

The Ontology of Alienation: Bodies of Praxis and the New Contradiction of the Social Form of Domination

1. Introduction

Marx's theory of alienation is the ontological theory that lies beneath his critical analysis of capitalist production. This ontological theory opens up spaces for praxis in the contemporary form of the social domination of capital over labour and reproduction because it shows how bodies link and decouple these three relations (capital/labour/reproduction) rendering them a unitary relation. I explain some of the relevant dimensions of the ontology of alienation in the context of this problematic. I explore how private property produces a system of second-order mediations that shatters the relation between "humanity", "nature", and "industry". These second-order mediations constitute an ontological fissure – a complex of alienations predicated the character of relations of domination and servitude, and negates the central category of the humanity/nature/industry relation, i.e., praxis. Alienated labour is at the centre of this complex of alienations. Transformations in the organisation of labour – to the preponderance of what I call emergent forms of labour – indicate a transition in the period of capitalism. There has been an attendant transformation in the character of alienated labour that is constituted by: the instrumentalisation of bodies' potential for praxis; the rendering of bodies themselves as the object of labour processes; and the modes by which these two processes constitute the dimensions of the 'dual-contradiction inherent in the reproduction of labour-power' (Federici). These transformations produce reproduction and the labour process as an alienated unity in which subjects of praxis re-emerge politically within the second-order mediated relation humanity/nature/industry. These transformations therefore produce the labour process and reproduction as fronts of anticapitalist struggle with radically new contours; this alienated unity is the social form of domination but, with it, bodies' potential for praxis directly confronts the logic of value.

2. Marxian Ontology: Labour and Alienation

2.1. Alienation as Ontology

Marx's ontological theory emerges from his method of immanent critique and his subsequent synthesis of Hegel's historical idealism and Feuerbach's passive materialism. Following his investigations, Marx contends that the organisation of society, economy, politics, religion, etc.,

– the entirety of the human experience and humanity itself – is alienated. Furthermore, ideas and ‘knowledge’ about all facets of human experience proceed on the basis of this alienation and are therefore distorted and one-dimensional representations of reality. I focus on alienation as a marker of ontology because it implicates, as a methodological procedure, my ability ‘to isolate, in a given field, the particular field which at the same time determines the horizon of its totality.’¹ This given field is the negation of the capitalist ordering of politics and the particular field is ‘the emancipation of the workers’ because, following Marx, I argue that this is the particular field that determines the horizon of the capitalist totality *beyond* capital and therein fosters a mode of critique of and resistance to capital that is able to bring the destruction of capital into view and the possibility for the supersession of other relations of servitude.²

From these arguments regarding a general alienation, through immanent critique and materialist dialectical abstraction Marx isolates the central mechanism of the alienation of and the alienation from ‘what is’, i.e. the ‘ontos’ (ὄντος).³ The nexus of human experience and the entirety of social, political and economic organisation is alienated because *labour* is alienated by and in class-society. As István Mészáros argues, Marx’s ontology begins to emerge from his critique of the world and of ideas about it as he approaches this critique ‘from the viewpoint of a great synthesising idea: “the alienation of labour” is the root cause of the whole complex of alienations.’⁴ From this idea, with its genesis in immanent critique and its location within a dialectical outlook, Marx produces the possibility for a linking of various points of critique; critique of political economy, critique of ethics, critique of the history of ideas, and critique of politics.

Marx’s critique of the theoretical fields of philosophy, ethics and political economy is fundamental to the development of his ontological theory. He observes that they cannot speak to one another even though they all contain the notion of “human essence/condition/

¹ Slavoj Žižek. *The Sublime Object of Ideology*. (London: Verso, 2008). 97. It is important to point out here that Žižek argues that this formulation leads to an ‘essentialist’ ordering of struggle and that this is a problem. I do not share his concerns but I do share the opposition to the idea that the emancipation of the workers is the end of political struggle.

² Marx *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*. Tr. Martin Milligan. (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1988). 82

³ I deploy the Ancient Greek ‘ὄντος’, the root of the word ‘ontology’ and present participle of the verb ‘to be’, to illustrate the fundamental and essential character of Marx’s argument regarding the alienation of and from the world. This does not refer to a mere formal or institutional separation from social organisation but rather a separation from Nature, in-keeping with the implications of the idea of ‘authentic being’ in the use of the term ὄντος in Ancient Greek philosophy.

⁴ Mészáros *Marx’s Theory of Alienation*. (Delhi: Aakhar, 2006). 16

experience” as their most basic and fundamental underpinning. Marx’s immanent critique of the contradictions within and between each of these fields, in concert with his dialectical investigations, leads him to the three most basic concepts of their shared problematic and thus to the structure of his ontological theory. Mészáros characterises Marx’s ontology at its most basic as a recognition of the centrality of the categories “man”, “nature”, and “industry” in the project to understand, define, and disaggregate this notion of human essence that is so essential to the humanities and social sciences.⁵

The category “man” of course refers to “humanity”, that is, the men, women, and children that make up the *homo* genus of hominids. The term “man” is used most commonly to refer to *homo sapiens*. The precision of this definition may at first sight appear precious. Nonetheless, I make it for two reasons. First, it has been demonstrated that members of other classes of the *homo* genus of hominids engaged in work. Second, texts throughout all disciplines are littered with the use of the term “man” in such a way as to denote the species and not the sex; this proliferation constitutes a series of acts of epistemic violence that contribute to the reproduction of patriarchal and phallogocentric modes of thought and practice.⁶ As Gayatri Spivak states, ‘I construct my definition as a woman not in terms of a woman’s putative essence but in terms of words currently in use. “Man” is such a word in common usage. Not *a* word, but *the* word.’⁷ Any project of liberation must include within it the replacement of this definite article with the indefinite. This violence is so embedded in language that it is difficult to avoid the use of these nouns and pronouns even in English – which is not structured with gendered nouns like other Indo-European languages – without undertaking a series of syntactical and grammatical gymnastics. I will retain the terms “man” and “men”, “his” and “him” when citing other authors and will use alternatives in my own text when I can do so without obscuring meaning.⁸ “Nature” refers to that organic and inorganic material that is, in an important sense, external to “man”. Notwithstanding, as has been noted throughout this chapter, “man” is simultaneously external to nature and part of it. “Industry” refers to the productive activity that people engage in when they interact with nature. Industry is the

⁵ Mészáros *Marx’s Theory of Alienation* 99-101

⁶ See for example Genevieve Lloyd. *The Man of Reason: ‘Male’ and ‘Female’ in Western Philosophy*. (London: Methuen, 1984).

⁷ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. ‘Feminism and Critical Theory’ in Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. *In Other Worlds*. (London: Routledge Classics, 2006). 103. Emphasis in original.

⁸ I am unable to find an acceptable way through the contradiction that pertains from resolving the epistemic violence inflicted by the use of the masculine noun, the violence to cognition that pertains from dropping (sic.) *ad. inf.* into the text, and the violence to meaning that can attend the modification of the gender bias deployed in these texts when the texts themselves remain unmodified.

process of mediation between man and nature; it is the process by which the reciprocal relationality between “man”, “nature”, and “industry” is put into motion.

