

Habermas's Critique of the Production Paradigm

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Jürgen Habermas's project of a reformulation of critical social theory was from the very beginning characterized by a confrontation with Marx and the Marxist tradition. In particular, their concepts of labor, production, and social synthesis repeatedly gained Habermas's attention and became objects of his critique. The rejection of what later came to be called the "production paradigm" occurred at three levels: in terms of *social theory*, Habermas doubts that a sufficient concept of social unity can be obtained through the concept of labor; in terms of *social philosophy*, Habermas complains about the meager normative potential of the concept of labor; and *sociologically*, the relevance of labor as a leading category in the epoch of late capitalism is called into question. In the following, I wish to concentrate upon the dimension of social theory.

Since *Knowledge and Human Interests*, and culminating in his critique of the production paradigm in *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, Habermas attributes to Marx a model of social synthesis through "labor." Habermas's critique is that the limitation of the concept of praxis to labor in the sense of "the making of products"¹ or the "metabolic process between society and nature"² brings the problem of reducing "rules of social interaction" to "technical and utilitarian rules for production and employing products."³ If, however, Marxist theorists decide to distinguish between these dimensions, then according to Habermas they necessarily depart from the categorical framework of the production paradigm. Thus, "labor" for Habermas can only be understood according to the model of a non-social, technical–manipulative relationship to an object. Accordingly, "the production paradigm is fit solely for the explanation of labor and not for that of interaction,"⁴ i.e., praxis in this sense "has structure-forming effects only for the metabolic process between human beings and nature."⁵ In contrast, according to Habermas's two-leveled concept, society appears

on the one hand, as a *process of production and appropriation*, which proceeds in accord with technical-utilitarian rules and signals the relevant level of exchange between society and nature (that is, the state of the forces of production); and on the other hand, as a *process of interaction*, which is regulated by social norms and brings about a selective access to power and wealth (that is, expresses the relations of production).⁶

That “practice in the sense of norm-governed interaction cannot be analyzed on the model of the productive expenditure of labor power and the consumption of use-values”⁷ is an understandable statement. However, the question arises as to whether such a reductionism is actually developed in Marx’s critic of political economy. In the following, I will demonstrate that Habermas, through his approach to Marx, which proceeds on the basis of Marx’s early writings, does not perceive changes to social-theoretical categories in the course of the development of Marx’s work. This applies above all to the form-analytical distinction between abstract and concrete labor, which is first fully developed in *Capital*.⁸

The core problem of Habermas’s social theory will prove to be that with the replacement of the concept of “relation of production” through that of the “institutional framework” or “interaction” on one hand and the “subsystem of rational-purposive behavior” on the other hand, the innovative content of the critique of political economy’s concept of society is missed, thus transforming social theory into an external combination of symbolic-interactionist reductionism and systems-theoretical affirmation of social alienation. Society is dissolved into the dualisms of labor and interaction, technics and ethics, human being–thing, and human being–human being relations. Habermas thereby consummates a separation of the class relation from its objective mediation, i.e., from its economic character in the narrow sense, and also trivializes autonomous economic mechanisms to media of communication that disburden activity with the goal of augmenting nature and an optimal material reproduction.

Synthesis Through Labor

In *Knowledge and Human Interests*, in establishing the foundation of the critique of the production paradigm, Habermas makes use of the procedure of assembling this paradigm from text passages from Marx’s work in which, as in the early writings, there is not yet a concept of the critique of political economy and hence no concept of the double character of labor has yet been developed by Marx, and in which, as in the seventh chapter of *Capital*, avowedly trans-historical expositions of the labor process are conducted in conscious abstraction from the specific relations of production. That results in the following picture of a materialist conception of labor: “labor has the function of synthesis,”⁹ which is understood as a process of constitution of the human species through interaction with nature.¹⁰ In such a concept, the synthesis through “labor” in the sense of a concrete labor in general—or, as Habermas says, a “behavioral system

of instrumental action”¹¹—the constitution of the species is, however, conceptualized in a reductive manner: “through the labor process” according to Habermas’s presentation, “what changes is not only the nature that has been worked on but, by means of the products of labor, the necessitous nature of the labor subjects themselves.”¹² The rules of this synthesis are ultimately supposed to become “objectified as productive forces,”¹³ the “identity of social subjects [...] alters with the scope of their power of technical control.”¹⁴ The process of social evolution is thus understood as a monological dialectic of “human beings” and “nature” in the labor process.

In order to draw this picture of materialist synthesis, Habermas must not only disregard the concept of social form, which is fundamental for the mature Marx, but also the insight into the primacy of relations of production over the forces of production in Marx’s late works. Under “form,” Habermas understands merely the change in “natural form” of objects in the process of concrete labor, meaning the transformation of nature according to human purposes in the labor process.¹⁵ Marx thus quoted: “In his production man can only proceed like nature herself, that is *only by changing the forms of substances.*”¹⁶ However, after this statement by Marx about labor as a process of the production of *use values*, this sentence follows: “Let us now pass from the commodity as an object of utility to the value of commodities.”¹⁷ Habermas does not go along with this step. Thus, he summarizes the concept of the synthesis through labor as “the synthesis of the material of labor by labor-power” which “receives its actual unity through categories of man’s manipulations.”¹⁸ Through labor, then, a unity of “man and nature” is created “that binds the objectivity of the possible objects of experience to the objective activity of subjects on the one hand, but does not eliminate the independence of its existence on the other,”¹⁹ whereby one can only speak of the social subject “in the singular” to the extent that it is “the level of development of the forces of production” that “determines the system of social labor as a whole.”²⁰ Production is supposed to be nothing other than “sensuous labor and creation,”²¹ the “tangible productive activity of the species.”²² The process of the self-constitution of the species thus imputed is according to Habermas identified by Marx “with the appropriation of essential powers that have been externalized in working on material.”²³ Since, according to Habermas, Marx “*conceives of reflection according to the model of production,*”²⁴ he misses the epistemological status of the social sciences and understands “economics as a ‘human natural science.’”²⁵

With his talk of laws of movement of the capitalist mode of production, Marx conceives of the logic of social development as a “natural law.”²⁶ According to Habermas, he thus orients toward the scientific *Zeitgeist* and suppresses the reflective specificity of critique, which relates to its object not only as a registry apparatus but rather means to recover it in a self-determined way. Against this reading, the following indication must suffice: Marx’s critique of economics must be understood as a materialism of *second* nature in two regards: first, as a theory of the real act of autonomization and objectification of the relations of production: when Marx thus claims to grasp the dynamic of the capitalist mode of production “as a process of natural history,”²⁷ it must be noted that “nature” or “naturalness” (*Naturwüchsigkeit*) are negatively determined category²⁸: under historically specific conditions, the social relations between human beings take the form of an actual social relationship between things, which is largely beyond the control of human beings.²⁹ Second, Marx’s critique of economics is a critique of the objective appearance, the *false* naturalization of social relations within the capitalist mode of production. Marx, thus, *opposes* naturalistic, anthropological, and empiricist conceptualizations of the field of political economy and attempts at the same time to explain these as arising from the forms of capitalist everyday life.³⁰ Thus, referring to a theory that explains that its objects, the forms of wealth specific to capitalism, do not contain “an atom of matter”³¹ as a “natural science,” as Habermas does, is more than astonishing.³²

