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Man is a Werewolf to Man: *Capital* and the Limits of Political Anthropology

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Abstract:

In the nineteen sixties and seventies the question of Marx's humanism, his attachment to an idea of human nature, was hotly debated. In the years since that debate has subsided the question of Marx and the human has emerged in multiple sectors. The dominance of neoliberalism as policy has revived the notion of capitalism as human nature. At the same time the anti-humanism of poststructuralism has been replaced with posthumanism. There has also been a revival of the question of humanity in light of the anthropocene. Given all of these developments it seems worth posing the question of the human in Marx again. Taking its cue from the Sixth Thesis on Feuerbach which argues that the human essence is the ensemble of social relations, this essay examines the way in which labor constructs and destroys the generic figure of humanity. Ultimately, it argues that Marx can be understood as making a unique contribution to philosophical anthropology, not one that argues about any fixed essence, cooperative or competitive, but understands history to be the generation and corruption of different essences, of constituting the basis for solidarity and antagonism.

Keywords: Marx, Capital, labour, philosophical anthropology, Paolo Virno, Etienne Balibar, General Intellect

Long after the “humanist controversy” came and went, and lingering into the age of posthumanism, the question of Marx’s philosophical anthropology lingers. There are immediate reasons for this, tied to contemporary ideology. Neoliberalism’s theoretical battle against Marxism has often claimed the terrain of human nature rather than history and social relations. One could argue that this story began long before neoliberalism with Adam Smith’s famous declaration of mankind’s tendency to “barter, truck, and exchange” but it has been extended and developed into theories of human nature which make the calculation of costs and benefits the entirety of thinking, willing, and desiring. Humanity becomes human capital, and the attempt to maximize benefits and minimize costs becomes the exemplary matrix of every possible action. The debate between capitalism and communism is often reduced to a debate between competition and cooperation, or egoism or altruism, as defining aspects of human nature, as if we never left Political Philosophy 101. Such a debate does a disservice to Marx, who had little to say about some supposed altruistic nature and much to say about the historical and social conditions of capitalism. One could say that it changes the question to an irreducibly academic debate, human nature remains a question than can never be finally answered, but it is precisely this turn towards human nature that reflects its particular brand of “capitalist realism.”¹ The appeals to human nature take the existing attitudes and comportments of capitalism, competition and self-interest, attitudes and comportments that can be generally understood to be products of capitalist relations and presents them as a cause. Neoliberalism, like liberal apologetics for capitalism that preceded it, gets its strength not from a theory of human nature articulated in philosophical texts but from a concrete experience of buying and selling, of what Marx called “the sphere of exchange.” Or, more to the point, neoliberalism in the broad sense of the term, as a culture revolution in which the quotidian experiences of work and consumption, especially work which is increasingly individuated and precarious, generate an idea of human nature as their after image. An effect appears as a cause.² Opposed to this neoliberal claim of human nature, we have not only the anti-humanist claim that “humanity” is always an effect of power and discourse, but the attempt to dispense with the human altogether, situating it in a post-human natural and technological processes that exceed it. Finally, there is the opposite interest in the human in the

return of philosophical anthropology in the works of Etienne Balibar, Paolo Virno, and Bernard Stiegler.

Thus, it is necessary to return to the question of the human in Marx, its place in the critique of political economy, not to restage the debates of “humanist Marxism, but to confront the current theoretical conjuncture, a conjuncture that can be provisionally defined in terms of the dominant, neoliberal humanism, the emergent, post-humanism, and the residual, anti-humanism. It is necessary to ask the question again how does *Capital*, make sense just not of human nature, but what could be broadly defined as the humanity of workers and capital? Or put differently, if Marx does not espouse some ideal of humanity as essentially cooperative, as something other than competition, then what the is philosophical anthropology at work in *Capital*? Or asked differently how does *Capital* articulate the limits of an anthropological understanding of the economy?

Homo Laborans Revisited

Beyond the facile reduction of Marx to a moralism of cooperation and communal living the other most persistent, and more reputable myth of Marx’s philosophical anthropology is that he considered the essence of humanity to be labour. This is a recurring theme in criticisms of Marx from Heidegger to Baudrillard. Its central thesis, gleaned in many ways from a reading of Marx’s eighteen forty-four manuscripts, is that labour defines the essence of humanity, defining its particular essence and activity. This definition posits a somewhat novel definition of the human essence, defining this essence as an activity as transformation of world and self, a second nature not a fixed and eternal nature.³ The problem of applying this critique to *Capital* is that it overlooks the focus and reduction of that text, dedicated as it is to “the critique of political economy.” The centrality of labour as an activity in *Capital* follows capital itself: just as capital confronts us as an “immense accumulation of commodities,” it also confronts us as an immense reinterpretation of human activity as labour. This is not to say that labour is addressed by Marx as something entirely historical and contingent having no bearing on the essence of humanity; it is precisely the connection of the historical and the anthropological, the contingent and the necessary that is central to Marx’s investigation. Labour is not an expression of some essence of humanity, but its organization cannot be separated from the question of human existence.

