

Marx and the Materialist Implosion to Zero: An Introduction to the Groundless Configurations of Political Economy

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Abstract: The resuscitation of the New Left from unilaterally reducing Marx into a study of labor exploitation, cultural hegemony, and the deprivation of the human has to be read as the problem of those conditions in confronting capitalism's exposure of its own deadlocks in crisis. As an alternative, the move of this article is to introduce an alternative reading of Marx's materialism in its faithfulness towards capital's perverted drive to suspend its own elementary conditions for its functioning (the cessation of production and circulation processes). The drive for capital to exceed its own conditions will forever be postponed through a bad infinity but then this irresolvable defective drive will always be immutable. Marx already hinted this in his close reading of Feuerbach's critique of religion by simply retaining the very illusions of religion as affirmative of the ontological reality of capital's sublime perversion. In his mature writings, this theme becomes surfaced throughout his engagement with Ricardo and Bailey's debate concerning the absolute value of the commodity. Marx's move here is to disclose the formulation of the theory of value through labor exploitation (Ricardo) and social relations among commodities (Bailey) only by rejecting the illusory dimension of capital's perverted drive (which in *Kapital I* and *II* is the rejection of the fetish quality of money). What Marx discovered instead, at the end of this article, is the infinite reproduction of the commodity to *want to be itself* through a leap toward the systems of equivalences. But only can this theory be fleshed out once the starting point of materialism has to be the critical moment when the commodity has lost its own bearings within production and circulation processes: the moment of *zero*.

Keywords: *Zero, Salto Mortale, Suture, Deadlock, Trieb*

*The event is itself a splitting off from, or a breaking with causality; it is a bifurcation, a deviation with respect to laws, an unstable condition which opens up a new field of the possible.*¹

- Gilles Deleuze

*The commodity to be exchanged may possibly be the product of some new kind of labour; that pretends to satisfy newly arisen requirements, or even to give rise itself to new requirements. A particular operation, though yesterday, perhaps, forming one out of the many operations conducted by one producer in creating a given commodity, may to-day separate itself from this connexion, may establish itself as an independent branch of labour and send its incomplete product to the market as an independent commodity.*²

- Karl Marx

Introduction: Marx without the Zero

The motifs of contemporary Marxism schematize itself — when being met with the never-ending exposure of capital's deadlocks — returns to a tragic political resignation in three fronts: on one hand, one will return to Orthodox Marxism; that is to say, a reimposition of a naive disposition of *givenness*: the way to resolve the failure of transposing speculative criticism towards praxis must be read as the opposition between metaphysical and scientific thinking; hence, the solution becomes the dissolution of the current order by reducing dialectics towards the scientific motion of historical, sociological and economic studies *à la* Engels. On the other hand, Cultural Marxists deploys another deadlock within Orthodox Marxism which in Lukács' "*What is Orthodox Marxism?*" explains an innovative expansion of industrial capitalism: the structural obfuscation of workers' consciousness lies in the gap between the scientific construction of capitalism — superstructures reifying social relations as natural facts — and the dynamic historical development of modernity;³ that is why his response to Engels' opposition between metaphysics and scientific Marxism as the obstruction of workers' consciousness in the *Anti-Dühring* is that the return to the latter becomes another *illusory content* of isolating facts from their corresponding social reality. But on another front is this ongoing resignation to Heideggerian Marxism: the recoiling towards scientific facts and the urge to shatter illusions *à la* Brecht becomes another ontic affair; if the radical restructuring of the given order becomes another problem of metaphysics, then the persistence of capital lies in the failure of conjoining the ontic dimension of concrete reality and the engagements of the ontological in which the solution for this gap is to reduce the problem into politically translating the ontological thrownness of being into its ontic historical operations (being-historical). The political project here becomes the benign restructuring of capitalism to secure the placements of meaning-giving: the return to the primordial "sendings of being" (*Seinsgeschick*). In Bloch's *On Marx*, he acutely criticized those three fronts as *Marx without the zero point*. "The zero point of the most extreme alienation, as represented by the proletariat," Bloch argues "becomes the point of dialectical reversal."⁴ And here, it must be cautioned that what Bloch meant by "dialectical reversal" is not so much the historicization of Marx under existing structural entanglements but it is this reversion to this zero as a pure "nothingness"⁵

¹ Gilles Deleuze, *Two Regimes of Madness* (New York: Semiotext(e), 2003), 116.

² Karl Marx, *Kapital*, vol. 1 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1887), 72.

³ Gyorgy Lukács, "What Is Orthodox Marxism?" in *History and Class Consciousness*, (Marx-Engels Internet Archive, 1967) accessed July 19, 2023. <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lukacs/works/history/orthodox.htm>.

⁴ Ernst Bloch, *On Marx* (London: Verso, 2018), 12.

⁵ Bloch, *On Marx*, 12.

— escaping categorizations while still circumscribed within the immanent — transcribed as the “plane of concrete possibility.” As a consequence, the zero which is resolved with its religio-generic entity is formalized by Bloch at the end of the chapter, “*Karl Marx and Humanity: The Material of Hope*.”⁶ becomingness is less about the rejection of metaphysics’ sclerotized tendencies than the metamorphosis of all things existing as being mediated by an empty indeterminate space; the concrete is spoken as an “objective non-warrantability” of the future to arrive. Thus, in his radical construction, Bloch formulated a materialism without any rigid ties to sociological and historiographical tenets: the concrete is always in its ‘unfinished state’ that obstructs the infinite processes of “drawing near a goal.”⁷

A new question then has to be formulated: if there is a sheer encounter of deadlocks on all established Marxist studies, then isn’t the more perverted problem this *drive to clear from the zero*? Or when a new diametrical opposition emerges, the move becomes a unilateral recoiling towards one than the other (which in this case is the heavy favoring of scientific nature, theory of reification, and the liberation from the techno-think (*das Man*) more than the others)? The missing link, however, in Bloch’s formulation of the *zero* is its relation towards contemporary ideology: the reinforcement of nonbelief.⁸ If the illusory contents of reality (here this must include the rejection of both the suprasensible discussions of the divine and the fetish quality of the commodities) must be disavowed, then why does the faculty of reason still remain stubborn in reconstructing the outside even when it’s impossible to conceive it in moments of despair? The alternative therefore is to locate the mad drive of capitalism as synonymous to the eternal defect of reason itself. The direction of this paper is to locate the perverted drive of capital within Marx’s critique of political economy as an extension of his critique of religion; to simply put it, the *zero* of capital qua religion is the drive to violate its own elementary conditions for its own expansion in the same way that reason has an internal perverted drive to negate its own conditions to achieve a sense of wholeness. And just like the tragedy of reason reaching its own meltdown towards the *Outside* within the immanent, the internal structuring of capital is in its schizophrenic implosion *ad infinitum*, forever breaching towards non-symbolic coordinates but bearing no signs of decay.

