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Consumption, Class Struggle, and Subjectification: Rethinking the Reproduction of Capital

by

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Abstract

This thesis offers conceptual means for a broadened approach to political economy by examining the reproductive role of consumption in advanced capitalist societies involved in the production of value and class struggle. I argue for a shift in the Marxist perspective, from reproduction of the means of production, to subjugation of labour-power through the circuit of the production of value, where consumption is ostensibly the reproductive moment, and the emergence of a micro-politics of class struggle. I suggest that social formations are characterized by an accumulation of contingent contradictions, rather than a general class antagonism, that disrupts the reproduction of capital. In the first chapter, I analyze the production-consumption identity in the reproduction of capital. Secondly, I address contingency in capitalist social relations, followed in the third chapter by the relation of the working class with consumption. In the final chapter, I re-theorize subjectification under the capitalist mode of production.

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Introduction:

The Circuit of the Production of Value, Consumption, and the Micro-politics of Class Struggle

Introduction

This thesis offers an analysis of contingency, consumption, and class struggle in the reproduction of social formations. It draws on and seeks to develop elements of Louis Althusser's later work on "aleatory materialism" as a central resource, which stresses contingent causality in the explication of consumption and consumerism in social reproduction. I read Althusser's work both creatively and critically, inasmuch as I also generate a critique of his work on subjectivity and the reproduction of social formations from a neo-Althusserian, aleatory materialist perspective (see Althusser 2000; 2006). I aim, therefore, to address some of the concerns about the role of consumption in contemporary capitalist social formations as they are outlined in critical theory and Marxist social theory literature, as well as the broader social science literature on consumerism. My thesis is a piece of theoretical research, meaning that I have limited empirical and historical references to what is necessary for explication. I will, however, use the circuit of the production of value to explicate a conception of class struggle based in the moment of consumption, that illustrates micro-level transformations and contingencies in the reproduction of a social formation.

This differs from basic Marxist terms, where the "general contradiction" between the bourgeois class and the working class (Althusser, 1969: 99) is often

considered the root of class struggle, which propels history and advances social formations. As Marx and Engels proclaim in the *Communist Manifesto*, "[t]he history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles", "that each time ended, either in a revolutionary reconstitution of society at large, or in the common ruin of the contending classes" (1977: 79). This conception of history[1] suggests the progression of history according to a materialist dialectic: social formations are "explained from the contradictions of material life, from the existing conflict between the social forces of production and the relations of production" (Marx, 1904: 12). Many subsequent Marxists have, consequently, analyzed contradictions of capitalist social formations in the subjugation of the working class as employees of capitalists, responsible for producing commodities and surplus value.

There are good reasons, however, for being cautious about conceptualizing social formations and history in the binary terms of a general contradiction between antagonistic classes with polarizing interests. As Marx's elaboration of the circuit of the production of value in the *Grundrisse* (1973) illustrates, the working class is differently constituted as a subject in all of the four moments of the circuit, which are production, distribution, exchange, and consumption, and not solely through their "human" capacity to labour and produce (Marx, 1978d). This view, unlike the emphasis on workers as producers, stresses the reproduction of the conditions of production in a social formation:

[1] The dialectical progression is by no means consistently maintained by Marx throughout the entirety of his work, as I will demonstrate below.

"The ultimate condition of production is […] the reproduction of the conditions of production" (Althusser, 1971: 127).

It is, then, necessary to dissect the identity that Marx establishes between production and consumption (1973: 89), the latter of which spurs reproduction, while production creates the conditions for consumption; as well as the simultaneous identity that exists between workers as producers of commodities and exchange-value, and workers as consumers of commodities and use-value. As I will argue in this thesis, the reproduction of the capitalist mode of production through the circuit of the production of value is key to understanding social transformation itself, given that the circumstances which make the reproduction of capital possible are aleatoric moments, in which the interference of an unpredictable circumstance may just as easily prevent reproduction. Thus, rethinking consumption allows one to better understand contradictions and class struggle at the level of everyday life, as they affect people living in capitalist social formations. Capitalist development and social transformation can be therefore recast in terms of the accumulation of contingent struggles that contribute to the precariousness of capital reproduction.

The accumulation of contingent moments can, over time, substantially alter the social relations of a social formation. Consequently, the Marxist account of historical processes need not necessarily be described in terms of a dialectic of general contradictions, or with recourse to large revolutionary movements spurred by an unavoidable class antagonism, since class struggle, especially as it concerns consumption and reproduction, constitutes a form of micro-politics with

transformative power that the working class experiences daily: although the reproduction of a social formation is assumed to be the result of workers' consumption, it is not at all clear that the reproduction of labour-power through consumption inevitably leads to the successful reproduction of capital.

Consumption, Reproduction, and the Process of History

Regimes of Accumulation, and the Changing Social Terrain

Although modern, Western social formations have been predominantly characterized as "capitalist" in the way they generate, own, and control surpluses since at least the Industrial Revolution,[2] the accumulation of capital has never been a steady, uninterrupted process. As Michel Aglietta states, the movement of history, even according to the logic of capital accumulation, is determined by class struggle: "This movement is all the more governed by the logic of accumulation, the more the class struggle occurs in modalities that are compatible with the extension of commodity exchange" (2000: 67). Thus, the mode of production and the social relations it engenders are always fluctuating to accommodate contingencies and complex, changing material conditions.

[2] *Contra* Marx, Max Weber argues that "[c]apitalism existed in China, India, Babylon, in the classic world, and in the middle ages", and is different from what is associated with "modern" capitalism only due to the lack of a "Protestant ethos" that emphasized a strong work ethic (2001: 17). Because I work within the Marxian problematic, which considers that capitalism is possible specifically through the separation of the masses from the means of production (see Chapters One and Two) and the distinction between use-value and exchange-value (see Chapters Two and Three), I will not refer to social formations that merely engage in exchange relations as "capitalistic".

The term "regime of accumulation" coined by the Regulation School refers to these different forms of capital accumulation, as "a systematic and long-term allocation of the product of economic activity in such a way as to ensure a certain adequation between transformations of conditions of production and transformations of conditions of consumption" (Jonsson, 1995: 13; Lipietz, 1987). While the regime of accumulation that predominated from the Second World War, termed "Fordism", focused on mass, automated production in the West (Aglietta, 2000: 123), with regulated wages that enabled mass consumption (Jonsson, 1995: 14), a new "post-Fordist" (Jessop: 2000: 251) regime of accumulation is said to characterize the period from the late 1960s onward. Owing to a saturation of Western markets and a need for expansion in order to reduce stagnating profits (Jonsson, 1995: 17), an international division of labour developed. Production moved to the periphery—otherwise known as "peripheral Fordism" (Lipietz, 1987: 78-9; Jonsson, 1995: 17)—while the West was dominated by information sectors and non-productive labour such as the distribution of goods and the development of service sectors.

Daniel Bell calls this post-Fordist shift the "postindustrial society" (1973), since it is characterized by the growth in professional and information sectors, as well as non-productive "blue collar" industries which aid the distribution of commodities. Crucially, however, it is a society in which mass consumption, in the absence of mass production, predominates, which is why contemporary capitalist social formations are often referred to as "consumer societies". Thus, commentators commonly see the shift away from industrial production as a

remarkable alteration in the economic sphere (e.g., Bell, 1973; Baudrillard, 1975; Lyotard, 1984).[3] But, I contend, along with the Regulation School, post-Fordism simply marks a different kind of regime of accumulation insofar as it combines the logic of capital accumulation with modes of socioeconomic reproduction specific to its circumstances.

I will therefore make Marx's circuit of the production of value the focus of my analysis of reproduction and the contingent state of the contemporary regime of accumulation. The circuit is comprised of production, distribution, exchange, and consumption, meaning that, while production or consumption can predominate in any given regime, they are still conditioned and influenced by a number of different moments within circulation. Rather than abstracting consumption as an action on the part of singular individuals and households that governs the entire social formation—either as a consequence of blind, unstoppable consumerism, or as the expression of individual choice and freedom—I emphasize consumption as a reproductive moment in a totality of social relations.

It is, as David Harvey notes, impossible to separate production, consumption, and the distribution and exchange they necessitate, because as relations, "they are codependent on one another" (2010a: 24). As Marx argues, the circuit of the production of value "form[s] a regular syllogism", in which production is a generality, while distribution and exchange are particularities, and consumption is a singularity (1973: 89). While the commodity is a "singular

[3] Specifically, one that makes a Marxian analysis inapplicable to contemporary society.

concept" (Havery, 2010a: 22), as an object appropriated by individuals, it has a "dual character" insofar as it has both a use-value and an exchange-value (Harvey, 2010a; Marx, 1906).

Commodities are produced as use-values, meaning they are of use to those who will buy them on the market, and also as exchange-values, which, when actualized as the commodity's price, is how much they can be bought for. Commodities must have both use-value and exchange-value: "if [it] doesn't meet a human want, need or desire, then it has no value! You have, in short, to be able to sell it to someone somewhere" (Harvey, 2010a: 22). Thus,

> you can't cut the commodity in half and say, that's the exchange-value and that's the use-value. No, the commodity is a unity. But within that unity, there is a dual aspect, and that dual aspect allows us to define something called value—another unitary aspect—as socially necessary labor time, and this is what the use-value of a commodity is a bearer of. But in order to be of value, the commodity has to be useful (23).

"Value" in the immaterial sense of socially necessary labour time is produced in the production process, and the commodity's exchange-value is realized for the capitalist only when it is sold to a consumer as a use-value, which is why the circuit of the production is a totality. I stress, as a result, the identity (i.e., an underlying commonality facilitative of social relations) between production and consumption that Marx establishes (1973: 91-4), as well as the concurrent identity between workers and consumers, in order to highlight the multifaceted nature of social relations and subject formation. This, in turn, indicates the serious limitation of abstracting one moment, consumption, from the circuit for analysis: for any regime of accumulation to exist, it must be able to produce and

successfully reproduce itself, even if certain moments in the production of value happen to predominate.

The Dialectic: Mechanism in Marx and Marxism

My insistence on the contingencies embedded in the various instances of reproduction as the key to understanding social transformation may appear inconsistent with what is often associated with the Marxian method, and called "dialectical materialism". As Friedrich Engels notes, commenting on his collaboration with Marx, history is to be understood according to "the struggle between two historically developed classes—the proletariat and the bourgeoisie", out of which socialism is the necessary outcome (1969a: 37). To be sure, such a mechanistic reading of historical progression can be found in the *Communist Manifesto*: Marx and Engels contend that the development of industry and the expansion of capitalist markets world-wide simultaneously develops the proletariat as an exploited class, at the locus of a revolutionary contradiction. Here, all of history and "every form of society has been based […] on the antagonism of oppressing and oppressed classes" (1977: 93), which can only be resolved when the great majority of proletarians rise up (92).

In the *German Ideology*, history similarly progresses through the emergence of general class contradictions which can only be resolved through revolutionary upheaval and the inevitable implementation of a communist society:

> In history up to the present it is certainly an empirical fact that separate individuals have, with the broadening of their activity into world-historical activity, become more and more enslaved under a power alien to them […], a power which has become more and more enormous and, in the last

> instance, turns out to be the *world market*. But it is just as empirically established that, by the overthrow of the existing state of society by the communist revolution […] and the abolition of private property which is identical with it, this power […] will be dissolved (1978a: 163, emphasis in original).