The Substitution of Personal for Anonymous Domination

However, Habermas is also forced to state that in his materialist investigations, Marx in no way identifies the “*self-conscious control* of the social life process” with “an *automatic regulation* of the process of production,”³³ but this difference points to the distinction between monological relations of labor on one hand and intersubjective relations of force or respectively of recognition on the other hand. The accusation, as is already known, is that of the insufficiency of the concept of a social synthesis by means of labor, which contains an impermissible “*reduction of the self-generative act of the human species* to labor.”³⁴ The concept thus requires supplementation by a “synthesis through struggle”³⁵ understood as a “symbolic interaction” in an “institutional framework,”³⁶ which is here still borrowed from the Hegelian dialectic of the morality of criminal and commonwealth.^{37,38} According to Habermas, Marx in fact reflects this framework but conceptually misses this dimension of human activity.³⁹ Thus, “revolutionary practice”

remains displaced in “the more restricted conception of the species’ self-reflection through work alone.”⁴⁰ “Synthesis through social labor,” according to Habermas, “mediates the social subject with external nature as its object. But this process of mediation is interlocked with synthesis through struggle,”⁴¹ which Marx understands as “a relation of social force, namely the power of one social class over another.”⁴² This relation of force is grounded in and “economically defined through the free labor contract as a form of civil law,”⁴³ which in turn is nothing other than a “distortion of dialogic relation” between human beings, which represents a “causality of split-off symbols and reified grammatical relations.”⁴⁴

It’s no wonder, then, that in his early work, Habermas identifies “revolutionary practice” with “the critical abolition of ideologies” through “reflection”⁴⁵ and interprets emancipation from alienated forms in terms analogous to psychoanalysis modified by communication theory: in the spirit of the characterization of value as “hold[ing] sway in reality itself,” objective “conceptuality,” as “illusion” and as a “mental configuration”⁴⁶ by Adorno, Habermas grasps the forms of wealth as an “objective illusion.”⁴⁷ “The commodity form of labor,” he asserts, “is ideology, because it simultaneously conceals and expresses the suppression of an unconstrained dialogic relation,”⁴⁸ but for Marx, the commodity form is in no way ideology, an objective form of thought, or a dissociated (linguistic) symbol; rather, *on the basis* of this real social relation, an ideological misrecognition of this social relation as the natural property of a thing is sparked. However, this renders understandable Habermas’s later critique of Marx, in which he attributes to Marx the—in Habermas’s opinion—untenable view that “the systemic interconnection between an economy organized along capitalist lines and its governmental complement is a sheer illusion, which is supposed to melt away into nothing with the abolition of the relations of production,”⁴⁹ or that Marx conceives of “an accumulation process that has broken away from orientations to use value” as “literally [!] amount[ing] to an illusion,” to an “enchantment”⁵⁰ even. This can be understood as a self-critique of Habermas’s position in *Knowledge and Human Interests*.

The topos of the “systemic as illusion” can, however, be translated into a non-Hegelian language, which will then make clear that Habermas with his later critique also sets his sights on the partially naïve-seeming reduction of the emergence of social interrelations to alienation, which are found in isolated passages of the early writings of Marx and Engels and in critical theory. Thus, for example, Alfred Schmidt tends toward a methodological individualism within

an emancipatory perspective, which proceeds from the assumption that social nominalism is the correct manner of description for communist societies:

As soon as people cease [...] to tolerate [...] the objective domination of the universal [...] ‘nominalism’ once again becomes valid; that is to say, a state of affairs is achieved in which the strange entities that human beings are at the mercy of disappear [...] the whole emerges from the planned and rational acts of individuals.⁵¹

Thus, the area of the mental-cultural loses its “superstructural character.”⁵² However, Habermas goes far beyond a critique of such idealism and wishes to praise at the same time the “evolutionarily advantageous level of integration”⁵³ of autonomous forms such as state and capital, thus elevating a social democratic program for the protection of the lifeworld to the level of critical social theory.⁵⁴ Habermas then asserts, without empirical foundation, but merely out of the trivializing, definitional orientation of his concepts of money and system,⁵⁵ that a “painless decoupling of the monetary-bureaucratic complex” can be “distinguished from the painful colonization of the lifeworld.”⁵⁶ I will return to this.

“Marx,” at least according to Habermas, “could have employed” Hegel’s “model and constructed the disproportional appropriation of the surplus product, which has class antagonism as its consequence, as a ‘crime.’”⁵⁷ But the model of a fractured moral totality refers, as Habermas emphasizes, to an “institutional framework constructed out of cultural tradition.”⁵⁸ He, thus, grasps forms of social intercourse as a praxis “subject to norms that decide, with the force of institutions, how responsibilities and rewards, obligations and charges to the social budget are distributed among members.”⁵⁹ In *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, this is repeated within the context of an approving discussion of György Márkus: “norms of action ground differential rights and duties and secure motivations for the exercise of differentially distributed social roles, which in turn determine activities, skills, and the satisfaction of needs” as well as “the distribution both of the means of production and of the wealth produced.”⁶⁰

Against this legal-philosophical reductionism, it must be asserted that the private legal order mentioned by Habermas in connection with the institutional framework is the form of a *non-juridical* content, which in turn is an economic-social form.⁶¹ Here, Marx identifies relationships of validation of an entirely different nature than those that can be identified at the level of conscious, moral-juridical conflicts of recognition, and that is what is actually economic about his object.⁶² Habermas on the other hand constructs the following associative chain: (legal-)norm–institutional framework–class struggle–force. Thus, in Habermas’s work, class

relationships appear, as Klaus Ottomeyer notes, “as personal-direct,”⁶³ precisely because Habermas ignores the specific synthesis through labor as Marx develops it on the basis of the commodity form. With regard to economic relations, Habermas only perceives the compulsorily reinforced mutual relation of *wills* of private-dissociated legal subjects. The economic form, the *objectively* mediated unity of *labors and products* under the condition of their systematic dissociation, does not at all exist for him. It falls through between person–person (interaction) and person–thing relations (“labor”). The relation of property—in Habermas’s early work, the core of the normatively regulated institutional framework—is in contrast a circuit of reproduction that goes far beyond normatively regulated social constitution⁶⁴ and that begins historically with the *violent* separation of direct producers from their means of production and subsequently presents itself as the *structural* reproduction of this initial situation through the mediation of the *exchange of equivalents*, and the implied *relations of recognition* between the subjects of exchange. Juridical relations of wills, social struggles, and state legal guarantees remain a constitutive element of modern property relations, but the latter cannot be reduced to them. *Economic* mediation, which in Habermas’s work amounts to the legal dimension of “the free labor contract,”⁶⁵ depends rather upon the value relation as an exchange relation and its tendencies to become autonomous. This remains omitted in Habermas’s perspective. According to Marx as well, there are no relations of property or exchange without law (synthesis of wills under the condition and with the consequence of their systematic dissociation into private-isolated wills), but this is at the same time the implication of normatively uncontrolled, originally economic relations (synthesis of labors and products under the condition and with the consequence of their systematic dissociation into private-isolated acts of labor and products).