“Human nature” is something that develops within the reciprocity that pertains in the relation between “man”, “industry”, and “nature”. Therefore the idea of “human essence”, as Mészáros argues, ‘*necessarily implies the ontological fundamental self-mediation of man with nature through his own productive (and self-producing) activity.*’⁹ Human essence is neither given nor static, but develops within the reciprocal mediation between “man”, “nature”, and “activity”. In Marx’s theory of alienation the idea of the transcendence of alienation is not predicated upon a “return to nature” or “return to essence”, as the post-*operaisti* assume. Rather, the theory of alienation proceeds from the identification of the first-order mediations of human existence – “man”, “nature”, and “industry” – and the findings of a critical analysis of capitalist production. These analyses conclude that the first-order mediations have been transformed into a system of second-order mediations, and that these second-order mediations have at their centre the separation of “man” into an antagonistic relation between private property and labour, and thus the entire complex of social organisation is predicated by the alienation of humanity from itself.

Private property and labour are the second-order mediations of the “man” relation: humanity is split into private property and labour. Private property is nature that has been separated from nature; it has been alienated by labour and simultaneously codified within juridical, political, legal, etc., institutions such that it is reified, i.e., it is made into a thing, and it has a bearer – the possessor of private property. Labour is productive activity that has been separated from the producer; it is industry that has been alienated from the human by private property such that it is made into a thing. This process of second-order mediation constitutes the alienation of labour and the framework of second-mediations is the fundament of the political economic organisation of production under capitalism in which alienated labour is put into motion. The world is understood in terms of its second-order mediation; the world is understood by ethics, philosophy, political economy, *et al*, only in terms of its alienated organisation.

To overcome the contradictions produced by the one-dimensional and incompatible standpoints of political economy and ethics Marx takes ‘the critically adopted standpoint of labour in its self-transcending universality’ and it is from this point that his theory of alienation

⁹ Mészáros *Marx’s Theory of Alienation* 108. Emphasis in original.

emerges.¹⁰ Marx's theory of alienation – a development of previous theories of alienation itself – passes through a number of developmental stages. For Marx it begins with his critique of law and of the notion of *veräußerung*, the alienation of property by sale. Building on Hegel's theory of alienation and his critique of labour, Marx isolates the concept of *entäußerung*, the externalisation of self, and through an analysis of the political economy of labour under capitalism poses *entfremdung*, the estrangement or loss of the object and the attendant loss of the self, as a form of the externalisation of self and activity that is particular to production under private property. In this conceptual movement Marx thereby illustrates a pernicious aspect to *entäußerung*, a term that Marx retains and uses in this modified form when he wants to emphasise the loss of self in productive activity. Thus in this example the recursive relationship between Marx's ontology and his dialectical method is illuminated. The ontology is a product of a process of immanent critique that is shaped by a materialist dialectical approach and, in turn the ontological theory illuminates vantage points and implicates a dialectical outlook from which a positive critique is to be produced. It is from this critical standpoint that the conceptual structure of the theory of alienated labour emerges.

2.2. The Conceptual Structure of Marx's Theory of Alienation: the critique of labour

At its most fundamental, Marx's theory of alienation is organised into four factors. The theory contains two "labour process" factors: the alienation of object and alienation of activity.¹¹ In the *Paris Manuscripts* Marx arrives at these two factors following an analysis of the labour process under capitalism. Following from this analysis, Marx draws out two "life" factors" that illuminate how the organisation of labour process under capitalism and its relations extend out from the labour process and thereby organise life itself. Marx's theory of alienation is the critique of the ontological consequences of work in class-society and more specifically of labour under capitalism. On the one hand, the theory of alienation is an analysis of the social relations of capitalist production; this analysis immediately brings forth the theory's two labour process factors. On the other hand, the theory explains how the organisation of labour under capitalism orders the world and the subjects who make it; every aspect of life under capitalism is qualitatively shaped in relation to the apparatuses that are produced and

¹⁰ Mészáros *Marx's Theory of Alienation* 113

¹¹ Paul Brook. 'The Alienated Heart: Hochschild's 'emotional labour' thesis and the anticapitalist politics of alienation', *Capital & Class* 33:7 (2009). 9.

reproduced according to the alienation of labour. At this point of categorisation of Marx's theory, it is important to note that there is no philosophical, methodological, or concrete justification to assume that these are the only four principal vantage points from which alienated labour can be examined. Such a justification would not be consonant with Marx's analysis, nor his ontological theory or materialist dialectical method. Later I introduce another vantage point on alienated labour – the alienation of the body as instrument. I argue that this vantage point is of equal analytical importance to these four and, more importantly, is a vantage point on alienation that illustrates the political character of the organisation of labour in the contemporary conjunction of capitalism. This aside, I will now endeavour to populate this generalised category of alienation by examining Marx's analysis of these four vantage points and thereby put this static conception into motion.

2.2.1. Alienation of object

The worker's production of the object under capitalism is mediated by the wage-labour relation, the private property relation and the exchange relation. When the worker works the object he or she is immediately separated from that object in accordance with the wage-labour relation and its attendant norms of private property and exchange. The worker's property – labour-power – has been exchanged with the capitalist (at its exchange-value, measured in the universal means of exchange – money) and thus belongs to the capitalist for the allotted period, during which it is set to work on the capitalist's property – the object. Marx's analysis of the alienation of object, nonetheless, does not merely go beyond the philosophical conclusion regarding the shattering of the first-order ontology of "man", "industry", and "nature". Marx extends the philosophical problematic in order to encounter and include within it the question of value.

For Marx, the object of labour is not merely an individual instance of a particular arrangement of matter that is worked upon to produce a use-value – although in an important sense it is this. The object of labour is *the* organic and inorganic matter that makes up nature itself; the object is the external world. Wage-labour, private property, and exchange are therefore apparatuses through which objectification – the worker's interaction with the external world in order to produce a use-value that corresponds to a need – is separated from appropriation; the object, and the manner of objectification, is appropriated by capital not the worker. Therewith 'objectification appear[s] as the loss of the object [and] the worker is robbed of the objects

most necessary for not only for his life but for his work.’¹² When viewed from the vantage point of the object, labour under capitalism is the worker’s objectification of the world as value and their simultaneous production of the world as something that is appropriated as capital by the capitalist. The production of value is the process of the worker’s denial of the use-values they need and of the means to produce those use-values.

The alienation of the object is the mechanism by which capital reproduces the social relations by which the worker comes to be dependent upon capital for the provision of needs. The alienation of the object is a two-fold process by which the world is reified as so many articles of private property – ‘an immense accumulation of commodities’ – and by which social relations are reproduced such that they foreclose on the possibilities for life outside capital relations.¹³ Thus, the loss to the worker that is attendant to the alienation of the object is the loss of the means to work and the loss of the means to life. The reified mediations of wage-labour, private property and exchange result not merely in the worker’s alienation of the world that he and she has produced, ‘means not only that labour becomes an object...but that it exists *outside him*, independently, as something alien to him, and that it becomes a power on its own confronting him.’¹⁴ Marx extends his analysis of this political relation by considering it from the vantage point of labour activity.

2.2.2. Alienation of activity

Marx’s theory of alienated activity connects this active process of alienation more fundamentally to human ontology. ‘Labour,’ Marx states, ‘is external to the worker.’¹⁵ Why? What are the bases of this external character? Marx argues that a principal root of this external character is in the organisation of labour under capital as a process that is inchoate with the production of use-values for the satisfaction of corresponding needs. Therefore, at its most fundamental, Marx’s theory of alienated activity is intimately connected to his ontological theory; specifically his theory of species powers and species needs. For Marx, powers are not simply faculties, abilities, capacities, etc., but are also the potentialities that are inherent within the dynamic character that pertains within the reciprocity of the development of human nature for the increasing fulfilment of these powers.¹⁶ That is, this notion of powers and their

¹² Marx *1844* 71

¹³ Marx *Capital I* 43

¹⁴ Marx *1844* 72. Emphasis in original.

