to be”...is revealed, and thus we are the “there”...where Being is disclosed.’<sup>50</sup> The structuralist overtones here are obvious. White attributes the predominant misreading of the individuation of Dasein to translation. She is explicitly critical of Macquarrie and Robinson’s continual pluralisation of Heidegger’s collective singular term ‘*das Seiende*’ (entity or what-is). Thus, “‘*das Seiende...sind wir je selbst*” becomes “we are ourselves the **entities**” and “*das Sein des Seienden*” becomes “the Being of **entities**”.<sup>51</sup> For White, the individuation of Dasein denotes the demarcation of Dasein from other domains of what-is, such that its being cannot be confused with that of other entity. Individuation is the constitution of Dasein’s existential self as itself, radically situating the ‘there’ of Dasein. It is only because of this individuation that one individual can be differentiated from another. Is it possible to suggest, therefore, that Dasein is *originarily* a social rather than individual entity?

These are convincing readings of Heidegger, but they must be squared with Heidegger’s constitution of Dasein as a social entity, such that an individual Dasein [*ein einzelnes Dasein*] – an entity which definitely figures in *Being and Time* – encounters what Heidegger calls ‘the others’. On the surface, the category of ‘the social’ rarely appears in *Being and Time*. In its place, catalysed by the question of ‘who’ Dasein is in its everydayness, Heidegger presents two existentials as ‘equi-originary’ [*gleichursprünglich*] with being-in-the-world: ‘being-

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<sup>49</sup> Charles B. Guignon, *Heidegger and the Problem of Knowledge* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1983), 104.

<sup>50</sup> Carol J. White, ‘Dasein, Existence, and Death’, in *Heidegger Reexamined, Vol. 1: Dasein, Authenticity, and Death*, ed. Hubert L. Dreyfus and Mark A. Wrathall (London: Routledge, 2002), 333.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid. 332. Emphasis added. Macquarrie and Robinson frequently interject ‘one’ and ‘one’s’ into their translation where ‘one’ [*man*] and ‘one’s’ [*eigenen*] do not appear in the German original, effectively compelling the English-language reader to comprehend Dasein as only an individual and not also a transindividual entity. To name two examples: ‘*einen Ausstand an Seinkönnen*’ becomes ‘something still outstanding in **one’s** potentiality-for-Being’ (Heidegger, *BT*, 279) and ‘*Endlichkeit der Existenz*’ becomes ‘finitude of **one’s** existence’ (ibid. 435). However, it is crucial to note that ‘one’ and ‘one’s’ regularly appear in Heidegger’s analysis of Dasein’s sociality. Thus ‘*Mitsein ist eine Bestimmtheit des je **eigenen** Daseins*’ is accurately rendered as ‘Being-with is in every case a characteristic of *one’s* own Dasein’ (ibid. 157). Emphases added.

with' and 'Dasein-with'.<sup>52</sup> For Heidegger, being-in-the-world *is* being-with others: 'the world is always the one that I share with others. The world of Dasein is a *with-world*.'<sup>53</sup> The others are intraworldly entities. They are confronted in the 'environmental context of equipment', the 'for-the-sake-of-which' structure which grounds the world as a referential totality of signifying actions. Put differently, the encounter with the others is fundamentally enabled by what Heidegger designates as the 'ready-to-hand', an entity whose essential being ('readiness-to-hand') is defined by an 'assignment' or 'involvement' within-the-world. The ready-to-hand is not defined by being a tangible object in space (this is the present-at-hand), but rather by its practical relation to the world. This brings us to Heidegger's formal definition of the others:

By "others" we do not mean all the rest but me – those over against whom the "I" stands out. They are rather those from whom, for the most part, one [*man*] does *not* distinguish oneself – those among whom one is too. This being-there-too... with them does not have the ontological character of a being-present-at-hand-along-"with" them within a world. This "with" is something of the character of Dasein; the "too" means a sameness of being as circumspectively concerned being-in-the-world.<sup>54</sup>

This passage expresses a complex sociality at the core of the being of Dasein. As an existential analytic, Dasein represents an incipient ontology of the social as a particular kind of 'transindividual individuation'.<sup>55</sup> Specifically, Dasein's sociality is a twofold individuation: following White, it sets Dasein off from other domains of entity (only Dasein, not the ready-to-hand nor the present-at-hand, is capable of being-with) but only because, and here opposing White, this sociality differentiates one individual Dasein from another as 'for the most part' indistinguishable. Neither the ready-to-hand nor the present-at-hand are capable of being social, but, unlike Dasein, they are radically differentiated within-the-world. Herein lies a crucial dimension of the world, and to push Heidegger further than what he offers, the ready-to-hand within-the-world: it conditions Dasein's by and large undifferentiated sociality with

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid. 149. §26 of *Being and Time*, 'The Dasein-with of Others and Everyday Being-with', has been widely commented on and is crucial to the work of Jean-Paul Sartre, Emmanuel Levinas, Jean-Luc Nancy, Jacques Derrida and Roberto Esposito.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid. 155. As he puts it a bit later: 'So far as Dasein *is* at all, it has being-with-one-another as its kind of being.' Ibid. 163.

<sup>54</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit* [1927] (hereafter *SZ*), in Martin Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe, Abteilung 1: Veröffentlichte Schriften 1914-1970, Band 2* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1977), 158 (*BT*, 154).

<sup>55</sup> The notion of 'transindividual individuation' has recently gained currency in the Anglo-American academy, primarily due to a growing reception of Gilbert Simondon and his commentators. See, for instance, Muriel Combes, *Gilbert Simondon and the Philosophy of the Transindividual* [1999], trans. Thomas LaMarre (Cambridge and London: MIT Press, 2013). For readings of Marx which draw on Simondon, see Luca Basso, *Marx and Singularity: from the Early Writings to the Grundrisse* [2008], trans. Arianna Bove (Leiden/Boston/Cologne: Brill, 2012), as well as Jason Read, 'The Production of Subjectivity: from Transindividuality to the Commons', *New Formations* 70 (Winter 2011), 113-31.

the others. The world ‘frees’ the others, not as ready-to-hand nor as present-at-hand, but as ‘like the very Dasein which frees them, in that *they are there too, and there with it.*’<sup>56</sup> For Jean-Luc Nancy, this sociality forms ‘the very humble layer of our everyday experience.’<sup>57</sup> The others are the ‘who’ of everyday Dasein, and this is the existential meaning of their being, their ‘Dasein-with’. As Heidegger puts it, ‘this Dasein-with of the others is disclosed within-the-world for a Dasein, and so too for those who are Daseins with us, only because Dasein in itself is essentially being-with.’<sup>58</sup> Heidegger fills out his characterisation of the others with an existentiale (and a thinly disguised fear of the masses) he names the ‘one’:

...Dasein, as everyday being-with-one-another, stands in *subjection* to others. It itself *is* not; its being has been taken away by the others. Dasein’s everyday possibilities of being are for the others to dispose of as they please. These others, moreover, are not *definite* others. On the contrary, any other can represent them. What is decisive is just that inconspicuous domination by others which has already been taken over unawares from Dasein as being-with. One [*man*] belongs to the others oneself and enhances their power...the “who” is not this one, not that one, not oneself, not some people, and not the sum of them all. The “who” is the neuter, *the “one” [das Man]...the “one” is an existentiale; and as an originary phenomenon, it belongs to Dasein’s positive constitution.*<sup>59</sup>

For Heidegger, there is an essential ‘averageness’ which belongs to the ‘one’ and which corresponds to a ‘levelling’ of the possibilities of Dasein’s being. Obvious differences with Marx notwithstanding (most notably, the individual’s classed existence discloses the others as simultaneously definite and indefinite, conspicuously and inconspicuously dominant), there are nonetheless aspects of Marx’s analysis of alienated labour in the *1844 Manuscripts* which resonate with this account of Dasein’s sociality. Three in particular stand out. The first is the likeness between (in Marx) the perversion of the human’s ‘genus-being’ into a means of

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<sup>56</sup> Heidegger, *BT*, 154.

<sup>57</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *Being Singular Plural* [1996], trans. Robert D. Richardson and Anne E. O’Byrne (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 8. *Being Singular Plural* is a determined attempt to rewrite *Being and Time* from the standpoint of *Mitsein*. For Nancy, ‘it is necessary to refigure fundamental ontology (as well as the existential analytic, the history of Being, and the thinking of *Ereignis* that goes along with it) with a thorough resolve that *starts from the plural singular of origins, from being-with.*’ Ibid. 26. The “question of social Being” must, in fact, constitute *the* ontological question.’ Ibid. 57.

<sup>58</sup> Heidegger, *BT*, 156. Following this passage, which is quite similar to Marx’s position (see footnote 2 in this chapter) that the social is not just to be understood as directly communal activity, Heidegger states that ‘Being-with is an existential characteristic of Dasein even when factually no other is present-at-hand or perceived. Even Dasein’s being-alone is being-with in the world.’ Ibid. 156-57. In other words, being-with in the world is the *a priori* condition of the lonely, isolated individual.

<sup>59</sup> Heidegger, *SZ*, 168, 169, 172 (*BT*, 164, 167). Confusingly, Macquarrie and Robinson translate *das Man* as ‘the they’ when they ought to translate *Man* and *das Man* as ‘one’ and ‘the one’ consistently throughout. *Das Man* will hereafter be rendered as ‘the one’ in *Being and Time* without recourse to a citation in *Sein und Zeit*.

individual existence and (in Heidegger) the disposal of the everyday possibilities of Dasein's being as the others please. The second is a shared emphasis on the distortion of 'the self'. For Marx, this is the alienation of the labour-process itself, understood as the 'self-activity' of the worker, and which is to be differentiated from something like 'humans in the entire wealth of their being'. For Heidegger, the self of everyday Dasein is the 'one-self' [*das Man-selbst*] (as opposed to 'the one itself' [*das Man selbst*]), and this self represents 'a particular Dasein' dispersed into and distracted by concerned absorption in the world.<sup>60</sup> In *Being and Time*, the 'authentic self' stands in opposition to the one-self.

The possibility of a philosophical correspondence between *Being and Time* and Marx's analyses of capitalist alienation is beginning to emerge, and this is all the more evident with the third point of resonance. To be clear, this point is only secured by modifying Heidegger in the direction of Marx, but it is all the more productive because of this. There is a conjunction between Marx's phenomenology of the alienation of the worker from both the product of his labour and from other workers, such that these become objective things divorced from and hostile to him, and Heidegger's account of an everyday absorption in the world which 'leaps over' the world and relegates it to a pre-ontological thing. Crucially, this conjunction traverses the two primary and interdependent articulations of 'world' in *Being and Time*: the ready-to-hand within the world of circumspective concern [*das Umwelt*], as well as the world of public interaction between one individual Dasein and another, which is to say the 'with-world' of solicitude [*Fürsorge*]. In Heidegger, the reification [*Verdinglichung*, literally 'thingification'] of the world of circumspective concern comes to the fore with what he calls the 'un-ready-to-hand', an entity which is 'not missing at all and not unusable',<sup>61</sup> but which, and here we must realign Heidegger towards Marx, does not 'stand in the way' of Dasein's concern. This is because concern – the existential register of the activity which Dasein performs and the things which this activity procures – is, at the level of individuals, overtly and covertly forced upon Dasein. Against Heidegger, Dasein's assignment is explicit precisely because this assignment has not been disturbed.<sup>62</sup> This non-disturbance is a class concern. Within capitalism, it is the exclusive belonging – ownership – of the ready-to-hand whose worldly character 'announces itself' as what might be described as a 'useful presence-at-hand' (the ready-to-hand qua the un-ready-to-hand). In his reading of the *1844 Manuscripts*, Marcuse grasps this subjection to the thing as the economic manifestation of an originary lack of Dasein. For Marcuse, Dasein's being always exceeds its existence, rendering its labour a futile attempt to realise its capacity

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<sup>60</sup> Heidegger, *BT*, 167.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.* 103.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.* 105.

for self-fulfilment. Therefore labour is, as he puts it, inescapably ‘burdensome’: ‘in labour it is always first a question of the thing itself and not of the labourer, even when a complete separation between labour and the “product of labour” has not yet taken place. In labour the human is always taken away from its self-being and toward something else: it is always with an other and for an other.’<sup>63</sup> It is necessary to read ‘the thing’ in the Marcuse passage as both the product of labour and the other worker in Marx, and as the being of both the ready-to-hand and ‘the other’ in Heidegger. Herein lies the relevance of Heidegger’s concept of solicitude to Marx. Solicitude ‘throws’ the other out of his ‘position’ and dictates that with which he is concerned.<sup>64</sup> Heidegger acknowledges solicitude to be a relation of dependence, and, in a rare moment of political economic insight, a ‘being-with-one-another of those who are hired for the same affair...[that] thrives only on mistrust.’<sup>65</sup> Whilst he never establishes the connection, solicitude (in its indifferent and deficient modes) *is* the objectification of the other as a tangible thing. The ‘one’ may be ‘as little present-at-hand as Dasein itself,’ yet the ‘the being of those entities which *are there with us* gets conceived as presence-at-hand.’<sup>66</sup>

Transposing this dialogue between Marx and Heidegger to the philosophy of time now requires that Dasein’s structural whole [*Ganze*] be investigated. At the end of the first division of *Being and Time*, ‘care’ [*Sorge*] emerges as the totalised manifold of existence which simultaneously refigures existence as ‘existentiality’. Care is formally defined as follows: ‘the being of Dasein means ahead-of-itself-being-already-in (the world) as being-alongside (entities encountered within-the-world).’<sup>67</sup> For Heidegger, existence, facticity and falling are the ontological characteristics of Dasein which ‘weave together’ the originary context of care, to which disclosedness and truth – and their articulation through discourse and language – essentially belong.<sup>68</sup> As previously considered, existence is constituted by understanding, an

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<sup>63</sup> Herbert Marcuse, ‘On the Philosophical Foundations of the Concept of Labour in Economics’, [1933] trans. John Abromeit, in Marcuse, *Heideggerian Marxism*, 130. Douglas Kellner also translates this essay in *Telos* 16 (Summer 1973), 9-37. There is clearly an ontological individualism in this essay.

<sup>64</sup> Heidegger, *BT*, 158, 161. This is misleadingly characterised as an ‘extreme possibility’ of solicitude, but in fact constitutes the phenomenological core of its ‘indifferent’ and ‘deficient’ modes.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.* 159.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.* 166, 168.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.* 237.

<sup>68</sup> If disclosedness (understanding, disposedness, falling) ‘maintains its articulation through discourse’ (Heidegger, *SZ*, 461/*BT*, 400), and if ‘discourse is existentially equi-originary with disposedness and understanding’ (Heidegger, *SZ*, 213/*BT*, 203), is it justifiable to suggest that, even if ‘discourse in itself is temporal,’ it ‘does not temporalise itself primarily in any definite ecstasis’ (Heidegger, *BT*, 400)? Is Heidegger’s transposition (as we will later consider) of understanding as the future, disposedness as beenness, and falling as making present not woven together with an ecstasis (if not a temporality) specific to Articulation itself? It never made its way into the final manuscript, but Heidegger’s temporalisation of language and speech in the ‘first draft’ of *Being and Time* addresses this. See Martin Heidegger, *The Concept of Time (The First Draft of Being and Time)* [1924], trans. Ingo Farin (London: Continuum, 2011), 63. This text should not be confused with his Marburg Theological

ability-to-be which in turn is structured by projection upon possibilities and the interpretation (the ‘working out’) of these possibilities. Facticity is the affective determinacy of Dasein. It is not the brute ‘factuality’ of something present-at-hand, but rather an actuality marked by a ‘disposedness’ which discloses Dasein in its essential ‘thrownness’. An existential fact that is never settled nor finished, thrownness reveals that Dasein has already always been ‘delivered over’ to being-in-the-world, even if, and in fact precisely because, Dasein ‘initially and for the most part’ evades this fact. ‘Falling’ fills out Heidegger’s notion of care. If existence is the domain of ‘being-ahead’ and facticity that of being-already-in the world, falling is the ‘being-alongside’ or ‘being-amidst’ entities encountered within-the-world. Falling is constituted by idle talk, curiosity and ambiguity. As being-in-the-world, it is also temptation, tranquillity and estrangement (falling is the only stated place of estrangement in *Being and Time*). Reminiscent of the ‘fundamental premise of private property’ for Marx, the fact that the human ‘produces only in order to have’<sup>69</sup>, falling is for Heidegger a ‘downward plunge’ whose ‘tranquillised supposition’ is that ‘it possesses everything...that everything is in reach.’<sup>70</sup> An existentially directly linked to the sociality of the one, falling is, for this reason, the primary point of entry into Heidegger’s two existentiell modes of being: authenticity/ownedness [*Eigentlichkeit*] and inauthenticity/unownedness [*Uneigentlichkeit*], wherein the latter is not (purportedly) a fall from the purer and higher state of the former, but an ontologically basic fascination with the world and the one, a positive possibility of Dasein’s ‘not-being-its-self’.<sup>71</sup>

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lectures of the same year: Martin Heidegger, *The Concept of Time* [1924], trans. William McNeill (Malden/Oxford/Carlton: Blackwell, 1992).

<sup>69</sup> Marx, *JM*, 274. See also Kostas Axelos, *Alienation, Praxis, and Technē in the Thought of Karl Marx* [1969], trans. Ronald Bruzina (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1976), 123-42.

<sup>70</sup> Heidegger, *BT*, 223.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.* 220. It is difficult to accept Heidegger’s argument that falling ‘does not express any negative evaluation.’ *Ibid.* As he expresses it: ‘we...misunderstand the ontologico-existential structure of falling if we...ascribe to it the sense of a bad and deplorable ontical property of which, perhaps, more advanced stages of human culture might be able to rid themselves.’ *Ibid.* For an attempt to move past this strict separation between the ontic and the ontological, to think affinities between inauthenticity in Heidegger and alienation in Marx, see Anne F. Pomeroy, ‘Remythologizing Heidegger: Capitalism, Time, and Authenticity’, *Φιλοσοφία (Philosophia): International Journal of Philosophy* 37:2 (2008), 119-38.

## 2.2 Death, Temporality and Historicity: *Being and Time*

‘Being-in-the-world’, Heidegger declares at the opening of his analysis of care, ‘is a structure which is originarily and constantly *whole*.’<sup>72</sup> Yet the entire chapter devoted to care (chapter 6 of the first division) never analyses the meaning of the whole or the totality as such. This task is left to the opening section of the second division of *Being and Time* (§45), which reminds the reader that existence ‘formally indicates that Dasein *is* as an understanding ability-to-be’ which firstly ‘raise[s] the question of this entity’s ability-to-be-a-whole [*Ganzseinkönnen*].’<sup>73</sup> As such an ability-to-be, there is thus some sense in which Dasein is necessarily not yet, some sense in which it is necessarily still outstanding, to which an ‘end’ belongs. But the issue for Heidegger is not the actual realisation of this end, such that Dasein ontically ‘completes’ its own ability-to-be-a-whole, but rather the end which defines – which is – this open ability, this possibility of being-a-whole. In short, this end of being-in-the-world is death [*Tod*], and it is an end which ‘limits and determines in every case whatever totality is possible for Dasein.’<sup>74</sup> This is, as we will now examine, a distinct existential-ontological conception of death, which only exists as a possibility – Dasein’s pure, ‘ownmost’ [*eigenst*]<sup>75</sup> possibility – and hence ‘is only in an existentiell *being towards death*.’<sup>76</sup> In other words, the existential structure of this existentiell being makes up Dasein’s ability-to-be-a-whole, such that this structure is modally divided between an authentic being-towards-death (anticipation) and an inauthentic everyday evasion in the face of death (awaiting).

Heidegger differentiates his conception of death from both ‘perishing’ and ‘demise’ at an analogous level to his dissociation of Dasein from both the present-at-hand and the ready-to-hand. Perishing is the biological end of life: the heartbeat stops. But since perishing is a category of the ontology of life which – as Heidegger wants it – is subordinate to the ontology of Dasein,<sup>77</sup> the end of Dasein from the standpoint of its existence as a living entity is not its perish but rather its demise. Strictly speaking, Dasein never perishes, but it certainly demises, but only so long as this demise is understood as the end of its life, *not* its death. The primary problem, however, with perishing and demise is that they situate death at the level of being-

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<sup>72</sup> Heidegger, *SZ*, 240 (*BT*, 225).

<sup>73</sup> Heidegger, *SZ*, 307, 310 (*BT*, 274, 276).

<sup>74</sup> Heidegger, *BT*, 277. Following Macquarrie and Robinson, *Ganze* will be translated as ‘whole’, whereas *Ganzheit* will be rendered as ‘totality’. Heidegger rarely uses the technical term *Totalität* for totality.

<sup>75</sup> White prefers to translate *eigenst* as ‘most proper’ rather than ‘ownmost’, so as to resist the reduction of Dasein to individual persons. See White, ‘Dasein, Existence, and Death’, 332. However, she does not mitigate the overt individualism of other dimensions of Heidegger’s analysis of death, particularly his depiction of the ‘in each case mineness’ of death.

<sup>76</sup> Heidegger, *BT*, 277.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.* 291.



at-an-end [*Zu-Ende-sein*] rather than being-towards-the-end [*Sein zum Ende*]. For Heidegger, these conceptions of death operate with a conception of end which displaces the fact that the end is already always there [*da*], such that Dasein's understanding ability-to-be-a-whole is, one might say, already always constituted by an understanding inability-to-be-a-whole. Comparing the not-yet of Dasein to a piece of ripening fruit, he suggests that '...as long as any Dasein is, it too *is already its "not yet"*'.<sup>78</sup> Heidegger never uses the word, but there is an implicit concept of totalisation being developed here, such that being-towards-death totalises precisely because it is not nor can never be a totality (in the ordinary or so-called pre-ontological sense of the term). This is also the unique way in which Heidegger's conceptions of death and the end dovetail with a particular conception of the *limit* [*Grenze*].<sup>79</sup> As White explains, 'We are interested in why and how the possibilities are thus limited'<sup>80</sup>, and 'death delineates and delimits Dasein's possibilities as an understanding able-to-be.'<sup>81</sup> Or as Blattner states, 'it is a limit-situation in which the ability-to-be is stifled.'<sup>82</sup> The conception of death which is appropriate to the entity that *is* its possibilities is the fundamental limit of those possibilities, but what kind of limit is this?

There is a complex philosophical appropriation of the conceptual lineage of the limit at work here. As with Heidegger's reconstruction of the purity of *a priori* synthetic judgements through his conception of world, this appropriation begins with Kant, although its relation to being-towards-death stems from the (for Heidegger) underdeveloped difference between the whole and the sum in Plato and Aristotle.<sup>83</sup> There are different but overlapping dimensions to

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid. 288. '...the "lack of totality in Dasein, the constant "ahead-of-itself", is neither something still outstanding in a summative togetherness, nor something which has not yet become accessible. It is a "not-yet" which any Dasein, as the entity which it is, has to be.' Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> As we will examine, this is also the unique manner in which Heidegger ties temporalisation to the basic teleological structure of action by way of the concept of finitude [*Endlichkeit*], that 'characteristic of temporalisation itself' (ibid. 378). It is the limit – qua the finitude of temporality – which secures being-towards-death as the existential ground of temporalisation.

<sup>80</sup> White, 'Dasein, Existence, and Death', 338.

<sup>81</sup> Carol J. White, *Time and Death: Heidegger's Analysis of Finitude* (Aldershot: Ashgate Press, 2005), 79.

<sup>82</sup> William Blattner, 'The Concept of Death in *Being and Time*', in *Heidegger Reexamined, Vol. 1: Dasein, Authenticity, and Death*, ed. Hubert L. Dreyfus and Mark A. Wrathall (London: Routledge, 2002), 325. Blattner stresses the centrality of anxiety [*Angst*] to Heidegger's analysis of death, although in a very curious fashion. On his reading, anxiety is not a disposedness in line with anticipatory being-towards-death, as Heidegger argues, but death *as such*. In other words, Blattner expresses the idea that death is *actually* a possible way to be Dasein (in which Dasein is unable to be). Death, it seems, is akin to an *anxiety attack*. It is a state in which the ability-to-be is stifled. His metaphor for this is as follows: 'in the absence of light, the ability-to-see is not non-existent, it is simply stifled.' Ibid. To Blattner's credit, he carefully reconstructs Heidegger's nuanced understanding of the end, drawing on Jasper's concept of the limit-situation, in order to evade any sense of the end as 'stopping'. However, his idea that death is a situation that 'occurs' when Dasein is beset by anxiety, in which none of its possibilities matter to it whatsoever, does little else but flatten the crucial importance of anticipation.

<sup>83</sup> Heidegger, *BT*, 288, ft. iii (494).

this appropriation whose shared origin is arguably the systematic distinction between the limit and the barrier [*Schranke*] within Kant's critical philosophy. For Kant, 'limits...always presuppose a space that is found outside a certain fixed location, and that encloses that location; barriers require nothing of the kind, but are mere negations that affect a magnitude insofar as it does not possess absolute completeness.'<sup>84</sup> Unlike mathematics and the natural sciences, the 'dialectical endeavours of pure reason' within metaphysics lead to limits whose transgression (qua transcendental ideas) 'cannot be avoided and yet will never be realised.'<sup>85</sup> In Heidegger, the existential rendition of this comes by way of Kierkegaard's concept of anxiety and Jasper's conception of the 'limit-situation' [*Grenzsituation*] in his *Psychology of Worldviews* (1919), which Heidegger footnotes.<sup>86</sup> Specifically, it is the towards within being-towards-the-end, such that anxiety 'amounts to the disclosedness of the fact that Dasein exists as thrown Being *towards* its end'<sup>87</sup>, which existentially registers the unavailability and yet actual impossibility of death. To put it another way, the anxiety inherent within being-towards-death corresponds to and yet critically modifies the function of the limit in Kant: corresponds to, because the limit (death) which begets this anxiety is certain and yet unrealisable; critically modifies, because the transgression of this limit in Heidegger is only ever a being-towards the limit, such that anxiety is not generated beyond the phenomenal realm of time and space but is rather only ever being-in-the-world itself.<sup>88</sup> Against Kant's transcendental idea, therefore, being-towards-death is not illusory or deceptive (at least, that is, in its 'authentic' mode).

This recoding of transgression as anticipation – this reworking of the transgression of the limit as what might be called 'being-towards-the-limit' – forms the background to the most consequential passage within Heidegger's analysis of death:

*The closest closeness of being towards death as a possibility is as far as possible away from anything actual. The more undisguisedly this possibility gets understood, the more purely does the understanding penetrate it as the possibility of the impossibility of any existence at all [überhaupt]. Death, as possibility, gives Dasein nothing to be 'actualised', nothing which Dasein, as actual, could itself be. It is the possibility of the impossibility of every way of comporting towards anything, of every way of existing. In the anticipation of this possibility it becomes 'greater and greater'; that is to say,*

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<sup>84</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics That Will Be Able to Come Forward as Science* [1783], trans. and ed. Gary Hatfield (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 103-4 (§57). Translation modified to register *Grenzen* as 'limits' and *Schranken* as 'barriers'.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.* 104.

<sup>86</sup> Heidegger, *BT*, 293, ft. vi (494-95). See also William Blattner, 'Heidegger's Debt to Jasper's Concept of the Limit-Situation', in *Heidegger and Jaspers*, ed. Alan M. Olson (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994), 153-65.

<sup>87</sup> Heidegger, *BT*, 295. Emphasis in the original.

<sup>88</sup> 'That in the face of which there is anxiety is being-in-the-world as such.' Heidegger, *SZ*, 247 (*BT*, 230).

the possibility reveals itself to be such that it knows no measure at all, no more or less, but signifies the possibility of the measureless impossibility of existence.<sup>89</sup>

This passage works with a twofold conception of the limit. On the one hand, death is the limit of all limits: the limit as such, the collective singular limit which grounds every limit of the understanding (*the* limit of the ability-to-be which ontologically grounds every limit of every ability-to-be). As Dasein's purest and ownmost possibility, this is the meaning of death as the absolute limit within the multitude of every limited experience. In this regard, the 'possibility of the impossibility of any existence at all' is the possibility of complete nonexistence, the possibility of the utter lack of existence. On the other hand, there is a radical situatedness at the heart of this passage, such that each and every act is existentially structured by a limit *specific* to that act. This limit is not death, but rather the factual domain of being-towards-death. The limit as such (death) ontologically grounds the specificity of the limit of each and every act, but it only does so *because* there is a specificity – a facticity – to the limit of each and every act. Hence the 'possibility of the impossibility of any existence at all' also registers the simple fact that Dasein cannot be in any particular way (this is equally evident within the doubled meaning of the 'possibility of the impossibility of every way of comporting towards anything, of every way of existing.') Existentially speaking, every act is constituted by a limit particular to that act, and, because of this, Dasein cannot be – it is not free to be – any existence whatsoever. This dimension of the limit is central to Heidegger's later analysis of 'anticipatory resoluteness', wherein the resolution is '*precisely the disclosive projection and determination of what is factually possible at the time*'<sup>90</sup>, and that through which Dasein's ability-to-be-a-whole has 'existentiell authenticity'. As being-towards-death, there is no measure to what Dasein *cannot* be: no measure to both the limit as such (death) which it cannot avoid but which it can never actualise, and no measure to the factual limit which structures each and every act. The ontological meaning of the possibility of Dasein's ability-to-be-a-whole takes in both of these measureless impossibilities of existence.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Heidegger, *SZ*, 348. The Macquarrie and Robinson translation of this passage (Heidegger, *BT*, 306-7) includes a 'one' ('*The closest closeness which one may have in Being towards death as a possibility*') and a 'oneself' ('the impossibility of every way of comporting oneself towards anything') which, as previously mentioned (footnote 51), effectively compels the English-language reader to grasp Dasein as already and only an individual entity, and as already and only an individual person at that.

<sup>90</sup> Heidegger, *BT*, 345. This analysis of resoluteness [*Entschlossenheit*] figures conscience as the 'call' of care, whereby an appeal is made – from Dasein to Dasein – to 'summon' it out of its fall into 'the one' and towards its 'ownmost ability-to-be'. Heidegger, *SZ*, 369 (*BT*, 322).

<sup>91</sup> At the end of her analysis of Heidegger's conception of death, White points out that the prefix '*Un*' of *Unmöglichkeit* (impossibility) denotes both 'excessive amount' as well as 'non/not'. She advances the notion that Heidegger might be playing with a doubled meaning of *Unmöglichkeit*, and that, in the anticipation of death, what is 'measureless' about the measureless impossibility of existence is both

We are now in a position to comment on Heidegger's culminating definition of death. Following his order of presentation, death is, in full: Dasein's ownmost possibility, which is non-relational [*unbezügliche*], unsurpassable [*unüberholbar*], certain [*gewiß*] and indefinite [*unbestimmt*].<sup>92</sup> Grounding each of these dimensions is what Heidegger calls the 'in each case mineness' [*Jemeinigkeit*] of Dasein's death which, after John Haugeland, indicates that in being-towards-death, it is not Dasein *per se* which is 'mine', but rather Dasein *in each respective case* which is 'mine'.<sup>93</sup> The extent to which a conception of the limit is interwoven through each of these dimensions is readily apparent. However, there is an equally apparent philosophical problem with this conception of death, a problem which is not beget by the concept of the limit as such, but rather by the particular *individualising* character of the limit which underlies being-towards-death. This is the well-documented problem which Dasein's originary sociality (the equi-originary existentials of being-with and Dasein-with) constitutes for being-towards-death. For Levinas, the individualising structure of being-towards-death in Heidegger ignores the ethical, non-derivative structure of responsibility for the Other which produces 'a world where I can die *as a result of someone* and *for someone*'.<sup>94</sup> For Ricœur, the 'intimist tendency' at the core of Heidegger's analysis of death conceals the full scope of the 'horizon of the world...from our sight'.<sup>95</sup> It is possible to mitigate these critiques through the ambiguities inherent within certain passages. For instance, when Heidegger states that 'death *lays claim* to it [Dasein] as an *individual* Dasein'<sup>96</sup>, it is important to recall that it is unclear what the exact contours of this 'individual' are, since, as earlier suggested, the individuation of Dasein signifies the demarcation of Dasein from other domains of entity, *not* – at least

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the non- *and* excessive possibility of existence. If Heidegger is in fact invoking *Unmöglichkeit* in this doubled sense, it is possible to suggest that death erases any measure to possibility both within and outside the limit, thus grounding the ontological importance of the limit. See White, 'Dasein, Existence, and Death', 342.

<sup>92</sup> Heidegger, *SZ*, 349-52 (*BT*, 307-10).

<sup>93</sup> Haugeland, 'Truth and Finitude: Heidegger's Transcendental Existentialism', 62. As previously indicated (see footnote 47), this specification of *Jemeinigkeit* adds weight to the idea that Dasein is not already always a human individual, that there is, in other words, a unique and separate Dasein for each individual person.

<sup>94</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: an Essay on Exteriority* [1961], trans. Alphonso Lingis (The Hague/Boston/London: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1979), 239.

<sup>95</sup> Ricœur, *Time and Narrative, Volume 3*, 295, ft. 38. Consider Ricœur's comment in light of the fact that the 'horizon' (from the Greek *horizein*) is that which limits, surrounds and encloses. Simon Critchley's insistence on the '*fundamentally relational character of finitude*' qua the 'originary inauthenticity' of death is a thought-provoking but ultimately unconvincing reworking of Heidegger, because it strips all existentiality away from Heidegger's explicitly existential conception of death, and because the novelty of his 'originary inauthenticity' is premised on the notion that authenticity is the exclusive domain of the origin in *Being and Time*, which is simply untrue [*ursprüngliche ≠ eigentliche*]. See Simon Critchley, 'Originary Inauthenticity – on Heidegger's *Sein und Zeit*', in Simon Critchley and Reiner Schürmann, *On Heidegger's Being and Time*, ed. Steven Levine (London: Routledge, 2008), 144.

<sup>96</sup> Heidegger, *BT*, 308.

originarily – the difference of one individual human being from another. In this sense, and on the condition that being-with and Dasein-with are in fact *originary* existentials, we might suggest that death lays claim to Dasein as, to invoke Nietzsche, an ‘individual more-than-individual’ (wherein the latter individual is an individual human being but the former individual is not). However, the stance that ‘death individualises – but only in such a manner that...it makes Dasein, as being-with, have an understanding of the ability-to-be of others’<sup>97</sup> undercuts the philosophical potential of the individual and the social alike, because the content of this understanding is *not* the same understanding which first ‘raise[s] the question of this entity’s ability-to-be-a-whole’. The latter understanding is in both existential and existentiell opposition to the former, given that ‘all being-alongside things of concern and all being-with others...fails when the ownmost ability-to-be is at stake.’<sup>98</sup> Despite their originary status, concern and solicitude have been relegated to second-rate existentials. From the standpoint of being-towards-death, they are not constitutive limits of Dasein’s ability-to-be-a-whole, but mere barriers which Dasein can choose to overcome, and in fact must choose to overcome, if it is to free itself from the illusions of ‘the one’.

It is structured by an anti-social individualism, but Heidegger’s analysis of death is not thereby irrelevant to the construction of a concept of historical time in Marx. Being-towards-death is not just the existential-ontological ground of temporalisation but so too the ground of the indissociable tie between temporalisation and totalisation. It thus has a direct bearing on the construction of a concept of historical time in Marx, but like all philosophical encounters, this has its conditions. The entire range of these is vast, but it is evident that *Being and Time* must be critically reconstructed in such a way that the anticipation of death becomes indelibly social.<sup>99</sup> Being-towards-death must become compatible with Marx’s distinctly social concept of the human. What this socialisation of death brings to light, as will soon be examined, is the problem of the historicity of the act in Heidegger more generally. With this socialisation comes an essential restriction of the Heideggerian project: time *cannot* give being as such.<sup>100</sup> Rather, time’s ‘gift’ is only Dasein. Or better: time and Dasein give one another. Restricting Heidegger in this fashion enables ‘the procedure of separating out the existential analytic of

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<sup>97</sup> Heidegger, *SZ*, 351 (*BT*, 309).

<sup>98</sup> Heidegger, *SZ*, 349-50 (*BT*, 308).

<sup>99</sup> Osborne, ‘Marx and the Philosophy of Time’, 20.

<sup>100</sup> ‘Time cannot at all be present-at-hand, it does not at all have any sort of determinate being – rather it is the condition of the possibility that it gives something like being (not entities). Time does not have the sort of being of some other thing, but rather, time *temporalises* [*Zeit zeitigt*].’ Martin Heidegger, *Logik: Die Frage nach der Wahrheit* [1925-6], in Martin Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe, Abteilung 2: Vorlesungen 1923-1944, Band 21* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1977), 410.

Dasein from the question of the meaning of being in general.’<sup>101</sup> It also redefines ‘ontological difference’ as that between Dasein and other domains of entity, *not* between being and entity as such. And as Heidegger is well aware, ontological difference is not just difference as such, but the *relations* between what is different. Hence to the extent that it is a historical difference, ontological difference (a concept, to be sure, Marx never uses) must also denote the difference between one mode of production and another, such that each mode of production produces a different kind of time *because* it produces a different kind of Dasein, and produces a different kind of Dasein *because* it produces a different kind of time. This is what a dialogue with Marx on the aforementioned ‘historical in being’ might become: not a dialogue whereby temporality is an entity,<sup>102</sup> but a dialogue whereby temporality only temporalises because – like Dasein – it bridges the ontical-ontological divide. In contrast to Heidegger, this is the sense in which *temporality only temporalises because it has materiality*. This is a temporality not simply of matter but of the formation of matter through the living time of labour.<sup>103</sup>

Yet despite the fact that it is constituted at the level of an anti-social individual, there is in Heidegger – not in Marx – a necessary aspect of temporalisation to which we must attend. This is the premise in *Being and Time* that existence holds ontological priority over facticity and falling, that ‘possibility as an existentiale is the most originary and ultimately positive way in which Dasein is characterised ontologically.’<sup>104</sup> That is, we take from Heidegger an ontological priority granted to the future [*die Zukunft*] over the past and the present, which is to say his conviction that ‘temporality temporalises itself originally out of the future.’<sup>105</sup> It is the future, not as that which is yet to come but as the existential-ontological meaning of the understanding ability-to-be, that in the last instance determines ‘beenness’ [*Gewesenheit*], the temporality of facticity, and ‘making present’ [*Gegenwart*], the temporality of falling. This is not to elide the past and the present<sup>106</sup> as originary ecstasies [*Ekstasen*, from the ancient Greek *ekstasis* or ἔκστασις] of temporality. Rather, it is to confront (this comes with its conditions)

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<sup>101</sup> Osborne, *The Politics of Time: Modernity and Avant-Garde*, 56. Exposing ‘being as such’ or ‘being in general’ [*Sein überhaupt*] as ‘ahistorical’ is more complex than might be assumed, as it depends on creating a concept of the ‘ahistorical’ out of a concept of the ‘historical act’ which both deviates from Heidegger and is not synonymous with situating this act in ‘its specific time and place’ (historicism).

<sup>102</sup> Reiterating Heidegger’s position in the Leibniz lectures (footnote 100): ‘Temporality “is” not an *entity* at all. It is not, but it *temporalises* itself.’ Heidegger, *BT*, 377.

<sup>103</sup> As cited in the previous chapter: ‘Labour is the living, form-giving fire; it is the transitoriness of things, their temporality, as their formation by living time.’ Marx, *Grundrisse*, 361.

<sup>104</sup> Heidegger, *SZ*, 191 (*BT*, 183).

<sup>105</sup> Heidegger, *SZ*, 438 (*BT*, 380).

<sup>106</sup> Whilst this thesis utilises the terms ‘the past’ and ‘the present’ in conjunction with facticity/beenness and falling/making present, it must be noted that Heidegger relegates ‘the past’ to an entity which is no longer present-at-hand, and ‘the present’ to the ‘levelling off’ of the significance of ‘now-time’. The future is the only coordinate of time which keeps its everyday name in *Being and Time*.

the materialist concept of history with Heidegger's definition of temporality as 'the unity of a future which makes present in the process of having been.'<sup>107</sup> From this perspective, the future of Marx and Engels's 'first historical act' is originary because 'the character of having been' arises from it, and because as a future in the process of having been, it 'releases from itself' and 'awakens' presence as the present and the present as presence.<sup>108</sup> As an ecstasy, the future of the first historical act stands outside-of-itself because it is already ahead-of-itself, and this excess, this essential surplus, constitutes the basis of its originary power. The future of the first historical act totalises the act, such that the difference between the present and the past is unified by an understanding – a projective capacity – for the sake of which any act exists.<sup>109</sup>

Being-towards-death secures the possibility of Dasein's ability-to-be-a-whole, but in what sense does it secure temporality as the ontological meaning of this possibility? For Heidegger, the answer to this question – that through which death and temporality are inextricably tied – is the *finitude* [*Endlichkeit*] of existence. The 'end' within *Endlichkeit* is not 'an end at which it [Dasein] just stops' but is, as previously indicated, a 'characteristic of temporalisation itself.'<sup>110</sup> Herein lies the crucial (if largely unacknowledged<sup>111</sup>) importance of the *telos* [τέλος] and *teleology* to *Being and Time*. Simply put, the teleological structure of the act is the standpoint from which Heidegger's analyses of death and temporality come together. This structure is explicitly not the structure of the ordinary interpretation of totality and temporality. For Heidegger, the 'end' of being-towards-the-end is the teleological end, *not* the chronological end. The teleological end cannot be conflated with the chronological end. Rather, the teleological end is the condition of thinking the chronological end, such that originary temporality is the condition of thinking the vulgar conception of time. As Todd Mei puts it, 'the ecstasies of time (past, present, future) characterise the end, or the for-the-sake-of, as one that is constantly reinvoked by virtue of the temporality that being is. This is the reflective burden of finitude which, in apprehending an end, can only realise it through constant ontological movement that never finally arrives there.'<sup>112</sup> This finitude dictates that

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<sup>107</sup> Heidegger, *BT*, 374. Emphasis added.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.* 374, 375, 378. On the doubled meaning of the German *Gegenwart*, see footnote 17.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.* 385.

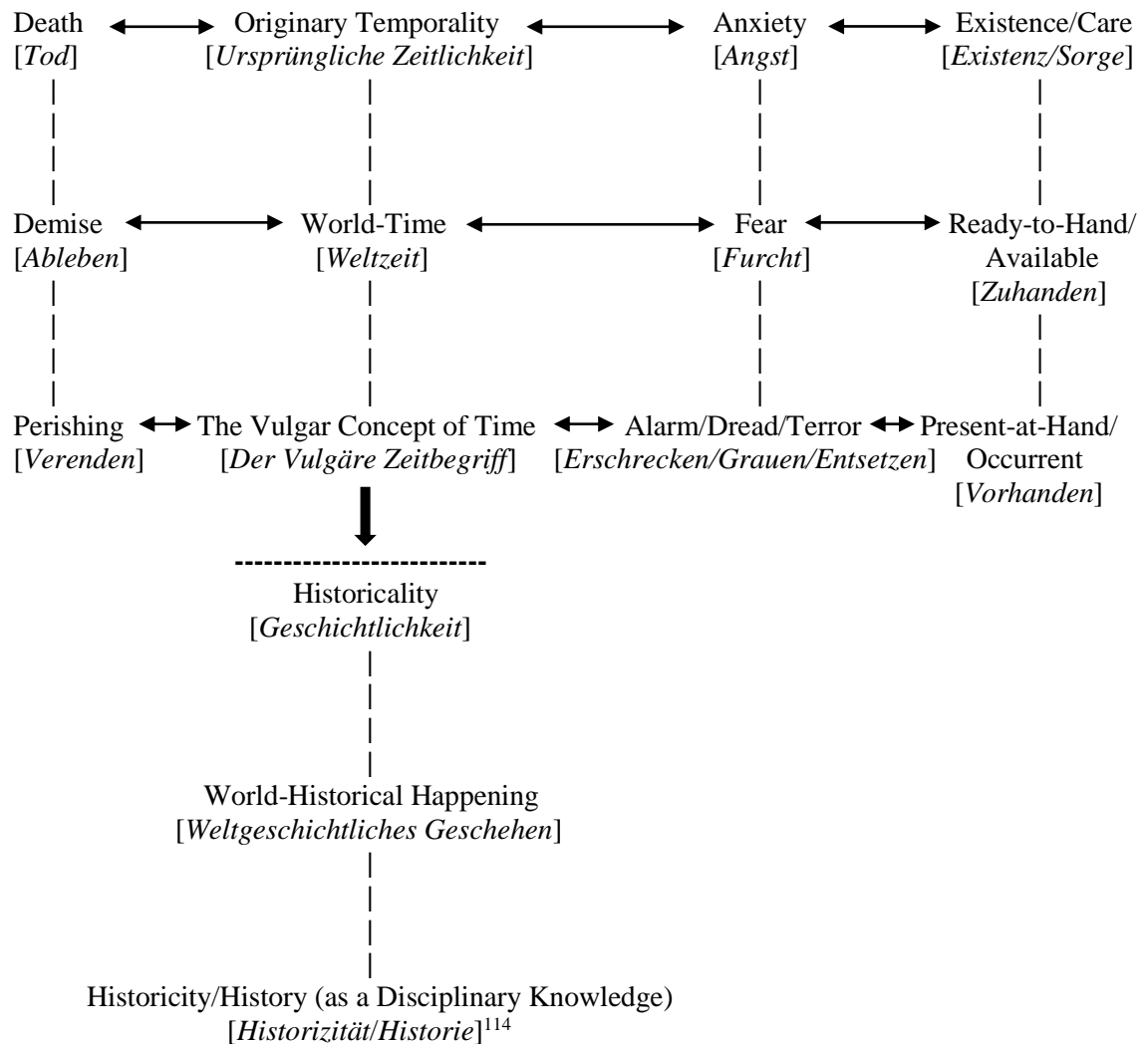
<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.* 378.

<sup>111</sup> Curiously, Heidegger does not openly acknowledge the fact that his rethinking of *telos* and teleology are at the heart of the project which is *Being and Time*. As we will investigate, this rethinking calls into question the relationship between action (the Greek *ergon* [ἔργον]) and *praxis* [πρᾶξις] more broadly. Take, for instance, his 1924 lectures on Aristotle, in which *praxis* is the ontological specification of action: '... we know that the being of human beings is determined in its ἔργον as πρᾶξις. This has *telos* [τέλος] in itself, comes to its end through itself.' Martin Heidegger, *Basic Concepts of Aristotelian Philosophy* [1924], trans. Robert D. Metcalf and Mark B. Tanzer (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009), 123 (§17).

<sup>112</sup> Todd Mei, *Heidegger, Work and Being* (London: Continuum, 2009), 125.

existence, facticity and falling are temporality temporalising itself, and this finitude secures temporality as the ‘originary ontological ground’<sup>113</sup> of existence. The end is the limit which in every case determines Dasein’s ability-to-be. Finitude does not *originarily* give temporality meaning (in capitalism, labour-time does not *originarily* have value) because Dasein ‘will die one day’. Finitude is not originarily the number of years, months, weeks, days, hours, etc. that we have left to live, but our existential limit as kinetic entities, a limit which is already always there as the origin of all possible projection. For Heidegger, our limited capacity to act in the situations we find ourselves in is what first gives temporality meaning, and it is this finitude from which the quantifiable time of ‘infinite’ or ‘endless’ time derives.

In short, this problematisation of teleology is Heidegger’s systematic deconstruction of action, activity and the act. Despite the fact that historicity has yet to be examined, we can schematise this deconstruction with the following diagram:



<sup>113</sup> Heidegger, *SZ*, 311 (*BT*, 277).

<sup>114</sup> This diagram shows the unequivocal dependence of historicity on temporality in *Being and Time*.



A couple of notes about this diagram. First, it transforms what Heidegger refers to as a ‘derivative time’ (wherein the priority of the future still holds)<sup>115</sup> into a logic of derivation which extends across the entirety of *Being and Time*. This is a tripartite structure of existential derivation whose model is the ‘degeneration’ of originary temporality into world-time, and world-time into ordinary time<sup>116</sup>, but as a structure it is not reducible to time. Second, to be faithful (for now) to Heidegger, the vertical and hierarchical orientation of derivation in this diagram is better imag(in)ed on a horizontal and non-evaluative plane, consistent with the idea that time (originary temporality, world-time *and* ordinary time) is the transcendental horizon for ‘any understanding whatsoever’ of being.<sup>117</sup> Consequently, authenticity and inauthenticity are written across the entire structure. Originary temporality is not the sole domain of authentic temporality; namely, originary temporality  $\neq$  authentic temporality. After Blattner, originary temporality in *Being and Time* is ‘modally indifferent’ to authenticity and inauthenticity: ‘*authentic temporality is merely one mode of originary temporality.*’<sup>118</sup> Hence world-time and ordinary time are not necessarily inauthentic. Strictly speaking, it is possible that world-time and ordinary time can be taken hold of as Dasein’s ‘own’ in such a way that they become ‘*an existentiell modification of the “one”*’ which ‘frees the other in his freedom for himself.’<sup>119</sup> Conversely, originary temporality repeatedly loses itself in the one and becomes ‘completely fascinated by the “world” and by the Dasein-with of others in the “one”.’<sup>120</sup> For Heidegger, a binding identity between one form of time and one existentiell mode of being, a fixed identity between, say, ordinary time and inauthenticity, flattens the essential difference between the ontological and the ontic because it immobilises – it absolutises – Dasein’s relationship to its own being. But what explains the convergence between one form of time and one existentiell mode of being? What mediates their relationship, such that there is, as there is in Heidegger,

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<sup>115</sup> Heidegger, *BT*, 378.