Capital, as it is well known, begins with an examination of the dual nature of the commodity, as use value and exchange value, a dual nature which in turn stems from the dual nature of labour as abstract and concrete. The fact that labour functions as a corollary to the much more central analysis of the commodity form has often led to its specific tensions and problems being overlooked. Concrete and abstract labour are the conceptual corollaries of exchange value and use value, the first is defined by concrete particularity and the second is defined by abstract equivalence. As much as the former serve as the necessary corollary of the later, in some case as both condition and effect, this should not obscure the particular innovation of the concept of abstract labour, and the specific problems of the conjunction of the abstract and concrete and labour.

As with the commodity, there is no immediate mystery to concrete labour; it is the specific work of weaving, tailoring, forging, and so on, the specific work of an individual, undertaking a specific task. As much as this concept seems self-evident, like something from a children's book dividing a village into butcher, baker, candlestick maker, there are a few riddles concealed in this concept. As with use value, the emphasis is on the concrete particularity of labour. My labour, your labour, is then absolutely irreducible to that of others. It is possible to then see concrete labour as something irreducibly specific, as being not only the specific task of a specific individual, but also the singularity of a given moment. As with use value, it is hard to comprehend how something so singular can be exchanged at all; this is of course the riddle that *Capital* opens with, an attempt to think the ground of that which is taken for granted.⁴ Concrete labour is only one side of the labour process, however, its concrete specificity is also confronted with its abstract generality. The idea that labour is the source of value is, after all not Marx's discovery, it can be found in Smith and Ricardo. What is unique to Marx, or what Marx gives himself credit for is the dual nature of labour, abstract and concrete, which is "the secret to the whole critical conception."⁵ Given that abstract labour is the solution to the riddle of commodity exchange, explaining how it is that commodities of different qualities and uses can be treated as equivalent, the question of its own condition of possibility is particularly important. Marx would seem to offer two reasons. First, Marx covers what could be considered an anthropological ground of abstract labour, arguing that the different forms of labour have as their common denominator the fact that they are produced by different human beings. As Marx writes,

If we leave aside the determinate quality of productive activity, and therefore the useful character of the labour, what remains is its quality of being an expenditure of human labour-power. Tailoring and weaving, although they are qualitatively different productive activities, are both a productive expenditure of human brains, muscles, nerves, hands, etc. and in this sense both human labour. They are merely two different forms of the expenditure of human labour.⁶

This assertion of a natural, human basis of abstract labour, of a communality is contradicted, or at least put in tension with Marx's assertion that the abstract nature of labour is not an anthropological given but a social process. It is the very fact that labour is exchanged, is treated as interchangeable that provides its abstract commonality. Its common basis is not to be found in the recesses of the human body, but in the social relations themselves. As Marx writes in the same section,

However, let us remember that commodities possess an objective character as values only in so far as they are all expressions of an identical social substance, human labor, that the objective character as values is therefore purely social.⁷

Marx seems to vacillate between a kind of nominalism and realism of abstract labour, placing the abstract quality alternately in the biological identity of humanity as a species or the social relations of a capitalist society. This apparent ambivalence brings to mind the Sixth Thesis on Feuerbach, which stated that the "human essence is no abstraction inherent in each single individual. In its reality it is the ensemble of social relations."⁸ The Sixth Thesis states as a principle what *Capital* presents as a tension: the human essence, the very identity of humanity right down to biology and the body itself, exists only in and through the historical articulation of social relations.⁹ Abstract labour, and with it abstract humanity, did not exist prior to the social relations of wage labour. As Marx indicates, the effect of this transformation extend well beyond the restricted domain of an economy, to encompass religion,

For a society of commodity producers, whose general social relation of production consists in the fact that they treat their products as commodities, hence as values, and in this material [*sachlich*] form bring their individual, private labors into relation with each other as homogenous human labor,

Christianity with its religious cult of man in the abstract, more particularly in its bourgeois development, i.e. in Protestantism, Deism, etc. is the most fitting form of religion.¹⁰

One could read Marx here as completing Feuerbach's project. It is not enough to reduce theology to anthropology, to find the figure of humanity beneath the projection of god, one must recognize that there is no humanity as such, there are only specific social relations which produce and reproduce a given figure of humanity. God, especially that of Deism and Protestantism, is not the product of some general longing of humanity, but of the particular society organized by the abstraction of wage labour. Other societies, other mode of productions, produce different ideas of humanity and God.