As Marx's position in his "Preface to the Critique of Political Economy" also makes clear, the mode of production as the economic "base" constitutes the foundation of any social formation, "on which rise legal and political superstructures and to which correspond definite forms of consciousness" (1904: 11). However, "[a]t a certain stage of their development, the material forces of production come into conflict with the existing relations of production… From forms of development of the forces of production these relations turn into their fetters. There then comes a period of social revolution" (12). It is quite clear then, that in some instances Marx and Engels themselves consider that social transformation occurs mechanistically, as a consequence of material contradictions between forces and relations of production.

Revolutionary Politics and Class Consciousness

There is also certainly a Marxist tradition of politics that acknowledges, in spite of some of the forceful predictions about the natural progression of history in Marx and Engels' revolutionary pamphlets, that historical change requires political intervention to aid the masses in realizing their real goals. Accordingly, Marxist political projects are usually conceived in broad, far-reaching terms. This is the most obvious in Vladimir Lenin's pronunciations about the importance of a disciplined, vanguard party, which would foster the "unprecedentedly large

masses of proletarians who have just awakened to political life" (1964). For Lenin, the task of the Bolshevik Party was the education of the proletariat, and later, the rural masses, about the particular path to revolution as necessitated by the conditions in Russia, such as supporting the Soviets of Workers' Deputies as "the only possible form of revolutionary government" (21). Once the Bolshevik Party came to power, part of any revolutionary programme for other communist parties necessitated support for the Soviet Union, as the first workers' state, which would aid and inspire further international revolution. Even Leon Trotsky, following his exile from the country by Stalin, proclaimed that members of the "anti-Stalinist" Fourth International should nevertheless "defend the social basis of the USSR, if it is menaced by danger on the part of imperialism" (1942: 29) since it continued to be a workers' state (albeit a dysfunctional one).

This kind of insistence on a revolutionary party is not the only instantiation of a politics oriented around the realization of socialism, however, as the example of Eduard Bernstein and the Revisionists at the end of the nineteenth century shows. To Bernstein, Axel van den Berg argues, the initial propositions of dialectical materialism had been proved wrong, in a very positivist sense: Bernstein "took Marxism to be a body of knowledge based exclusively on empirically verifiable evidence and hence in need of revisions whenever contradicted by such evidence" (1988: 98). In Bernstein's view, Marx's Hegelian influences caused him "to make deductions about social conditions from abstract, *a priori* dialectical schemata, with insufficient regard to actual facts. This led him to believe in historical determinism" (Kołakowski, 1978: 102).

Contra the predictions of Marx and Engels, Bernstein notes hastily that in late nineteenth-century Europe, "Peasants do not sink; middle class does not disappear; crises do not grow larger; misery and serfdom do not increase" (cited in van den Berg, 1988: 98). Rather than insisting on a revolutionary programme rooted in the possibility of a polarization of classes, which, as Bernstein observed in late nineteenth-century Europe, was not occurring, "the task of social democracy was *gradually* to socialize political institutions and property" (Kołakowski, 1978: 105, emphasis added). Consequently, "democratic institutions, increasing control by those institutions over the economy, expansion of the rights and influence of labor and labor unions, reduction and limitations of the rights of property, greater equality of income" to name some of Bernstein's ideas, could be achieved, if they were not already, through democratic and parliamentary reforms (van den Berg, 1988: 99).

Aleatory Materialism and Class Struggle

My intervention, in which I advocate a Marxist conception of micro-politics at the level of contingencies and class struggle rather than in the broad historical terms of general contradictions, comes from the circuit of the production of value. I have read Marx's rigorous theoretical analyses of capitalist social formations and the accumulation of capital symptomatically—part of the methodology which I distill in the next section in greater detail—instead of focusing on his pronouncements about specific revolutionary events in the nineteenth century, to parse out the implications of capitalist social relations on working class action. I

analyse class struggle in connection with Althusser's "materialism of the encounter", which accounts for the possibility that encounters between events and conjunctures are contingent insofar as they do not take place out of pre-given necessity (2006: 197). There is thus "no Meaning to history", or *Telos*, that guides it toward a dialectical synthesis, but instead a series of encounters, emergent from their particular, material conditions, out of which meaning arises (194). The aleatoric, or contingent character of history is, I contend, a necessary point to make to avoid relying on the notion of "false consciousness" of workers so common in Marxist and critical theoretical literature to explain why large-scale transformation has yet to take place.

Working-class subjects are already subjectified in multiple ways through encounters at the levels of production, distribution, exchange, and consumption. Consumption thus appears to embody the "general contradiction" between classes, as an accumulation of contradictions in both the forces and relations of production in working class subjectivity. Yet workers are constantly on the verge of a "void"—a contingent opening toward possibilities manifested in the "difference between the actual and potential" (Datta, 2007: 275)—as a result of their separation from the means of production. This, for Althusser, means that they are always in a position of encountering an aleatoric point in which any perceived historical laws appear in a "'floating' state" (2006: 198), whereby their arbitrary nature is obvious. Althusser maintains that, according to Marx himself, there is no real, overarching reason for the existence of any mode of production, which is, after all, only a

> particular "combination" of elements. These elements are an accumulation of money (by the "owners of money"), an accumulation of the technical means of production (tools, machines, an experience of production on the part of the workers), an accumulation of the raw materials of production (nature), and an accumulation of producers (proletarians divested of all means of production) (198, parentheses in original).

Thus, although social formations seem to operate according to established laws of capitalist development (197), the void in which each of these contingent elements accumulated is always present, especially in forms of class struggle over the reproduction of capital. As Datta argues, "aleatory materialism places a great deal of emphasis on the emergence of the new from the absence/void of its ostensible, actual requisite conditions" (2011: 223). Thus although the reproduction of labour-power through consumption might appear as a requisite to the reproduction of capital, the contingent effects of workers' actions may "underdetermine" the course that the reproduction of the social formation takes.[4] This means that social transformation can occur as a result of material conditions, rather than a clearly defined class consciousness (as stipulated in the *Communist Manifesto*, and many subsequent Marxists, e.g., Lukacs).

As the concept of a "regime of accumulation" suggests, capital accumulates depending on the social and material circumstances surrounding it, which are never fixed or permanent. Aglietta contends that regimes strive for equilibria, regulated by social and political institutions, though inevitably, there are "weak points, or zones where corrective mechanisms can break down" (2000:

[4] According to Datta, "[u]nderdetermination means the circumstance that the potentials within a social formation are not exhausted by the actually existing arrangement of social forces" (2011: 222). No social formation is, then, completely determined only by the elements that appear to predominate in it.

20). In these cases, he says, the entire regulatory system of the regime reacts "as a totality" by "modifying the form of regulation" (20), which ultimately changes the regime of accumulation itself. As I argue in Chapters One and Two, class struggle on the part of both the bourgeoisie and the proletariat contributed to the decline of the Fordist regime, and the rise of the post-Fordist regime: capitalists faced stagnating profits with mass production centred in the global North, as well as rising production costs, which affected the rate of profit (Harman, 2009: 232). By relocating many production industries to the periphery, they were able to expand their markets. However, the newly unemployed members of the working class could only ensure a continuation of mass consumption if they were able to purchase commodities through credit, in the absence of stable forms of wages—this, in turn, raises the possibility that the exchange-value of commodities that capitalists seek will not actually be realized. Hence, contingency and forms of class struggle are always present in the reproduction of a social formation, giving rise to the possibility of an accumulation of micro-level transformations that may result in overall social change.

It is hardly surprising that such transformations do not necessarily take place in the realm of a general conflict between working-class and capitalist interests. On one hand, as Althusser argues, any "general contradiction" in the mode of production is better described as the result of an "accumulation of circumstances" through instances of class struggle, rather than a broad conflict that subsequently defines all forms of action (1969). However, Jason Read also argues that "it is no longer possible to separate capital […] from what used to be

called the superstructure", meaning that the realm of material production is barely distinguishable from the "production of ideas, beliefs, and tastes" commonly associated with "ideology":

> In the advertisements and images of today's mass media it is not only the production process that has vanished, moved offshore, but it is also often difficult to find the commodities themselves: magazine ads instead illustrate a lifestyle, an image of cool, and it is that image that we are supposed to buy. This transformation also entails a fundamental mutation of labor: It is not simply physical labor power that is put to work but knowledges, affects, and desires. In short, capitalist production has taken on a dimension that could be described as "micro-political", inserting itself into the texture of day-to-day social existence and, ultimately, subjectivity itself (2003: 2).

Thus, Marx's notion of the "mode of production" is not limited to describing economic relations so much as it refers to "the totality of the social" (5). If capitalism operates on a "micro-political" level through its quotidian effects on the working class, then class struggle, as an attempt to ameliorate or overcome certain undesirable effects, is a form of micro-politics against enclosure or exploitation by disrupting the successful reproduction of capital.

These accumulations of circumstances are not, then, the result of a historical teleology that guides them in the direction of change. Consequently, the dialectic of history which is inspired by a Hegelian "end" or overcoming of alienation (Althusser, 1972) and the revolutionary politics that seeks this end, must be reconsidered. In the following section, I outline the methodological procedure I used in undertaking this thesis to carry out the process of theorizing an aleatory process of history at the mundane level of class struggle.

Methodology: Reasoning About the Research Process as a Whole

The Three Methodological Approaches Used in This Thesis

My research in this thesis has been informed by three methodological approaches found in critical Marxist social theory. First, I have engaged in immanent critiques of academic debates in relation to empirical conjunctures, such as the decline of Fordism or the "postindustrial turn", which I am examining. The work of critique provides a detailed construction of the theoretical logic of a position, especially its implicit and explicit evaluatative criteria, rather than a *criticism*, which dogmatically accepts or rejects a position based on unexamined criteria (Habermas, 1971; Honneth, 2009; Althusser, 2009).

Thus a critique should assess the adequacy of the theoretical position at the level of its "coherence, scope, complexity, productivity, explanatory power, perspicacity and the questions it enables one to pose" (Datta, Frauley, and Pearce, 2010: 244) about social phenomena. In particular, I have undertaken an assessment of a broad range of Marx's work, from the apparently idealist "early Marx" of the "1844 Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts", to the systematic works of the "later Marx" such as the *Grundrisse*, *Capital*, and *Theories of Surplus Value*. This was necessary to evaluate the explanatory power of the Marxian analysis of capitalism, and the relevance of the Marxist political project, to contemporary, complex capitalist social relations. Through careful exegeses of these works, presented in the following four chapters, I have actively interpreted and explained the theoretical work I am assessing.