<sup>116</sup> William Blattner, ‘Temporality’, in *A Companion To Heidegger*, ed. Hubert L. Dreyfus and Mark A. Wrathall (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 318. See Heidegger, *BT*, 383, where degeneration is linked to the notion of ‘springing-from’.

<sup>117</sup> ‘Our provisional aim is the interpretation of *time* as the possible horizon for any understanding whatsoever of being.’ *Ibid.* 19. This is an understanding of time as that which exceeds and transgresses (from the Latin *transcendere*) as well, as previously mentioned, as limits, surrounds and encloses (from the Greek *horizein*). This is Dasein as a ‘transcendental horizon’: ‘Dasein’s selfhood does not imply a substantial centre from which the transcending movement is supposed to start, but is, on the contrary, founded upon transcendence itself – as the condition of its very possibility.’ Françoise Dastur, ‘The Ekstatico-Horizontal Constitution of Temporality’, in *Martin Heidegger: Critical Assessments, Vol. 1, Philosophy*, ed. Christopher Macann (London: Routledge, 1992), 174. Heidegger’s transcendental horizon is indebted to the temporalising structure of ‘transcendence in immanence’ in Husserlian phenomenology, from which Nancy’s idea of art as ‘transimmanence’ equally departs. See Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Muses* [1994], trans. Peggy Kamuf (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 34–5.

<sup>118</sup> Blattner, *Heidegger’s Temporal Idealism*, 99.

<sup>119</sup> Heidegger, *BT*, 168, 159.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.* 220.

an ‘originary and authentic temporality’ and an ‘ordinary and inauthentic time’? How do we account for the fact that the temporal relationship between the originary and the authentic, and that between the ordinary and the inauthentic, has the capacity to change? These questions, which Heidegger does not address, refresh the larger problem of the relationship between the ontological and the ontic in *Being and Time*, a problem only intensified by the fact that Dasein is ‘ontically distinctive’ because it is ontological.

These questions lay the groundwork for an investigation of how the materialist concept of history problematises Heidegger’s deconstruction of the act, an investigation whose origin converges with the problem of the origin [*Ursprung*] in *Being and Time*. Schürmann’s work is the crucial point of departure. It demonstrates that the classical relationship between thought and action is essentially inverted in Heidegger: the mantle traditionally assumed by thought passes over to action. For Schürmann, this inversion does not just reground ontology in action, but in so doing renders any distinction between thought and action *anarchic* because the tension at the heart of Heidegger’s practical *a priori* releases the origin and the originary from the restrictions of ‘the philosophical principle’.<sup>121</sup> Schürmann traces this release by way of a complex genealogy of the origin. First, he examines the causal and teleocratic dimensions of the kinetic notion of *archē* [ἀρχή], internally defined as inception and domination over that to which it gives rise, and as the source of the end [*telos*] which structures both *poiêsis* (setting to work in order to produce a sensible object) and *praxis* (setting to work as an end unto itself). He fails, however, to identify the basic temporal makeup of *archē*: *telos* provides the futural standpoint from which temporal unification occurs, a unification which is only actual as the past in the present. *Archē* is the past (cause, inception), yet it is a past which is only intelligible from within the present action it dominates.<sup>122</sup> Second, Schürmann follows the translation of the Greek *archē* into the Latin *principium* through Duns Scotus’s *Treatise on God as a First Principle* and Leibniz’s *Monadology*. What is at stake here is how the ‘first from which’ things arise does not represent time forgotten – as Schürmann maintains – but time immobilised, an ossified time under the command of the past as absolute subject, be it in the figure of the *princeps* which confers an essential order or the law of the *principium* which grounds logic and truth. The philosophical upshot of this is that action – whilst still within time – cannot be figured as an *implicitly* temporalising concept. ‘At the close of that epoch [Latin philosophy],’

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<sup>121</sup> Schürmann, *Heidegger on Being and Acting*, 95-6. According to Schürmann, this is an ontological, epistemological and historical release which simultaneously sunders the boundaries between ontology, epistemology and history.

<sup>122</sup> This is the temporal logic of *archē*: ‘In Aristotle, where the origin is understood in the context of *human* making, the elements of inception and of domination in *archē* balance each other. Production is a becoming over which *telos* reigns, perceived from the start as *archē*.’ Ibid. 110.

Schürmann notes, ‘the *principium* becomes a law of the mind...a first truth conceived by reason and formulated as a premise.’<sup>123</sup> For Schürmann, this is the philosophical and historical context that Heidegger’s conception of beginning [*Beginn*], inception [*Anfang*] and the origin dismantles.<sup>124</sup> Beginning and inception are categories which cut across Heidegger’s critical engagement with the metaphysics of presence. Beginning entails an inchoate movement that signals the precondition of thinking, whereas inception recovers the Presocratic idea of being seized by and responding to an experience, one which brings forth a dynamic constellation of sensation, speech and thought. The *Ursprung* – the ‘primal leap’<sup>125</sup> – is phenomenologically simultaneous with and yet ontologically prior to *Beginn* and *Anfang*. For Schürmann, this priority of the origin comes through two co-constitutive questions: the question of ‘ontology originarily’, which is the task of *Being and Time*, and the question of ‘origin ontologically’, from which presencing as event – and with it Heidegger’s notion of *Ereignis* – emerges.<sup>126</sup>

The problem with Schürmann’s scheme is not the questions themselves but the fact that *Being and Time* is not held accountable to the question of the origin ontologically. This should not come as a surprise. The origin as such is not thematised in *Being and Time*. At the start of the second division, the ‘originariness’ [*Ursprünglichkeit*] of an ontological Interpretation (as opposed to interpretation as the existential working out of an understanding) is loosely defined in relation to the unity of Dasein’s structural whole, but this definition does nothing to mitigate – actually it exacerbates – the fact that, strictly speaking, *there is no concept of the act in Being and Time*. Dasein is phenomenologically presented as the ontological basis of temporalisation, but nowhere is it ontologised *qua* action and the act. The lack of an ontological concept of the act in *Being and Time*, a lack which dictates that the phenomenological ontology of Dasein implicitly stands in for this concept, is synonymous with the lack of an ontological concept of the origin in *Being and Time*. The consequences of this are diverse. For one thing, it consigns the philosophical status of the ‘equi-originary’ [*gleichursprünglich*] to a descriptive seriality. *Being and Time* is a serial text like Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason*: the ‘equi-originaries’ of

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<sup>123</sup> Ibid. 106.

<sup>124</sup> ‘...the task is crucial if acting – life – is to be disengaged from teleocratic as well as principial frameworks; if deconstruction is to set free from beneath *archē* and *principium* an origin less compromised by command and domination; and if in the final analysis the question of acting comes down to complying with that more elusive origin.’ Ibid. 121.

<sup>125</sup> ‘To originate something by a leap, to bring something into being from out of the source of its nature in a founding leap – this is what the word origin (German *Ursprung*, literally, primal leap) means.’ Martin Heidegger, ‘The Origin of the Work of Art’ [1935-6], trans. Albert Hofstadter, in Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), 75.

<sup>126</sup> For Schürmann, ‘many of the misunderstandings concerning Heidegger are explainable by the exclusive attention paid to his effort to raise the ontological question originarily, without noting his simultaneous effort to think the origin ontologically.’ Schürmann, *Heidegger on Being and Acting*, 128-29. *Ereignis* is a concept of the later Heidegger, after the so-called ‘turn’ [*Kehre*].

Dasein are successively added on top of one another. *Being and Time* is not a systematic text, such that the equi-originary denotes constitutive relations between different domains of what is originary. It is difficult, therefore, to conceive of the originary within ‘originary temporality’ as something else than an internal derivation of world-time and vulgar time. Yet this is exactly what Heidegger expects of us. Originary temporality is intended to grant us access, as earlier indicated, to ‘something like being’.

But if there is a single aspect of Heidegger’s failure to thematise the origin and the act which stands out more than any other, it is the impoverishment of the philosophy of history. Proceeding from the standpoint that the analysis of Dasein’s ability-to-be-a-whole has to this point been overdetermined by being-towards-death, that the ‘end’ which is Dasein’s beginning – its ‘birth’ – has been overlooked, the penultimate chapter of *Being and Time* introduces the existential and existentiell dimensions of the ‘happening’ [*Geschehen*] and the historicity [*Geschichtlichkeit*] of Dasein. For Heidegger, happening is the movement [*Bewegtheit*] of existence (not the motion [*Bewegung*] of something present-at-hand) which defines the way ‘in which Dasein is stretched along and stretches itself along’<sup>127</sup> between its birth and its death, whereas historicity is the structural name of this happening. Historicity introduces nothing new to Dasein’s temporal character. It ‘merely reveals what already lies enveloped in the temporalising of temporality’, and is ‘at bottom, just a more concrete working out of temporality.’<sup>128</sup> The relationship between temporality and historicity essentially follows the relationship between understanding and interpretation: historicity is the interpretation of the temporality of understanding. Historicity does not influence the three ecstasies of originary temporality in any particular way, which is as much to say that history does not shape the ontological constitution of time in any particular way. The philosophical scope of historicity is accordingly limited to the elaboration of the *existentiell* possibilities (and solely *authentic* existentiell possibilities at that) of being-towards-death. The extent to which historicity has bearing on the existential analytic of Dasein is already established by originary temporality. Dasein’s fate is consequently ‘that powerless superior power which puts itself in readiness for adversities’<sup>129</sup> and its destiny is thus the instantiation of its being-with, the co-happening of the community and the people, both of which enable Dasein to hand down factual possibilities to itself which have-been-there. This is for Heidegger the meaning of repetition, whereby the ‘peculiarly privileged position’ of the past (having-been-there) appears in the historical.<sup>130</sup> Yet

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<sup>127</sup> Heidegger, *BT*, 427.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.* 428, 434.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.* 436.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.* 438.

historical repetition does not unseat the priority of the future, since it is only being-towards-death which enables repetition in the first place.

Historicity, this thesis maintains, does little else than aggravate the problem that the act and the origin are ontologically sidestepped in *Being and Time*. Historicity offers nothing in the way of a response to the unavoidable problem that history constitutes for the ‘one issue of radical phenomenology’ (being as time).<sup>131</sup> History qua historicity is not an ‘originary ontological ground’ in its own right, thus there is no sense in which a concept of the ‘historical origin’ might be constructed out of *Being and Time*. At an existential-ontological level, it is temporality, not historicity, which is originary in *Being and Time*.<sup>132</sup> This dovetails with the overriding issue that, as Adorno puts it, ‘the structure of historicity...only offers an *apparent* solution to the problem of the reconciliation of nature and history.’<sup>133</sup> As referenced in the introduction, ‘*authentic being-towards-death – that is to say, the finitude of temporality – is the hidden basis of Dasein’s historicity.*’<sup>134</sup> Yet if authentic being-towards-death is non-relational and in each case mine – if the anticipation of death is unavoidably anti-social – then Dasein has no mediated externality to it at all, such that the difference between the individual and the historical end – the difference between individual and historical temporalisation – is completely flattened. In Marx, the difference between an individual and historical temporality is mediated through nature, whereby an individual act (the social production of the means of life from the standpoint of the individual) is neither immediately nor immanently historical, but only leads to historicity (the historical individual) because it is necessarily mediated through nature. This is important, because it demonstrates structurally – historically – that historicity cannot be an immanent dimension of individual temporalisation (this despite the fact that Heidegger restricts historicity to the working out of individual temporalisation). The individual and its historicity must each be mediated by an exteriority, and it is precisely the historically changing character of this exteriority – of nature – that comes to the fore with Marx’s (underdeveloped) concept of the social individual. The social individual is a normative concept in Marx: it is historically produced as what it ought not to be. It is thus indissociable from a historical ontology of communism. This is the sense in which, after István Mészáros,

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<sup>131</sup> Schürmann, *Heidegger on Being and Acting*, 127. The history which constitutes a problem for being as time cannot be ‘the project Heidegger pursues after his *Kehre*...[which] crystallises in the question, *how does presencing become history?* How does it, as event, condition all that can occur?’ Ibid. The retroactive insertion of a historical origin qua *Ereignis* into *Being and Time* is not the answer.

<sup>132</sup> Heidegger uses the expressions ‘originary happening’ (435) and ‘originary historicity’ (438) in *Being and Time*, but these are strictly confined to the existentiell level of authentic resoluteness and fate.

<sup>133</sup> Theodor Adorno, ‘The Idea of Natural-History’ [1932], trans. Bob Hullot-Kentor, in *Telos* 60 (Summer 1984), 115. For the sake of consistency, ‘historicity’ has been replaced by ‘historicality’.

<sup>134</sup> Heidegger, *BT*, 438.

only a ‘truly’ social individual realises the ‘complete personality’ [*Gesamtpersönlichkeit*] of the human: ‘the realisation of “Gesamtpersönlichkeit” necessarily implies the reintegration of *individuality* and *sociality* in the tangible human reality of the *social individual*.’<sup>135</sup> However, it is not just the individual’s alienated powers which are reappropriated in communism, but so too something like historicity itself, such that individuals become historical for the first time: they relegate the ontological status of all previous history to ‘pre-history’. The social individual not only fulfils its own concept in communism; it also becomes an authentically historical individual for the first time. The point here is that Heidegger’s concept of authentic historicity de-historicises its own condition of possibility (temporality), whereas Marx’s concept of the social individual does not (capitalism). In Schürmann’s terms, historicity does *not* release the origin from the restrictions of ‘the philosophical principle’. Ultimately, what Heidegger and Schürmann cannot avoid is Adorno’s accusation that historicity ‘immobilises history in the unhistorical realm, heedless of the historical conditions that govern the inner composition and constellation of subject and object.’<sup>136</sup>

Two points follow from this which bring our dialogue with Heidegger to a close. First, his conception of historicity bypasses the philosophical importance of birth [*Geburt*] as an unsurpassable existential-ontological limit of Dasein.<sup>137</sup> ‘Being-towards-birth’ (a neologism which Heidegger never uses) is not established as a necessary aspect of being-towards-the-

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<sup>135</sup> István Mészáros, *Marx’s Theory of Alienation* [1970] (London: Merlin Press, 1986), 269. The problem with Mészáros’s account is that the social individual *as such* is conceptually opposed to the isolated individual in capitalism. He does not recognise that the isolated individual in capitalism is a *socially* isolated individual, no less a social individual than its (speculative) counterpart determined by communism.

<sup>136</sup> Theodor Adorno, *Negative Dialectics* [1966], trans. E.B. Ashton (London and New York: Continuum, 2004), 129. The incommensurability between the temporality of Dasein [*Zeitlichkeit des Daseins*] in *Being and Time* and the ‘Temporality of Being’ [*Temporalität des Seins*] in Heidegger’s later work is not unrelated to this. Namely, the analysis of historicity paves the way for attempts to think a transition from *Zeitlichkeit* to *Temporalität*. Consider John Sallis’s search for ‘another time’: ‘the move to an analytic of *Temporalität* would be an advance to a form of time that would be more originary than the originary time of Dasein. It would be an advance beyond the time that the existential analysis establishes in its identity with Dasein, an advance beyond the time that would be sheltered in what was once called the soul, an advance toward another time.’ John Sallis, ‘Another Time’, in *Appropriating Heidegger*, ed. James E. Faulconer and Mark A. Wrathall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 183. The search for what Sallis calls ‘uranic time’ devolves into mysticism: ‘Could the sheer radiance of the sky, its pure shining, the radiant shining that *is* the sky, ever be mistaken for something at hand in the narrow human world? Then, neither could the time it gives be assimilated to Dasein’s temporality. And then, one would need to say that the time given by the sky, this uranic time, is, in a way both remote and wondrous, another time.’ Ibid. 189.

<sup>137</sup> Inspired by Hannah Arendt’s account of natality in *The Human Condition* (1958) and the category of *vita activa* (labour, work, action) which underlies this account, Ricœur suggests that ‘...the silence of *Being and Time* regarding the phenomenon of birth...is surprising. Should not this jubilation be opposed to...an obsession of metaphysics with the problem of death...does not the anguished obsession with death amount to closing off the reserve of openness characterising the potentiality of being?’ Paul Ricœur, *Memory, History, Forgetting* [2000], trans. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2009), 357.

limit which, as is the case with being-towards-death, grounds the historicalising possibility of Dasein's ability-to-be-a-whole. Birth is characterised as the other 'end' of Dasein's ability-to-be-a-whole, but it is quickly subsumed by death.<sup>138</sup> The priority of death over birth is secured by the immanent relationship between birth and the 'connectedness' of Dasein's life, whereas death is (for Heidegger) irreducible to life. Yet despite his frequent use of qualifying quotation marks, Heidegger does *not* develop an existential conception of 'birth', ironically foreclosing the possibility (to be consistent with the logic of derivation in *Being and Time*) that birth qua biological reproduction – hence the temporality of biological reproduction – might somehow figure in the phenomenological ontology of Dasein. From the standpoint of the limit, there is no sense in which birth constitutes a 'pure facticity' analogous to the pure possibility of death; no sense, in other words, in which the past might moderate the originary ontological power of the future.<sup>139</sup> In general, it is clear that Heidegger's neglect of birth is indissociable from the problem that the origin represents for his analysis of historicity. Yet the integration of being-towards-birth need not invalidate his reworking of the teleological structure of the act. There is no reason why the act cannot be structured by more than one unsurpassable limit which grounds the possibility of Dasein's ability-to-be-a-whole. If anything, birth adds an additional dimension to being-towards, further radicalising Dasein's situatedness and further solidifying the ontological importance of the limit. Despite the fact that birth is an 'irreducibly past possibility'<sup>140</sup> which can never be re-actualised, it is also – in both its biological and existential registers – an originary component of the historical future. It is an end that conditions the very possibility of Dasein's historical repetition, the very possibility, that is to say, that Dasein can ontically and ontologically reproduce itself.

This leads to a second – and even more ontologically basic – problem with Heidegger's philosophy of history. At the heart of the lack of a sustainable concept of the act and the origin in *Being and Time* is a *systematic lack of a concept of need*. This lack is all the more glaring

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<sup>138</sup> In repetition, Dasein's birth '*is caught up into its existence* in coming back from the possibility of death (the possibility which cannot be surpassed)...' Heidegger, *SZ*, 516 (*BT*, 443). Simply put, Dasein can 'catch up' with its birth – but not its death – in anticipatory resoluteness.

<sup>139</sup> Were it to be developed, the 'pure facticity' of birth would need to be theorised in relation to the factual domain of being-towards-death, which is to say the particular limit specific to each and every act.

<sup>140</sup> Consider the temporality of this passage by Lisa Guenther: 'I suggest that a rigorous distinction must be made between the originating possibility of birth and all the other possibilities granted to me at birth, in order to mark the ontological distinction between the unrepeatable, deeply passive, and irreducibly past possibility *of* birth, and the heritage of repeatable possibilities given to me *at* birth. What is at stake in this distinction? On one hand, understood strictly as an ontological limit, birth grants me the sheer possibility of existence; on the other hand, and at the same time, birth grants all the traditions, practices, languages, and other possibilities that together form a heritage that is received but must also be chosen.' Lisa Guenther, 'Being-from-others: Reading Heidegger after Cavareto', *Hypatia* 23:1 (January-March 2008), 106.

because there is an unacknowledged yet undeniable dependence on a discourse of need which cuts across the existential analytic of Dasein. On Heidegger's own terms, Dasein *needs* the world: its very possibility of existence, its very understanding ability-to-be, is absolutely impossible in isolation from being-in-the-world. The *a priority* of the world is beyond dispute. Yet this foundational need is only thematised in passing: we 'need' the ready-to-hand when it is understood to be missing, when it has become the 'un-ready-to-hand'; the temporality of circumspective concern confers meaning to our 'everyday needs'.<sup>141</sup> There is exactly one passage in *Being and Time*, included in Heidegger's analysis of the 'temporal problem of the transcendence of the world', which expresses the ontological centrality of need: 'Dasein exists for the sake of an ability-to-be of itself. In existing, it has been thrown, and as something thrown, it has been delivered over to entities which it needs [*es bedarf*] in order to be able to be as it is – namely, *for the sake of itself*.'<sup>142</sup> But what are these entities which Dasein needs? What structures the relationship between Dasein and the world as a relationship of need? The answer, in short, is the ready-to-hand. The ontological structure of the ready-to-hand grounds Dasein as an entity already always in a certain *practical relation* to a particular world. The ready-to-hand defines being-in-the-world as a practical relation, and it is precisely this relation which differentiates the ready-to-hand from the present-at-hand.<sup>143</sup> As Mark Okrent puts it, 'the whole difference between the ready-to-hand and the extant is that to be an extant being of a certain type is to be capable of effects that make no reference to potential ends.'<sup>144</sup> What the ready-to-hand draws attention to is the fact that the existential analytic of Dasein does not just rethink the teleological structure of the act through the end of *praxis*, but that the end of the act is defined by an indissociable connection between *praxis* and *poiêsis*. Dasein's being is *praxis*, as Franco Volpi and others have demonstrated<sup>145</sup>, but it is equally *poiêsis* (from the standpoint, that is, of the production of necessary objects for use, not the objects themselves). Heidegger's philosophy of time implicitly registers this. As Blatter reminds us, there is no

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<sup>141</sup> Heidegger, *BT*, 103, 403, 407.

<sup>142</sup> Heidegger, *SZ*, 482 (*BT*, 416).

<sup>143</sup> As previously discussed, the ready-to-hand is an entity whose being is constituted by any assignment or involvement within-the-world. It is *not* defined by being a tangible object in space, but rather by its practical relation to the world.

<sup>144</sup> Mark Okrent, *Heidegger's Pragmatism: Understanding, Being and the Critique of Metaphysics* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1988), 87. 'Extant' is Okrent's translation of *vorhanden*, viz. the present-at-hand. Despite its general indifference to the philosophical problem of history, the American pragmatist reading of Heidegger has gone a long way towards enriching the philosophical potential of the ready-to-hand.

<sup>145</sup> Franco Volpi, 'Being and Time: A "Translation" of the *Nicomachean Ethics*?', trans. John Protevi, in *Reading Heidegger from the Start: Essays in his Earliest Thought*, ed. Theodore J. Kisiel and John van Buren (Albany: SUNY Press, 1994), 195-212. See, in addition, Theodore Kisiel, *The Genesis of Heidegger's Being and Time* (Berkeley and London: The University of California Press, 1993), chapters 5 & 6.



difference between the ‘world-time now-structure’ and the originary present within originary temporality: the former is embedded within originary temporality as one of its three ecstasies (the ecstatic present of falling).<sup>146</sup> Yet Heidegger’s philosophy of history explicitly rejects this. As previously alluded to, Heidegger declares that the ‘ontological structure of world-historical happening’ (the happening of worldly entities other than Dasein which are historical) must be excluded from ‘the ontological enigma of the movement of happening in general.’<sup>147</sup> This is an exclusion which – not without irony – conditions Schürmann’s insistence that ‘ontology originarily’ and the ‘origin ontologically’ are inseparable. It is an exclusion which contradicts Heidegger’s claim that historicity is just the ‘concrete working out’ of originary temporality. Yet the problem is not contradiction as such, but rather the specific ahistorical – or better, the specific de-historicising – *a priori* of the world which this contradiction reveals.

The potential solution to this problem is the systematic reconstruction of the *a priori* of Heidegger’s world. This reconstruction would resituate the ontological structure of world-historical happening as *integral* to the ‘ontological enigma’ of the movement of happening in general, precisely because historicity is *not* simply the concrete working out of originary temporality. This solution would by no means remove contradiction from the world; rather, it would register the fundamental relationship between contradiction and historicisation more generally. It would register a fundamental originariness to historicity irreducible to, because equi-originary with, the *Ursprünglichkeit* of temporality. This world presents the possibility of historicising the relationship between temporality and historicity in *Being and Time*. It theoretically enables us to address the previously raised question of the changing relationships between temporality and existentiell (authentic and inauthentic) modes of being. Of central importance to Marx, this world would therefore allow us to engage *Being and Time* from the standpoint of the ‘economic fact of the present’<sup>148</sup>, thus rendering the ontological structure of capitalist everyday life constitutive of Heidegger’s analysis of Dasein’s everyday use of time, or what he refers to as Dasein’s ‘reckoning with time’. For Heidegger, this is the temporality of circumspective concern which ‘permits’ the ready-to-hand and the present-at-hand to be encountered in time. It is a temporality which guides Dasein’s everyday encounter with others, in which making present possesses a ‘peculiar importance’.<sup>149</sup> Yet there is nothing in *Being*

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<sup>146</sup> Blattner, ‘Temporality’, 321.

<sup>147</sup> Heidegger, *SZ*, 514 (*BT*, 441).

<sup>148</sup> Marx, *EPM*, 107. In her introduction to Marcuse’s *Hegel’s Ontology*, Seyla Benhabib essentially makes the same claim on behalf of Marcuse’s intervention, such that ‘a Heideggerian objection to the present work would be that it contains no clear distinction between the “world-historical” dimension, the historicity of entities and of our shared world, which unfolds in public space, and the “historicity” proper to Dasein.’ Marcuse, *Hegel’s Ontology and the Theory of Historicity*, xxx. Along with Marcuse, this thesis rejects a distinction between the ‘world-historical’ and ‘Dasein’ at the level of historicity.

<sup>149</sup> Heidegger, *BT*, 459.

*and Time* which allows us to historicise this importance, nothing which might historicise time-reckoning as a particular ‘system of time accountancy’<sup>150</sup>, whereby worldly entities receive their basic temporal attribute, their ‘within-time-ness’.<sup>151</sup> Ultimately, the essential issue is this: Heidegger’s world is not just a de-historicising but a *de-historicising* world, but what exactly does this mean? What is the existential-ontological meaning of ‘historicalisation’ itself?

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<sup>150</sup> Harry Harootunian, ‘Marking time, making histories’, a review of Tomba, *Marx’s Temporalities*, *Radical Philosophy* 178 (March/April 2013), 40.

<sup>151</sup> Heidegger, *BT*, 382. For Heidegger, within-time-ness should not be confused with Henri Bergson’s analysis of the externalisation of qualitative time into a measurable quantity in space.

### 2.3 Critique of Dialectical Reason and the Concept of Historicalisation

Of all the ways in which the materialist concept of history destabilises the phenomenological ontology of Dasein in *Being and Time*, the philosophical (not to mention political) jolt which Marx's concept of need gives to this ontology stands as the most consequential. The historical materialism which this concept grounds raises critical social, biological and natural questions for this ontology, questions which expose the absence within this ontology of the inseparable concepts of the origin and the act. As the previous chapter reveals, *The German Ideology* does not just subsume need under a historical logic, but structures need as the logic of history itself. Our grasp of the historicalising power of need begins with the category of the economic – and the definition of the first historical act – as the dialectic of the creation of the means to satisfy existing needs and the creation of new needs. This grasp also registers need as the ontological basis of the sociality of human individuation, from which the division of labour receives its historical intelligibility. Yet since Marx and Engels do not provide a temporal reading of their materialist concept of history, and since they do not, as the introduction to this chapter states, situate their concept of history in relation to the totalisation of the time of all human lives, *The German Ideology* yields what is at best a nascent and descriptive concept of historicalisation. That is, it does not provide an account of historicalisation as *constituted by relations between temporalisation, totalisation and materiality more broadly*. Hence it does not offer the means by which the historicalising logic of dialectics is secured, such that the dialecticisation of need provides the transhistorical category of wealth with its formal structure of historical measure. The stakes of this are high, if in fact a concept of historical time is to be constructed out of the materialist concept of history. The question is therefore: how would an existential-ontological concept of historicalisation enrich Marx's philosophy of history more generally?

Sartre's *Critique* does not use the word 'historicalisation', but unlike *Being and Time*, it enables the construction of a concept of historicalisation in a way which reframes, qualifies and extends the materialism of *praxis* in the *Theses on Feuerbach* and the materialism of need in *The German Ideology*. It is clear that Heidegger's 'historicality' does not and cannot do the same. Yet the importance of *Being and Time* is not thereby diminished. In his presentation of the totalising structure of individual *praxis* as the 'original intelligibility' of history, such that totalisation becomes, to employ the classical Marxist expression, the 'law of dialectics', Sartre does not just consider certain aspects of *Being and Time* useful for his project to existentially rework the materialist concept of history. More fundamentally, he is finding his way to Marx *through* (not just with) Heidegger. The *Critique* must be read, I argue, as a determined attempt to affect a transition from Heidegger's existential problematic to Marx's historical materialist

problematic, an attempt that is spurred by a gap – an immanent deficit – within Heidegger which, as should now be evident, is the decisive lack of a concept of need. For Sartre, Marx speculatively fills this gap, but only on the condition that (1) Marx’s concept of human need is subjected to the logic of totalisation and temporalisation, as this is the only way in which it can be sustained as ‘materialist’; this condition is itself predicated on the condition that (2) dialectics constitutes the logic of totalisation and temporalisation. This is the crux of Sartre’s methodological approach: Marx and Heidegger are dialectically confronting one another, such that – so to speak – Heidegger is being made to totalise and temporalise Marx, and Marx is being made to dialecticise and historicalise Heidegger. What secures this as a unique approach is the fact that Heidegger is as much a catalyst for this confrontation as is Marx.<sup>152</sup> Heidegger constitutes a lack, but it is a constitutive lack: he as much as Marx initiates the possibility of constructing a properly ‘materialist’ concept of human need, a concept which, as we will see, is by no means faithful to that offered by Marx. But – and this is crucial – there is an unequal exchange at work here. The *Critique* is *not*, as much of the secondary literature characterises it, a ‘synthesis’ between existentialism and Marxism. On the contrary, the relationship between Heidegger and Marx is for Sartre – it must be – asymmetric: Marxism, after all, is ‘the unsurpassable philosophy [*l’indépassable philosophie*] of our time.’<sup>153</sup> The fundamental relation between Dasein and the ready-to-hand – namely, being-in-the-world – is in the *Critique* systematically replaced and ontologically reconstructed through the relation between *praxis* and the ‘practico-inert’, a relation which takes the name of ‘materiality’. Dialectical intelligibility itself emerges from this relation. For Sartre, the dialectic is the *necessary* consequence of individual action under certain material conditions, and therefore, to integrate Marx into this, the *necessary* structure of different ‘regions’ of materiality wherein the social production of the means of life occurs.<sup>154</sup> How and why this amounts to totalisation and temporalisation must now be demonstrated.

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<sup>152</sup> Pietro Chiodi suggests that ‘...in many important respects the *Critique* is a straightforward return to the Heideggerian position after the attack on it in *Being and Nothingness*.’ Pietro Chiodi, *Sartre and Marxism* [1965], trans. Kate Soper (Hassocks: The Harvester Press, 1976), 8.

<sup>153</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, *Critique de la raison dialectique, tome 1: Théorie des ensembles pratiques* [1960] (Paris: Gallimard, 1985), 9. Marcuse’s writings in the late 1920s and early 1930s expresses the same position. His essays during this period seek to rewrite Heidegger’s phenomenological ontology within the terms of Marx. However, they do not engage Heidegger’s philosophy of time, and thus their implicit attempt to fashion a ‘Heideggerian Marxism’ at the level of history and historicity is ultimately a failure, relegating their contribution to what is better described as a ‘Marxist Heideggerianism’. These essays are collected in Herbert Marcuse, *Heideggerian Marxism*, ed. John Abromeit and Richard Wolin (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005).

<sup>154</sup> This is the manner in which materiality is a *historical* monism. Critiquing Engels, Sartre contends that ‘the monism which *starts from the human world* and *situates* man in Nature is the monism of materiality. This is the only monism which is realist, and which removes the *purely theological* temptation to contemplate Nature “without alien addition”.’ Sartre, *CDR* 1, 180-81.

Sartre's account of totalisation in the *Critique* is indebted to Heidegger's analysis of being-towards-death in *Being and Time*. In particular, the way in which Dasein's ability-to-be-a-whole structures it as an existential analytic directly bears on Sartre's understanding of individual *praxis* as the ontological basis of totalisation as well as a 'whole'.<sup>155</sup> As previously mentioned, totalisation in Heidegger and Sartre alike should be comprehended as an ongoing unification whose unity is the very process of its differentiation, *not*, as Mészáros reads Sartre, as a process whereby 'millions of individual actions' (this is Sartre's expression) 'add up to a network of lawlike determinations in the proper sense of *historical* necessity.'<sup>156</sup> The fact that the movement of totalisation is necessarily ongoing comprises its 'fundamental character'.<sup>157</sup> This movement is not only the basis of differentiating totalisation from the scholastic (static) notion of the totality.<sup>158</sup> It also dictates that totalities are always 'detotalised totalities', which is to say that their existence hinges on both (1) having been separated from the process of their own production (totalisation), and thus (2) a unity – an 'active power of holding together its parts' – which correlates to an act of the imagination.<sup>159</sup> In other words, only totalisation, not the totality, is the ontological ground of 'material unification', even if, as we will learn, this unification is imposed upon human action by 'material forces gathered together in the passive unity of tools or machines' which themselves '*perform actions*'.<sup>160</sup> The relationship between totalisation and the totality brings to the forefront Sartre's 'progressive-regressive' method (as it is outlined in *Search for a Method*, the prefatory essay to the *Critique*), and the movement of totalisation-detotalisation-retotalisation that makes up the systematic logic of the *Critique*. Rather than denoting successive moments of the 'spiral' of history, totalisation, detotalisation and retotalisation are to be understood as nonsuccessive yet qualitatively different movements

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<sup>155</sup> Sartre differentiates a whole from a totality as follows: '...a "whole" is not a totality, but the unity of the totalising act insofar as it diversifies itself and embodies itself in totalised diversities.' Ibid. 48, ft. 22.

<sup>156</sup> Mészáros, *The Work of Sartre: Search for Freedom and the Challenge of History*, 243. Mészáros is commenting on historical, not individual, totalisation in Sartre in this passage, but the point remains the same: totalisation is not an 'adding up' of existing multiplicities. It is rather a double movement wherein 'multiplicity is multiplied to infinity, each part is set against all the others and against the whole which is in the process of being formed, while the totalising activity tightens all the bonds, making each differentiated element both its immediate expression and its mediation in relation to the other elements.' Sartre, *CDR* 1, 46.

<sup>157</sup> Chiodi, *Sartre and Marxism*, 36.

<sup>158</sup> In his foreword to the *Critique*, as part of his reading of Sartre's desire to dissociate himself from the 'standpoint of totality' in Lukács's *History and Class Consciousness*, Fredric Jameson sums this up: 'For Sartre...a totality is precisely a static concept, a concept of being rather than of process, and one governed by analytic rather than by dialectical reason.' Fredric Jameson, Foreword to Sartre, *CDR* 1, xxi.

<sup>159</sup> Sartre, *CDR* 1, 45.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid. 184. The ontological status of the act from the standpoint of its performance by the practico-inert – what Sartre calls 'passive action' – must be differentiated from the act as *praxis*.

internal to totalisation as such. In his analysis of ‘enveloping totalisation’ in the second volume of the *Critique*, Thomas R. Flynn summarises this as follows: ‘every totalisation presumes a detotalisation of which it is the ongoing negation or retotalisation.’<sup>161</sup>

Before the relationship between *praxis* and the practico-inert takes centre stage in the *Critique*, ‘interiorisation’ and ‘exteriorisation’ emerge as the first registers in which this logic of totalisation is to become synonymous with the meaning of dialectics. For Sartre, totalisation exteriorises itself through totalities, ‘worked matter’ in which past *praxis* is embodied, but this exteriorisation is already always tied to what he describes as the ‘reinteriorisation’ of totalities. This is, in a manner of speaking, the ‘ur-site’ of dialectical intelligibility: when an exteriorised totality is reinteriorised through *praxis*, this reinteriorisation is at once ‘an interior negation of interiority.’<sup>162</sup> This double movement (the interiorisation of exteriority and the exteriorisation of interiority) may represent an ‘antiquated’ framework<sup>163</sup>, but it lays the groundwork for two philosophical cornerstones of the *Critique*. First, and in line with Marx’s *Theses*, it situates *praxis* (but also, exceeding Marx, the practico-inert) as ontologically basic to the subject-object relation, such that ‘interiority’ and ‘exteriority’ become particular dynamisations (but also immobilisations) of, respectively, the subject and the object. Second (to return to the question which this chapter begins with), the movement of interiorisation and exteriorisation establishes the parameters of the relationship between totalisation and negation. Negation is a dynamic movement unto itself, but from the standpoint of totalisation it is only intelligible as a *particular moment* of totalisation. That is, negation only produces ‘a temporary totality... on the basis of a provisional totalisation.’<sup>164</sup> Herein lies Sartre’s ambiguous relationship to Hegel. On one level, the *Critique* is an orthodox reading of the *Phenomenology*, insofar as it retains the primacy of the negation of the negation (which, as we will discover, is Sartre’s definition of need). Yet on another, because it grounds dialectics in *praxis* (rather than consciousness), and thus stipulates that totalisation, detotalisation and retotalisation (rather than identity, non-identity and contradiction) constitute the core of dialectics, the *Critique* materialises negation in a fashion that extends far beyond Hegel. The implications this has for the temporalisation

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<sup>161</sup> Thomas R. Flynn, *Sartre, Foucault, and Historical Reason, Volume 1: Toward an Existentialist Theory of History* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1997), 158. As Sartre articulates it: ‘...totalisation is the way in which detotality is totalised; or again, in which detotalisation is retotalised.’ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Critique of Dialectical Reason, Volume 2 (Unfinished): The Intelligibility of History* [1985] (hereafter *CDR 2*), ed. Arlette Elkaim-Sartre and trans. Quintin Hoare (London and New York: Verso, 1991), 448. The triad ‘territorialisation-deterritorialisation-reterritorialisation’ in the two volumes of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* is a spatialisation of totalisation-detotalisation-retotalisation in the *Critique*, a spatialisation which in large part leads to the problems that history constitutes for the *Anti-Oedipus* (1972) and *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980).

<sup>162</sup> Sartre, *CDR 1*, 57.

<sup>163</sup> Chiodi, *Sartre and Marxism*, 46-7.

<sup>164</sup> Sartre, *CDR 1*, 60. To which we must add: ‘on the basis of a provisional temporalisation’.

of history (as a collective singular, to which Hegel and Sartre are equally wedded)<sup>165</sup> must be considered, but only after materiality is investigated in its own right.

The relationship between *praxis* and the practico-inert cannot be comprehended from the perspective of human action and inorganic matter ‘in themselves and as such’. For Sartre, action and matter have never been, nor will ever be, exclusive and self-sufficient domains: ‘within *praxis*...there is a dialectical movement and a dialectical relation between action as the negation of matter..., and matter, as the real, *docile* support of the developing re-organisation, as the negation of action.’<sup>166</sup> This is the sense in which matter is already always worked matter; matter in itself, which is to say worked matter considered from the standpoint of its pure exteriority, ‘does not appear *anywhere* in human experience.’<sup>167</sup> Sartre’s conception of worked matter is a potential basis from which ‘labour’ in *The German Ideology* might be (retroactively) secured as the meaning of *praxis* in the *Theses*, such that worked matter is ‘the fundamental motive force of History’ in which ‘the actions of all unite and take on a meaning [*sens*], that is to say, they constitute for all the unity of a common future.’<sup>168</sup> Worked matter is without question at the heart of the practico-inert, but it by no means exhausts the scope of the practico-inert. Invoking (and transgressing the limits of) Marx’s concept of a productive force, the practico-inert takes in a radically expansive and differential ensemble of forces: ‘to the extent...that these forces are forces of inertia..., they introduce exteriority in the form of passive unity as *a material bond of interiority*.’<sup>169</sup> For Flynn, the practico-inert is the functional (one might add heretical) heir to ‘being-in-itself’ in *Being and Nothingness*.<sup>170</sup> The multiple forms of passivity which it designates actively constitute the practical field, but only insofar as these *anti-dialectical* forces defined by anti-*praxis* (‘*praxis* without an author’) and

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<sup>165</sup> ‘...there is *one* human history, with *one* truth and *one* intelligibility.’ Ibid. 69. The critical departure which Sartre’s conception of negation makes from Hegel’s is inseparable from his dialecticisation of Heidegger’s anti-dialectical philosophy of difference. Sartre is a notable exception to the predominant trajectory of the philosophy of difference within 20<sup>th</sup> century French philosophy more generally.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid. 159. ‘Matter as the receptacle of passivised practices is indissolubly linked to lived *praxis*, which simultaneously adapts to material conditions and inert significations, and renews their meaning [*sens*], *re-constituting* them by transcending them, if only to transform them.’ Ibid. 168. Flynn emphasises the crucial distinction between signification [*signification*] and meaning/direction [*sens*] in Sartre’s work: the former ‘refers to a static, conceptual meaning’, whereas the latter ‘denotes the ongoing unity of a lived process.’ Flynn, *Sartre, Foucault, and Historical Reason, Vol. I*, 104. Just as history cannot be a totality but it can, it is, a totalisation, so too it cannot be signified but it can, it does, have *sens*.

<sup>167</sup> Sartre, *CDR* 1, 180.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid. 183. On multiple occasions (90, 124, 136-37, 165, 178, etc.) in which worked matter is the implicit or explicit subject, Sartre either implies or explicitly states that labour is the historical meaning of *praxis*.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid. 179. ‘Thus materialised *praxis*...has the effect of uniting men precisely to the extent that it separates them by imposing on everyone a meaningful reality infinitely richer and more contradictory than they anticipated individually.’ Ibid. Totalisation and the practico-inert are indissociable.

<sup>170</sup> Flynn, *Sartre, Foucault, and Historical Reason, Vol. I*, 120.

‘counterfinality’ negate the finality of the dialectical praxis-project. ‘This negation, however, operates not by destruction or dissolution, but by deviation and inversion’<sup>171</sup>, a negation whose effect ‘is to render material external to the project and opposed to it as necessity to freedom.’<sup>172</sup> Hence, like *praxis*, the practico-inert is internally structured by multiple, shifting relations between action and matter, relations that coalesce in the forces of ‘passive activity’.<sup>173</sup> Unlike *praxis*, however, the practico-inert is neither the origin nor ontological ground of totalisation: ‘the practico-inert can be treated *as a process...*, but this process, insofar as it is *already* passive action, presupposes the entire *praxis...*, which it reabsorbs and transforms in the object, while still being based on its real, abstract pullulation.’<sup>174</sup> As with the dialectic of living and dead labour in Marx, the material realisation of *praxis* is entirely dependent on the field of the practico-inert, just as the practico-inert can only be activated through *praxis*. Yet *praxis* and ‘*praxis alone...is, in its dialectical freedom*, the real and permanent foundation (in human history up to the present) of all the inhuman sentences which men have passed on men through worked matter.’<sup>175</sup> The humanism of the *Critique* is thus simultaneously mitigated and fuelled by matter: *praxis* is ontologically accountable to the exteriority of matter, but exteriority itself is nothing but the product of *praxis*, of totalisation as exteriorisation.

The relation between *praxis* and the practico-inert can only be confirmed as a material relation – in fact as the meaning of ‘materiality’ itself – when and if two fundamental and indissociable aspects of this relation are brought to light. The first is that the relation between individual *praxes* is itself dialectical and that this relation is mediated by the practico-inert. In other words, the practico-inert determines human activity as inherently social: there is a dialectical relation between the dialectical structure of each individual *praxis* and this relation, whereby individual action is ‘*transcended and preserved by inertia*’, is an ‘*original statute of reifying sociality*.’<sup>176</sup> This is the manner in which the practico-inert ‘is simply the activity of others insofar as it is sustained and diverted by inorganic inertia.’<sup>177</sup> Sartre’s dialectic remains ontologically individualistic, but the priority of the individual is mitigated by the fact that his

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<sup>171</sup> Sartre, *CDR* 1, 340.

<sup>172</sup> Chiodi, *Sartre and Marxism*, 49.

<sup>173</sup> Within the field of the practico-inert, ‘matter as passive activity and counterfinality contradicts its own idea through its movement.’ Sartre, *CDR*, 171. Curiously, Flynn restricts ‘passive activity’ to serialised individual action rather than situating it across the entire (human and non-human) milieu of the practico-inert. See Thomas R. Flynn, *Sartre and Marxist Existentialism: The Test Case of Collective Responsibility* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984), 96, 105.

<sup>174</sup> Sartre, *CDR* 1, 713. For Sartre, a practico-inert process is a systematic form of exploitation (such as racism, capitalism or colonialism) which must be differentiated from the ‘three modalities of human action’: individual *praxis*, common, constituted *praxis*, and *praxis*-process. Ibid. 789.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid. 333.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid. 319.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid. 556.



*praxis* is already always social as a consequence of his existence within multiple domains of materiality, each of which are created – necessarily – by other individuals. The *Critique* can thus be read as the construction of a concept of the social individual that Marx never provides. This individual is only intelligible within what Sartre calls ‘the series’: the most basic form of the social whereby individuals are united by their separation. This serial unity emerges from the ‘formal, universal structure of alterity’<sup>178</sup>, relations of otherness (viz. alienation) that Sartre characterises as ‘the practico-inert object itself insofar as it produces itself in the milieu of multiplicity with its own particular exigencies.’<sup>179</sup> The *praxis* that underlies this unity is hence ‘serial *praxis*’: ‘the practico-inert structure of...*praxis* insofar as it is social’<sup>180</sup>, the existential basis of passive activity, and the *praxis* from which other social forms – namely the group and the collective – derive. The relation between the group and the collective is central to Sartre’s social ontology: far from being constituted between two discrete social entities, this relation is best grasped as a unitary field of social immanence wherein the materiality of the practico-inert is both resisted and surrendered to. Consider the following passage:

The group is defined by its undertaking and by the constant movement of integration which tends to turn it into pure *praxis* by trying to eliminate all forms of inertia from it; the collective is defined *by its being*, that is to say, insofar as all *praxis* is constituted by its being as mere *exis*; it is a material, inorganic object in the practico-inert field insofar as a discrete multiplicity of active individuals is produced in it under the sign of the Other, as a *real unity within Being*...as a passive synthesis, and to the extent that the constituted object is posited as essential and that its inertia penetrates *every individual praxis* as its fundamental determination by passive unity, that is to say, by the *pre-established* and *given* interpenetration of everyone as Others.<sup>181</sup>

The primary point to take from this is that groups and collectives constantly negate one another because they are dialectically structured – totalised – by one another. The group’s opposition to serial *praxis* is predicated on the collective ‘which engenders and sustains it’<sup>182</sup>, just as the

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<sup>178</sup> Ibid. 264.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid. 266.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid. 255. ‘...*the collective* is not simply the form of being of certain social realities, but...it is also the being of sociality itself at the level of the practico-inert field...a collective is in itself a sort of scale model of the practico-social field and of any passive activity carried out in it.’ Ibid. 304. Flynn’s work is exemplary in its account of how truly expansive a category Sartre understands the practico-inert to be. It takes in ‘the social field of collective objects like the newspaper or the Gothic cathedral, ...ideas and systems like racism and colonialism, and...institutions like the army or the state bureaucracy’, in addition to passive unities like language, ideology, classes, and other forms of ‘objective spirit’ (viz. culture). See Flynn, *Sartre, Foucault, and Historical Reason, Vol. I*, 121-23, and Flynn, *Sartre and Marxist Existentialism*, 99-101. This (below) has diverse ramifications for the meaning of ‘collective action’ and the ‘collective subject’.

<sup>182</sup> Sartre, *CDR* 1, 254.

collective can never evade the fact that the ossification of the group which it yields inexorably leads to new gatherings marked by new bonds of interiority (i.e. fused groups, pledged groups, etc.). Groups continually dissolve into the individuating seriality from whence they came, but it is precisely this seriality that undercuts Goldmann's claim<sup>183</sup> that Sartre cannot be a Marxist because he has no concept of a collective subject. The practico-inert *acts*, and this means that the collective (and the group) subject is everywhere in the *Critique*.

The mediation of the practico-inert which grounds the social materialism of the *Critique* would be nothing if it were not situated in relation to Sartre's unique conception of need. In a word, need *motors* the dialectic of action and matter within *praxis*; philosophically, it is that through which materiality is ontologically basic to matter. Early in the *Critique*, Sartre outlines the broad contours of his understanding of need:

Everything is to be explained through need [*le besoin*]; need is the first totalising relation between the material being, man, and the material ensemble of which he is part. This relation is *univocal*, and *of interiority*. Indeed, it is through need that the first negation of the negation and the first totalisation appear in matter. Need is a negation of the negation insofar as it expresses itself as a *lack* within the organism; and need is a positivity insofar as the organic totality tends to preserve itself *as such* through it...; the negation of this negation is achieved through the transcendence of the organic towards the inorganic: need is a link of *univocal immanence* with surrounding materiality insofar as the organism *tries to sustain itself* with it...; as soon as need appears, surrounding matter is endowed with a passive unity, in that a developing totalisation is reflected in it as a totality: matter revealed as passive totality by an organic being seeking its being in it – this is Nature in its initial form.<sup>184</sup>

Following Marx and Engels, Sartre's conception of need proceeds from the physiological and biological reproduction of human life. The living body is absolutely crucial to the *Critique*: it is an originary condition of totalisation and the first coexistence of *praxis* and matter – of ground and product – in time and space. The body is thus an organic totality that 'acts on inert bodies through the medium of the inert body *which it is* and which it *makes itself*.'<sup>185</sup> However, in sharp contrast with Marx, it is not surplus but *scarcity* [*la rareté*] which for Sartre underlies this metabolism between humanity and nature. Scarcity, not surplus, fuels history, such that, in Marx's terms, new needs are created and productive forces expand *because* there is scarcity.