¹⁵ Marx *1844* 74

¹⁶ Ollman *Alienation* 74

development functions within Marx's ontological theory of the interaction between "man" and "nature" through "industry".¹⁷ As Ollman argues, the exercise and development of species powers results in a concomitant expansion of the system of needs; this expansion is simultaneously the means or the mode by which humanity becomes aware of its powers and their potential.¹⁸

The *fact* of forced labour and its *form* that bears upon the stunting of powers. As a result of the technical division of labour, as a result of the worker becoming an appendage of the machine, and as a result of the abstraction of labour-power as variable capital, the worker 'in his work...does not affirm himself but denies himself, does not feel content but unhappy' because the worker 'does not freely develop his physical and mental energy but mortifies his body and ruins his mind.'¹⁹ Labour is coerced and limiting; 'the worker, therefore, only feels himself outside his work, and in his work feels outside himself' because his or her work 'is not his spontaneous activity.'²⁰ As such, the alienation of activity in terms of specifically human powers pertains from a relation between three conditions that proceed alongside each other such that each of these conditions is actually a fundamental characteristic of the others. These conditions are: first, the forced character of the fact of wage-labour, i.e., that wage-labour has become the sole means of subsistence because the worker has been separated from the means of production; second, the limiting character of the form of wage-labour, i.e., that the capitalist division of labour disconnects the worker from the object as a whole and relegates him or her to the production of only a part of a use-value; and third, the alien character of the object, i.e., that it belongs to another. The combination of these three conditions – the relation that they form – is the fundamental part of the complex of alienated labour that necessitates the worker's self-estrangement of that part of their Being that is most human. Thus, as Mészáros notes, Marx concretises the binary demarcation 'between labour as *Lebensäusserung* (manifestation of life) and as *Lebentäusserung* (alienation of life)' by framing it within a critical understanding of the reified mediations private property, wage-labour, and exchange.²¹ Labour under capitalism is not 'merely a means to satisfy needs external to it'; it is the means by which work itself is transformed from being the means to the realisation of life and the potential of human life to being the means by which human capacities and potentialities are

¹⁷ Mészáros *Marx's Theory of Alienation* 103

¹⁸ Ollman *Alienation* 76

¹⁹ Marx *1844* 74

²⁰ Marx *1844* 74

²¹ Mészáros *Marx's Theory of Alienation* 91

alienated from the humans that embody them.²² And in turn, humans are alienated from that which makes them human.

2.2.3. Alienation of species-being

Marx bookends his discussion of alienated labour with comments on the reproduction of the worker in his or her commodity form.²³ ‘Production,’ Marx states, ‘does not simply produce man as a *commodity*...it produces him in this role as a *spiritually* and physically *dehumanised* being.’²⁴ Marx is not simply talking about labour activity here but about all spheres and processes of the capitalist mode of production, while also arguing that activity is the fundamental element of this production of the worker as less than human. At the centre of this reified and alienated production of humanity, within a system of reciprocal relationality that pertains between the apparatuses and processes of the production of value under capitalism, is a fundamental power relation: ‘the external character of labour for the worker appears in the fact that it [labour activity] is not his own, but someone else’s... that in it *he* belongs, not to himself, but to another... It is the loss of self.’²⁵

Thus Marx’s examination of alienated labour as it is manifested within the labour process flows into the ontological problem: what are the consequences of labour under capitalism to Being? As Nick Dyer-Witheford states, this problem is the ‘appropriation [by capital] of humanity’s capacity to co-operatively change the conditions of its collective existence – indeed to transform its very own nature.’²⁶ This is the negative problem posed by the alienation of species-being in Marx’s theory of alienation and is framed as a positive critique by Marx in ‘Theses on Feuerbach’ and in *Capital vol. I*. There I argue that the problem of species-being is the philosophical framing of the political problem of the annexation of the potential for praxis in emergent forms of labour. With the range of vantage points produced by

²² Marx 1844 74

²³ Comments on this relation appear at the beginning of the section [Estranged Labour] and at the beginning of the next section [Antithesis of Capital and Labour: Landed Property and Capital]. These section headings are not Marx’s but were inserted by the Institute of Marxism-Leninism. It is important to note here that the first 39 pages of the second manuscript, to which the latter section belongs, have been lost; therefore we don’t know how Marx drew together this relation, if in any detail at all, but we do know that this investigation regarding the reproduction of labour-power does span the first and second manuscript. However, we also know that, unlike the key aspects of Marx’s analysis in *The Paris Manuscripts*, a more full analysis of the reproduction of labour-power does not reappear in Marx’s later writings and the discussion of reproduction in *Capital vol. I* is contained within the same dimensions as the discussion here.

²⁴ Marx 1844 86

²⁵ Marx 1844 74. My emphasis.

²⁶ Dyer-Witheford ‘1844/2004/2044: The Return of Species Being’ 3

both these positive and negative forms of critique in mind, what is the alienation of species-being?

Alienated labour from the vantage point of species-being immediately inserts Marx's ontological theory within the examination of the labour process in such a way as to also integrate an anthropological theory. That is, the critique of species-being immediately illuminates the second-order mediation of the "man", "industry", "nature" relation under private property alongside a historically-grounded characterisation of the human as having needs for specific use-values and the powers to fulfil – and expand – those needs. As Marx states, 'in estranging from man (1) nature, and (2) himself, his own active functions, his life-activity, estranged labour estranges the *species* from man. It turns for him the *life of the species* into a means of individual life.'²⁷ At its most tangible, then, the alienation of species-being describes the separation of the worker from his and her human specificities; that is, the ability to set their labour-power to work on producing use-values that contribute to the fulfilment of their needs and the potential for the expansion of these specifically human powers.²⁸

2.2.4. Alienation from other humans

The final vantage point from which Marx considers alienated labour is the alienation of people from each other. This separation of humanity from humanity occurs as a consequence of the qualities of these three alienated relations and presents itself in two important ways. Firstly, if one person is alienated from their own object, activity and their species life, they are alienated from the objects, activities and species life of all others; objects, activity and species life only pertain within the complex of the system of alienations and are only accessible as alienated manifestations.²⁹ Secondly, 'only man himself can be this alien power over man'; this class-bound power relation separates human beings from one another.³⁰ The alienation of human beings from each other follows from the alienation of the object, life, and activity because these alienations create class society. 'Labour for the worker,' Marx states, 'is not his own but someone else's... it does not belong to him and in it he belongs, not to himself, but to another.'³¹ That is, the world, human activity, life itself, 'is owned by a capitalist, *whose interests are directly opposed to my own.*'³² In short, the complex of alienations is produced

²⁷ Marx 1844 76. Emphasis in original.

²⁸ This will be discussed at greater length in the next chapter on the distinction between work and labour.

²⁹ Marx 1844 78

³⁰ Marx 1844 78

³¹ Marx 1844 74

³² Ollman *Alienation* 147. Emphasis in original.

and reproduced by means of a separation of human beings from each other, i.e., by means of class domination.

3. The Critique of Labour in the “New Economy”

2.1. Body Work

The body is central to concrete forms of work that have been described by the concepts of aesthetic, emotional, affective and immaterial labour, criticisms regarding the disembodiment of labour and the conceptual retiring of corporeality in the concepts themselves notwithstanding. These emergent forms of labour demonstrate that forms of labour which utilise the subjective, aesthetic, linguistic and cognitive capacities of labour-power result in the instrumentalisation of bodies’ capacities to be political. To engage in the critique of emergent forms of labour I propose a conception of body work. This dialectical concept of body work has three factors: the work that we do on our own bodies, the work that we do on the bodies of others, and the marks made on the body by work. These three factors are vantage points to examine the making of bodies in the contemporary conjunction of capitalism; they are three sides of the same process of making bodies.