Materialist Implosion to Zero: The Theological-Metaphysical Niceties of the Rational Miser

Rehabilitating the *zero* without favoring the libidinal domains, economic signifiers, socio-historical relations, and structure-superstructure impositions must require finding its theoretical genesis in Marx’s reading of Feuerbach’s critique of religion. Recall when Feuerbach argued in the chapter “Contradiction in Revelation of God” that the expression of divine revelation is this split contradiction between objective historical disclosures and subjective rational affirmation.⁹ But what he is truly after here is not to speak of this as mere distinction between divine nature which is outside the reach of the human condition and the faculty of reason to attribute human signifiers to God but that this divine revelation qua split is derived from the internal malfunction of reason itself (not in the fallibility of reason but the very obsession of reason to lunge towards both the indiscernible and the drive for its own destruction); this defect reproduces the compulsion of reason to drive itself towards its own negation; towards anything that self-destruct human essences. The temptation here, in which Engels fell upon, is either 1) resolving this split towards the classic restoration of human species-

⁶ Bloch, *On Marx*, 22.

⁷ Bloch, *On Marx*, 23.

⁸ Paul Einstein and Todd McGowan, *Rupture: On the Emergence of the Political* (Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2012), 46.

⁹ Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity* (Walnut: MSAC Philosophy Group, 2008), 163

essences vis-à-vis a materialist reversion consisting of socio-historical totalities and natural-scientific progressions; shunning down any trans-human realities in favor of material sensuous reality. “With irresistible force,” Engel argues in *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy*, “Feuerbach is finally driven to the realization that the Hegelian pre-mundane existence of the “absolute idea”, the “pre-existence of the logical categories” before the world existed, is nothing more than the fantastic survival of the belief in the existence of an extra-mundane creator.”¹⁰ The materialist suturing between God and human reason — which impels the subject to project itself to the divine — lies within the identical relation between God and man; the human reflection of God within the planes of determinate reality will not contradict the nature of God while the placement of God without its distinction from material reality does not intrude the generic essence of the human. Or 2) reject the deadlock altogether as an empty illusory “nothing” which obstructs the unification between divine and human identity. In this manner, Feuerbach describes the knowledge of God being the projection of human knowledge not as the simplistic alienation of man from his own internal nature but as the fatal drive of reason to reinstate the *gap*. But here Feuerbach extends this *gap* in the next chapter “Contradiction in the Nature of God”: the antagonism as “nothing” theoretically shifts from God-human distinctions towards the “highest degree of resemblance”;¹¹ the pure absence of distinction — outside God-human unification — away from a radical solipsism: the suppression of the doctrines of reason itself; the zero point for reason to make distinctions between God and the subject. And yet, looking back on the chapter “Creation out of Nothing,” this absent center from making any significations is precisely what activates the whole play of human subjectivity: the infinite drive for reason to keep up with itself; the “nothing” which compels the stubborn attempt of reason towards a sense of wholeness.

To speak is an act of the will; thus, creation is a product of the Will: as in the Word of God man affirms the divinity of the human word, so in creation he affirms the divinity of the Will: not, however, the will of the reason, but the will of the imagination — the absolutely subjective, unlimited will. The culminating point of the principle of subjectivity is creation out of nothing.¹²

The missing link therefore in Feuerbach’s reading is that this deadlock as “nothing” is expressed as the defective compulsion of reason towards an indiscernible category as *excess* deeming it scandalous to the discourse of reason (i.e., the disposition that something can be created out of nothing is folly from the position of rationality) instead of simply positing a suprasensible space that exceeds the human. This elucidation is similar to that with the correspondence between Gershom Scholem and Walter Benjamin where Scholem speaks the “nothingness of revelation” as a “zero point” only insofar as the absence of contents *disappear* but at the same time *appearing* as zero within the immanent.¹³ Here Todd McGowan supplements it by deriving the assertion of the “nothingness of revelation” from the overarching incompleteness of significations which demands to hide the zero by asserting “endless proliferation of signifiers.”¹⁴ It must be then necessary to reverse Feuerbach’s formulation on the self-alienation of religious experiences: God as the missing signifier does not simply affirm its own internal cartography whereby the sublime encounter of the suprasensible activates human projection towards the divine but it is this empty signifier that grounds the basic

¹⁰ Frederick Engels, *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy* (Marx-Engels Internet Archive, 1994), accessed September 20, 2023, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1886/ludwig-feuerbach/>.

¹¹ Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, 180-181.

¹² Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, 63

¹³ Gershom Scholem, *The Correspondence of Walter Benjamin and Gershom Scholem. 1932-1940*, trans. Gary Smith and Andre Lefevere (New York: Schocken Books, 1989), 142.

¹⁴ Einstein and McGowan, *Rupture*, 43.

ontological reality of structures, that is, religion affirms the incompleteness of everything but at the same time reproduces the drive for its own completion. The culmination therefore of the splitting between the divine and the discourse of reason is the very *failure* of reason to attain its own infrastructures instead of the epistemological failure of reason to reach divine terrains; the impossibility of the subject to retain its own generic essence. The modeling of religion now becomes torn between two problematics: on one hand, the mysticism of religion — in which Engels, Feuerbach, the early Marx, and Brecht concern themselves with — as either veiling the historical-natural interplays in concrete reality or remaining indifferent to human essences and on the other hand, the mysticism of religion as illusion positively affirms the perverted drive of both reason and structures themselves. To put it simply, the former is concerned with historicization while the latter is concerned with the infinite drive [*Trieb*] to suture deadlocks in its encounter of the zero. So, the real theoretical trap here is that the *zero* qua religion is not suppressed by the self-alienation of the human from his/her generic essence but by the total rejection of the deadlock as an *illusion* by either returning to the socio-historical structures of the concrete or to designate the *zero* as another sociological category: the error of secularizing the *Outside* as zero within the discourse of the *Inside*. Marx here intervenes with two shifting theoretical attitudes towards religion:

- 1) In the preface of *Economic & Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, it is axiomatic to read Marx's criticism against Feuerbach's reversion towards religious anthropology as just another derivation from philosophical speculation. But away from the putative scholarly analysis where Marx's analysis of alienation is simply read as the deprivation of the subject's generic essence through labor, what he truly contested, especially in the chapters "*Wages of Labor*" and "*Estranged Labor*," was that the reversion towards the material conditions *à la* Feuerbach never reveals the process of alienation as an *abstracted* process waiting to be realized within commodities; it can reveal the material processes of capital, private property, and labor which leads to *estrangement* (e.g., explaining the alienation through a computed and concealed difference between market-price and natural-price), but it can never reveal the eternal split between labor and what it produces.¹⁵ The early Marx's interest with Feuerbach's critique of religion is not therefore the lack of praxiological contents but it is that the materialist reversion *does not go far enough*. And so, the focus here should not be that Marx's approach to religion is similar to Feuerbach's critique through the theoretical retention of human essences, but instead the interesting divergence between the two is that the latter plays with alienation through this subjective projection as being derived from the abstractive split between God and man (and hence rejecting the alienation by returning to naturalistic explanations of reality) while the former formulates alienation not as mere illusions but as an abstractive split between worker and produces being *materialized*. What the early Marx meant in "*Estranged Labor*" that "the more man puts into God, the less he retains in himself" is not *estrangement* as simply a moment of despair where the subject's human essence becomes absent in exploitation but it is when the *split* being abstracted by capitalists — rendering laborers as workers — eventually becomes

¹⁵ "Political economy proceeds from the fact of private property, but it does not explain it to us. It expresses in general, abstract formulae the *material* process through which private property actually passes, and these formulae it then takes for *laws*. It does not *comprehend* these laws — i.e., it does not demonstrate how they arise from the very nature of private property" See Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy*, trans. Martin Nicolaus (London: Penguin Books in association with New Left Review, 1973), 69-70.

materialized as a *total loss of reality*;¹⁶ alienation qua religion is less about static miseries than the objective world which loses its own bearing from the position of the proletariat.