Dieter Wolf, thus, correctly establishes that the consequence of Habermas’s theoretical strategy is that “the sociality of production addressed by the term ‘institutionalized relation of force’” has “nothing to do with the sociality of production in its historically specific social form determination” which is why this relation of force, “without any consideration of production,” appears modifiable “within the framework of ‘symbolic interaction’”:

Detached from production, without possessing any historically specific [...] form-determination, the capital relation has been quietly transformed into a sort of ‘institutionalized relation of force’, which like every other master-servant relationship [...] is one between people, the specificity of which consists of being an ‘interrelationship of symbolically mediated interaction’ since time immemorial.⁶⁶

Habermas, thus, also usually speaks of the appropriation of surplus *product*, actually a pre-capitalist form of exploitation, and not of surplus *value*, the capitalist form mediated by exchange which presupposes a synthesis through labor. To Habermas, the anonymous character of the social relation between producers of domination mediated by value appears to be merely personal domination disguised in an objective form,⁶⁷ which is ultimately demonstrated by his concept of sanction: he distinguishes between two forms of sanction, namely punishment on the basis of conventional norms in the sense of a “failure against authority” as well as a “failure in reality” in the technical sense.⁶⁸ The sanction that the market holds ready, however, consists neither of one nor the other form but stands rather between material constraints that “derive from the character of the material world and from the physical qualities of the body” and negative sanctions that are derived “from punitive responses on the part of some agents towards others.”⁶⁹ The sanction of the market is situated in social-structural compulsions. Since the “movement of the market,” Ottomeyer maintains, “obey *neither ‘technical rules’ nor norms* arising from a dialectic of recognition—unless one wishes to trace back the law of value, which [...] imposes itself without regard for the intention [!] of all participants, to some sort of agreement between the subjects affected.”⁷⁰

Instead of understanding the reproduction of social groups mediated by the social relation between things in exchange and the reproduction of autonomous economic forms and functions mediated in a class-specific way as a necessary interrelationship, Habermas divides them: whereas in the interactionist part of his theory, anonymous compulsions are reduced to personal ones, in the technicist, later systems-theoretical part, domination is dissolved in terms of differentiation theory into inevitable practical constraints. Typical for this is also the statement of the aim of rationalization in “systems of purposive-rational action” as “growth of productive forces; extension of power of technical control.”⁷¹ Here, the economy also appears as an activity for increasing technical efficiency, not one for maximizing profit.

That Habermas misses the point of the concept—connected to the categories of abstract labor and value—of economic-anonymous compulsions can also be seen finally in his engagement with Peter Winch’s conceptualization of the social in terms of language-game theory. For Winch, “social relations between men and the ideas which men’s actions embody are really the same things considered from different points of view,”⁷² social relations between people “exist only through those ideas and similarly those ideas exist only in their relations to

each other.”⁷³ Money, property, or economic transactions are also such ideas.⁷⁴ Habermas had already criticized this idealism among other things⁷⁵ in 1967. Thus, he reasons: “the objectivity of a process of tradition that takes place in the medium of symbolic meaning is not objective enough.” The “metainstitution of language as tradition is dependent in turn on social processes that cannot be reduced to normative relationships.”⁷⁶ However, Habermas grasps “the nonnormative forces that enter into language as a metainstitution” merely as *direct* “force” on one hand, which is assigned to “systems of domination,”⁷⁷ and as a “constraint of external nature” on the other hand, which asserts itself in “systems of labor.”⁷⁸ Again, the *specific-economic* compulsion falls through the cracks of this anthropologizing interpretive grid.

Now, the objection could be raised that at least in some passages, Habermas addresses the anonymous character of economic rule. In fact, one reads in *Legitimation Crisis* that “the class relationship” according to Marx “can assume the anonymous, unpolitical form of wage dependency.”⁷⁹ Or, in *The Theory of Communicative Action*, he mentions that Marx writes of “an objectified and anonymous process of exploitation.”⁸⁰ But here, Habermas also remains within the personalizing paradigm of traditional Marxism. *This* anonymity is namely nothing other than the *objective concealment* of class relations and exploitation—Habermas is concerned solely with “the power, sanctioned in civil law” of “the owners of the means of production”⁸¹ behind the “objective shell.” This power also exists, but anonymous rule refers precisely to the autonomization of structural aspects of objectively mediated activity with regard to *all* actors—the domination of value *as such* and of capital, *not* merely the concealed domination of the capitalists.⁸² Furthermore, Habermas uses this reference to Marx merely to *distance* himself from Marx’s position: he mentions this coupling of—not understood—objectivity and domination merely in order to deny it and to emphasize the “*intrinsic evolutionary value*”⁸³ of autonomous subsystems; that is, to say, in order to praise the supposed beneficial achievements for all of the state and capital.

Norm-Free Regulation by Means of the Medium of Money

In his later work, the technicist vocabulary with which Habermas characterizes the “sphere of labor” is varied in a sense according to systems theory. Here, we must mention above all else the concept of money as a symbolically generalized medium of communication, with which Habermas seeks to describe the dimension of modern societies which cannot be grasped in an

interactional manner. But the concept of medium is no substitute for the critique of political economy's concepts of money and capital as social forms, since it ignores the aspect of social domination, conceals the potential for crisis intrinsic to them, and simply cannot answer the question concerning the possibility of a systematic, self-reproducing exchange economy, which the means is inverted into an end, beyond the utility calculations of all social actors.⁸⁴ Habermas speaks in the *Theory of Communicative Action* of "norm-free sociality"⁸⁵ and characterizes market mechanisms as "the nonnormative steering of individual decisions not subjectively coordinated":⁸⁶ whereas in the lifeworld or the institutional framework, a process of norm-regulated social constitution through reciprocal coordination of the orientations for action of those participating⁸⁷ occurs, in the subsystems, social constitution is converted into a non-linguistic steering medium, whereby the social nexus is constituted by "functionally intermeshing action consequences."⁸⁸ However, these determinations are not substantively connected with the autonomization of the logic of capital, anonymous compulsions, and the reproduction of class relations. On the contrary, Habermas regards the performances rendered by the subsystem of the economy as the fulfillment of "conditions for maintenance of sociocultural lifeworlds."⁸⁹ He agrees with the neoclassical view of Parsons, who relates the function of the economic system to "the productive performances of the economy."⁹⁰ Or to express it more clearly, he assists in knitting together the ideology that the economy actually exists to serve people, even in capitalism. While Habermas does point out differences between language and money,⁹¹ he nonetheless conceptualizes money uncritically in the neoclassical mold as a symbol of utility: it is used *first of all* as a mere medium of exchange and *secondly* of goods (!), whereby it ultimately *third of all* is supposed to "embody measurable amounts of value to which all participants can relate as something objective."⁹² The "generalized value" of money is supposed to lie in its "utility" and stands in a connection—not further explicated—with "use value," which Habermas refers to as "real value."⁹³ Heiner Ganßmann rightfully points out the lack of clarity of Habermas's concept of utility and the even more unclear idea of a measure of utility that Habermas presupposes. Habermas does not provide the slightest clue as to how he imagines the measure of utility and what it means that money "symbolizes amounts of value,"⁹⁴ measures and preserves value. If "it is not possible to quantify power,"⁹⁵ then one wonders why this should be the case with utility. Habermas has nothing more to offer here than discreet neoclassical orthodoxy: he merely asserts with a questionable argument from authority that "economics had