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<sup>183</sup> See Lucien Goldmann, *Marxisme et sciences humaines* (Paris: Gallimard, 1970), 330-31, as well as Flynn's response to Goldmann in *Sartre and Marxist Existentialism*, 173-77.

<sup>184</sup> Sartre, *CDR* 1, 80-1. This conception of need safeguards dialectical reason from being killed twice over 'to make sure it is dead – the first time by claiming to have discovered it in Nature, and the second time by suppressing it within society.' Ibid. 712.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid. 82. '...the matter outside it subjects the living body to an inorganic statute precisely to the extent that it is itself transformed into a totality.' Ibid. 81.

If need is the negation of the negation, scarcity is the negation which is negated: the ‘negation of man in man by matter.’<sup>186</sup> To put it another way, matter and scarcity are indissociable terms in Sartre’s conceptual vocabulary: scarcity is matter, and matter scarcity, but only to the extent that both exist ‘as a *human fact*, rather than as the malignity of a cruel Nature.’<sup>187</sup> Scarcity is the transhistorical condition under which the negation of the negation becomes an affirmation – a positivity – but it also dictates that this affirmation (viz. need) is a univocal relation: the human must exteriorise itself in matter in order to exist, but matter need not, or rather it cannot, reciprocate the same action. Matter cannot exteriorise itself (at least, that is, at the level of human history): it is only ever exteriorised and reinteriorised by *praxis* (this is the meaning of passive activity). This is the reason why scarcity produces a ‘permanent framework of a field of tension’<sup>188</sup>, not just within individuals facing the constant threat of elimination but between individuals as well. Social relations are thus structured as relations of ‘interiorised scarcity’, as relations, in short, of violence and with the Other.<sup>189</sup> If scarcity and matter are conceptually indissociable in the *Critique*, so too are violence and need. They articulate two different but interdependent dimensions of totalisation as an ongoing and open movement.

Sartre is often critiqued for this conception of need, primarily because the entire milieu of relations between action and matter, *praxis* and the practico-inert, individuals, collectives, groups, etc. that is immanent to this conception stems from a *transhistorical identification* of alienation and objectification, an identification which, Chiodi argues, is mediated by alterity: ‘alienation is bound to alterity *to the extent to which alterity is equivalent to objectification.*’<sup>190</sup> As Chiodi reads it, the *Critique* systematically conflates alienation, objectification and alterity. It takes the Hegelian coincidence of objectification and alienation in the *Phenomenology*, but effectively refuses the latter’s possible disappearance precisely because the former is tied to an ineliminable – existential – alterity. Effectively refuses, since Chiodi denies Sartre’s claim that the group-in-fusion might shoulder the ‘double concrete undertaking’ of ‘removing man from the statute of alterity which makes him a product of his product, in order to transform him, *when molten [à chaud]*, by appropriate practices, into a *product of the group*, that is to say – as long as the group is freedom – *into his own product.*’<sup>191</sup> For Chiodi, the statute of alterity in fact dictates that ‘*de-alienation...becomes possible only through the suppression of*

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<sup>186</sup> Ibid. 149. Thus labour ‘has to be defined as *praxis* aimed at satisfying need *in the context of scarcity* by a particular negation of it.’ Ibid. 136-37.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid. 140, ft. 21.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid. 125.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid. 815. Violence ‘is the constant non-humanity of human conduct as interiorised scarcity; it is, in short, what makes people see each other as the Other and as the principle of Evil.’ Ibid. 149.

<sup>190</sup> Chiodi, *Sartre and Marxism*, 88.

<sup>191</sup> Sartre, *CDR* 1, 672-73.

*objectification, which in being a feature of the reciprocal relation of multiplicity, can only be suppressed through the suppression of multiplicity itself.*<sup>192</sup> Namely, through the suppression of totalisation itself, which is the suppression of history itself. ‘What this means, simply, is that de-alienation has the temporal dimension of an *instant*.’<sup>193</sup> If, for Sartre, the individual ‘discovers himself as *Other* in the world of objectivity’, and if the domination of individuals by matter, through individuals’ own *praxes* as the Other and through the *praxes* of Others, constitutes the ‘permanent possibility of alienation for everyone’, it is difficult to imagine how this possibility is not already a permanent necessity, the ‘*destiny in exteriority of freedom*.’<sup>194</sup> There seems to be no alternative to the fundamental incompatibility between reciprocity and objectivity at the heart of the *Critique*. For Mészáros, the root of this problem stems from the fact that the *Critique* ‘turn[s] the *eminently historical and socially transcendable category of scarcity* into a paralyzing ahistorical and anti-historical *absolute*, arbitrarily proclaimed to be the insuperable *permanence* and the overall determination and horizon of our real history.’<sup>195</sup> This is unquestionably true. Sartre resists at every turn the viewpoint that the ‘human fact’ of scarcity and (as he understands it) the alienation to which it gives rise are specific economic manifestations of the division of labour and private property relations within capitalism. This resistance – this over-ontologisation of history – extends to Sartre’s conception of ‘exigency’ (need from the standpoint of the practico-inert, its imperative) and its subcategory of ‘interest’, or ‘being-wholly-outside-oneself-in-a-thing insofar as it conditions *praxis* as a categorial imperative.’<sup>196</sup> The notion that both exigency and interest owe their historical intelligibility to capitalist private property is something that Sartre continually dismisses.

Yet the critical literature on the *Critique* generally does not thematise (in most cases it does not acknowledge) the manner in which Sartre’s conception of need forms the backbone of his understanding of the relationship between totalisation and temporalisation. Directly put,

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<sup>192</sup> Chiodi, *Sartre and Marxism*, 93.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid. 95.

<sup>194</sup> Sartre, *CDR* 1, 227, 136, 227. Destiny, as Flynn describes it, is ‘a future inscribed in the practico-inert.’ Flynn, *Sartre and Marxist Existentialism*, 103. Destiny is ‘an irresistible movement [that] draws or impels the ensemble towards a prefigured future which realises itself through it.’ Sartre, *CDR* 1, 551.

<sup>195</sup> Mészáros, *The Work of Sartre: Search for Freedom and the Challenge of History*, 243. Mészáros is, bar none, the most forceful critic of Sartre’s conception of scarcity. Again, this is not without irony. Mészáros continually faults the *Critique* for its ‘ahistorical discourses’ and its lack of ‘historical specificity’, but he never considers the idea that Sartre provides the very means of rendering concepts such as the ‘ahistorical’ and expressions such as ‘historical specificity’ intelligible, which, it seems, are for Mészáros self-sufficiently secured by Marx’s concept of ‘mode of production’. This irony is exacerbated by the fact that Mészáros accords to nature an impenetrable (ahistorical?) ‘lawfulness’. According to Mészáros, there is an ‘absolutely inescapable order of Nature’ whose ‘lawfulness...can be dynamically adapted but not violated’, dictating that there is ‘ineliminable natural substratum of human existence itself.’ Ibid. 247-49.

<sup>196</sup> Sartre, *CDR* 1, 197.

*need secures the ontological dependence between totalisation and temporalisation.* It is that through which the unification of totalisation *must* be understood as the active differentiation between the past, the present and the future. At the crux of this is Heidegger's reconstruction of the teleological framework of the act. In Sartre, as in Heidegger, individual *praxis* is given meaning by the particular end of a particular project, precisely because every individual *praxis* makes the future present through the end of the act. Yet in the *Critique* – and this is exactly what is missing in *Being and Time* – need is where the end comes from. It is what governs the projection of the end. Need, such as it is defined by the negation of scarcity, thus occupies and materially grounds the place of finitude in *Being and Time*. It is the historical-existential limit in relation to which temporality temporalises itself as a kind of 'being-towards-need'. As with Heidegger, the future is prioritised as the standpoint of the temporal unity of the act, which is to say that temporal unification is univocal: it originates from the projected future of the act. Yet on top of denoting an existential understanding ability-to-be, the future in the *Critique* is also structured by the *conscious imagination* of the end of the act. The future is simultaneously both actual and imaginary in the *Critique*, which cannot be said of *Being and Time*. It is open because it is a projective capacity for the sake of which any act exists *and* because it correlates to an act of the imagination. This latter sense of the future (the broadly Aristotelian conception of the future that guides the third volume of Lukács's *Ontology of Social Being*<sup>197</sup>) is directly in line with one of Marx's classic descriptions of labour in *Capital*: '...what distinguishes the worst architect from the best of bees is that the architect builds the cell in his mind before he constructs it in wax. At the end [*Ende*] of every labour process, a result emerges which was already present in the imagination of the worker from the start, hence already existed ideally. The worker not only realises a change of form of the natural; he also realises his own purpose [*Zweck*] in the natural. And this is a purpose he is conscious of. It determines the mode of his activity with the rigidity of a law, and he must subordinate his will to it.'<sup>198</sup> This purpose is an implicit formulation of the future in Marx, a teleological future immanent to the metabolism between humanity and nature. Sartre's future is distinctive because it combines – and therefore exceeds – both Marx and Heidegger's construction of the teleological future, and because it emerges from (absent in Marx and Heidegger alike) a conception of need which itself emerges from an account of the relationship between materiality and matter. This, as we will now begin

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<sup>197</sup> See in particular Georg Lukács, *The Ontology of Social Being, Vol. 3, Labour* [1971-3], trans. David Fernbach (London: Merlin Press, 1978), 1-46.

<sup>198</sup> Karl Marx, *Das Kapital: Kritik der politischen Ökonomie, Erster Band: Der Produktionsprozeß des Kapitals* (hereafter *Kapital 1*), in Marx and Engels, *MEW*, Band 23 (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1962), 193 (*Capital 1*, 284).

to examine, is crucial to our project of thinking historical temporalisation and, consequently, the concept of historicalisation.

The *Critique* does not investigate the ontological dependence between totalisation and temporalisation to the extent to which it might. There is, for instance, no consideration of how the movement of totalisation-detotalisation-retotalisation might correspond to something like ‘temporalisation-detemporalisation-retemporalisation’, nor does Sartre specify how collective and group *praxes* institute new bonds between totalisation and temporalisation irreducible to individual *praxis*. As the introduction to this chapter argues, if temporalisation is conceivable beyond the scope of individual *praxis* as totalisation, then there is an entire domain within the *Critique* which is missing, a domain which, this thesis contends, must be explored in order to both maximise and qualify Sartre’s formulation of history as ‘totalisation without a totaliser’. Nonetheless, there are passages in the *Critique* that must be highlighted, as they represent a critical departure from Heidegger as well as the means through which Marx and Engels’s first historical act can be read temporally, and done so beyond what the previous chapter provides. The first passage is a general exposition of what Sartre calls ‘dialectical time’:

Organic functioning, need and *praxis* are strictly linked in a dialectical manner; dialectical time came into being, in fact, with the organism; for the living being can survive only by renewing itself. This *temporal* relation between the future and the past, through the present, is none other than the functional relation of the totality to itself; the totality is its own future lying beyond a present of reintegrated disintegration. In short, a living unity is characterised by the decompression of the temporality of the instant; but the new temporality is an elementary synthesis of change and identity, since the future governs the present insofar as this future strictly identifies itself with the past.<sup>199</sup>

The second passage reworks Heidegger’s analysis of being-towards-death:

Need, as a negation of the negation, is the organism itself, living itself in the future, through present disorders, as its own possibility and, consequently, as the possibility of its own impossibility; and *praxis*, in the first instance, is nothing but the relation of the organism, as exterior and future end, to the present organism as a totality under threat; it is function exteriorised.<sup>200</sup>

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<sup>199</sup> Sartre, *CDR* 1, 82.

<sup>200</sup> *Ibid.* 83.

The third passage is an account of the temporality of exigency:

Inertia comes to him from the fact that previous work has constituted in the machine *a future which cannot be transcended* in the form of exigency...and from the fact that this untranscendable future is actualised in all its urgency by present circumstances (the capitalist process as a whole and the conjuncture in the unity of historical totalisation). Thus *the inertia of praxis*, as a new characteristic of it, removes none of its previous characteristics: *praxis* remains a transcendence of material being towards a future reorganisation of the field. But passivising *annulment* modifies it from the future towards the past within the petrified framework of exigency: this is because the future to be realised is already fabricated as mechanical inertia *in the way in which past being is transcended*. And indeed it can always be said that any material circumstance which has to be transcended, even the configuration of the land in the course of a walk, imposes a certain content on the future towards which it is transcended. It restricts certain possibilities and provides a certain instrumentality which will characterise the final result. However, it does not *produce* that future; the future comes to material circumstances through men, and if material circumstances are preserved in it as significations, it is not because it is homogeneous with them (and passive like them), but on the contrary because human *praxis* has given it a human future by projecting it (as transcended and preserved) into this future. On the contrary, *precisely* because they have been worked and assembled by men, who have made them anti-human, the machine and the combination of exigencies contain the movement of transcendence in themselves and, in connection with this inert movement, the future of the ensemble is the mechanico-practical meaning of this totality insofar as it *functions* (that is to say, insofar as an *exterior* force enables it to realise itself as a pseudo-organic function). Thus the reason why past being cannot be transcended is that it is itself the inscription in being of a *praxis* which produces, beyond any particular human *praxis*, its own meaning as transcendent being. So the human *praxis* which lives in symbiosis with this inert practice and which is controlled by it as exigency constitutes itself as a mechanical means (in exteriority) of introducing mechanics amongst its characteristics as a human undertaking. It remains entirely what it is (if one takes it abstractly as a pure, isolated *praxis*) but its own future as transcendence of its past being is transcended by this very past-being insofar as it is already signified by the future.<sup>201</sup>

These passages exemplify the unique fashion in which Sartre dialecticises Heidegger's anti-dialectical philosophy of time. If there is a single dimension that cuts across each passage, it is the way in which, as the first passage expresses it, the 'future strictly identifies itself with the past'. This is not a conflation of the future and the past within an absolutised present. The difference between the future and the past has not been flattened, but rather dialecticised, and dialecticised, crucially, under the immense weight and pressure of the practico-inert. The basic teleological structure of the act prevails (the future still governs the act through its end), but need and exigency, the functional relations of, respectively, organic and inorganic totalities to

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<sup>201</sup> Ibid. 235-36.

themselves, are only actual within the dialectic between *praxis* and the practico-inert<sup>202</sup>, or what might be described as *the dialectic between the totalising present and the totalised past*. Both *praxis* and the practico-inert ‘contain the movement of transcendence in themselves’, but each encompasses a different kind of movement corresponding to a different kind of transcendence. *Praxis* is a dialectical movement between the present and the past wherein the present is prioritised as the totalising transcendence of the past towards the future. As the totalising present, *praxis* is the dialectical negation of the past as a totality, which is to say that the materiality of the present is the dialectical negation of the past as matter. To the extent that it is embodied as matter – i.e. to the extent that it is totalised as a totality – the past is fated to inertia (the totality cannot undo its separation from the process of its own production). But the past is equally fated to movement, because the totalising present cannot totalise without re-interiorising matter (there is no *praxis* without *poiêsis*). In contrast to *praxis*, the practico-inert prioritises the totalised past as an anti-dialectical force that incessantly saps the present of its ability to transcend the past, such that the future becomes untranscendable insofar as it already signifies and already identifies itself with the past. As the milieu of recurrence and historical repetition, the practico-inert constitutes the standpoint from which passivity is ‘*the whole as the presence of the future*’, and worked matter is ‘the solidified threat of the future.’<sup>203</sup> This ‘theft of the end’<sup>204</sup> at the hands of anti-*praxis* and counterfinality deforms temporalisation into the production of passive temporalities (‘the ingenuity of the organiser’ within Taylorism ‘consists in replacing temporalisation by passive temporality.’<sup>205</sup>) In short, the practico-inert temporalises, but only because, to invoke Marx, it represents the perversion [*Verrücktheit*] of human *praxis* as temporalisation.

It is clear that the dialectic of *praxis* and the practico-inert has the potential to amplify the temporal reading of the first historical act in the previous chapter. Generally speaking, the *Critique* adds significant depth to the past and the future of this act, qualifying but not undoing the priority that this act accords to the present. As the previous chapter suggests, the past can be identified with the domain of existing needs within the dialectic of the creation of the means to satisfy existing needs and the creation of new needs. From a Sartrean perspective, however,

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<sup>202</sup> It is crucial to remind ourselves that the dialectic between *praxis* and the practico-inert is not simply another name for the dialectic between action and matter, but is rather a complex dialectic between a dialectical and anti-dialectical configuration between action and matter.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid. 86, 184.

<sup>204</sup> Chiodi, *Sartre and Marxism*, 53.

<sup>205</sup> Sartre, *CDR* 1, 559. This dovetails with how ‘a group...incorporates lived temporality with the passive temporality of the practico-inert, so as to accomplish, through actions that are multiple and the same, a common result.’ See Joseph S. Catalano, *A Commentary on Jean-Paul Sartre’s Critique of Dialectical Reason, Volume 1, Theory of Practical Ensembles* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 200.



this past takes on a constitutive function which exceeds its mere creation and negation by the present. The past is no longer non-dialectical but rather anti-dialectical: it internally opposes the negation of the negation within the present as a particular negation of the negation itself (exigency is the movement of ‘past-present-past’ that is internal to the movement of need as ‘present-past-present’). Hence the social production of the means of life is (for Sartre) already controlled by the practico-inert (alienation and class are already internal to the first historical act). As for the future of the first historical act, Sartre as well as Heidegger obviously provides us with the framework with which the future is to be grasped as immanent to the present: the teleological structure of the act. Chapter One claims that the future does not lie in waiting: it is not the waiting repetition of an actual dialectic played out between the present and the past. Yet it does not identify *telos* as the reason why this is the case, such that it is only the end of the act which unifies the time of the act. *Telos* – not negation – provides the standpoint from which the practical dependence between totalisation and temporalisation is secured. Thus the question emerges: does the unifying power that Heidegger and Sartre grant to the future, and does the prefabricating power that Sartre attaches to the past, undercut the ontological priority of the present within the first historical act? The answer, in a word, is no. The future and the past are constitutive features of this act, but only because they are immanent to the present. Sartre does not thematise this point, and would likely reject it. The *Critique* is guided by the idea that the future and the past completely determine, and thus overdetermine, the present,<sup>206</sup> but nowhere is this idea measured against the idea that temporalisation *as such* is only actual within the present. This is not, after Heidegger, an appeal to the identity between the present and presence (the phenomenological appearance of matter). More basically, this is the notion, unconsidered by Sartre, that *the present is the ontological meaning of movement itself*, in both its active and inert registers. In this sense, totalising *praxis* and passive activity are inseparable movements *of the present*.<sup>207</sup> Far from fitting into the framework of synchrony/diachrony, this present correlates to the phenomenological present outlined in the introduction to this chapter: properly materialised, it is the condition of thinking the past and the future in relation to one another. If this present is an ‘unbridgeable “pernicious chasm”’ that lies ‘between the subject

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<sup>206</sup> See in particular Sartre, *CDR* 1, 709. The present is – by far – the least theorised of the three temporal modes in the *Critique*, largely because the historicist framework of synchrony/diachrony predetermines its meaning. This leads Flynn to problematically accept that temporalisation = ‘diachronic totalisation’ (which in turn is = historical totalisation). See Flynn, *Sartre, Foucault, and Historical Reason, Vol. I*, 111.

<sup>207</sup> After Hegel, Heidegger and Marcuse, it is important to establish the difference and relation between the movement/motility [*Bewegtheit*] of existence/life and the motion [*Bewegung*] of a tangible object in space (see footnote 127 in this chapter and footnote 69 in Chapter 1). This difference does not feature in Marx but, this thesis argues, it might be productively integrated into his work (especially the various drafts of *Capital*).

and the object'<sup>208</sup>, and 'between' the past and the future, it is only because – qua the movement of becoming – it is ontologically basic to them.

This underdetermination of the present notwithstanding, the *Critique* equips us with the means of constructing a concept of historicalisation that promises to enrich Marx's philosophy of history. In order for this concept to work, it must register the singularity of the historical (as opposed to the individual and the social) act, as well as articulate a general set of relations within and between totalisation, temporalisation and materiality, relations that each and every historical act 'incarnates'.<sup>209</sup> There are a number of ways to approach historicalisation through Sartre, but undoubtedly the most productive is through the concept of 'enveloping totalisation' and its correlative '*praxis*-process' in Sartre's second *Critique*. Enveloping totalisation does not represent a departure, but rather an intensive and extensive expansion – a 'compression' and 'decompression' – of totalisation in his first *Critique*. As Flynn puts it, 'what [enveloping totalisation] adds to 'totalisation' *tout court* from volume 1 is a greater intensity and a broader scope. It is more comprehensive than isolated organic *praxis* in both senses of the term: it is more inclusive of the mediating relationships that render abstract organic *praxis* concrete and, correspondingly, it yields greater understanding of the *praxis* in question...it is a unifying notion (historicising *praxis*-process), not an atemporal concept, that subsumes our *praxes* as parts of a dynamic whole.'<sup>210</sup> Commenting on Sartre's position that 'every singular totalisation is enveloping as a totalisation as well as enveloped as a singularity'<sup>211</sup>, Flynn goes on to state that 'the singularity of the totalisation comes from its unique locus as the nodal point and matrix of an indefinite multiplicity of relationships', and 'its enveloping character arises from the linkage it constitutes (both in knowledge and in being) to the entirety of these relations.'<sup>212</sup> There are two noteworthy conclusions to take away from this. First, the primacy of individual and social (collective, group) *praxis* has been supplanted by that of '*praxis*-process', which, irreducible to its individual and social actors, is the ontological basis not of totalisation *sans*

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<sup>208</sup> Georg Lukács, 'Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat' [1923], in *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics* [1923], trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge and London: MIT Press, 1972), 204. The expression 'pernicious chasm' comes from Ernst Bloch.

<sup>209</sup> 'Incarnation' does not feature as a central category in Sartre's first *Critique*. It mainly designates individuation within the group, particularly its 'summit' (e.g. the sovereign). Incarnation is, however, crucial to the dialectical logic of his second *Critique*. As an 'internal and local temporalisation' of 'a certain moment of the ongoing totalisation', it encompasses every level of enveloping totalisation. It is, 'at all levels, the retotalisation of the enveloping totalisation by every event, every *praxis* and every particular *exis*.' Sartre, *CDR* 2, 77, 256. The conceptual homology between Sartre's 'incarnation' and Hegel's 'concrete universal' is clear.

<sup>210</sup> Flynn, *Sartre, Foucault, and Historical Reason, Vol. I*, 157.

<sup>211</sup> Sartre, *CDR* 2, 49.

<sup>212</sup> Flynn, *Sartre, Foucault, and Historical Reason, Vol. I*, 157. As Flynn points out, this aspect of enveloping totalisation is for Sartre the 'law of immanence' which constitutes 'the synthetic interiority of the historical field.' Sartre, *CDR* 2, 384.

*phrase*, but of singular totalisations. The upshot of this is that there is no such thing as concrete *praxis* ‘as such’. There are only concrete *praxes*, each of which temporalise because they are orientated towards an end *and* because, as *praxis-processes*, they forge ‘passive syntheses’ that ‘reintroduce multiplicity’ into *all* modalities of human action.<sup>213</sup> Temporalisation has now become ‘the movement of enveloping temporalisation’<sup>214</sup>, which is to say temporalisation ‘by every event, every *praxis* and every particular *axis*.’

This leads to the second conclusion. Enveloping totalisation *fundamentally unsettles* the culminating formulation of history as ‘totalisation without a totaliser’ in the first *Critique*. We must consider how Sartre defines this formulation:

History is intelligible if the different practices which can be found and located at a given moment of historical temporalisation finally appear as partially totalising and as connected and merged in their very oppositions and diversities by an intelligible totalisation from which there is no appeal. It is by seeking the conditions for the intelligibility of historical vestiges and results that we shall, for the first time, reach the problem of totalisation without a totaliser and of the very foundations of this totalisation, that is to say, of its motive-forces and of its non-circular direction.<sup>215</sup>

The point here is straightforward. The end of individual and social *praxis* is one thing, but is there such a thing as ‘the end of history’, and if so, what mediates the relationship between these ends? What gives history its unity? ‘How’, as Sartre asks early in his first *Critique*, ‘can there be a historical future?’<sup>216</sup> ‘Totalisation without a totaliser’ is a placeholder of a response to these questions. The essence of this formulation is that totalisation at the level of individual and social *praxis* (totalisations which ‘have’ totalisers) is not – it cannot be – the totalisation that totalises history. That is, if history is in some way the totalisation of the time of the human, then it might be understood as the totalisation of all individual and social totalisations, and as the temporalisation of all individual and social temporalisations, yet this totalisation and this temporalisation are not – they cannot be – the same totalisation and temporalisation immanent to individual and social *praxes*. The difference between individual and historical totalisation is particularly important to Sartre. *We know* totalisation from the standpoint of the individual, but the intelligibility of historical totalisation, that totalisation ‘from which there is no appeal’, is obscure. It is akin to Hegel’s ‘cunning of reason’, and to the invisible hand of Adam Smith’s market, each of which work behind the backs of individuals.

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<sup>213</sup> Ibid. 335. Recall that Sartre identifies ‘three modalities of human action’ in the first volume of the *Critique*: individual *praxis*, common (constituted) *praxis*, and *praxis*-process.

<sup>214</sup> Ibid.

<sup>215</sup> Sartre, *CDR* 1, 817.

<sup>216</sup> Ibid. 79.

Sartre leaves unaddressed – he does not ask – what kind of relationship exists between ‘totalisation without a totaliser’ and enveloping totalisation. For Flynn, enveloping totalisation is ‘in its most comprehensive form’ a ‘version’ of totalisation without a totaliser, such that the former constitutes the diachronic (or progressive) meaning-direction [*sens*] of the synchronic (or regressive) latter.<sup>217</sup> Consequently, “‘totalisation without a totaliser’” does not refer to some “hyperorganism” or some transcendent reality, which Sartre would reject on principle. Rather, it denotes that set of objective relations or possibilities that are put in motion and sustained, even in their deviating and counterproductive functions, by individual and group or collective activity.<sup>218</sup> Put in motion and sustained, he should add, by singular (enveloping) totalisations, by *praxis*-processes. This is an interesting – and faithful – reading of the relationship between Sartre’s two *Critiques*. It takes Sartre at his word on the last page of the first *Critique* that ‘we have not yet considered the diachronic depth of practical temporalisation’<sup>219</sup>, implicitly stating that ‘enveloping temporalisation’ fulfils this need. However, Sartre and Flynn do not realise that the framework of synchrony/diachrony (the framework that grounds the implied (Sartre) and reconstructed (Flynn) relationship between totalisation without a totaliser and enveloping totalisation) threatens to undercut the dynamic – the *dialectical* – relationship between what Sartre identifies as ‘the formal structures of history’ (volume 1) and ‘real history’ (volume 2). This dovetails with what Mészáros calls the ‘*unfinishability* of [Sartre’s] theory of historical totalisation.’<sup>220</sup> Whilst Mészáros singles out the ‘existential-ontological foundation’ of the *Critique*, and the ‘incurable’ lack of social and historical mediation it yields, as the reason for this unfinishability<sup>221</sup>, the blame is better placed on Sartre’s attempt to yoke the philosophy of history ‘to the double synchronic and diachronic movement by which History constantly totalises itself.’<sup>222</sup> It is exceedingly difficult to transcend the *atemporal* origins of synchrony and diachrony within structuralist linguistics, origins, as the introduction to this chapter warns, which indelibly steer us towards historicism. ‘Diachronic totalisation’ therefore becomes *the* meaning of historical temporalisation. Even if we grasp ‘the double synchronic and diachronic movement’ as doubly dialectical, such that it correlates to the movement within *and* between the formal structures and the ‘concrete and absolute reality of History’<sup>223</sup>, we are still left with the problem of how to understand historical change and difference through Sartre’s unique

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<sup>217</sup> Flynn, *Sartre, Foucault, and Historical Reason, Vol. I*, 157, 177.

<sup>218</sup> *Ibid.* 177.

<sup>219</sup> Sartre, *CDR* 1, 818.

<sup>220</sup> Mészáros, *The Work of Sartre: Search for Freedom and the Challenge of History*, 242.

<sup>221</sup> *Ibid.* 243.

<sup>222</sup> Sartre, *CDR* 1, 818.

<sup>223</sup> Sartre, *CDR* 2, 335. ‘The concrete and absolute reality of History can be only in the singularity of the practical relations uniting singular men to the singular objectives they pursue, in the singularity of the conjuncture.’ *Ibid.*

dialectical-teleological conception of time. In Heideggerian terms, how are historical change and difference irreducible to the ‘ordinary’ (chronological) conception of time?

This yields a more fundamental problem. The concept of historicalisation must register the singularity of the historical event<sup>224</sup>, but do so in such a way that historical time does not become relegated to a passive medium through which this singularity is realised (Benjamin’s ‘homogenous, empty time’). Yet the only way to avoid this relegation is to likewise conceive historicalisation at the level of history as a *collective* singular, consistent with the idea that the problem of history is ‘*how to universalise the singular without suppressing its specificity.*’<sup>225</sup> That is, the concept of historicalisation must equally register relations between totalisation, temporalisation and materiality – need-based relations of dependence – *specific to history as a whole*. This returns us to the argument that enveloping totalisation unsettles the formulation of history as ‘totalisation without a totaliser’. The reason why enveloping totalisation is useful is not because it provides a model for the concept of historicalisation, but because, in holding historical temporalisation ontologically accountable to ‘the real’, which is to say to the entire field of historical time, it casts considerable doubt on the idea that history is not in some sense constituted by a totaliser. This is not a ‘mysterious totaliser’<sup>226</sup> which forces ‘the dialectic to become a divine law again, a metaphysical fate’<sup>227</sup>, but is better understood as the condition of thinking what Sartre calls ‘*our History*’ (viz. human history). This is the premise of the rest of this thesis: there *is* an identifiable totaliser that totalises, and thus temporalises, history. It has not existed throughout history, but this lack of transhistorical validity takes nothing away from the fact that it is (to date) the *only* historically totalising stand.

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<sup>224</sup> The existential notion of ‘historicalisation’ in Sartre’s *War Diaries* (1939-40) and his *Notebooks for an Ethics* (1947-48) is the philosophical precursor of the singularity of the historical event in his second *Critique*. This is the sense in which the lives of, to use Sartrean examples, Flaubert and Stalin incarnate their respective ‘epochs’.

<sup>225</sup> Mészáros, *The Work of Sartre: Search for Freedom and the Challenge of History*, 242. According to Mészáros, this is both the definitive problem of history and an ‘insurmountable problem’ for Sartre.

<sup>226</sup> *Ibid.* 241.

<sup>227</sup> Sartre, *CDR* 1, 36. It is the unconditional absence – not the presence – of a totaliser within historical totalisation which consigns the dialectic to metaphysics.

## Chapter Three

### Whither Labour?

...we should not say that one man's hour is worth another man's hour, but rather that one man during an hour is worth as much as another man during an hour. Time is everything, man is nothing; he is at the most the embodiment of time. Quality no longer matters. Quantity alone decides everything: hour for hour, day for day...<sup>1</sup>

This thesis has, up to this point, been predominantly framed at a transhistorical level. Chapter 1 introduced a transhistorical materialist concept of history: a concept of history that, for Marx and Engels, registers all of human history. The heart of Chapter 1 is a temporal reading of the first historical act – the social production of the means of life – that is a ‘fundamental condition of all history, which today, as thousands of years ago, must daily and hourly be fulfilled merely in order to sustain human life.’<sup>2</sup> Specifically, this chapter looked at Marx and Engels’s internal specification of this act – the creation of the means of satisfying existing needs and the creation of new needs – as two different dimensions of one and the same historical act. It then argued that the basic temporal structure of this act is a dialectic between the present and the past, one immanently guided by a teleological future. What Chapter 1 established is that, for Marx and Engels, labour and need are the two categories upon which the materialist concept of history depends, and thus labour and need are the two forces without which the temporality of history cannot be thought. Chapter 2 gave us the means by which to ontologically ground the temporal reading offered by Chapter 1. Heidegger’s *Dasein* provides an account of how the act as such temporalises, but fails to establish need as the end of the act, whereas Sartre explicitly reworks the relation between *Dasein* and its world as a material relation between individual *praxis* and the ‘practico-inert’, thus situating need not only at the heart of temporalisation, but at the heart of the unity between totalisation and temporalisation. The conclusion of Sartre’s first *Critique* is the formulation of history as ‘totalisation without a totaliser’ (a formulation, we should note, which is remarkably similar to Althusser’s ‘process without a subject’). For Sartre, history can thus be conceived as the ongoing totalisation and temporalisation of all individual totalisations and temporalisations, but historical totalisation and temporalisation does not – it cannot – have a totaliser. Any attempt to identify such a totaliser is to relegate dialectics to metaphysics.

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<sup>1</sup> Karl Marx, *Das Elend der Philosophie* [*Misère de la Philosophie*] [1847], in Marx and Engels, *MEW*, Band 4 (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1977), 85 (for an English edition of this passage: Karl Marx, *The Poverty of Philosophy* (New York: International Publishers, 1963), 53-4).

<sup>2</sup> Marx and Engels, *GI*, 48.

The underlying concern of this chapter – in fact the rest of this thesis – is the fate of the materialist concept of history, and hence the fate of Heidegger and Sartre’s contribution to our temporal understanding of this concept, in the wake of Marx’s critique of political economy from the late 1850s onwards, which is to say from the *Grundrisse* onwards. In what ways does this critique problematise the transhistoricality of the materialist concept of history? In what ways does it force us to rethink ‘transhistoricality’ in Marx more generally? If labour and need are the two essential categories at the heart of the materialist concept of history, in what sense does this critique modify our understanding of these categories, our understanding, that is, of how labour and need temporalise and historicalise? This chapter concentrates on the category of labour, whereas the following chapter will, in light of what is demonstrated in this chapter, thematise the category of need. So what becomes of Marx’s category of labour in the wake of his critique of political economy? How does this critique transform the category of ‘labour in general’, the transhistorical category which, one might state, registers the ontological basis of the totalisation and temporalisation of history? We must address these questions because, and contrary to some readings of Marx, ‘human labour in general’ [*menschliche Arbeit überhaupt*] does not fall out of his critique of political economy. In actual fact, labour in general is at the forefront of this critique, albeit in ways which radically alter the scope and critical function of this category in both the *1844 Manuscripts* as well as *The German Ideology*. This is because, this chapter argues, Marx’s critique of political economy introduces a concept without which labour in general cannot be thought, a concept which is the historically specific (to capitalism) *condition* of thinking this category. In short, this concept is Marx’s concept of ‘abstract human labour’ [*abstrakt menschliche Arbeit*], a concept that is a cornerstone of his concept of capital and that is the central focus of this chapter. To suggest that abstract labour is the condition of conceiving ‘labour in general’ does not mean that capital is ‘a necessary feature of the *human labour-process as such*, irrespective of the historical forms it has assumed’<sup>3</sup>, but it *does* mean that we cannot conceptualise this process, nor the historical forms it assumes, in isolation from the totalising and temporalising power of capital.

As controversial as it may be to declare this, this chapter proceeds from the premise that *Capital* readily demonstrates that abstract labour is the condition of thinking labour in general. ‘Labour in general’ is an epistemological *consequence* of the commodity exchange relation in capitalism, an exchange relation that both constitutes and is constituted by the ‘value-forming substance’: abstract labour. Hence when Marx asserts that ‘the equality and equivalence of all

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<sup>3</sup> Marx, *Capital* 1, 981. When capital is comprehended as a necessary feature of labour as such, ‘it is consequently something permanent, determined by the nature of human labour itself.’ Ibid. This is, in short, the defining error of classical political economy, an error in which ‘capital comes to be thought of as a *thing*...[that] plays...a role appropriate to it as a thing in the process of production.’ Ibid. 982.

kinds of labour because and insofar as they are human labour in general' is predicated on 'the dominant social relation...[being]...the relation between men as possessors of commodities'<sup>4</sup>, this does not mean that, consequent to the establishment of a generalised system of commodity exchange (capitalism), abstract labour emerges as the 'historically specific' form of an already existing – transhistorical – labour in general, but rather that something like 'labour in general' becomes, for the first time in history, intelligible *because* capitalism creates a particular kind of labour – abstract labour – as its own condition. This thesis argues that there is no basis other than abstract labour, and therefore no mode of production other than capitalism, which enables us to think 'labour' transhistorically, which enables passages like:

The labour-process...is purposeful activity aimed at the production of use-values. It is an appropriation of what exists in nature for the requirements of human beings. It is the universal condition for the metabolism [*Stoffwechsel*] between the human being and nature, the eternal, natural condition of human existence, and it is thus independent of every form of that existence, or rather it is common to all forms of society in which human beings live.<sup>5</sup>

The crux of the issue here is the category of 'concrete labour'. The premise of this chapter is that capital demolishes the thought of something like a 'transhistorical labour in general' – a 'concrete labour as such' – except – *and this is the essential point* – as a general category that receives its intelligibility from concrete labours *as* particular instances of abstract labour. Put differently, the only actuality to the category of 'labour in general' is abstract labour: insofar as 'labour in general' is actual in general, it is as abstract labour. Within capitalism, 'labour in general' is not actual as concrete labour. It is actual as concrete labours (plural, the multiplicity of them), which is why abstract labour constitutes its condition of intelligibility. The *dialectic*, we will argue, between concrete labour (the Multiple) and abstract labour (the One), a dialectic that is specific to capitalism, cannot be compromised. The potential 'controversy' arises from the fact that Marx himself, in *Capital* and elsewhere, offers us passages (such as the one above) that clearly depict 'labour' in transhistorical terms. Passages like these are, this thesis argues, very problematic, because they do not acknowledge what *Capital* demonstrates: capital is their condition of possibility. As we will learn, this extends to other concepts in Marx's critique of political economy as well, namely 'concrete labour', 'use-value' and 'labour-power'. In some regards, therefore, this chapter is in conflict with Marx.

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid. 152.

<sup>5</sup> Marx, *Kapital* 1, 198 (*Capital* 1, 290).



Yet the purpose of this chapter is not simply, or even primarily, to demonstrate that the concept of abstract labour is the condition of thinking labour in general.<sup>6</sup> Its overriding purpose is in fact to systematically examine, *consequent* to the fact that abstract labour makes ‘labour in general’ intelligible, the complex and rich concept that is ‘abstract labour’ itself, at the heart of which is a complex and rich – if underdeveloped – account of temporalisation. Indeed, the temporal – *temporalising* – dialectic between abstract and concrete labour is arguably Marx’s greatest contribution to the philosophy of time, a contribution that is still far from being fully realised. To anticipate the next chapter, the reason why such attention is being paid to abstract labour is that if it is the condition of thinking labour in general, then it must also be an essential (but not the only) condition of thinking the materialist concept of history.<sup>7</sup> This chapter is thus the necessary first step towards establishing what the previous chapter speculatively proposed and what the next chapter seeks to demonstrate: against Sartre, there *is* a totaliser that totalises and temporalises history. It is capital. Thus whilst history does not feature prominently in this chapter, this does *not* mean that abstract labour is in any sense ‘outside’ of history, or that the exchange relation which simultaneously constitutes and expresses abstract labour is somehow ‘outside’ of historical time. Quite the opposite. Abstract labour and the commodity exchange relation are squarely within history and historical time, precisely because they are *constitutive* of history and historical time. They – and this claim can only be fully appreciated after Chapter 4 and the Conclusion – are a historical-ontological *ground* of the production of historical time. In opposition to the standpoint of much of the literature in so-called ‘Systematic Dialectics’, therefore, the capitalist exchange relation is not just a historical but a historicalising relation, such that historical time is – logically and actually – *immanent* to the systematic development of the value-form.<sup>8</sup> A crucial dimension of coming to this realisation – and this the concern of the second section of this chapter, after the totalising and temporalising power of abstract labour has been outlined – is the systematic investigation of Marx’s concepts of ‘necessary’

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<sup>6</sup> The question is also: if abstract labour is the condition of thinking labour in general, is it the condition of thinking Sartre’s ‘*praxis*’? Heidegger’s ‘*Dasein*’? The historical condition that makes, we might go so far as to say, the existential-phenomenological subject possible?

<sup>7</sup> Chapter 4 concentrates exclusively on the materialist concept of history, but it raises the question of whether capital is the condition of thinking the modern, post-Enlightenment conception of history more generally.

<sup>8</sup> ‘Systematic Dialectics’ does not grasp capital as the condition of thinking history, and hence does not think the systematic properly. Statements such as the following (which is representative of Systematic Dialectics) are thus misguided: ‘the exchanges outlined in the first chapter of *Capital* are not historical but logical.’ Stavros Tombazos, *Time in Marx: The Categories of Time in Marx’s Capital* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2014), 62. This standpoint is common, and extends beyond Systematic Dialectics. In his Kantian rereading of commodity exchange as the *a priori* synthetic matrix of the social, Sohn-Rethel states that ‘the exchange abstraction excludes everything that makes up history, human and even natural history’, and that through the exchange relation ‘time becomes unhistorical time.’ Sohn-Rethel, *Intellectual and Manual Labour: a Critique of Epistemology*, 48-9, 56.

and ‘surplus-labour’. These two concepts must be examined not only because their difference and relation are the very reason why abstract labour exists, but because – and this is the task of Chapter 4 – the *production* of their difference and relation comprises, in Sartre’s words, the ‘primary intelligibility’ of history.

An overriding consequence of this chapter – one that the rest of this thesis reinforces – can be grasped by the following proposition: *there is no place for a ‘transhistorical ontology’ in Marx, only a historical ontology*. Categories such as labour and need are only ontologically valid at the level of the *difference* between one mode of production and another, such that the capitalist human is a fundamentally different kind of subject than the feudal human (the social individual in capitalism is a fundamentally different kind of subject than the social individual in other modes of production<sup>9</sup>). Yet this does *not* mean that we cannot *think* transhistorically. For our purposes, the specifically capitalist existence of abstract labour is exactly what allows us to think ‘labour’, ‘need’ and ‘history’ transhistorically. In short (assuming one holds to the ontological priority of a mode of production), the ‘transhistorical’ should be understood as an epistemological category in Marx, whereas the ‘historical’ is an ontological category. Hence whilst this chapter – in fact the rest of this thesis – destabilises the transhistorical basis of the claims made in the first two chapters, it does *not* render these claims meaningless. Rather, it shows that the capitalist mode of production is the historical condition of thinking what, up to this point, has been presented at a transhistorical level. The spirit of this chapter is thus not to shut down the possibility of ‘the transhistorical Marx’, but to historicise him. This is important because the concept of historical time must register the possibility of social and historical time after capitalism. We *need* the transhistorical Marx, precisely because it is impossible to think communism without him.

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<sup>9</sup> This point registers the essential limit of Carol C. Gould’s *Marx’s Social Ontology: Individuality and Community in Marx’s Theory of Social Reality* (Cambridge and London: MIT Press, 1978). Drawing on the passages on the ‘social individual’ in the *Grundrisse*, Gould attempts to create a transhistorically valid social ontology as the *basis* from which to think the historical development of social individuality. There is something sociological in the bad sense about a methodology such as this: Gould’s manoeuvre effectively de-historicises the social in order to historicise the historical. Marx’s conception of a ‘social individual’ is intelligible because of capitalism (as is the category of ‘society’).

### 3.1 Abstract and Concrete Labour

We do not need to go further than the first chapter of the first volume of *Capital* to have a sense of how ‘labour in general’ owes its intelligibility to capital. A direct consequence of the systematic development of the value-form in this chapter is the realisation that the capitalist exchange relation does not just express but in fact *constitutes* the category of labour in general. The following passage encapsulates this nicely:

Men and women do not...bring the products of their labour into relation with each other as values because they see these objects as the thinglike shells [*sachliche Hüllen*] of homogeneous human labour. It is the opposite. By equating their different products to each other in exchange as values, they equate their different kinds of labour as the same human labour. They do not know this, but they do this.<sup>10</sup>

Marx repeatedly emphasises this point throughout the first chapter of *Capital*: ‘It is only the expression of equivalence between different sorts of commodities which brings to view the specific character of value-creating labour, by actually reducing the different kinds of labour embedded in the different kinds of commodity to their common quality of being *human labour in general*.’<sup>11</sup> In other words, the act of exchange determines the kind of labour that determines the value of what is being exchanged. The value-form, and the act of exchange that is implied by this form, are originary conditions of Marx’s labour theory of value. Value [*Wert*], which might be described as ‘exchangeability in definite proportions’<sup>12</sup>, is the self-mediating ground of the social. It is determined, as we will examine, by ‘socially necessary labour-time’, but it is nothing if it is not also understood as an exchange-determined ground. Capitalist production is already always production for exchange, and thus the exchange relation must ‘be grasped as simultaneously *constitutive* of value and serving as its *expression*.’<sup>13</sup>

Any discussion of the relationship between capital and the category of labour in general must, however, attend to one particular exchange, one consistent with the exchange relation as doubly constitutive and expressive of value, but one that, given the content of what is being exchanged, stands as both the presupposition and result of the production-process of capital.

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<sup>10</sup> Marx, *Kapital* 1, 88 (*Capital* 1, 166-67). The ‘products of labour’ which men and women bring into relation with each other should also, crucially, be understood as these very same men and women.

<sup>11</sup> Marx, *Capital* 1, 142. Emphasis added.

<sup>12</sup> See Tony Smith, ‘Hegel, Marx and the Comprehension of Capitalism’, in *Marx’s Capital and Hegel’s Logic: A Reexamination*, ed. Fred Moseley and Tony Smith (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2014), 29.

<sup>13</sup> Christopher J. Arthur, *The New Dialectic and Marx’s Capital* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2004), 96.

This is the act of the sale and purchase of labour-capacity [*Arbeitsvermögen*] or labour-power [*Arbeitskraft*], or what Marx also calls ‘the exchange of variable capital for labour-power.’<sup>14</sup> Marx details this exchange in Chapter 6 (of the English edition) of the first volume of *Capital*, emphasising the two conditions necessary for the possessor of money to encounter the owner of labour-power on the market. These are the two senses in which the potential labourer must be ‘free’: (1) free from the possession of the means of production (hence free from the means of satisfying his own needs), and (2) free – in the juridical sense of the term – to sell his sole possession (but only for a fixed amount of time, such that he ‘manages both to alienate his labour-power and to avoid renouncing his rights of ownership over it.’<sup>15</sup>) As we will learn in Chapter 4, ‘so-called originary accumulation’ [*die sogenannte ursprüngliche Akkumulation*] is itself the condition of these conditions. It should also be noted here that unlike the permanent presence and various metamorphoses of the category of labour in Marx’s work, the concept of labour-power does not appear until the late 1850s (the *Grundrisse*), and does not feature until the mid-1860s (it is everywhere in Marx’s 1849 pamphlet *Wage-Labour and Capital*, but only because of Engels’s editorial hand in 1891).

For our present purposes, however, we must navigate a potential ambiguity at the heart of Marx’s account of labour-power. On the one hand, he characterises it as ‘the entire field [*Inbegriff*] of those physical and intellectual capabilities existing in the corporeal form [*Leiblichkeit*], the living personality of a human being, capabilities which he sets in motion whenever he produces a use-value of any kind.’<sup>16</sup> To the extent that it ‘exists only as a capacity of the living individual’<sup>17</sup>, labour-power might seem to function as a transhistorical – indeed a naturalistic transhistorical – concept in Marx. This reading might be likened to what Moishe Postone calls ‘traditional Marxism’, such that labour-power becomes the normative repository of labour as the ‘transhistorical essence of social life.’<sup>18</sup> Accordingly, labour-power would come into alignment with Marx’s depiction of the labour-process as ‘the universal condition for the metabolism between the human and nature, the eternal, natural condition of human existence... independent of every form of that existence.’<sup>19</sup> This reading also intersects with a

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<sup>14</sup> ‘Variable capital’ has a variable meaning throughout the various drafts of *Capital*, but in the context of the exchange relation it designates the wage-form (this is its predominant meaning in ‘Results of the Immediate Production-Process’, written before the publication of *Capital* in 1867). However, it also designates the act of labour itself, insofar as this act is only actual as ‘one of the *modes of existence*’ of capital. Ibid. 988.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. 271. In this sense, the worker’s mode of freedom and his mode of subjection are the same thing.

<sup>16</sup> Marx, *Kapital* 1, 181 (*Capital* 1, 270).

<sup>17</sup> Marx, *Capital* 1, 274.

<sup>18</sup> Postone, *Time, Labor, and Social Domination*, 61.