- 2) In *Kapital I*, although Marx abandoned capital as another machinery that alienates subjects from their labor, he nonetheless extends the critique of political economy as another religio-generic entity. Interestingly, what he criticized in David Ricardo and Adam Smith is that they both removed the illusory contents of money and gold altogether (similar to that of Feuerbach) and thereby resorting to the theories of political economy as either a reduction of capital towards labor exploitation or the interrelation of use-value and exchange-value in disclosing the mode of general equivalences which makes the exchange of commodities possible. Marx's novels move through religion was neither to favor capital as a category of labor expenditure or the social qualities of commodity which makes the whole enterprise of exchange concealed but, by retaining the fetish quality of money, what he arrives at is the description of capital as the reproduction of the "rational miser" which interests themselves in "accumulating riches in heaven."¹⁷ Karatani's *Transcritique: On Kant and Marx* describes this Marxist formulation of capital's religious content as that of a "sublime perversion"¹⁸ which cannot be exposed with historical materialism. The "perversion" for Marx is the eternal drive for capital to exceed its own functioning — which thereby contradicts — the fundamental conditions for commodity exchange and expansion in Industrial capitalism. What Marx described capital as a "theological and metaphysical niceties"¹⁹ — while retaining its economic coordinates — must be read as the interminability of this perverted religious drive of capital to self-expand (without the need for private property and labor exploitation) in the exposition of capital's deadlock in crisis; if the commodity remains unsold in its *zero* baseline where production and circulation processes are temporarily suspended, then commodity becomes what it is *even* when it does not meet the conditions of exchange but only in virtue of capital to reproduce new forms of expansion — in crisis — without classical modes of domination (e.g., an example is introducing credit systems).

The *zero* qua retaining the illusions of religion in both cases is that the main conditions for capitalist expansion are always both *groundless* (deprived of any substantive contents such as structure-superstructure relations) and *worldless* (deprived of any socio-historical bearings). Its point of expansion is neither within the concrete conditions of political occurrences being tied to superstructural impositions nor the economic conditions for capital to follow the logic of labor, rent, and imperialism. Instead, it is found within a critical space between two modes where the synthesis of values can be

¹⁶ "This fact expresses merely the object which labor produces — labor's product — confronts it as *something alien*, as a *power independent* of the producer. The product of labor is labor which has been congealed in an object, which has become material: it is the *objectification* of labor. Labor's realization is its objectification. In the conditions dealt with by political economy this realization of labor appears as *loss of reality* for the workers; objectification as *loss of the object* and *object-bondage*; appropriation as *estrangement*, as *alienation*." See Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*, 71.

¹⁷ Kojin Karatani, *Transcritique. On Kant and Marx* (London: MIT Press, 2003), 7.

¹⁸ Karatani, *Transcritique*, 209.

¹⁹ "A commodity appears, at first sight, a very trivial thing, and easily understood. Its analysis shows that it is, in reality, a very queer thing, abounding in metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties. So far as it is a value in use, there is nothing mysterious about it, whether we consider it from the point of view that by its properties it is capable of satisfying human wants, or from the point that those properties are the product of human labour." See Marx, *Kapital* vol. 1, 46.

achieved for exchange and the case when the synthesis of values becomes interrupted but is still necessary for its own functioning; the “accumulation of riches in heaven” is synonymous with the internal defect of reason to infinitely drive itself towards its own self-negation in order to breach into indiscernible territories: *the perverted drive of capital to both establish its own conditions for its expansion and to violate those very conditions itself*. Marx already hinted this in the fourth chapter of *Kapital I* titled “*The General Formula of Capital*.” The transformation of money into capital cannot be located within the moment of consumption; that is to say, the deficiency in explaining capital as C-M-C (Commodity sold to sustain purchasing powers to acquire another commodity) is that the process contains no mystery of capital; it only ends when the transaction falls out from the circulation process — towards consumption — with the general equivalence of two commodities in order to satisfy a definite want. But with the process of sales as M-C-M (Money not being spent unlike in C-M-C but *advanced* within the circulation process), a “reflux of money”²⁰ occurs without a final phase when the rules of general equivalency among commodities become disintegrated: the synthesis of values becomes lost in the circulation process.

The character and tendency of the process M-C-M, is therefore not due to any qualitative difference between its extremes, both being money, but solely to their quantitative difference. More money is withdrawn from circulation at the finish than was thrown into it at the start. The cotton that was bought for £100 is perhaps resold for £100 + £10 or £110. The exact form of this process is therefore M-C-M', where M' = M + D M = the original sum advanced, plus an increment. This increment or excess over the original value I call “surplus value.”²¹

Surplus-value, in this particular case, becomes the zero point that violates the general rule for equivalences. The reselling of cotton in this example has to be incremental by reinstating an excess value (which in Marx’s specific example is the retention of the same surplus-value of £10 being incremented towards the shifting quantitative value of a £100) in contrast with the rules of consumption in C-M-C where, although the quantitative difference between two commodities can persist, the qualitative value between two commodities should still be equivalent (e.g., the value of a yarn is different from the value of a cotton but the labor power needed to produce one article of yarn and cotton has to be the same). What is the difference between the lack of equivalency made by surplus-value in sales and the lack of equivalency in purchase? It is that the latter can be self-corrected to presume the circulation process towards its ends in the consumption phase (e.g., if 1 cotton is not enough to be exchanged with 1 gold then it is necessary for the qualitative and quantitative property of 1 cotton to be altered until the subject can acquire 1 gold) while the former is *infinitely irresolvable*. Marx’s move here is to locate the transformation of money into capital without the classical formulas for wealth accumulation. Instead, he locates the transformation into capital as the *infinite compulsion to repeat the interminable* qua surplus-value.

The expansion of value, which is the objective basis or main-spring of the circulation M-C-M, becomes his subjective aim, and it is only in so far as the appropriation of ever more and more wealth in the abstract becomes the sole motive of his operations, that he functions as a capitalist, that is, as capital personified and endowed with consciousness and a will. Use-values must therefore never be looked upon as the real aim of the capitalist; neither must the profit on any single transaction. The restless never-ending process of profit-making alone is what he aims at. This boundless greed after riches, this passionate chase after exchange-value, is common to the capitalist and the miser; but while the miser is merely a capitalist gone mad, the capitalist is a *rational miser* (Emphasis added). The never-ending augmentation of exchange-value, which the miser strives after,

²⁰ Marx, *Kapital* vol.1, 103.