already analyzed money.”⁹⁶ Habermas also reproduces the neoclassical idealization of exchange as a symmetric occurrence of optimal, reciprocal utility maximization, since he asserts “the exchange relation does not in its very definition disadvantage anyone involved in his calculation of utility, and whereas the process of exchange may well be, as we say [!], in the interest of both parties.”⁹⁷

The fact that money literally externalizes the participation in social wealth for social actors—it marks a mediation that presupposes a sharp separation from the object of need, private property, and the exclusion from wealth⁹⁸—is ignored in this context, as is the possibility of crisis which is already given with the existence of money,⁹⁹ as well as the inversion of means and end in the economy, which has emancipated itself from all human determination of aims, subordinating the latter. The only thing left by Habermas is a washed out indication that money is “*capable of being invested*.”¹⁰⁰ Otherwise, Habermas does not want to “discuss in any detail the *system-building effect* that the money medium can have under certain evolutionary conditions”;¹⁰¹ for that, he would also need a concept of capital and class, which he does not provide. On the contrary, he relies unilaterally upon the reduction of the expenditure of interpretive energy and the decrease of the risk of dissent which money supposedly brings about,¹⁰² with which he brings it into the proximity of being a mere technical means of utility maximization, the imperatives of which must not be allowed to reach into the areas of the lifeworld, in order to be regarded as tolerable. Such infringements or colonization effects, as Habermas characteristically names them, are however for him purely external¹⁰³ (hence the colonization metaphor) and “*coincidental acts of autonomization*,”¹⁰⁴ which are not intrinsically connected with the medium of money.¹⁰⁵ In a later essay, however, Habermas argues that “the switch to media-steered interactions results in an objective inversion of setting goals and choosing means” for actors, since “the medium itself now transmits the system-maintenance imperatives of the system in question,” and such interactions are therefore “no longer embody an instrumental reason located in the purposive rationality of decision makers, but rather a functionalist reason inherent in self-regulating systems.”¹⁰⁶ However, this insight remains abstract. It is not substantiated by Habermas, neither in terms of economic theory nor political theory, or does it become at all clear what the content of the term conservation (*Bestandserhaltung*) means, or what is supposed to be rational about functionalist reason, if here a decoupling of all manner of the rationality of actors occurs.¹⁰⁷ Altogether, we must agree with

Ganßmann when, with regard to Habermas's concept of money, he notes that Habermas "proceeds through astoundingly well-chiseled conceptual models in order to arrive at the conclusion that money is complicated but ultimately harmless institution."

"Labor" as a Model for Praxis?

Moishe Postone correctly notes that Habermas's "critique of Marx's conception of synthesis through labor is based upon an understanding of labor as concrete labor per se."¹⁰⁸ However, Marx does not reduce praxis to "labor," but rather "he analyzes how what might be two dimensions of social life in other societies are conflated in capitalism, inasmuch as both are mediated by labor."¹⁰⁹ That is to say, for Marx, concrete labor always has a social character. He emphasizes that human beings only produce "by cooperating in a certain way and mutually exchanging their activities [...] only within these social connections and relations does their relation with nature, does production, take place."¹¹⁰ However, and this is Postone's point, concrete labor in pre-capitalist relations is essentially mediated in a normative manner, whereas under capitalist relations they are primarily mediated by abstract labor. So why does Habermas ignore this additional social dimension of labor as abstract labor? A considerable source of the assumption that Marx favors a largely monological concept of labor is undoubtedly the selective reference to different levels of presentation in *Capital*: Habermas's interpretation rips statements by Marx—among others from Chapter 7—out of context and declares them to be Marx's social-theoretical foundation as such. What is not taken into consideration is that Marx here consciously constructs the abstraction of "the" worker and considers his or her activity in its "simple and abstract elements"¹¹¹ in order to demonstrate that we are dealing with determinations that are peculiar to all human labor processes and that are distinct from the social form that the labor process assumes in capitalism—namely that of being a process of valorizing value. For that reason, Marx can say that it is "not necessary to present the worker in his relationship with other workers; it was enough to present man and his labor on one side, nature and its materials on the other."¹¹² To conclude from a conscious methodological abstraction that here certain manifestations of the labor process are absolutely reduced to an isolated artisanal-artistic form of activity, simply means ignoring the levels of abstraction of Marx's argumentation. Dieter Wolf points out the specific character of the level of presentation of the simple labor process, which on one hand consummates an abstraction from all social aspects that

effect the genesis and reproduction of human-specific competencies (thought, language, etc.), but which on the other hand cannot contain abstractions from the results of these social processes without succumbing to “the instinctive operations of certain animals”: an abstraction is made from the sociality of labor, without which thinking and speaking cannot be explained. Nonetheless, after this has occurred, the remaining side of social labor is considered, “without falling back into ‘animalistic, instinctive proto-forms of labor.’”¹¹³

Now, if Habermas refers to “cooperation” as a “form of social labor,” with which the abstraction of the simple labor process is “always” connected qua interaction,¹¹⁴ then according to Wolf he does not leave the labor process, but proceeds to the labor process that, under the influence of the capital relation, has “acquired the form of cooperation based upon simple division of labor within a workplace.”¹¹⁵ With cooperation, one has not grasped the entirety of the sociality of labor, since here the form of *social* division of labor is ignored in favor of the *division of labor within a workplace*. And it is precisely the social division of labor that concerns Marx with regard to the synthesizing function of labor as the substance of value and a purely social relation. We have already seen that Habermas wishes to make this market-based social division of labor dependent upon the “institutional framework,” understood in purely juridical terms as a “property order,”¹¹⁶ whereas cooperation in the capital-determined labor process is supposedly generated by a consciously calculating instrumental rationality. Value and social synthesis qua abstract labor also remains unaddressed here.