The question is not one of completing Feuerbach's critique, but of grasping a human essence that exists in and through its social relations. Paolo Virno has developed the philosophical anthropology behind such a concept of humanity, using "natural historical" to characterize exactly this aspect of capitalism. Taking inspiration from the philosophical anthropology developed by such writers as Arnold Gehlen, Virno begins from the premise of a humanity that must be understood as undetermined and open to the world, as lacking in instincts that delineate a particular response to a particular aspect of the world.¹¹ This does not mean that human beings are entirely outside of biology or nature, existing as something defined entirely by history and contingency, but that the biological capacities that define humanity, the capacity for speech, for forming habits, as well as the need for clothes and other forms of artifice to survive, exist only insofar as they are actualized in specific historical situations. Language is a generic capacity, as is the need to wear some sort of clothing, but this generic capacity can only be realized in specific historical formations, in specific social relations. Human nature is not something that stands apart from history, it is not some kind of constant, but a set of general capacities that are actualized in specific historical situations.¹²

This general condition is transformed in contemporary capitalism. Capitalism is not just another historically specific actualization of the generic possibilities of humanity but a putting to work of this abstract human potential itself. The generic equivalence of labour power is the generic indifference of humanity. "Meta-history irrupts into ordinary history in the none-too-sublime guise of labour-power."¹³ Virno's first formulation, that of abstract human potential, as the biological basis for labour power, is a formulation more or less corresponding to formal subsumption, to the

early stage of capital in which all that is altered is the formal relationship of wage labour, the worker sells his or her labour power rather than producing for use or the selling of goods. At this stage, the technological and social composition of labour remains unchanged. Exploitation is the exploitation of absolute surplus value, the exploitation of the difference between the time spent reproducing the costs of labour, necessary labour, and the surplus produced. For Virno real subsumption has to be understood as not just a transformation of this economic relation, as capital restructures the technological and social conditions of labour shifting exploitation from the quantitative expansion of the working day to its qualitative intensification, but also a fundamental alteration of the anthropological basis of labour power. In real subsumption it is not just that one sells one's capacity to do work, a capacity that always remains distinct from its actualizations; what is sold, what is put to work, is nothing other than the very capacity to develop new capacities. What contemporary capitalism puts to work are not just actualized potentials, not this or that habit, but the very potential to create habits itself. As Virno stresses with respect to the "general intellect," the socialized knowledge that has become a productive force, this intellect is not the specific knowledge of the sciences or computer programming, but the very capacity to learn and create. "General intellect should not necessarily mean the aggregate of the knowledge acquired by the species, but the faculty of thinking; potential as such, not its countless particular realizations. The general intellect is nothing but the intellect in general."¹⁴ Contemporary capitalism, the capitalism of services, precarity and mobility, is not just one historical articulation of the actualization of the natural capacity to learn and develop habits, but is, in some sense, the exploitation of this very capacity as capacity. What capital puts to work is not this or that specific manifestation of human nature, but human nature, humanity as potentiality, itself.

Human nature returns to the centre of attention not because we are finally dealing with biology rather than history, but because the biological prerogatives of the human animal have acquired undeniable historical relevance in the current productive process.¹⁵

Previous societies, even earlier stages of capital, were grounded upon the production and reproduction of a particular set of habits, concepts, and comportments, but with capitalism what comes to light is not this or that habit, but the very capacity of gaining (and losing) them. "Precarity and nomadism lay bare at

the social level the ceaseless and omnilateral pressure of a world that is never an environment.”¹⁶ Capital is a fundamental short circuit of the anthropological condition: if all previous societies have resolved the potential to speak, understand, and act into an actual language, specific forms of knowledge and a set of habits, contemporary capitalism turns to that potential itself, making it manifest and productive, without ever solidifying into a set of habits, a second nature, or a world. All that is solid melts into air.

Virno's trajectory is one of the increasing becoming abstract of labour power, as capital begins to appropriate more and more of the generic capacities underlying labour power. Capital not only puts to work abstract humanity, but anthropogenesis itself. One has to wonder about what remains of concrete labour in this increasing becoming abstract of labour. As much as contemporary work can be understood as an actualization of the generic capacities of humanity it still is actualized in a specific individual's endeavour. The paradoxical actualization of the virtual, the selling of labour power as the potential to not only work but communicate and interact, still manifests itself in particular actions and over the course of a particular work day. For Virno the concreteness of this becoming abstract is manifest in two different phenomena. First, there is the general problem of capitalist historicity, that unlike all previous modes of production, capital appears to be not just a specific actualization of this generic potential, a specific language, custom, set of habits, etc., but the actualization of potential itself. This creates a particular mystification, a particular appearance in which capital appears as human nature.