²¹ Marx, *Kapital* vol.1,10.

by seeking to save his money from circulation, is attained by the more acute capitalist, by constantly throwing it afresh into circulation.²²

What Marx did in this passage was not to abandon the logic of wealth accumulation in wholesale, but this perverted drive of capital wishes to partition itself by exceeding the rules of wealth accumulation; the strong compulsion to expand itself by being unconnected to the material categories of capital (i.e., labor, theory of reification, and etc.). In this precise sense, the theological category of capitalism is the drive to expand — activated by its zero qua the irresolvability of the split between exchange-value and use-value — without the *desire for material*. That is why Karatani's reading of Marx ends with an antinomy: commodity can be achieved and unachieved even when the general rule of equivalence within the exchange proper still remains (*Ex Post Facto*).²³ A commodity can be what it is even when the equivalent values remain unfulfilled or violated: it becomes commodity as *Ex Ante Facto*. That is to say, the commodity in this position can be expressed as not-yet becoming a commodity; the possibility of the commodity to be what it is even when the synthesis would impossibly be met. The final expression therefore in constituting a commodity is that when the basic rules of production and circulation become interrupted, *the commodity wants to be itself*; establishing the synthesis of values as another signifier to recover its own defect and incompleteness. The rational miser who wishes to “accumulate riches in heaven” becomes the zero cartography of capital for its functioning *without the need to own*: without any reference to consumption, equivalences, and production. “All nations with a capitalist mode of production” argues Marx in *Kapital II* “are therefore seized periodically by a feverish attempt to make money *without the intervention of the process of production* (emphasis added).”²⁴ That is why when the cracks of capital qua the defect within the synthesis between exchange-value and use-value become surfaced in crisis, capital redeploys this zero point in order to recreate new structures of social relations to fulfill its own incompleteness but at the same time eternally preserving its own cracks: *a materialist implosion to zero without any moment of collapse*. The strong alternative, therefore, against naive Scientific Marxism and Historical Materialism is to theorize a radical form of materialism which is focused on capital's drive to impossibly resolve the zero but also the impossibility to imagine its own demise: *capitalism as a living dead*; it can never catch up to itself but also infinitely reproducing its own mode of existence. That is why in *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, capital's response to the growing economic recessions in France leading to 1968 is to reintroduce *a new form of subjectivity*:²⁵ neo-liberalism becomes reproduced by appropriating the demands of leftist trade unions and students; capitalism becomes a *liquified reversal* of traditional power imbalances. It now becomes possible for capitalist machinery to expand itself by embracing class struggle; that is to say, national industrialization and the need for creative and sexual autonomy can be deployed *without quitting the rules of the democratic game* of capital. This new form of subjectivity becomes the total annihilation of radically restructuring social relations in favor of building models of meaningful participation of individuals — being assured of freedom from domination — within the public sphere (e.g., sexual liberation movements, experimenting with direct representation of laborers in workplaces, creative expression of human subjectivity, reverting back to ‘authentic’ forms of living, and etc.). No wonder Deleuze provocatively argued that “May ‘68 did not take place.”²⁶ There is a ‘social mutation’ that was “irreducible to social determinism”; a creative reinforcement of a new existence without

²² Marx, *Kapital* vol.1,105.

²³ Karatani, *Transcritique*, 8.

²⁴ Karl Marx, *Kapital* vol. 2 (New York: International Publishers, 1995).

²⁵ Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism* (London: Verso, 1999), 234.

²⁶ Deleuze, *Two Regimes of Madness*, 116.

purely siding with orthodox Marxism or cultural Marxism. The very impasse to resolve the economic recessions is precisely what created the new spirit of capitalism.

Marx's Intervention in the Ricardo-Bailey Debate and the Zero Cartography of Political Economy

Marx's appropriation of religion as an extension of his critique of political economy — if we relate this back to Marx's *Critique of Political Economy* and *Kapital* — exposes the tension between classical economics (in which it relies solely on Ricardo's theory of value) and neoclassical economics (its credence to Bailey's theory of value). With regards to the former, Ricardo relegates the realization of values only in the production process.²⁷ His rationale behind it is that if exchange-value is determined by labour-time then 1) the quantity of distribution relies on the value of the commodity in relation to its exchange value that is computed in parallel to its labour-time, and 2) the value must be intrinsic within the commodity itself; the relational structure among commodities "absolutized" in the form of exchange-value.²⁸ On the contrary, Bailey's critique of Ricardo counter-argues that value can only be found within the relations of commodities. What Bailey did was not to discard Ricardo's theory in wholesale but instead, he begins by accepting that the default appearance of political economy is exchange-values being drawn from expended labor;²⁹ but for Bailey, the mistake of classical economy is that 1) it ended there without probing the structures of political economy behind this mechanistic appearance, and 2) Ricardo's theory of value has no theoretical capacity to surface the value of a particular commodity even when it has the same quantity of exerted labor-power and physical properties with the same commodity. Marx uses a scenario where it takes forty yards of linen to make two coats with the same quality;³⁰ the trouble here according to Bailey is that only in Ricardo's theory can we express the value of those coats as an equivalence towards the value of the forty yards of linen, but it cannot explain the value of a single coat without constantly referring to the value of the linen. Hence, Bailey's solution is to theorize a new system of value that is dependent on the social form that is expressed within the relation between a commodity and expended labor; or to borrow from Marx's interpretation of Bailey, the "form of the manifestation" expressed within the "phenomenal form."³¹ The absolute expression of commodity as extracted labor being relativized into

²⁷ "Ricardo, the economist of production par excellence, whose object was the understanding of the distinct social structure of modern production, for this very reason declares that distribution, not production, is the proper subject of contemporary political economy." See Karl Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, 1970, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1850/pol-econ/appx1.htm>.

²⁸ "The author of "Observations" and S. Bailey accuse Ricardo of converting exchange value from something relative into something absolute. The opposite is the fact. He has explained the apparent relation between objects, such as diamonds and pearls, in which relation they appear as exchange values, and disclosed the true relation hidden behind the appearances, namely, their relation to each other as mere expressions of human labour. If the followers of Ricardo answer Bailey somewhat rudely, and by no means convincingly, the reason is to be sought in this, that they were unable to find in Ricardo's own works any key to the hidden relations existing between value and its form, exchange Value." See Marx, *Kapital* vol. 1, 45.

²⁹ "The author of "Observations" and S. Bailey accuse Ricardo of converting exchange value from something relative into something absolute. The opposite is the fact. He has explained the apparent relation between objects, such as diamonds and pearls, in which relation they appear as exchange values, and disclosed the true relation hidden behind the appearances, namely, their relation to each other as mere expressions of human labour." See Marx, *Kapital* vol. 1, 58.

³⁰ "For instance, forty yards of linen are worth — what? 2 coats. Because the commodity coat here plays the part of equivalent, because the use-value coat, as opposed to the linen, figures as an embodiment of value, therefore a definite number of coats suffices to express the definite quantity of value in the linen. Two coats may therefore express the quantity of value of forty yards of linen, but they can never express the quantity of their own value." See Marx, *Kapital* vol. 1, 37.