Naturalistic Conception of Wealth and Empiricist Conception of Labor

It can be said in summary that Habermas’s concept of wealth in his early writings stands in the tradition of a Ricardian interpretation of Marx (Robinson, Sweezy, Dobb, Baran, et al.)¹¹⁷ that had characterized the 50s and 60s. This reduces—based upon a few misunderstood passages in *Capital* in which naturalistic-sounding characterizations of the source of value as “a productive expenditure of human brains, muscles, nerves, hands etc”¹¹⁸ can in fact be found—the so-called substance of value to a physiological or at least an empirical magnitude: Marx supposedly attempts in his determination of the substance of value “to be realistic,” to discover “something observable and important”¹¹⁹ or “a physiological process [...] a level with a basis in nature.”¹²⁰ This naturalistic and primarily quantitatively oriented interpretation of Marx’s categories *first of all* ignores the qualitative aspect of the question concerning value and the substance of value and

with regard to the determinants of value refers back merely to the quantitative dimension of social average labor time; *second*, it disregards the intrinsic connection between value and value-form as well as money; and *third*, it behaves with complete indifference toward the structure of dialectical presentation of economic categories.

Thus, already in 1960, Habermas assumes a conception of value as “a datum of natural history”¹²¹ and writes of “physical exploitation.”¹²² This naturalistically constricted point of view is also the basis of his interpretation of statements by Marx in the *Grundrisse* as a thesis on machinery being productive of value: Marx, according to Habermas, had understood the transition to automated production in the *Grundrisse* “in such a way that the production of value would be transferred from directly productive labor to science and technology.”¹²³ In fact, however, Marx speaks here of “the creation of real wealth,” in the sense of use-values, which become less dependent “on labour time and on the amount of labour employed than on the power of the agencies set in motion during labour time,” whereas the capitalist form of wealth remains, as it was before, dependent upon the “amount of labour employed” within the framework of the class relation.¹²⁴ Within this interpretation of Marx, Habermas is already working with a concept of wealth that confounds the production of use-value and the production of value. It is otherwise hard to explain how he understands Marx’s theses from the *Grundrisse* to be a “revisionist notion.”¹²⁵ On the other hand, it is consistent, since it is not clear why one would attribute value-productivity to a “psycho-physical magnitude” called labor and not to another psycho-physical magnitude called technology.¹²⁶ The logical presentation architecture of *Capital* is just as disregarded by Habermas as the systematic interrelation between value and money. Later, he would switch to adopting the subjective theory of value of neoclassical economics, which is also naturalistic.¹²⁷

Alongside this early piece of evidence that Habermas “does not grasp Marx’s distinction between value and material wealth”¹²⁸ and misses the genuinely social content of the concept of abstract labor, further evidence can be found from later works. He constantly raises the accusation against Marx that “the theory of value is carried through in action-theoretic concepts that make it necessary to approach the genesis of reification *below* the level of interaction”¹²⁹ and that “action can be understood only as productive-objectifying activity.”¹³⁰ But since, according to Habermas, “Production constitutes only an object or a content for normative rules,”¹³¹ he is unable to grasp its social dimension. How unspecific Habermas’s handling of Marx’s categories

is, also demonstrated by his assertion in “The New Obscurity” that “The classic authors of social theory from Marx through Max Weber were in agreement that the structure of bourgeoisie society received its form from abstract labor.”¹³² However, the notion that Weber formulated a concept of abstract labor that is even close to that of Marx can only be sensibly asserted if, like Habermas, one understands abstract labor to be a special form of concrete labor. In general, Habermas’s use of Marx’s concepts in his later writings gives an impression of extreme arbitrariness. What, for example, is “abstract labor power”¹³³ supposed to be? Does he mean de-skilled labor power, as Marx still suggests in the introduction to the *Grundrisse*? But this is also not abstract and never labor sans phrase in the value-theoretical sense.¹³⁴ Also his thesis that exchange value is the form of appearance of use value¹³⁵ makes no sense within the framework of Marx’s theory and Habermas does not offer an alternative. Finally, the notion that “monetarized labor power” is referred to by Marx as “abstract labor”¹³⁶ is simply false. The mere fact that labor-power and labor are amalgamated here provides evidence for the increasing tendency toward a language-game without rules in which Habermas ensnares himself when appropriating Marx’s work.

Also remaining trapped in a purely empirical concept of labor is Habermas’s diagnosis of a “devaluation of the relevance of labour within the life-world.”¹³⁷ “The production paradigm,” according to Habermas, “gives the concept of practice such a clear empirical meaning that the question arises of whether it loses its plausibility with the historically foreseeable end of a society based upon labor.”¹³⁸ This is also the place of the sociological critique of the production paradigm that Habermas hints at with references to a talk by Claus Offe from the year 1982. His observations on the structural transformation of labor society definitely calls primitive versions of labor movement Marxism into question, but Offe can only believe that the erosion of the homogeneous milieu of the industrial worker or the dissolution of continuous biographical trajectories of labor, the rise of new social lines of conflict beyond the wage relation, and the extension of state activity to secure the general conditions of production affects the level of Marx’s analysis of capital because he reduces the concept of labor of the production paradigm to a particular sort of concrete labor and a specific pattern of the organization of the labor process, namely a specific manifestation of proletarian factory labor that characterized the living conditions under capitalism of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. The “experiences and conflicts engendered by labour”¹³⁹ are what is meant when Offe advances the thesis that “the

sphere of production and work is losing its capacity to determine the structure and development of the larger society”¹⁴⁰ and that one can note a “differentiation within the concept of work.”¹⁴¹ He reduces Marx’s concept of labor to the sphere of the immediate factory labor process and the dominant forms of “technical-organizational productivity”¹⁴² found there, in order to present the increase of functionally indispensable, primarily state “service work” as a demolition of Marx’s spectrum of concepts. There arises on the basis of “economic-strategic criteria of rationality”¹⁴³ a non-normalizable, norm-derived praxis “partially freed from the immediate discipline of an acquisitive social rationality, and from its corresponding achievement and productivity restraints”¹⁴⁴ which is additionally a source of post-materialist value orientations and an “indispensable foreign body”¹⁴⁵ in the system of capitalist reproduction.

Offe conceives of the form of the *social* division of labor—according to Marx “objective equalisation of unequal quantities of labour forcibly brought about by the social process”¹⁴⁶—as the “the subjective equality of the labours of individuals”¹⁴⁷ or as *concrete labor* consciously *measured temporally* according to the criterion of “efficient production”¹⁴⁸ within the *workplace*.¹⁴⁹ For that reason, the fact that “the quantitative volume” of state service, surveillance, and reproductive activity “cannot easily be determined,”¹⁵⁰ is what makes it a “foreign body,” and upon which at least Habermas obviously hangs his hopes for emancipation.

Summary

On the basis of the few pages at my disposal here, it is impossible in an even remotely adequate way to demonstrate that production and labor, in contrast to Habermas’s interpretation, are *two-dimensional* categories in Marx’s work, which very much constitute a form of social unity in capitalism, along with the content of normative rules.¹⁵¹ Thus, a few observations will have to suffice.