When capitalism appropriates an anthropological requisite like the potential to produce, the accent can fall either on the contextualized ways in which the appropriation takes place, or on the indeterminate character of this requisite, pertaining to any epoch or society. The second emphasis points to the 'bourgeois narrow-mindedness, which regards the capitalist forms of production of production as absolute forms—hence as eternal, natural forms of production.' It is the concept of labour-pour that explains the spread of state of mind (little matter where it be melancholic or euphoric) inspired by the “end of history.”¹⁷

While Virno's exploitation of abstraction offers an interesting answer to the question of “capitalist realism,” the inability to think or imagine beyond capitalism, it approaches this question primarily from the perspective of historical consciousness, of a general awareness or failure to think historicity. From a more individuated, or subjective dimension, we could ask how does the increasing tendency of anthropogenesis, of the becoming human of the labour process constitute a

particular mode of the production of subjectivity? Virno offers two responses to this question. First, he expands the definition of alienation to encompass a loss of not only one's productive activity but the entirety of social relations.

Nobody is as poor as those who see their own relation to the presence of others, that is to say, their own communicative faculty, their own possession of a language, reduced to wage labor.¹⁸

Against this generalized alienation Virno also charts a more affirmative version of this experience in the changing contours of the term "professionalism." Whereas the term used to be associated with a specific set of highly trained expertise, a kind of personalization of the general intellect as forms of knowledge, it has increasingly become associated with an attitude a subjective comportment. Job postings increasing demand a professional demeanor and attitude, an attitude that is more associated with a way of being in the world than any claim on specific knowledge.

"Professionalism on the other hand is seen as a subjective property, a form of know-how inseparable from the individual person; it is a sum of knowledges, experiences, attitudes, and a certain sensibility."¹⁹

Alienation and professionalism, the impoverishment of experience and a generalized opportunism, constitute two sides of contemporary experience, they are the basis of its ambiguity. The present appears as both utter impoverishment and total potential, existence is precarious but everything seems possible.

Virno's emphasis on the ambiguity of contemporary work, caught as it were between the alienation of anthropogenesis, the transformation of the most basic human capacities of language and interaction into commodities, and professionalization, the valorization of a subjectivity that is both engaged and abstract, capable of applying itself to diverse situations, returns us to a hidden subjective dimension of the split between concrete and abstract labour. As much as concrete and abstract labour can be understood as corresponding to two different sides of the commodity, use value and exchange value, they also can be understood as corresponding to two different subjective comportments and evaluations. One can identify with concrete labour, with the specific task and job at hand, especially as that work becomes not just a particular task, but a subjective position, being a butcher, baker, or candlestick maker, and abstract labour with the general task of

being employed, of being a part of capital. Concrete and abstract labour then constitute not just two sides of the labour process, always in tension, but two sides of subjectification. What Virno charts is a generalized becoming abstract of the labour process as the identification with a concrete task necessarily gives way to the identification with the labour process itself. In a similar manner Frédéric Lordon has argued that the contemporary labour process is defined by a subjectification of abstract labour. The ideal subject of contemporary labour is the entrepreneur, someone who does not identify with any particular activity or enterprise, but with the very possibility of being employed and engaged in labour.²⁰ If formal subsumption can be understood as the devalorization of concrete labour, specific activities are no longer pursued because of their use or use value, then real subsumption can be understood as the revalorization of abstract labour, it is subjectivity as abstract labour.

The Hidden Abode of the Post-Human

As much as it is possible to see a figure of humanity, of a generic humanity, appear alongside abstract labour, this is not the entirety of the connection between labour and the human. It cannot be because in some sense abstract labour is labour viewed from the perspective of exchange, of the market. Labour is only viewed as abstract and interchangeable from the perspective of the labour market. Marx's assertion of the connection between abstract labour and abstract humanity appears in the section on the fetish of commodities. It thus appears in the section in which Marx is discussing the non-appearance of abstract labour as labour. The commodity appears to have value, exchange value, as one of its physical attributes, and it is alongside this appearance there is the appearance of the general idea of humanity as something of an afterthought. Or, to be more precise, as much as abstract labour appears it would seem to appear on the labour market, and mediated through ideological forms such as religion and law which present it as the generic idea of humanity, while its economic role is obscured by the fetish of the commodity. That the assertion of the connection of humanity and labour is articulated in the section on commodity could give credit to the idea of humanity itself as a kind of fetish, albeit an ambiguous one. One could argue, as Marx does in *The Communist Manifesto*, that abstract humanity is not just an idea, but is itself a practice as capital overcomes the division between nations and even overcoming differences "of age and sex" as all become instruments of labour.²¹ The ice waters of calculation drown out all