<sup>19</sup> Marx, *Kapital* 1, 198 (*Capital* 1, 290). This passage is nearly identical to passages in Marx, *Capital* 1, 133, and Marx, *Contribution*, 36.

number of recent Italian formulations of the concept of ‘biopolitics’ (this is paradoxical insofar as the relevant authors explicitly dissociate themselves from ‘traditional Marxism’). For Paolo Virno, the capitalist purchases the life and the body of the worker because ‘this life, this body, are what contains the faculty, the potential, the *dynamis*’<sup>20</sup>, but for Virno this potentiality is irreducible to its commodification, because life is ontologically basic to capital. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri agree: ‘Labour-power has always exceeded its relation to capital in terms of its potential, in the sense that people have the capacity to do much more and produce much more than what they do at work.’<sup>21</sup> The actualisation of ‘biopolitical labour-power’ – which is for Hardt and Negri the contemporary capacity of human beings to live and to love – thus leads to a ‘creativity’ which expresses the common and points beyond capital.<sup>22</sup>

A far more definitive case can, however, be made that labour-power is *only* intelligible from the standpoint of its commodification. Like every other commodity, labour-power has a value and a use-value [*Gebrauchswert*]. Like every other commodity, its value is determined by the social labour-time necessary for its production, time that is, in this case, objectified as ‘a certain sum of the means of life’<sup>23</sup> essential to the preservation [*Erhaltung*] of the individual worker. Unlike every other commodity, therefore, the labour-time requisite for the production of labour-power is at once the labour-time necessary for its reproduction – both socially and biologically – presenting the determination of its value with ‘a historical and moral element’<sup>24</sup> which simply cannot be attributed to any other commodity. In this respect, labour-power is a ‘peculiar commodity’ [*eigentümliche Ware*], since its owner’s mortality directly bears on the determination of its value.<sup>25</sup> However, this peculiarity must be extended to the *use-value* of labour-power as well. First – and we will consider this later – because human mortality also directly bears on the determination of this use-value. The second reason, which is inseparable from the first, is that labour-power, considered from the standpoint of its use-value, is the *sole* provider of the use- and exchange-value [*Tauschwert*] of *every* commodity.<sup>26</sup> This peculiarity

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<sup>20</sup> Paolo Virno, *A Grammar of the Multitude*, trans. Isabella Bertoletti, James Cascaito, and Andrea Casson (Los Angeles and New York: Semiotext(e), 2004), 82-3.

<sup>21</sup> Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Commonwealth* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), 151.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.* 315.

<sup>23</sup> Marx, *Kapital* 1, 185 (*Capital* 1, 274).

<sup>24</sup> Marx, *Capital* 1, 275. By this Marx primarily means the strength and organisation of the working-class. Class struggle features in the analysis of the production-process the next chapter.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> Like value, ‘exchange-value’ is a purely relational category. It is nothing but the form of appearance, the manifestation, of value as a *purely social* objectivity, which is to say that ‘not an atom of matter enters into’ it. *Ibid.* 138. Insofar as exchange-value expresses the quantitative ratio in which one commodity is exchanged for another, money is its necessary and exclusive representative. The question here is whether labour-power is the sole provider of *every use- and exchange-value*. See Marx, *Capital* 1, 131, and footnote 28, below.

corresponds to the doubled character of labour specific to capitalism: namely, ‘concrete useful labour’ [*konkrete nützlicher Arbeit*], or the social individual form of labour that produces use-values, and ‘abstract human labour’ [*abstrakt menschliche Arbeit*], or the purely social form of labour that produces exchange-values. These two social forms of labour do *not* refer to two separate or distinguishable acts, but rather ‘to two aspects of the same labour in commodity-determined society.’<sup>27</sup> To the extent that it is defined by the production of use-value, whose status as an economic category specific to capitalism remains ambiguous<sup>28</sup>, a certain degree of historical indeterminacy might seem to follow concrete labour. But when this ‘*expenditure of human labour-power* in a particular form and with a definite aim’<sup>29</sup> is considered – quite necessarily – in its *dialectical* relation to abstract labour, ‘*labour as the expenditure of labour-power*, whatever the “useful” mode in which it is expended’<sup>30</sup>, what quickly becomes evident is that labour-power is only intelligible from the standpoint of its commodification. Abstract labour – and Marx is unambiguous on this point – is *not* a transhistorically valid category. Its power, qua ‘living labour’, to produce exchange-value establishes it as the ‘life-blood of capitalism’<sup>31</sup> and capitalism alone. As Peter Osborne formulates it, ‘this power...is thus not “fundamentally” but rather *historically* ontological: it is the historico-ontological product of the process of production of capital as a whole.’<sup>32</sup> To reinforce this point from another angle, the idea of a dialectic between a transhistorical (‘concrete’) and historical (‘abstract’) concept of labour – which is to say a dialectic between a social form of labour common to all modes of production and one specific to a particular mode of production – is nonsensical. ‘Concrete labour’ is historically specific to capitalism.<sup>33</sup> In short, ‘use’, ‘exchange’ and ‘labour’ can be

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<sup>27</sup> Postone, *Time, Labor, and Social Domination*, 144. For Marx, therefore, ‘...the commodity does not contain two different sorts of labour; the *same* labour, however, is determined as different and as opposed to itself.’ Quoted in *ibid*.

<sup>28</sup> The ambiguity within Marx’s account of use-value is far more pervasive than that within his account of labour-power. In the *Grundrisse*, the *1861-63 Manuscripts*, and the *Marginal Notes on Wagner*, use-value is characterised as a decidedly economic and historical category, whereas a number of passages in the first volume of *Capital* and the *Contribution* would seem to suggest that it is a category ‘outside the sphere of investigation of political economy.’ Marx, *Contribution*, 28. Marx should be critiqued on this front. Use-value, this thesis maintains, is *only* intelligible as an economic and historical category specific to capitalism. Use-value, which Marx too often conflates with ‘utility’ [*Nutzen*], is *internal* to value, even as it is *produced* as exterior to it. That is, use-value stands opposed to exchange-value, but only *within* the value-form. This will be further developed in our analysis of the dialectic of concrete and abstract labour-time.

<sup>29</sup> Marx, *Capital* 1, 137. Emphasis added.

<sup>30</sup> Karl Marx, *Randglossen zu Adolph Wagner’s Lehrbuch der politischen Ökonomie* [1879-80], in Marx and Engels, *MEW*, Band 19 (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1987), 370.

<sup>31</sup> Marx, *Capital* 1, 1007.

<sup>32</sup> Osborne, ‘Marx and the philosophy of time’, 19.

<sup>33</sup> Werner Bonefeld is mistaken in his position that figuring concrete labour ‘as a specifically capitalist form of labour’ amounts to an ‘absurd notion.’ Werner Bonefeld, ‘Abstract labour: Against its nature and on its time’, *Capital & Class* 34:2 (2010), 270. *Categorically*, in its meaning as the dialectical other of abstract labour, ‘concrete labour’ is a specifically capitalist form of labour.

understood as transhistorical categories, but ‘use-value’ and ‘exchange-value’, and ‘concrete labour’ and ‘abstract labour’, cannot. Likewise, the capacity to use ‘brains, muscles, nerves, hands, etc.’ is not something which is specific to capitalism, but labour-power is. In Wolfgang Haug’s terms, the purchase of labour-power is set in motion by a ‘use-value promise’<sup>34</sup> which cannot be reduced to the potentiality of life itself (in this sense, the concept of abstract labour completely destabilises Virno’s, and Hardt and Negri’s, concept of ‘biopolitics’).

In a letter to Engels written after the publication of *Capital*, Marx identifies his analysis of ‘the *doubled character of labour*, according to whether it is expressed in use-value or in exchange-value’, as one of the two ‘best points of my book.’<sup>35</sup> ‘All understanding of the facts depends on this’<sup>36</sup>, he claims (to which we might add: ‘so too our understanding of historical totalisation and temporalisation’). Like the concept of labour-power, the concepts of concrete and abstract labour do not extend across Marx’s corpus. In the *Grundrisse*, ‘labour as such’ [*Arbeit schlechthin*] and ‘labour *sans phrase*’ appear as proto-formulations of abstract labour, but they are not *concepts* of abstract labour, because they are not structured dialectically in relation to concrete labour. It is only after the *Contribution* (from 1859) wherein concrete and abstract labour feature as concepts essential to Marx’s critique of political economy (this is interesting insofar as ‘labour-power’ does not feature until the mid-1860s). Therefore, despite the fact that ‘labour-time’ [*Arbeitszeit*] *does* feature in the *Grundrisse*, we cannot state that it functions *as a concept* in Marx until after the *Contribution* (there are several passages in the *Grundrisse* with which to construct ‘concrete labour-time’ and ‘abstract labour-time’ alike as concepts, but only on the condition that they are retroactively read through the dialectic of concrete and abstract labour). This dovetails with the standpoint (of this thesis) that Marx must be read in such a way that ‘concrete labour’ and ‘concrete labour-time’, and ‘abstract labour’ and ‘abstract labour-time’, each become *two different expressions of one and the same thing*. Thus, for instance, abstract labour is already always abstract labour-time: a particular form of homogenous, quantifiable and divisible time which constitutes the measure and substance of value. In both its concrete and abstract manifestations, the ‘time’ of labour-time is inseparable from the ‘labour’. However it is grasped (even if it never leaves the domain of the ‘ordinary’ conception of time), it is not something which can be tacked on to, and severed from, ‘labour’.

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<sup>34</sup> Wolfgang Fritz Haug, ‘Commodity aesthetics revisited: Exchange relations as the source of antagonistic aesthetization’, *Radical Philosophy* 135 (January/February 2006), 19. Labour-power is a problem for Haug, insofar as its use-value promise – the ‘*aspects* offered by the commodity’ – cannot be reduced to ‘the Archimedean ellipse of commodity aesthetics.’ Ibid. 19-20.

<sup>35</sup> Letter to Engels on 24 August 1867, Marx and Engels, *MEW*, Band 31 (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1965), 326. According to Marx, the other best point of the first volume of *Capital* is his ‘treatment of *surplus-value independently of its particular forms* as profit, interest, ground-rent, etc.’ Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

In this regard, the hyphen within ‘labour-time’ is crucial, because it registers the ontological unity of the concept of *Arbeitszeit*: ‘labour-time is a part of the time of the labourer; that is, it is part of the *life-time* of the labourer.’<sup>37</sup> This can be specified further, because if, consequent to the commodification of labour-power, living labour (and thus the labourer who personifies this labour) is internal to the value-form, then labour-time is only actual as a part of the time of capital, as a part of the *life-time* of capital.

The contours of abstract labour and abstract labour-time must nevertheless be outlined *before* those of concrete labour and concrete labour-time. There is (and on this point we cannot waver) a dialectic of abstract and concrete labour, but this is a dialectic wherein abstract labour has, to say the least, the upper hand. Generally speaking, three things should be kept in mind. First, abstract labour is the predominant, although not self-sufficient, successor to the category of labour in general: the totalising and temporalising power of labour in general must first and foremost be reworked through the category of abstract labour. Second, Marx’s analysis of abstract labour is far more temporally informed than that of his analysis of concrete labour: the temporality of the latter is either described with vague reference to a ‘qualitative’ labour-time, or, much more common, as already reduced to abstract labour-time, in the sense that ‘the worker is nothing more...than personified labour-time.’<sup>38</sup> Indeed, unless it is stated or implied otherwise, ‘labour-time’ is to be understood as abstract labour-time. Third, and this directly follows from the previous two points, abstract labour determines concrete labour to a degree and extent that is simply unmatched by concrete labour itself. Just as use-value is internal to value, so too is use-value producing labour internal to value-producing labour, even as the latter produces the former as its dialectical opposite. Whereas ‘concrete labour has to take the form of its opposite, undifferentiated human labour, to count as socially necessary labour’<sup>39</sup>, abstract labour does not, not because it is not dialectically dependent on concrete labour, but because it *is* socially necessary labour.

Two common misconceptions about abstract labour can now be addressed. First, whilst this social form of labour constitutes the equalisation of qualitatively distinct concrete labours, it does *not* constitute the ongoing homogenisation of these labours. Abstract labour, as Werner Bonefeld articulates it in his critique of Massimo De Angelis, ‘is not concrete labour, however homogenised, monotonous, repetitive, senseless and boring it might be.’<sup>40</sup> Chris Arthur makes the same point to introduce his critique of Harry Braverman’s *Labour and Monopoly Capital*:

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<sup>37</sup> Osborne, ‘Marx and the philosophy of time’, 19.

<sup>38</sup> Marx, *Capital* 1, 352-53.

<sup>39</sup> Bonefeld, ‘Abstract labour: Against its nature and on its time’, 266.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.* 260. Nor is ‘concrete labour’ abstract labour, despite the fact that the former is internal to the latter, and only actual because of the latter.



‘the simplification of [concrete] labour refers to an impoverishment of its quality. But even the simplest motion still has *some* quality, it can never be abstraction as such.’<sup>41</sup> Simply put, the ‘content’ of abstract labour cannot be conflated with Taylorism or the assembly line.

A second and far more widespread misconception about abstract labour requires a more detailed examination. The passages on the physiological dimension of this labour in the first chapters of the *Contribution* and *Capital* – abstract labour as the ‘productive expenditure of human brains, muscles, nerves, hands, etc.’<sup>42</sup> – continue to cause something of a rift within the secondary literature. I.I. Rubin’s *Essays on Marx’s Theory of Value* (1923) (or, to be exact, the rediscovery of this work in the early 1970s) is at the origin of this. Rubin argues that:

One of two things is possible: if abstract labour is an expenditure of human energy in physiological form, then value has a reified-material character. Or value is a social phenomenon, and then abstract labour must also be understood as a social phenomenon connected with a determined social form of production. It is not possible to reconcile a physiological concept of abstract labour with the historical character of the value which it creates.<sup>43</sup>

An ‘irreconcilable’ divide between the physiological and social dimensions of Marx’s concept of abstract labour is often framed as a transhistorical-historical divide, and in this sense might be understood as parallel to, if not constitutive of, the ambiguities inherent within his accounts of labour-power and use-value. This has prompted several commentators to make a choice on Marx’s behalf, thereby clearing the way for a critical (that is, consistent) reconstruction of this concept. Following Rubin, Bonefeld rejects any place for physiology within abstract labour: the ‘asocial physiological terms’ in which it is defined are incompatible with its existence as ‘a specific temporal form of capitalist labour.’<sup>44</sup> On the other hand, and against Rubin, Axel Kicillof and Guido Starosta maintain that the physiological definition is the ‘only meaningful definition of abstract labour, which, as much as its concrete aspect, is a purely material form, bearing no social or historical specificity.’<sup>45</sup> Postone takes a (seemingly) more nuanced stance:

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<sup>41</sup> Arthur, *The New Dialectic and Marx’s Capital*, 44.

<sup>42</sup> Marx, *Capital* 1, 134. See also Marx, *Contribution*, 30-1.

<sup>43</sup> Isaak Illich Rubin, *Essays on Marx’s Theory of Value* [1923, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition 1928], trans. Miloš Samardžija and Fredy Perlman (Detroit: Black and Red, 1972), 135.

<sup>44</sup> Bonefeld, ‘Abstract labour: Against its nature and on its time’, 258.

<sup>45</sup> Axel Kicillof and Guido Starosta, ‘On Materiality and Social Form: a Political Critique of Rubin’s Value-Form Theory’, *Historical Materialism* 15:3 (2007), 34. Kicillof and Starosta expand on this by stating that ‘when performed privately and independently, and once congealed in the natural materiality of the product of labour, that purely material form acquires the form of the value of the commodity, i.e. a purely social form that embodies “not an atom of matter”.’ Ibid. 34-5. The problems with this reading are too many to detail here, but Kicillof and Starosta are unique insofar as they effectively state that abstract labour is not just a transhistorical generalisation of concrete labour which is transformed

we must ‘move beyond the physiological definition of abstract human labour’ and yet, at the same time, uncover why Marx presents the value-forming substance as physiological; that is, as ‘transhistorical, natural, and thus historically empty.’<sup>46</sup> The answer, for Postone, is Marx’s analysis of commodity fetishism: the expenditure of brains, muscles, etc. is the necessary form of appearance [*Erscheinung*] of abstract labour as a general social mediation, and is thus ‘the fundamental core of the fetish of capitalism.’<sup>47</sup> Yet there is a fundamental flaw to this position, the identification of which sheds light on a problem shared by each of these commentators. ‘The discovery of abstract labour-time leads ineluctably to that of commodity fetishism’<sup>48</sup>, as Daniel Bensaïd is right to declare, but this is *not* because physiological labour amounts to the form of appearance of abstract labour, but because, from the standpoint of capital, the human body is completely reducible to abstract labour, to *purely social* brains, muscles, nerves, hands etc., the expenditure of which satisfies purely social needs.<sup>49</sup> This is what Marx calls ‘simple average labour’, and this labour is precisely what is both expressed and veiled by the value-form (namely money). The ‘labour’ that capital (and political economy) would like us to think creates value, that labour which is transhistorical and natural, etc., is not the atomised form of physiological labour which Marx presents, but the labour of qualitatively distinct and unified human beings and bodies, labour which ‘has value itself’ and which ‘appears as paid labour.’<sup>50</sup> In short, the physiological dimension of Marx’s concept of abstract labour does not vitiate its historical specificity or purely social character, but registers it. As Alfred Schmidt reminds us, in Marx, ‘history itself projects into the physiological structure of the human being,’<sup>51</sup> and one (but by no means the only) aspect of this, specific to capitalism, is the reduction of the human body to the same ‘phantom-like objectivity’<sup>52</sup> which exemplifies value.

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into a purely social form of labour specific to capitalism, but both of these forms of labour *at the same time*.

<sup>46</sup> Postone, *Time, Labor, and Social Domination*, 145. This passage reflects the fact that, for Postone, the ‘ontological’ and the ‘transhistorical’ are synonymous. In other words, he systematically dissociates ontology and history, and thus refuses the possibility of a historical ontology.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid. 170. For Postone, the physiological definition of abstract labour is accordingly central to Marx’s immanent critique, because it is a ‘part of an analysis of capitalism *in its own terms*, that is, as the forms present themselves.’ Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Daniel Bensaïd, *Marx for Our Times: Adventures and Misadventures of a Critique* [1995], trans. Gregory Elliott (London: Verso, 2002), 118.

<sup>49</sup> To put this another way: from the standpoint of capital, the use-value of labour-power, a usefulness which ‘is conditioned by the properties of the bodies of commodities’, is purely social brains, muscles, nerves, hands, etc. Marx, *Kapital* 1, 50 (*Capital* 1, 126). I owe this reference and translation to C.E. McMnamin.

<sup>50</sup> Marx, *Capital* 1, 677, 680.

<sup>51</sup> Alfred Schmidt, *The Concept of Nature in Marx* [1962], trans. Ben Fowkes (London and Brooklyn: Verso, 2014), 84.

<sup>52</sup> Marx, *Capital* 1, 128.

Abstract labour temporalises – it is already always abstract labour-time – because it is the meaning of ‘social labour’ within capitalism. There is a fundamental social dimension to concrete labour: the ‘social individual’ within capitalism is the bearer of concrete labour as a distinct social form (one, that is to say, characterised by a private and isolating existence). Yet abstract labour represents the *originary* social character of commodity producing society: ‘the general or abstract character of labour is...its *social* character, because it is the character of the *equality* of the labours incorporated in the different products of labour. This determinate form of *social* labour distinguishes commodity production from other modes of production.’<sup>53</sup> Thus any conception of ‘social time’ specific to capitalism must proceed from abstract labour. As Tomba articulates it, ‘the time of abstract labour, positing itself as that which regulates the relations of exchange, constitutes a new form of the transcendental, conditioning the *a priori* structures of experience.’<sup>54</sup> In Foucault’s positivist terms, this is a historical *a priori* that, to rewrite a passage in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, is an ongoing ‘a condition of reality for **acts**...an *a priori* not of truths that might never be **done**, or really given to experience; but the *a priori* of a history that is given, since it is that of things actually **done**.’<sup>55</sup> Postone’s persistent emphasis on abstract labour as a ‘general social mediation’ and a ‘socially total mediation’ is thus warranted: abstract labour is not just what is common to the entire multiplicity of concrete labours; ‘rather, *it is the social function of [abstract] labour which makes it general*.’<sup>56</sup> It is the substance and measure of value by virtue of the fact that it is a purely socialising time, a time that renders exchangeable all individual temporalisations (in Marx’s terms, it makes possible the reduction of every form of ‘complex labour’ to ‘simple average labour’). This time ‘has no reality apart from its *exchangeability*’<sup>57</sup>, as Guy Debord asserts, but it is important to stress

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<sup>53</sup> Karl Marx, quoted in Massimiliano Tomba, ‘Historical Temporalities of Capital: An Anti-Historicist Perspective’, *Historical Materialism* 17 (2009), 48.

<sup>54</sup> Tomba, *Marx’s Temporalities*, 108.

<sup>55</sup> ‘...what I mean by the term is an *a priori* that is...a condition of reality for **statements**...an *a priori* not of truths that might never be **said**, or really given to experience; but the *a priori* of a history that is given, since it is that of things actually **said**.’ Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language* [1969], trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972), 127. This *a priori* is the successor to the ‘positive unconscious of knowledge’ in *The Order of Things*: a distinctly historical unconscious underlying scientific discourses. See Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: an Archaeology of the Human Sciences* [1966] (New York and London: Routledge Classics, 2002), xi-xii.

<sup>56</sup> Postone, *Time, Labor, and Social Domination*, 151. As Althusser says of Sartre, so too can we say of Postone: he is ‘the philosopher of mediations *par excellence*.’ See Louis Althusser, ‘Marxism is not a Historicism’, in Althusser and Balibar, *Reading Capital*, 136. Consider Postone’s culminating definition of value: ‘Value is, then, a category of mediation: it is at once a historically determinate, self-distributing form of wealth and an objectified, self-mediating form of social relations.’ Postone, *Time, Labor and Social Domination*, 154.

<sup>57</sup> Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle* [1967], trans. Ken Knabb (London: Rebel Press, 1992), 87. I owe this reference to Bonefeld, ‘Abstract labour: Against its nature and on its time’, 262.

that abstract labour-time is not originally a quantity but a social relation, a regulatory force that ‘can only be quantified through the effect of a difference that manifests itself in it.’<sup>58</sup> It is equally important to stress that abstract labour-time is not the same thing as clock-time. The former ontologically depends on the latter – its homogeneity, quantifiability and divisibility is predicated on the clock – but it is not equivalent to it.<sup>59</sup> The clock historically precedes, and will continue to exist after, abstract labour (this point dovetails with Heidegger’s position that the clock ‘is factually necessary’<sup>60</sup>, which is to say that it is not necessarily ‘inauthentic’). But this is not the most important point. Abstract labour controls the clock – most immediately by its measure of concrete labour – yet its own measure is not the clock but *money* (in capitalism, the clock is subservient to money as a temporal form: it does not register the ‘natural’ time of sunlight but the ‘natural’ law of valorisation).<sup>61</sup> Money, in both its function as a commodity and as capital – as the ‘materialisation of universal labour-time’<sup>62</sup> and as value made formally independent<sup>63</sup> – constitutes the real measure of abstract labour.

The temporalising time of abstract labour is at once its totalising power. ‘Social labour’, ‘total labour-power’, ‘universal social labour’, etc. – expressions which recur throughout the *Contribution* and *Capital* and which must be grasped as synonymous with abstract labour – are *totalising* concepts in the full Sartrean sense of the term. Their unity *is* the process of their differentiation, a dialectical fact which is most basically expressed by Marx’s characterisation of concrete labour as a ‘mere organ’ of abstract labour: ‘labour, thus measured by time, does not seem, indeed, to be the labour of different persons, but on the contrary the different working individuals seem to be mere organs of this labour.’<sup>64</sup> To put this another way, the individual act of labour totalises and temporalises – it has unity – *because* it is totalised and

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<sup>58</sup> Tombazos, *Time in Marx*, 4.

<sup>59</sup> Postone’s historical sketch of ‘abstract time’ comes dangerously close to conflating abstract *labour*-time with clock-time. See Postone, *Time, Labor, and Social Domination*, 200-16.

<sup>60</sup> Heidegger, *BT*, 466. Recall that ‘world-time’ and ‘ordinary time’ are not necessarily inauthentic, that, for Heidegger, ‘originary temporality’ is not the sole domain of ‘authentic temporality’.

<sup>61</sup> As Tomba says: ‘The clock measures the labour-time concretely performed in production, while the time of abstract labour objectivised in the same commodity as socially-necessary labour – thus, as exchange-value – has a social measure, given by money. The first temporality is measured by the capitalist or by his overseers with the stopwatch in his right hand and the *Principles of Scientific Management* in the left; the second temporality is, instead, regulated on the global markets.’ Tomba, *Marx’s Temporalities*, 103.

<sup>62</sup> Marx, *Contribution*, 49.

<sup>63</sup> The essential function of money-capital is to overcome its own limit, the contradiction between its own quality (the ‘quintessence of all use-values’ (Marx, *Grundrisse*, 270), viz. infinite general wealth) and the necessity of its quantification (it is only ever a definite amount of money). This dialectic of infinitude and finitude is the historical-ontological basis of (modern) clock-time.

<sup>64</sup> Marx, *Contribution*, 30. Or: ‘the abstractly general counts not as a property of the concrete, sensibly real, but on the contrary the sensibly concrete counts as the mere form of appearance or definite form of realisation of the abstractly general.’ Karl Marx, quoted in Arthur, *The New Dialectic and Marx’s Capital*, 46.

temporalised by abstract labour. In capitalist society, abstract labour is thus the condition of both the individuation of the act of labour and the historical intelligibility of the division of labour.<sup>65</sup> The averageness of ‘simple average labour’ is critical here, because it *quantifies* the totalising core of abstract labour: it secures the identity between abstract labour and ‘socially necessary labour-time.’ Simple average labour thus lies at the basis of what Tombazos, in his analysis of the third volume of *Capital*, identifies as the culminating contradiction of socially necessary labour-time: that between the social labour required to produce a commodity (the aliquot time of total labour-power allotted to the production of a particular use-value), and the social need for that commodity (the aliquot time of total social need offered as an equivalent for this use-value).<sup>66</sup> At this level, value can be defined as the ‘link or the interaction between these two times’<sup>67</sup>, even if this connection, as Marx emphasises, is only ever fortuitous.<sup>68</sup> The basic point, however, still remains: *abstract labour is only intelligible from the standpoint of totalisation*. It only temporalises from this standpoint, because only totalisation registers the *dialectical* relation between abstract and concrete labour.

The unavoidable question must now be asked: what exactly is ‘concrete labour-time’? That is, does it have a ‘measure’ which is not – at least not immediately – reducible to abstract labour-time? This is a difficult question to address, given Marx’s conviction that:

If the mere quantity of labour functions as a measure of value regardless of quality, it presupposes that simple labour has become the pivot of industry. It presupposes that labour has been equalised by the subordination of men and women to the machine or by the extreme division of labour; that men and women are effaced by their labour; that the pendulum of the clock has become as accurate a measure of the relative activity of two workers as it is of the speed of two locomotives. Therefore, we should not say that one man’s hour is worth another man’s hour, but rather that one man during an hour is worth as much as another man during an hour. Time is everything, man is nothing; he is at the most the embodiment of time [*die Verkörperung der Zeit*]. Quality no longer matters. Quantity alone decides everything: hour for hour, day for day...<sup>69</sup>

This well-known passage from *The Poverty of Philosophy* (the last part of which frames this chapter) was composed over a decade before the dialectic of abstract and concrete labour becomes a feature of Marx’s writings, but it nonetheless typifies his temporal understanding

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<sup>65</sup> As Tombazos puts it, ‘abstract labour introduces a division within itself that is usually called the “division of labour”.’ Tombazos, *Time in Marx*, 29.

<sup>66</sup> See *ibid.* 26-7, 36, 53. See also Marx, *Capital* 3, 288.

<sup>67</sup> Tombazos, *Time in Marx*, 26-7.

<sup>68</sup> Marx, *Capital* 3, 288.

<sup>69</sup> Marx, *Das Elend der Philosophie* [*Misère de la Philosophie*], 85 (*The Poverty of Philosophy*, 53-4).

of this dialectic, and should therefore be read from the standpoint of this dialectic. It expresses a relation between abstract and concrete labour so asymmetric that ‘the opposition at stake is not one between two forms of time...but one between time per se (figured as quantitative) and the human (figured as qualitative).’<sup>70</sup> Marx does not always de-temporalise the human (which in this passage can be read as ‘concrete labour’) in such radical terms. For instance, there are passages (primarily in the *Grundrisse*) in which human labour (the ‘living, form-giving fire’<sup>71</sup>) is not only not opposed to time, but in which its time – its time within capitalism – possesses a qualitative dimension:

Labour-time itself exists as such only subjectively, only in the form of activity. In so far as it is exchangeable (itself a commodity) as such, it is defined and differentiated not only quantitatively but also qualitatively, and is by no means general, self-equivalent labour-time; rather, labour-time as subject corresponds as little to the general labour-time which determines exchange-values as the particular commodities and products correspond to it as object.<sup>72</sup>

Yet unlike the labour-time in this passage (which should be read as concrete labour-time), the vast majority of Marx’s critique of political economy depicts concrete labour as a time already outside of and opposed to itself, as a time which concrete labour is compelled to embody. The secondary literature on abstract labour – one that is still governed by the position that abstract labour is extrinsic, rather than internal, to historical time – registers this. The issue here is not this fidelity to Marx, but the lack of a *concept* of concrete labour-time within this literature, a concept accountable to abstract labour as a distinct form of social time specific to capitalism. There are statements to the effect that concrete labour ‘has a concrete temporality’<sup>73</sup>, that its time ‘has a particular content...that is experienced subjectively’<sup>74</sup>, but there has been (to date) no systematic attempt to conceptualise concrete labour as a social form of time simultaneously internal and external to abstract labour. There are numerous possible explanations for this, but one in particular stands out: this literature remains internal to Marx’s philosophy of time (such that it exists).<sup>75</sup> In other words, this literature (Bensaïd, Bonefeld, Postone, Tomba, Tombazos, etc.) does not adequately confront the fact that Marx offers us a concept of abstract labour but

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<sup>70</sup> Osborne, ‘Marx and the philosophy of time’, 18.

<sup>71</sup> Marx, *Grundrisse*, 361.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.* 171.

<sup>73</sup> Bonefeld, ‘Abstract labour: Against its nature and on its time’, 267.

<sup>74</sup> Tombazos, *Time in Marx*, 18.

<sup>75</sup> More often than not, a condition of this interiority is a certain exteriority – indifference – towards Marx’s philosophy of history.

*not* of concrete labour. It thus maximises, yet stays within the limits of, the concept of abstract labour, such that this concept constitutes a historical ontology of ‘ordinary time’ which, to be sure, Heidegger and Sartre do not offer, but which also must account for the idea that the time of concrete labour – a time which abstract labour produces and upon which it depends – is not immediately reducible to abstract labour.

To his credit, Postone has gone the furthest in an attempt to temporalise concrete labour in ways which avoid this immediate reduction. At the heart of his reinterpretation of abstract labour as a general social mediation is a dialectic between ‘concrete time’ (time as a ‘function of events, occurrences or actions’, hence time as a ‘dependent variable’) and ‘abstract time’ (‘uniform, continuous, homogeneous, “empty” time’, hence time as an ‘independent variable’, an ‘independent framework within which motion, events, and action occur.’<sup>76</sup>) Abstract time, he goes on to say, ‘is divisible into equal, constant, nonqualitative units.’<sup>77</sup> The specifically capitalist iteration of this is the changing dynamic between the productivity of labour (concrete time) and the consequent redetermination of the constant social labour hour (abstract time).<sup>78</sup> This ‘ongoing directional movement of time’<sup>79</sup>, which Postone likens to a ‘treadmill pattern’, has an intrinsic historical dimension: it ‘can be grasped as a dialectic of abstract and historical time’<sup>80</sup> immanent to the value-form. In short, ‘historical time’ in capitalist society *is* ‘concrete time’.<sup>81</sup> There are multiple problems with this reading of Marx, but they all proceed from the fact that severing ‘labour’ from abstract and concrete labour-time dehistoricises, it absolutises, the historically specific character of labour in capitalism that Postone insists on (*ad nauseam*). Abstract labour qua ‘abstract time’ does not temporalise history, or even temporalise as such: it is rather the readymade backdrop against which temporalisation – qua ‘concrete time’ – is measured (this explains why, for Postone, abstract time is already ‘abstract domination’).<sup>82</sup> As Bonefeld summarises it from a different perspective, ‘Postone presupposes what needs to be explained.’<sup>83</sup> As for ‘concrete time’, its exclusive identity as the historical time of capitalism

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<sup>76</sup> Postone, *Time, Labor, and Social Domination*, 202.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid. Once again, Postone’s concept of abstract time conflates abstract labour-time with clock-time. The progress made by his dialectic of concrete and abstract time is immediately undone by his *de*-dialectisation of abstract labour-time, such that this time is not understood as a dialectical *relation* between two different manifestations of clock-time, but as clock-time itself.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid. 292-93.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid. 293.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid. 295.

<sup>81</sup> ‘Historical time in capitalism...can be considered as a form of concrete time that is socially constituted and expresses an ongoing qualitative transformation of work and production, of social life more generally, and of forms of consciousness, values, and needs. Unlike the “flow” of abstract time, this movement of time is not equable, but changes and can even accelerate.’ Ibid. 294.

<sup>82</sup> See, for instance, *ibid.* 191. Hence abstract labour qua ‘abstract time’ *de-temporalises* history.

<sup>83</sup> See Werner Bonefeld, ‘On Postone’s Courageous but Unsuccessful Attempt to Banish the Class Antagonism from the Critique of Political Economy’, *Historical Materialism* 12:3 (2004), 104.

renders abstract labour a form of unhistorical time.<sup>84</sup> It thereby renders the difference between the historical time of capitalism and other modes of production indistinguishable: the defining aspect of capitalist historical time is not the *dialectic* of abstract and concrete labour, but the productivity of concrete labour *within itself*. In sum, a ‘dialectic of abstract and historical time’ has no historicity, nor can it be understood as immanent to the value-form. It is unintentional, but the social totality which features in *Time, Labor, and Social Domination* turns its back on the dialectical – the historicalising – relationship between abstract and concrete labour-time.<sup>85</sup> Simply put, it does *not* register this relationship historically.

If Postone’s attempt to ‘temporalise’ concrete labour is a failed attempt, it nevertheless reminds us that concrete labour-time is only intelligible in its dialectical relation with abstract labour-time. This much is evident: there is no such thing as concrete labour *as such*: ‘concrete labour’ is only ever particular concrete labours, a social form of labour which in its concretion is necessarily multiple. Nor can we state that concrete labour produces value (this is as much to say that concrete labour is not immediately reducible to abstract labour). The production of value is the sole purview of abstract labour. In Marx, therefore, it is impossible to conceive of concrete labour at a level of generality equal to that of abstract labour. Yet this does not mean that concrete labour cannot be examined as a form of temporalisation itself, that there is not, we might say, a temporalising structure common to each and every instance of concrete labour. A crucial problem that the concept of concrete labour produces is how to negotiate its explicit *empirical* basis (one which restricts most analyses of concrete labour to a time that must ‘occur within “homogenous time”...is compelled to occur within the time of its abstract measure’<sup>86</sup>) with its implicit *existential* basis (one shared by each and every social individual), while at the same time maintaining its *historical* basis (one secured by its relation to abstract labour). Put differently, the empirical temporality of shipbuilding is not the same as that of writing a thesis, but it is still possible to assign a shared existential basis to each, the generality of which is not the same as that represented by abstract labour (but is no less historically specific to capitalism because of this). However, we must insist on this point: if this basis is a ‘measure’ of concrete

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<sup>84</sup> This puts Postone squarely in line with Sohn-Rethel: see footnote 8 in this chapter.

<sup>85</sup> Postone maintains that Sartre’s *Critique* ‘presuppose[s] the concepts of “moment” and “totality” ontologically.’ Postone, *Time, Labor and Social Domination*, 152, ft. 86. He goes on to argue that, as against Sartre and Althusser alike, his work ‘treats the relation of moment and totality as historically constituted, a function of the peculiar properties of the social forms analysed by Marx with his categories of value, abstract labor, commodity, and capital.’ Ibid. Assuming that ‘ontologically’ means ‘ahistorically’ here, we can state that Postone’s concepts of ‘abstract time’ and ‘concrete time’, as well as the relation he establishes between them, can be subjected to the same critique.

<sup>86</sup> Bonefeld, ‘Abstract labour: Against its nature and on its time’, 267–68. Most analyses of concrete labour-time are in this sense Kantian: they accord to the schematism of the categories, in particular the schemas of magnitude and substance. See Kant, *CPR*, A143–44/B182–84, 274–75.



labour, it is only because it is internal to – it is an existential condition of – the social measure constituted by abstract labour and expressed by money.

As the bearers of concrete labour, individuals temporalise by virtue of the fact that they are *social* individuals. Consequently, if the existential basis of temporalisation is to have any meaning at all in Marx, it must itself be based in the sociality of human individuation specific to capitalism. Consider the following passage by Osborne:

If one agrees with something like the early Heidegger's argument that the anticipation of death is the existential basis of temporalisation... (modified to register the social basis of this anticipation in relations with others, and hence the sociality of human individuation), then it is a short step to inferring that human finitude, in the sense of the existential register of mortality, is the *ontological basis of the "value" of time* and, thereby, the ontological ground of labour-time's functioning as a universal measure of value. And this, despite the fact that any such "measurement", in itself, involves the social instantiation of a degraded, "ordinary" or merely chronological conception of time (negating the existential temporalisation upon which it depends). At its limit, time is valuable because it (that is, "your" time) *runs out*.<sup>87</sup>

This passage can be read from various different (highly interrelated) standpoints: the exchange relation, the division of labour, the dialectic of abstract and concrete labour, and so forth. Yet one standpoint particularly draws our attention, not just because it takes in each of these other standpoints, but because it does so as the capitalist origin from which the materialist concept of history must be restructured. This origin is the commodification of labour-power: it sets off a dual and asymmetric form of historical totalisation and temporalisation.

The sale of labour-power must be viewed from 'the standpoint of the simple circulation of commodities'<sup>88</sup>, because this sale constitutes an initial act of the circuit C–M–C: the simple transformation of one commodity into another, wherein money is nothing but the disappearing means with which to complete the circuit. As Tombazos reminds us, the economic subject of this circuit – selling in order to buy – is the individual human being<sup>89</sup>, not because this circuit is instigated by individual will, but because it ensures that individual need does not exceed the need to conserve and reproduce oneself (which this circuit satisfies). The peculiar importance of the 'peculiar commodity' labour-power is in this sense doubled: its sale not only represents the exclusive entryway into the labour-process, but dictates that the *only* relationship between the circuit C–M–C and the satisfaction of need is the purchase of 'a certain sum of the means

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<sup>87</sup> Osborne, 'Marx and the philosophy of time', 20.

<sup>88</sup> Marx, *Capital* 1, 209.

<sup>89</sup> Tombazos, *Time in Marx*, 61.

of life' (in the restricted sense of *Leben* as 'subsistence'). For our purposes, this importance is manifested in the manner in which concrete labour – the labour yielded by labour-power from the standpoint of its sale – temporalises history. Insofar as it can be treated as a specification of individual *praxis* in Sartre's terms, concrete labour constitutes, to quote from Chapter 2, 'a dialectical movement between the present and the past wherein the present is prioritised as the totalising transcendence of the past towards the future.' Moreover, the existential basis of this temporalisation is, following Heidegger, the individual worker's finitude (on the condition, to return to Chapter 2 again, that finitude is understood as a being-towards a factual limit which structures – temporalises – each and every act). Therefore, and to tie this back to Chapter 1, concrete labour might be conceived as a 'first historical act': it produces the 'dialectical time' (to use Sartre's expression) that epitomises the creation of the means to satisfy existing needs and the creation of new needs.<sup>90</sup>

Yet even from the limited standpoint of the labour-process, this description of historical temporalisation is obviously inadequate. The use-values produced by concrete labour are only means of life – they only satisfy existing needs and create new needs for their producers – by virtue of the fact that they do not belong to these producers, that, in other words, they authorise the payment of the wage which is then exchanged for other means of life. Thanks to the wage-form, the means of life are only actual as objects of exchange, as commodities, and hence their production has *already* been determined by abstract labour (the diverse metamorphoses of this at the level of historical totalisation and temporalisation will be developed in the next chapter). However, before we comment on this, we must address the character of this 'already'. This is not a straightforward thing to do, if in fact:

Social labour-time exists in...commodities in a latent state...and becomes evident only in the course of their exchange. The point of departure is not the labour of individuals considered as social labour, but on the contrary the particular kinds of labour of private individuals, i.e. labour which proves that it is universal social labour only by the sublation of its original character in the exchange process. Universal social labour is consequently not a readymade presupposition but an emerging result. Thus a new difficulty arises: on the one hand, commodities must enter the exchange process as objectified universal labour-time, on the other hand, the labour-time of individuals becomes objectified universal labour-time only as a result of the exchange process.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> In this regard, concrete labour represents a concrete form of 'labour in general', which is to say that it temporalises and historicalises as a kind of 'labour in particular'.

<sup>91</sup> Marx, *KPÖ*, 31-2 (*Contribution*, 45).

As Arthur notes, Marx's solution to the contradiction at the end of this passage is money, yet 'although money certainly posits the labour it represents, and hence by reflection the labour represented by all commodities, as abstract universal labour, the abstraction is still not posited *prior* to exchange.'<sup>92</sup> After Rubin, Arthur concludes that this contradiction is better addressed within the production-process itself, such that generalised commodity production – production that is already always production *for exchange* – is predicated on 'living labour [being] treated as abstract *prior* to exchange precisely because it is treated as abstract *in* exchange.'<sup>93</sup> This is not to say that – within the production-process itself – concrete labour-time is actually *realised* as abstract labour-time (only the act of exchange achieves this), but it does mean that – within this process – concrete labour-time is already *internal* to abstract labour-time. This internality is what is often described as the 'imposition' and 'policing' of abstract labour-time; its agents are the foreman and the clock. It is along these lines that Bonefeld, drawing on the work of Riccardo Bellofiore, characterises abstract labour as a real abstraction that 'projects the "ghost of value"...back into production, where the ghost turns into a vampire that sucks living labour dry, reducing it to "time's carcass".'<sup>94</sup> The exchange relation is the sole guarantor of socially necessary labour-time, but, 'if anything, the constitution of labour as abstract in the capital relation is *more* fundamental than its constitution as abstract in exchange'<sup>95</sup>, because only the labour-process makes possible the transformation of the 'ontological basis of the "value" of time' into socially necessary labour-time.

If, consequent to the commodification of labour-power, concrete labour is internal to abstract labour, then *human* need (the temporalising and historicalising ground of the act, that from which the teleological end, hence the unity, of this act derives) is internal to capital. In Chapter 4 of the first volume of *Capital* – 'The General Formula for Capital' – Marx asserts that 'the simple circulation of commodities...is a means to a final goal which lies outside circulation, namely the appropriation of use-values, the satisfaction of needs', whereas 'the circulation of money as capital is an end in itself, for the valorisation of value takes place only within this constantly renewed movement.'<sup>96</sup> There are two, and two fundamentally opposed, conceptions of need – and with them teleologies – at work here, and establishing the difference and relation between them is one of the primary tasks of the following chapter. But what must

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<sup>92</sup> Arthur, *The New Dialectic and Marx's Capital*, 46.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid. 'In effect, abstract labour as a form-determination of the living labour of the wage worker, and abstract labour as the dead labour objectified in a commodity, are the same thing, in the one case looked at as activity, in the other as its result.' Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Bonefeld, 'Abstract labour: Against its nature and on its time', 266. The expression 'time's carcass' is a translation of '*die Verkörperung der Zeit*', from the passage in *The Poverty of Philosophy* cited earlier (see footnotes 1 and 69 in this chapter). 'The embodiment of time' is a more literal translation.

<sup>95</sup> Arthur, *The New Dialectic and Marx's Capital*, 45.

<sup>96</sup> Marx, *Capital* 1, 253.

be emphasised now is that whereas the satisfaction of individual needs lies outside of simple circulation, the *creation of the means* to satisfy these needs lies squarely inside the circulation of money as capital. Unlike the simple circulation of commodities, the circulation of money as capital not only presupposes but *posits* the means of satisfying individual needs.<sup>97</sup> Again, we are faced with the peculiar importance of the commodification of labour-power. It not only dictates that the acts within a particular instance of the circuit C–M–C (i.e., the sale of labour-power, the concrete act of labour, and the exchange of the wage for the means of life) are only actual within the circuit M–C–M' (the definitive circuit of capital: buying in order to sell), but that, insofar as it leads to the satisfaction of individual needs, *every* act within *every* instance of C–M–C is only actual within M–C–M'. In sum, the materiality of C–M–C is predicated on M–C–M', and thus the totalising and temporalising capacity of concrete labour as a historical act is *based* in the totalising and temporalising power of abstract labour, or the labour yielded by labour-power from the standpoint of its purchase. In Sartre's terms, abstract labour totalises and temporalises not because it is driven by human need, but because it internally transforms – it perverts – this need into *exigency*. Hence for the worker (to return to two previously cited passages in the *Critique*), 'the future governs the present insofar as this future strictly identifies itself with the past'<sup>98</sup>, and 'the future to be realised is already fabricated as mechanical inertia *in the way in which past being is transcended*.'<sup>99</sup> As a 'living organism', capital's self-renewal is expressed by this temporality of exigency, a temporality that *quantifies* human need. If, as the previous chapter argues, human need grounds 'death' as the existential limit in relation to which 'temporality temporalises itself', such that the act temporalises itself as a kind of 'being-towards-need', then exigency constitutes the capitalist restructuration of this, whereby the 'ontological basis of the "value" of time' is reduced to the number of years, months, days, etc. that the individual worker has left to live.<sup>100</sup> This despite the fact – in fact *precisely because* – capital 'is indifferent to his or her reproduction other than as part of a certain social aggregate of labour-power.'<sup>101</sup> This has significant ramifications for the materialist concept of history. Capital, as the next chapter establishes, *is* the subject of history (this is synonymous with the

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<sup>97</sup> As Tombazos shows, Marx's understanding of the difference between simple circulation and the circulation of money-capital is indebted to the transition from chemism to teleology in Hegel's *Logic*. See Tombazos, *Time in Marx*, 75-9. Unlike the chemical process (simple circulation), the teleological process (capital) not only presupposes but posits the moments of its self-renewal.

<sup>98</sup> Sartre, *CDR* 1, 82.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.* 235.

<sup>100</sup> Marx's concept of capital could well be understood as a dialectic of mortality (in both its existential and chronological registers) and immortality, inasmuch as 'the immortality which money strove to achieve by setting itself negatively against circulation, by withdrawing from it, is achieved by capital, which preserves itself precisely by abandoning itself to circulation', and 'value is capital only as self-immortalising and self-multiplying value.' Marx, *Grundrisse*, 261, 639.

<sup>101</sup> Osborne, 'Marx and the philosophy of time', 20.

fact that it is the economic subject of M–C–M’), but it is this subject because its needs deprive human beings of their capacity to totalise and temporalise history (on their own terms). This is the reason why, as Chapter 4 also argues, *Capital* is the condition of thinking the materialist concept of history in *The German Ideology*, but only because it destabilises this concept: the condition of thinking the first historical act is, as we will see, its de-historicalisation. It cannot and never will realise its ultimate end (infinite wealth), but until it is gone, capital will never cease attempting to ensure that human need, and thus ‘material life itself’, does *not* exceed the ‘reproduction of the physical existence of... individuals.’<sup>102</sup>

There is no doubt that the category of labour in general is irrevocably altered by Marx’s critique of political economy. In the aftermath of the *Contribution* and *Capital*, the totalising, temporalising and historicalising power of labour must be rethought through the concept of abstract labour, unto itself and in its dynamic relationship with concrete labour.<sup>103</sup> Yet abstract labour is nothing – it has no practical materiality – if it is not joined with the other ‘best point’ of the first volume of *Capital*: the concept of *surplus-value* [*Mehrwert*]. More than any other concept, surplus-value – the investigation of which guides the rest of this chapter – illuminates the complex (and politically vexing) directions history takes within capitalism. Insofar as ‘the only utility [*Nützlichkeit*] whatsoever which an object can have for capital can be to preserve or increase it’<sup>104</sup>, surplus-value determines the fact that living labour ‘confronts capital not as a use-value, but as *the* use-value pure and simple...*the use-value* of capital itself.’<sup>105</sup> From the dialectic of abstract and concrete labour two new concepts appear (which, again, are identical): *surplus-labour* [*Surplusarbeit*] and *surplus-labour-time* [*Surplusarbeitszeit*]<sup>106</sup>. Just like the surplus-value it produces, surplus-labour is by no means a straightforward concept (as is often

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<sup>102</sup> Marx and Engels, *DI*, 21 (*GI*, 42).