Value production and the reproduction of labour-power are two intrinsically connected processes but are also contradictory ones; the logic of value production is not a totalising force that dominates the body. I follow Burawoy and Federici and argue that while capitalist control is never total in either of these spaces, it does extend from one to the other. Therefore, I argue that a politics within and against capitalist power emerges from what Federici calls the ‘dual character and the contradiction inherent in reproductive labour.’³³ Despite the siege upon the indeterminacy of labour-power that is characteristic of emergent forms of labour, to obscure the possibilities of resistance would be to commit the same idealist prefiguration of the subject as in post-*operaismo* – but while they prefigure the autonomy of living labour, this formulation would prefigure interminable domination. There is a constant tension between the reproduction of labour-power as a production of the human and the coercive character of the standards imposed on reproduction by the logic of the labour market and value production.

³³ Silvia Federici. ‘The Reproduction of Labor Power in the Global Economy and the Unfinished Feminist Revolution’ 99

What is distinctive about the contemporary conjunction of capitalism is that it utilises more and more aspects of the body as labour-power. In particular, in the areas of symbolic and affective production, the management of emotion, and the articulation and production of aesthetics, bodies' capacities to be political, i.e., the potential for praxis, are the properties by which labour is the 'form-giving fire'; the workers body, and those capacities themselves, are a central element of the matter that is given form.³⁴ The use-value of labour-power is that it produces use-values. Each of the concepts of aesthetic, emotional, immaterial/affective/biopolitical labour uncover an aspect of the *embodied* character of the use-values created by labour-power. My reconfiguration of the concept of body work systematically demonstrates that the essence of these use-values is the capacities of bodies to produce one another. By situating it within an analysis of capitalist power relations it demonstrates that this production of bodies' capacities pertains amidst the dual contradictory character of the reproduction of labour-power and that therefore the changes in the organisation of work do not demonstrate either a becoming autonomy of living labour nor a process of ever more interminable domination of life by the logic of capital accumulation. To put this another way, I argue that these forms of labour demonstrate an alteration in the political economic character of the labour/capital antagonism in which the body itself becomes the site of conflict between labour and capital, and that this site extends throughout the spheres of production and consumption and produces a cultural and political context that is coordinate to Marx's theory of alienation.

From the vantage point of capital, factor one of body work – work on one's own body – is a practice upon which the consumption of commodities is generated. In the first place consumption for body work is a phenomenon that situates itself within the expanding system of needs and body work is thereby produced as a site of potential commodity consumption. This one-dimensionality is reflected in the universalist tendencies of understandings of body work; body work involves the exchange of property and the consumption of use-values. Labour-power is a commodity that is consumed by capital. With this in mind, from the vantage point of capital work on one's own body is also 'the reproduction of the worker as the carrier of the capacity to work.'³⁵ That is, body work is the work of the reproduction of labour-power and is therefore the production of the form of variable capital. Of course, these two aspects are intrinsically connected; the consumption of use-values is prerequisite to the

³⁴ Marx *Grundrisse* 361

³⁵ Wolkowitz *Bodies at Work* 29

production of the self and the production of the self, in an important sense, is the reproduction of labour-power. I argue that to understand body work within history, capitalism, and its present conjunction, it must be examined from the vantage point of labour-power. It is labour-power that is commodified in the wage-labour exchange, and it is labour-power that is subject to formative shaping both at and outside the point of production. In order to begin to understand the politics that link and decouple these spheres it is necessary to make labour-power re-emerge from its abstraction as variable capital.

The concept of body work reveals a fundamental relation between the inside and the outside of capitalist production. A dialectical configuration of the concept of body work reveals that: the worker is formatively shaped in work; that the worker produces ideological and cultural commodities which formatively shape the subject through the sphere of consumption; such that the subject engages in body work in such a way as to reproduce their own labour-power and the labour-power of others in accordance with the requirements of capitalist production. This *accordance*, nonetheless, is subject to a constant tension as a result of the inability of capital to totalise its power over all spheres of life. This tension notwithstanding, as capital utilises more and more aspects of embodied labour-power, political apparatuses for the reproduction of socially necessary forms of labour-power extend beyond the site of production to the spheres of circulation and consumption.

From the vantage point of the commodity the consumer of commodities is also a producer of commodities and a bearer of labour-power – keeping in mind here that labour-power itself is a commodity. Therefore, when body work is examined from the vantage point of the commodity “labour-power”, it becomes increasingly difficult to separate factors one and two. Body work is a form of wage-labour in which the subjective, aesthetic, affective, emotional, linguistic, cognitive and corporeal capacities of the body are mobilised as an instrument for the formative shaping of those same capacities of bodies under wage-labour. As such, it is impossible to separate wage-labour from the work that workers do on their own bodies and the bodies of others outside of labour time. These body work practices, which are undertaken in apparently separate spheres of life, actually entail one another in an ontological sense; the fundamental inner connection between the two is the process of the reproduction of labour-power. As such, body work in these two apparently separate spheres is concomitant to the marks written on the body by wage-labour. Given the logic of value production under capitalism and the imperative of the deployment of ‘socially-necessary labour-time’, labour as activity cannot be separated from labour-power nor from the modes of the reproduction of

labour-power nor from the understanding that labour under capitalism is a site of coercion and consent, domination and subordination, and therefore is a place that marks the body of the worker. The work that we do on our own bodies, work we do on the bodies of others, and the marks made on the body by work are not discrete sets of practices but are really just three aspects of the same relation: this relation is an essentially political relation within which production and bodies connect and disconnect.

By examining emergent forms of labour in terms of their concrete labour process, that is, in terms of the concrete forms of the putting into motion of labour activity, instrument and object and with reference to the processes by which labour-power is given determinate form, a fundamental inner connection between these three factors of body work emerges. No one factor of body work is analytically prior to the other but rather body work proceeds as work on one's own body, work on the bodies of others, and as the marking of the body by work within a reciprocal relationship. Emergent forms of labour under capitalism shape bodies aesthetically, they shape how bodies communicate with one another, and they shape bodies' subjectivity because they constitute an important aspect of the power apparatus in which the subjects who produce the political and ideological environment are themselves shaped. Any political and ideological environment shapes subjects' capacities and forestalls and/or facilitates their potentialities because this environment constitutes the terrain in which bodies exercise their political character. In the contemporary conjunction of capitalism the worker's body is marked because emergent forms of labour involve the formative shaping of the worker's embodied capacities as the instrument of labour. The consumer's body is marked in such a way as to embody the particular form of capacities that are valorised by the emergent labour market.

This nexus of capitalist control over the labour process, the embodied character of labour-power, and the variety of the aspects of labour under capitalism that render labour as *forced labour*, constitute an environment in which workers must formatively shape their own bodies such that their body is coordinate to the determination of labour-power – commodified, with a use-value and an exchange-value – that is common to these branches of industry. This is not to discount the struggle against the capitalist determination of labour-power but rather to restate that the field of struggle is constituted by the dependency of the working class on the sale of their labour, the separation of producers from the means of production and the transformation of the aim of labour from a concern with the production of use-values to a concern with the production of exchange-value. The worker's body is part of the product; the

qualitative content or mode by which workers communicate, manage and produce emotion and affective responses forms the labour-power that is socially-fixed within the power apparatus of the labour process. This power apparatus extends beyond production by means of the struggle over the reproduction of labour-power.