particularity in the universality of exploitation. However, this is not to say that this universal is without its positive effects, as a real abstraction it carries with it the after-image of a kind of universality, a universality integral to the very notion of the working class. As much as the worker, the subjectification of abstract labour, can be considered to ambiguously imposed between exploitation and universality. In order to move beyond this ambiguous appearance it is necessary to move beyond exchange into production, into the hidden abode of production. This ambiguity is only deepened by not just its proximity to the fetish, but its structural homology. Like the fetish character of the commodity, abstract labour necessarily obscures the conditions of its emergence. These conditions include the truly non-universal conditions of housework, reproductive labor, and the racial and sexual division of labour.²² As Marxist-Feminists as well as the different currents of black Marxism have underscored is that not only does capital emerge from the uneven and combined development of unwaged reproductive labour and slavery, this uneven and combined condition is the necessary precondition of its emergence.²³ It is not just that abstract labour is incomplete and partial, not actually reflecting a true universal, but the conditions of its non-universality, the persistence of a gender division between housework and other forms of labour, are its necessary conditions. Unwaged labour, whether in the form of slavery, at its onset, and social reproduction, as it develops, are the necessary conditions for the centrality of wage labour. The figure of the worker, of abstract labour, is necessarily incomplete.

Moving beyond this ambiguity entails moving beyond the sphere of exchange, even the exchange of labour power, to enter into the hidden abode of production. Here we are confronted with another contradiction, not that between the natural and social basis for abstract labour, or even the contradiction between the universality of the image of the worker and the particularity of its history, but between the generic idea of labour and its specific history. Part Three of Capital Volume One of *Capital*, the first section on the labour process, begins with a generic discussion of labour “independent of any specific social formation.”²⁴ Marx then outlines a general schema of labour, of any labour process, as consisting of “purposeful activity, that is work itself,” the object upon which such activity is undertaken, and the instrument of that undertaking. Even at this general, and even anthropological stage, Marx’s schema includes the kernel of a historical element. Work is not just a transformation of the external world, of nature, but it is simultaneously a transformation of the worker’s own nature. It is at once a static schema and a matrix for historical transformation. Nonetheless it is still striking to see in the subsequent sections that deal with the

specifically capitalist mode of production, with large scale industry and cooperation, Marx writes, "Capital now sets the worker to work, not with a manual tool, but with a machine that itself handles the tools."²⁵ This displacement of the initial schema culminates in the worker's reduction to nothing other than "conscious organ of the machine," an eye overseeing a process that he or she neither initiates nor comprehends. This fragmentation and reduction of the body to a part, an organ in a larger machine, is not just limited to the body, the hand or the eye, but it crosses the Cartesian divide becoming an aspect of the mind as well. Mental operations can be subject to the same repetition and fragmentation.²⁶ It is in this context that we get a very different account of the general intellect, not the abstract intellect of anthropogenetic potential, but the ossified and fragmented intellect. This is how Marx writes about the general intellect in his correspondence for *The New York Daily Tribune*

...the progressive division of labour has, to a certain extent, emasculated the general intellect of the middle-class men by the circumscription of all their energies and mental faculties within the narrow spheres of their mercantile, industrial and professional concerns.²⁷

What begins with a Promethean schema of the transformation of nature and humanity ends in humanity's destruction and fragmentation.

Once again we are confronted with a contradiction of sorts. This is not the contradiction between use value and exchange value, abstract labour and concrete labour that sets a dialectic in motion, but a contradiction that is not explicitly thematized by Marx (or Marxism), like the apparent contradiction between the biological and social basis of abstract labour. As with the abstract labour discussed above, it is perhaps necessary to interpret this contradiction in the most generous way possible, to read it for what it might articulate rather than simply as a failing on Marx's part. What it articulates, and puts to work, is in some sense the opposite, perhaps even dialectical of Marx's concept of the abstract labour as the "ensemble of social relations." If the ensemble of social relations can constitute an anthropological figure, defining humanity as first a universal figure of labour, and then the manifestation of its anthropogenesis, they can also constitute its destruction, its reduction to organs and parts of a productive process. The former makes it possible to grasp what is at stake in the latter. It is not just that the worker is reduced to the conscious organ of the machine during the hours of work in a kind of dead end job,

but this destruction is the destruction of the knowledge and integrity constitutive of humanity. Not the exploitation of anthropogenesis, but its destruction. As Bernard Stiegler argues the reduction of the worker to a conscious organ of the machine can be understood as an extension of proletarianization to the point of the destruction of the very constitution of individual subjectivity.²⁸ As Balibar describes this anthropological destruction.