Secondly, and related to immanent critique, are symptomatic readings,

which, as Althusser notes, involve a reading of a text against itself in order to compare the specified aim of the text with what it actually does: a symptomatic reading "divulges the undivulged event in the text it reads" (2009: 29). All readings, for Althusser, are "guilty" with respect to their intentions and the questions they implicitly pose, since "there is no such thing as an innocent reading", and as theorists, "we must say which reading we are guilty of" (14). In the first instance, I have assessed the debates I engage with in terms of the adequacy of the results according to the criteria of the positions of their authors. I do not base my critiques only on my own expectations, or normative perspectives about how a social formation should be structured—something that, as van den Berg notes, happens quite frequently in Marxist literature (1988). However, based on my reconstruction of the debates about consumption, I have also established my own criteria for considering consumption in the context of the circuit of the production of value as a means of situating consumption in broader social relations. Thus, for example, my critique in Chapter Two of the "commodification" hypothesis found in Western Marxism, is concerned with the way in which the critique of commodification and reification must take individual "things" and commodities, rather than social relations, as the basis of social formations, despite having criticized the individualism of contemporary capitalism.

Finally, I have productively re-theorized the referents of the "post-Fordist" consumer society according to a Marxian, critical realist framework. Reworking theoretical concepts that have become taken for granted is necessary to avoid a

narrowing of the intellectual terrain: although concepts like the "postmodern" or "postindustrial" society are commonly used to describe contemporary social formations, they do, in some cases, insist on consumer-driven, "information" societies as a kind of new epoch in which class struggle over the means and techniques of production no longer exists (e.g., Bell, 1973). Yet, as Slavoj Žižek argues,

> we are in the midst of a process in which a new constellation of productive forces and relations of production are taking shape; however, the terms we use to designate this emerging New ("postindustrial society", "information society", etc.) are not yet true *concepts*. [Rather], they are theoretical *stopgaps*: instead of enabling us to think the historical reality they designate, they relieve us of the duty to think.

Thus, Žižek asks,

> what if all these attempts to *leave behind*, to erase from the picture, material production by conceptualizing the current mutation as the shift from production to information ignore the difficulty of thinking how this mutation affects *the structure of production itself*? (2001: 138, emphasis in original).

My examination of contemporary capitalist society according to the circuit of the production of value, rather than consumer behaviour or declining industrial production, is thus geared toward recasting such a social formation in light of the production and reproduction of (or failure to reproduce) social relations.

However, it is important to note that the changing social terrain necessitates a re-theorizing of Marxism as well, in order to avoid essentializing the economic as the cause of the social (Callari and Ruccio, 1996: 3). Rather than appealing to positivist deduction to produce a middle range theory, or phenomenological induction to produce grounded theory (Frauley & Pearce, 2007: 18), I will rely on

critical realism (elaborated below) to theorize consumption and the reproduction of social formations from a Marxian perspective, based on the conjunctures described by empirical social science. This involves a process termed "retroduction", described by Andrew Sayer as a

> mode of inference in which events are explained by postulating (and identifying) mechanisms which are capable of producing them. […] In many cases the mechanism so retroduced will already be familiar from other situations and some will actually be observable. In others, hitherto unidentified mechanisms may be hypothesized (2010: 107).

In the following section, I outline the tenets of critical realism, and my metatheoretical commitments, which are responsible for giving theoretical coherence to my methodology as a whole.

Metatheoretical Commitments

I find critical realist sociology to be consistent in its understanding of the social realm with the Marxian and Althusserian theory I have outlined, since it adheres to a materialist conception of society "of *sui generis* social entities sometimes called structures" (Woodiwiss, 2005a: 21). Critical realism provides a critique of the "positivism/hermeneutics polarity in the social sciences" (Benton: 2007, xii). Positivism and hermeneutics are both problematic approaches for this project, on the grounds that neither adequately addresses social relations as an object of study.

Positivism consists in "showing that [an event] is an instance of a well-supported regularity" (Keat & Urry: 1975, 9); scientific theories are therefore "sets of highly generalized universal statements, whose truth or falsity can be

assessed by means of systematic observation and experiment" (13). Although the Marxist E.P. Thompson insists that "any theory of historical process may be proposed, [though] all theories are false which are not in conformity with the evidence's determinations" (1980: 232), many other Marxists have pointed out that social processes and the state of social relations are themselves only measurable as effects of the structure of a social formation that can never be grasped as a physical object (e.g., Ehrbar, 2007). Consequently, while critical realism engages with empirical phenomena like the effects of class struggle or shifts in capital accumulation, it does not seek to validate theories of the social world by empirical evidence alone, which is deficient in accounting for complex causal processes that happen at the level of the actual, and are influenced by the "real" itself.

Hermeneutics, as the study and interpretation of texts and the broader world of meanings, is also deficient, because it tends to be self-referential. But theoretical work cannot simply consist of interpretations of other theoretical writings, given that this practice fails to account for concrete, material relations (Frauley and Pearce, 2007: 16-17). Hermeneutics is also ontological idealism at the level of causality, given that meanings in individuals' minds are taken to be the decisive element constituting occurrences in the social world.

My epistemological commitment is thus realist, since I advocate theoretical work that actively engages with empirical social phenomena, but also aims to go beyond it. For Keat and Urry, this means that to ask

> *why* something occurs, we must first show *how* some event or change brings about a new state of affairs, by describing the way in which the

> structures and mechanisms that are present respond to the initial change (1975: 31, emphasis in original).

Thus, according to Anthony Woodiwiss (2007) "observation should be theory-driven; causal-modelling and testing are better means of articulating theory and data than hypothesis testing for generalizations" (99-100). While realism grants, much like positivism, that "objects exist independently of our knowledge of them" (Frauley and Pearce, 2007: 16), realists do not insist on the stark delineation of theory from empirical testing and practice as a means of validating hypotheses (Althusser, 2009). This is because what constitutes "the empirical" is "what people experience of the material world through their senses" (Datta, 2012: 105), rather than the processes and causal actions located at the level of "the real" and "the actual" (Frauley and Pearce, 2007; Datta, 2012).[5] For Močnik, a

> good example may be commodity fetishism: although bourgeois consciousness is typically nominalist and does not "believe in" the transubstantiation-mystique of commodity-value, it is the structure of the commodity economy itself that is "realist", i.e. it constitutively encompasses the "real existence" of the "name of things", viz. the general equivalent, money. It is "objectively" that relations among men take the form of relations among things (1990: 120).

To study empirical objects rather than the level of the real would, then, neglects social relations themselves.

My ontological stance is materialist, given that I take the social world as one

[5] Datta specifies that "what actually happens and what we can empirically comprehend through our senses does not exhaust what else could actually happen (that is, become an actual event)" (2012: 106). Explanation restricted to the level of the empirical is thus constrained in its ability to account for causal processes in a social formation, because it only accounts for what people can experience sensorily, and not the totality of what "actually exists" and "what could actually […] be produced by real causal forces and mechanisms" (105).

that exists independently of individuals' interpretations and understandings, in the concreteness of the social relations in the practical making of social life. It is also materialist inasmuch as we must hold that the external world is in part accessible through the senses or else there would be no reason for assuming that anything existed outside of our minds. However, realism recognizes that the social theorist is "born into and socialized in specific social and historical circumstances, and hence some preconceptions are inevitably brought to the research process and affect how people understand research findings". Crucially, though, "to rely on one's preconceptions, even if based on a widely accepted theory, means committing the error of theoreticism, merely using data to illustrate a thesis decided in advance of empirical investigations" (Datta, 2012: 105). Critical realism therefore grants that even if the social world exists materially and externally to us, our understanding of it can never be guaranteed through simple apprehension alone.

Outline of the Remainder

In the following section, I provide a brief outline of each of the four chapters comprising this thesis. The first chapter, "Social Relations, Consumption and Reproduction in Marxian Theory", addresses the consumption-oriented post-Fordist regime of accumulation, which is sometimes called "postindustrialism" in non-Marxist literature. The notion of a regime of accumulation, which the Regulation School defines as a mode of capital accumulation that reproduces its specific "institutional forms, procedures and habits" (Jonsson, 1995: 14), is

introduced. Against descriptions and analyses of the rising "information society", in which industrial production ostensibly declines along with class-based antagonisms while mass consumption increases and defines social relations, I reassert the importance of production as a theoretical concept. I invoke Marx's circuit of the production of value to illustrate the inseparability of production and consumption, and the inevitable implications this has for the reproduction of a complex capitalist social formation.

I argue that, although consumption seems to predominate the current regime of accumulation, calling it a "defining mode" (Baudrillard, 1996: 199) of contemporary capitalism abstracts consumption out of the social relations that constitute its preconditions, and that determine it. Consequently, the relation of consumption to production is obscured, which, as Marx asserts, has to do with a deepening division of labour and the very circulation and exchange of commodities themselves (1973). As a result, it is difficult to explicate the reproductive nature of consumption as creating the need for further production, all of which contributes to the sustainment of the social relations of a particular regime of accumulation, regardless of whether it is driven by mass consumption or not. The upshot of insisting on an analysis of post-Fordist social relations in the context of the circuit of the production of value, and the identity between production and consumption that it implies, is that I can examine consumption as both a reproductive moment in the circuit, and a means of fulfilling the needs of workers who are separated from the objects of production through distribution and exchange.

In Chapter Two, "Distribution, Exchange, and Enclosure in Complex Capitalist Social Formations: A Critique of the Political Economy of Consumption and Consumerism", I address critiques raised in the Marxist literature about the increasing commodification of everything from objects to social relations themselves in mass-consumption societies. Because my approach to consumption in the first chapter centres on consumption as the generative end of the circuit of the production of value, my analysis does not rely on the assumption of a "falsely-conscious" consumer who is alienated from working class interests, and consumes endlessly as a result of the apparent mystification of commodities through mass marketing and advertising. Rather, I suggest that workers, who are simultaneously consumers as a consequence of their separation from the means of production, consume for the purpose of reproducing themselves.

This, however, does not necessarily mean that the working class is constantly reproducing capitalist social relations with such effectivity that it is nearly impossible to escape the capitalist social formation, short of cultivating a strong class consciousness against capitalist exploitation. As well as reproducing themselves through consumption, workers also struggle, or engage in a micro-politics of daily life. Primitive accumulation and the idea of "separation" from, or "enclosures" of the means of production, gives insight into the precarious state of capital reproduction when one considers the processes of distribution and exchange that must successfully take place for exchange-value and consumption to be successfully realized. Thus the reproduction of capital and its corresponding

social relations may be disrupted by forms of class struggle, on the part of both workers and capitalists, that affect the mode of regulation in the regime of accumulation, and can sometimes bring about the transformation of the regime altogether. According to Aglietta, modes of regulation explain the reproduction of a mode of accumulation in terms of the struggles, social reproduction, and "corrective mechanisms" necessary to sustain the totality of the system (2000: 20). This is in contrast to notions of general equilibrium and their reliance on fixed, rational human nature to explain the persistence of capitalism through economic coordination (13). As such, the reproduction of a regime of accumulation often requires social or state intervention, or "regulation", the results of which have the potential to alter forms of production, wage regulation, and thus the way the working class reproduces itself.