According to Marx, in all modes of production with a division of labor, labor has the role of satisfying social needs. But only under the conditions of a division of labor with *private* character, which implies systematic relations of exchange, do they obtain the additional social function of constituting a social nexus. Private acts of labor “can only satisfy the manifold needs of the individual producer himself only in so far as every particular kind of useful private labour can be exchanged with, i.e., counts as the equal of, every other kind of useful private labour.”¹⁵² The labor of producers acquires a double character: “On the one hand, it is a specific sort of

labor that produces particular goods for others”—which characterizes the specific social character of concrete labor—“yet, on the other hand, labor, independent of its specific content, serves the producer as the means by which the products of others are acquired.”¹⁵³ It cannot fulfill this function in its concrete manifestation, but only in its property of being labor *sans phrase*: as *abstract labor*. Accordingly, in capitalism we are dealing with the state of affairs of the social constitution of (concrete) labor through (abstract) labor. In all previous modes of production, in contrast, labor and products are “qualitatively particular”¹⁵⁴ and as such, in their natural form, are socially recognized on the basis of specific types of interaction.¹⁵⁵ Accordingly, material wealth as a result of concrete labor does not constitute a social nexus according to Marx. However, it is the “social nexus within which people mutually *recognize* their acts of labor as *socially* expended,”¹⁵⁶ and in pre-capitalist modes of production, this social nexus precedes such acts of labor—in the Habermasian sense of an “institutional framework of compulsory norms.”

The difference between concrete and abstract labor exists in all societies, in the mind of the theoretical observer, as a property of all concrete labor of being human labor as such.¹⁵⁷ But first in generalized relations of production of a private division of labor does abstract labor also acquire the function of being the social-general form of concrete labor *and thus also the substance of value*. According to Marx it is

something which is only valid for this particular form of production, the production of commodities, namely the fact that the *specific social character* of private labours carried on independently of each other consists in their equality as human labour, and, in the product, assumes the form of the existence of value.¹⁵⁸

Thus, an independence is bestowed upon abstract labor which otherwise “only the social nexus distinct from it has,”¹⁵⁹ and concrete and abstract labor are ultimately as distinct as two separate entities.¹⁶⁰

Here, I have only been able to indicate that Habermas systematically misses Marx’s concept of the double character of labor and lacks categorical access to the value-theoretical level of Marx’s work. The reified or alienated form of the recognition of concrete labor under conditions of production characterized by a private division of labor, which occurs by means of abstract labor, falls between the cracks of symbolic interactionism, Ricardian naturalism, and later the system-theoretical neo-classical theoretical apparatus. But for Marx, abstract labor and value are not products of concrete labor in the engagement of human beings with nature; rather, they stand for the social unity of acts of labor (and products) under the condition and with the

consequence of their systematic dissociation as private acts of labor (and products).¹⁶¹

Commodities only have value-objectivity within this specific social relation between things. It is a relational property, since for Marx no good is a commodity on its own, “none has *such value-objectivity* on its own [...] they only possess this social objectivity [...] as a social relationship.”¹⁶² Value is the relation of products of labor as products of human labor as such in the act of exchange—a historically determinate form of the mediation of labor, which first in capitalism becomes the general form of social metabolism (*Stoffwechsel*). Value is objectively mediated, is represented in things, and misrecognized as a natural property of things while being a social relation between private acts of labor. In its objective form of representation (money), it already implies the structurally violent separation of human beings from the objects of their needs, as well as the possibility of crisis, and becomes autonomous as the aim of material reproduction in the form of capital. This objective-anonymous form of social constitution, which escapes the control of human beings, is not encompassed by normative relations or technical-utilitarian relations to objects. Marx interprets economic objectivity as a historically specific relation, without following the reification of economic theory or the differentiation-theoretical neutralizations of systems theory—“economy” is understood by Marx *as a society constituted by domination*. But Marx does not succumb to a symbolic interactionism that grasps social forms merely as complexes of norms. Economic forms, according to Ulrich Krause, constitute “neither a relationship between things and subjects (such as in subjective value theory), nor between subjects (such as in theories of power or action).”¹⁶³ Marx grasps that modern relations of production are not merely objectively veiled interpersonal relations or traceable back to the domination of norms.

“The *social relationships* of their labours,” according to Marx’s long-ignored insight, “*are and appear* consequently not as immediately social relationships of persons in their labours, but as *objectified relationships* of persons, or *social relationships of objects*.”¹⁶⁴ Capital generates a form of anonymous rule whose characteristic is not the subordination of the will of one person under that of another. This type of domination is not primarily one of “actors being compelled,” but rather one of a “compelled existence,”¹⁶⁵ without this compulsion being one of first nature. According to Marx, capitalism is a social formation that conditions a subordination of the wills and goals of *all* social actors to the imperative of accumulation, that demands

“production for production’s sake”; it lets “the capitalist from another side appear just as much under the bondage of capital [...] as the laborer.”¹⁶⁶

It is, therefore, a regression behind Marx’s insights into the nature of capitalism when Habermas reduces economic domination to the normative assignment of roles and conceives of autonomized forms of wealth such as money and capital as neutral forms of social unity.

Translated by Alex Locascio

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LdS: Habermas, Jürgen. 1988. *On the Logic of the Social Sciences*. Cambridge: MIT Press.

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Notes

1. DM, 79.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid., 80.
4. Ibid., 81.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid., 80.
7. Ibid., 81.
8. On the methodological break that occurs in 1857, see Heinrich (2004). On the development of the concept of labor since the *Grundrisse*: Wolf (2008).
9. EI, 28.
10. Ibid., 28f.
11. Ibid., 34.
12. Ibid., 29.
13. Ibid., 35.
14. Ibid., 36.
15. Ibid., 34f.
16. In the Penguin edition translated by Ben Fowkes: "When man engages in production, he can only proceed as nature does herself, i.e., he can only change the form of the materials." 133. The emphasis is added by Habermas without comment.
17. Marx (1976: 134).
18. EI, 35.
19. Ibid., 33.
20. Ibid., p. 54.
21. Ibid., 39.
22. Ibid., 44.
23. Ibid., 43.
24. Ibid., 44.
25. Ibid., 46.
26. Ibid., 45.
27. Marx (1976: 92).
28. Schmidt (1971: 41f and 191f).

29. “Their [the producers] own movement in society has for them the form of a movement made by things, and these things, far from being under their control, in fact control them.” (*Capital*, Volume I, 168) This movement, which Marx refers to as “a regulative law of nature” that “asserts itself” (*ibid.*), does not however originate with the things, but rather from the relation of the things to each other by human beings under specific historical conditions. That is why it is a case of second nature.

30. See Heinrich (1999: 82, 310).

31. Marx (1976: 138).

32. Marx also opposes turning his theory of history into a deterministic philosophy of history see MECW 5, 37, 90f. and MECW 24, 201. An important element of such a philosophy of history is the idea of the development of the forces of production as the universal-historical self-timer and motor of progress—this concept is in fact found primarily in Marx’s early writings, but such relics can also be found in *Capital* (Volume I, 285f). However, here, one can criticize Marx using Marx, who in his theory of real subsumption reverses the relationship of determination between forces of production and relations of production, which thus gets rid of the idea of a universal logic of development. Habermas however, generalizing, thinks that the historically mutable form of knowledge and objects as well as that of individuals and social relationships are, according to Marx, dependent upon “the development of the productive forces” (EI, 36): “It is the development of the forces of production that provides the impetus to abolishing and surpassing a form of life that has been rigidified in positivity and become an abstraction.” (EI, 43) Habermas later rightly criticized this idea of the primacy of the forces of production (RHM, 292), not sufficiently, however, since he only denies the determinative force of the forces of production with regard to the relations of production, but not an “indigenous growth of the productive forces” (*ibid.*). How a “spontaneous growth in technical knowledge and for the development of the productive forces” (*ibid.*) is possible remains unclear.