³¹ "The first peculiarity that strikes us, in considering the form of the equivalent, is this: use value becomes the form of manifestation, the phenomenal form of its opposite value. The bodily form of the commodity becomes its value

‘use-value.’ Marx’s latent concern is that Bailey’s critique and Ricardo’s theory of value are conceptually created only when *it resolves the splitting between exchange-value and use-value*; the exchangeability of commodity being finalized to either its equivalence to labor-time or to its relation to other commodities reduces the structure of political economy to either the production or circulation process. Although Marx understood that Ricardo’s theory of value opened class antagonism as the new specter of political economy³² and also Bailey’s critique of Ricardo contributed to a new dimension of commodity exchange without having a fixed center to determine its value (heterogeneous equivalences between two commodities that has the same expended labour-time and material property),³³ Marx’s baseline critique towards Ricardo and Bailey is that both of them mistaken labor value or use value as the real value of the commodity. And here it is imperative to take a step further than schematizing the problem as simply that of reducing political economy to either exchange-value or use-value: the theoretical defect here is that Ricardo’s reduction of commodity as “magnitude of value” must consist in *repressing the study of commodity in line with the origin of value* itself while Bailey’s analysis of commodity exchange — without being determined by an absolute value — has to *repress the immanent value of the commodity*:

[On Bailey] The few economists, amongst whom is S. Bailey, who have occupied themselves with the analysis of the form of value, have been unable to arrive at any result, first, because they confuse the form of value with value itself; and second, because, under the coarse influence of the practical bourgeois, they exclusively give their attention to the quantitative aspect of the question. “The command of quantity ... constitutes value.”³⁴

[On Ricardo] Ricardo never concerns himself about the origin of surplus value. He treats it as a thing inherent in the capitalist mode of production, which mode, in his eyes, is the natural form of social production. Whenever he discusses the productiveness of labour, he seeks in it, not the cause of surplus value, but the cause that determines the magnitude of that value. On the other hand, his school has openly proclaimed the productiveness of labour to be the originating cause of profit [...]. Nevertheless, Ricardo’s school simply shirked the problem, they did not solve it. In fact these bourgeois economists instinctively saw, and rightly so, that it is very dangerous to stir too deeply the burning question of the origin of surplus value.³⁵

form. But mark well, that this quid pro quo exists in the case of any commodity B, only when some other commodity A enters into a value relation with it, and then only within the limits of this relation. Since no commodity can stand in the relation of equivalent to itself, and thus turn its own bodily shape into the expression of its own value, every commodity is compelled to choose some other commodity for its equivalent, and to accept the use value, that is to say, the bodily shape of that other commodity as the form of its own value.” See Marx, *Kapital* vol. 1, 37.

³² “Let us take England. Its Political Economy belongs to the period in which the class struggle was as yet undeveloped. Its last great representative, Ricardo, in the end, consciously makes the antagonism of class interests, of wages and profits, of profits and rent, the starting point of his investigations, naively taking this antagonism for a social law of Nature.” See Marx, *Kapital* vol. 1, 11.

³³ “If we mean that, we do not mean that and vice versa. Our ‘meaning’ has nothing at all to do with the essential character of the thing we consider. If we speak of the value in exchange of a thing, we mean in the first instance of course the relative quantities of all other commodities that can be exchanged with the first commodity. But, on further consideration, we shall find that for the proportion, in which one thing exchanges with an infinite mass of other things, which have nothing at all in common with it—and even if there are natural or other similarities between those things, they are not considered in the exchange—[for the proportion] to be a fixed proportion, all those various heterogeneous things must be considered as proportionate representations, expressions of the same common unity, [of] an element quite different from their natural existence or appearances.” See Karl Marx, *1861-1863 Manuscripts* (New York: Prometheus Books), 315.

³⁴ See Marx, *Kapital* vol. 1, 54.

³⁵ Marx, *Kapital* vol. 1, 358.

Thus, the appropriate method to classify their theoretical deficiencies is not their internal error to describe socio-economic realities exhaustively but their theories on value were presented as *a repression of this unbearable antagonism* — as zero — outside production-circulation processes. That is why Karatani argued that this antagonism is formed through repressing this third mediating entity that disrupts the direct exchange among commodities.³⁶ There is a third figure that makes the exchange possible even without referring to the value being formulated by labor-exploitation nor the direct equivalences among commodity's values. On a basic level, Marx too has already written an explanation of such dilemma in *Kapital* which is similar to that of suppressing multiple bifurcations (but without the repression of the 'third space' that was directly supplemented by Karatani): on one hand, the problem of classical economy is that its theory of values can only be created by repressing the twofold character of labor: a suppression of the splitting between labor value that occurs during the production process (absolute labor value) and the labor value that is determined when the commodity exchange becomes finished (social labor value).³⁷ The significance of this antagonism for Marx is not to simply argue that labor-value has to undergo a shift in its own magnitude since it has to acquire its use-value eventually (if that were the case, then Marx would have repeated the same error with that of neoclassical economics by reducing the split into use-value) but instead he exposed the enigma of capitalist productivity: *the magnitude of labor-value cannot be quantitatively determined, even in the production process, until there is a 'price' — in its religious-fetish form — that expresses the commodity's 'equivalency'*.³⁸ And the

³⁶ Karatani, *Transcritique*, 34.

³⁷ "The insufficiency of Ricardo's analysis of the magnitude of value, and his analysis is by far the best, will appear from the 3rd and 4th books of this work. As regards value in general, it is the weak point of the classical school of Political Economy that it nowhere expressly and with full consciousness, distinguishes between labour, as it appears in the value of a product, and the same labour, as it appears in the use value of that product. Of course, the distinction is practically made, since this school treats labour, at one time under its quantitative aspect, at another under its qualitative aspect. But it has not the least idea, that when the difference between various kinds of labour is treated as purely quantitative, their qualitative unity or equality, and therefore their reduction to abstract human labour, is implied. For instance, Ricardo declares that he agrees with Destutt de Tracy in this proposition: "As it is certain that our physical and moral faculties are alone our original riches, the employment of those faculties, labour of some kind, is our only original treasure, and it is always from this employment that all those things are created which we call riches... It is certain, too, that all those things only represent the labour which has created them, and if they have a value, or even two distinct values, they can only derive them from that (the value) of the labour from which they emanate." (Ricardo, "The Principles of Pol. Econ.," 3 Ed. Lond. 1821, 334.) We would here only point out, that Ricardo puts his own more profound interpretation upon the words of Destutt. What the latter really says is, that on the one hand all things which constitute wealth represent the labour that creates them, but that on the other hand, they acquire their "two different values" (use value and exchange value) from "the value of labour." He thus falls into the commonplace error of the vulgar economists, who assume the value of one commodity (in this case labour) in order to determine the values of the rest. But Ricardo reads him as if he had said that labour (not the value of labour) is embodied both in use value and exchange value. Nevertheless, Ricardo himself pays so little attention to the twofold character of the labour which has a twofold embodiment, that he devotes the whole of his chapter on "Value and Riches, Their Distinctive Properties," to a laborious examination of the trivialities of a J.B. Say. And at the finish he is quite astonished to find that Destutt on the one hand agrees with him as to labour being the source of value, and on the other hand with J. B. Say as to the notion of value." See Marx, *Kapital* vol. 1, 56.