As I will illustrate, the transition from a Fordist regime of mass production and mass consumption was effectuated by increasingly high costs of production in the West, overproduction and a saturation of markets, which saw production relocate to the global periphery and cost many Western workers their jobs. The rise of new information technologies, and a complex global division of labour characterize, in part, the transition from Fordism to post-Fordism, where mass consumption is enabled not by regulated, stable wages and jobs for workers necessary for their social reproduction, but finance capital and the democratization of credit (cf. Datta and MacDonald, 2011). The precariousness of these institutions, and the possibility that exchange-value may not be realized if

workers cannot ultimately pay for the commodities they consume, is indicative of the contingency of the reproduction of both capital and capitalist social relations.

Chapter Three, "Workers-as-Consumers: Rethinking the Political Economy of Membership", examines the identity between workers and consumers in light of the contingent set of social relations that I explicate in the second chapter. I analyze the position of the working class as both workers and consumers, in order to explicate the multifaceted concept of "membership" in complex capitalist social formations. My aim, in this case, is to be able to better conceptualize the notion of "political economy" in terms of the state of belonging to a social formation. As I argue, workers inevitably have interests in appropriating the objects of production for the use-value they provide them with. This means they are not consuming for the purpose of realizing exchange-value, which is the goal of the capitalist classes, but instead for acquiring objects that satisfy wants and needs regardless of the benefit to capital.

Consequently, even though the legal apparatuses of capitalist social formations bestow favourable rights on workers-as-consumers, in contrast to the resistance historically associated with labour rights (Žižek, 2011; Hobsbawm, 1987); and while advertisers tend to interpellate workers as individual consumers and not as workers (Wolff, 2005), the interests of worker-consumers cannot necessarily be conflated with the concerns of the bourgeoisie in reproducing capital. Instead, the notion of "membership" in a society is never binary, or split between antagonistic class interests, but is constantly in flux. I address this argument in further detail in Chapter Four.

The fourth, and final chapter, "A Materialist Typology of Subjectification in the Circuit of the Production of Value", distills processes of subjectification under capitalist social relations according to the four moments in the circuit, production, distribution, exchange, and consumption. I argue that each instance engenders a different kind of subjectivity for the working class, such that it is highly implausible to insist on a general class antagonism located in the conflict between the mode of production (i.e., capitalist interests) and the relations of production (working-class interests) (Althusser, 1969). In actuality, as Althusser's understanding of over- and underdetermination implies, the appearance of any overarching contradiction or antagonism is the accumulation of instances of contradictions, which are primarily determined, or "overdetermined", by the kind of production taking place in a social formation, but are also concurrently influenced or "underdetermined" by unpredictable contingencies such as class struggle. I have, therefore, suggested that worker subjectivity is overdetermined by the initial separation of the working class from the means of production, such that the sale of labour-power is a condition both for earning a wage to reproduce oneself, and for capitalist production. However, the different forms of class struggle that occur at the level of distribution, exchange, and consumption engender multiple forms of subjectivity that cannot be defined through recourse to production alone.

Conclusion

This introduction has argued for a displacement of the mechanistic dialectic of

history associated with Marxist theory and politics, in which history progresses by way of contradictions at the level of production and social relations. In order for Marxist critical theory to make a meaningful intervention in the sociology of contemporary capitalism, it cannot rely on the notion of the falsely conscious consumer within mass-consumer societies, but must instead take seriously the role of consumption in the reproduction of capital, with all of its contingent possibilities. I have described my intervention, which focuses on contingency and class struggle in the circuit of the production of value and the reproduction of capital, and the micro-politics of social transformation in contrast to large-scale revolutionary political projects. Here, transformation is understood as occurring through the accumulation of conflicts and class struggles, without appeal to an overarching meaning or end of history.

I then explained the theoretical methodology I used to explicate this conception in the four chapters of the thesis. This includes critique, in which exegeses of academic debates are made to assess their positions, symptomatic readings, where the positions are considered against their own criteria of validity, and productively re-theorizing my theoretical referents according to my critical work. My critical realist perspective allows me to theorize empirical conjunctures, and thus, the material conditions of the social formations I am examining, without resorting to narrow empiricism. Finally, I outlined the plan of the thesis through brief descriptions of each of the four chapters and their arguments. I now turn to the task of the first chapter, which is an explication of the identity between production and consumption, and the reproductive moment for capital.

Chapter One:

Social Relations, Consumption and Reproduction in Marxian Theory

Introduction

In this chapter, I argue that consumption cannot be abstracted from the totality of social relations in which it is imbricated, as many theorists of the contemporary "postindustrial", "consumer" society often attempt to do. I illustrate this with reference to consumption as a singular, albeit reproductive moment in the circuit of the production of value: consumption helps to reproduce the forces and relations of production, and thus capital, by satisfying the needs and wants of workers and consumers, as well as creating demand for new needs in the future. As I insist here and in subsequent chapters, theorizing social reproduction enables one to conceptualize shifts and changes in social relations and capital accumulation, and the disruption of continual reproduction,[1] that contribute to the emergence of so-called consumer capitalism.

Substantial shifts in the regimes of capital accumulation that have characterized capitalist social formations since the Industrial Revolution require examinations of various "modes of regulation", or the "institutional forms, procedures and habits", that reproduce them (Jonsson, 1995: 14) such as production and wage regulation, or habits of consumption. While capitalism from

[1] Theorizing social reproduction also enables thinking about the possibility that even a social formation may not reproduce itself.

the nineteenth century to the First World War was predominantly centred on "the extended reproduction of the means of production", a growth in mass production (and with it, unionized labour and stable wages) and mass consumption characterized the period from the Second World War to the 1960s (14). Consumption, as a limitless process which operates irrespective of the satisfaction of basic needs (Baudrillard, 1996: 204), is often considered "a defining mode of [the] industrial civilization" (199) from the 1960s onward, with the decline of mass production in the West. Daniel Bell would later characterize this particular kind of society "post-industrial" capitalism (1973), given that it is dominated by the spread of information-producing technologies and consumption rather than manufacturing or industrial production.

Such a focus on the role of consumption in defining social life does, however, obscure the relations of production inherent in what Karl Marx considers the singular moment of consumption (1973). For Marx, consumption forms the final instance in the circuit of the production of value, from which production itself begins again: "consumption, which is conceived not only as a terminal point but also an end-in-itself, actually belongs outside of economics except insofar as it reacts in turn upon the departure and initiates the whole process anew" (89). Yet production and consumption are only the beginning and end of the circuit of the production of value, which also includes the distribution of commodities following production, and their exchange prior to consumption. As Marx states, "distribution determines the proportion in which the individual shares in the product; exchange delivers the particular products into which the

individual desires to convert the portion […] assigned to him" (88-9). Finally, the commodity becomes the "object and servant of individual need" (89) through consumption. Thus, when Bell, and those with positions similar to his, emphasize consumption as the "defining mode" of advanced capitalism, consumption as a singular instance is abstracted from the reproduction of the particular social relations embedded in the totality of the social formation under its conjuncture. These social relations subsequently appear as individual choices in the context of the laws of the market, rather than as the active production and reproduction of social life in the context of a regime of accumulation in which consumption happens to predominate today.

Production and Labour

"Post-Fordism" is a regime of accumulation in which "work organization" (Aglietta, 2000: 124) ostensibly "liberates" Western workers from the automation of assembly lines and mechanization that dominated Fordist regimes of accumulation (122). In actuality, Michel Aglietta contends, post-Fordism is, in part, a reaction to the cost and "rigidity of the assembly-line process" in which the forces of production are developed with

> a totally integrated system in which production operations properly so called, as well as the measurement and handling of information, react upon each other as elements in a single process, conceived in advance and organized in its totality, rather than in successive and separate steps of an empirical process of heterogeneous phases (124).

Although the post-Fordist economies from the late twentieth century onward are said to be characterized by mass consumption, information technologies, and a

service sector rather than industrial production, it is not possible to adequately conceive of a social formation in the absence of a productive force, which, crucially, is able to reproduce the social formation.

Production as a theoretical category is central to Marxist social theory because it explains, in the broadest of terms, how the "production of ideas, of conceptions, of consciousness, is at first directly interwoven with the material activity and the material intercourse of men [*sic*]"[2] (1978a: 154). Social relations between people are, therefore, produced in a social context; they are not natural and ahistorical. For Marx, "[m]en are the producers of their conceptions, ideas etc.—real, active men, as they are conditioned by a definite development of their productive forces and of the intercourse corresponding to these" (154). Marx's understanding of production is, in a general sense, one which is aimed at describing and explaining real social conditions created through the work, interaction, development, and the transformation of human societies.

Marx defines "production" as "the appropriation of nature on the part of an individual within and through a specific form of society" (1973: 87). As a consequence, production must always be understood relative to the mode of production it occurs within, given that, for Marx, "[p]roduction is always a *particular* branch of production – e.g. agriculture, cattle-raising, manufactures etc." (86, emphasis in original). In all cases, however, production produces something of use to human, social beings. The products of this appropriation of

[2] Production is, of course, a category that refers in broad strokes to all social production, on the part of males and females. Marx's language reflects the gendered bias of the nineteenth century, rather than the contemporary convention of inclusive language.

nature "must invariably owe their existence to a special productive activity, exercised with a definite aim, an activity that appropriates particular nature-given materials to particular human wants" (1906: 49-50). Marx thus argues, along the lines previously established in political economy, that it is the labour of human beings which creates "useful articles" (45), by transforming objects of nature into objects that satisfy the needs and wants of individuals in a society: "So far […] as labour is a creator of use-value, is useful labour, it is a necessary condition, independent of all forms of society, for the existence of the human race" (50).

It is in the capitalist mode of production, however, that labour becomes a source of wealth, as individuals without the means for the production of subsistence are employed as workers, by those who own and control the means of production, to produce commodities for exchange on the market. A commodity is a useful product of human labour; it is "in the first place, an object outside us, a thing that satisfies human wants of some sort or another" (41). Yet, commodities differ from other objects produced by labour throughout history insofar as they exist only in the capitalist mode of production. Marx specifies that a commodity is created as a use-value for someone else (48), to which Engels later adds: "To become a commodity a product must be transferred to another, whom it will serve as a use-value, by means of exchange" (1978b: 308). Hence, commodities must be produced and sold for value. Thus commodities appear on the market in the form of exchange-value, given that "[u]se-values become a reality only by use or consumption" (1906: 42).

Unlike use-value, which is specific to the kind of commodity produced and therefore incommensurable with other use-values as a form of trade, the "common substance that manifests itself in the exchange value of commodities when they are exchanged, is their value" (45). Hence, as David Harvey reiterates, human labour produces the "immaterial and relational" concept of "value", which equates to socially necessary labour time and is represented by exchange-value (2010a: 22-3). However, "value doesn't mean anything unless it connects back to use-value. Use-value is socially necessary to value" (22). It is the "homogeneous human labour" (1906: 46), for Marx, that produces the value of commodities, because the quantity of labour in a commodity determines the efficiency with which it is produced. Marx defines "socially necessary labour-time" as "that required to produce an article under the normal conditions of production, and with the average degree of skill and dexterity at the time" (46). The introduction of advanced technology into the realm of production enables quicker commodity production, such that the quantity of manufactured output is increased. According to Marx then, "that which determines the magnitude of the value of any article is the amount of labour socially necessary, or the labour-time socially necessary for its production" (46). Consequently, commodities which were produced in the same amount of time, on average, have the same value.