There is a dual connection between body work as work on one's own body and body work as work on the bodies of others. First, work on the bodies of others in the call centre is contingent upon work on one's own body, as the reproduction of labour-power. It is through the reproductive relation that work on one's own body, as a valorisation of labour-power, is ontologically connected to body work as work on the bodies of others. The reproduction of labour-power cannot be reduced to work on one's own body but is a process that occurs as a result of working on oneself and being worked upon by others within the social and technical relations of capitalist production.

Emergent forms of labour produce a political environment that is characterised by capitalistic inscriptions on the body, which are never total but nonetheless designate the body as a site for the exertion of force, compulsion, domination, coercion and consent. The inability of these capitalistic inscriptions of the body to constitute a totalised force indicate that the body is also the source of struggle, resistance, sabotage, and refusal.

In body work, in its concreteness as emergent forms of labour, what is inseparable is made to appear separate. When we consider body work under capitalism the analytic separation between the work that one does on one's own body, the work that one does on the bodies of others, and the marks made on the body by labour under capitalism, depoliticises the production of bodies. This relation, or rather its absence, is an *abstraction*: the separation of work from life produces an ideological environment in which body work undertaken in the so-called private sphere and thus *appears* to be autonomous from capital and driven by an irreducible intendedness of the subject towards their own body. It is not.

4. The (Re)Production of Alienated Bodies of Praxis

4.1. The Alienated Unity of Emergent Forms of Labour

There is a relation between the forms that bodies take and the forms that the organisation of labour takes. In the contemporary conjunction of capitalism this relation is constituted by the

rendering of the political capacities of the body as an object and an instrument for the labour process. This is a political relation in a double-sense. First, in emergent forms of labour the capacities by which bodies are political – the capacities by which bodies are able to interact with the external world in a practical, critical way – are the object of the political economic processes in which labour-power is socially-fixed, in which indeterminate labour-power is given determination. It is a political relation that has politics as its object; the ideal form of this determination, from the perspective of capital, is the end of politics. Second, it is political because this relation is not one of cause and effect – vis-à-vis a putative hegemon that shapes bodies according to its needs, desires and logic – but rather is a relation in which bodies are precarious figures that are at one and the same time objects of determination and subjects of indeterminacy. This relation is constitutive of political spaces in which subjects are formed. Bodies are formed not only at the site of production but rather there is an inner connection between different practices of body work that brings the logics and power relations of capitalist value production into collision with the formation of bodies and engages these logics with spheres of life that are beyond capital and antagonistic to it. Politics links and decouples these moments and tendencies. As such, this relation of determination is not an economic determinacy in which bodies are brought under the heel of the commodity and politics vanishes accordingly; the relation of determination is a political relation that is articulated and disarticulated in connection to the failure and forming of political subjectivity. The determination of bodies does not make political space vanish but rather the character of forms of embodiment that are attendant to emergent forms of labour demonstrates the urgency of the political problem of wage-labour under capitalism.

The political problem of alienation has never been as urgent as it is today because it is the political capacities and potentialities of the worker that are the object of alienation. The organisation of labour appears as an apparatus that separates the worker from the embodied capacities by which the resistance, subversion and destruction of the organisation of labour is to emerge. Furthermore, the organisation of labour appears as an apparatus that distorts those capacities for resistance by transforming them into capacities for the production of value, i.e., codes the political capacities of bodies as labour-power. To illustrate the politics of this twin-mode of separation/distortion I examine how it operates across the spheres of production and reproduction. There is a tendency in capitalism for an alienated unity of the spheres of production and reproduction within a productive organism that is nonetheless constituted amidst contradiction. It is important to avoid scraping away the significance of class struggle

but it is also important to recognise that class struggle is a force of production that pertains in relation to other forces of production; class struggle is not an autonomous force through which praxis proceeds as a teleology but rather class struggle is constituted in a political relation to production.

4.2. Factors of Alienation

The emergent centrality of the body in these forms of labour reveals a reconfiguration of the political relations that pertain within and extend out from work. Of course, there are elements of these political relations that are attendant to the specifically capitalist organisation of the labour process. However, I argue that emergent forms of labour indicate political elements that are more closely related to changes in the forms that the reproduction of labour-power takes. Furthermore, I argue that these elements follow from the alienation of the body as an instrument of the labour process and the alienation of the body as the object of the labour process.

Body work immediately presents the instrumentalisation of the body in ways that extend beyond the rendering of repetitive, machine-like activities upon the arms and legs and the thinking capacities of bodies during labour time. Therefore, although Marx's ontological theory indicates a reading of the body as a site of power, I argue that they are elements to be read through the prism of the organisation of contemporary capitalism. The concrete character of industrial labour is simply different from body work: factory-work, building-work, farm-work, etc., do not mobilise the political capacities of bodies in production. Marx makes the case that these forms of labour mortify the body and ruin the mind throughout his works, with approaches to this problem, from various perspectives, in *The Paris Manuscripts*, *Grundrisse*, and *Capital vol. I*.³⁶ Body work in the contemporary conjunction of capitalism does mobilise the political capacities of bodies and does something to bodies that does not immediately appear to be their mere mortification and ruining. The arguments of Peter Fleming and Franco "Bifo" Berardi, regarding the 'blurring [of] the symbolic distinction that traditionally separates home and paid work [under capital]' and 'a new affection for work', for example, indicate

³⁶ For example, Marx 1844 75 on the pernicious consequences of the labour process on the body; Marx *Grundrisse* 257-302 from the perspective of the body itself as a use-value consumed by capital; Marx *Capital vol. I* 173-287 again on the costs of the capitalist labour process on the worker's body.

more complex contours to domination and resistance.³⁷ They indicate that the worker in emergent forms of labour is not, as in Marx's theory, 'depressed spiritually and physically to the condition of a machine and from being a man becomes abstract activity and a stomach.'³⁸ These forms of labour reflect continuities that emerge from capitalist control over the concrete, use-value producing aspect of labour, analogously to the historical shift from the production of absolute surplus-value to the production of relative surplus-value.³⁹ I argue that the contemporary shift in the abstract/concrete modalities of value production is constituted by the reification of concrete labour activity in standardised forms and that politics is central to this transformation because the "matter" of the labour-power that is reified in this form is the very matter which indicates to Aristotle that 'man is by nature a political animal (πολιτικὸν ζῷον).'⁴⁰ To use Marx's language here, the emergent worker's spirituality is not "depressed" but is designated as the instrument for the production of value in emergent forms of labour; the reproduction of labour-power cannot be reduced to the metamorphosis of the worker's stomach into a mere furnace but rather the modalities of the reproduction of labour-power are central to the possibility for producing surplus-value. By deploying alienation theory upon these forms of the instrumentalisation of bodies, in consideration of the concomitant extension of the modes by which capital valorises bodies, I will demonstrate the processes by which the power relations of production extend out to life itself in forms that are particular to the contemporary conjunction of capitalism.