<sup>103</sup> Consider this passage by Tombazos : ‘In the usual way of reading *Capital*, the commodity divides itself into abstract and concrete labour, in value and use-value, without being able to be value if it is not also use-value, and vice versa. This is correct but insufficient. Abstract labour divides itself, within itself, into abstract labour (universality) and abstract/concrete labour (universality/particularity)...It seems to us more correct to say that the commodity is divided into value and value/use-value in order to highlight the non-independent (and neutral) character of use-values under capitalism. Thus, abstract labour appears in two forms: as a simple unity with itself (value, universality) and as a “composed” unity (value/use-value, abstract/concrete labour, particularity).’ Tombazos, *Time in Marx*, 29-30. The problem with this passage is not that all use-values are dependent on value, but that they are all *neutral* (the use-value of labour-power is by no means ‘neutral’).

<sup>104</sup> Marx, *Grundrisse*, 270.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.* 295, 297. Like most passages in the *Grundrisse*, this passage must be read from the retroactive standpoint of the dialectic of abstract and concrete labour. See, in addition, Arthur, *The New Dialectic and Marx’s Capital*, 42.

<sup>106</sup> Unlike ‘concrete labour’, ‘abstract labour’ and ‘necessary labour’, ‘surplus-labour’ will be written with a hyphen in order to reflect the unity of the original German. The same holds for ‘surplus-labour-time’ (as against ‘necessary labour-time’ [*notwendige Arbeitszeit*]). In the *Grundrisse*, Marx often uses the term ‘surplus-time’ [*Surpluszeit*] synonymously with surplus-labour-time.

assumed). It registers a contradiction at the heart of ‘socially necessary labour-time’ (one more basic than the contradiction between the social labour necessary to produce a commodity and the social need for that commodity). Surplus-labour thus registers a contradiction at the heart of abstract labour/value, and for this reason the relation between necessary and surplus-labour must be examined in its own right, before – and this is the task of Chapter 4 – it can be grasped as constitutive of a distinct historical dynamic.

### 3.2 Necessary and Surplus-Labour

The concepts of surplus-labour and surplus-value add a new dimension to the complex lineage of, and relationship between, concepts within Marx's critique of political economy. Unlike the concepts of labour-power, abstract labour and concrete labour, surplus-labour and surplus-value feature *prominently* from the start of this critique (on the assumption that the *Grundrisse* constitutes this start). In the *Grundrisse*, the exposition of surplus-labour and surplus-value is far more developed than that of labour-power, even as it already registers the extent to which surplus-labour, surplus-value and labour-power are conceptually inseparable. Of even greater consequence, however, is the fact that this exposition is not mediated by a dialectic of abstract and concrete labour. The lack of a concept of abstract labour in the *Grundrisse* is particularly important. If, as Osborne maintains, 'the concepts of abstract labour and labour-power are indissociable', such that 'ontologically, both are *actual* only as *ideal* objectivities'<sup>107</sup>, the same must be said of the concept of surplus-labour (i.e. surplus-labour must be added to this list of indissociable concepts). Surplus-labour is not identical to abstract labour. It is, rather, abstract labour from the standpoint of the difference between the value of labour-power and every other commodity. Once more, the logic of retroactivity emerges here, insofar as surplus-labour and surplus-value function as developed concepts in the *Grundrisse*, but only on the condition that they are refigured through abstract labour and its dialectical relation with concrete labour. This is important, because the *Grundrisse* – not the *1861-63 Manuscripts* nor *Capital*, each of which dedicate significant attention to surplus-labour and surplus-value<sup>108</sup> – arguably contains the most philosophically constructive passages on surplus-labour and surplus-value, primarily because they critically appropriate the difference and relation between the barrier [*Schranke*] and the limit [*Grenze*] in Hegel's *Logic*.<sup>109</sup> Hence we might say – not without irony – that the *Grundrisse* offers some of the most philosophically constructive passages on abstract labour as well. The point here (one which extends across Marx's critique of political economy, if not his entire corpus) is that the logic of retroactivity is at once a logic of mutual constitution. In other words, it is fair to state that the *Grundrisse* offers as much to *Capital* as *Capital* does to the *Grundrisse*.

Surplus-value constitutes 'the hidden time of the commodity', as Tombazos depicts it, because it emerges from the difference between the labour-time necessary for the production of a commodity and the labour-time necessary for the reproduction of the labour-power whose

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<sup>107</sup> Osborne, 'Marx and the philosophy of time', 19.

<sup>108</sup> Surplus-labour and surplus-value do not feature in the *Contribution*, which is essentially a draft of the first three chapters of the first volume of *Capital*.

<sup>109</sup> See, in particular, Marx, *Grundrisse*, 415-16 and 420-23.

use produces this commodity.<sup>110</sup> This difference is a purely quantitative difference, in terms of both substance and measure. There are not two different kinds of socially necessary labour-time at work here: the labour-time necessary for the reproduction of labour-power is the same type of labour-time necessary for the production of all commodities (labour-power is the same as every other commodity in that it can only be reproduced through every other commodity). Nevertheless – *and this is crucial* – this difference sets into motion a single ‘necessary labour’ (and with it a singular concept of need) internally opposed to itself, such that necessary labour divides itself, within itself, into the labour-time necessary to reproduce labour-power and that necessary to produce every other commodity.<sup>111</sup> Surplus-value thus not only sets labour-power against every other commodity (labour-power is not ‘peculiar’ because it has no ‘hidden time’, but because its ‘hidden time’ *is* the absence of this time<sup>112</sup>), but sets abstract labour and value against themselves more generally. A contradiction – in fact a dialectic – is thereby produced between labour-power and every other commodity, *including* the labour necessary to produce each (this despite the fact that each derive from the same kind of labour-time). Surplus-value does this for a very simple reason: its existence, which is to say the existence of capital, hinges on creating an excess out of a relationship of equivalence. And as *Capital* makes clear, there is precisely one commodity which has the capacity to yield an excess from the inviolable ‘law of commodity exchange’. Labour-power, and labour-power alone, yields the surplus-labour that yields surplus-value, and it is for this reason commodified. This is the context from which the practical relationship between abstract and surplus-labour must be understood. Surplus-labour depends on abstract labour for its temporal intelligibility, but abstract labour-time only exists because ‘necessary labour’ simultaneously contains and does not contain surplus-labour within itself. The homogeneity, quantifiability and divisibility of abstract labour-time – a time, we must recall, which is originally not a quantity but a social relation – is not fundamentally based on any difference which manifests itself in it, but on *the* difference between the labour-time necessary to produce labour-power and every other commodity. Abstract labour-time is ‘socially necessary labour-time’, but only on the condition the latter is grasped as both separate and opposed to surplus-labour, and as containing surplus-labour within itself.

The fact that surplus-labour is (at least ideally) contained within every commodity other than the one which yields it expands the dialectical scope of abstract labour. On the one hand, Marx’s basic formulations of the labour theory of value – the use-value of labour-power is ‘a

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<sup>110</sup> Tombazos, *Time in Marx*, 85.

<sup>111</sup> I am using Tombazos’s language here. See *ibid.* 29 (and footnote 103 in this chapter).

<sup>112</sup> This corresponds to the basic sense in which labour-power is a ‘peculiar commodity’ because the mortality of its owner directly bears on the determination of its value.



source not only of value, but of more value than it has itself<sup>113</sup>, or, ‘surplus-value...is only the relation of living labour to that objectified in the worker’<sup>114</sup> – owe their intelligibility to abstract labour-time. Surplus-value does not make sense absent the concept of abstract labour. The essence of surplus-labour-time is the ‘theft of labour-time’, but not just because countless hours are stolen from workers. Surplus-labour-time is equally a *qualitative* theft, grounded by the sense in which abstract labour is firstly a purely relational – a purely social – form of time. Abstract labour has a quality, but in Hegel’s terms, the dialectic of concrete and abstract labour that produces labour-time as the measure of value cannot be directly mapped onto the dialectic of quality and quantity in the *Logic*. That is, quality + quantity → measure cannot be rewritten as ‘concrete labour + abstract labour → measure’. The dialectic of quality and quantity is in Marx already *internal* to abstract labour. Consequent to the commodification of labour-power, the quality of use-value producing labour is quantified precisely because it is already internal to the quality of exchange-value producing labour, or pure exchangeability<sup>115</sup>.

However, and on the other hand, the purely relational quality of abstract labour must be grasped as immanent to, in fact as emerging from, the doubled relation between necessary and surplus-labour. We have already postulated this, and the bulk of Chapter 4 will redevelop this from the standpoint of the production of historical time. But what needs to be stressed here is that if, at its core, abstract labour originates from the doubled relation between necessary and surplus-labour, it also conceals this relation. The homogeneity, quantifiability and divisibility of abstract labour-time both expresses and disguises the doubled relation between necessary and surplus-labour; or, this expression and disguise exist within and at the same time. Hence the dual importance of money as the ‘materialisation of general labour-time’. The sale of every product of labour except labour-power *ideally* expresses (profit) and veils (price) the surplus-labour, the surplus-value, within these products. This realisation is retroactive and corresponds to the sense in which surplus-labour is internal to socially necessary labour. The sale of labour-power is more complex, but can be characterised in similar terms. It sets into motion both the

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<sup>113</sup> Marx, *Capital* 1, 301.

<sup>114</sup> Marx, *Grundrisse*, 337. For Marx, ‘it is not at all contradictory, or, rather, the in-every-way mutually contradictory statements that labour is *absolute poverty as object*, on one side, and is, on the other side, the *general possibility* of wealth as subject and as activity, are reciprocally determined and follow from the essence of labour, such as it is *presupposed* by capital as its contradiction and as its contradictory being, and such as it, in turn, presupposes capital.’ Ibid. 296.

<sup>115</sup> This point is indebted to the fifth chapter of Arthur’s *The New Dialectic and Marx’s Capital*. See Arthur, *The New Dialectic and Marx’s Capital*, 90, 109. In addition to this, see Christopher J. Arthur, ‘Marx, Hegel and the Value-Form’, in *Marx’s Capital and Hegel’s Logic: A Reexamination*, 269-91. Tombazos is correct to point out that abstract labour is indifferent to the productivity of concrete labour, that it can thus only be ‘more or less extensive and intensive’, but it does not follow that abstract labour is a purely quantitative category, that, as he puts it, ‘the “quality” of abstract labour is precisely that it has no “quality”.’ Tombazos, *Time in Marx*, 112.

expression (rate of profit) and the concealment (price of labour, the wage<sup>116</sup>) of the extraction of surplus-labour, thus latent surplus-value, from individual workers. This extraction is both prospective and retroactive<sup>117</sup>, and corresponds to the sense in which surplus-labour is defined against socially necessary labour. In Hegelian mode, the basic point here is that the ‘essential relation’ abstract labour does not only just exist, but is both manifestation [*Erscheinung*] and semblance [*Schein*], because it is itself based in the doubled relation between necessary and surplus-labour. Abstract labour-time simultaneously realises the fact that, within capitalism, ‘surplus-labour and necessary labour are mingled together’<sup>118</sup>, as well as the fact that surplus-labour is nothing other than ‘forced labour’.<sup>119</sup>

The dialectic that confronts us is thus not the ‘dialectic of necessary and surplus-labour’ (there is no such thing), but rather, within capitalism, the dialectic within necessary labour as such. This dialectic differs from that between abstract and concrete labour in two crucial ways. First, as previously stated, this dialectic comes out of two different manifestations of one and the same kind of labour and time. Second, and more importantly, the structure of this dialectic is essentially different. Whereas concrete labour is produced by abstract labour as both internal and external to abstract labour (this is the manner in which living labour is external to capital *because* it is internal to the production-process), surplus-labour *produces itself* as both internal and external to necessary labour. In other words, if a defining feature of capitalism is that surplus determines necessity, then this is so because surplus-labour simultaneously determines itself as internal (from the standpoint of the production of all commodities but labour-power) and external (from the standpoint of the production of labour-power) to necessary labour. Thus the objective conditions of the production-process which make possible the transformation of value into surplus-value not only appear, but are posited, as the result of surplus-value itself.<sup>120</sup> Consequently, ‘the particular forms which value...must adopt in order to realise itself anew,

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<sup>116</sup> ‘Wage-labour always consists of paid and unpaid labour’ (Marx, *Grundrisse*, 574), and at the same time, ‘in wage-labour...even surplus-labour, or unpaid labour, appears as paid.’ (Marx, *Capital* 1, 680).

<sup>117</sup> In other words, the commodification of labour-power chronologically precedes the labour-process, but the exchange of labour-power for the wage is only actual (the worker is only paid) after this process.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid. 346. Marx’s statement that ‘capital did not invent surplus-labour’ (Ibid. 344) is misleading. It is true that within the *corvée* system ‘the necessary labour which the Wallachian peasant performs for his own maintenance is distinctly marked off from his surplus-labour on behalf of the boyar’ (Ibid. 346), but this surplus-labour is not just the unhidden predecessor of surplus-labour within capitalism, as Marx’s analysis of the working-day [*der Arbeitstag*] suggests. The various forms of feudal surplus-labour are *fundamentally* different from the kind of ‘surplus-labour’ which characterises capitalism. If anything, and just like the relation between abstract labour and labour in general, surplus-labour within capitalism is the condition of thinking ‘surplus-labour’ transhistorically.

<sup>119</sup> Marx, *Grundrisse*, 324.

<sup>120</sup> ‘...the values he [the capitalist] gave in that exchange [the wage for living labour capacity] were not values which he originally put into circulation out of his own funds; they were, rather, objectified alien labour which he appropriated without giving any equivalent whatsoever, and which he now exchanges for alien living labour.’ Ibid. 457.

i.e. to posit itself as capital...are...only *particular* forms of surplus-labour itself.’<sup>121</sup> This is the framework through which the following passage must be read:

...capital forces the workers beyond necessary labour to surplus-labour. Only in this way does it realise itself, and create surplus-value. But on the other hand, it posits necessary labour *only to the extent* and *insofar as* it is surplus-labour and the latter is *realisable* as *surplus-value*. It posits surplus-labour, then, as the condition of the necessary, and surplus-value as the limit [*Grenze*] of objectified labour, of value as such. As soon as it cannot posit value, it does not posit necessary labour; and, given its foundation, it cannot be otherwise. It therefore restricts labour and the creation of value – by an artificial check, as the English express it – and it does so on the same grounds as and to the same extent that it posits surplus-labour and surplus-value. By its nature, therefore, it posits a *barrier* [*Schranke*] to labour and value-creation, in contradiction to its tendency to expand them boundlessly. And inasmuch as it both posits a barrier *specific* to itself, and on the other side equally drives over and beyond *every* barrier, it is the living contradiction.<sup>122</sup>

The direct context of this passage is the contradiction – and the illusion that arises from this contradiction – between the individual and collective worker (or between the individual worker and his class), a contradiction which is itself generated by the contradiction between the individual and collective capitalist (or between the individual capitalist and his class). This passage expresses the simple fact that, apart from *his* workers, the individual capitalist relates to the working class not as workers, but as consumers: as possessors of exchange-value in the form of money (not wages). Hence the drive to simultaneously restrict and expand what Marx describes as the worker’s ‘exchangeability’ [*Tauschfähigkeit*] – the capacity, that is to say, of labour-capacity to consume.<sup>123</sup> This is the meaning of capital as the ‘living contradiction’. But what predominantly interests us here is the appearance of the concepts of ‘limit’ and ‘barrier’. In the *Grundrisse*, and elsewhere, Marx does not systematically develop a relation, or even a difference, between the limit and the barrier. Thus the importance of this passage: it casts light on what this difference and relation *might* look like. Yet there is also – this thesis maintains – *a more fundamental* relation between the limit and barrier in Marx which must be uncovered, both because it grounds other expressions of this relation (such as the one articulated above),

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<sup>121</sup> Ibid. 451.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid. 421.

<sup>123</sup> ‘Capital, then, posits *necessary labour-time* as the barrier to the exchange-value of living labour-capacity; *surplus-labour-time* as the barrier to necessary labour-time; and *surplus-value* as the barrier to surplus-labour-time; while at the same time it drives over and beyond all these barriers, to the extent that it posits *labour-capacity* opposite itself as something simply engaged in exchange, as money, and surplus-labour-time as the only barrier, because creator [*Schöpferin*], of surplus-value.’ Karl Marx, *Grundrisse der Kritik der politischen Ökonomie*, in Marx and Engels, *MEW*, Band 42 (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1983), 337 (*Grundrisse*, 422-23).

and because it confronts Hegel's concepts of limit and barrier, namely as they are outlined in the second chapter of the 'Doctrine of Being' in the *Logic*: 'Determinate Being' [*Das Dasein*]. For Hegel, 'through the limit something is what it is, and in the limit it has its quality'<sup>124</sup>, such that the limit is 'the mediation through which something and other each as well is, as is not.'<sup>125</sup> In other words, the limit of something determines the fact that its 'beyond' is simultaneously internal and external to it. This something is, for this reason, *finite*: 'nonbeing constitutes [its] nature and being', and hence 'the truth of this being is [its] end.'<sup>126</sup> Yet this something is also, for this very same reason, possibly *infinite*: its concept registers the possibility that its negation – its finitude – can itself be negated. In this sense, its self-positing limit is equally a *barrier*: a limit that 'ought' [*Sollen*] to be transcended.<sup>127</sup>

The doubled relation between necessary and surplus-labour fundamentally disrupts, and in so doing reworks, this philosophy of the limit. It is therefore impossible to map this doubled relation as a doubled relation between the 'something' and 'other' in Hegel's *Logic*. From the standpoint of all commodities but labour-power, it is true that the labour necessary to produce labour-power stands as the limit of surplus-labour, insofar as the latter is finite because of the former, and strives to transcend the former. And it is also true that surplus-labour realises this transcendence, if only ever as a 'bad infinity' [*Schlecht-Unendliche*]: an infinity entangled, to use Hegel's words, in an 'alternating determination'<sup>128</sup> with the labour necessary to produce labour-power. Therefore, the possibility of the infinite expansion of capital exists, but only as 'infinite expansion within limits'<sup>129</sup>. Or, 'the movement of capital is...limitless'<sup>130</sup>, but only insofar as the formal circuit M–C–M' contains material production ('...P...') within it.<sup>131</sup> However, these assertions represent the reach of any kind of 'homology' between Hegel and Marx's concept of the limit. From the standpoint of every commodity but labour-power, it is

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<sup>124</sup> Hegel, *The Science of Logic*, 126.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid. 127.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid. 129.

<sup>127</sup> 'Something's own limit thus posited by it as a negative which is at the same time essential, is not merely limit as such, but *barrier*. But what is posited as negated is not barrier alone; the negation is two-edged, since what is posited by it as negated is the *limit*, and this is in general what is common to both something and other, and is also a determinateness of the *in-itself* of the determination as such. This *in-itself*, therefore, as the negative relation to its limit (which is also distinguished from it), to itself as barrier, is the *ought*.' Ibid 132. This translation has been altered to render *Schranke* as 'barrier' rather than 'limitation'.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid. 138.

<sup>129</sup> Peter Osborne, 'A sudden topicality: Marx, Nietzsche and the politics of crisis', *Radical Philosophy* 160 (March/April 2010), 21.

<sup>130</sup> Marx, *Capital* 1, 253.

<sup>131</sup> Chris Arthur describes '...P...' as the "black box"...that lies at the heart of capital, and which it must manage materially, and not just formally.' Christopher J. Arthur, 'The Problem of Use-Value for a Dialectic of Capital', in *New Dialectics and Political Economy*, ed. Robert Albritton and John Simoulidis (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 137.

not enough to declare that surplus-labour has quality because its limit is the labour necessary to produce labour-power. And this is not because surplus-labour posits this necessary labour as its limit *in spite of itself* (this is consistent with the *Logic*). The basic issue, rather, is that this necessary labour is unfree to posit its own limit. From the standpoint of *every* commodity, surplus-labour is not the self-positing, but the *imposed*, limit of the labour necessary to produce labour-power. Thus it is not only necessary labour as such, but the capitalist limit *itself*, which exists as a ‘living contradiction’. For the production of every commodity except labour-power, the barrier is a limit which the labour necessary to reproduce labour-power not just ought but *must* transcend, and transcend, furthermore, *as* the labour necessary to produce every other commodity. For the reproduction of labour-power, two points can be made. First, the barrier is a limit that necessary labour not just ought not but *must not* transcend, simply because this non-transcendence is the condition of the creation of surplus-labour. This barrier may ‘*always* in principle be overcome’<sup>132</sup>, but given the regulatory power of the wage-form and the labour market, is in practice rarely overcome, and when it is, only ever momentarily. Second, this suggests that the limit of the labour necessary to reproduce labour-power is effectively a limit without barriers: an entirely unsurpassable limit. From the standpoint of the reproduction of labour-power, there is nothing but absolute separation between necessary and surplus-labour: ‘for the worker, the capitalist mode of production is alienation as unsurpassable ontological condition...the point at which the circulation of capital makes its dialectical turn for its return trip laden with surplus-value is the point of the expropriation of labour-power, which for the worker is a point of absolute and pure loss: no supersession or sublation here, merely a *really* bad infinity that is therefore not dialectical at all.’<sup>133</sup> In this regard, and to return to the previous chapter, we might suggest that capital temporalises through two different, but interdependent, forms of ‘being-towards-the-limit’, wherein surplus-labour is, necessarily and simultaneously, the surpassable and unsurpassable limit. Therefore, we might state that from the standpoint of temporalisation, Marx is in equal parts Hegelian and Heideggerian.

This is the context in which Marx’s analysis of ‘free’, or ‘disposable’, time – both within and without capitalism – must be situated. Marx consistently equates this time – particularly ‘disposable time’ – with wealth itself: ‘the whole development of wealth rests on the creation of disposable time’<sup>134</sup>, and more decisively: ‘wealth is disposable time and nothing more.’<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> Osborne, ‘A sudden topicality: Marx, Nietzsche and the politics of crisis’, 21.

<sup>133</sup> Haver, ‘For a Communist Ontology’, 117.

<sup>134</sup> Marx, *Grundrisse*, 398.

<sup>135</sup> This formulation of wealth first appears in the *Grundrisse* (ibid. 397), and is elaborated on in Karl Marx, *Theories of Surplus-Value, Part 3* [1861-63], trans. Jack Cohen (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1972), 255-57. This formulation is not Marx’s: it comes from an anonymous 1821 London pamphlet entitled *The Source and Remedy of the National Difficulties*.

Thus together with the concepts of need and productive force, the concept of free/disposable time must be understood as constitutive of Marx's transhistorical concept of wealth. And yet, free/disposable time – which is, amongst other things, the 'time for education, for intellectual development, for the fulfilment of social functions, for social intercourse, for the free play of the vital forces of [the] body and...mind'<sup>136</sup> – is only intelligible as a concept when it is placed in relation with the concept of labour-time. In capitalist society, therefore, free/disposable time is only intelligible in relation with the doubled relation between necessary and surplus-labour; that is, the doubled relation between necessary and surplus-labour-time. The necessary labour-time which contains surplus-time within itself – the necessary labour-time to produce every commodity but labour-power – is the basis of the free time of the capitalist: 'the *free time* of the non-working parts of society is based on the surplus-labour, or *overwork*, the *surplus-labour-time*, of the working part.'<sup>137</sup> This free time might be characterised as the 'time of the superstructure': the time for 'the performance of activities which are not directly productive' (e.g. statecraft, war), as well as the time 'for the development of human abilities and social potentialities... which have no directly practical purpose' (e.g. art, science).<sup>138</sup> Surplus-labour-time is the 'base' of this time of the superstructure – it is the base of 'ideological time' – but only insofar, to return to the first chapter, and as the upcoming passage reinforces, as there is a co-constitutive, not unilateral, relation between these two times. Additionally, the necessary labour-time which surplus-time excludes itself from – the labour-time necessary to reproduce labour-power – constitutes the basis of the free time of the worker. It is not that the individual worker does not have free time – the physiological limits of the working-day, and the ensuing struggle to reduce its length, renders this impossible – but rather that his labour-time posits his free time as 'existing *in and through the opposition to surplus-labour-time*.'<sup>139</sup> Yet whilst *this* free time is opposed to surplus-labour-time, it is also – and only – 'free' by virtue of the fact that it is productive for capital. Consider the following passage:

The saving of labour-time [is] equal to the increase of free time, i.e. time for the full development of the individual, which in turn reacts back upon the productive power of labour as itself the greatest productive power. From the standpoint of the direct

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<sup>136</sup> Marx, *Capital* 1, 375.

<sup>137</sup> Karl Marx, *Economic Manuscripts of 1861-63*, in *Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels Collected Works (MECW)* Volume 30, *Marx: 1861-1863*, trans. Ben Fowkes (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1988), 191.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.* 190.

<sup>139</sup> Marx, *Grundrisse der Kritik der politischen Ökonomie*, 604 (*Grundrisse*, 708). The use of the masculine personal pronoun 'his' here is deliberate: it registers the fact that free time 'existing *in and through the opposition to surplus-labour-time*' must itself negotiate the fact that labour-power is reproduced through the *absolute* unfreedom of domestic labour-time. Simply put, Marx is indifferent to the fact that, within capitalism, domestic labour-time measures nothing, neither value nor wealth.

production-process, it can be regarded as the production of *fixed capital*, this fixed capital *being man himself*...Free time – which is both idle time and time for higher activity – has naturally transformed its possessor into a different subject, and he then enters into the direct production-process as this different subject. This process is then both discipline, as regards the human being in the process of becoming; and, at the same time, practice [*Ausübung*], experimental science, materially creative and objectifying science, as regards the human being who has become, in whose head exists, the accumulated knowledge of society.<sup>140</sup>

This is a striking passage, one that underscores the extent to which the free time of the worker is structured by capital. It exemplifies the other side of the relation between surplus-labour-time and this free time: if, on the one hand, this free-time is opposed to surplus-labour-time, such that the latter represents what ought to be the former, the theft of the former, on the other hand, this free time is equally *creative* of surplus-labour-time, such that the latter is also, and contradictorily, predicated on the increase of the former. This passage needs to be doubly situated. The first context, one that will receive more attention later, is the difference between the production of circulating and fixed capital. Whereas the former involves the production of use-values which satisfy immediate needs, the latter is defined by the production of the means of this production, production ‘not towards value as an immediate object, but rather towards value creation’, which is to say the production of the ‘value-producing power of capital.’<sup>141</sup> A defining dimension of capitalism is the tendential orientation towards the production of fixed, rather than circulating, capital.<sup>142</sup> Stemming from this, the second context is quite simply the fact that the ongoing development of the capacity to produce is directly connected to ongoing development of the ‘capability to consume’<sup>143</sup> [*Fähigkeit des Genusses*, which equally means the capability to enjoy], a capability which is itself ‘the development of an individual potential, a force of production.’<sup>144</sup> These contexts ground the manner in which, ‘from the standpoint of the direct production-process, [the increase of free time] can be regarded as the production of *fixed capital*, this fixed capital *being man himself*.’ The increase of free time not only enriches the capability of the worker to transform into ‘the watchman and regulator of the production-process itself’, such that this process becomes ‘the appropriation of [the worker’s] own general productive power, his understanding of nature and his mastery over it by virtue of his presence as a social body.’<sup>145</sup> This increase is as much the enrichment of the worker as a consumer, the

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<sup>140</sup> Marx, *Grundrisse*, 711-12. Emphasis added. Marx wrote the expression ‘being man himself’ in English. See Marx, *Grundrisse der Kritik der politischen Ökonomie*, 607.

<sup>141</sup> Marx, *Grundrisse*, 710.

<sup>142</sup> ‘...it is in the production of *fixed capital* that capital posits itself as *end-in-itself* and appears active as capital, to a higher power than it does in the production of circulating capital.’ Ibid.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid. 711.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid. 705.

‘human being who has become, in whose head exists, the accumulated knowledge of society’; *this* is the ‘full development of the individual’ which in turn fuels the general productive power of labour. The free time of the worker may ‘naturally [transform] its possessor into a different subject’, but the naturalness of this transformation, and the difference of this subject, are still structured by, because they are internal to, capital. Osborne’s critique of this passage is thus misplaced. Far from expressing ‘utterly untenable, nineteenth-century assumptions’, such that it cannot account for how ‘there is nothing “natural”, and little that is “free”, about current processes of the transformation of the individual into a “different subject” during disposable time’<sup>146</sup>, this passage in fact *anticipates* the extent to which these processes (consumption and the culture industry) are ‘unnatural’ as well as unfree.

Yet the full importance of this passage only comes to light when it is read in conjunction with, and against, the following passage in *Theories of Surplus-Value*:

*Labour-time*, even if exchange-value is sublated, always remains the creative substance of wealth and the measure of the *cost* of its production. But free time, *disposable time*, is wealth itself, partly for the enjoyment of the product, and partly for free activity which – unlike labour – is not dominated by the pressure of an extraneous purpose which must be fulfilled, and the fulfilment of which is regarded as a natural necessity or a social duty, according to one’s will. It is self-evident that if labour-time is restricted to a normal amount [*Maß*] and, moreover, labour is no longer performed for someone else, but for oneself, and, together with the sublation of the social contradictions between master and men, etc., it acquires a quite different, a free character, it becomes real social labour, and finally the basis of *disposable time* – the *labour-time* of men who also have disposable time, must be of a much higher quality than that of working animals [*Arbeitsstiers*].<sup>147</sup>

The relation between labour-time and free/disposable time is as essential to the comprehension of communism as it is to capitalism. If there is a ‘communist ontology’ in Marx, if he provides us with an outline of a ‘communist mode of production’, then this relation – which should be understood as the relation between freedom and necessity more broadly – constitutes the basis of the ‘ontological difference’<sup>148</sup> between communism and capitalism. There is still a dialectic of freedom and necessity in communism. The difference, however, between this dialectic and

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<sup>146</sup> Osborne, ‘Marx and the philosophy of time’, 21. Crucially, Osborne’s citation of this passage omits the sentence stating that the increase of free time ‘can be regarded as the production of *fixed capital*, this fixed capital *being man himself*.’ See *ibid.* 20.

<sup>147</sup> Karl Marx, *Theorien über den Mehrwert*, in Marx and Engels, *MEW*, Band 26, Dritter Teil (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1968), 253 (*Theories of Surplus-Value, Part 3*, 257).

<sup>148</sup> Recall that the Heideggerian notion of ‘ontological difference’ (the difference between being and entity) must in Marx be based in the difference between one mode of production and another.



its capitalist counterpart is that, in communism, it is freedom – not necessity – that constitutes the measure of wealth. In communism, ‘the measure of wealth is...not any longer, in any way, labour-time, but rather disposable time.’<sup>149</sup> As the passage above puts it, labour-time ‘always remains the creative substance of wealth and the measure of the *cost* of its production’, but if exchange-value – and with it abstract labour – is actually sublated, then this time is no longer the measure of wealth *itself*, simply because wealth no longer assumes the form of value. The dialectic of freedom and necessity in communism is a non-antagonistic dialectic – in Maoist terms, it expresses a ‘non-antagonistic contradiction’ – insofar as ‘the realm of freedom really begins only where labour determined by necessity and external expediency ends’, as well as the fact that ‘the true realm of freedom, the development of human powers as an end in itself... can only flourish with [the] realm of necessity as its basis.’<sup>150</sup> In this way, the conflict between labour-time and free/disposable time disappears, not because their difference disappears, but because *surplus-labour-time* disappears. Communism sublates the ‘socially necessary labour-time’ of capitalism because it abolishes the surplus-labour within this time. This is the manner in which communism is the consciously collective, thus rational, recognition of the *qualitative identity* between the labour-time necessary to reproduce labour-capacity and the labour-time necessary to produce every other product, whereas capitalism represents the structural refusal to recognise this identity (despite the fact that it depends on it). At the same time, this sublation not only preserves but enhances the productive power of ‘socially necessary labour-time’, but only insofar as it yields an entirely different quality of social labour-time, and thus an entirely different quality of product, than capitalism. In short, communism allows no place for surplus-time within labour. ‘Free activity’ becomes the exclusive domain of this time, such that labour – ‘life’s first need’ – is the basis, but not the measure, of wealth.<sup>151</sup>

Yet the ontological difference between communism and capitalism – the fact that each produces a fundamentally different kind of time since each produces a fundamentally different

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<sup>149</sup> Marx, *Grundrisse*, 708. Antonio Negri’s position that ‘Communism is the negation of all measure, the affirmation of the most exasperated plurality – creativity’ is thus completely at odds with Marx’s position. Antonio Negri, *Marx Beyond Marx: Lessons on the Grundrisse* [1979], trans. Harry Cleaver, Michael Ryan and Maurizio Viano, ed. Jim Fleming (New York: Autonomedia, 1991), 33.

<sup>150</sup> Marx, *Capital* 3, 958-59.

<sup>151</sup> ‘...when the narrow-minded bourgeois form is stripped away, what is wealth other than the universality of individual needs, capacities, pleasures, productive forces, etc., created through universal interchange? The full development of human mastery over the forces of nature, those of so-called “nature” as well as his own nature? The absolute working out of his creative potentialities, with no presupposition other than the previous historical development, that 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* scale? 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?’ Marx, *Grundrisse der Kritik der politischen Ökonomie*, 395-96 (*Grundrisse*, 488). This wealth comprises a fundamentally different kind of historical time.

kind of human, and vice versa – is only intelligible when it is framed as a historical difference. And the kind of history and historical time that communism produces is itself only intelligible from the standpoint of the kind of history and historical time that it sublates. For this reason, the relation between necessary and surplus-labour, which more than any other relation within capitalism structures the social production of the means of life, must now be configured as a distinct kind of historical relation. Specifically, how does the *production* of this relation relate to the materialist concept of history? How does it restructure the historicalising power of need? In short, *what is the relation between valorisation and the production of historical time?* These questions point to the focus of the next chapter: the production-process of capital, the process which sets the relation between necessary and surplus-labour into motion as historical time.

## Chapter Four

### Capital: the Condition of Thinking History

Historical Materialism...means the *self-knowledge of capitalist society*.<sup>1</sup>

As previously argued, the difference between the circuits C–M–C and M–C–M' should be understood as expressing two different conceptions of need. Whereas the first circuit leads to the satisfaction of human needs – most importantly the satisfaction of the need of the worker to reproduce his own existence – the second circuit correlates to capital's need to self-expand: the 'constantly renewed movement' that is 'an end in itself.'<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, the kind of 'need' underlying the circuit M–C–M' constitutes the perversion [*Verrücktheit*] of human need, such that, in Sartrean terms, the self-expansion of value transforms human need into exigency – the individual is compelled to sell his labour-power in order to live, *precisely because* capital must expand.<sup>3</sup> In this respect, if concrete labour is internal to abstract labour – if the former totalises and temporalises, but only insofar as it is internal to the totalising and temporalising power of the latter – this is because only exchange-value, not use-value, satisfies capital's need for self-expansion.<sup>4</sup> In other words, it is only from the standpoint of the need of capital, measured by exchange-value, that the scope of the internality of concrete labour to abstract labour reveals itself. The individual sells his labour-power because he needs to live, but this need is *not* the totalising and temporalising basis of his ensuing labour. The need that governs the teleological end of this labour is *not* the worker's need to consume the means of life, but rather the creation of use-values predestined for exchange. In capitalism, the worker does *not* posit the end of his act – capital does – and thus his need to consume the means of life arises quite separately from the actual production of these means. The only thing that actually connects the production and consumption of the means of human life is the wage.

Consequently, despite the fact that concrete and abstract labour totalise and temporalise differently (this is important: there is no dialectic between them if this is not acknowledged),

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<sup>1</sup> Georg Lukács, 'The Changing Function of Historical Materialism' [1919], in *History and Class Consciousness*, 229. 'Thus historical materialism is, in the first instance, a theory of bourgeois society and its economic structure'. Ibid.

<sup>2</sup> Marx, *Capital* 1, 253.

<sup>3</sup> For Sartre, this represents the sense in which the practico-inert temporalises: exigency – or need from the standpoint of the practico-inert – constitutes the systematised perversion, the systematic co-option, of the temporalising basis of human *praxis*.

<sup>4</sup> However, only use-value – e.g. the use-value of labour-power – *produces* that which satisfies capital's need for self-expansion. Only the use-value of labour-power produces surplus-value.

the *historical-ontological* ground of each – the ground which determines that, within each, totalisation is temporalisation, and temporalisation totalisation – *is the same*. This ground is, quite simply, capital's *need* to self-expand.<sup>5</sup> Yet if this is the case, new questions emerge: what is the relationship between capital's need to self-expand and history? More precisely, what is the relationship between this need and the materialist concept of history? How does this need relate to this concept as a modern, philosophical concept of history? Capital's relentless drive to expand pervades the whole of Marx's critique of political economy, but what would it mean to reconstruct Marx's exposition of this drive as a historicalising concept of need? A concept of need which registers the creation of history itself, such that capital's need historicalises *qua* needs? These questions point to the fact that the expansive ontological scope of the concepts of necessity [*Notwendigkeit*] and need [*Bedürfnis*], as first introduced in the *1844 Manuscripts* and enriched by *The German Ideology*, is not realised by Marx in the various drafts of *Capital*. In other words, from the *Grundrisse* onwards, Marx does not, this chapter argues, adequately sustain the 'materialist outlook' [*materialistischer Anschauung*], an outlook which, according to *The German Ideology*, determines not only that necessities and needs must be subjected to a historical logic, but must be understood as constituting that very logic itself. In *The German Ideology*, this outlook is undeniably grounded in human necessities and human needs, but this does not mean that it does not thereby extend to capital's necessities and capital's needs. Not at all. If, within capitalism, human needs are internal to, if they are satisfied because of, capital, what this means is that capital does more than make itself relevant to the materialist outlook. It *regrounds* this outlook. This must be systematically investigated, such that a general set of ontological relations between need, capital and history reveals itself, and reveals itself beyond the predominant framework through which Marx presents these relations, which is to say the ordinary understanding of history. Marx teaches us that social needs evolve and expand, and that capitalism is a historically specific formation of socially necessary labour and social need, one which alienates human necessities and human needs. This is of course true, but it presumes rather than explains the relationship between the self-expansion of capital and the materialist concept of history more generally.

We must address this relationship because, and as we have already established, abstract labour is the condition of thinking the category of 'labour in general', the category upon which the intelligibility of the materialist concept of history depends. But – and this cuts to the heart

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<sup>5</sup> This is not to say that capital's need to self-expand is not itself ontologically grounded by the human's need to socially produce the means of its life, that there is not, in other words, a mutually constitutive – a reciprocal – ontological ground between capital's need and human needs. The point, rather, is that the *historical-ontological* ground of the expansion of human needs within capitalism, that which gives this expansion its historical intelligibility, is capital's need to self-expand.

of the matter – it is one thing to demonstrate that ‘labour in general’ hinges on abstract labour, and quite another thing to *put this into motion as history*. If capital is in essence ‘movement’, ‘motion’, and ‘unity-in-process’<sup>6</sup>, it must hereafter be grasped as a *historicalising* movement, motion, and unity-in-process. And if, furthermore, self-valourising value – i.e. capital – is the ‘comprehensive subject’ [*übergreifendes Subjekt*] of its own processes, ‘in which it alternately assumes and loses the form of money and the form of commodities, but preserves and expands itself through all these changes’<sup>7</sup>, then the comprehensiveness of this subject (the manner in which this subject is the unification – the totalising and temporalising movement – of its own processes, and thus the unity of the acts within these processes) *must become its historicalising power*. As should now be clear, by ‘historicalise’ we do not mean ‘historicise’ – understanding capital as a ‘historically specific’ subject (at least what is normally meant by this expression), nor do we mean situating this subject in its ‘specific time and place’, in, for example, 1860s England (this is historicism); rather, we mean the way in which, *as* the comprehensive subject, *as* the unity of the acts within the processes that it is, *capital historicalises*, and it does so in such a manner that it constitutes the condition of thinking Marx’s modern post-Enlightenment concept of history.<sup>8</sup> This historicalisation is the condition of thinking ‘historicisation’, and, therefore, capitalism’s historical specificity. Capital (and here we mean ‘capital in general’, or ‘universality’<sup>9</sup>) totalises and temporalises in such a manner that these movements become

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<sup>6</sup> Marx, *Grundrisse*, 620.

<sup>7</sup> Marx, *Capital* 1, 255. I am indebted to Peter Osborne for the translation of ‘*übergreifendes Subjekt*’ as ‘comprehensive subject’, as opposed to Ben Fowkes’s ‘dominant subject’ (*übergreifendes* literally means ‘overarching’ or ‘all-grasping’). Fowkes’s translation lends itself too easily to the notion that the human subject is ‘externally dominated’ by the subject that is value (this is Postone’s ‘abstract domination’), when in fact the point is that *human subjectivation is internal to value* (in capitalism, the human is (predominantly) a subject *because* there is value). Living labour is internal to the value-form; *labour-power is used*. And the human consumer is predominantly a subject *because* there is circulation: ‘as the subject predominant [*übergreifend*] over the different phases of this movement, as value sustaining and multiplying itself in it, as the subject of these metamorphoses proceeding in a circular course – as a spiral, as an expanding circle – capital is *circulating capital*.’ Marx, *Grundrisse*, 620. Martin Nicolaus’s translation of *übergreifend* as ‘predominant’ lacks the overarching connotations of ‘comprehensive’, but it is preferable to Fowkes’s ‘dominant’.

<sup>8</sup> The focus of this chapter is the relationship between capital and Marx’s particular post-Enlightenment concept of history, but the ultimate question which Marx poses for the philosophy of history is whether capital constitutes the condition of thinking *every* post-Enlightenment concept of history (from roughly the mid-eighteenth century onwards). In other words, does capital constitute the very possibility of the category of history, as conceived by the likes of Kant, Hegel, Condorcet, Comte, Dilthey, Heidegger, Collingwood, Sartre and Fukuyama? Constitute the very possibility of ‘the collective singular form of *Geschichte*, which since around 1780 can be conceived as history in and for itself in the absence of an associated subject or object’? Koselleck, *Future’s Past: on the Semantics of Historical Time*, 236. Marx does not feature in Koselleck, hence the latter never asks whether capital *is* the subject of ‘history...in the absence of an associated subject or object’.

<sup>9</sup> As Roberto Fineschi says, in Marx, “‘capital in general’ [*Kapital im Allgemeinen*] and “‘universality’” [*Allgemeinheit*] mean the same thing.’ Roberto Fineschi, ‘On Hegel’s Methodological Legacy in Marx’, in *Marx’s Capital and Hegel’s Logic: A Reexamination*, 140, ft. 2. Whilst these categories only appear in Marx’s work until the end of 1862, Fineschi demonstrates that ‘capital in general’ actually

historicalising movements: they become constitutive of the movement of historical totalisation and historical temporalisation. Thus, against Sartre, this chapter argues that there *is* a totaliser – it is capital – that totalises and temporalises history.<sup>10</sup> Broadly speaking, this is what is meant by the statement that ‘capital is the subject of history’. Ontologically, this is not to assert (and here we must draw on the historicist understanding of historical time) that capital has been the subject of all hitherto existing (human) history, and will be the subject of all (human) history to come. This is absurd. Ontologically, capital has only been, and will only be, the subject of history for as long as capitalism has existed and continues to exist (even if, strictly speaking, it is impossible to know not only when – or if – capitalism will end, but also when it ‘began’<sup>11</sup>). Epistemologically, however, this does not invalidate the fact that, without capital, there is no history in and for itself: no ‘history of all hitherto existing society’ nor no ‘all history to come’. ‘History as such’, ‘history itself’, exists because of capital.

What is the upshot of this? If, on some level, we are to hold on to the materialist concept of history, wherein ‘history’ can be understood as something like ‘the social production of the means of *human* life’, a production that satisfies existing human needs and creates new human needs, then we must recognise and work through the fact that capital is the subject that makes this understanding possible. Methodologically, this requires that we extend the logic of history to capital itself. This requires that capital – whose existing and new needs might be formulated as ‘reproduction on an expanded scale, i.e. accumulation’<sup>12</sup> – be conceived from the standpoint

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‘[becomes] more consistent thanks to some modifications’ *after 1862*. Ibid. 144, 142. ‘Total social capital’ [*gesellschaftlichen Gesamtkapital*] is, as we will later learn, the decisive modification. Hegel is the clear interlocutor here, insofar as the three moments of the Concept in the *Logic* (universality, particularity and singularity) correspond to capital in general, many competing capitals and interest-bearing capital in *Capital*. The details of this reading of the Hegel/Marx confrontation are not important here, but what needs to be stressed is that ‘capital in general’ does *not* turn its back on particularity and singularity, but is dialectically dependent on them. Hence the ‘historicalisation’ being discussed here is *not* indifferent to different particular histories, nor is it indifferent to the singularity of the historical event, but is rather dialectically dependent on them. As previously cited, this dovetails with the problem of history as ‘*how to universalise the singular without suppressing its specificity.*’ Mészáros, *The Work of Sartre: Search for Freedom and the Challenge of History*, 242.

<sup>10</sup> Disclosing capital as this totaliser does not invalidate, but actually registers, Hegel’s ‘cunning of reason’, as well as the ‘invisible hand’ of Smith’s market. This is the structuralist dimension of capital’s subjectness: it is the ‘hidden’ or ‘empty’ subject of history.

<sup>11</sup> Take the question of the ‘origins of capitalism’. Insofar as capitalism is a mode of production, and a mode of production is a totalising abstraction of multiple, actually existing societies, the desire to locate the origins of capitalism in a particular time, place and phenomenon (in, for instance, 16<sup>th</sup> century English agrarian relations, which is the ‘Brenner Thesis’) is fundamentally misguided. In other words, capitalism is capitalism by virtue of the fact that, as a *system* of social relations and forces irreducible to linear causation and time, its origins belong to no one place, time or phenomenon. This fact guides Marx’s analysis of ‘originary accumulation’, and it is, to varying degrees, lost on the leading thinkers of the origins of capitalism (e.g. Fernand Braudel, Maurice Dobb, Paul Sweezy, Robert Brenner, Perry Anderson, Immanuel Wallerstein and Ellen Meiksins Wood).

<sup>12</sup> Marx, *Capital* 1, 763.

of producing the means of its own life. These means are irreducible to the human's means of life – the commodities necessary for the reproduction of the owner of labour-power. Capital's means of life are not these and other commodities, but rather the *processes* by which the 'inner substance' of commodities – 'socially necessary labour-time' – produces and circulates itself. More specifically, the processes by which this labour-time expands itself – valorises itself – constitutes capital's means of life. It is not difficult to grasp, therefore, that capital presents us with a very different kind of 'life' than that of the human being. Yet whilst there is a consistent appeal to life in Marx's critique of political economy – there is a consistent use of life-related terms – there is no (or at least no explicit) theoretical discourse on the 'life of capital' in this critique (indeed, the same can be said of 'the life of the worker', 'living labour', and so forth, insofar as 'life' here only functions ontologically around the concepts with which it is joined). What, then, is the 'life of capital'? In what sense is this life a historical – a historicalising – life? To answer these questions, this chapter maintains, we must systematically investigate the different dimensions of capital's need to self-expand, and thereby create a life that expresses these dimensions.<sup>13</sup> This is, in the end, how to fill out capital as the subject of history. This is how *social* – as opposed to individual – life occupies the standpoint (in capitalism) from which 'historical totalisation' and 'historical temporalisation' can be understood. Hence this is how Marx's distinct challenge to the Heideggerian and Sartrean projects can ultimately be secured. As opposed to Heidegger, capital, not Dasein, is 'the originary happening' [*das ursprüngliche Geschehen*] that makes the 'science of history' possible (this itself stems from the fact that the individual's being-towards-death is predominantly actual within what can be called capital's 'being-towards-life'<sup>14</sup>). Contra Sartre, individual *praxis* is not the totalising and temporalising core of historical dialectics; the life of capital – 'universal social labour' – is.

This chapter focuses on the production-process of capital, and treats the self-expansion at the heart of this process as the practical basis upon which the materialist concept of history depends.<sup>15</sup> In Sartrean language, this self-expansion constitutes the 'primary intelligibility' of history: it gives history its autonomy and – as heretical as it may be to state this – its 'motive

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<sup>13</sup> The production-process of capital (*Capital* Vol. 1) correlates to what can be called capital's 'deathly life', whereas the circulation-process of capital and its metamorphoses (*Capital* Vol. 2) – treated in the conclusion to this thesis – might be understood as the 'life-circuit' or 'life-process' of capital.

<sup>14</sup> To expand on the previous footnote, the 'life' in this formulation must be doubly understood, as both the life of capital which, 'vampire-like, lives only by sucking living labour, and lives the more, the more labour it sucks' (Marx, *Capital* 1, 342), and as the life of capital in which the production-process is just one of the moments within each of capital's multiple life-circuits. This formulation does not detract from the fact that, following Osborne, human finitude is the 'ontological basis of the "value" of time'. It simply gives this fact its historical purchase. It expresses that, in capitalism, human finitude is only this basis in relation to the historicalising life of 'self-immortalising and self-multiplying value.' Marx, *Grundrisse*, 639.