This process of autonomization-intellectualization-materialization of 'knowledge' determines more and more the exercise of the 'property rights' and thereby individuality. But at the same time it renders more and more uncertain the identity of proprietors, the identity of the 'subject' of property. Then we are no longer dealing merely with a mechanism of division of human nature that practically contradicts the requirement of freedom and equality. Instead we are dealing with a dissolution of political individuality.²⁹

This is something other than the division of mental and manual labour. In part because the very idea of a worker reduced to a conscious organ suggests that this deskilling cuts transversally across this division, the mind like the hand can be subject to the same reduction the same repetition of an activity. In each case the minimal constitution of the constitution of subjectivity, or anthropogenesis, is undermined by the deskilling of labour. Labour which is first presented as the elevation and self-transformation of the human becomes its destruction. The social ensemble must be grasped as the simultaneous destruction and elevation of the very conditions of humanity, elevating some to their absolute potential, to the becoming of potential, and others are reduced to the destruction of their potential.

Of course, Marx considered such an anthropological division in his earliest writing on *Capital*. In the *Eighteen Forty Four Manuscripts* Marx writes the following:

Political economy conceals the estrangement inherent in the nature of labor by not considering the direct relationship between the worker (labor) and production. It is true that labor produces for the rich wonderful things – but for the worker it produces privation. It produces palaces – but for the worker, hovels. It produces beauty – but for the worker, deformity. It replaces labor by machines, but it throws one section of the workers back into barbarous types of labor and it turns the other section into a machine. It produces intelligence – but for the worker, stupidity, cretinism.³⁰

It is worth asking how Marx's argument in *Capital* (as well as *The Grundrisse*) differs from this early assertion. First of all, the condition is transformed, it is no longer property, private property, as the single cause, but the entirety of economic and technical conditions of labour. It has been transformed from determination to overdetermination. Second, the terms of opposition are more complex, and multiple, the division is not between workers and the rich, but are internal to the productive process itself. Even within the supposedly unified group of workers of the general intellect there is a division between the ossified organs and generic capacity. This division does not map neatly onto any division of class or wage: as Virno argues, it is often the poorly compensated worker of the service industry that has to contend with the most uncertainty, novelty, and contingency, putting to work the generic capacity of language and creation. Against this we could contrast the worker in a highly specialized form of knowledge, the university professor, copywriter, and lawyer, who repeats the same intellectual formulas. However, even this contrast fails to capture the way in which one can find the same processes, the same reduction and expansion of human capacities at work in the same individual, the same society. To paraphrase Balibar, at the exact moment that the world becomes unified economically it becomes violently divided anthropologically.³¹

Living Labour and Undead Exploitation

The combined and uneven destruction of the worker cannot be simply opposed to some enrichment of the capitalist. It is not a simple inversion where the poverty of one is the enrichment of the other. In fact, any attempt to produce a figure of the bourgeois, of the capitalist, in capital would come up short. This is another effect of the centrality of labour, of beginning from the perspective of labour, those who do not labour are simply left to the margins and blank spaces. The capitalist appears as "moneybags" as the bearer of a function of capital. There is one notable exception to this, and that is the chapter on the working day.

The chapter on the working day has a particular status in the structure of *Capital*. It offers the most detailed discussion of conditions of the working class in England, so much so that it at times seems like Marx's attempt to offer his own version of Engels's book of that name. However, it is not without its own reflection on the anthropology of capital, on the conception of human nature that is put to work by

the capitalist. This anthropology is foregrounded by the general logic of conflict between capitalist and worker, a logic inscribed in the very status of labour power as a commodity. As Marx writes,

On the other hand, the peculiar nature of the commodity sold implies a limit to its consumption by the purchaser, and the worker maintains his right as a seller when he wishes to reduce the working day to a particular normal length. There is here therefore an antinomy, of right against right, both equally bearing the seal of the law of exchange. Between equal rights, force decides.³²

It is against this general logic of forces, a conflict that, as Marx stresses, exceeds any other limits, moral, and natural. It is in this context that Marx sardonically mentions that “Accordingly to the anthropology of the capitalists, the age of children ended at 10 or at the outside, 11.”³³ The “anthropology of capitalists” is one in which the only factor of humanity that registers is its capacity to be put to work. It is an anthropology without sleep, childhood, and even food, in which humanity is nothing other than exploitable labour power. This anthropology is not produced speculatively, but is manufactured in the factories.³⁴