A fundamental element of production in body work is that its object is not a non-human object, as it is in Marx's theory. The object of emergent forms of labour is a human being. This human character of the object is also the fundamental element of reproductive work, as it always has been. The use-value of labour-power in body work, when considered in terms of its exchange as commodity and in its guise as 'work on the bodies of others', is its ability to formatively shape subjects' bodies directly in immediate service encounters and indirectly through the production of the social, ideological and cultural environment in which subject formation proceeds, and of which immediate service encounters are a part. I examine the qualitative

³⁷ Fleming *Authenticity and the Cultural Politics of Work* 23; Berardi *The Soul at Work* 83

³⁸ Marx *1844* 23

³⁹ Put simply, absolute surplus-value is value that is produced by the extension of the working day beyond the point at which the inputs of production, i.e. all the elements of labour-power, have been reproduced. A point which is measured in units of exchange-value and after which surplus-value is produced. Relative surplus-value is value that is produced by the reduction of socially-necessary labour time and therefore the reduction of the value of labour-power. Marx *Capital vol. I* 299

⁴⁰ Aristotle. *The Politics*. Tr. J.A. Sinclair. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1962). 28. Aristotle's invocation of an order of domination and oppression with its roots in an ahistorical transposing of the class-structure of the Polis into a set of transcendental norms that prefigure the "good" notwithstanding.

character of this coordination of labour, production, and consumption but the aspect that I focus on most is the attendant character of the reproduction of labour-power in accordance to the “needs” of the labour market that is attendant to the capitalistic expansion of the system of needs. I demonstrate that the alienation of the object is not merely an extension of the alienation of humans from their fellow humans, as we might expect when we consider the object as a human being. It is also a fundamental aspect of the reproduction of these branches of capitalist production because the character of the labour process contributes to the political space in which the forms of labour-power that are required for production itself are shaped.

As such I argue that the central characteristic of the labour/capital antagonism is its predication by a struggle for the annexation of the potential for autonomy that proceeds by way of the articulation of alienation throughout production, consumption and reproduction. Emergent forms of labour constitute a relation between production, consumption, and reproduction that shapes the political capacities of bodies. Body work implicates a reciprocal effect that pertains from the instrumentalisation and objectification of bodies – which are really just two aspects of the same relation – in labour and consumption. The effect of the labour process on the reproduction of the form of labour-power renders the body itself as the site of politics. Labour-power is reproduced in forms that foreclose on the potentialities of bodies and therein foreclose on the possibilities for political subjects to constitute themselves as distinct from the logics of value production: it is not simply the arms and legs that are coded as labour-power; hearts and minds are opened up to commodity logics, marked by work. Nonetheless, this foreclosing is never total. Body work, and the emergent forms of labour from which this abstraction is drawn, indicates a qualitatively new character to the politics of production in terms of how capitalist production dominates bodies and in terms of how bodies resist and subvert these forms of domination.

4.2.1. The Alienation of the Instrument

There are three principle modes by which the body’s political capacities and potentialities are alienated as an instrument for the labour process; first, it results from an ongoing series of acts of commodity consumption in accord with the social, cultural and ideological articulations that pertain within the mode of production; second, it emerges from a transformation in the forms of the reproduction of labour-power, engaging various forms of use-value consumption, commodified and otherwise; third, it is a consequence of the practice of labour amidst the power relations of emergent forms of labour. None of these modes are mutually exclusive of

one another; they can be demarcated but not separated because they are merely different vantage points onto the same process of the making of bodies, i.e., the processes that I have configured as body work. What is at stake in these modes by which the political capacities of bodies are made an instrument for the capitalist labour process, when considered separately and when considered in terms of their fundamental inner connection, is that they constitute a siege on the possibilities for a political space that is outside capital. As such, these modes are a material reconfiguration of political space.

The instrumentalisation of the body is simultaneously a process of limiting and delimiting a terrain of political struggle that is in constant flux: on the one side, this struggle is constituted by the coding of workers as variable capital, the alienation of workers from their human capacities, and the attendant depoliticisation of production. On the other side is the coding of the workers as humans that cannot be reduced to capital, the resistance to alienation that is inherent to the reduction of bodies to capital, and the character attendant to the *production* of the emergent form of capitalist production as a site of politics. Nonetheless, it is naïve and reductive to characterise this struggle as a simple binary opposition: the political problem of emergent forms of labour is not simply the worker's cooperation, consent and collusion in their own alienation; it is that their own alienation is the alienation of the subjective capacity to do things like to choose, to consent, to act with reference to one's *own* need/desire because the logics of value, the labour market, and the penetration of these logics into the processes of the reproduction of one's own body tend towards the subsumption of these capacities within an eternal and immutable framing of capitalist production. The alienation of the body as an instrument is attendant to a combination of the subjective and objective that requires practice, performance, internalisation and arbitration of different forms of subjectivity that are nonetheless connected to the forced character of labour and the commodification of embodied capacities as labour-power.

Transformations in the forms of the reproduction of labour-power constitute the second principle mode by which bodies are rendered as instruments of the labour process of emergent forms of labour. Consumption from the vantage point of the labour process, as opposed to consumption from the vantage point of capitalist production, is the reproduction of labour-power. Federici states that there is a dual contradiction at work in this relation. First, the reproduction of labour-power is the production of the human; there is a vast realm of reproductive work that pertains outside the logic of the production of labour-power. In this sense, there are historical social forces in the reproduction of labour-power under capitalism

that precede the intervention of capitalist production. Second, pertaining from all those features of the wage-labour relation that render labour under capitalism forced labour, the production of the human must simultaneously proceed in a fashion that meets the demands of the labour market. Within this dual contradiction, Federici argues, the abstraction “labour-power” highlights ‘the fact that reproductive work is not the free reproduction of ourselves or others according to our and their desires.’⁴¹ I argue that this contradiction emerges as a field of struggle in which the ideological character of consumption in the contemporary conjunction of capitalism collides with those logics are not integrated within the particularly capitalistic modes of the reproduction of the human. That is, the ideological environment that is attendant to reproduction, from the perspective of commodity consumption, shapes desire itself and the idea of ‘our desire’ is a precarious and indeterminate figure formed within capitalist relations. It is within the relation between the contradictory field of desire and necessity of the reproduction of the human as the reproduction of labour-power that domination and resistance is forged; the worker’s body is configured as having the potential to be an instrument and the worker’s alienation of their body as the abstraction “labour-power” proceeds alongside the reproduction of the self and others as “human”, that is, as an abstracted but indeterminate and specifically human labour-power.

The instrumentalisation of bodies’ capacities for praxis – the modes by which these capacities are coded as labour-power and as the vessels of commodity consumption – is an alienation of the body from itself; it is the production of the body as value, but is a production that is essentially political. This mode of the production of the body is not an economic determinacy but is a production of the body as the site of the struggle constituted by the capitalistic determination of an indeterminate subject. That is, determination is neither total nor irrevocable nor does the alienation of the worker preclude the worker’s re-appropriation of themselves. Although the alienation of the body is a process of the amputation of the body’s capacities as commodity-forms, it is a distortion of capacities which nonetheless remain embodied and whose qualitative character pertains within this dual contradiction. The alienation of the body as instrument is a reification of these capacities as the form-giving fire that produces the commodity, and as such constitutes a separation that is produced and reproduced within this form of the relations-in-production but there is always a tension throughout these processes of alienation that pertains from the dual contradiction of the

⁴¹ Federici ‘The Reproduction of Labour-power’ 99

reproduction of labour-power. This tension is the political space of production in emergent forms of labour.

Alienation in emergent forms of labour, considered from the perspective of the instrument of the labour process and in terms of the three modes of instrumentalisation of the body, proceeds both during and outside of labour time. These are the relations within which the body's capacities are transformed into instruments for the labour processes of body work and the character of alienation is two-fold. First, the possibilities for species-being are foreclosed upon in the transformation of "human" capacities into the capacity to produce commodities because this very process is constituted by the progressive annexation of the field of desire by the logic of capital accumulation and the worker's internalisation of the needs of the capitalist labour market as a consequence of the modes by which they reproduce their own bodies. Second, in the process of the wage-labour exchange and in the reification of labour these capacities are objectified as labour and are thereby alienated as the private property of the purchaser of labour-power. This is not simply an alienation of activity but is a process of separation that can only proceed during labour time *because* the sphere of consumption has been constituted by an antagonism between the capitalistic shaping of desire and the reproduction of the human. The alienation of instrument brings the alienation of species-being directly into the labour process.