33. EI, 51.

34. *Ibid.*, 42.

35. *Ibid.*, 55.

36. *Ibid.*, 42.

37. *Ibid.*, 57.

38. “The punitive causality of fate is executed upon the rulers as class struggle coming to a head in revolutions. Revolutionary violence reconciles the disunited parties by abolishing the alienation of class antagonism that set in with the repression of initial morality [...] the positivity of rigidified political life mirrors the disruption of a moral totality; and the revolution that must occur is the reaction of suppressed life, which will visit the causality of fate upon the rulers.” (EI, 57) Only then is the “freedom from constraint contained in dialogic self-recognition-in-the-other” brought about. (EI, 59) But this freedom from domination can only be spelled out as a communicative state of affairs, not in terms of production, the increase of technical power of disposition and functional differentiation.

39. EI, 52.

40. *Ibid.*, 42.

41. *Ibid.*, 55.

42. *Ibid.*, 52.

43. Ibid.

44. Ibid., 59.

45. Ibid., 42.

46. Adorno, in Adorno et al. (1976: 80).

47. EI, 59.

48. Ibid.

49. DM, 66.

50. TkH II, 339.

51. Schmidt (1972: 52).

52. Schmidt (1971: 140).

53. TkH II, 339.

54. The neglect of class-specific problems of the welfare state, which becomes noticeable in Habermas's work primarily in the 1980s, is a chapter of its own. The notion that the independent dynamic of accumulation and the bureaucratic exercise of power are "reconciled" (TkH II, 361), that "the role of employee loses its debilitating proletarian features," (TkH II, 349) that "capitalism" (Dews, 116) "went well" (Dews, 112) as long as it concentrated on "material reproduction" (Dews, 116) can be doubted for very good reason. Habermas's conclusion was: "I find it more elegant [!] and plausible to give capitalism credit for being what it is" (Dews, 116). Meyer (2005: 225) notes that Habermas's "essential basic theoretical decisions" are oriented toward "the dynamic of Fordism anticipated as a normal state of affairs." This Fordism is then only attacked in terms of a critique of bureaucracy.

55. See Joas (1992: 203).

56. Ibid.

57. EI, 57.

58. Ibid..

59. Ibid., 53.

60. DM, 80.

61. For Marx, modern law is the necessary implication of the commodity relation. Umberto Cerroni (1974: 91) refers to it as the "form of the interrelationship between the wills of isolated individuals, which are socially related to each other through the real mediation of things." When Marx (1976: 178) writes that the content of law determines the legal form, or that the latter expresses or reflects the former, then only to the effect that this content, the economic relation, itself exhibits a specific form: value as the form of social constitution of private-dissociated products, which must be reproduced in the relation between the wills of social actors. That in no way means that a particular class interest directly assumes the form of law.

62. See Heinrich (2008: 119): "The validation we are concerned with here is neither something agreed upon by those engaged in exchange, nor something imposed by a state. Rather, it is a structurally given relation of an economy based upon exchange."

63. Ottomeyer (1976: 31).

64. “Thus to define bourgeois property is nothing else than to give an exposition of all the social relations of bourgeois production.” (MECW 6, 197).

65. EI, 52.

66. Wolf (2012: 44).

67. Neuendorff (1973: 107n) points out this instance of missing the point of Marx’s object when he notes that “the decisive difference” between norms and prices consists in the fact “that the social relation of individuals in their productive activity on the market appears as a relation of things, one mediated by the value-relations between commodities appearing as prices. Such an inversion of social relations into a relation of things never occurs in the behaviour of partners in interactions regulated by norms.”

68. TWI, 93.

69. Giddens (1984: 176).

70. Ottomeyer (1976: 30). For that reason, according to Ottomeyer, concepts such as “character mask” and “role” must also be distinguished from each other: “The form determination of the encounter between concrete-sensory persons which results from the independent dynamic of economic relations confronts these persons as a *character mask*.” In contrast to a role, the requirements referred to with the character mask should be identified “not as the expectations of persons,” but as structural compulsions (83). Hartmut Rosa also emphasizes the difference between anonymous compulsions of the market and rule regulated by norms qua negative sanctions. Whereas norm-regulated mechanisms of rule of political ‘totalitarianisms’ “can constantly be contested and fought against as well as ignored or transgressed” (Rosa, 2012: 286), that is not true to the same extent for the anonymous compulsions of the market. They operate with the power of natural laws, appear to be pure practical constraints, and allow failure in the competitive struggle to appear as individual inadequacy. (286) Márkus (1980: 46) asserts that in capitalism, the “fundamental maxims of economic behaviour” appear “as universal and value-neutral principles of reason.” The violation of these principles allows the behaviour of the actor “as a result of causal interrelations (and not on the basis of direct social sanctions) to appear just as unsuccessful [...] as if it had violated the technical rules for the use of a particular tool.” This as-if character is lost in Habermas’s work.

71. TWI, 93.

72. Winch (1958: 121).

73. Ibid., 118.

74. Ibid.

75. The passage in question is also directed against Gadamer’s hermeneutics.

76. LdS, 172.

77. Ibid., 173.

78. Ibid., 174.

79. LS, 26.

80. TkH II, 334.

81. LS, 26.

82. “Anonymous” in Habermas’s use of terminology is simply an anonymization of relations of domination that are actually personally ascribable—just like when one makes an author anonymous who still actually exists. Against the concept of anonymous rule that I use, the objection is sometimes raised that “domination” or “rule” (German: *Herrschaft*) necessarily implies the domination of one will over another, i.e., a (human) ruler. If one reduces the concept of domination in such a manner, which initially appears to be purely a question of terminology, then the concept of anonymous rule must stand metaphorically for anonymous or structural social compulsions, which Marx also described with the concept of alienation.

83. TkH II, 339.

84. For a critique of the trivialization of money as a medium of communication, see: Ganßmann (1996: 130–146), Creydt (2000: 149–151), Pahl (2001). In the *Grundrisse*, one finds the following statement that deals with the inappropriate metaphor likening the ideas expressed in language to the value expressed in money: “To compare money with language is [...] erroneous. Language does not transform ideas, so that the peculiarity of ideas is dissolved and their social character runs alongside them as a separate entity, like prices along commodities.” (Marx, 1973: 163).