This is why for Marx, production and the labour involved therein is "the point of departure" in the circuit of the production of value (1973: 83): production not only gives insight into how commodities will be circulated through capitalist exchange by virtue of the amount of labour invested in them, but also plays a role

in determining the very social relations which permit this kind of exchange. As I will illustrate in the following section, however, Marx's understanding of production has often been conflated with a narrow definition of industrial manufacturing, which is now considered subsidiary in advanced, complex capitalist societies. Consequently, some commentators have suggested that these societies are better characterized as consumption- rather than production-oriented, in spite of the problems this classificatory criterion raises for understanding economic and social reproduction.

The End of the Primacy of "Production": Consumer Societies and the Decline of Manufacturing

The predominance of production in Marx's thought has become a contentious issue in advanced capitalist societies, on the grounds that industrial manufacturing and the production of goods are in decline in the West, compared with the rise of information technologies, as well as professional and service sectors. Daniel Bell argues that the concept of post-industrialism, which marks a shift from "goods to services" (1973: 121) in the economy, "emphasizes the centrality of theoretical knowledge as the axis around which new technology, economic growth and the stratification of society will be organized" (112).[3] While the industrial society

[3] As I will argue in Chapters Two and Three, complex capitalist societies engender new and different kinds of production which may not have been associated with traditional capitalist production (such as that in factories). The constant commodification of objects, services and knowledge in contemporary societies means that the division of labour has become more complex with the increasing complexity of production (e.g., the working class is likely to be composed of blue collar producers, service workers, and professionals), not that

described by Marx may have been one where individuals were located according to their relationship with the means of production (e.g., where the constitution of work itself changes with "the transition from 'putting out' to machinofacture in factories" [Jessop, 2002: 101]), Bell suggests that post-industrial societies are increasingly dominated by those with access to information:

> A post-industrialist society is based on services. Hence, it is a game between persons.[4] What counts is not raw muscle power, or energy, but information. The central person is the professional, for he is equipped, by his education and training, to provide the kinds of skill which are increasingly demanded in the post-industrial society (127).

Accordingly, the economy is ostensibly comprised primarily of a "non-manufacturing but still blue collar" labour force and "public utilities as auxiliary services in the movement of goods" (127). This transformation fosters the "mass consumption of goods" and "an increase in distribution (wholesale and retail)", a sector of "personal services" including "restaurants, hotels, auto services, travel, entertainment, [and] sports", all of which grow "as people's horizons expand and new wants and tastes develop" (128).

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production has been totally displaced by the sectors that Bell highlights, as somehow separate from production. As Hardt and Negri point out, the disappearance of the "mass male factory worker" does not mean that production and the proletariat no longer exist, since the "immaterial labor" of "communication, cooperation, and the production and reproduction of affects" plays a large role in "capitalist production and the composition of the proletariat" (2000: 53).

[4] Jean-François Lyotard similarly considers that the "postmodern" society, which corresponds on a cultural level with the postindustrial economy, is characterized by "language games" (1984: 9). For Lyotard, the grand narrative of progress in the modern society—which includes the Marxist understanding of production as paving the way for an abundance of wealth held in common—is no longer credible. Instead one finds "little narratives" in language games between social individuals in the information society: "to speak is to fight, in the sense of playing, and speech acts fall within the domain of a general agonistics" (10).

The Fordist regime of accumulation which preceded the "postindustrial" society had certainly promoted mass consumption as well, but through a mode of regulation fostering a rise in productivity and welfare state interventionism. This "required a new system of wage-formation and manipulation of aggregate demand through Keynesian policies and social transfers via the welfare state of households": "The essence of Fordism is the attuning of mass production and mass consumption through Keynesian anti-cyclical policies" (Jonsson, 1995: 15). However, by "the late 1960s and 1970s, the Fordist regime of accumulation entered its phase of crisis" as a consequence of falling profits in mature markets (17). Foreign investment and "peripheral Fordism" (Lipietz, 1987) in industrializing countries saw many forms of production relocate out of the West. At the same time, the "increasing internationalization of capitalist economies" contributed to underconsumption on the demand side, with the undermining of "the Fordist mode of regulation as the influence of macro-economic policy measures" (Jonsson, 1995: 17).

In spite of the decline of the welfare state, the rise of an ostensibly consumer-oriented society, with a predominant service sector, was aided by other forms of regulation like social and institutional relations aimed promoting equilibrium (Jonsson, 1995: 21).[5] As Jonsson argues, "industrial innovation is not simply a matter of responding to market demand. The role of the selection environment has to be taken into account and it cannot simply be reduced to

[5] Contrary to neoclassical economics, the regulation school argues that equilibria are established not through the market, but as a consequence of modes of regulation like forms of social and political intervention.

market-demand" (47). Indeed, the promotion of wants and needs through advertising helps create a substantial demand for commodities where there may not have been any before (Jonsson, 1995; Packard, 1960; Wernick, 1991). The democratization of credit and the emergence of financial capital act as interventions that provide consumers with the material means of acquiring commodities, while producing a state of contingency in capitalist social formations (Callinicos, 2010; Harman, 2009). For Baudrillard, consumer credit means that people no longer acquire commodities as forms of useful capital that they may need for the rest of their lives, but that they consume before the exchange-value of a commodity has even been realized (i.e., before commodities are fully paid for by consumers). The need to work off this debt perpetuates social relations in advanced capitalist societies (1996).

Consumption is therefore, as theorized by Jean Baudrillard, "an active form of relationship (not only to objects, but also to society and the world), a mode of systematic activity and global response which founds our entire cultural system" (199, parentheses in original). Baudrillard maintains that "consumption" and "consuming" differ from the act of acquiring an object or commodity to satisfy needs, which individuals have done "[f]rom time immemorial" (199). Consumption, says Baudrillard, is not about the satisfaction of needs, but is "the virtual totality of all objects and messages ready-constituted as a more or less coherent discourse. If it has any meaning at all, consumption means an activity consisting of the systematic manipulation of signs" (200).

For Baudrillard, consumption is not merely about acquiring or "devouring" (204) the objects of production, but a process of consuming what he calls "sign-object[s]" (201), through which one is able to materialize unconscious desires and display her or his cultural location, knowledge, and identity. Indeed, as Baudrillard maintains, this kind of symbolic exchange is not so far divorced from the so-called primitive societies analyzed by Mauss or Levi-Strauss, which were hardly utilitarian, but instead "produced sets of obligations between groups" (Pearce, 1989: 91), including preceding generations:

> Only an absurd theory of liberty could claim that we are quits with the dead, since the debt is universal and unceasing: we never manage to "return" what we have taken for all this "liberty". This huge litigation, involving all the obligations and reciprocities we have denounced, is properly the unconscious (Baudrillard, 2004: 134).

In considering consumption as a constitution of the self and social relations, Baudrillard, echoing Durkheim and Lacan, makes a crucial claim: "There are no limits to consumption. […] If consumption were indeed what it is naively assumed to be, namely a process of absorption or devouring, a saturation point would inevitably be reached." But, "[t]hat consumption seems irrepressible is due, rather, to the fact that it is indeed a total idealist practice which no longer has anything to do (beyond a certain threshold) […] with the satisfaction of needs" (204). As a result, a critique of Marx's "concepts of production, mode of production, productive forces, relations of production, etc." (1975: 21) is necessary, given that a "radical questioning of the concept of consumption begins at the level of needs and products" (23).

When postindustrialists divorce consumption from production by emphasizing the role of the "non-manufacturing but still blue collar" (Bell, 1973) workforce consuming a lifestyle symbolized by objects, however, one risks overlooking some of the stark, continuing realities of production. I will briefly outline two consequences here before discussing the circuit of the production of value and the reproduction of capital in greater detail. First, although Baudrillard insists that consumption is an infinite process, the sustainability of consumerism has recently come into question (Perez and Esposito, 2010) owing to the wasteful practices of mass production and the diminishment of resources.

As Teresa Brennan (1998) argues, the productive relationship between individuals and nature is less clearly defined than human beings, as subjects, working on nature, an object, to produce an article. Natural resources, along with technology, are usually considered forms of constant capital (i.e., the cost of materials used in production) because, according to Brennan, the value they produce is "precisely constant": "nature and technology can give no more than they cost" (265). Labour-power, conversely, "is variable in its capacity to add value", depending on the forms of constant capital available to labour on and with.

Thus "[v]ariable capital is variable because it adds more than it costs in the production process" (265). As Marx notes, variable capital consists of that which costs less than the value it adds in the production process, such as the payment of workers' wages in exchange for labour-power (1906). For Brennan, however, the issue of resource sustainability problematizes the dichotomy

between nature as object and labour as subject at the level of production. As she notes, nature has "an energetic property in common with labor-power" such that nature also "live[s] and add[s] energy" to the production process (1998: 266).[6] Hence, natural objects, which can be manipulated artificially to grow faster or produce more (e.g., in giving animals hormones to mature faster, or in genetically engineering super crops) are themselves forms of variable capital. The result is that production itself is more volatile than even Marx may have imagined, because production time "is out of joint with the reproduction-time of nature" (264; cf. also Sixel, 2001) as well as that of the labourer.

Secondly, even if the majority of the labour force in Western societies were employed in either "blue collar" service work or "white collar" professions (Bell, 1973: 127-8), production has hardly disappeared. As I will argue in Chapter Two, the "enclosures" of the commons and increasing commodification of all aspects of social life means that the production of commodities is more prevalent than ever. However, the continuation of industrial production abroad in the periphery, which supplies some of the goods for circulation in the global North, is largely overlooked in the "postindustrial" literature, which seems to take for

[6] José López notes, however, that Marx's shift from "the anthropological conception of work in his later writings" to the energy invested and used by workers in the production process derives from the emergence of a "'new science' of energy, or thermodynamics" in which "nature, as a reservoir of a fundamental and convertible component – energy" became a "crucial social, political, cultural and scientific site where fatigue, productivity and the conservation of energy were constituted as scientific, moral and political objects of study" (2001: 79). It is hardly surprising, then, that there should be a relation between nature and labour as forms of variable capital.

granted that consumption and the service industry cannot themselves reproduce capital without the transformation of raw materials into goods.

Kalyan Sanyal calls this relocation a process of primitive accumulation on par with the expropriation of land from English peasants prior to the nineteenth century (2006). This, for Sanyal, does not necessarily mean that post-colonial countries are following the same line of development as the West. He distinguishes between third-world workers employed in the productive sphere, and those in the subsistence or "need" economy who engage in non-capitalist work to survive. Crucial, however, is that even individuals in the latter category contribute to the reproduction of capital whether or not they are directly employed in factories as workers when they are given temporary work to fill positions in the event of worker unrest. Thus, the power of productive, industrial capitalism remains a prominent force:

> The presence of an outside of capital does not signal its weakness, the lack of its transformative power. On the contrary, the continued existence of the non-capitalist need economy, encompassed by the commodity space, is the sign of capital's strength: its ability to successfully carry out primitive accumulation on the one hand and to confine the outcasts and the dispossessed to the need economy created through welfarist governmentality (254).

Herein lies the importance of taking the capitalist social formation as a contradictory totality including production and consumption on a global scale, rather than abstracting consumption and "postindustrial" activity as the primary feature of advanced capitalism.