4.2.2. The Alienation of the Object

The human body is the object of the labour process in emergent forms of labour. In these forms of labour the body itself is the subject of the formative shaping that is the intended aim of the putting into motion of labour activity and instruments that constitutes labour itself. In body work it is human bodies – not non-human objects – that are valorised by labour. The instrumentalisation of the body and the rendering of the body as an object are two aspects of the same relation. Instrumentalisation of the body occurs when one works on one's own body through a variety of processes of consumption, as a result of reproductive work, and as a result of the power relations under which wage-labour in emergent forms proceeds, i.e., as a mark made on the body by work. In this sense, instrumentalisation is a process of being objectified; in consumption the subject makes him or herself an object and in wage-labour the consumer is made an object. Marx argues that the formative shaping of the object is a dual process of objectification and appropriation. The 'individual objectifies himself in the thing.' and 'production is always appropriation of nature.'⁴² In wage-labour, however, the worker does not

⁴² Marx *Grundrisse* 221; Marx 'Introduction to a Critique' 188

appropriate the object but rather labour is the process by which the worker's objectification is appropriated as capital by means of a complex of alienations. First, labour itself is made an object through the commodification and alienation (*veräußerung*) of labour-power, the quantification of labour as abstract units of variable capital, and the forms of capitalist control of activity that are attendant to this reification.⁴³ Second, or as such, the object of labour is figured as a unit of circulating capital, as matter that is united with objectified and alien (*Fremdheit*, relating to *entfremdung*) labour activity in order to that it may be formed as commodity, i.e. as an object with an exchange-value.⁴⁴ Third, or as such, the worker's objectification 'is a social quality (relation) which is...external to him.'⁴⁵ It is a process of the worker's estrangement of the object and of him or herself within a productive-form of alienated objectification; i.e., it is a process of *entäußerung* and of *selbstentäußerung* (estrangement and self-estrangement) in which objectification is separated from appropriation.⁴⁶ Objectification is not the free objectification of the worker in the object but is the worker's objectification of the capitalist organisation of production, which he or she has embodied in their alienated activity. As such, the external character of the social relations of production proceeds from the production of both labour-power and the worker as a commodity. When viewed from the vantage point of the production of the object in body work I argue that there are elements of this examination that reflect the continuity of the politics of capitalist production and there are elements that require revision in light of changes in modes of value production.

The organisation of work in the contemporary conjunction of capitalism illuminates two important provocations to this analysis. Marx argues that the worker objectifies him or herself in the object of their work and under wage-labour capital appropriates this activity and the object as private property, as capital. Private property is not *property*; it is a distinct form of property, legally codified and recognised within a particular historical, social and cultural context, and is not an eternal or immutable form.⁴⁷ Therefore, if the objects of emergent forms of labour are the bodies of juridically and politically free human beings then it is not cogent to argue that capital appropriates bodies as *private* property because bodies are antithetical to private property; bodies are presupposed by the capitalist concept of private property as *non-*

⁴³ *Veräußerung*: the alienation of property by sale.

⁴⁴ *Entfremdung*: the estrangement or loss of the object and the attendant loss of the self.

⁴⁵ Marx *Grundrisse* 226

⁴⁶ *Entäußerung*: the externalisation from self. *Selbstentäußerung*: the externalisation of self.

⁴⁷ Marx 'Introduction to a Critique' 192

private property because there are no legal or political frameworks within which bodies themselves can be alienated as private property because such a social relation is *slavery*. Second, to view this relation from the vantage point of the worker, if the object of labour under capitalism is not rendered as private property by wage-labour activity how might we examine ‘the relation of the worker to the *product of labour*,’ this human object, ‘as an alien object exercising power over him’?⁴⁸ I propose that the human character of the object of labour emphasises a further and more pressing political relation than that of the object exercising power over the worker: the worker does not simply alienate themselves in producing the object, the worker alienates the object – humanity – from him and herself and produces the human in accordance with the dual contradiction identified by Federici; that is, as an alterity, as an alienated entity who is on the one hand a human being and on the other is the congealed form of alienated labour. I argue that the worker alienates themselves from human beings and, in doing so, alienates humanity not merely *from* its ontological connection with the world, and from its connection with itself, but alienates it *as* value.

The object is not an article of private property belonging to the capitalist, as it is in Marx’s theory. Marcia Klotz finds that in the *Paris Manuscripts* ‘private property, in essence, is defined as the congealed form of alienated labour.’⁴⁹ However, despite not being an article of private property, through the labour process of body work the object nonetheless becomes ‘the congealed form of alienated labour.’ Thus the body as the object of body work *is not* private property but *is* the product of alienated labour. I argue that the fact of being made an object but not being rendered as private property is analogous to the mode by which labour-power is coded as a commodity yet still remains the private property of its bearer. To manipulate Marx’s words to the features of my own problematic, the body that is the object of body work is ‘the embodiment of abstract human labour.’⁵⁰ Body work is the production of bodies as value by alienated labour that can be measured in time and this value is manifested as an exchange-value of the formative shaping that has been undertaken as the aim of the work. Remembering that labour time is the measure of the magnitude of value not the magnitude of exchange-value, I argue that this general schema of value can be applied to waged body work

⁴⁸ Marx 1844 75. Emphasis in original.

⁴⁹ Marcia Klotz. ‘Alienation, Labor, and Sexuality in Marx’s 1844 Manuscripts’ *Rethinking Marxism* 18:3, (2006). 408.

⁵⁰ Marx *Capital* vol. I 64

in industries as diverse as hairdressing, food service, cultural production and knowledge articulation.

To view the production of the body as value from the perspective of the body, in the act of production the body is commodified. This is not to say that the body is rendered as an object of private property that can be exchanged – although as the bearer of labour-power it can be exchanged. It is to say that the body is capable of being formatively shaped and that in this labour process in which the aim is the formative shaping of the object both the capacity to formatively shape and the act of formative shaping – in whatever concrete form it takes – have an exchange-value. The concrete character of labour-power in emergent forms of labour is socially-fixed in such a way as expand the magnitude of value that labour in its abstract aspect can produce. Body work in its various concrete manifestations is an apparatus of capitalistic subject formation because it is a dual process of the worker alienating the object – other humans – from him and herself and of making the object alien from its human capacities, twisting and distorting those capacities and potentialities so that they appear merely as vessels for the embodiment of value.

To illustrate the reciprocal relationality that pertains in the production of the body and the centrality of the figure of alienation, the human body is alienated from itself by alienated labour in which the character of objectification proceeds according to the logic of the accumulation of capital, which is the logic of alienation. Thus there is a dual character to the alienation of labour in which the object is a human body. Labour activity itself is made an object within capitalist relations-in-production and the human body is shaped in a labour process in which the intended aim of labour is a dual mode of the production of surplus-value. First, surplus-value is exploited from labour time in the usual ways, as absolute and relative surplus-value, and the body of the consumer, as the object of labour, is coded as a repository for exchange-value. Second, the act of producing the body is not merely a moment in production but is a process of producing the body as a desiring body needful of forms of self-production, as the production of self and reproduction. The reification of the labour-power of body work, and the attendant alienated character of its productions, simultaneously exploits this desire for self-production and produces the body/self in modes that make it suitable for particularly capitalistic modes of self-production. Emergent forms of labour demonstrate that these forms of body-production are being monopolised by capitalist production. As well as rendering the human body as an object, to be worked upon in order to produce surplus-value, body work is the reification of the consuming human body as a product, but one that is never

finished and is therefore always needful for forms of self-realisation, the availability of which are more and more limited to commodified forms. Thus the contradiction identified by Federici must be extended. It is not simply a dual contradiction where the production of the human collides with the production of labour-power fit for the labour market; the production of the human also collides with the production of a body fit for the expanding sphere of consumption.