³⁸"In a sense, it is correct to say that Marx sought to push the Ricardian labor theory of value even further than Ricardo. On the other hand, facing an impasse, Ricardo partly revised his theory and had it that value is not determined solely by invested labor, except for within those departments that have a standard composition of capital and a standard turnover term. As I have already said in the context of Bailey's criticism of Ricardo, however, Marx was no longer of the opinion that each commodity internalizes its own value. The value of each commodity is given only when the relationship between commodities forms a system; if so, even if the value substance of a commodity is the invested labor, it would be the labor value that has been repositated and adjusted in the exchange with money. In other words, it is the "social labor-time" or the "abstract labor-time," as Marx put it. Marx's social labor time is distinct from the actual labor time expended to produce individual commodities; it is rather the labor time that is discovered belatedly within products after being socially constituted via the exchange with money. The value vis-à-vis labor time—either via commodity exchange or

point here is not to determine ‘equivalency’ as the social relation among commodities and labors that is needed for the direct exchange but rather as the withering of absolute labor value (and yet paradoxically that expended labor time is needed to determine the value of the commodity in the exchange proper) whereby the ‘price’ has to resolve such contradiction by precisely establishing its equivalence vis-à-vis the socialization of the commodity which was provoked in the moment of exchange itself.³⁹ The problem with neoclassical economics is that, though their starting point is the exchange-value as the given appearance of political economy, they still classify labor only in the level of the ‘seeming’ (*erscheint*)⁴⁰ and therefore must be unmasked into its essence qua social forms. Marx argues that Bailey’s gesture which absolutizes use-value represses the manifestation of political economy as the antagonism between manifestation (*Erscheinung*) and essence (*Wesen*);⁴¹ as Marx would argue in *Kapital I*, exchange-value only stands for the “equal quantities”⁴² that are common to the commodities in the exchange process but use-value becomes constructed after the successful equivalences (in the level of having the ‘natural properties of the commodities’ being equal) among commodities— hence, what Marx would call as the “total abstraction”⁴³ that parted ways from the intrinsic property of the commodities. However, Marx’s formulation remains incomplete because it has not yet explained the moment of ‘split’ qua *zero* being repressed. The closest to where Marx would explicitly get to is that the culmination of the commodity exchange is the irreconcilable division between exchange-value and use-value as soon as its concrete and abstract labor remains ‘out of sight’ in consumption (commodity exchange operates when its exchange-value manifests as independent from its use-value since exchange-value is the only form where the value of the commodity can appear).⁴⁴ Althusser, in *Reading Capital*, went further by interpreting the division between consumption

capitalist production—cannot be measured quantitatively by any means whatsoever. What we can know is only price. And what is certain is that capital is deadly serious about the reinforcement of productivity; that this is realized only by shortening the necessary labor time; and that the difference of productivity determines the hierarchy of value systems of world nations.” See Karatani, *Transcritique*, 337.

³⁹ “Also in *Capital*, Marx says he assumes “simple labor”; this is for convenience’ sake and the “simple” has nothing to do with the kind of labor. The diversity and complexity of labor as use-value cannot be measured quantitatively. But it is in reality quantified—as the amount of wages—only after being socialized by the commodity exchange. Therefore, intellectual labor comes to be quantitatively compared with simpler labors. It is not that the labor time expended for the production of commodities places them in equivalency, but that placing them in equivalency determines the social labor time expended for the production. The quality of labor does not matter in this. And there is no need to revise the previous analysis; even in the face of a shift of major labor forms from, for instance, the second industry (manufacturing) to the third industry (service).” See Karatani, *Transcritique*, 337.

⁴⁰ “Exchange-value appears (*erscheint*) first of all as the quantitative relation, the proportion, in which use-values of one kind exchange for use-values of another kind. This relation changes constantly with time and place. Hence exchange-value seems (*scheint*) to be something accidental and purely relative, and consequently an intrinsic value [...] seems (*scheint*) a contradiction in terms.” See Marx, *Kapital* vol. 1, 26.

⁴¹ Marx, *Kapital* vol. 1, 26.

⁴² “Let us take two commodities, e.g., corn and iron. The proportions in which they are exchangeable, whatever those proportions may be, can always be represented by an equation in which a given quantity of corn is equated to some quantity of iron: e.g., 1 quarter corn = x cwt. iron. What does this equation tell us? It tells us that in two different things – in 1 quarter of corn and x cwt. of iron, there exists in equal quantities something common to both. The two things must therefore be equal to a third, which in itself is neither the one nor the other. Each of them, so far as it is exchange value, must therefore be reducible to this third.” See Marx, *Kapital* vol. 1, 27.

⁴³ “This common “something” cannot be either a geometrical, a chemical, or any other natural property of commodities. Such properties claim our attention only in so far as they affect the utility of those commodities, make them use values. But the exchange of commodities is evidently an act characterised by a total abstraction from use value.” See Marx, *Kapital* vol. 1, 27.

⁴⁴ “We have seen that when commodities are exchanged, their exchange value manifests itself as something totally independent of their use value. But if we abstract from their use value, there remains their Value as defined above. Therefore, the common substance that manifests itself in the exchange value of commodities, whenever they are

and production not as a strict separation but as a culmination towards a *new condition* of commodity relations. His main points are 1) the split between consumption and production created a new method — as the pure relation between the two opposing fields — for realizing values without having to integrate the commodity within the circulation process only for the sake of meeting human needs. This ‘pure relation’ created a new motif of capitalist expansion as wealth accumulation⁴⁵ apart from anthropological needs (however Althusser’s scientific Marxism allows him to refer this ‘pure relation’ as a structural determination): the location of productivity is therefore not within concrete labor exploitation but as a *pure relation* that escapes consumption and production domains and yet it determines the whole play within consumption and production processes. A novel interpretation of capitalist expansion is therefore not anymore, this obscuration of exploitation within commodity exchange but a suturing of this production-consumption split. No wonder that in “*The Elements of the Structure and their History*” Althusser’s student, Etienne Balibar, hinted the function of structural determinisms not simply as the application of a universal mechanistic law towards commodity relations (e.g., laws of supply and demand, and etc.) but as the resolution of production-consumption relations (which is innately expressed as antinomic) being expressed within the social form of commodity relations.⁴⁶ 2) Althusser argued that the new conditions in both circulation and production should be expressed as the unity of social relations. But what he meant here is to argue that the result of relating all elements under the political economy discloses ‘pre-existing elements’ that exists in the form of gap (i.e., *Reading Capital* has several references towards discussing the abstract social form of the commodity by beginning with a split: examples in the text includes the split between buying and selling,⁴⁷ between law and tradition,⁴⁸ and etc.) instead of simply discussing commodity as a ‘combination’ (*Verbindung*)⁴⁹ of all social elements required to establish the values (whether exchange-value or use-value) needed for the direct exchange to occur. What Karatani did, however, is to raise the concerns of this third mediating site to the level of ‘crisis’; if the relation between buying and selling remains nullified in crisis (“the moment of fantasy collapses”),⁵⁰ then, for Karatani, people would still flock back to a theological illusion qua *money*:⁵¹ all in virtue of this incessant drive to resolve this unbearable antinomy. But the difference now is that 1) the drive towards the monetary system under a traumatic encounter to this third space cannot be described within the same categories of wealth accumulation since the artificial chain of payments that are necessary to own anything becomes defunct—the value of the commodity in crisis vanishes (here we must recall of this critical moment, which was also anticipated by Marx’s *Kapital*, as the fragile cessation of production and circulation processes).