Although the consumption of commodities is ubiquitous in advanced capitalist societies (including the core and increasingly in the periphery), I argue

that it is necessary to locate commodification and the moment of consumption in the circuit of the production of value to truly be able to analyse and explain the reproduction of capital. For Marx, "the most general abstractions arise only in the midst of the richest possible concrete development, where one thing appears as common to many, to all. Then it ceases to be thinkable in the particular form at all" (1973: 104). Thus, to really address the singular moment of consumption as a process of both capital and social reproduction, it can no longer be treated as a generality. In fact by abstracting consumption as a general process, the individual choices of consumers, rather than these forms of social reproduction, are brought to the fore such that the social element of consumption is seen merely as the action of atomized individuals. I will now outline this position in the context of consumption in the processes of production, distribution, and exchange, which are central to the Marxian critique of bourgeois economics and its focus on individual desire as determinant of the exchange of goods.

The Circuit of the Production of Value

Productive Consumption and Consumptive Production

It would be incorrect to assume that Marx focuses only on the production of commodities and the creation of value through labour, given his concern with the reproduction of capital and the subsequent maintenance of capitalist societies. The circuit of the production of value seems, in actuality, to shed light on the role of commodities and consumption in contemporary capitalist societies, from the production of objects, services, or even experiences, to their very realization as

commodities when they are purchased by individuals who appropriate the use-value of the commodity.[7] According to Marx, "production, distribution, exchange and consumption form a regular syllogism; production is the generality, distribution and exchange the particularity, and consumption the singularity in which the whole is joined together" (1973: 89). Production and consumption are therefore considered inseparable moments in the constitution of capitalist-dominated social relations, insofar as they initiate the circuit of production.[8]

In the absence of a social division of labour, Marx notes that production and consumption are identical on the grounds that one must produce in order to consume: "It is clear that in taking in food, for example, which is a form of consumption, the human being produces his own body" (1973: 90). As such, "[p]roduction […] is also immediately consumption, consumption is also

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[7] Although Marx often says that commodities only become commodities when they are "direct object[s]… of individual need[s]" (1973: 89), the use of the word "need" should not be restricted to the understanding of a basic necessity. Baudrillard questions consumption "at the level of needs and products" (1975: 23) on the grounds that consumption is hardly "tied to the realm of needs" (1996: 204). As Shumway (2000) and Karatani (2008) have pointed out, Marx is not suggesting that the anyone naturally has a need for a commodity that isn't conditioned in some way by their social formation, but instead that they acquire some use-value out of commodities, regardless of why they are useful, rather than the exchange-value sought by capitalists.

[8] As Ernest Mandel points out, neoclassical marginalist economics tends to begin from the "rentier" or capitalist, and thus from "individual consumption rather than social production" (1962). As a consequence, production is seen as mainly satisfying needs rather than simultaneously producing them: this is a linear process rather than a totality. Similarly, Istvan Meszaros notes that classical economics and its marginalist successors have generally considered that capitalist entrepreneurs merely tap into the abstract demands of individual decision makers as "utility-maximising consumers" (1980); production and consumption therefore do not form a totality through the circuit of the production of value, but constitute separate instances. Demand exists in the abstract, and production responds, but the two do not influence each other cyclically because the former is considered inherent in human nature.

immediately production" (91). According to Marx, production and consumption concurrently act as mediating forces on each other, insofar as production creates the objects of consumption, while consumption "creates for the products the subject for whom they are products" (91). Consequently, "without production, no consumption; but also, without consumption, no production; since production would be purposeless" (91).

It is thus possible to categorize a triple identity between production and consumption. Marx names the first instance "immediate identity", in which production is consumption and consumption is production. In this case, production corresponds to the reproduction of the mode of production, while consumption is "productive consumption" (93). The second identity is the mutual dependence of production and consumption through the mediation of production by consumption, and consumption by production. Here "[p]roduction creates the material, as external object, for consumption; consumption creates the need, as internal object, as aim, for production" (93). In short, the mutual dependence of production and consumption demonstrates why both moments appear as external, but indispensable to each other. Finally, the third identity indicates how production and consumption create each other in completing themselves. Production creates the objects of consumption, while "consumption accomplishes the act of production only in completing the product as product by dissolving it, by consuming its independently material form" (93).

On this account, Marx suggests that it is easy to assume that production and consumption are completely identical. However, as he asserts,

> [t]he important thing to emphasize here is only that, whether production and consumption are viewed as the activity of one or many individuals, they appear in any case as moments of one process, in which production is the real point of departure and hence also the predominant moment. Consumption as urgency, as need, is itself an intrinsic moment of productive activity. But the latter is the point of departure for realization and hence also its predominant moment; it is the act through which the whole process again runs its course. […] Consumption thus appears as a moment of production (94).

What is imperative is that political economists gladly acknowledge the identity between production and consumption, especially in considering "the relation of demand and supply" (93). In thinking about actually-existing social relations, however, Marx notes those who produce commodities have external relations to the products. Similarly, the "return [of the product] to the subject depends on his relations to other individuals. He does not come into possession of [them] directly" (94). Instead, "*[d]istribution* steps between the producers and the products, hence between production and consumption, to determine in accordance with social laws what the producer's share will be in the world of products" (94, emphasis in original).

Distribution as a Mediating Force in the Circuit of Production

If production is the generality of the circuit of the production of value, distribution and exchange are particularities, in contrast to consumption, which is a singularity. Production is a precondition for the existence of social relations, as the force that creates them in general. Distribution, though, is determined "by social accident", and exchange "stands between [distribution and production] as formal social movement" (89) of commodities. However, distribution and

exchange do not simply determine the movement of commodities from producers to buyers in a linear fashion, given that one finds distribution and exchange at the level of production (in the movement of tools of production and labourers; in the exchange between town and country).

According to Marx, "[t]o the single individual […] distribution appears as a social law which determines his position within the system of production within which he produces" (96). The same is true for society as a whole, on the grounds that a "conquering people divides the land among the conquerors, thus imposes a certain distribution and form of property in land, and thus determines production" (96). Having seen that production is specific to defined sets of social relations, it is possible to understand distribution as a precondition to social production, the latter of which cannot produce itself spontaneously: "When the social conditions corresponding to a specific stage of production are only just arising, or when they are already dying out, there are, naturally, disturbances in production, although to different degrees and with different effects" (88). Importantly, the

> capitalist system presupposes the complete separation of the labourers from all property in the means by which they can realize their labour. As soon as capitalist production is once on its own legs, it not only maintains this separation, but reproduces it on a continually extending scale (1906: 786).

Marx's explanation of the tumultuous transition from the feudal to the capitalist mode of production, which he calls "primitive accumulation", serves as an illustration of the redistribution of labourers for a new form of production. It will also show why, in dispossessing them from the means of production, labourers and workers consume as a form of reproduction rather than out of an inherent

self-interested greed, as relations are commodified and regulated in economic terms rather than through harsh feudal sanctions (Hunt, 1996: 186-7).

Primitive Accumulation, the Creation of a Working Class, and Exchange Relations

Marx's concept of primitive accumulation has been used to account for the unpredictable and forceful transition from feudalism to capitalism. It runs contrary to classical economists and social contract theorists who maintained that the complex, capitalist division of labour arose out of a recognition on the part of self-interested individuals of the benefits of cooperation for both protection and productivity. Marx argues that over a period of four centuries, the large-scale displacement of labouring populations from common land forced them to seek employment from "the owners of money", such as merchants and traders who represented the emerging bourgeoisie, so that they could continue to make a living. However, primitive accumulation has been referenced in contemporary literature as an ongoing process which does not merely precede the capitalist social formation, but is endemic to capital accumulation: the working classes must be continually separated from possible means of production as they are privatized and commodified, if capital is to be accumulated. I address enclosures and dispossession in advanced capitalism in greater detail in Chapter Two. Here, it suffices to note that primitive accumulation begets a system of capitalist exchange—of both commodities and labour—as workers are separated from the

means of production and reunited with the objects of production only through exchange and consumption.

In its narrowest definition, primitive accumulation refers to the violent dispossession of the English peasantry,[9] or "the wage-labourers of agriculture" (788) from common land—that is, their means of production—between the fifteenth and the nineteenth centuries. Adam Smith and the political economists had earlier posited "previous accumulation" as an idyllic process whereby the "diligent, intelligent, and, above all, frugal élite" accumulated wealth through their hard work. They were thus able to employ "the other, lazy rascals, [who were] spending their subsistence, and more, in riotous living" rather than saving, meaning that the latter were forced to sell their labour-power to the former group of people (784-5). Marx contends, however, that such an explanation of the roots of private property and poverty is purely fictitious, on the grounds that capitalism was historically preceded by the feudal mode of production. In such a society, there existed no outlet for success through hard work and frugality, given that the aristocratic wealth of the ruling classes was hereditary rather than earned. As such, the "immediate producers, the labourer, could only dispose of his own

[9] Marx's explanation refers specifically to England, although he notes that primitive accumulation did occur in other similar forms throughout Europe, such as in the emancipation of serfs in Italy during the fifteenth century. There, serfs were emancipated before they earned any right to the land they worked on—a right which was held by the dispossessed English peasants. Consequently the emancipation of the Italian serfs was also their proletarianization (785-6). Commentators have noted similarities, however, between Marx's European model and post-colonial countries in contemporary capitalism. As I noted above, Sanyal argues that outsourcing production to the global periphery results in the dispossession of local inhabitants from common land, forcing them to work for the owners of the means of production.

person after he had ceased to be attached to the soil and ceased to be the slave, serf, or bondman of another" (786). There thus had to be a social transformation to weaken the power of the noble aristocracy and promote private ownership and production before hard work and frugality could even create wealth. In short, the means of production had to be distributed such that one could work as a free labourer rather than according to ties with the land.

Marx attributes the actual cause of the dispossession of labourers *en masse* to the enclosure of land for private purposes. This was for as seemingly insignificant reasons as the "[t]ransformation of arable land into sheep-walks" (790) to counter rising Flemish wool manufacturing "and the corresponding rise in the price of wool in England" (789). Yet the enclosure of land and the eviction of the peasantry created a large population of labourers with no means to support themselves; they became, according to Marx, robbers, vagabonds, or beggars whom "[l]egislation treated […] as 'voluntary' criminals, and assumed that it depended on their own goodwill to go on working under the old conditions that no longer existed" (806). This, for Marx, is the making of a proletarian population: a group of "free labourers" who are "free from, unencumbered by, any means of production of their own" (785), and thus free to sell their labour to any party willing to buy it. Concurrent with this is the growing power of the nascent merchant class, "the owners of money, means of production […] who are eager to increase the sum of values they possess by buying other people's labour-power" (785).