85. TkH II, 171.

86. Ibid., 150.

87. This obscure assertion is accurately rejected by Uwe Steinhoff (2006: 392ff).

88. TkH II, 150.

89. Ibid., 152.

90. Ibid., 242.

91. Ibid., 265.

92. Ibid.

93. Ibid., 264f.

94. Ibid., 265.

95. Ibid., 269.

96. Ibid., 258.

97. Ibid., 271.

98. MECW 5, 77–80 and Marx (1973: 108, 156f, 161ff, 221f, 247ff).

99. See Marx (1976: 209), as well as Heinrich (1999: 251): “The relationship to money, through which a coherent social interrelation is at all constituted, simultaneously implies the danger of the destruction of this coherence [...] in that classical and neoclassical economics reduce money to the role of a mere technical mediator [...] they abstract from the possibility of crisis.”

100. TkH II, 265.

101. Ibid., 266.

102. Ibid., 261f.

103. Moreover, Habermas's term colonization ignores system-immanent frictions so much that his theory simply "misses" "economic crises and a high level of permanent unemployment," which have increasingly characterized the era since the 1980s. (Joas and Knöbl, 2006: 346).

104. Meyer (2005: 230).

105. This goes so far that Habermas even suggests the utopia of a decoupling of a market economy and the relation of wage labor (Dews 182f.). However, this remains without theoretical consequences and as far as I know, a single occurrence.

106. Habermas (1998: 234f).

107. Meyer (2005: 235) criticizes this as an attempt of grasping autonomized dynamics by means of "an objectivist use of the metaphor of reason."

108. Postone (1993: 230).

109. Ibid., 231.

110. MECW 9, 211.

111. Marx (1976: 290).

112. Ibid.

113. Wolf (2012: 25).

114. EI, 326, fn.14.

115. Wolf (2012: 36).

116. EI, 328.

117. See Dews, 148.

118. See Marx (1976: 134. Also 137).

119. Popper, 165.

120. Haug (1989: 113).

121. TP, 227.

122. Ibid.

123. Ibid., 229.

124. Marx (1973: 704).

125. TP, 227.

126. Against the thesis that technical and labor-organizing structures are value-productive such as, Seidl (1996: 22ff) demonstrates that here, the material productivity of capital is being confounded with the value-productivity of labor. In fact, the following statement by Marx is true: "their [the workers] co-operation only begins with the labour process, but by then they have ceased to belong to themselves [...] as co-operator, as members of a working organism, they merely form a particular mode of existence of capital. Hence the productive power developed by the worker socially is the productive power of capital." (Marx, 1976: 451) The synergy effect of combined production does not become a productive "organism" by means of the self-socializing of the labourer, but rather is set into motion by capital. Material productivity, which is thus raised—the creation of more use-values during the same period of labour-time—however does not affect "*exchange-value* directly. Whether 100 together or each single one

of the 100 works alone, the *value* of their product = 100 working days, whether it is expressed in many or a few products, i.e., indifferent to the productivity of labour.” (MEGA II/3.6, 2166f.). The value product—determined just as before by the average labour-time of the individual workers—is in the case of cooperation merely distributed among a greater number of products, but does not itself grow, as long as the labour-time is not extended or the intensity of labour increased. Thus, cooperation determined by capital increases material productivity, without creating more value. The increase in productivity through organizational or technical innovation does not at all affect the quantitative limits of *value* creation—the number of workers, labour time, the intensity of labour; rather it bypasses these limits through the process of relative *surplus*-value production. The distribution of labour-time in necessary and surplus labour makes possible, in connection with the increase in productivity that has effects upon the means of consumption of workers, a quantitative extension of valorization without increasing the value product. Thus, it is the use-value producing character of capital that creates the illusion of its value-productivity.

127. See Heinrich (1999: Chapter 2).

128. Postone (1993: 233).

129. TkH II, 504.

130. Ibid. quoting G. Lohmann.

131. DM, 81.

132. NU, 4.

133. TkH II, 313.

134. On this, see Wolf (2008).

135. TkH I, 357.

136. TkH II, 335.

137. Habermas (1982: 225).

138. DM, 79.

139. Offe (1985: 133).

140. Ibid., 134.

141. Ibid., 138.

142. Ibid., 137.

143. Ibid., 138.

144. Ibid., 139.

145. Ibid.

146. MECW 29. 299.

147. Ibid.

148. Offe (1985: 139).

149. Parallel to this subjectification of Marx’s categories, the concept of class is reduced to the empirical concept of social class, to “experiences and conflicts engendered by labour” (Offe, 1985: 133). Offe sees it as an argument against class theory that “socio-economic status variables are less adequate predictors of voting behavior” (ibid.). According to Sven Ellmers (2007), such clusters of empirical “individual variables” cannot catch Marx’s form-

analytical concept of class, since this is an element of an analysis of the constitution of forms of wealth specific to a social formation (47). It serves to explain those social relations that characterize the essence of capitalism. In contrast, the empirical analysis of social structures only grasps asymmetrical wealth distribution on the basis of the *presupposed* foundations of value-, money-, and capital-form. Furthermore, the concept of the empirical concept of class is elastic, since neither the dimension of inequality that must be taken into consideration in the constitution of class, nor its quantitative aspect as a limited value of the vertical distinction between classes is clearly established by empirical relations. In contrast, the form-analytical concept of class is “prescribed *without alternative* by the theoretical structure, since a further-reaching diversification of social classes would lead to a confounding of the core structure of capitalism and a certain developmental phase of capitalism.” (54) The sociological empiricism of Offe/Habermas has no sensorium for this difference.

150. Offe, 138.

151. Habermas and his school have ignored this critique, which has been known for decades. Whoever does not wish to do the same is referred to the following texts for an adequate concept of abstract labor: Wolf (1985), Heinrich (1999: 206–14), and as a summary: Elbe (2010).

152. Marx (1979: 166).

153. Postone (1993: 149).

154. *Ibid.*, 150.

155. *Ibid.*

156. Wolf (1985: 67).

157. *Ibid.*, 47.

158. Marx (1976: 167).

159. Wolf (1985: 317).

160. *Ibid.*

161. “As use-values or goods, commodities are *physically distinct* things. Their *existence as value*, in contrast, constitutes their *unity*. This unity does not arise from nature, but rather from society.” (MEGA II/5, 19).

162. MEGA II/6, 30. See also MEGA II/7, 55.

163. Krause (1977: 148).

164. As per the first edition of *Capital* Vol. I. German edition MEGA II/5, 47, English version available at: <http://marx.libcom.org/works/1867-c1/commodity.htm>.

165. The distinction between “compelled existence” and “being compelled” is made by Klaus Peters (2007), in order to distinguish the objective conditions of action resulting from structural compulsions from the coercion of one person’s will by another. See also Anthony Giddens’s distinction between structural compulsion and negative sanctions in Giddens (1984).

166. MEGA II/4.1, 65 This does not mean that with that, everything is said about economic domination in capitalism. One must at least distinguish between a) the domination of anonymous structures, and b) the heteronomous dominance within the structure, i.e., objective exchange-mediated relations of inequality between individuals of a class and the character masks, which all serve this structure as “means,” as well as c) the

nonetheless implied direct subordination of the will of the worker to that of the capitalist (the despotism of the factory regime) as well as non-judicial (non-contractual) struggles and conditions.

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