In a crisis, the antithesis between commodities and their value-form, money, becomes heightened into an absolute contradiction. Hence, in such events, the form under which money appears is of

exchanged, is their value. The progress of our investigation will show that exchange value is the only form in which the value of commodities can manifest itself or be expressed. For the present, however, we have to consider the nature of value independently of this, its form.” See Marx, *Kapital* vol. 1, 27.

⁴⁵ “The proportion between these two departments is governed by the *structure* of production which intervenes directly to determine the nature and the quantity of a full part of the use-values which never enter consumption for need but only production itself. This discovery plays an essential part in the theory of the realization of value, in the process of capitalist accumulation, and in all the laws that flow from it.” See Louis Althusser, *Reading Capital* (London: NLB, 1970) 165-166.

⁴⁶ Althusser, *Reading Capital*, 231.

⁴⁷ Althusser, *Reading Capital*, 177-178.

⁴⁸ Althusser, *Reading Capital*, 228.

⁴⁹ Althusser, *Reading Capital*, 175.

⁵⁰ Karatani, *Transcritique*, 153.

⁵¹ Karatani, *Transcritique*, 153.

no importance. The money famine continues, whether payments have to be made in gold or in credit money such as banknotes.⁵²

2) in this sense, if commodity acquisition becomes null in a crisis, then Karatani's conceptualization of money is not that of a material medium in which it serves as both the "denominator of value"⁵³ (in terms of labor time) and the means of payment but it is an *imaginary* locale (what Marx described surplus-value as possessing "all the charms of a creation out of nothing") — in the same manner as to how Feuerbach posited the nothingness of the God-subject split as another activation of the perverted drive of reason — which expresses the subject's drive for a clearing after a traumatic encounter of this excessive third space (and this is what sets apart from Althusser's formulation where he reduced the antagonism between production and circulation as a part of capitalism's drive for productivity.⁵⁴ Specifically, the spirit of capitalism mutates its own conditions of expansion without the drive to acquire goods; the beast enlivens even without having to be motivated by economic needs nor having the drive to ownership). What Karatani implicitly points out here is crucial: this absent site that bares itself from the total operations of political economy is the *sine qua non* condition for the subject to *integrate* into the sphere of capital through the help of this inherent drive to stabilize the asymmetric relation within the system of values (where the irreducible antinomy discloses itself through a rupture). The purpose being that 1) the object, whose transposition towards being inducted into the modes of circulation was temporarily suspended during crisis, successfully becomes a commodity without any deterrence, and 2) capital needs to generate a new condition of commodity relations by both establishing alternative modes of commodity production and circulation (Althusser already hinted this when he argued that capitalism mutated when the very condition of how the production process functions — in its abstractive sense instead of producing goods in reliance to the quantity of supply and demand — can also be reproduced without having to rigidly apply it to production processes which require labor exploitation).⁵⁵ Simply, in the normal operations of political economy, money stands as the mediator for commodity exchange.⁵⁶ But in times of crisis, money negates the condition for commodity exchange because *it fabricates the subjects' drive to integrate within the equivalent-form* (or the abstract relations where it is possible to acquire the right to own anything only when the purchaser possesses an entity which has the proportional value with that of the commodity in transaction). Yet here Karatani expressed another note in line with Marx's critique against Bailey and Ricardo: classical and neoclassical economics are complicit in *repressing* this third mediating site and the rupturing effect of this irreducible antinomy (again, this antinomy was already presented as "equivalency" among commodities being expressed as the contradiction between extracted labor and the vanishing of labor value and 'use-value' constructed out of the attempt to resolve the antagonism between *Erscheinung* and *Wesen*) because they both neutralized 'money' as a fetish quality that remains as an illusion. For Ricardo, money is only secondary (while the main 'value substance', for them, should be labor) insofar as it only functions as an index for the equivalences among commodity values that have proportional relations of labor value.⁵⁷ The issue of money is minimal in Bailey's formulation

⁵² Marx, *Kapital* vol. 2, 87-88.

⁵³ Karatani, *Transcritique*, 22.

⁵⁴ Althusser, *Reading Capital*, 165-181.

⁵⁵ Althusser, *Reading Capital*, 165.

⁵⁶ "Classical economists and their critics, neoclassical economists, overlooked the enigma as to why exchanges could occur only by way of money. For they took money either as a measure of value or as a means of exchange." See Karatani, *Transcritique*, 333.

⁵⁷ "All commodities are mutually interrelated, but only mediated by money qua the general equivalent. Ricardo considered labor-value substantial and money secondary, while tacitly relying upon the being of money. All commodities

for the following reasons:⁵⁸ a) for him, equivalences between two commodities that have the same use-value is already enough for the direct exchange without accounting money as the mediator of value relations,⁵⁹ and b) money, in a neoclassical sense, functions to commence the exchange only when the commodity's value successfully relates itself into value relations. Karatani's intention was to expose the common defect of those two theories; that the empire of capital corrodes when we begin to denounce both its fetish qualities (the critical attitude in unveiling the structural gestures of capitalist productivity) and its totalitarian drive for self-expansion. In Bailey and Ricardo's positions, they fell for those theoretical traps because they only conceived of an object's transposition into commodity exchange within the circulation process.⁶⁰ Strictly speaking, their attempts to uncover the pathology of capital, by either rejecting the illusory dimension of money or analyzing money as expended labor, is just the dissolution of capital only within the level of production and consumption processes. This is why Karatani constantly upholds Marx's critique of political economy as a metaphysical affair in contradistinction to both Engels' claim that Marx's dialectics are meant to be materialist and Lukács' argument that Marx's method is aimed to critique totalizing systems of knowledge.⁶¹ If critique in the sphere of production-circulation processes (labor exploitation and theory of commodity fetishism) remains insufficient inasmuch as it underestimates the mysterious movement of capital's internal drive to self-produce itself outside those two processes, then Karatani's close reading of Marx lays out a groundwork of a novel caricature of critique (borrowing from Žižek)⁶² that retains this empty *form* that is responsible for sustaining both capitalist illusions and the shattering of its own mystifications (in the form of a suturing).

Conclusion: The Genesis of Capitalism as the Infinite Reproduction of the Negative

What must be resisted in Marx's critique of classical political economy and industrial capitalism is unilaterally favoring either labor exploitation (in the side of production) and commodity fetishism (in the side of consumption) and instead, confront its ontological emergence: *the origins of industrial capitalism — in a metaphysical sense — is the critique against illusory productions made by a fixed center*. The contours of capitalism in the *Communist Manifesto* are the *profanation of the holy*; but when the perverted drive of capitalism qua religion becomes confronted the dictum must be said in its reversal: *the sacralization of the profane*. The main injunction of capital is not anymore under a static instrumentalization of a center (whether capitalism shifts under the methods of technocratization or empowering human subjectivity) but it is to *negate this center* as another *illusion* which distorts the concrete conditions of socio-historical conditions. So instead of rejecting capital's 'inescapable mad drive' as a mere illusory content and returning the enterprise of philosophy to socio-historical relations,

are mutually interrelated, but only mediated by money qua the general equivalent. Ricardo considered labor-value substantial and money secondary, while tacitly relying upon the being of money." See Karatani, *Transcritique*, 194.