The proletarian population thus forms what Marx calls the "relative surplus population", or "a mass of human material always ready for exploitation" (693). Ken Kawashima subsequently argues that the relative surplus population acts as a kind of promise to the capitalist class, in which the existence of free labourers guarantees a "redundant working population" (2005: 615) always at the disposal of capital. "On the one hand", he notes, "the presence of the surplus populations promise, *for the capitalist*, that the encounter with labor power will be *anything but* contingent or accidental" (2005: 616, emphasis in original), insofar as the proletariat, with only its labour to sell, comprises the largest portion of the population. Yet,

> to the degree that this promise is made to the capitalist, the same existence and production of the surplus population makes an inverse promise to "free workers" "set free" from the production process […]: namely, that the conditions of exchange for the worker will be accidental, contingent, and aleatory. The accidental conditions of this exchange promise the worker only the suspense of not knowing whether s/he may or may not realize and express the value of her peculiar commodity (616).

As such, workers are constituted through what Marx calls "virtual pauperism":

> It is already contained within the concept of the *free labourer* that he is a *pauper*: virtual pauper. According to his economic conditions he is merely a *living labour capacity*… If the capitalist has no use for his surplus labour, then the worker may not perform his necessary labour (1973: 604, emphasis in original).

The proletariat, in lacking all access to the means of production except through the exchange of labour-power with capitalists, is defined by the constant threat of being unable to perform the labour necessary to sustain itself, and thus of being unable to reproduce itself and consume. It also means that workers, "with only their labor as a commodity, are always obliged to assume the position of selling"

(Karatani, 1995: 166). That is, wage-labourers are constantly forced to sell labour-power in exchange for a wage, with which they will then be able to consume commodities.

The contingency of the distribution of labourers as a "social accident" (Marx, 1973: 89) renders the exchange of labour for wages through employment a kind of ostensibly natural, uncontrollable law: when employment opportunities are good, a successful economy is invoked as an explanation, while precarious or poor employment is a sign of downturn, which has to be rectified through more demand and production. Jacques Rancière alludes to the "Brownian motions that constantly affect precarious and transitory forms of existence" (cited in Kawashima, 617). For this reason, Kawashima invokes the Althusserian concept of interpellation (1971) to explain how capitalist production creates a feeling of "economic bondage" for workers in the relative surplus population, who regard their condition as necessary, natural, and unchangeable. For Kawashima, "Althusser depicts the subject as if it were destined—and doomed—to 'freely' accept being subjected to the Subject in the moment of interpellation" (618). The relative surplus population is indicative of an undifferentiated group of workers. Regardless of training, specialization, or complete lack of skill, those who do not own the means of production appear as homogeneous on the grounds that they all sell their labour-power.[10] According to Kawashima,

[10] Hence why, according to Kawashima, skilled labourers who become unemployed may be forced to take up unskilled work at a lower pay in the event of an economic downturn—they, like unskilled workers, make up a population which can be absorbed by capital when necessary, and discharged when not. As Ross Perlin also notes, employers have learned how to "rebrand ordinary jobs in

> [l]abor power, in the form of surplus populations, is not yet differentiated or formed as subjects, but is already complicit with the world of capital—it "belongs to capital"—insofar as capitalist production creates the very conditions and forms of existence of labor power as a surplus population (619).

Thus workers are "compelled, in order to live on, to 'turn' toward the Subject of capital"—specifically, as individuals who are in competition with each other for the job opportunities available (619). Here, in Althusserian terms, is where the process of constituting individuals ideologically is located: "the category of the subject is only constitutive of all ideology insofar as all ideology has the function (which defines it) of 'constituting' concrete individuals as subjects" (1971: 171, parenthesis in original).

Even though Marx notes that the process of exchange occurs between individuals who are selling and purchasing, as a moment that mediates between distribution and production on the side of consumption, it is hardly the case that exchange is a singular instance. Admittedly, exchange "appears as independent of and indifferent to production", but this is only when the objects of production are actually exchanged in consumption (1973: 99). Yet the aleatoric circumstances of the relative surplus population give the impression that the social world consists only of self-interested individuals in competition with each other for employment, meaning that the exchange of labour for wages is seen as an instance of personal success or failure. One is either offered a job, feeling as if "they have been

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the internship mold, framing them as part of a structured program—comprehensible to educators and parents, and tapping into student reserves of careerism and altruism" (2011: 3). Consequently, many members of the relative surplus population find themselves reproducing capital under "draconian policies", with minimum wage or no wage at all, "entirely at the company's will" (2) in the hopes of one day securing an actual job with their experience.

'chosen' and selected out of a seemingly endless resevoir of labor power" (Kawashima, 2005: 621), or fails to secure employment and is looked upon as incapable, unmotivated, uncompetitive, or immoral.

For Marx, however, this particular form of exchange presupposes a complex division of labour already dominated by the capitalist mode of production. "[P]rivate exchange", he maintains, "presupposes private production". Furthermore, "the intensity of exchange, as well as its extension and its manner, are determined by the development and structure of production", exemplified by the "exchange between town and country; exchange in the country; exchange in the town" (99). According to Kojin Karatani, "Marx stressed that commodity exchange began between communities. This was an explicit criticism of Adam Smith, who assumed that commodity exchange began between individuals" (2008: 570).[11] Thus, although exchange tends to take place between two or more "free" individuals in the capitalist mode of production, Marx (not unlike Emile Durkheim) stresses the social nature of the process, especially as one that integrates individuals.

Selling, Buying, and the Moment of Consumption

It should now be possible to understand the separation of consumption from production through capitalist social relations. Consumptive production and productive consumption are separated as identities through the capitalist mode of

[11] Karatani's definition of a "community" is not altogether clear, however, since he does not specify which kinds of groups within a social formation this refers to, or whether the notion of a community is a reference to the so-called "primitive communism" ostensibly practiced by primitive, tribal societies.

production as a result of the circulation of commodities in the form of distribution and exchange. In divorcing producers from the means of production through expropriation, production, mediated by a distribution of both workers themselves and creative technologies, becomes an instance isolated from consumption until consumers are able to demand commodities. This demand, however, is further effectuated by the exchange, not only of commodities between individuals, but of labour-power for wages which enables one to purchase commodities. Yet, because the labour market is precarious, and employment is contingent on the capitalist classes requiring labour at any given time, the exchange of labour as a commodity for payment appears as a natural law, which individuals experience as either successful, skilled workers, or as failed, lazy individuals.[12] I now turn to what Marx calls the producer's external relation to the product (94), in the form of

[12] The existence of a lumpenproletariat as separate from the rest of the working class in the relative surplus population itself evidences the normative status associated with the unemployed (or unemployable). These may consist, according to Marx, in the "dangerous classes" such as vagabonds, criminals, and prostitutes, but also paupers or orphans; and "those unable to work, chiefly people who succumb to their incapacity for adaptation, due to the division of labour; people who have passed the normal age of the labourer; the victims of industry, whose number increases with the increase of dangerous machinery… the sickly, the widows, &c." (1906: 707). Richard Wolff (2005) notes that anyone who does not necessarily contribute to the direct reproduction of capital, such as artists, can fall into this category; initially, as Michel Foucault points out, convicts, "prostitutes, and so on" constituted "enemies" of the masses who were subjected to the rule of courts composed of petty bourgeois classes determining what was "'right' or 'not right' to do or be" (1980: 3). According to Foucault, this kind of deviancy is no longer brutally punished (cf. Marx's contention that the unemployed were, in feudal times, once punished as criminals); rather, attempts are made at normalizing this population: "Does the convicted person represent a danger to society? Is he susceptible to penal punishment? Is he curable or readjustable?" (1977: 21).

consumption, for it is only through this final phase in the circuit of the production of value that individuals come into contact with the objects of production.

Contrary to previously mentioned criticisms of Marx, which suggest that he lays excessive emphasis on the role of production, the moment of consumption is of considerable import as distinct within the unity of the production of value. This is because consumption is crucial to the initiation of the process of production anew after the circuit as been completed: if no further value could be created, the capitalist mode of production would disappear. As Althusser argues, "[t]he ultimate condition of production is therefore the reproduction of the conditions of production. This may be 'simple' (reproducing exactly the previous conditions of production) or 'on an extended scale' (expanding them)" (1971: 121, parentheses in original). Karatani demonstrates this circle very succinctly when he writes that the reason for the significance of labour-power as a commodity is

> not that capital makes individuals work for wages. If it were simply about the workforce, slavery should be good enough. In fact, in some places the distinction between wage work and slavery is difficult to discern. What is indispensable to the capitalist economy is that workers buy back their own products while at the same time working for wages (2008: 586).

Although the initial prevailing regime of accumulation from the Industrial Revolution through to the First World War was comprised extensively of the "extended reproduction of means of production" and "expanding [the] scale of production" (Jonsson, 1995: 14), capital accumulation (expressed as M—C—M') requires the concurrent expansion of the consuming class as well for reproduction of capital accumulation.

It is insufficient, and very expensive, to reproduce coercive apparatuses of control in the hopes of perpetuating the capitalist mode of production in particular, not least since the conditions under which capital is accumulated and reproduced are always fluctuating. By the twentieth century, reproduction of such large means of production required mass consumption, which was, according to Jonsson, fostered by the promotion of individualistic consumption in social spheres and "house-owners' culture" above "proletarian culture" (16). Stagnating profits and the complete saturation of Western markets in the late 1960s further necessitated an international division of labour.

Such a global separation of consumption from production doubtless explains why theorists of the postindustrial, the postmodern, or the consumer society focus so strongly on the individual act of consumption—Marx's "singularity" in the syllogism of production, in which the object of production "steps outside this social movement [of production] and… satisfies [individual need] in being consumed" (1973: 89). As Marx argues, "definite production" determines "definite consumption, distribution and exchange as well as *definite relations between these different moments*" (99, emphasis in original). Thus, "if the market, i.e., the sphere of exchange, expands, then production grows in quantity and the divisions between its different branches become deeper" (99).

Owing to the global expansion of markets, and an increasingly complex division of labour in advanced capitalist societies, it is often difficult to see the identity between production and consumption. Yet, for the normative diatribes against the immorality of consumptive acquisitiveness, consumption is also seen

as the only recourse individuals have against faltering or failing economies.[13] The onus of Western citizens is therefore twofold: one must seek employment (recognition from the Subject of capital, in Kawashima's understanding of Althusser), but one must also consume. Consumption is necessary for the sustainability of the economy, and workers themselves, who are otherwise unable to produce their own means of subsistence.

The consumption of commodities, then, is both a form of the reproduction of capital, and the reproduction of the worker, as a worker and a social being, within capitalist social relations. As Vance Packard, writing at the beginning of the "age of consumption" notes, increasingly efficient production technologies posed problems for economists, who predicted that workers would become redundant if "output per man [rose] by about 40 percent" over the course of ten years. With "at least a million additional workers […] coming onto the labor market each year", "[t]he problem of absorbing them [was] likely to be most challenging". Consequently, he writes, the "United States economy [depends] on the willingness of consumers to spend more each year than they have the preceding year" (1960: 18).[14] Yet the duality of the worker-as-also-consumer,

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[13] For example, George W. Bush famously asks for Americans' "continued participation and confidence in the American economy" following the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001: referencing the destruction of the World Trade Centre, he remarks, "Terrorists attacked a symbol of American prosperity; they did not touch its source" (20 September, 2001). Consumption, then, became both an expression of freedom against extremist ideals, and a patriotic duty in the fledgling stages of the War on Terror.