If one shifts the genitive from the “anthropology of the capitalist” to an examination of the particular Marx’s understanding of the humanity of the capitalist, the matter is just as striking. Marx adopts the voice of the worker, addressing the capitalist as follows,

You may be a model citizen, perhaps a member of the R.S.P.C.A. [Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals], and you may be in the odour of sanctity as well; but the thing you represent when you come face to face with me has no heart in its breast.³⁵

Marx’s infamous methodological claim that he would treat individuals as merely “bearers” of economic relations receives its justification. Capitalism itself is indifferent to motivations and intentions. Just as the capitalist is indifferent to the humanity of the worker, capitalism is indifferent to the humanity of the capitalist. “As a capitalist, he is only capital personified.” Between equal abstractions force decides. However, Marx goes farther than this point. It is in the chapter on The Working Day that Marx makes his famous remark stating that the capitalist is “vampire like, living only by sucking living labour.” It is not just that capitalism is indifferent to the

humanity of the worker: it is actively hostile to it, inhabiting it like some kind of monster. It is not just the vampire that Marx invokes, but also the Werewolf, another monster that inhabits humanity with an insatiable desire. Capital appears as a motley collection of every folktale and monster movie.

The chapter on the Working Day offers a striking combination of not only ethnographic detail, but political struggle, it is the only chapter of *Capital* in which the working class appears as an active subject, struggling for the ten hour bill in England, a general logic of forces, and a polemical phantasmagoria of monsters. The combination of these dimensions could be read in moralizing tone, the heroic working class confronts the monster that is capital, or they could be understood as another chapter in the generation and constitution of anthropology in *Capital*. First, it extends the destruction of subjectivity from the worker to the capitalist. The worker is reduced to a conscious organ of the machine, while the capitalist becomes the personification of a ceaseless desire for surplus value that exceeds it. The class struggle is not a struggle between different classes of individuals, but a struggle that cuts through the very constitution of humanity.

Conclusion

Where does the examination of the anthropology of labour and its limits in and around *Capital* leave us? It is possible to sketch out two possible conclusions. First, if the grand philosophical debate of human nature is framed between Thomas Hobbes' assertion that "man is a wolf to man" on one side, that humanity is locked in a vicious competition which can only be contained but never ultimately cancelled by the state, and Spinoza's "man is a god to man" on the other, the idea that nothing is more useful to human life than the combined effort of humanity, then Marx offers a third formulation, "man is a werewolf to man." This third position is the assertion that human conflict and sociability have less to do with some natural basis for antagonism or cooperation, than the extent to which humanity itself is thoroughly transformed by its constitutive practices and relations, becoming something other. With the added caveat that there is no human nature outside of this process of transformation and possession: the human essence is nothing other than the ensemble of social relations, including those that make it other than itself and ultimately hostile to itself. The human world is a world of the commodity form, abstract labour, the general intellect, and conscious organs, a world of gods and monsters.

Second, and perhaps more importantly, Marx's investigation of the constitution and destruction of humanity through labour, reveals that the question cannot be a matter of being for or against the human. Nor is it a matter of declaring the current age to be the bold era of the posthuman. We have always been posthuman, the very idea of humanity is inseparable from its social ensemble, from its organization and destruction. What Marx suggests is another series of questions, it is not a matter of being for or against an essence, or declaring an essence to be surpassed, but of understanding how this essence is produced and organized. Moreover, it then becomes a matter of transforming practices in order to maximize the conditions of liberation and cooperation, to make it more of a world of gods than monsters. That is the revolutionary project.

¹ Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* (London: Zero Books, 2009) p.7.

² As Fredric Jameson writes, summing up this connection and the challenge it poses "The market is in human nature' is the proposition that cannot be allowed to stand unchallenged; in my opinion, it is the most crucial terrain of ideological struggle in our time." Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism; Or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991) p.263.

³ Franck Fischbach, *L'Être et l'acte: Enquête sur les fondements de l'ontologie modern de l'agir* (Paris: Vrin, 2002) p.162.

⁴ On this point see Michel Henry, *Marx: A Philosophy of Human Reality*, Translated by Kathleen McLaughlin, (Bloomington, Indiana University Press).

⁵ Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Selected Correspondence*. Edited by S. W. Ryanzkaya and Translated by I. Lasker (Moscow: Progress, 1955) p.186.

⁶ Karl Marx, *Capital*, p. 134.

⁷ Karl Marx, *Capital*, p.138.