⁵⁸ Karatani, *Transcritique*, 6.

⁵⁹ Karatani, *Transcritique*, 6.

⁶⁰ "Marxists typically held that the economic domain was a base structure, while state and nation were superstructure. Furthermore, they restated that the superstructure nevertheless was relatively autonomous to, though determined by, the economic base. First, the very notion that the capitalist economy is base or infrastructure is itself questionable. The world organized by money and credit is rather one of illusion, with a peculiarly religious nature. Saying this from the opposite view, even though state and nation are composed by communal illusion, precisely like capitalism, they inevitably exist thanks to their realistic grounds. So it is that we cannot dissolve them by saying that they are illusory." See Karatani, *Transcritique*, 203.

⁶¹ G.H.R. Parkinson, *Georg Lukács* (Routledge: London, 1977), 41.

⁶² "Marx's basic move is the opposite one, the move back to the secret of the form itself. The key trap is not to be blinded by form, but to reduce form to a "mere form", that is, to overlook how the secret essence *needs* this form, how the form itself is essential" See Slavoj Žižek, "The Parallax View," *New Left Review* 25, no. January/February (2004), 55.

what must be done is to treat this as a crucial substance for the emergence of the capital: 1) the secularized diminution of illusion, as another religious-fetish content, which represses capital's internal splitting qua *zero* and 2) the very failure and lack of Capital to reach outside its own limits is its emerging moment itself. Marx's reading of Bailey's critique of Ricardo (that there is no fixed center for the systems of equivalency (labor exploitation, for Ricardo, being the universal essence) to function) should be read both as the rejection of money and the internalization of value within the commodity as illusions. Marx's first remark in "*Section 3: The Form of Value or Exchange-Value*" is that if these 'illusions' are removed, then what can only be explained is a new form that makes the relation of commodities discernible but it will be impossible to explain this empty 'thing' that indicates and signals the direct exchange and the commodity relation itself; this very 'illusion', for Marx, is what completes the exchange. Hence, the problematics regarding capitalism as requiring both a synthesis that ends in an equivalence among values and the negation of the synthesis of values altogether in integrating the commodity within the systems of equivalences should be reinterpreted as:

- 1) The question of how the self-expansionary movement of capital should be within the scaffolding of an invincible signifier that resists any correspondence to the empirical realm of social conditions.
- 2) The furnishing of the 'social character' of a commodity is only transmitted and spoken through this empty site that, paradoxically, resists the 'social character' of the commodity itself.

This absent site — yet still maintaining its location in material reality — from any reference to the 'social character' of the commodity vouches for what Marx explicitly discovered in surplus-value and its exploitations. At the first level, they are not under the classification of production process but under an irruptive *splitting* among value systems, buying and selling, and the processes of circulation and production itself. But on a more complex level, the logic of 'difference' among values that is synonymous with the 'splitting' in Marx must be this *empty interstitial gap* (this is not to mean of a higher supra-natural reality of course) *between objects that generates the mode of equivalentiality*; the irreducible force that stands within this 'empty gap' is *the motion of integration*. The empty site where it contributes to the heart of the beast. This gap is the recollection of what Marx relayed in *Kapital I*: the unity of exchange-value and use-value is only fulfilled by its own antinomy; the twofold character of labor value that appears in the commodity.⁶³ A synthesized value that is ready for the exchange is always mediated by a value-form that stands for the withering of the physical internal properties of the commodity as the main procedure of supplanting the subject into the general equivalent. But in the *Grundrisse* specifically on "The Chapter on Capital", this 'gap' becomes a reinforcement of capital's internal madness: *Capital lies in its special character as the relation of production or circulation to itself but also not within its internal special character that composes labour production or circulation.*⁶⁴ Perhaps this is the route in which historical materialism presents its own limits because history as modified feudal relations cannot speak of the 'thing' that obstructs all forward correspondences to any immanent contents but at the same also establishes its own relations to the material. In short, it can't explain the mad drive of capital outside of the domains of productivity and domination. When tasked with how surplus-value can be expressed even without the need to integrate within the circulation process, Marx also insisted in *Kapital I* how surplus-value cannot locate itself within the circulation process because the logic of equivalences as

⁶³ Marx, *Kapital* vol.1, 29-30

⁶⁴ Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy*, trans. Martin Nicolaus (London: Penguin Books in association with New Left Review, 1973), 186-213.

the conditions for the exchange has no capacity to create values but at the same time it also expresses the value of congealed labor (since equivalences only function to guarantee symmetry among value relations).

It is therefore impossible for capital to be produced by circulation, and it is equally impossible for it to originate apart from circulation. It must have its origin both in circulation and yet not in circulation... The conversion of money into capital has to be explained on the basis of the laws that regulate the exchange of commodities, in such a way that the starting-point is the exchange of equivalents. Our friend, Moneybags, who as yet is only an embryo capitalist, must buy his commodities at their value, must sell them at their value, and yet at the end of the process must withdraw more value from circulation than he threw into it at starting. His development into a full-grown capitalist must take place, both within the sphere of circulation and without it. These are the conditions of the problem. *Hic Rhodus, hic salta!*⁶⁵

So how does one read the mad drive of capital as both within and outside circulation and production processes? The clue is in the last line *Hic Rhodus, hic salta* (Rhodes is here, here is where you jump!). The expression of capital's madness in Marx's discernible antagonisms within surplus-value is through a *leap*. 'Leap', in *Kapital I*, is theorized to discern surplus-value being realized (the transubstantiation of money to capital in commodity exchanges) as a transition from exchange in its 'larval form' (meaning, a commodity has to begin with following the 'immanent laws of exchange') until it evolves into a 'butterfly' — the exchange now becomes fulfilled by escaping away from those laws of exchanges not to simply speak of transposing towards another rule of exchange viz. circulation process but that exchange, in its final form, is the retraction from all laws of exchange. No wonder Marx prudently pointed out that though the exchange ends in drawing "more value from circulation than he threw into it at starting" the exchange still *must, and yet must not* "take place in the sphere of circulation." Marx's attitude here under the pretext of commodity exchange qua leap, in this sense, has to fully operate under the lack of any positive identity towards both the production and circulation process; this 'leap' being under the denomination of a microscopic difference (the absent locale) between production and circulation. The fascination here is that *suturing* qua leap is not the masking of this 'absent locale' away from social reality but instead this resistance against the positive affirmation of both circulation and production processes are still part of capital's *constant variable* for its functioning: the integration of the absent site as another general system of sense. The alternative move here is not to simply return back to cultural criticism to unmask these malaises (which is another form of *suturing* in a sense that it has forgotten the production aspect of political economy) but to return to the condition of the object who has undergone the traumatic encounter of this 'absent locale' that resists the whole functioning of political economy. From the position of the object who encountered the traumatic suspension of its transposition towards being a commodity, it must be argued that the highest expression of the object should be an inherent *split* that resists its own unification of values: on one hand, the object remains hysterical as it loses its bearing within the production-circulation process; while on the other hand, the exposure of this deadlock reproduces the drive to reconcile both its own innate splitting and the absent site of political economy in the form of *wanting to be a commodity*—the site of *suturing*.

⁶⁵ Marx, *Kapital* vol.1, 114.

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