<sup>15</sup> The circulation-process of capital is examined in the conclusion to this thesis.

force'.<sup>16</sup> Marx and Engels are correct to argue – and this chapter should be read as reinforcing this argument – that in the bourgeois conception of history – the culminating ‘conception of history up to the present’ – the ‘actual basis of history has either been totally neglected or else considered as a minor matter quite irrelevant to the course of history.’<sup>17</sup> Yet what they do not recognise in *The German Ideology*, and what Marx does not demonstrate, or even suggest, in the various drafts of *Capital*, is that the ‘need’ without which history cannot be comprehended is not, that is, *not originally*, human need, but rather capital’s need to self-expand. Ultimately, it is the two ‘great sections’<sup>18</sup> of the movement of capital – the production- and circulation-processes – which, taken together, render ‘the process of expansion of human needs and the productive forces corresponding to them’<sup>19</sup> intelligible *as history*, but, this chapter argues, the production-process of capital takes precedence, because this process directly determines that, in capitalism, the human is not only not the subject of the expansion of its own needs, but that this displacement is the very reason why there is such a thing as ‘human history’. As we will see, the production-process is the ontological basis of some of the most basic, and seemingly self-evident, assumptions that Marx’s, if not every post-Enlightenment, conception of history tacitly accepts: human history not only exists ‘in itself and as such’<sup>20</sup>, but its progression never stops. Hence the speculative proposition which guides this chapter is this: *valorisation is the production of historical time*. The production-process of capital valorises value, and it does so in such a way that, to rework the Lukács quotation that frames this chapter, historical time becomes its self-knowledge.

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<sup>16</sup> The point here is not that the assertion that class struggle is the ‘motive force of history’ is necessarily misplaced, but that it must negotiate the fact that in addition to being the condition of thinking history, capital is the condition of thinking the category of ‘class’.

<sup>17</sup> Marx and Engels, *DI*, 39 (*GI*, 59). Heidegger’s philosophy of history is the paradigmatic example of this.

<sup>18</sup> Marx, *Grundrisse*, 620.

<sup>19</sup> Osborne, *How to Read Marx*, 41.

<sup>20</sup> As Ricœur stresses in his reading of Koselleck, this goes hand-in-hand with the idea that ‘history is the history of humanity, and in this worldwide sense, the world history of peoples. Humanity becomes both the total object and the unique subject of history, at the same time as history becomes a collective singular.’ Ricœur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 300. The irony here is that history first becomes the ‘history of humanity’ precisely because capital, not humanity, is the subject of this history.



## 4.1 The Production-Process of Capital

There is a passage in the *Grundrisse* that is worth citing at the outset, because it constitutes a rare instance in which Marx addresses, that is, *directly* addresses<sup>21</sup>, the relationship between surplus-labour and history. It is thus worth citing in full:

The great historical quality of capital is to *create...surplus-labour*, superfluous labour from the standpoint of mere use-value, mere subsistence; and its historical determination is fulfilled as soon as, on the one side, there has been such a development of needs that surplus-labour above and beyond necessity [*Notwendige*] has itself become a universal need [*Bedürfnis*] arising out of individual needs themselves – and, on the other side, when the severe discipline of capital, acting on succeeding generations [*Geschlechter*], has developed general industriousness as the universal property of the new generation – and, finally, when the development of the productive powers of labour, which capital incessantly whips onward with its unlimited mania for wealth, as the sole conditions in which this mania can be realised, have flourished to the stage where the possession and preservation of universal wealth require a lesser labour-time of society as a whole, and where the labouring society relates scientifically to the process of its progressive reproduction, its reproduction in a constantly greater abundance; hence where labour in which a human being does what things could do has ceased. Therefore, capital and labour relate to each other here like money and commodity; the former is the universal form of wealth, the latter merely the substance destined for immediate consumption. Capital's ceaseless striving towards the universal form of wealth drives labour beyond the limits of its 'natural neediness' [*Naturbedürftigkeit*], and thus creates the material elements for the development of the rich individuality, which is as all-sided in its production as in its consumption, and whose labour also therefore appears no longer as labour, but as the full development of activity itself, in which natural necessity in its immediate form has disappeared; because a historically created need has taken the place of a natural need. This is why *capital is productive*; i.e. an *essential relation for the development of the social productive forces*.<sup>22</sup>

This passage is not just cited for what it actually tells us, but also for what it potentially tells us, for what, that is to say, it can be made to tell us. If 'the great historical quality of capital is to *create...surplus-labour*', such that 'surplus-labour...has itself become a universal need', what would it mean to read this creation as the creation of the means of understanding history itself? This is the essential task of this chapter: to simultaneously ground ourselves in Marx's analysis of the production-process of capital, and to push this analysis beyond its immediate and intended scope.

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<sup>21</sup> See also Marx, *Economic Manuscripts of 1861-63*, 199.

<sup>22</sup> Marx, *Grundrisse der Kritik der politischen Ökonomie*, 244 (*Grundrisse*, 325).

When we speak of the ‘production-process of capital’, we must, after Marx, internally differentiate this process between the ‘labour-process’ [*Arbeitsprozeß*] and the ‘valorisation-process’ [*Verwertungsprozeß*]. The relationship between these two processes has, from one standpoint, already been established: it directly corresponds to the relationship between the concrete labour which produces use-values (the labour-process) and the abstract labour which produces exchange-values (the valorisation-process). Marx often depicts the relation between the labour- and valorisation-process within the terms of the concrete/abstract labour relation: ‘The production-process is the *immediate* unity of the labour-process and valorisation-process, just as its immediate result, the commodity, is the *immediate* unity of use-value and exchange-value.’<sup>23</sup> Hence, as with concrete and abstract labour, we are not looking at two different acts here: the labour- and valorisation-process register one and the same purposive act, albeit from dialectically opposed standpoints. And as with abstract and concrete labour, the unity of the labour- and valorisation-process is hierarchically structured: ‘...the *labour-process itself* is nothing else than the *means* of the *valorisation-process*, just as the use-value of the product is nothing but a repository of its exchange value’<sup>24</sup>; additionally, ‘in capitalist production the *labour-process* is only the *means*, the end is supplied by the *valorisation-process*.’<sup>25</sup> Therefore just as concrete labour and use-value exist as the internalised, dialectical opposites of abstract labour and value, so too is the existence of the labour-process within capitalism<sup>26</sup> predicated on the valorisation-process: the former only exists *because* it is internalised by the latter as its dialectical opposite. This is the sense in which ‘the labour-process is as it were incorporated in it [the valorisation-process], subsumed under it.’<sup>27</sup> Yet what Marx’s analysis of the relation between the labour- and valorisation-process gives us, which the presentation of the relation between concrete and abstract labour in Chapter 3 does not, is a direct account of *why* these relations exist. The relation between concrete and abstract labour presumes precisely what the relation between the labour- and valorisation-process explains: *the production of the relation between necessary and surplus-labour*. It is this production, and this production alone, that

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<sup>23</sup> See Karl Marx, *Resultate des unmittelbaren Produktionsprozesses* (Frankfurt: Archiv sozialistischer Literatur 17, Neue Kritik, 1968), 21 (Marx, *Capital* 1, 991). The *Results of the Immediate Production-Process* – and not the *1861-63 Manuscripts* or the first volume of *Capital* (proper) – contains the most direct account of the relation between the labour- and valorisation-process.

<sup>24</sup> Marx, *Resultate des unmittelbaren Produktionsprozesses*, 21 (Marx, *Capital* 1, 990).

<sup>25</sup> Marx, *Capital* 1, 1001-2.

<sup>26</sup> We should remind ourselves that, as with concrete labour and use-value, Marx presents us, quite problematically, with a transhistorical labour-process *per se*. He does not recognise that, conceptually speaking, the ‘labour-process’, just like ‘concrete labour’ and ‘use-value’, depends on capitalism for its intelligibility. The transhistorical descriptions of the labour-process do not just appear in Chapter 7 (of the English edition) of the first volume of *Capital*: see, for instance, Marx, *Economic Manuscripts of 1861-63*, 56-9, in addition to Marx, *Contribution*, 36.

<sup>27</sup> Marx, *Economic Manuscripts of 1861-63*, 67.

gives abstract labour its *raison d'être*, its immanent movement without which we cannot grasp capital as the condition of thinking history. Thus if Chapter 3 makes the epistemological claim that necessary and surplus-labour hinge on abstract labour for their intelligibility, this chapter makes the ontological claim that abstract labour only exists – and hence the difference between concrete and abstract labour only exists – because of the necessary/surplus-labour relation. Quite simply, the only reason why abstract labour exists is because ‘the *production of surplus-value*, i.e. the *objectification of unpaid labour*’<sup>28</sup> exists. We can now summarise the historical-ontological importance of the relationship between the labour- and valorisation-process: this relationship gives the concrete/abstract labour relation its movement because it establishes the necessary/surplus-labour relation as the engine of this movement. *This* is the reason why the relationship between the labour- and valorisation-process is the predominant framework of the first volume of *Capital*, as well as substantial portions of the *1861-63 Manuscripts* and the *Grundrisse*. This relationship underscores the fact that, for Marx, every relation is at bottom a *processual* relation: a relation is only a relation because it is a material process between its relatum. *Capital*, in other words, directly reinforces a basic lesson of the *Theses on Feuerbach*: *the relation, logically and ontologically, grounds the relatum* (not the other way around). We must firstly prioritise the relation between the labour- and valorisation-process, such that the difference between these processes can come to light.

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<sup>28</sup> Marx, *Capital* 1, 991.

### 4.1.1 Subsumption

The concept which Marx uses to capture the relation between the labour- and valorisation-process, a concept without which, this thesis argues, history cannot be thought, is *subsumption* [*Subsumtion*]. In short, subsumption is *the* concept which structures Marx's understanding of the production-process of capital. For this reason, we must briefly consider its philosophical development leading up to Marx. The modern usage of 'subsumption' is associated with Kant, who was the first to establish the sense in which subsumption refers to the processes through which the universal and the particular enter in relation with one another, or more precisely the sense in which the particular is brought *under* the universal, and thereby transformed in some manner. In Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, subsumption is the essential process underlying the faculty of judgement [*Urteilkraft*]. For Kant, it captures the relation between the manifold and the categories of the understanding, between the sensible and the logical: 'to the use of a concept there... belongs a function of the power of judgement, whereby an object is subsumed under it.'<sup>29</sup> To return to Chapter 1, subsumption is a central feature of Kant's analysis of the schematism of the pure concepts of the understanding.<sup>30</sup> The *Critique of Pure Reason* directly assigns a temporalising logic to subsumption: the question of 'the **application** of the category to appearances'<sup>31</sup> must be addressed through the numerous schematics of time. Subsumption introduces the 'third thing' – the multiple time-determinations, culminating in the entire scope or 'field of time' [*Zeitbegriff*] – that secures the possibility of a relation between categories and appearances. (The interesting thing at play here is not that the schematism of the categories provides a multidimensional framework for temporalising the relation between abstract and concrete labour, but the sense in which Marx reproduces Kant in his position that time is the 'third thing' that allows two commodities, and thus we might say abstract and concrete labour, to have a relation in the first place). Subsumption does not figure as extensively in Hegel as it does in Kant, but the former is consistent in his critique of the latter's use of this concept. For Hegel, the essential problem with Kantian subsumption is that it does not register the fact that the universal is universal by virtue of the fact that it has a *determinate content*. In other words, Kantian subsumption is, for Hegel, a 'one-sided' or 'bad' abstraction: it strips away what is particular about the particular, and thereby prevents the universal from manifesting itself as a singularity or concrete universal. Kantian subsumption does not tell us what is essential about

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<sup>29</sup> Kant, *CPR*, A248/B304, 359.

<sup>30</sup> The opening line of the schematism of the categories reads: 'In all subsumptions of an object under a concept the representations of the former must be **homogeneous** with the latter, i.e., the concept must contain that which is represented in the object that is to be subsumed under it, for that is just what is meant by the expression "an object is contained under a concept".' Ibid. A137/B176, 271.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid. A138/B177, 272.

the object, since it lacks the concrete fullness without which abstractive power is productive. For Hegel, the manifold is not external to the concept, but is rather the concept incarnate. Thus if one takes the standpoint of the ‘self-subsistence of both subject and predicate’ (which Kant *does*, because his transcendental subject – the *Gemüt* – is a human subject), then ‘subsumption is only the *application* of the universal to a particular or an individual, which is placed *under* the universal in accordance with a vague idea that it is of inferior quality.’<sup>32</sup> Hegel’s problem is not subsumption as such – the very rationality, the dialectical movement, of the syllogism depends on relations of subsumption – but the failure to recognise that subsumption is nothing if it is not also thought in relation to *inherence* [*Inhärenz*]. That is, subsumption registers the fact that the universal and particular inhere in one another, albeit in different ways.<sup>33</sup>

Commenting on Marx’s claim in the *Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right* that Hegel does not ask whether his use of the category of subsumption is ‘the rational, the adequate mode of subsumption’<sup>34</sup>, the Endnotes Collective suggests that:

The irony here is that it is just such a usage of this category that Marx himself goes on to develop. From the 1861-63 draft of *Capital* onwards, subsumption, for Marx, is the subsumption of the particularities of the labour-process under the abstract universality of the valorisation-process of capital. The abstract category, it seems, really does find itself a body. Marx’s critique of German idealist philosophy is thus paralleled in his critique of capital. However, now the error is not on the part of the speculative philosopher, for it resides, rather, in capitalist social relations themselves. The abstract universal – value – whose existence is posited by the exchange abstraction, acquires

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<sup>32</sup> Hegel, *The Science of Logic*, 629.

<sup>33</sup> The Endnotes Collective gives good commentary on the place of subsumption in Hegel’s *Philosophy of Right*, although they overstate the manner in which this place marks a tension in Hegel’s work more broadly. It is true that, in the *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel in effect recreates the Kantian framework: he reproduces the sense in which the manifold is *external* to the pure categories of the understanding and thus subsumed under – subjected to – these categories. Here the universality of the sovereign’s decision is not configured as inhering in, and thus constituted by, the particularities of civil society. This decision does not manifest itself as a concrete universal, but is rather a decision which imposes itself upon civil society, such that the executive power – namely the judiciary and the police – have an ‘immediate bearing on the particular concerns of civil society and they make the universal interest authoritative over its particular aims.’ G.W.F. Hegel, *Philosophy of Right* [1821], trans. T.M. Knox (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), 189 (§287). Therefore, the ‘particular interests which are common to everyone fall within civil society and lie outside the absolutely universal interest of the state proper.’ Ibid. 189 (§288). See <http://endnotes.org.uk/en/endnotes-the-history-of-subsumption> (accessed 27 April 2015).

<sup>34</sup> In full: ‘The sole philosophical statement Hegel makes about the *executive* is that he “*subsumes*” the individual and the particular under the general, etc. Hegel contents himself with this. On the one hand, the category of “subsumption” of the particular, etc. This has to be actualised. Then he takes any one of the empirical forms of existence of the Prussian or modern state (just as it is), anything which actualises this category among others, even though this category does not express its specific character. Applied mathematics is also subsumption, etc. Hegel does not ask “Is this the rational, the adequate mode of subsumption?” He only takes the *one* category, and contents himself with finding a corresponding existent for it. Hegel gives a *political body* to his logic: he does not give the *logic of the body politic*.’ See Karl Marx, *Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right*, in *MECW* Volume 3, *Marx and Engels: 1843-1844* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1975), 48.

a *real* existence vis-à-vis particular concrete labours, which are subsumed under it. The real existence of abstractions, which acquire the ability to subsume the concrete world of production under them – and posit themselves as the truth of this world – is for Marx nothing other than a perverted, enchanted, ontologically inverted reality. The absurdity and violence which Hegel perceives in a relation of subsumption applies not only to Hegel's system itself, but also to the actual social relations of capitalist society.<sup>35</sup>

The merit of this reading is that it recognises the sense in which Hegel's system reproduces, and is in fact predicated on, capitalist social relations. However, there are two problems with this reading, the identification of which cuts to the heart of Marx's distinct use of the category of subsumption. First, Hegel did *not* understand subsumption to be absurd and violent; rather, this was the critique he levelled at Kant's specific use of the category of subsumption in his 1831 Berlin lectures on logic, not subsumption *per se*.<sup>36</sup> In the *Logic*, as the previous paragraph shows, the doubled relation of subsumption and inherence is central to Hegel's formulation of the syllogism in the Doctrine of the Concept. It is true that the *Philosophy of Right* is in tension with Hegel's critique of Kantian subsumption, as it reproduces Kant's use of the category of subsumption, but this is *not* representative of Hegel's system more broadly.

This leads to the second, more basic, problem. Like much of the secondary literature on subsumption more generally, the Endnotes Collective does not consider the complex *dialectic* between the labour- and valorisation-process, the understanding of which is essential not only to Marx's understanding of subsumption, but, as we will see, the very intelligibility of history. The character of this dialectic has, once again, already been introduced – it corresponds to the dialectic between concrete and abstract labour. This dialectic is the *processual manifestation* of the fact that abstract labour produces, within itself, concrete labour as its dialectical exterior (this is one register of the larger sense in which, consequent to the commodification of labour-power, living labour is external to capital *within* the production-process). But what must now be highlighted is that this dialectic is the dynamic transposition of the dialectic of abstract and concrete labour *via the category of subsumption*. We must thus insist on the following point (one that much of the secondary literature fails to thematise, and in some cases acknowledge): *subsumption is an indelibly dialectical category in Marx*, the exposition of which grounds our exposition of the production-process of capital. Marx does not explicitly highlight this point, but it is only from the standpoint of the essentially dialectical character of subsumption that

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<sup>35</sup> See <http://endnotes.org.uk/en/endnotes-the-history-of-subsumption> (accessed 27 April 2015).

<sup>36</sup> See G.W.F. Hegel, *Lectures on Logic* [1831], trans. Clark Butler (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), 12-13 (§22), which the Endnotes Collective mistakenly cites as representative of Hegel's view on subsumption as such.

Marx's indebtedness to Kant and Hegel, as well as his critical departure from them, can be realised. On one level, the valorisation-process subsumes the labour-process in much the same way that subsumption functions in the *Critique of Pure Reason*: the labour-process is *brought under* the valorisation-process in such a way that the labour-process – as a sensible object of appearance – is transformed into an object of capital's self-knowledge, thus authorising the universality and necessity of the valorisation-process. Despite Hegel's protestations that such a grasping of subsumption 'alters what is immediate...strip[s] away what is sensory, and lift[s] out the universal'<sup>37</sup>, this is precisely the point: capital is wholly indifferent to the particularities of the labour-process. This indifference marks the self-expansion of capital via the production of exchange-values: capital is predicated on the *erasure* of the concrete, sensual particularities of the labour-process. On another level, however, this erasure is at once *the creation of these particularities*. This is the deeply Hegelian dimension of Marx's concept of subsumption: the dialectical manner through which the subsumption of the labour-process under the valorisation-process is the logical and ontological *creation* of the particularities of the labour-process, such that, after the *Logic*, the universality of the concept – here the valorisation-process – inheres within these particularities. This is the syllogistic structure of capital from the standpoint of subsumption. Marx's concept of subsumption thus represents a unique confrontation between Kant and Hegel's conceptions of subsumption. Yet despite the fact that the Kantian aspect of Marx's concept of subsumption is the most immediate and explicit dimension in *Capital*, it is ultimately the dialectical dimension – a dimension which proceeds from Hegel but critically restructures him at the same time – which grounds the uniqueness of this concept.

Three points follow from this. First, Marx's concept of subsumption confirms the sense in which the relation ontologically precedes the relatum: it is not as if one pre-existing thing (the valorisation-process) subsumes another (the labour-process). Rather, following the basic logic of totalisation and temporalisation, 'subsumption' denotes the active production of the relation between the valorisation-process and labour-process, and thereby the intelligibility of the difference between these processes. Second, this concept specifies the sense in which the labour-process is internal to the valorisation-process, and for this reason subsumption *replaces* the logic of 'internalisation' which, up to this point, has structured our comprehension of the relationship between concrete and abstract labour, and the relation between human needs and the needs of capital. However, and this should now be clear, subsumption is not simply another word for 'internalisation', but is rather a dialectic of interiorisation and exteriorisation. If, after Sartre, an exteriorised totality is reinteriorised through *praxis*, such that this reinteriorisation

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid. 12 (§22).

is at once ‘an interior negation of interiority’<sup>38</sup>, then we might transpose this to Marx and state that the interiorisation of the labour-process into the valorisation-process is at once the interior negation of the interiority of the valorisation-process. The erasure of the particularities of the labour-process is dialectically fastened to the expanding creation of these particularities. The difference, however, between Sartre and Marx is that, consequent to the commodification of labour-power, this dialectic must be understood as the self-creation of the valorisation-process itself (the valorisation-process externalises the labour-process within itself). This leads to the third and final point, one that signals the greatest critical departure from Hegel. Subsumption is, after Peter Osborne, what we might call an ‘actual abstraction’. As Osborne suggests, ‘once we divest ourselves of Hegel’s notion of an *achieved* absolute’ (as a side note: this is precisely the problem with Hegel’s *Philosophy of Right*, the reason why Hegel’s otherwise consistent commitment to the dialectical character of subsumption is lost in this work), then ‘*analytically* “good” abstraction, “concrete fullness of abstraction”, or the unity of the categorial forms of a systematic dialectic, may now correspond to *practically* “bad” abstraction: paradigmatically, in Marx’s analysis, domination by the abstractions of the value-form.’<sup>39</sup> In other words, once we recognise subsumption for what it is – a necessarily ongoing and open *process* – then the analytically ‘good’ dimension of subsumption – the manner in which the concrete fullness of the valorisation-process is constitutive of the particularities of the labour-process – may now correspond to the practically ‘bad’ dimension of subsumption – the erasure, consequent to the commodification of labour-power, of the particularities of the labour-process. However, as Osborne points out, ‘this kind of practically “bad” abstraction has a different logical form to the “one-sided” bad abstractions of the understanding, from which the discourse of good and bad abstractions derives.’<sup>40</sup> In other words, the subsumption of the labour-process under the valorisation-process (here in the sense that the latter ‘erases’ the concrete particularities of the former) is a ‘bad’ erasure *immanent* to a ‘good’ creation.

This is the philosophical context in which the two forms of subsumption that constitute capitalism – formal subsumption and real subsumption – must be situated. For Marx, formal subsumption is ‘formal’ because it denotes the way in which capital ‘takes hold’ of the labour-process without actually transforming the content of this process, whereas real subsumption is ‘real’ because capital actually transforms this process – it actually, and incessantly, recreates this process in order to increase the productivity of labour. Marx primarily makes use of formal subsumption in order to highlight how existing labour-processes are brought under the capital

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<sup>38</sup> Sartre, *CDR* 1, 57.

<sup>39</sup> Peter Osborne, ‘The reproach of abstraction’, *Radical Philosophy* 127 (September/October 2004), 27.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*



relation<sup>41</sup>, how, for instance, guild-labourers become wage-labourers without actually having the content of their labour-process transformed. Real subsumption, on the other hand, yields what Marx describes as the ‘specifically capitalist mode of production’. As is well-known, the production of surplus-value – the production of the difference and relation between necessary and surplus-labour – motors both formal and real subsumption alike: the valorisation-process subsumes the labour-process because capital needs to self-expand (to produce surplus-value). Accordingly, Marx directly ties the two different forms of subsumption to two different forms of the production of surplus-value, the analysis of which constitutes half of the first volume of *Capital*. Formal subsumption corresponds to the production of ‘absolute surplus-value’: the absolute extension of the working-day past the labour-time necessary to reproduce the owner of labour-power, whereas real subsumption corresponds to the production of ‘relative-surplus value’: the reduction of the labour-time necessary to reproduce the owner of labour-power and therefore the ‘corresponding alteration in the respective lengths of the two components of the working-day.’<sup>42</sup> Thus absolute surplus-value is ‘absolute’ as it involves the absolute extension of the time beyond that necessary to reproduce the worker, whereas relative surplus-value is ‘relative’ because the increase of surplus-labour-time is relative to the reduction of necessary labour-time, such that the working-day may stay at the same length, or even decrease. In short, formal subsumption, and the absolute surplus-value correlating to it, is an *extensive* process, whereas real subsumption, and the relative surplus-value that correlates to it, is an *intensive* process. However, as with the labour- and valorisation-process, it is not the difference between formal/real subsumption, and thus absolute/relative surplus-value, that ultimately concerns us, but rather the relations between them, because it is these relations which constitute, one might say, the ‘inner substance’ of the dialectic of the labour- and valorisation-process. Subsumption is, for Marx, a dialectical category: it registers how the valorisation-process both internalises and externalises – within itself – the labour-process, but this does not mean that the relations between formal and real subsumption are dialectical relations. Unto themselves, formal and real subsumption can be understood as dialectical processes, insofar as each express different forms of the relation between the labour- and valorisation-process, but there is, in Marx, no such thing as ‘the dialectic of formal and real subsumption’ (nor is there a ‘dialectic of absolute and relative surplus-value’). However, this takes nothing away from the need to uncover the

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<sup>41</sup> Marx, *Capital* 1, 1020-21.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid. 432. Whereas Marx rarely directly uses the term ‘subsumption’ in the first volume of *Capital* proper, the *Results of the Immediate Production-Process* renders the relationship between formal and real subsumption, and absolute and relative surplus-value, quite explicit: ‘If the production of absolute surplus-value was the material expression [*materieller Ausdruck*] of the formal subsumption of labour under capital, then the production of relative surplus-value may be viewed as its real subsumption.’ Ibid. 1025.

relations between formal and real subsumption, as well as those between absolute and relative surplus-value, because they constitute the internal engine of the production-process of capital more generally.

One dimension of Marx's writings from the *1861-63 Manuscripts* onwards is the sense in which formal subsumption, and hence absolute surplus-value, 'precede' real subsumption and relative surplus-value.<sup>43</sup> In this way, formal subsumption is the 'premise and precondition of...real subsumption.'<sup>44</sup> On one level, this characterisation is not surprising: it proceeds from Marx's examination of the working-day, such that 'the constant tendency of capital' to extend the length of the working-day to its 'utmost physically possible limit'<sup>45</sup>, and the subsequent struggle by workers to reduce the length of this day, can be comprehended as fuelling dynamic transformations of the labour-process itself, transformations that directly raise the productivity of labour and thereby lower the time necessary to the produce workers' means of life. In this manner, formal subsumption might be understood as the premise and precondition of the three definitive developments within real subsumption: cooperation, the division of labour, and the use of machinery. The absolute limits of absolute surplus-value give rise to the quality of real subsumption, the 'specifically capitalist mode of production'. According to Marx, it is only in real subsumption wherein:

The *social* productive forces of labour, or the productive forces of directly social, *socialised* (i.e. collective) labour come into being through cooperation, the division of labour within the workshop, the use of *machinery*, and in general the transformation of production by the conscious *use* of the sciences, of mechanics, chemistry, etc. for specific ends, technology, etc. and similarly, through the enormous increase of *scale* corresponding to such developments (for it is only socialised labour that is capable of applying the *general* products of human development, such as mathematics, to the immediate production-process; and, conversely, progress in these sciences presupposes a certain level of material production). This entire development of the productive forces of *socialised labour* (in contrast to the more or less isolated labour of individuals), and together with it the *use of science* (the *general* product of social development), in the *immediate process of production*, takes the form of the *productive power of capital*.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> See, in particular, *ibid.* 1025.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.* 1026.

<sup>45</sup> Karl Marx, *Value, Price and Profit* [1865], as cited in Tomba, *Marx's Temporalities*, 134.

<sup>46</sup> Marx, *Capital* 1, 1024. 'With the real subsumption of labour under capital a complete (and constantly repeated) revolution takes place in the mode of production, in the productivity of the workers and in the relations between workers and capitalists.' *Ibid.* 1035. The expression 'a complete and constantly repeated revolution' is Marx's self-reference to *The Communist Manifesto*.

As this passage shows, real, not formal, subsumption is the realisation of ‘social labour’ within capitalism. This social labour is spurred by the competition between individual capitals: organisational and technological innovation is driven by the desire of individual capitalists to sell – if only momentarily – commodities at an ‘individual value’ below that of their existing social value (innovation, particularly new machinery, is unevenly introduced within the same industry and across different industries). In the end, however, the idea that formal subsumption ‘precedes’ its real counterpart, that the former is simply the ‘premise and precondition’ of the latter, is not a convincing framework with which to understand their relationship. In fact, it is misleading. This is not just because ‘from one standpoint the distinction between absolute and relative surplus-value appears to be illusory.’<sup>47</sup> More fundamentally, this is because, logically as well as materially, the relationship between formal and real subsumption must be grasped as a mutually constitutive relationship, an interplay, or continual crossing-over, from one form to another, or what Tomba calls the ‘reciprocal co-penetration between absolute surplus-value and relative surplus-value.’<sup>48</sup> Real subsumption is both the logical and material premise and precondition of formal subsumption (as much as the reverse). The introduction of machinery in one branch of industry not only ‘prolong[s] the labour-time of those workers who continue to work with the old, imperfect means of production,’<sup>49</sup> it is also ‘the most powerful means of lengthening the working day beyond all natural limits in those industries first directly seized on by it.’<sup>50</sup> There is simply no ‘replacement’ of formal subsumption by real subsumption: the valorisation-process subsumes the labour-process because it relies, from the start, on the co-existence and interplay between formal and real subsumption. Real subsumption ‘is logically implicit in the concept of capital’<sup>51</sup>, and for this reason cannot be comprehended as something which chronologically succeeds formal subsumption. This does not excuse us from granting a certain priority to real subsumption/relative surplus-value over formal subsumption/absolute surplus-value. The former constitute the ‘specifically capitalist mode of production’: they are what allows capitalist production to ‘[establish] itself as a mode of production *sui generis* and [bring] into being a new mode of material production’<sup>52</sup> (it is, as we will see, real subsumption

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid. 646. For Marx, ‘relative surplus-value is absolute, because it requires the absolute prolongation of the working day beyond the labour-time necessary to the existence of the worker himself. Absolute surplus-value is relative, because it requires a development of the productivity of labour which will allow the necessary labour-time to be restricted to a portion of the working day.’ Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Tomba, *Marx’s Temporalities*, 155. As Tomba states, it is because of this reciprocal co-penetration that ‘the distinction between the North and South of the world, between First, Second and Third World, ...between centre, semi-periphery and periphery, and the concomitant typology of advanced or backward capitalisms, loses any meaning.’ Ibid. 155-56.

<sup>49</sup> Marx, *Economic Manuscripts of 1861-63*, 327-28.

<sup>50</sup> Marx, *Capital* 1, 526.

<sup>51</sup> Arthur, *The New Dialectic and Marx’s Capital*, 76.

<sup>52</sup> Marx, *Capital* 1, 1035.

which ultimately is at the base of the possibility of establishing capital as constitutive of a new mode of history *sui generis*). Real subsumption – not formal subsumption – is the reason why, as the passage quoted above illustrates, the capitalist social productive forces of labour come into being and expand. Real subsumption – not formal subsumption – is the reason why ‘the socially productive power of labour develops as a free gift to capital...and appears as a power which capital possesses by its nature – a productive power inherent in capital.’<sup>53</sup> And yet, only the ongoing interplay between these two forms of subsumption gives rise to the self-expansion of capital; only this interplay, as we will now begin to examine in more detail, registers capital as a totalising, temporalising and thus historicalising dialectic. Taken together, formal and real subsumption constitute the material processes through which capital’s need to self-expand is actualised. These processes are crucial to our understanding of history and historical time. Yet in order to secure how capital, qua subsumption, relates to history, we must first consider how it does *not*. That is, we must first consider how subsumption is often situated in a historically totalising and temporalising framework that does little else but presume, and thereby obscure, how capital, time and history structure one another.

Over the last thirty to forty years, a common reading of the relationship between history and subsumption has arisen, which for all its internal variations holds two basic assumptions.<sup>54</sup> First, ‘subsumption’ in Marx can be understood as a category of historical periodisation, such that successive periods of history (no matter how they are demarcated) directly correspond to successive phases of formal and real subsumption. The precise meaning of formal as opposed to real subsumption in these accounts varies, but the conviction that formal subsumption both logically and historically precedes real subsumption is firm.<sup>55</sup> These readings are exclusively limited to the history of Western Europe. Second, the contemporary (the early 1970s onwards) phase of real subsumption can be taken as what Jacques Camatte calls the ‘total subsumption of labour under capital.’<sup>56</sup> This is the manner in which real subsumption has, one might state, ‘completed’ the subsumption of labour under capital. There are two passages<sup>57</sup> that exemplify these two assumptions, particularly that of ‘total subsumption’. The first comes from Fredric

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid. 381.

<sup>54</sup> Despite its shortcomings, the Endnotes Collective provides a useful and critical introduction to this reading. See <http://endnotes.org.uk/en/endnotes-the-history-of-subsumption> (accessed 27 April 2015). The primary focus of this article is the French group *Théorie Communiste*.

<sup>55</sup> See e.g. Étienne Balibar, ‘Elements for a Theory of Transition’, in Althusser and Balibar, *Reading Capital*, 302-3, wherein formal subsumption ‘begins with the form of outwork on behalf of a merchant capitalist and ends with the industrial revolution.’ For Balibar, formal subsumption thus coincides with Marx’s analysis of manufacture, and possesses the structure and form of a transition wherein there is a distinct non-correspondence – a dislocation – between the forces and relations of production.

<sup>56</sup> Jacques Camatte, *Capital and Community* [1976], trans. David Brown (London: Unpopular Books, 1988), 45. I am indebted to the Endnotes Collective for this reference.

<sup>57</sup> I am indebted to Andrés Sáenz de Sicilia for both of these references.

Jameson's recent rereading of the first volume of *Capital*, and illustrates the way in which he uses the category of subsumption to substantiate his theory that the first volume of *Capital* is essentially about unemployment:

This particular Marxian "law" – "in proportion as capital accumulates, the situation of the worker, be his payment high or low, must grow worse" (*Capital* 1, 799) – was the object of much mockery during the affluent post-war 1950s and 1960s. It is today no longer a joking matter. Along with Marx's intimations of globalisation, these analyses seem to renew the actuality today of *Capital* on a world scale. In another sense they designate a stage of "subsumption" in which the extra-economic or social no longer lies outside capital and economics but has been absorbed into it: so that being unemployed or without economic function is no longer to be expelled from capital but to remain within it. Where everything has been subsumed under capitalism, there is no longer anything outside it; and the unemployed – or here the destitute, the paupers – are as it were employed by capital to be unemployed; they fulfil an economic function by way of their very non-functioning (even if they are not paid to do so).<sup>58</sup>

The second passage comes from Antonio Negri's 1981 essay 'The Constitution of Time', and, echoing Camatte, encapsulates what Negri later calls 'the phase of the total subsumption of society.'<sup>59</sup>

[with real subsumption] use-value cannot appear except under the guise of exchange-value. There is no longer an external vantage point upon which use-value can depend... Real subsumption means the complete realisation of the law of value... social labour covers all the time of life, and invests all of its regions... the entire time of life has become the time of production.<sup>60</sup>

These passages can be critiqued on a number of different fronts. The opposition which Jameson establishes between the 'economic' and the 'social', such that we can 'designate a stage of "subsumption" in which the extra-economic or social no longer lies outside capital and economics but has been absorbed into it', is to miss the essential point that, for Marx, the economic *is* a category of the social, that, as Chapter 1 illustrates, the 'economic' is, after *The German Ideology*, synonymous with the social production of the means of life, and thus the

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<sup>58</sup> Frederic Jameson, *Representing Capital: a Commentary on Volume One* (London and New York: Verso, 2011), 71.

<sup>59</sup> Antonio Negri, 'Twenty Theses on Marx: Interpretation of the Class Situation Today', in *Marxism Beyond Marxism*, ed. Saree Makdisi, Cesare Casarino and Rebecca E. Karl (New York: Routledge, 1996), 159.

<sup>60</sup> Antonio Negri, 'The Constitution of Time' [1981], in *Time for Revolution*, trans. Matteo Mandarini (London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 25-9.

historical meaning of the human as an essentially social being.<sup>61</sup> We must also draw attention to Jameson's conflation of 'capital' and 'capitalism', leading to statements such as 'everything has been subsumed under capitalism' (capital is the comprehensive, the predominant, subject of capitalism, not its exclusive subject). Negri's argument that 'there is no longer an external vantage point upon which use-value can depend' is also, as the previous chapter demonstrates, to miss the historical specificity of the category of use-value. Disregarding for the moment the question of whether it is even possible to speak of a 'historical phase' of formal as opposed to real subsumption, the idea that there was once, within capitalism, a moment wherein use-value had such an 'external' vantage point is to forget the fact that, within capitalism, use-value has *always* only appeared 'under the guise of exchange-value', that use-value only stands opposed to exchange-value *within* the value-form. But what needs to be stressed here, a point that these critiques orbit around but do not directly confront, is the manner in which Camatte, Jameson and, most of all, Negri do not just presume what needs to be explained, but do so even as they invoke the very category which allows us to explain what needs to be explained. To be more direct: they reveal, albeit unintentionally and unconsciously, that there is *an ontologically and epistemologically basic relationship between the subsumption of labour under capital and the production of historical time*, and, furthermore, that the category of *totalisation* is what first allows us to uncover this relationship. Put differently, their primary problem is *not* their desire (something that Marx would certainly not endorse) to extend the scope of subsumption beyond the production-process of capital – to 'everything' (Jameson), or to 'the entire time of life' (Negri) – a desire which does little less but conflates the basic difference between capital and capitalism, or more specifically the difference between the production-process of capital and social reproduction more generally.<sup>62</sup> Nor is the primary problem their desire to create distinct, chronological historical stages corresponding to formal and then real subsumption, a desire that dismisses the constant interplay within capitalism, from its start, between these two forms of subsumption. These are significant problems that threaten to jettison the very intelligibility

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<sup>61</sup> This is important because it points to the sense in which Jameson's category of 'postmodernity' (that *Representing Capital* certainly holds on to) can be understood as an essentially ahistorical, if not anti-historical, category. If 'postmodernity' is 'our' current historical conjuncture wherein real subsumption subsumes 'everything', the irony here is that Jameson's philosophy of history aligns with Marx's – the economic and the social become intertwined – precisely at the moment that Jameson evacuates history from Marx (who provides, one might say, a 'pre-postmodern' account of capitalism).

<sup>62</sup> What these accounts – particularly Negri's – do is eradicate the ineradicable, the unsurpassable, limit to capital: *the commodification of labour-power*. The consequences of this are immense, and leave us with a Marx that is barely recognisable. When, as Negri says, 'social labour covers all the time of life', it is not just the difference between labour-power and living labour which disappears, but the very difference between the production- and circulation-process of capital. 'Social life' as such becomes synonymous with 'labour-time', such that the *raison d'être* of capitalism is not valorisation, but the tautological desire for command for command's sake.

of Marx's work, but, in the end, they point towards an even more fundamental problem: the failure to recognise that the intelligibility of history hinges on what conception of 'totalisation' guides it. Simply put, the totalisation that guides Camatte's 'total subsumption of labour under capital', as well as Negri's 'total subsumption of society', is the vulgar meaning of totalisation: a totalising process whose unidirectional advance contains, within itself, the possibility of its own 'completion' (and wherein real subsumption becomes, whether Negri intends this or not, synonymous with the (chronological) 'end' of history).<sup>63</sup> To this understanding of totalisation corresponds the vulgar meaning of temporalisation, whose historical register is well-known: the linear and irreversible understanding of time whose custodian is of course chronology. Yet the problem is not, strictly speaking, chronology *as such*, but rather the fact that this model of historical time only expresses what must be explained: historical time is 'historical' by virtue of the fact that it appears as a *self-expanding time*, or, in other words, that historical time is historical time because it expands of its own accord. The ordinary understanding of historical time registers this, but it does so in a way that the origins of self-expansion are disguised (this is why it is the dominant model of historical time). In merely reproducing the ordinary concept of historical time, Camatte, Jameson and Negri cannot explain what their accounts implicitly rely on: 'history' as, in and for itself, the perpetual movement of self-expansion. This despite the fact, and ironically, that it is precisely Marx's analysis of the subsumption of labour under capital which allows us to account for this. It is not a closed and completed totality that makes this possible, but rather a totalisation which is by definition open and incomplete, whose unity, as should now be evident, is the very process of its differentiation. In short, it is the ongoing *dialectic* between the labour- and valorisation-process, as previously characterised – the very dialectic that Camatte, Jameson and Negri neglect – that constitutes the condition of thinking the self-expansion of historical time. Subsumption *is* a historical category, not because it is a periodising – or even a historicising – category, but because it is *historicalising* category: it is a category which registers the very constitution of history itself.

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<sup>63</sup> If Negri's concept of totalisation correlates to the ordinary concept of totality – totalisation extending into every facet of the 'social' and 'life' – this is because, for him, '*valorisation is a continuous and totalitarian process*, it knows neither limit nor repose.' Negri, *Marx Beyond Marx*, 76. Jettisoning the commodification of labour-power as the defining limit of valorisation, is, in short, to confuse, and thus conflate, totalisation and totalitarianism.

### 4.1.2 Automation

We are now in a position to establish how the production-process of capital gives rise to the materialist concept of history, to establish, that is to say, the fundamental relation between the production of surplus-value and Marx's modern, post-Enlightenment conception of history. If the expansion of human needs is the essence of this concept, and if the expansion of capital is the historical-ontological ground of understanding the expansion of human needs as 'history', then the subsumption of the labour-process by the valorisation-process is not only the material expression of capital's need to self-expand, but the relation that makes the category of history possible. If, in what follows, the valorisation-process is prioritised over the labour-process and real subsumption is prioritised over formal subsumption – both of which we must do – this is not because the valorisation-process is in any way 'independent' of the labour-process, or that real subsumption somehow 'replaces' formal subsumption, but because Marx singles out the valorisation-process and real subsumption as the truly 'capitalist' features of the production-process of capital. To secure capital as the condition of thinking history is to stress the defining features of the valorisation-process and real subsumption. Two features in particular stand out, the investigation of which guides the next two sections. The first of these is *automation*.

The discourse of automation is shot through Marx's critique of political economy from the *Grundrisse* onwards. Broadly speaking, the real subsumption of the labour-process by the valorisation-process is grounded by the transformation of objectified labour, or more precisely the transformation of the means of production, into capital itself: 'Within the framework of capitalist production this ability of objectified labour to transform itself into *capital*, i.e. to transform the means of production into the means of controlling and exploiting living labour, appears as something utterly appropriate to them...as inseparable from them and hence as a *quality* attributable to them as things, as use-values, as means of production.'<sup>64</sup> In this regard, the means of production become – as a quality unto themselves – defined by movement (as opposed to being static objects put into motion by an external force), and thus human beings are no longer the subjects whose labour animates objects in order to satisfy human needs. Real subsumption inverts this relation: '...at the level of material production, of the life-process in the realm of the social – for that is what the production-process is – we find the *same* situation that we find in *religion* at the ideological level, namely the inversion of subject into object and *vice versa*.'<sup>65</sup> Real subsumption and its most developed material expression – machinery – is that wherein the 'motion and the activity of the instrument of labour asserts its independence

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<sup>64</sup> Marx, *Capital* 1, 988-89.

<sup>65</sup> Marx, *Resultate des unmittelbaren Produktionsprozesses*, 20 (Marx, *Capital* 1, 990).



*vis-a-vis* the worker’, such that ‘the instrument of labour now becomes an industrial form of perpetual motion.’<sup>66</sup> With this inversion of subject and object, this automatising of the means of production themselves, comes a radical restructuring of the relationship between material production and ‘life’. The labour-process in capitalism can still – because it must – be grasped as yielding the means of human life, but only insofar as this process, and with it human need, serves the needs of the valorisation-process. In other words, if the dialectic of the labour- and valorisation-process constitutes the manifold expansion and diversification of human needs, this is because human needs are inessential to this dialectic: ‘the production in enormous mass quantities which is posited with machinery destroys every connection of the product with the direct need of the producer, and hence with direct use-value; it is already posited in the form of the product’s production and in the relations in which it is produced that it is produced only as a conveyor of value, and its use-value only as condition to that end.’<sup>67</sup> From the standpoint of the production-process of capital, human life is thus superfluous. It exists in an exterior and purely negative relation to the life of capital, since ‘the worker consumes his provisions during pauses in the labour-process, whereas the *machine* consumes what is essential to it *while it is still functioning*.’<sup>68</sup> The life of capital, ‘the life-process of the social’, is its self-produced need to be already always in motion.

In the *Results of the Immediate Production-Process*, there is a compelling passage that describes the relationship between automation and the production-process in temporal terms. Remarking on the difference between the labour already contained in the means of production and the labour which is added to the production-process, Marx writes:

The two kinds of labour are distinguished only by the fact that the one is already *objectified* in use-values while the other is in the process of being so *objectified*. The one is in the past, the other in the present; the one dead, the other living; the one *objectified* in the past, the other *objectifying* itself in the present. To the extent that past labour replaces living labour, it itself becomes a process, *valorises itself*; it becomes a *fluens* that creates a fluxion. This absorption into itself of additional living labour is its *process of self-valorisation*, its authentic *transformation into capital*, into value generating itself, its transformation from a *constant amount of value* into a variable value in a state of *process*.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid. 526.

<sup>67</sup> Marx, *Grundrisse*, 694.

<sup>68</sup> Marx, *Capital* 1, 984.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid. 994. If a *fluens* is a ‘flowing’, then a *fluxion* is, after Isaac Newton, this flowing as a continuous function. This passage must be read in conjunction with the following passage from the *Grundrisse*: ‘The communal substance of all commodities, i.e. their substance not as material stuff, as physical character, but their communal substance as *commodities* and hence *exchange-values*, is this, that they are *objectified labour*. The only thing distinct from *objectified labour* is *non-objectified labour*, labour which is still objectifying itself, *labour* as subjectivity. Or, *objectified labour*, i.e. labour which is *present in space*, can also be opposed, as *past labour*, to labour which is *present in time*. If it is to be

What must be emphasised here is the fact that the quality of labour already contained in the means of production, and that being added to the production-process, is, as Marx articulates it, *identical*.<sup>70</sup> Each represent different quantities of this labour, but both involve the same kind of ‘general social labour’: abstract labour. Thus consequent to the commodification of labour-power, the objectivity of each, whether it has already been constituted or is still in the process of constituting itself, is structured by the purely social objectivity of the value-form. *This* is the objectivity being expressed here: the ‘ghost-like’ objectivity not just of value, but of value in an *automatic state of process*, neither of which are something like ‘the course sensuousness of matter’. Thus consequent to the commodification of labour-power, the objectivity of the present and the past, or, more precisely, the objectivity of the dialectic of the present and the past within the production-process of capital, is structured by the purely social objectivity of the value-form. This presents us with a crucial development on what has been a basic concern of this thesis: the temporality of the ongoing first historical act, the temporality that provides us with a possible basis of historical time. Insofar as there is a relationship between the social production of the means of human life and the production-process of capital, this, as should now be clear, is a relationship that is entirely mediated by the value-form: if capital constitutes a radically historicalising power, if its production constitutes the incessant production of new human needs, such that capital systematises human needs in ways unmatched (to date) by any other historical subject, then this is so *because* these new needs appear within the social form of value. But the ontological power that gives the temporality of the first historical act within capitalism its movement has now been potentially identified: the replacement of living labour by dead labour: the tendential replacement of living labour by the machine. This is, to be sure, a dialectical replacement: the replacement of the worker by the machine in one industry is the active creation – the active expansion – of living labour in other, new industries. Thus the past is not ‘replacing’ the present, but rather past labour is, *within the present*, within the dialectic of the present and the past, replacing present labour, and, in so doing, constituting the manifold expansion of the historical present. The constitutive power of the past is therefore not Sartre’s practical-inert, but rather the *automation* of dead labour. Sartre’s determination of the present by the past within the present (the practico-inert) cannot account for the *immanent* movement

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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*.’ Marx, *Grundrisse*, 272. The crucial thing to keep in mind in this passage, as well as its counterpart in the *Results of the Immediate Production-Process*, is that, consequent to the commodification of labour-power, ‘living labour’, ‘non-objectified labour’ as well as ‘labour which is present in time’ (all of which mean the same thing), is labour subsumed by the valorisation-process. In other words, the worker may be a human being opposed to capital, but this ‘living subject’ is only a subject by virtue of being *within* the production-process.

<sup>70</sup> Marx, *Capital* 1, 994.

of this process (this also accounts for his recourse to the synchrony/diachrony model), whereas Marx's determination of the present by the past within the present does: it gives us the reason (real subsumption spearheaded by machinery) *why* the production-process sets into motion a kind of historical time. The future – the historical future – is here animated as well: the *telos* underwritten by the production-process of capital is what gives the historical future its place within the ongoing, self-expanding, dialectic of the present and the past.