⁸ Karl Marx, "Theses on Feuerbach" In *The German Ideology*. Edited and Translated by C.J. Arthur. (New York: International, 1970) p.122.

⁹ Etienne Balibar, *The Philosophy of Marx*, Translated by Chris Turner and Gregory Eliot (New York: Verso, 2017) p.153.

¹⁰ Karl Marx, *Capital*, p.172

¹¹ Arnold Gehlen, *Man: His Nature and place in the World*, Translated by Clare Mcmillan and Karl Pillemer, (New York: Columbia, 1988) p.24.

¹² Paolo Virno, *When the Word Becomes Flesh: Language and Human Nature*, Translated by Giuseppina Mecchia, (New York: Semiotexte, 2015) p.174.

¹³ Paolo Virno, *Déjà vu and the End of History*, Translated by David Broder, (New York, Verso) p.162.

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- ¹⁴ Paolo Virno, *A Grammar of the Multitude: For an Analysis of Contemporary Forms of Life*. Translated by Sabella Bertoletti, James Cascaito, and Andrea Casson, (New York: Semiotexte, 2004) p.66. The term "general intellect" is drawn from "the fragment on Machines" in Marx's *Grundrisse*. As Marx writes, "Nature builds no machines, no locomotives, railways, electric telegraphs, self-acting mules etc. These are the products of human industry; natural material transformed into organs of the human will over nature, or of human participation in nature. They are *organs of the human brain, created by the human hand*, the power of knowledge objectified. The development of fixed capital indicates to what degree general social knowledge has become a *direct force of production*, and to what degree, hence, the conditions of the process of social life itself have come under the control of the general intellect and been transformed in accordance with it" Karl Marx *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy*, translated by Martin Nicolaus, (New York: Penguin, 1973) p.706.
- ¹⁵ Paolo Virno, "Natural-Historical Diagrams: The 'New Global' Movement and the Biological Invariant," Translated by Alberto Toscano in *The Italian Difference: Between Nihilism and Biopolitics*, Edited by Lorenzo Chiesa and Alberto Toscano, (Melbourne: re.press, 2009) p.142.
- ¹⁶ Virno, "Natural Historical Diagrams," p.143.
- ¹⁷ Virno, *Déjà Vu and the End of History*, p.173.
- ¹⁸ Virno, *Grammar of the Multitude*, p.63.
- ¹⁹ Paolo Virno, "Post-Fordist Semblance," Translated by Max Henninger, in *Sub Stance #112, Vol. 36, No. 1*, (2007) p. 44
- ²⁰ Frédéric Lordon, *Willing Slaves of Capital: Spinoza and Marx on Desire*, Translated by Gabriel Ash. (New York: Verso, 2014) p.87
- ²¹ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, in the *Marx/Engels Reader*, Edited by Robert Tucker, (New York: Norton, 1978) p.479.
- ²² Sylvia Federici, *Revolution at Point Zero: Housework, Reproduction, and Feminist Struggle*, (Oakland: PM Press, 2012) p.16.
- ²³ Éric Alliez and Maurizio Lazzarato, *Guerres et Capital*, (Paris: Éditions Amsterdam, 2016) p.54.
- ²⁴ Marx, *Capital*, p.283.
- ²⁵ Marx, *Capital*, p.509.
- ²⁶ François Guéry and Didier Deleule, *The Productive Body*, Translated and Introduced by Philip Barnard and Stephen Shapiro, (London: Zero, 2014) p.120.
- ²⁷ Karl Marx "The New-York DailyTribune," <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1861/10/21.html>, 21 October 1861.
- ²⁸ Bernard Stiegler *For a New Critique of Political Economy*, Translated by Daniel Ross, (London: Polity, 2010) p.40.
- ²⁹ Etienne Balibar *Masses, Classes, Ideas: Studies on Politics and Philosophy before and after Marx*, Translated by James Swenson, (New York: Routledge, 1994) p.58.
- ³⁰ Karl Marx, *The Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, Translated by Martin Milligan, Edited by Dirk J. Struik, (New York: International, 1964) p. 110.
- ³¹ The passage in Balibar is "At the moment at which humankind becomes economically and, to some extent, culturally "united," it is violently divided "biopolitically," in *We, the People of Europe? Reflections on Transnational Citizenship*, translated by James Swenson, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004) p.130.

³² Marx, *Capital*, p.344.

³³ Marx, *Capital* p. 392.

³⁴ Macherey, Pierre 2015, *The Productive Subject*. Translated by Tijana Okić, Patrick King, and Cory Knudson, Viewpoint: Online <https://www.viewpointmag.com/2015/10/31/the-productive-subject/>.

³⁵ Marx, *Capital*, p.343.

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