Thus the alienation of the object of labour is not the alienation of the object as private property but rather is the production of the political character of the labour/capital antagonism by means of the intervention of value in the production of bodies. That is, the production of the human body as an object of labour is a process of the determination of the body by capital as value. Body work, as work on one's own body, as both unwaged work and waged labour on the bodies of others, and as a mark made on the body by labour and by work ("work" in terms of the dual contradiction of reproductive work under capitalism) produces bodies divided. There is an antagonism in all of these forms of body work that result from the capitalistic valorisation of – and therefore their rendering as abstractions – the affective and emotional capacities of bodies and the connection of these capacities to aesthetics. This antagonism is characterised by the struggle between capital's domination of the reproduction of these capacities, in terms of their qualitative form, and the resistance to measure that has its origins in the humanness of embodied capacities, albeit a humanness that is already a human abstracted from its specificities in the mediation of wage-labour.

4.4. Alienated Labour, Antagonism, and the Margins of Anticapitalist Praxis

What, now, are the dimensions of alienated labour? There has been a transformation in the qualitative character of the object of labour. The human character of the object of labour renders the dual process of objectification and appropriation more immediately political than it does in the production of non-human objects. The 'metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties' of the commodity are not merely forces that make 'the social character of men's labour *appear* to them as an objective character stamped upon the product of that labour.'⁵¹ The enigma of the commodity has become a force that makes the particular, capitalist social character of labour an objective character of labour itself. This objective character does not

⁵¹ Marx *Capital* vol. I 76-7. My emphasis. "appears" in original.

emerge from labour in its abstract aspect, as the coding of the world as various magnitudes of value measured in labour time thereby making the character of productive cooperation appear as a relation between things. It emerges from the coding of bodies themselves as magnitudes of value, determinant of and determined by particular forms of concrete labour – body work – that have proliferated according to the logic of the theory of value, i.e., the logic by which labour in its abstract aspect subsumes the concrete aspect of labour. It emerges from the making of people as objects in the sphere of production though the practice of making oneself an instrument of the labour process and it emerges in the sphere of reproduction through the making of oneself as an object of the labour process and in making oneself and other the object of a contradictory process of making the body as labour-power. The dual process of objectification and appropriation is still alienated – the worker objectifies him or herself and capital appropriates the objectification as value – but this appropriation directly confronts the dual-contradictory character of the reproduction of labour-power; the objectification is appropriated as value *qua* labour-power and as such the value that is appropriated by capital is subject to the constant tension between the reproduction of embodied capacities for the labour market and the reproduction of the human. The alienation of the political capacities of bodies today represents a limit to capital; the domination of labour in its abstract aspect collides with the concrete character of emergent forms of labour because this concrete character pertains amidst the dual contradiction of the reproduction of labour-power. Capital's supersession of this limit would look exactly like Debord's spectacle: the circumvention of this limit would require that the commodity attain 'the *total* occupation of social life,' a limit that my analysis does not demonstrate has been breached.⁵²

The alienation of the instrument and the object in emergent forms of labour are apparatuses of the determination of the political subject. Of course, this determination is not a universal, qualitative determination of content; determination is not *deterministic*. The question of the politics of alienation is not a simple algebra constituted by independent variable "economic organisation"/dependent variable "political subjectivity." This manner of interpreting Marx's theory has resulted in the gravest errors of interpretation and theoretical production by both Marxists and critics of Marx. Rather, determination in general pertains within contradiction and the determination of human subjectivity pertains within the context of the subjective, active, thinking and practical character of human beings. The making of the body as an instrument is a determination of form; the particular content, quality, and degree of

⁵² Debord *Society of the Spectacle* Para 42. Emphasis in original.

instrumentalisation is determined within the opposition between domination and resistance. This is the political space of alienation.

The important point here is that the form of determination – a contextual and precarious determination of the body, and therewith of political subjectivity itself – bears upon the *potential* for the resistance to domination. The form of labour-power in emergent forms of labour is engendered by the capitalist valorisation of the capacities of bodies – the capacity to learn, to change, to work – from which resistance emerges. There is no universal formula that connects the determination of the body with either interminable domination or structural refusal but rather the results of domination and practices of refusal are embodied. The body, in work and in life, is itself the site of the domination of the capitalist mode of production and of resistance to it, at whatever degrees it may present itself.

Emergent forms of labour indicate that economy is organised such that the human capacities and potentialities from which resistance to alienation can emerge are themselves alienated from the bodies that bear them. Alienation is a process of the twisting and distorting of human capacities such that they fulfil the needs of value, the reification of these capacities as commodified labour-power, and the separation of these capacities and their estrangement in the body of the person who is the object of the work. Thus a circle is made in these processes of alienation that nonetheless persists within a contradiction between the production of the body as variable capital and the production of the body as human. This alienation is not simply a phenomenon in production but rather extends throughout spheres of production and consumption, these spheres mediated within the dual contradictory character of the reproduction of labour-power. The potential for resistance to domination is subsumed under the figure of value. As a result, antagonism is not merely a general alienation of humanity as separate and opposed figures of labour and capital. Nor is antagonism simply the domination of one figure by the other, nor is it the resistance to domination. It is the construction of that antagonism in an assemblage of political economic forms, with the production of bodies at its centre, such that the capitalist organisation of production appears as a natural, eternal figure that is more or less suited to the provision and satisfaction of need and desire because the production of bodies under capitalism formatively shapes, within contradiction, need and desire in almost every field of life. Emergent forms of labour shapes bodies such that antagonism is occluded, domination internalised, and the indeterminate figure of the potential for praxis is determined as a commodified use-value of labour-power.

The capacities and potentialities of bodies for praxis – the qualities of bodies that humans draw upon to express their Being as political Being – has become the social form of the domination of labour by capital. The political problem is that economic domination takes a form in which it shapes the potential for resistance in the image of value, in the image of itself. The extension of capitalist power is simultaneously the limit to anticapitalism and the possibility for the transcendence of this limit. The alienated unity of the productive and reproductive spheres appears interminable as capital is on the verge of the total domination of life by commodity logic. But the instrument of the labour process is the worker's body; it is the worker's capacity to change, to create, to engage in human relationships and to produce the world. As such, the alienation of these capacities as instrument brings species-being directly into confrontation with capitalist production within the labour process. Therefore, the emerging politics of alienation connects the 'colossal, but timid, limit to capital' – the power to work, to create, to change, to engage and interact with the world in a practical, critical way – directly to the site of production. The emergent labour process brings the dual contradictory character of the reproduction of labour-power into a direct confrontation with the logic of value at the point of production. The reproduction of the human confronts the commodification of the human as labour-power in the labour-process itself.

The emerging politics of alienation persists in the gap between the totalisation of commodity logic and the totalisation of working class antagonism. The marks made on bodies are not indelible but are made on subjects within history; capital is an active subject shaping bodies and bodies are active subjects shaping their own bodies and the bodies of others. What matters is *how* this contradiction takes antagonistic forms.