This brings us to Marx's so-called 'Fragment on Machines'. It is worthwhile to cite and comment on a long passage within this section of the *Grundrisse*, not only because it captures the essential place of automation within real subsumption, but also because commentators on Marx – particularly Negri – have read this and similar passages in ways that threaten to jettison their historical intelligibility. Marx writes the following:

...once adopted into the production-process of capital, the means of labour passes through different metamorphoses, whose culmination is the *machine*, or rather, an *automatic system of machinery* (system of machinery: the *automatic* one is merely its most complete, most adequate form, and alone transforms machinery into a system), set in motion by an automaton, a moving power that moves itself; this automaton consisting of numerous mechanical and intellectual organs, so that the workers themselves are cast merely as its conscious linkages. In the machine, and even more in machinery as an automatic system, the use-value, i.e. the material quality of the means of labour, is transformed into an existence adequate to fixed capital and to capital as such; and the form in which it was adopted into the production-process of capital, the direct means of labour, is sublated by a form posited by capital itself and corresponding to it. In no way does the machine appear as the individual worker's means of labour. Its distinguishing characteristic is not in the least, as with the means of labour, to transmit the worker's activity to the object; this activity, rather, is posited in such a way that it merely transmits the machine's work, the machine's action, on to the raw material – supervises it and guards against interruptions. Not as with the instrument, which the worker animates and makes into his organ with his skill and strength, and whose handling therefore depends on his virtuosity. Rather, it is the machine which possesses skill and strength in place of the worker, is itself the virtuoso, with a soul of its own in the mechanical laws acting through it; and it consumes coal, oil etc. (*matières instrumentales*), just as the worker consumes food, to keep up its perpetual motion. The worker's activity, reduced to a mere abstraction of activity, is determined and regulated on all sides by the movement of the machinery, and not the opposite. The science which compels the inanimate limbs of the machinery, by their construction, to act purposefully, as an automaton, does not exist in the worker's consciousness, but rather acts upon him through the machine as an alien power, as the power of the machine itself. The appropriation of living labour by objectified labour – of the power or activity which creates value by value existing for-itself – which lies in the concept of capital, is posited, in production resting on machinery, as the character of the production-process itself, including its material elements and its material motion. The production-process has ceased to be a labour-process in the sense of a process dominated by labour as its governing unity. Labour appears, rather,

merely as a conscious organ, scattered among the individual living workers at numerous points of the mechanical system; subsumed under the total-process [*Gesamtprozeß*] of the machinery itself, as itself only a link of the system, whose unity exists not in the living workers, but rather in the living (active) machinery, which confronts his individual, insignificant doings as a mighty organism...<sup>71</sup>

This passage reconfirms much of what has already been established in relation to the dialectic of the labour- and valorisation-process: (1) there is a totalising relation between these processes (the valorisation-process in this passage can be comprehended as based on a ‘system of machinery’), such that the labour-process is a mere ‘organ’ of the machine (this reproduces the relation between concrete and abstract labour as depicted in the previous chapter); (2) the machine – not the worker – is what ‘animates’ the production-process of capital; and thus (3) what gives ‘life’ to the production-process is capital’s need to be in perpetual motion, not the human being (which needs to rest). But what must now be raised and commented on here is the possibility that this passage registers a basic shift – if not a structural realignment – within the fabric of capitalism itself. More precisely, this is the possibility that the automatic system of machinery *displaces* what had up to the introduction of this system defined capitalism as a mode of production. More than anyone else, Negri most forcefully expresses this position. His direct commentary on this passage, first presented in his seminars in the spring of 1978 at the École Normale Supérieure, conforms to his reading of real subsumption in ‘The Constitution of Time’: the system of machinery does not just reduce the labour-process to ‘a simple element of the process of valorisation’<sup>72</sup>, but extends the production-process into society as such. Thus for Negri, ‘real subsumption of labour can’t but be (in the same moment) real subsumption of society. Of society, in other words of the productive social forces, especially of science...the moment arrives when the whole system *is displaced* and advances.’<sup>73</sup> We have previously

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<sup>71</sup> Marx, *Grundrisse der Kritik der politischen Ökonomie*, 592-93 (*Grundrisse*, 692-93). There is a counterpart to this passage, in the *1861-63 Manuscripts*, which captures the automation within the other aspects of real subsumption: cooperation and the division of labour. In this passage, Marx stresses the manner in which the worker becomes the ‘exclusive life-process’ of one of the multiple ‘monosyllabic’ processes involved in the production of a commodity, such that ‘the overall production-process of a single commodity appears now as a combined operation, a complex of many operations, all of which complement each other independently, and can be carried out *simultaneously* alongside each other.’ Indeed, it is for Marx simultaneity [*Gleichzeitigkeit*] that is the defining temporal feature of cooperation and the division of labour. With real subsumption, the multiple processes that yield a commodity no longer ‘follow each other in chronological sequence’, but are simultaneously undertaken, such that ‘the complementarity of the different processes is here transferred from the future to the present, whereby a commodity which is begun at one side is finished at the other.’ Marx, *Economic Manuscripts of 1861-63*, 277-78.

<sup>72</sup> Negri, *Marx Beyond Marx*, 142.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.* Therefore ‘the subsumption of society has become the production of that same society. The displacement is total...at this stage, *the capitalist appropriation of society is total.*’ *Ibid.* 142-43.

outlined the problems with the notion of ‘the total subsumption of society’ and do not need to restate them again. However, we have yet to consider what, for Negri, is the overall practical consequence of this subsumption: the displacement of the ‘law of value’ itself, such that real subsumption constitutes the abolition of labour-time as the measure of value. As Negri asserts, provocatively, in ‘The Constitution of Time’: ‘in the displacement produced by the realisation of subsumption, the unitary paradigm of time-as-measure of value is smashed. Subsumption generates a completely enveloping temporal *Umwelt* that dissolves the possibility of measure.’<sup>74</sup> Simply put, *this* is the fundamental axis around which Negri’s reading of Marx in this period unfolds (which, to date, Negri has not abandoned<sup>75</sup>). We might summarise it in this way<sup>76</sup>: up to the ‘stage’ of real subsumption, the capacity of time to measure value was based on the *externality* of use-value to exchange-value. This is because (1) the reduction of all kinds of labour to ‘simple average labour’, and the time corresponding to this reduction (e.g. socially necessary labour-time, the time of exchange-value, the time of measure) was, as Marx puts it, ‘established by a social process that goes on behind the backs of the producers’<sup>77</sup>; and thus (2) ‘time-as-measure’ was determined by the domain external to production: the domain of use-value. In this sense, use-value was the external catalyst that made the time of exchange-value possible: ‘the measure of exchange-value is determined from outside...by temporal quantities founded on use-value.’<sup>78</sup> However, with the advent of real, or ‘total’, subsumption, use-value is completely (i.e. non-dialectically) internalised and redefined by exchange-value, rendering different labours irreducible to ‘simple average labour’, and hence the time of measure a ‘pure and simple tautology’<sup>79</sup>, a time that, without an external standpoint from which it is measured, becomes its own measure. ‘Social labour’ is thus no longer intelligible in relation to the ‘social labour-time’ Marx presents us with, but becomes a form of labour wherein ‘the totality of life’ and ‘the totality of time from which this life is woven’ are indistinguishable.<sup>80</sup> Time can no

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<sup>74</sup> Negri, ‘The Constitution of Time’, 42.

<sup>75</sup> The displacement of the labour theory of value is at the heart of Hardt and Negri’s well-known, and much maligned, ‘trilogy’: *Empire* (2000), *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (2004), and *Commonwealth* (2009).

<sup>76</sup> This is simply a summary of the first section of the first chapter of ‘The Constitution of Time’, which Negri entitles ‘Time-as-measure and productive time’, but the fact is that this section grounds Negri’s broader critique of the labour theory of value. See Negri, ‘The Constitution of Time’, 23-9.

<sup>77</sup> Marx, *Capital* 1, 135.

<sup>78</sup> Negri, ‘The Constitution of Time’, 24.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid. 27. If ‘time-as-measure’ remains, it is only ‘in the *flow* between labour and time. A continuous time. A tautological time.’ Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid. 29. Negri’s work in this period paved the way for analyses of what has become variously known as ‘immaterial labour’, ‘cognitive capitalism’ and ‘affective labour’. See, for instance, Paolo Virno, ‘General Intellect’, *Historical Materialism* 15:3 (2007), 3-8, as well as Carlo Vercellone, ‘From Formal Subsumption to General Intellect: Elements for a Marxist Reading of the Thesis of Cognitive Capitalism’, *Historical Materialism* 15:1 (2007), 13-36, which argues that Marx’s use of the expression ‘general intellect’ marks a new historical stage of development ‘after’ formal and real subsumption.

longer be presented as measure, but ‘must rather be presented as the global phenomenological fabric, as base, substance and flow of production in its entirety.’<sup>81</sup> The production-process of capital is now synonymous with the production of society as a whole, whereby the exploitation that the value-form previously expressed becomes ‘pure and simple command.’<sup>82</sup>

This account of real subsumption and the end of labour-time as measure is, at least on Marx’s own terms, utterly confused. The notion that use-value constitutes a domain ‘external’ to production, and thereby the ‘external origin of the measure of time’<sup>83</sup>, points to the defining limit of Negri’s work: the complete lack of an analysis of commodification, specifically the complete lack of an analysis of the commodification of labour-power.<sup>84</sup> This lack has the fatal effect of removing the dialectic of concrete and abstract labour, and hence the dialectic of the labour- and valorisation-process, from his analysis. And this dovetails with his attempt to yoke real subsumption to a stagist ‘before’/‘after’ framework. Taken to its logical conclusion, this reading of real subsumption has the peculiar quality of removing the dialectic of the labour- and valorisation-process from its purview, whilst at the same time announcing that, with the advent of real subsumption, this dialectic has come to its rational end, having been reduced to a non-dialectical tautology. This brings us back to the earlier cited passage from the ‘Fragment on Machines’. The reason why such attention is being paid to Negri’s reading of subsumption, why his critique of the labour theory of value has been detailed to the extent that it has, is that this reading and critique possess another peculiar quality: they effectively, and one might state self-consciously, express the idea that the automation at the heart of the production-process of capital is synonymous with the automatic expansion of capital. That is to say, Negri effectively

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<sup>81</sup> Negri, ‘The Constitution of Time’, 29.

<sup>82</sup> As Negri puts it the 1978 lectures: ‘...when the theory of value cannot measure itself by a quantity of labour-time or by an individual dimension of labour, when a first displacement leads it to confront social time and the collective dimension of labour, at this moment the *impossibility of measuring exploitation modifies the form of exploitation*. The emptiness that appears in the theory of value, the evacuation of any element of measure which is not a generic reference to social industriousness, the liberation of social industriousness and its constitution in collective individuality, does not suppress the law of value but reduces it to a mere formality. Of course, formality does not mean a lack of efficacy. Formality does not mean a lack of meaning. The *form of the law of value* is, on the contrary, efficient and full of meaning, but efficacy and meaning are given to it only by its *irrationality*, by the end of the progressive and rationalising function of exploitation. The form is the empty, miserable base of exploitation. The *form of value is pure and simple command, the pure and simple form of politics* – of the “essential inessentiality”, as the young Marx would say in Hegelian terms. We are here at the culminating point of a process in which the power relations – rationally established – regulated and included within the development of capital – are reversed. Where the relation of rationality inverts itself. *The inversion is total.*’ Negri, *Marx Beyond Marx*, 147-48.

<sup>83</sup> Negri, ‘The Constitution of Time’, 27.

<sup>84</sup> The ‘use-value of labour-power’ features in the translator’s – Matteo Mandarini’s – introduction to ‘The Constitution of Time’, but it is nowhere to be found in Negri’s work itself. See Negri, *Time for Revolution*, 11. Mandarini reproduces Negri’s basic misunderstanding of labour-power when he claims that ‘the labour theory of value demanded that labour-power existed, in some sense, outside capital (outside its disciplinary regime) and needed to be drawn in.’ Ibid.

claims that, because of real subsumption, the production-process of capital is *in-itself and as such automatic*. Capital expands *of its own accord*: the production and reproduction of capital is wholly self-sufficient.<sup>85</sup> In Negri's world, this does not remove antagonism and exploitation from the picture (indeed, it intensifies them<sup>86</sup>), but it does dictate that they no longer bear any rational relation to the commodification of labour-power. On Negri's terms, the function of this commodification is pure *irrationality*; its function is – at best – an 'empty, miserable base of exploitation.'<sup>87</sup> (If Negri removes the dialectic of the labour- and valorisation-process from his analysis in order to announce its rational end (chronologically), and thus its irrational end (teleologically), this is because he has already made this move with the commodification of labour-power). And yet what Negri's account obscures is that, for Marx, the commodification of labour-power not only makes real subsumption, and thus automation within the production-process, possible, but dictates that real subsumption remains *bound* to the production-process (it does not extend to 'society' writ large). What this account obscures is that, for Marx, after Hegel, automation is an *appearance [Erscheinung]*, the *necessary* appearance of an 'essential relation' between necessary and surplus-labour (an essential relation underwritten by the real subsumption of labour under capital and the production of relative surplus-value). As such an appearance (as opposed to a mere illusion [*Schein*]), automation simultaneously (1) *expresses* the fact that, consequent to the commodification of labour-power and the real subsumption of labour, there *is* an inversion of subject and object, that machinery *does* displace the human as the subject of the production-process, thereby re-transforming this process into an 'automatic system'; but it equally (2) *conceals* the fact that 'surplus-value does not arise from the labour-power that has been replaced by the machinery, but from the labour-power actually employed in working with the machinery.'<sup>88</sup> In other words, automation *is* real, the machine *is* perpetual motion (so long as it is turned on and functioning properly), and, at the same time, automation is an illusion, because it generates the (false) appearance that the production of surplus-value is itself automatic, as if this production were not dependent on the commodification, and hence use, of labour-power. In opposition to Negri, the essential point here is that real subsumption constitutes the incessant *entrenchment* of labour-time's function as the measure of value, not its displacement, and that this is directly tied to real subsumption transforming capital into an

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<sup>85</sup> In Negri's words: 'This transcendental of the society of real subsumption is the transformation of Prometheus into Narcissus, the ideal of the complete self-sufficiency of the schema of production and of automatic functioning. *Ecstasy*.' Negri, 'The Constitution of Time', 48.

<sup>86</sup> For Negri, 'the first result produced by the logic of separation is to displace the relationship necessary labour/surplus labour to...the level of the capacity of capital to subsume society, and to *transform the relation between two complete, opposed subjectivities* that are hostile to the point of destroying each other reciprocally.' Negri, *Marx Beyond Marx*, 145.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.* 148.

<sup>88</sup> Marx, *Capital* 1, 530. 'Machinery...creates no new value.' *Ibid.* 509.

‘automatic subject’<sup>89</sup> [*ein automatisches Subjekt*] (a necessary dimension of capital’s function as the ‘comprehensive subject’ of capitalism). Thus inasmuch as Marx, drawing on Goethe’s *Faust*, suggests that capital acts ‘as if consumed by love’<sup>90</sup>, that the valorisation-process is an ‘animated monster’ that works ‘as if its body were by love possessed’<sup>91</sup>, we must never lose sight of the fact that automation only exists *because* of the commodification of labour-power. Automation is an *actual appearance* of this commodification, an animation whose self-motion appears because real subsumption is its animator.

This is important, because it provides us with a new framework whereby capital can be presented as the condition of thinking the materialist concept of history. Specifically, Marx’s critical appropriation of the Doctrine of Essence in Hegel’s *Logic* – his critical appropriation of the essence/appearance [*Wesen/Erscheinung*] relation in Hegel – allows us to formulate the following (speculative) proposition: ‘*history*’ can be thought of as something which, in itself and as such, is ‘in motion’, ‘moves on’, ‘expands’, etc., **precisely because** capital’s production of the ‘essential relation’ between necessary and surplus-labour – the production of surplus-value – **appears as automatic**. Or, to put this another way, the expansion of human needs, and the expansion of productive forces corresponding to the expansion of human needs, can only be thought of as ‘history’ because (1) the expansion of human needs is subsumed by capital’s need to self-expand, and (2) capital’s self-expansion appears as automatic. This is the context in which Marx’s work intersects in interesting ways with Koselleck’s, such that the former potentially provides the latter with the material basis necessary to sustain the historiographic-semantic findings of Koselleck’s *Future’s Past*. More precisely, this is the possibility that real subsumption and the production of relative surplus-value constitute the historical-ontological ground of the emergence, in the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century, of ‘*Neuzeit*’ – the distinctly modern or ‘new time’ that registers, as David Cunningham expresses it, summarising Koselleck, an “epochal threshold” [in which] history itself, in the collective singular, comes to be first perceived as “in motion” – a perception that Koselleck locates in a divergence between the “space of experience” and the “horizon of expectation”.<sup>92</sup> The suggestion here is thus this: what else is *Neuzeit* but the historical time fostered by the production of relative surplus-value? What else is *Neuzeit* but the self-expanding time of capital, a time that is perceived as ‘in motion’ because the production of surplus-value appears as self-expanding? This is what an encounter between Marx and Koselleck might yield. Our working proposition that the intelligibility of ‘history’

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid. 255.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid. 1007.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid. 302 (see also Marx, *Grundrisse*, 704).

<sup>92</sup> David Cunningham, ‘A Marxist heresy? Accelerationism and its discontents’, *Radical Philosophy* 191 (May/June 2015), 29.



relies on the automatic character of the production-process of capital might also function as a corrective to the predominant standpoint of ‘Systematic Dialectics’ which, as Chapter 3 points out, systematically excludes history and historical time from the domain of Marx’s systematic dialectic. Specifically, it might contribute to the sense in which, as some of the scholarship in this field has already argued<sup>93</sup>, Marx’s appropriation of Hegel’s Essence-Logic marks the most consequential homology between *Capital* and the *Logic*. This critical appropriation, this thesis maintains, allows us to grasp the fundamental historical intelligibility of passages such as the following, which, like the previous passage, is contained within the ‘Fragment on Machines’ in the *Grundrisse*:

In machinery, objectified labour itself appears not only in the form of the product or of the product employed as means of labour, but in the form of the force of production itself...the accumulation of knowledge and of skill, of the general productive forces of the social brain [*des gesellschaftlichen Gehirns*], is thus absorbed into capital, as opposed to labour, and hence appears as an attribute of capital, and more specifically of fixed capital, insofar as it enters into the production-process as a means of production proper...in machinery, knowledge appears as alien, external to him; and living labour [as] subsumed under self-activating objectified labour. The worker appears as superfluous to the extent that his action is not determined by the needs of capital [*die Bedürfnisse des Kapitals*].<sup>94</sup>

Like its earlier cited counterpart, this passage allows us to grasp the essential relation between the self-expansion of capital and the materialist concept of history, epitomised by the assertion that ‘self-activating objectified labour’ appears as ‘the force of production itself’. Yet of equal importance here, and what we will examine now, is something that, in addition to automation (although indissociable from it), constitutes another dimension of the valorisation-process and real subsumption, thus something that, along with automation, secures capital as the condition of thinking history. This feature is *alienation*.

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<sup>93</sup> See, in particular, Tony Smith, ‘Hegel, Marx and the Comprehension of Capitalism’, and Riccardo Bellofiore, ‘Lost in Translation: Once Again on the Marx–Hegel Connection’, both of which appear in *Marx’s Capital and Hegel’s Logic: A Reexamination*, ed. Fred Moseley and Tony Smith.

<sup>94</sup> Marx, *Grundrisse der Kritik der politischen Ökonomie*, 594-95 (*Grundrisse*, 694-95). The ‘social brain’ in this passage dovetails with the physiological dimension of Marx’s concept of abstract labour highlighted in the previous chapter.

### 4.1.3 Alienation

The alienation [*Entäußerung*] and estrangement [*Entfremdung*]<sup>95</sup> of human life is of course a defining feature of Marx's entire oeuvre. In Marx's earlier writings, it is the *1844 Manuscripts*, not *The German Ideology*, that makes up the primary locus of Marx's analysis of the alienation of human labour and thus the explicit locus of Marx's appropriation of the philosophical status of alienation in Hegel. In the *1844 Manuscripts*, Marx transforms the self-externalisation and objectification of consciousness in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* into an existential and moral critique of the law of political economy, the law of 'national economy' [*Nationalökonomie*], a law that dictates – above all – that the means of production, and thus the means of life, are private property. This is the context of Marx's renowned, fourfold specification of alienation as: (1) the alienation of the worker from the product of his labour ('the object which labour produces – its product – stands opposed to it as an *alien being*, as a *power independent* of the producer'<sup>96</sup>); (2) the alienation of the labour-process itself, which is to say the 'self-activity of the worker' ('production itself must be active alienation, the alienation of activity, the activity of alienation'<sup>97</sup>); (3) after Feuerbach, the alienation of the worker as a human being and thus as a genus-being [*Gattungswesen*] ('estranged labour...turns *humanity's genus-being*...into a being *alien* to it, into a *means of individual existence*'<sup>98</sup>); and (4) the alienation of one worker from another, one individual human being from another ('an immediate consequence of men and women's estrangement from the product of their labour, their life activity, their generic-being, is the *estrangement of men and women* from other *men and women*'<sup>99</sup>).

Alienation does not feature in the first chapter of this thesis, and for a very basic reason: unlike the concepts of labour, need and productive force, and a certain conception of class and the division of labour, alienation is *not* something that Marx presents in transhistorical terms. In short, alienation and estrangement exist for Marx because they are *capitalist* alienation and *capitalist* estrangement. This is apparent in the *1844 Manuscripts* (which is essentially Marx's 'Hegelianisation' of Engels's 1843 *Outlines of a Critique of Political Economy*), wherein the analysis of alienation is explicitly presented from the standpoint of capitalist private property,

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<sup>95</sup> Marx's use of the terms *Entäußerung* and *Entfremdung* reflects Hegel's complex philosophical response to the English word 'alienation'. Strictly speaking, *Entäußerung* means 'externalisation', and hence does not capture the entire scope of 'alienation' in English [from the Latin *alius* (other, another) and *alienus* (alien, foreign, and belonging to someone else)]. Hence despite the fact that *Entäußerung* is commonly translated as 'alienation', one should keep in mind that this translation relies on the 'alien' [*fremd*] within *Entfremdung* for its intelligibility.

<sup>96</sup> Marx, *OPM*, 511 (*EPM*, 108).

<sup>97</sup> Marx, *EPM*, 110.

<sup>98</sup> Marx, *OPM*, 517 (*EPM*, 114).

<sup>99</sup> Marx, *EPM*, 114.

which is to say the standpoint of the ‘economic fact *of the present*.’<sup>100</sup> For our purposes, we must consider the alienation generated by the production-process of capital, or more precisely the alienation created by the subsumption of the labour-process under the valorisation-process. This alienation is vital, because like the automation with which it is intertwined, it constitutes an essential standpoint of the intelligibility of history. In other words, the notion, as previously proposed, that the form of appearance of the production of relative surplus-value (automation) makes possible the idea that ‘history’ is something which, in itself and as such, is in motion, moves on and expands, must be supplemented by the idea that alienation, as the manifestation of the fact that surplus-value is produced *by* and *with* private property, constitutes an additional standpoint without which ‘history’ cannot be thought. This is the notion that ‘history’ not only *stands outside of and opposed to human beings* – that it is indifferent to them – but also, and as a consequence, that history is a force that *independently determines and governs them*. To express this notion through Marx’s words, consider this description of the valorisation-process in the *Grundrisse*:

the combination of...labour appears just as subservient to and led by an alien will and an alien intelligence – having its *animating unity* elsewhere – as its material unity appears subordinate to the *objective unity* of...*machinery*, of fixed capital, which, as *animated monster*, objectifies the scientific idea, and is in fact the coordinator, does not in any way relate to the individual worker as his instrument; but rather he himself exists as an animated individual punctuation mark; as its living isolated accessory...<sup>101</sup>

in conjunction with this passage in *The German Ideology*, in which the ‘social power’ being characterised here could very well be understood as history itself:

The social power, i.e. the multiplied productive force, that arises with the cooperation of different individuals as it is determined by the division of labour, appears to these individuals, since their cooperation is not voluntary but has come about naturally, not as their own united power, but as an alien force existing outside them, of the origin and goal of which they are ignorant, which they thus cannot control, which on the contrary passes through a peculiar series of phases and stages independent of the will and the action of men and women, nay even being the prime governor of these.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid. 107.

<sup>101</sup> Marx, *Grundrisse*, 470.

<sup>102</sup> Marx and Engels, *DI*, 34 (*GI*, 54).

Take note of Marx and Engels's deliberate use of a fetishised conception of nature in the latter passage; this conception is essential to the idea that Marx's analysis of the production-process of capital allows the basic relationship between alienation and history to come to light. If, after *The German Ideology*, the human is a natural-historical being and nature is a human-historical means of life, what Marx's analysis of the valorisation-process and real subsumption reveals is not that the capitalist division of labour and private property (*The German Ideology* depicts these as 'identical expressions'<sup>103</sup>) render nature and history as 'unnatural' and 'unhistorical', such that alienation has 'taken away' the previously rich totality of human powers and needs, that alienation has fractured what in human beings was previously whole. Rather, the situation is more complex than this. On the one hand, the division of labour and private property which constitute, and are constituted by, real subsumption register the sense in which human powers and needs *are* separated off from human beings, inasmuch as these powers and needs are *not* possessed and actualised by individuals. In this regard:

The *division of labour* is the economic expression of the *social character of labour* within...estrangement. Or, since *labour* is only an expression of human activity within alienation, of the living of life as the estrangement of life, *the division of labour*...is therefore nothing else but the *estranged, alienated* positioning of human activity as a *real activity of the genus* or as the *activity of men and women as genus-beings*.<sup>104</sup>

This passage should be retroactively read from the standpoint of Marx's examination of real subsumption from the early 1860s onwards, since this is the only way in which the specifically capitalist division of labour can be understood as constitutive of a conception of 'history' (and 'nature') as a productive force in its own right – independent and divorced from individuals – wherein, as previously cited, 'knowledge appears as alien, external' to workers. Thus 'history' exists because the expansion of human needs is predominantly *not* actualised within, and thus *not* possessed by, the majority of human beings. However, and on the other hand, this grasp of alienation needs to be reconciled with the sense in which, albeit through alienated property relations, human powers and needs are *actively developed by capital* within human beings, in that these powers and needs *are* possessed and actualised by individuals:

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<sup>103</sup> Marx and Engels, *GI*, 53. They state: 'in the one the same thing is affirmed with reference to activity as is affirmed in the other with reference to the product of the activity.' *Ibid.*

<sup>104</sup> Marx, *OPM*, 557 (*EPM*, 159).

...[capital] creates the material elements for the development of the rich individuality, which is as all-sided in its production as in its consumption, and whose labour also therefore appears no longer as labour, but as the full development of activity itself, in which natural necessity in its immediate form has disappeared; because a historically created need has taken the place of a natural need. This is why *capital is productive*; i.e. an *essential relation for the development of the social productive forces*.<sup>105</sup>

There is a distinct tension in Marx – from the *Grundrisse* onwards – between two discourses: alienation *both is and is not* the separation and dispossession of the human from the expansion of its needs. Yet this tension is precisely that through which we must comprehend the relation between alienation and the materialist concept of history. These discourses are dialectically bound to one another: if there was no development of these needs and powers by capital there would be no possibility of their active reappropriation (no possibility, that is, of communism). This tension – dialectic – cuts to the heart of the meaning of the ‘social individual’ in Marx (which, as Chapter 2 argues, Mészáros does not grasp): the notion of history as the ‘expansion of productive forces’ is predicated on the existence of a mode of production in which, ‘on the one hand, we have a totality of productive forces, which have...taken on a material form and are for the individuals no longer the forces of the individuals but of private property, and hence of the individuals only insofar as they are owners of private property themselves’<sup>106</sup> (that is, only insofar as labour-power is commodified); and in which, on the other hand, the productive powers of social individuals are being actively developed by capital in the production-process (indeed in capitalist society more generally). This tension and dialectic are complicated further by *Capital*, such that the deeply structuralist dimension of human beings as the ‘bearers’ and ‘personifications’ of alienated social relations simultaneously registers the distance of human beings from the structures that they personify, to the point where they are overdetermined by these structures, and yet – at the same time – these human beings *are* these structures. In other words, ‘the capitalist’ may just be the personification of capital, but he is no less an individual because of this, just as ‘the worker’ may be the personification of ‘variable capital’, but he is likewise no less an individual because of this.

We are now at the point where the constitutive place of class and class struggle<sup>107</sup> must be reassessed in relation to Marx’s philosophical concept of history. Chapter 1 briefly raises

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<sup>105</sup> Marx, *Grundrisse der Kritik der politischen Ökonomie*, 244 (*Grundrisse*, 325).

<sup>106</sup> Marx and Engels, *GI*, 92.

<sup>107</sup> These two terms should be understood synonymously. In Marx, ‘class’ is not a static category which is subsequently put into motion through struggle. ‘Class’ is already always class struggle, which is to say that, so long as classes exist, they only ever exist through struggle. To rearticulate the relationship between needs and the means of their satisfaction in Chapter 1, there is no chronological succession here: one moment (the existence of a class) is not subsequently followed by another (the struggle of this class).

the question of whether category of ‘class’ can, on some level, be grasped in transhistorical terms, and suggests that whereas something like ‘the differentiation and grouping of humans in relation to the surplus product’ might be understood as transhistorically valid (that is, in all human history up to the present), classes and the struggles they constitute *cannot*, in the last instance, and as much as some Marxists would reject this, be comprehended as ontologically *originary* in the same way that labour and need can and must. Class and the division of labour are ontologically ‘down the line’ from labour and need, such that class and class struggle can only be logically comprehended as a ‘motive force’ or ‘engine’ of history *after* needs and the labours which satisfy these needs have been established as the basic intelligibility of history.<sup>108</sup> *However*, once capital is established as the condition of thinking history (once abstract labour becomes the condition of thinking ‘labour in general’ and once capital’s need to self-expand becomes the condition of thinking the expansion of human needs), class takes on a constitutive function that previously – at a transhistorical level – was impossible for us to justify. This is because the formation of classes specific to capitalism – the formation of classes not just from the ownership of the means of producing life, but from the *exclusive* ownership of these means by one class as against another – is a material basis without which alienation and estrangement, and hence ‘history’, would not exist. The non-ownership of all facets of the labour-process (the activity, means and products of labour) by the producers is, in other words, a direct condition of thinking history. The specifically capitalist aspect of this is crucial. If, as *The German Ideology* contends, there is (to date) no consciousness in isolation from the originary division between spiritual and material labour, which is to say in isolation from the existence of a ruling class, Marx’s analysis of the subsumption of the labour-process by the valorisation-process implicitly reworks this, and reveals that there is (to date) no *historical* consciousness, no consciousness of *history* in itself and as such, in isolation from the division of labour and consequent creation of classes within capitalism. Hence when Balibar states, as earlier cited, that ‘Marx...[extends] the scheme of the division of labour to its fullest extent...’ whereby he ‘accord[s] existence to classes on the dual plane of the division of labour and consciousness, and therefore *also* [makes]...the division of society into classes a condition or a structure of thought’<sup>109</sup>, we must specify this and declare that only the *capitalist* division of society into classes gives the thought of ‘history’ its possibility. If for Marx and Engels class ‘achieves an

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<sup>108</sup> The essential point here is that if, famously, ‘the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles’, this proclamation can only be sustained *after* the needs of capital, or more precisely, *after* the real subsumption of the labour-process under capital, has been established as the condition of thinking ‘the history of all hitherto existing society’. See Marx and Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, 34. The historical importance of class struggle is not thereby diminished: it is simply given its ontological and epistemological basis.

<sup>109</sup> Balibar, *The Philosophy of Marx*, 46, 44.

independent existence over against...individuals,' and if these individuals 'become subsumed under it [class],'<sup>110</sup> this must be understood as an essential condition of history, in both thought and actual existence. Yet this condition is *only* valid from the standpoint of the subsumption of the labour-process (individuals) under the valorisation-process ('class', a category whose intelligibility relies on abstract labour).<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Marx and Engels, *GI*, 82.

<sup>111</sup> Like 'labour in general', the category of 'class' is the creation of abstract labour and the valorisation-process, for how else is the surplus product yielded by 'surplus-labour', in capitalism or any other mode of production, imaginable in isolation from abstract labour and the valorisation-process? This dovetails with, even as it is not the immediate context of, Marx and Engels's assertion in *The German Ideology* that 'the emergence of the class...is itself a product of the bourgeoisie.' Ibid. 84. This does *not* mean that the separation of the means of production from the producers is not a condition of abstract labour and the valorisation-process, but it *does* mean that the latter are the condition of thinking the former as constitutive of 'classes'.

#### 4.1.4 So-called Originary Accumulation

Automation and alienation form the two axes around which the production-process of capital can be established as the condition of thinking the materialist concept of history. Nevertheless, this chapter would be incomplete without an examination of so-called originary accumulation [*die sogenannte ursprüngliche Akkumulation*]<sup>112</sup>, the final part of the first volume of *Capital*. Marx's concept of originary accumulation is a direct, critical response to the place of 'previous accumulation' in political economy – above all Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations*<sup>113</sup> – but it is also, and more fundamentally, a confrontation with the seemingly circular logic that structures the production-process of capital; namely: 'the accumulation of capital presupposes surplus-value; surplus-value presupposes capitalist production; capitalist production presupposes the availability of considerable masses of capital and labour-power in the hands of commodity producers'<sup>114</sup>, which is to say the accumulation of capital. At the basis of this presuppositional circle – that which enables this apparently seamless circularity to exist and which, and as we will see, is erased from it – is the originary accumulation of capital. In mocking opposition to the 'insipid childishness'<sup>115</sup> of the morality tale which political economy tells itself – e.g. that capitalism sprung from the difference between, on the one hand, the 'frugal elite' and, on the other, the 'lazy rascals' who squandered their money in 'riotous living' – Marx presents his readers with a systematic account of originary accumulation, one which registers the fact that,

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<sup>112</sup> 'Primitive accumulation' is of course the predominant English language translation of *ursprüngliche Akkumulation*. In contrast to this, this thesis argues that 'originary' is a better rendition of *ursprüngliche* than 'primitive', first and foremost because 'primitive accumulation' conjures up, as Osborne suggests, 'a nineteenth-century anthropological imagery, which would consign the process to a past time; or at least, identifies its methods with those of pre-history.' *How to Read Marx*, 104-5. As Osborne notes, 'primitive accumulation' obscures the contribution that Marx's *ursprüngliche Akkumulation* makes to the concept of the origin – the *Ursprung* – in the German philosophical tradition more generally. *Ibid.* 105. Thus originary accumulation might be grasped as constitutive of a kind of 'originary temporality', in ways that converge with and radically depart from Heidegger's use of the term. Finally, 'originary' is preferable to 'original', because the former registers the ongoing *constitutive* function of originary accumulation, and hence the sense in which, as we will see, capital cannot exist without it.

<sup>113</sup> Without doubt, Michael Perelman's *The Invention of Capitalism: Classical Political Economy and the Secret History of Primitive Accumulation* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000) is the preeminent investigation of political economy's simultaneous support and dismissal of originary accumulation. The 'so-called' within 'so-called originary accumulation' registers Marx's direct response to political economy, but it also, this thesis suggests, can be extended to the permanence of originary accumulation within capitalism.

<sup>114</sup> Marx, *Capital* 1, 873.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.* After Jason Read, this tale is 'the idealized memory of an individual capitalist's accumulation.' Jason Read, 'Primitive Accumulation: the Aleatory Foundation of Capitalism', *Rethinking Marxism* 14:2 (Summer 2002), 27. As Read points out, this is the context of Balibar's comment that 'the analysis of primitive accumulation thus brings us into the presence of the radical *absence of memory* which characterises history (memory being only the reflection of history in certain pre-determined sites – ideology or even law – and as such, anything but a faithful reflection).' Balibar, 'Elements for a Theory of Transition', 283.



‘in actual history, ... conquest, enslavement, robbery, murder, in short, violence [*Gewalt*], play the greatest part.’<sup>116</sup> He summarises this accumulation in the following terms:

The process, therefore, that creates the capital-relation can be nothing other than the process that separates the worker from the ownership of the conditions of his own labour; it is a process that operates two transformations, whereby the social means of life and production are turned into capital, and the immediate producers are turned into wage-labourers. So-called originary accumulation, therefore, is nothing else than the historical process of separating the producer from the means of production. It appears as “originary” [*Er erscheint als „ursprünglich“*] because it constitutes the pre-history [*Vorgeschichte*] of capital, and of the mode of production corresponding to capital.<sup>117</sup>

Marx’s concept of originary accumulation brings to centre stage, as some commentators have convincingly argued<sup>118</sup>, a – if not *the* – essential logic underlying the accumulation of capital: the logic of *separation* [*Scheidung*]. This separation (between the producer and the conditions of production, thus between the wage-labourer and the capitalist) constitutes, as Marx puts it across his work, ‘the actual formation-process of capital [*den eigentlichen Bildungsprozeß des Kapitals*]’<sup>119</sup> and ‘the concept of capital.’<sup>120</sup>

The conventional – although increasingly less so – reading of originary accumulation understands this concept within the terms of historical periodisation, which is to say that this accumulation is read as a chronologically distinct span of historical time that, centuries ago, gave rise to capitalism. Quite similar to the conception of formal subsumption as historically ‘preceding’ real subsumption, originary accumulation is, on this reading, not just a category of historical periodisation but a category of historical *transition*: it encompasses (15<sup>th</sup> – 18<sup>th</sup> century England being the archetype) the period of transition from feudalism to capitalism, and therefore more or less ‘ends’ after capitalism established itself on the world stage.<sup>121</sup> This

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<sup>116</sup> Marx, *Kapital* 1, 742 (*Capital* 1, 874).

<sup>117</sup> Marx, *Kapital* 1, 742 (*Capital* 1, 874-75). ‘This historical act is the historical genesis of capital, the historical process of separation which transforms the conditions of labour into capital and labour into wage-labour. This provides the basis for capitalist production.’ Marx, *Theories of Surplus-Value, Part 3*, 315.

<sup>118</sup> See, in particular, Massimo De Angelis, ‘Marx and primitive accumulation: The continuous character of capital’s “enclosures”’, *The Commoner*, Volume 2 (September 2001), <http://www.commoner.org.uk/02deangelis.pdf> (accessed 21 May 2015), and Werner Bonefeld, ‘The Permanence of Primitive Accumulation: Commodity Fetishism and Social Constitution’, *The Commoner*, Volume 2 (September 2001), <http://www.commoner.org.uk/02bonefeld.pdf> (accessed 21 May 2015).

<sup>119</sup> Marx, *Theorien über den Mehrwert*, Dritter Teil, 414 (*Theories of Surplus-Value, Part 3*, 422).

<sup>120</sup> Marx, *Capital* 3, 354. See also Marx, *Theories of Surplus-Value, Part 3*, 311.

<sup>121</sup> This is, at least at the level of the ‘diachronic analysis’, the framework of Balibar’s ‘Elements for a Theory of Transition’.

reading consequently highlights the empirical histories that Marx provides in the final chapters of the first volume of *Capital*: particularly the expropriation of the agricultural peasantry from the land they cultivated and collectively owned (and the acts of Parliament which sanctioned this expropriation), the manifold development of the state and the mechanisms through which it wields power<sup>122</sup>, and, outside the confines of the European nation-state, the global reach of colonial accumulation and imperialist war.<sup>123</sup> As De Angelis shows, Lenin's *The Development of Capitalism in Russia* (1899) arguably inaugurates this reading as the predominant reading of originary accumulation, which is subsequently appropriated in different manners by Rosa Luxemburg's *The Accumulation of Capital* (1913) and the infamous 'Dobb-Sweezy debates' on the transition from feudalism to capitalism.<sup>124</sup> These readings are not at all surprising, nor are they necessarily without merit, insofar as they are faithful to Marx's position that originary accumulation 'precedes capitalist accumulation', that it 'is not the result of the capitalist mode of production but its point of departure.'<sup>125</sup>

Yet there is undeniably something – something quite significant – which is lost by this reading of originary accumulation. What is lost (and this is increasingly a point of emphasis, if not consensus, in the secondary literature) are the various dimensions of the continuous, in fact the *permanent*, character of originary accumulation within capitalism, such that originary accumulation is a *necessarily ongoing* feature of the capitalist mode of production. And this is not – or at least not primarily – an empirical point, which is to say a point about the ongoing introduction and expansion of capital into parts of the world (China being the contemporary exemplar) previously outside, if only ever relatively, the reach of capital. Although important, this point merely reproduces the conception that 'originary accumulation' is a chronologically

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<sup>122</sup> Marx's analysis of the credit-system, the modern system of taxation, and the political economic function of debt is notable: 'the national debt, i.e. the alienation [*Veräußerung*] of the state – whether that state is despotic, constitutional or republican – marked the capitalist era with its stamp. The only part of the so-called national wealth that actually enters into the collective possession of a modern nation is – the national debt.' Marx, *Capital* 1, 919. If there is a 'subject' of originary accumulation, it is *the state*, not capital. To my knowledge, there is to date no work that looks at the capital-state relation from the standpoint of the relation between capitalist and originary accumulation.

<sup>123</sup> 'The discovery of gold and silver in America, the extermination, enslavement and entombment in mines of the indigenous population of that continent, the beginnings of the conquest and plunder of India, and the conversion of Africa into a preserve for the commercial hunting of blackskins, are all things which signify the dawn of capitalist production. These idyllic processes are the chief moments of originary accumulation.' Marx, *Kapital* 1, 779 (*Capital* 1, 915).

<sup>124</sup> De Angelis, 'Marx and primitive accumulation: The continuous character of capital's "enclosures"', 2-4. The standard conception of originary accumulation still exercises a fair amount of influence. For instance, in his recent review of Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge's *Geschichte und Eigensinn* (1981) (translated in 2014 as *History and Obstinacy*), Stewart Martin questions Negt and Kluge's declaration that 'primitive accumulation not only stands at the beginning of modern human development, but also permanently renews itself in every moment.' See Stewart Martin, 'Political economy of life: Negt and Kluge's *History and Obstinacy*', *Radical Philosophy* 190 (March/April 2015), 33.

<sup>125</sup> Marx, *Capital* 1, 873.

distinct span of historical time, and thus a ‘one-off act’ (no matter when, where, nor how long this act lasts, and despite the fact that it contains innumerable singular acts within itself). The point, rather, is one which must be understood at the level of ‘capital in general’ or ‘universal capital’ (which, to be sure, dialectically manifests itself through singular capitals): this is the sense in which originary accumulation stands in an ontologically, and thus *logically*, necessary relationship to capitalist accumulation (‘proper’<sup>126</sup>), such that originary accumulation marks an essential and constantly reproduced foundation of the *systematic* dialectic (and thus, as we will soon consider, the *historical* dialectic) expressed by Marx’s concept of ‘capital’. The crux of the issue here, as earlier alluded to, is the *separation* (between the producer and the means of production, and between the wage-labourer and the capitalist) without which there can be no commodification of labour-power, and thus no production-process of capital. There are a number of passages across Marx’s work that reveal the sense in which capitalist accumulation ontologically and logically relies on originary accumulation.<sup>127</sup> In the third volume of *Capital*, as part and parcel of his analysis of the centralisation of capital, whereby big capital ‘swallows up’ – it ‘decapitalises’ – small capital, Marx contends that ‘this is simply the separation of the conditions of labour from the producers raised to a higher power.’<sup>128</sup> In the third volume of the *Theories of Surplus-Value* (the 1861-63 Manuscripts), he depicts capitalist accumulation – the ‘*accumulation of capital* on the basis of capital itself’ – as ‘[reproducing] the separation and the independent existence of objective wealth [*gegenständlichen Reichthums*] as against labour on an ever expanding scale’, such that capitalist accumulation ‘merely presents as a

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<sup>126</sup> The difference between originary accumulation and capitalist accumulation (the latter is frequently labelled as ‘mature accumulation’ or ‘accumulation proper’) must be maintained, so as not to conflate these concepts in Marx, who on a number of occasions explicitly differentiates them: ‘It is indeed this separation between the conditions of labour, on the one hand, and the producers, on the other, that forms the concept of capital, as this arises with originary accumulation...subsequently appearing as a constant process in the accumulation and concentration of capital, before it is finally expressed...as the centralisation of capitals already existing in few hands, and the decapitalisation of many.’ See Marx, *Kapital* 3, 256 (*Capital* 3, 354-55). Commenting on this passage, De Angelis suggests that ‘while sharing the same principle – *separation* – the two concepts point at two different *conditions* of existence. [Originary accumulation] implies the *ex novo production* of the *separation*, while [capitalist accumulation] implies the *reproduction* – on a greater scale – of the same *separation*.’ Massimo De Angelis, ‘Marx and primitive accumulation: The continuous character of capital’s “enclosures”’, 8. Thus even as, strictly speaking, ‘originary accumulation’ is the originary accumulation *of capital*, such that it is, at a certain level, misleading to suggest that it is not a kind of ‘capitalist’ accumulation (particularly since capitalist accumulation (proper) creates the conditions, as we will see, whereby originary accumulation is constantly reproduced), it is necessary, on another level, to differentiate these two accumulations. Only one – capitalist accumulation – *actually creates* surplus-value, whereas the other is the condition of possibility for this. Likewise, capital is the subject of capitalist accumulation, whereas it is *not* the subject of (its) originary accumulation (the state is).

<sup>127</sup> I am indebted to De Angelis for the passages cited here, specifically section 3.2 of his ‘Marx and primitive accumulation: The continuous character of capital’s “enclosures”’: ‘*Separation* and the secret of (primitive) accumulation’.

<sup>128</sup> Marx, *Kapital* 3, 256 (*Capital* 3, 354).

*continuous process* what in *originary accumulation* appears as a distinct historical process.<sup>129</sup> And finally, in the *Grundrisse*, he suggests that ‘once this *separation* is given, the production-process can only produce it anew, reproduce it, and reproduce it on an expanded scale.’<sup>130</sup> These passages trigger De Angelis’s statement that ‘the difference between accumulation and primitive accumulation, not being a substantive one, is a difference in the conditions and forms in which this *separation* is implemented.’<sup>131</sup> This argument has its limits – unlike originary accumulation, the substance of capitalist accumulation is far more complex, determined by a series of relations and dynamics irreducible to the separation of the means of production from the producers – but it is, nevertheless, a provocative way of framing the relationship between originary and capitalist accumulation. On one (albeit a restricted) level, we might assert that the only difference between these two accumulations is the social conditions and forms under which separation is enforced (be it a gun, for instance, or a handshake).

Originary and capitalist accumulation cannot be conflated with one another,<sup>132</sup> but this should not distract our attention from the extent to which these are densely interwoven, and therefore indissociable, social processes. Bonefeld’s work argues this point consistently and persuasively.<sup>133</sup> It underscores originary accumulation as a ‘permanently’ and ‘constantly’ reproduced accumulation which is, variously, ‘the condition and presupposition of capital’s existence’, ‘the foundation of...capitalist social relations and thus the social constitution through which the exploitation of labour subsists’, and ‘the presupposition of capital and the result of its reproduction.’<sup>134</sup> ‘In short’, Bonefeld argues, ‘primitive accumulation is the social constitution of capitalist social relations.’<sup>135</sup> There are two dimensions of his work which must be highlighted here, because they directly bear, as we will shortly consider, on the relationship between originary accumulation and the production of historical time. The first is Bonefeld’s use of Hegel’s concept of sublation [*Aufhebung*], the way in which he makes use of the three

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<sup>129</sup> Marx, *Theorien über den Mehrwert*, Dritter Teil, 309, 268 (*Theories of Surplus-Value, Part 3*, 315, 272).

<sup>130</sup> Marx, *Grundrisse*, 462.

<sup>131</sup> De Angelis, ‘Marx and primitive accumulation: The continuous character of capital’s “enclosures”’, 6.

<sup>132</sup> See footnote 126.

<sup>133</sup> With ‘The Permanence of Primitive Accumulation: Commodity Fetishism and Social Constitution’, see also Werner Bonefeld, ‘History and Social Constitution: Primitive Accumulation is not Primitive’, *The Commoner*, Debate 1 (March 2002), <http://www.commoner.org.uk/debbonefeld01.pdf> (accessed 23 May 2015), Werner Bonefeld, ‘Class Struggle and the Permanence of Primitive Accumulation’, *Common Sense* 8 (November 1988), 54–66, and Werner Bonefeld, *Critical Theory and the Critique of Political Economy: On Subversion and Negative Reason* (London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014), specifically Chapter 4: ‘Capital and Labour: Primitive Accumulation and the Force of Value’.

<sup>134</sup> Bonefeld, ‘The Permanence of Primitive Accumulation: Commodity Fetishism and Social Constitution’, 1–2.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.* 2.

meanings sublation registers and which stand in contradiction to one another – (1) to raise/lift up, (2) to destroy/abolish, and (3) to preserve/maintain – so as to grasp the constitutive relation between originary and capitalist accumulation. Echoing Marx’s statement in the *Grundrisse* that ‘once developed historically, capital itself creates the conditions of its existence (not as conditions for its arising, but as results of its being)’<sup>136</sup>, Bonefeld maintains that the principle ‘of primitive accumulation, i.e. separation, is *aufgehoben* in the social constitution of capitalist accumulation, and figures now no longer as its historical becoming but as the result of accumulation, a result that capital has to pose continuously to reproduce itself.’<sup>137</sup> Therefore, the second dimension is that originary accumulation is constitutive of the commodity-form as the dominant social form within capitalism, and hence constitutive of the ‘fetish character’ of the commodity. It is in this context that Bonefeld writes:

Primitive accumulation is the centrifugal point around which resolves the specific capitalist mode of existence of labour-power, the determination of human purposeful activity in the form of a labouring commodity. While the capitalist production and exchange relations subsist through the commodity-form, primitive accumulation is the secret history of the determination of human purposeful practice in the form of a wage-labour commodity. The commodity-form subsists through this determination, presupposes it and, through its form, denies it in the name of abstract equality and freedom.<sup>138</sup>

There is an indissociable relationship between ‘the secret’ [*das Geheimnis*] of the commodity-form and that of originary accumulation. Originary accumulation is the historical-ontological condition of the fetish character of exchange-determined social relations, such that ‘the social relations between...private labours appear as what they are, i.e. not as direct social relations between persons at work, but as thing-like relations between persons and social relations between things.’<sup>139</sup> That is to say, originary accumulation is the condition of the condition (the commodification of labour-power) without which relations between persons cannot appear as

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<sup>136</sup> Marx, *Grundrisse*, 459.

<sup>137</sup> Bonefeld, ‘History and Social Constitution: Primitive Accumulation is not Primitive’, 6. Thus ‘the notion that the essence of primitive accumulation is suspended [*aufgehoben*] in accumulation proper means that the principle of primitive accumulation, that is separation, is raised to a new level, rendering primitive accumulation as a specific epoch historically redundant. At the same time, its essential character is maintained as the constitutive presupposition of capital: separation.’ Ibid. 4. However, as we will consider shortly, the relationship between originary accumulation and the ‘historical becoming’ of the accumulation of capital cannot be restricted to the historical past (in its chronological register), because, as the constitutive basis of capital, originary accumulation is the *ongoing* constitutive basis of history as the *ongoing self-expansion of time*.

<sup>138</sup> Bonefeld, ‘The Permanence of Primitive Accumulation: Commodity Fetishism and Social Constitution’, 5.

<sup>139</sup> Marx, *Kapital* 1, 87 (*Capital* 1, 166).

relations between things. If this accumulation ‘is suspended in the commodity-form as its “subterranean” condition, constitutive presupposition, and historical basis’<sup>140</sup>, this is because it makes ‘social labour’ in capitalism possible.

Bonefeld’s work brings into relief a defining problem of the relation between originary and capitalist accumulation: namely, does the ‘permanence’ of originary accumulation refer to the principle of separation it first enacts, or – on top of this – originary accumulation *itself*? That is, consequent to the sublation of originary within capitalist accumulation, is it just the separation of labour from its means that is incessantly reproduced by capital, as capital’s own presupposition and result, or is originary accumulation itself also therefore reproduced? Is it possible to grasp originary accumulation – not just the separation it first engenders – as not simply the historical premise *but the historical result* of capitalist accumulation? In short, is originary accumulation itself an ongoing process?<sup>141</sup> To answer this question affirmatively is to come into unavoidable conflict with Marx himself, who on multiple occasions – in *Capital* and elsewhere – makes assertions to the effect that originary accumulation ‘is not the result of the capitalist mode of production but its point of departure’<sup>142</sup>, that this accumulation ‘is the historical basis, instead of the historical result, of specifically capitalist production.’<sup>143</sup> Marx should be critiqued here. Originary accumulation is not just continuous because the separation to which it gives rise ‘subsequently appear[s] as a constant process in the accumulation and concentration of capital’<sup>144</sup>, but also because, *consequent* to capitalist accumulation ‘proper’, human beings continue to be separated from the means of production in ways that cannot be secured by capitalist accumulation alone. At the crux of this issue is the difference and relation between a ‘capitalist’ and ‘non-capitalist’ labour-process. What is important to realise is that there is no linear progression here, no movement towards the ‘complete subsumption’ of what is ‘non-capitalist’ by what is ‘capitalist’. Rather, the vast majority – at least today – of ‘non-capitalist’ labour-processes are in fact capitalist labour-processes that have been re-designated by capital as ‘non-capitalist’. In this way, the ongoing totalisation of capital is not just ongoing because the subsumption of countless labour-processes under the valorisation-process is in

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<sup>140</sup> Bonefeld, ‘The Permanence of Primitive Accumulation: Commodity Fetishism and Social Constitution’, 6.

<sup>141</sup> As Bonefeld conveys it: ‘primitive accumulation is a constantly reproduced accumulation, be it in terms of the renewed separation of new populations from the means of production and subsistence, or in terms of the reproduction of the wage relation in the “established” relations of capital’, such that, and as previously cited, originary accumulation ‘is the presupposition of capital *and the result of its reproduction.*’ Ibid. 1-2, emphasis added. Both Bonefeld and De Angelis point towards Samir Amin’s *Accumulation on a World Scale: a Critique of the Theory of Underdevelopment* (1974) as a pioneering work that explicitly presents originary accumulation itself as necessarily ongoing.

<sup>142</sup> Marx, *Capital* 1, 873.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid. 775.

<sup>144</sup> Marx, *Capital* 3, 355.

fact the manifold differentiation and expansion of labour-processes themselves, but equally because the totalisation of capital designates existing labour-processes as either ‘insufficiently capitalist’ or as outright ‘non-capitalist’: ‘antiquated’ labour-processes (this process dovetails with the dialectical production of the ‘new’ qua the active creation of the ‘old’, as outlined in relation to the ongoing first historical act in Chapter 1). Herein lies the importance of originary accumulation. The designation of what is an ‘insufficiently’ or ‘non-capitalist’ labour-process is of course dialectically subject to what is ‘sufficiently’ capitalist, and hence subject to being re-created – subsumed – as a new labour-process. What makes this re-creation possible is the re-separation of the means of production from the producers, a process which is *in no way predominantly* characterised by coercion and violence, but which is never absent the latent possibility (everywhere) and overt actuality (somewhere) of originary accumulation. To deny this is to effectively deny capital’s ongoing need for a state (only the state ensures and insures capital as the subject of capitalism), in addition to its ongoing recourse to war.<sup>145</sup> In this regard, the real subsumption of labour – or the ‘specifically capitalist mode of production’ – not only results, as previously shown, in the expansion of the formal subsumption of labour, but in the originary accumulation of capital itself. If real subsumption constitutes a ‘constantly repeated revolution’ in the production-process, then originary accumulation is both a presupposition *and result* of this. To put this another way, originary accumulation is simultaneously the cause and effect of the actuality that ‘separation’ is not a one-off act but is in capitalism ephemeral, precisely because what constitutes the ‘means’ and ‘conditions’ of production – and thus the production-process of capital more generally – is constantly being revolutionised. In other words, if ‘once developed historically, capital itself creates the conditions of its existence (not as conditions for its arising, but as results of its being)’<sup>146</sup>, then originary accumulation must be understood as one of the conditions that is the result of capital’s being.<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>145</sup> The implicit temporal orientation of those analyses that stress the ‘continuous character’ of originary accumulation is – for the most part – the past, which is to say that originary accumulation is (within capitalism) predominantly theorised as a *reactionary* process. This is the underlying assumption behind David Harvey’s rereading of originary accumulation as ‘accumulation by dispossession’, such that the ‘new imperialism’ is fundamentally a response to the economic crises of the 1970s. See David Harvey, *The New Imperialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003). De Angelis argues that ‘the temporal dimension [of originary accumulation] includes in principle both the period of the establishment of a capitalist mode of production *and* the preservation and expansion of the capitalist mode of production *any time the producers set themselves as an obstacle to the reproduction of their separation to the means of production.*’ De Angelis, ‘Marx and primitive accumulation: The continuous character of capital’s “enclosures”’, 13. Originary accumulation thereby becomes a deliberate response or strategy, *ex post facto*, to existing forms of class struggle. This is not incorrect, but it obscures the sense in which originary accumulation is also and systematically *structured by the future*, such that it represents a form of *speculation* – a gamble, a hedge – on capital’s need to self-expand.

<sup>146</sup> Marx, *Grundrisse*, 459.

<sup>147</sup> ‘Thus, primitive accumulation becomes not only a cause of the capitalist mode of production but its effect.’ Read, ‘Primitive Accumulation: the Aleatory Foundation of Capitalism’, 37.

This is crucial, because it is only when originary accumulation is understood as both the presupposition and result of capitalist accumulation that the systematic relationship between originary accumulation and the production of history and historical time emerges. Generally speaking, we might state that if originary accumulation is the condition of the condition of the production-process of capital, then it is thereby the condition of the condition of thinking the materialist concept of history. Put differently, originary accumulation might be considered as a kind of ‘originary temporality’ – an originary temporality of separation, and, as we will soon consider, of violence – which makes the historical time of capital possible, but which, at the same time, the historical time of capital makes possible. The claim, therefore, is that originary accumulation is simultaneously the presupposition and result, the premise and consequence, the cause and effect, etc., of both capital’s formal and real subsumption of labour, and hence the two features at the heart of the production-process of capital (automation and alienation) without which history cannot be thought. Originary accumulation is thus inseparable from the speculative proposition which guides this chapter: valorisation is the production of historical time. This is what, at the level of the philosophical concept of history, secures the *systematic* character of originary accumulation, which is to say its fundamental relation to the systematic-historical dialectic that is capital. The co-constitutive relation between originary accumulation and alienation is straightforward and requires little demonstration: the separation that defines the former is both the condition and result of the various forms of separation which render the production-process of capital the production of alienation. For Marx, the ‘objective conditions of living labour appear as *separated, independent [verselbständigte]* values opposite living labour capacity as subjective being, which therefore appears to them only as a value of *another kind*’<sup>148</sup>, whereby ‘the objective conditions of living labour capacity are presupposed as having an existence independent of it, as the objectivity of a subject distinct from living labour capacity and standing independently over against it.’<sup>149</sup> However, the relationship between originary accumulation and automation requires a slightly more substantial explanation. On the one hand, the relationship between originary accumulation and the real subsumption of labour is easily grasped, such that the separation underpinning and reproduced by cooperation, the division of labour and, most consequentially, the use of machinery within the production-process, is both enabled by originary accumulation and brings about the renewal of originary accumulation. In this regard, originary accumulation is inseparable from the manner in which, as previously analysed, the systematic use of machines – the so-called ‘automatic system of machinery’ – constitutes the conception of ‘history’ as the self-expansion of time. On the other

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<sup>148</sup> Marx, *Grundrisse*, 461.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.* 462.



hand, this must be supplemented – or intertwined – with the fetish character of the commodity, specifically the fact that the real subsumption of labour both conditions and is conditioned by the commodity-form (in this sense, Marx’s systematic exposition of the value-form in the first few chapters of the first volume of *Capital* presumes the entirety – *originary accumulation included* – of the exposition that follows). In other words, if, following Bonefeld, originary accumulation is the constitutive basis of the fetish character of the commodity, then it is also the ontological basis of *the essential link between automation and fetishism at the level of the philosophical concept of history*. If automation gives us the idea of history as something that, in itself and as such, is in motion, moves on, and expands, this is indissociable from the fetish character of the commodity-form as both the premise<sup>150</sup> and result of the production-process of capital. The originary separation between the producers and the means of production not only enables a ‘life-process of the social’ whereby the radical expansion of human needs can only appear within the value-form, but also, and because of this, whereby the social relations between humans that grounds the expansion of their needs appears, within the objects which satisfy these needs, as the ‘objective characteristics of the products of labour themselves, as the socio-natural properties of these things.’<sup>151</sup> The expansion of human needs appears as the socio-natural property of commodities themselves, and this must be tied to the notion that self-expansion – the self-expansion of time – is the essential property of history itself. Even more succinctly: ‘history’ is a fetish (but it is no less real because of this). Hence the fetish character of the commodity confirms what was previously postulated: capital’s historicalising power is at once its *de-historicalising* power, which is to say, first, that the modern concept of ‘history’ is only possible because of this de-historicisation, and, second, that originary accumulation is what first gives capital this power (which is then systematically reproduced by capital itself). This is the necessary context of the basic relationship between originary accumulation and the bourgeois erasure of history, and therefore the context, as earlier cited, of Balibar’s claim that originary accumulation ‘brings us into the presence of the radical *absence of memory* which characterises history.’<sup>152</sup> The ‘insipid childishness’ of the ‘nursery tale’ that political economy tells itself unconsciously presumes the commodity-form and its secret.

A final note about violence [*Gewalt*]. Violence is of course pivotal to Marx’s analysis of originary accumulation and what should be understood as its ‘comprehensive subject’: the modern, bourgeois state. In short, for Marx, the violence of originary accumulation ‘is itself

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<sup>150</sup> ‘I call this the fetishism which attaches itself to the products of labour as soon as they are produced as commodities, and is therefore inseparable from the production of commodities.’ Marx, *Capital* 1, 165.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid. 164-65.

<sup>152</sup> Balibar, ‘Elements for a Theory of Transition’, 283.

an economic power [*ökonomische Potenz*].<sup>153</sup> However, for our purposes, capital's peculiar de-historicising power – that is, the dialectic of historicalisation and de-historicalisation to which capital gives rise – must be understood through its essential ontological relation to the systematic violence which is originary accumulation. This returns us to the logic with which Marx's – and this section's – analysis of originary accumulation begins: again, the seemingly seamless, and self-expanding, circle whereby the accumulation of capital presupposes surplus-value, surplus-value presupposes capitalist production, and capitalist production presupposes the accumulation of capital. We have, after Marx, now broken this circle, exposed the basis – the originary accumulation – upon which this circle depends and (here diverting from Marx) reproduces. What must now be considered is, first, the essential place of violence within this circle and thus, second, the essential place of violence in relation to the production of historical time. What the violence of originary accumulation first (and to this day<sup>154</sup>) enables is the fact that capital proceeds *as if* [*als ob*] labour-power can *always* be commodified, which is to say that capital not only proceeds *as if* labour-power is a readymade commodity, but moreover *as if* it directly produces labour-power as its own commodity (this is its utter indifference to the production of the means of human life). This is because the violence of originary accumulation is not just the presupposition of the circularity of capital, but its hidden, its secret, or, better, its *expelled*, presupposition: violence is the presupposition of capitalist accumulation *precisely because* it is immediately effaced by capital as its constitutive presupposition. As Jason Read expresses it: 'poised as it were at the point of transformation, the moment of violence almost disappears in its execution...the violence of primitive accumulation is immediately justified within and by the new order that it constitutes.'<sup>155</sup> The violence of originary accumulation is, in other words, immediately foreclosed by the production-process of capital, a foreclosure that

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<sup>153</sup> Marx, *Capital* 1, 916.

<sup>154</sup> 'To this day', but, and once again, *in no way predominantly overtly* today. The violence of originary accumulation is indeed *aufgehoben* within capitalist accumulation, but this takes nothing away from the ongoing necessity of originary to capitalist accumulation.

<sup>155</sup> Read, 'Primitive Accumulation: the Aleatory Foundation of Capitalism', 37. Read formulates this in conjunction with the following passage in Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus*: 'Hence the very particular character of State violence: it is very difficult to pinpoint this violence because it always presents itself as preaccomplished. It is not even adequate to say that the violence rests with the mode of production. Marx made the observation in the case of capitalism: there is a violence *that necessarily operates through the State*, precedes the capitalist mode of production, constitutes the "primitive accumulation", and makes possible the capitalist mode of production itself. From a standpoint within the capitalist mode of production, it is very difficult to say who is the thief and who is the victim, or even where the violence resides. That is because the worker is born entirely naked and the capitalist objectively "clothed", an independent owner. That which gave the worker and the capitalist this form eludes us because it operated in other modes of production. It is a violence that posits itself as preaccomplished, even though it is reactivated every day.' See Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* [1980], trans. and foreword by Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 447.

secures and is secured by the fetishism of the commodity-form. As Read shows, this leads to a transformation of violence itself – ‘the emergence of a new type of violence’ – one that not only registers the fact that ‘the sporadic and excessive feudal forms of violence pass into the universality of law’<sup>156</sup> (into the universality, in Marx’s words, ‘of state-power [*Staatsmacht*], the concentrated and organised violence of society’<sup>157</sup>), but also into ‘the quotidian relations that are the effects and cause of the law’<sup>158</sup>, which is to say the everyday life of the production-process of capital.<sup>159</sup>

We might conclude, therefore, by suggesting that the modern, philosophical concepts of history and historical time are *inherently violent concepts*, insofar as originary accumulation is woven into the very fabric of valorisation and hence the production of historical time. The seemingly indifferent, if not benign, character of historical time as the self-expansion of time, as the background, in Marx’s terms, in which change within and between modes of production occurs, is in fact predicated on a systematic violence – specific to capitalism – that is not only ‘immediately justified within and by the new order that it constitutes’, but is actively recreated by this order. The temporal intelligibility of the ongoing creation of new needs – the temporal intelligibility of the ongoing first historical act – is in fact predicated on a peculiar temporality of violence that not only ‘always presents itself as preaccomplished’<sup>160</sup>, but does so precisely because it is reproduced by a mode of production that presents itself as preaccomplished, that presents itself as the self-sufficient condition of its own being.

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<sup>156</sup> Read, ‘Primitive Accumulation: the Aleatory Foundation of Capitalism’, 38.

<sup>157</sup> Marx, *Kapital 1*, 779 (*Capital 1*, 915).

<sup>158</sup> Read, ‘Primitive Accumulation: the Aleatory Foundation of Capitalism’, 38.

<sup>159</sup> Therefore, ‘capitalist accumulation is nothing other than primitive accumulation continued onto the shop floor, thus nothing other than a continuation of the modification of violence begun with “bloody legislation” and the enclosure acts.’ Ibid.

<sup>160</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, 447.

## Conclusion

### The Historical Time of Capital and the Time of History

Time is the measure of life itself.<sup>1</sup>

The production-process of capital is given priority in this thesis because it is the first and most immediate ground from which ‘the social production of the means of life’ becomes intelligible as history. Yet inasmuch as it is a necessary point of departure, the production-process – and with it the first volume of *Capital* – does not secure capital as the condition of thinking history, and therefore does not exhaust the scope of the relation between capital and historical time. Ultimately, it is only when the immediate production-process is examined in conjunction with the circulation-process of capital, that the basis of the materialist concept of history, and thus the possibility of developing a concept of historical time out of this concept of history, is truly disclosed. The significance of the circulation-process is not registered by so-called ‘simple circulation’ (the circulation of money and commodities in the narrow sense of the term), but rather by the circulation of money and commodities *as capital*. It is this circulation, or what Marx frequently calls ‘the circulation-process proper’ [*den eigentlichen Zirkulationsprozeß*], which, on the one hand, and along with the ‘actual’ production-process, constitutes one of ‘the two great sections’<sup>2</sup> of the movement of capital, such that we can identify, and differentiate, a ‘circulation-time’ from a ‘production-time’.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, and this is a basic concern of the second volume of *Capital*, ‘circulation’ must equally be understood as a broader and more comprehensive [*übergreifendes*] category, one that, at a higher level of abstraction, actually contains, as a necessary moment within itself, the immediate production-process of capital.

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<sup>1</sup> Marx, *Economic Manuscripts of 1861-63*, 52.

<sup>2</sup> Marx states: ‘the total production-process [*Gesamtproduktionsprozeß*] of capital includes both the circulation-process proper and the actual production-process. These form the two great sections of its movement, which appears as the totality of these two processes. On one side, labour-time, and on the other, circulation-time. And the whole of the movement appears as unity of labour-time and circulation-time, as unity of production and circulation. This unity itself is motion, process. Capital appears as this unity-in-process of production and circulation, a unity which can be regarded both as the totality of the production-process, as well as the specific completion of *one* turnover of the capital, *one* movement returning into itself.’ Marx, *Grundrisse der Kritik der politischen Ökonomie*, 520 (*Grundrisse*, 620). The ‘proper’ in the expression ‘the circulation-process proper’ and the ‘actual’ in the expression ‘the actual production-process’ are two different translations of the same German word: *eigentlichen*.

<sup>3</sup> Therefore, ‘circulation-time and production-time are mutually exclusive. During its circulation-time, capital does not function as productive capital, and...produces neither commodities nor surplus-value.’ See Karl Marx, *Capital: a Critique of Political Economy, Vol. 2: the Process of Circulation of Capital* [1885] (hereafter *Capital 2*), trans. David Fernbach (London and New York: Penguin Books, 1978), 203. See also Marx, *Grundrisse*, 658, where circulation-time is figured as ‘*not-production-time*’ as well as ‘*not-value-positing-time*’.

From *this* standpoint, the ‘circulation-process’ is not the dialectical opposite of the production-process – this is not the circulation-process proper – but is rather a category that *expresses* the unity of the production- and circulation-processes proper. This is what Marx calls the ‘overall-process’ [*Gesamtverlaufs*] or ‘total-circuit’ [*Gesamtkreislauf*] of capital, which later becomes the ‘overall’ or ‘total’ (as opposed to the immediate) production-process of capital in the third volume of *Capital*.<sup>4</sup> The subject of this process is not simply ‘capital’, but more precisely what Marx calls ‘total social capital’ [*gesellschaftlichen Gesamtkapital*], a concept which must be understood as the successor of ‘capital in general’ [*Kapital im Allgemeinen*], but which, at the same time, does not invalidate the concept of ‘capital in general’.<sup>5</sup> It is total social capital and its metamorphoses – its three cycles or circuits [*Kreislauf*] – which concerns us now, because this allows us to bring this thesis to a close.

What must be emphasised is that the opening chapters of the second volume of *Capital*, in particular Chapter 4 – ‘The Three Figures of the Circuit’ – *equal* the systematicity of the systematic development of the value-form in the first chapters of the first volume of *Capital*. Moreover, these chapters in Volume Two offer what their counterpart in Volume One cannot: a systematic presentation of the various forms of capital *itself*, or, in other words, a systematic presentation of capital *subsequent* to the establishment of capital as self-expanding value.<sup>6</sup> They present – for the first time – a framework wherein capital might be *systematised* as the condition of thinking history and historical time. In sharp contrast to Marx’s analysis of the production-process in the first volume of *Capital* (above all his depiction of the overt violence of originary accumulation), these opening chapters of the second volume of *Capital* present ‘capital’ at a much higher level of abstraction: the struggle to reduce the length of the working-day does not, for instance, figure (at least explicitly) in these pages.<sup>7</sup> This does not, however, diminish their speculative contribution to our comprehension of history and historical time. In

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<sup>4</sup> Hence insofar as there is some kind of ‘logic’ (apart from Engels’s editorial hand) that structures the three volumes of *Capital*, it is not the dialectic ‘Volume 1 + Volume 2 = Volume 3’, as is occasionally assumed, but rather a logic wherein the immediate production-process (Volume 1) is *subsumed* by the circulation-process, broadly construed (Volume 2), which is thereafter actualised by the total-process of capitalist production (Volume 3). This is the sense in which the aim of Volume 3 is to ‘discover and present the concrete forms which grow out of the *process of capital’s movement considered as a whole*.’ Marx, *Capital* 3, 117. That is, Volume 3 actualises – via categories such as ‘profit’ and ‘price’ – what Volume 2 has already established, albeit at a high level of abstraction.

<sup>5</sup> See Chapter 4, footnote 9. From the second volume of *Capital* on, the categories of ‘abstract labour’ and ‘value’ can be understood from the standpoint of ‘total social capital’.

<sup>6</sup> This thesis accordingly shares Tombazos’s enthusiasm for the opening chapters of the second volume of *Capital*, particularly Chapter 4. See Tombazos, *Time in Marx*, 2, 4, 124.

<sup>7</sup> Marx is well aware of this when, for instance, he states that ‘capital, as self-valorising value, does not just comprise class relations, a definite social character that depends on the existence of labour as wage-labour. It is a movement, a circulatory-process through different stages, which itself in turn includes three different forms of the circulatory-process. Hence it can only be grasped as a movement, and not as a static thing.’ Marx, *Capital* 2, 185.

the three circuits of ‘total social capital’ – the circuits of money capital, productive capital and commodity capital, each of which include the moment of production within themselves – we have a rich and multifaceted exposition of what was raised in the introduction to Chapter 4, but which the body of that chapter only presents from the limited standpoint of the immediate production-process: the *life* through which capital satisfies its need to self-expand. The three circuits of total social capital form different but interrelated ‘life-processes’ – ‘life-circuits’ – of capital, and thus represent a crucial, if not the most important, means with which to enrich the (underdeveloped) discourse of life in Marx’s critique of political economy more broadly.<sup>8</sup> Tombazos’s *Time in Marx* stands apart in its analysis of this largely unexplored dimension of Marx’s work.<sup>9</sup> Drawing upon the figures of the syllogism in Hegel’s *Logic* (not to mention Marx’s direct acknowledgement of his indebtedness to this syllogism), Tombazos shows the extent to which the different positions and relations between money (M), the commodity (C) and production (P) represent a critical appropriation of Hegel that nonetheless corresponds to the different positions and relations between universality (U), particularity (P) and singularity (S) within the syllogism. This is, as Tombazos says, ‘the syllogistic structure of capital’<sup>10</sup>, and, after the *Logic*, it directly correlates to the sense in which, as the ‘Idea’, capital is a processual ‘living being’ – a teleological ‘living organism’ – which divides itself, within itself, into *three processes*<sup>11</sup>: (1) the ‘living individual’, or ‘shape’ (the circuit of productive capital); (2) the ‘life-process’, or ‘assimilation’ (the circuit of commodity capital); and (3) the ‘genus-process’ (the circuit of money capital). The details of this homology between Marx and Hegel (which most of the work in so-called ‘Systematic Dialectics’ after Tombazos does not address) cannot

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<sup>8</sup> The following two passages in the *Grundrisse* are also quite instructive: **first**, ‘Capital...exists as the subject of circulation; circulation is posited as its own life’s course. But whilst capital thus, as the whole of circulation, is *circulating capital*, is the process of going from one phase into the other, it is at the same time, within each phase, posited in a specific aspect, restricted to a particular form, which is the negation of itself as the subject of the whole movement. Therefore, capital in each of its particular phases is the negation of itself as the subject of all the various metamorphoses’; and, **second**, ‘Insofar as capital in every moment of the process is itself the possibility of going over into its other, next phase, and is thus the possibility of the whole process, which expresses capital’s act of life, to that extent each of the moments appears potentially as capital – hence commodity capital, money capital – along with the value positing itself in the production-process as capital.’ Marx, *Grundrisse*, 620, 637. Marx’s use of the expression ‘the life-process of capital’ (see also *Capital* 1, 425) cuts across his entire critique of political economy, but the second volume of *Capital* is arguably unmatched in its contribution to our understanding of the relation between the concept of capital and the philosophical concept of life.

<sup>9</sup> See, in particular, Tombazos, *Time in Marx*, Chapter Eleven, ‘Capital as Syllogism’, and Chapter Twelve, ‘Capital in Marx, or “Life” in Hegel’.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.* 140.

<sup>11</sup> ‘The living being is the syllogism whose very moments are inwardly systems and syllogisms...but they are active syllogisms, or processes; and within the subjective unity of the living being they are only *One* process. Thus, the living being is the process of its own concluding with itself, which runs through *three processes*.’ G.W.F. Hegel, *The Encyclopaedia Logic* (Part I of the *Encyclopaedia of Philosophical Sciences with the Zusätze*) [1817, 1830], trans. T.F. Geraets, W.A. Suchting and H.S. Harris (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1991, 292 (§217)).

be taken any further here.<sup>12</sup> It must suffice to state that the circuits of money capital, productive capital and commodity capital make up, respectively, the ‘valorisation, conservation and auto-critique/self-control of value’<sup>13</sup>, such that, as a ‘triple autonomous movement’, as a ‘rich and complex organisation of rhythms’<sup>14</sup>, ‘total social capital’ is Marx’s most complete expression of the ‘life of capital’. This leads us to the following passage in the second volume of *Capital*, Marx’s most comprehensive passage on total social capital:

The total circuit presents itself for each functional form of capital as its own specific circuit, and indeed each of these circuits conditions the continuity of the overall process; the circular course of one functional form determines that of the others. It is a necessary condition for the total-production-process [*Gesamtproduktionsprozeß*], in other words for the social capital, that this is at the same time a reproduction-process, and therefore the circuit of each of its moments. Different fractions of the capital successively pass through the different stages and functional forms. Each functional form thus passes through its circuit simultaneously with the others, though it is always a different part of the capital that presents itself in it. A part of the capital exists as commodity capital that is being transformed into money, but this is an ever-changing part, and is constantly being reproduced; another part exists as money capital that is being transformed into productive capital; a third part as productive capital being transformed into commodity capital. The constant presence of all three forms is mediated by the circuit of the total capital through precisely these three phases.

As a whole, then, the capital is simultaneously present, and spatially coexistent, in its various phases. But each part is constantly passing from one phase or functional form into another, and thus functions in all of them in turn. The forms are therefore fluid forms, and their simultaneity is mediated by their succession. Each form both follows and precedes the others, so that the return of one part of the capital to one form is determined by the return of another part to another form. Each part continuously describes its own course, but it is always another part of capital that finds itself in this form, and these particular circuits simply constitute simultaneous and successive moments of the overall process.

It is only in the unity of the three circuits that the continuity of the total-process is realised...total social capital always possesses this continuity, and its process always contains the unity of the three circuits.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Of interest here is the manner in which, *from the standpoint of total social capital*, ‘production’ (the circuit of productive capital) simply represents the capacity of the living organism to preserve/maintain itself, *not* the sense in which this being reproduces itself *as more than itself* – as ‘giving birth’ to more than what it already is (this is the function of the circuit of money capital). To put this a different way, whereas the production-process in the first volume of *Capital* obviously corresponds to the production of surplus-value, this is, from the standpoint of the second volume of *Capital*, expressed by the circuit of money capital, not the circuit of productive capital. As Marx expresses it, ‘the general form of the movement P...P’ is the form of reproduction, and does not indicate, as does M...M’, that valorisation is the purpose of the process.’ Marx, *Capital 2*, 172.

<sup>13</sup> Tombazos, *Time in Marx*, 140.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.* 144.

<sup>15</sup> Karl Marx, *Das Kapital: Kritik der politischen Ökonomie, Zweiter Band: Der Zirkulationsprozeß des Capitals* [1885], herausgegeben von Friedrich Engels (hereafter *Kapital 2*), in Marx and Engels, *MEW*, Band 24 (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1963), 108 (*Capital 2*, 184). Consider also Marx, *Capital 2*, 180: ‘if we take all three forms together, then all the premises of the process appear as its result, as premises produced by the process itself. Each moment appears as a point of departure, of transit, and of return.’

This passage raises many questions which might foster some speculative conclusions. Namely, is Marx's concept of accumulation – at the level of 'total social capital' – a model of historical time? That is, does total social capital secure the manner in which the expansion of human needs can be understood as history? Is total social capital ultimately what totalises and temporalises history? Is it the comprehensive historicalising, and therefore de-historicalising, subject? These questions may come across as unrelentingly abstract and hence as orientating human history and its 'real material basis' in precisely the opposite direction which Marx and Engels desire in *The German Ideology*. Indeed, they may seem to disregard Marx and Engels's exhortation in *The Holy Family* that 'history does nothing, it does not "possess vast wealth", it does not "fight battles"! Rather, it is humans, actual, living humans, who do all that, who possess and fight; it is not "history" that uses humans as a means to pursue *its own* ends, as if it were a person apart. History is *nothing but* the activity of humans pursuing their ends.'<sup>16</sup> Yet to read these questions as complicit in the mystification of 'history' is to forget precisely what kind of 'subject' capital – total social capital – is. It is to forget that, in capitalism, total social capital *is* the comprehensive subject which makes human *historical* acts possible, which provides the unity of the human act with its historical intelligibility. As Marx declares, after the passage quoted above: 'those who consider the autonomisation [*Verselbstständigung*] of value as a mere abstraction forget that the movement of industrial capital is this abstraction in action.'<sup>17</sup> The point to take from this is not that this autonomisation is not produced by human beings, but rather that human beings are equally, and in fact asymmetrically, produced by this autonomisation, such that this autonomisation makes possible the idea that 'history is *nothing but* the activity of humans pursuing their ends.' 'Human history' is only conceivable because, in capitalism, human beings produce and satisfy their needs *as* the personifications and bearers of the 'movement of independent value, acting with the force [*Gewalt*] of an elemental natural-process.'<sup>18</sup> In this way, if total social capital and its process is the unity of the production- and circulation-processes proper<sup>19</sup>, its time, which might be characterised as 'the time of the total-process of capitalist production', or indeed as 'the unity of the time of production and the time of circulation', is *not*, after Tombazos, the 'organic time of capital', but rather *the historical time of capital*, a historical time whose material basis is introduced (albeit in highly abstract

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<sup>16</sup> Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Die heilige Familie, oder Kritik der kritischen Kritik. Gegen Bruno Bauer und Konsorten* [1845], in Marx and Engels, *MEW*, Band 2 (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1962), 98 (Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Holy Family, or Critique of Critical Criticism. Against Bruno Bauer and Company*, in *MECW*, Volume 4, *Marx and Engels, 1844-1845*, trans. Richard Dixon and Clemens Dutt (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1975), 93).

<sup>17</sup> Marx, *Capital* 2, 185.

<sup>18</sup> Marx, *Kapital* 2, 109 (*Capital* 2, 185).

<sup>19</sup> Marx, *Capital* 2, 180.



terms) in the second volume of *Capital*, and subsequently concretised in the third volume of *Capital*.<sup>20</sup>

*However* – and this point guides the second part of this conclusion – it is impossible to imagine the ‘historical time of capital’ – the concepts of history and historical time which exist because of total social capital – in isolation from Marx’s concept of *crisis*. Inasmuch as capital is, as Tombazos describes it, a ‘rich and complex organisation of rhythms’, it is, and because of this, equally the permanent tendency towards crisis, such that its rhythmic unity contains, within itself, the permanent possibility of ‘a kind of “arrhythmia”... a momentary disturbance of the system’s coherence.’<sup>21</sup> Generally speaking, we must attend to three different levels at which ‘crisis’ operates in Marx’s work, but which, when taken together as a whole, casts considerable doubt on the unity of Marx’s understanding of crisis, such that it is questionable whether one can identify a ‘concept’ of crisis in Marx.<sup>22</sup> The first two levels are immanent to capitalism. They proceed from Marx’s position that, at their core, crises are manifestations of the ineradicable contradictions of capital: they bring ‘to the surface’ the barriers [*Schranken*] ‘to the free development of the productive forces’, barriers which capitalism ‘contains within itself’.<sup>23</sup> This begins – and this is the first level – with the fact that the *potential* for crisis is immanent to the value-form itself. Even the most simple metamorphosis of the commodity, the ongoing separation, in time and space, between its purchase and sale<sup>24</sup>, contains the seeds of crisis within itself, because when the ‘assertion of [the] external independence [*äußerliche Verselbstständigung*]’ of the two processes ‘which lack internal independence’ ‘proceeds to a

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<sup>20</sup> Tombazos’s ‘organic time’ is the comprehensive concept of the third and final section of his *Time in Marx*. It is the culminating conceptual formulation which unites ‘the time of production’ and ‘the time of circulation’ as, respectively, a ‘linear time’ and ‘cyclical time’. The problems with this reading aside, we must note that it goes hand-in-hand with a systematic lack of an analysis of the concept of *need*, a fact which results in the separation, for Tombazos, of the ‘logical’ and ‘historical’ time of capital.

<sup>21</sup> Tombazos, *Time in Marx*, 145.

<sup>22</sup> Much of the discussion that follows is indebted to Peter Osborne’s recent article ‘A sudden topicality: Marx, Nietzsche and the politics of crisis’, *Radical Philosophy* 160 (March/April 2010), 19-26, which proceeds from the premise that whereas Marx is undoubtedly a thinker of crisis, it is unclear whether he is a *theorist* of crisis, whether, that is to say, he ‘propound[s] something that might legitimately be called a “crisis theory”.’ Ibid. 19. This dovetails with Tombazos’s argument that Marx only analyses ‘periodical crises linked to the industrial cycle, which are therefore “normal”, necessary and inevitable moments of capitalist production’, but leaves unanalysed ‘the structural crises that are abnormal or extraordinary in that they cannot be overcome by the spontaneous or endogenous mechanisms of the system.’ Tombazos, *Time in Marx*, 274. However, what Tombazos calls a ‘structural crisis’ is *not* the same thing as what Osborne calls ‘the all-pervasive, *general-historical* character of the concept of crisis in its modern form’, a concept of crisis which Tombazos leaves unanalysed and with which, as we will learn, the concept of historical time must reckon. See Osborne, ‘A sudden topicality: Marx, Nietzsche and the politics of crisis’, 20.

<sup>23</sup> Karl Marx, *Economic Manuscripts of 1861-63* (Continuation), in *MECW*, Volume 32, *Marx: 1861-1863*, trans. Renate Simpson (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1989), 157. See also Karl Marx, *Theories of Surplus-Value, Part 2* [1861-63], trans. Renate Simpson (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1969), 528.

<sup>24</sup> Marx, *Economic Manuscripts of 1861-63* (Continuation), in *MECW*, Volume 32, 140, 145.

certain critical point, their unity violently makes itself felt by producing – a crisis.’<sup>25</sup> In this regard, ‘crisis’ can be understood as the *enforced* movement of interdependent processes that have become immobile. Crisis is therefore not just the lack of the essential movement which is capital, but so too ‘the forcible establishment of unity between elements that have become independent and the enforced separation from one another of elements which are essentially one.’<sup>26</sup> ‘Alongside the interrupted circulation’, as Marx puts it elsewhere, ‘a *forced circulation* takes place.’<sup>27</sup>

However, and Marx regularly stresses this point, this understanding of crisis is nothing but the formal possibility of crisis, ‘the general, abstract possibility of crisis [that] denotes no more than the *most abstract form* of crisis, without content, without a compelling motivating factor.’<sup>28</sup> In capitalism, the ‘content’ which transforms the formal possibility of crisis into an actual crisis is a conjunctural question, and consequently can only be known through actual political-economic events. Yet what, on Marx’s terms, each and every specifically capitalist crisis registers – and this is the second level to which we must attend – are the ‘periodic’ crises which characterise the cycles of industrial capital, crises which are, as Tombazos expresses it, “‘normal”, necessary and inevitable moments of capitalist production.’<sup>29</sup> Osborne summarises this understanding of crisis nicely:

1. Crises are *modes of appearance of structural contradictions* within the process of capitalist production – they bring contradictions ‘to the surface’, as Marx says.
2. Crises are *means for the temporary solution*, and hence new forms of mediation, of such contradictions, which restore the conditions for accumulation.
3. The restoration of conditions for accumulation is at the same time the *renewal of the terms of the contradictions* within the system that gave rise to the crisis in the first place.<sup>30</sup>

From this standpoint, a crisis is a *functional* aspect of the expanded reproduction of industrial capital. At the level of total social capital, crisis can be comprehended as the manifestation of contradiction within one or many of the ‘life-cycles’ of capital, and the temporary (enforced) resolution of the consequent ‘arrhythmia’, such that crisis is in fact reproductive of the broader

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<sup>25</sup> Marx, *Capital* 1, 209. The point here is that the value-form in no way ensures that the movement of valorisation is continuous. Marx’s well-known critique of Say’s law summarises this: ‘no one can sell unless someone else purchases. But no one directly needs to purchase because he has just sold.’ Ibid. 208-9.

<sup>26</sup> Marx, *Economic Manuscripts of 1861-63* (Continuation), in *MECW*, Volume 32, 144.

<sup>27</sup> Marx, *Grundrisse*, 600. See also *ibid.* 443-44.

<sup>28</sup> Marx, *Economic Manuscripts of 1861-63* (Continuation), in *MECW*, Volume 32, 140.

<sup>29</sup> Tombazos, *Time in Marx*, 274.

<sup>30</sup> Osborne, ‘A sudden topicality: Marx, Nietzsche and the politics of crisis’, 20.

turnover-time [*Umschlagszeit*] of capital.<sup>31</sup> In this sense, a crisis is simultaneously a *disruption* of the unity of production- and circulation-time and also a condition of the *renewal* of what is already always a contradictory unity. At the level of both the potentiality (the value-form) and actuality (the industrial cycle) of the accumulation of capital, therefore, crisis is *constitutive* of history and historical time. The idea that ‘history’ constitutes – in and of itself – the ongoing self-expansion of time is (to date) predicated on capitalist crises.

However, neither of these levels take in what Osborne calls ‘the all-pervasive, *general-historical* character of the concept of crisis in its modern form (including the historico-political notion of a crisis of the capitalist system as a whole, as a condition of a transition to a new mode of production – a notion which clearly motivated Marx).’<sup>32</sup> In opposition to this concept of crisis (the third and final level to which we must attend), the second level (and by extension the first level, which is simply the formal possibility of the second) possesses a ‘restrictedly *conjunctural* character and relatively *narrow political-economic* basis.’<sup>33</sup> The difference – or rather the disjunction – between these three levels is crucial, because it cuts to the core of the philosophical and political problem that the introduction to this thesis first raised, and to which we can finally return: namely, capital is the condition of thinking history and hence historical time, but the philosophical concept of history *must* register the possibility (but by no means the inevitability) of social and historical time after capitalism. The thought of history, in other words, necessarily unsettles its ongoing comprehensive condition of possibility, because the realisation of history’s ‘true’ teleological end (there are several ways of grasping this in Marx: e.g. the flourishing of the ‘true’ realm of freedom, or the emergence of the ‘genuinely’ social individual, or the ‘absolute’ movement of becoming) hinges on the speculative chronological end of capitalism. In a word, the concept of historical time *compels* us to think ‘the time of history’ beyond the historical time of capital, as inclusive, that is to say, of the historical time of communism and its subjects. This does *not* mean that, unlike the historical time of capital, the ‘time of history’ is not grounded by the ongoing expansion of human needs and productive forces, or that it is not a form of self-expanding time. Far from it. It just means that capital is sublated as the comprehensive subject of historical time. We might put it this way: the ‘time of history’ must be thought from the standpoint of the sublation of the contradiction that, for Marx, human beings simultaneously live (to date) in *pre-history and history*. Hence the need

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<sup>31</sup> ‘...a crisis is always the starting-point of a large volume of new investment. It is also, therefore, if we consider the society as a whole, more or less a new material basis for the next turnover cycle.’ Marx, *Capital* 2, 264.

<sup>32</sup> Osborne, ‘A sudden topicality: Marx, Nietzsche and the politics of crisis’, 20. Osborne goes on to define this concept of crisis as ‘its fundamental political meaning at the level of its greatest historical generality...the generality and fundamentally historical character of the concept of crisis.’ Ibid. 22.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid. 20.

to realise the end of ‘pre-history’ (a political category) within history; that is, to negate (which is reversible...it can regress) the ‘pre-history’ of the ongoing historical present and, therefore, usher in the beginning of a new unified kind of history, which is, as Pierre Vilar puts it, ‘the task of another mode of production.’<sup>34</sup> This is what the concept of crisis must register, which Marx’s concept of crisis does not. Politically and philosophically, ‘crisis’ is here a *historical* category, not simply a political-economic concept specific to capitalism. This is the context in which Osborne states that ‘analysis of the historical process demands not merely an account of fundamental contradictions and their expression in conflicts and crises, but an account of crisis as a *condition of possibility of the new*, in this case the *qualitatively historically new*: new forms of social production, new relations of production and forms of organisation.’<sup>35</sup> And yet, despite the fact that capitalist crises intrinsically point beyond the confines of the political economy of capitalism (and therefore beyond the political-economic scope of Marx’s concept of crisis), the repetitive nature of these crises is precisely what makes it so difficult to imagine how the qualitatively historically new can be realised, such that this new is already structured, and thereby foreclosed, by the historicalising temporality of capital.<sup>36</sup>

The crisis which brings Tombazos’s *Time in Marx* to a close – the ‘structural crisis’ – does not provide us with a solution to this problem. Framed by the promise to ‘examine the conceptual link between the totality-capital and historical time’<sup>37</sup>, this conception of crisis<sup>38</sup> actually obscures the relationship between capital and historical time<sup>39</sup>, and thus precludes the

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<sup>34</sup> Pierre Vilar, ‘Marxist History, a History in the Making: Towards a Dialogue with Althusser,’ *New Left Review* 1/80 (July/August 1973), 105.

<sup>35</sup> Osborne, ‘A sudden topicality: Marx, Nietzsche and the politics of crisis’, 21. Osborne continues: ‘*crisis “theory” is thus in principle inadequate to thinking the historico-political meaning of crises* – and this includes Marx’s own account (or “theory”) of capitalist crises, however central to such a thinking it might be. Hence my reluctance to think of Marx as a crisis “theorist”, with respect to the politics of crises, which was his ultimate concern.’ Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> For Osborne, ‘with regard to the temporality of crisis, the cyclical character of crises of accumulation tends to instil less a sense of possibility than of *repetition*. This serves to reinforce the main form of temporal abstraction associated with the experience of commodities in capitalist societies: “the new”. The periodic character of crisis and the commodity-form each produce modes of experience of temporal abstraction that undermine or erode the *historical* experience of crises and, thereby, function to repress the political possibilities they contain.’ Ibid. 24.

<sup>37</sup> Tombazos, *Time in Marx*, 275.

<sup>38</sup> See *ibid.*, Chapter 24, ‘The Structural Crises’, 291-305, which, along with its appendix, does little in the way of constructing a concept of ‘structural crisis’ as an ‘abnormal or extraordinary’ (*ibid.* 274) crisis of capitalism, instead offering an empirical history of business cycles over roughly the past 150 years. Why structural crises are ‘structural’, and intelligible as such as against ‘periodical crises’ (which would equally seem to be part of the *structure* of capitalist accumulation), is thus left at a descriptive level.

<sup>39</sup> Tombazos’s grasp of the relationship between capital and historical time comes out of his analysis of ‘structural crises’. He states: ‘far from acting in a social environment that it only conquers, capital produces its objective contents that are this environment. It produces its own history. Each particular stage of capitalism, each recovery from a structural crisis, is the peace that capital concludes with itself.’ *Ibid.* 300. After Hegel, ‘this correspondence between “subjectivity” and “objectivity” is not that

possibility of developing a general-historical concept of crisis out of, and in relation to, the endemic crises of capitalism. Yet this is precisely what must be done, insofar as ‘the political significance of the concept of crisis...depends upon *some* projected articulation of these two levels, some *conjunctural political effectivity at the level of the mode of production*, in response to “periodic” crisis.’<sup>40</sup> We might go so far as to say that this is the only possible way to think, let alone actualise, the possibility of social and historical time after capitalism. This returns us to the philosophical – and brings into the conversation the political – importance of the category of life in Marx’s work. If ‘crisis’ can, on some level, be understood as a crisis of the ‘life’ of something, such that it signals the *possibility* of the end of this life as such, then the politics of historical time (a politics structured both by the understanding of capital as the condition of thinking history and the process of realising historical time after capitalism) must treat the recurring crises of capitalism (whether ‘normal’ or ‘abnormal’) from the standpoint of their disruption of the *life-time* of capital. And this ‘life-time’ is not just the (unknowable) duration of the life of capital, such that crises enable, but only potentially, the chronological end of capitalism, but, and more fundamentally, the historicalising time of the life of capital as it is presented in this thesis (a time which is itself the ontological ground of measuring the ‘duration’ of capitalism<sup>41</sup>). This is, despite the absence of politics surrounding its presentation, the distinct political importance of the concept of ‘total social capital’ in the second volume

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of the conceptual totality of capital with an external empirical reality, with a neutral historical time. Rather, it is the relative correspondence of the former with the objective determinations it produces.’ Ibid. Thus, ‘capital as an “Idea” is the correspondence of a logical order of time – obeying its own immanent criteria – with historical time. This correspondence is a permanent relation of tension and conflict, a relation of sometimes hidden and sometimes evident contradiction. Crises, particularly structural crises, are violent moments of confrontation between antagonistic forces. They open up various possibilities, among which is that of a new “peace” between the “subjective side” and “objective side” of capital. This is why capitalism is a coherent system of determinations, at the same time completed and open, dynamic and in movement.’ Ibid. There are two problems with this reading. First, history/historical time are reduced to the ‘objective side’ of the dialectic of capital, the ‘empirical world’ that is dialectically tied to the ‘subjective side’ – the ‘thought’ or ‘universal reason’ – of capital, wherein a ‘mutual fertilisation’ and ‘contradictory unity’ between the universal logic and particular history of capital exists. Ibid. 303. This stands against the idea of this thesis that history/historical time are the manifestations of the dialectic of capital *itself* – from *both* the standpoint of its objectivity and subjectivity. Second, Tombazos’s concept of crisis (both ‘periodical’ and ‘structural’) thus precludes the possibility of constructing a *historical* concept of crisis: the fundamentally historical character of crisis is here not simply limited to capital, but to the objective side of capital at that. The ‘various possibilities’ of crises thus become one possibility: historical repetition.

<sup>40</sup> Osborne, ‘A sudden topicality: Marx, Nietzsche and the politics of crisis’, 21. The ‘two levels’ here are the ‘historical development of the mode of production beyond its own limits, on the one hand, and political economy of capital, on the other’. Ibid. For Osborne, ‘the failure to adhere to the disjunction’ between these two levels ‘generates the quasi-theological notion of a “final” crisis of the capitalist system, as a whole, as some kind of event, rather than a process with a duration of many decades, if not centuries, appropriate to the idea of a “social” rather than a merely “political” revolution. And it is this notion that lies behind the substitution of a theory of breakdown for a (generational) politics of transformation.’ Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> See Chapter 4, footnote 11.

of *Capital*. What this concept begs is not just a concept of historical time whose philosophical scope matches the systematicity of total social capital, but a concept of historical time whose political scope is equally systematic, such that political practice can, on some level, be thought in relation to total social capital itself. The development of a *historical* concept of crisis is the necessary first step towards such a philosophy and politics of historical time.

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