[14] In Chapter Three, I address this willingness with reference to the worker-consumer identity, created through increasing relative surplus value and the democratization of credit, which promotes consumption and interpellates workers as consumers.

both a source of redundancy and the solution to the problem, was hardly lost on advertisers and the Advertising Council, who released promotional slogans such as "Buy, buy, buy; it's your patriotic duty"; "Buy your way to prosperity"; or, "Buy now—the job you save may be your own" (17). The postindustrial age of mass consumption, in short, requires consumption and its agents for capital reproduction precisely because the mass production of the previous Fordist regime of accumulation is not guaranteed otherwise.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have argued that concepts like "postindustrial", "consumer societies" obscure consumption as a moment, or instance, within the circuit of the production of value that is responsible for reproducing capital. As a result, the act of consuming, something generally unavoidable in the capitalist mode of production, is characterized as an individual choice, which occurs through the free, spontaneous movement of money and commodities according to some sort of natural law. In his own elaboration of complex capitalist society, Kojin Karatani criticizes the use of the term "market economy" over "capitalism" because it "conveniently represents capital's movement as people's free exchange of things via money in the marketplace. This veils the fact that market exchange is at the same time capital's accumulation" (2005: 208). I have argued, in a similar vein, that in abstracting consumption as the predominant instance in the production of value, the reproduction of capital is cast instead as the free, individual appropriation of objects of social production. This equates to an

ahistorical, conception of the social world, in which interactions are governed through individual language games, the success of which is dependent on the speaker's competency in the game, and access to information more than any other socio-historical circumstances. As a consequence, however, it is difficult to consider the modes of regulation and struggles over the reproduction of capital that transformed consumer societies in the first place.

Such an abstraction is enabled by the distance between production and consumption, where distribution and exchange occur on a global level. Although production and consumption form an identity in which consumption is determined by production and production by consumption, the processes of distribution and exchange, whereby commodities are portioned out and circulated among individuals or groups of people for purchase, inevitably mediate between production and consumption in capitalist societies. Thus, by the time individuals acquire commodities, they are far removed from the process of production, such that consumption as a reproductive moment for capital is obscured to those who are ostensibly responsible for reproducing it—namely, exploited workers. As I will argue in the next chapter, however, even if consumption reproduces capital in the circuit of the production of value, the capitalist social formation is never so deterministic that it precludes contingency and uncertainty in reproducing social relations.

Chapter Two:

Distribution, Exchange, and Enclosure in Complex Capitalist Social Formations: A Critique of the Political Economy of Consumption and Consumerism

Introduction: Enclosures and Accumulation in Relation to the Problem of Commodification

Having explicated the identity of production and consumption in terms of a reproductive moment for capital in the first chapter, I will now address concerns with increasing economic commoditization—what Marxist critical theorists call commodification—which hold that capital is growing and reproducing in mass consumption societies, to the exclusion of the other foundations of social and political development. Critics of commodification take their cues from Marx's conception of the "fetishism of commodities" (1906: 83), in which he argues that commodities, or "products of the labour of private individuals" (83-4), appear as objects whose existence and value is subject to natural laws of exchange rather than social relations. Commodities therefore acquire an abstract, or alien character, since producers only come into contact with the products of their labour through exchange relations (84). As commentators have noted, however, contemporary capitalist social relations are also characterized by the controversial commodification of, and assignment of exchange-value to, other aspects of social life, such as public space (Cronin, 2002; Jubas, 2007), personal identity

(Baudrillard, 1998; Bauman, 2008; Giddens, 1991), affect (Hardt and Negri, 2000), and even religion (Verter, 2003; Park and Baker, 2007).

Although commodification can be a problematic process, since it represents the privatization of objects of social labour as well as the privatization of social life, it is not necessarily the case that all social relations have become reified to the point where individuals can act only as calculating consumers reproducing capital and inequality. Focusing an analysis almost exclusively on the singular act of consumption, in which people acquire commodities for their individual needs has a tendency, I argue, to reduce social relations to individual expressions of wants and needs (in the case of commodificaton critiques, these wants and needs are often said to be reified or alienated). In order to understand the implications of the moment of consumption through "consumerist" modes of regulation in post-Fordist accumulation, one must also examine circulation and relations of exchange, which allude to moments of class struggle and the precarious state of the reproduction of capital.

In Chapter One, I indicated that primitive accumulation and the separation of producers from any means of production necessitates the distribution and exchange of products for consumption. Hence, the identity between production and consumption appears only as individual or group demand (i.e., through preference and choice) in bourgeois economics for commodities which have been produced for the market. Here, I will examine primitive accumulation, or "enclosures", alongside capital accumulation in order to understand consumption as a singular, aleatoric instance in the circuit of the production of value. While

critics of commodification worry about the creation of "falsely-conscious" consumers who are only capable of viewing their lives and relations through commodities, I contend, like Marx, that consumption represents the realization of exchange-value in material form, through which the socioeconomic and cultural values of liberal capitalist societies can be expressed. The process of realizing these values, however, is a contingent state of reproduction of capital, which inevitably relies on both the coercive and subtle reproducing of the "consumer", rather than a state of reified social relations.

Commodity Fetishism, Commodification, and Critical Theory

One of the ironies of critiques of commodification is that, in focusing almost exclusively on the proliferation of commodities in the social world and the valorization of profit, social relations themselves often appear reified rather than merely hidden beneath the commodity form. As a consequence, the societies described by commodification critiques are those in which social relations are determined by excessive reverence of exchange-value (Adorno, 2001) on the part of individuals, who have little understanding of the harmful social, political, and more recently, environmental consequences of mass-consumption. To be sure, Marx acknowledges the mystical qualities of the spontaneous generation of value in the exchange of commodities. However, this fetishism is created and enabled just as much through distribution and exchange as it is through the act of consumption itself, given that by the time a commodity is consumed, the value-creating labour within it has already been obscured. This means that an

examination of accumulation and its preconditions is just as necessary as commodification in the explanation of consumption.

Marx on the "Fetishism of Commodities" and Labour-Power as a Commodity

Commodity fetishism occupies a central place in critical theory because it helps explain the naturalization of commodity relations in capitalist societies. Since everything from the objects of production, to labour-power, to social life itself, can be treated as a commodity as a consequence of commodification, the acts of buying and selling, or realizing exchange-value, often seem natural or unchangeable, glossing over the inherently exploitative relations that are necessary for the accumulation of capital. Michael Taussig asserts that out "[o]f necessity, a commodity-based society produces such phantom objectivity, and in so doing, it obscures its roots—the relations between people" (1980: 4). It is difficult, then, to understand how something like labour-power as a commodity, which is no longer treated as a life-activity, is embedded in a specific social context, since it appears to be a real commodity that can be exchanged according to nearly natural laws (4). The upshot for critical theorists, especially those who take their cues from Lukacs' notion of reification (Shumway, 2000), is that interactions between people are expressed as if they were between "things", as social relations are reified.

Marx argues that the "enigmatical character" of commodities is due to the existence of the commodity form itself (1906: 82), insofar as commodities are those objects produced specifically for consumption by others as a means of

generating profit. Consequently, commodities possess both a use-value, which results when "man, by his industry, changes the forms of the materials furnished by nature, in such a way as to make them useful to him" (81); and an exchange-value, or the commonality of commodities—that is, the transformative labour invested in each of them—expressed as money for purchase by others.[1] As Marx notes, "[e]ach individual's production is dependent on the production of all others; and the transformation of his product into the necessaries of his own life is [similarly] dependent on the consumption of all others" (1973: 156).

Individuals, in short, producing commodities in a specialized fashion, are reliant on others to produce commodities that they cannot, in order to consume them. Producers are principally concerned with the question, "[H]ow much of some other product [in particular, money] can they get for their own? In what proportions the products are exchangeable?" Crucially,

> [w]hen these proportions have, by custom, attained a certain stability, they appear to result from the nature of the products, so that, for instance, one ton of iron and two ounces of gold appear as […] equal value as a pound of gold and a pound of iron in spite of their different physical and chemical qualities (1906: 86).

This forms the basis of a reciprocal "social bond […] expressed in *exchange value*, by means of which alone each individual's activity or his product becomes

[1] In contrast to the labour theory of value, theorists of marginal utility hold that value originates in the utility of an object for its consumer: an object satisfies a greater desire—i.e., it has more utility—if an individual has a greater need for it. Thus, "the maximum of total utility coincides with worthlessness"; (i.e., an individual or group no longer has any need for certain kinds of commodities) "while value is determined by the higher marginal utility, which is conditional upon *scarcity*" (Birck, 1922: 18, emphasis in original). Marginal utility therefore assumes, in most cases, a rational atomistic individual economic actor. I will address this issue in a later section on circulation and the emergence of the "consumer".

an activity and a product for him" (1973: 156, emphasis in original). Producers, therefore, "must produce a general product – *exchange value*, or, the latter isolated for itself and individualized, *money*" (157, emphasis in original).

The "enigmatical" qualities of commodities are the result, for Marx, of the "objective" expression of labour within the products themselves as "Values", which are seen as being determined by the market and the exchange of physical objects:

> A commodity is […] a mysterious thing, simply because in it the social character of men's labour appears to them as an objective character stamped upon the product of that labour; because the relation of the producers to the sum total of their own labour is presented to them as a social relation, existing not between themselves, but between the products of their labour. This is the reason why the products of labour become commodities (1906: 83).

Marx calls the assumption of a "relation between things" rather than "a definite social relation between men" the "Fetishism of commodities", which "attaches itself to the products of labour, so soon as they are produced as commodities, and which is therefore inseparable from the production of commodities" (83).

Commodity fetishism is thus akin to the magical thinking Marx associates with religious practices, wherein "productions of the human brain" are considered divine, "independent beings endowed with life" which become the object of worship (83).[2] As argued by Durkheim, where tribes or clans may have worshipped totemic objects as "the symbol of both the god and the society" with

[2] This is not unlike Feuerbach's earlier critique of Christianity, in which the "consciousness of God is the self-consciousness of man; the knowledge of God is the self-knowledge of man. Man's notion of himself is his notion of God" (1972). Feuerbach considers this identity unknown to Man, however, such that people are unaware that what they are actually worshipping in a god is humanity itself.

"the clan transfigured and imagined in the physical form of the [object] that serves as totem" (Durkheim, 1995: 208), commodities acquire a fetishism in the capitalist mode of production such that they appear to spontaneously generate value as objects of exchange, rather than as objects of labour. Indeed, the ideology surrounding fetishized commodities and their mystification, conceived according to Althusser's understanding of the "objective" existence of ideology in Ideological State Apparatuses as institutions and practices that are productive of subjection, functions much as religion does in Durkheim "to ensure the cohesion and reproduction of the social formation" (Strawbridge, 1982: 128). "The whole mystery of commodities", Marx contends, and "all the magic and necromancy that surrounds the products of labour as long as they take the form of commodities, vanishes […] so soon as we come to other forms of production" (1906: 87), where production is not separated from consumption by complex exchange processes.

The fetishized status of the commodity in the capitalist social formation is due to "the peculiar social character of the labour that produces them" (83), which, as I have already mentioned with reference to the distinction between use-value and exchange-value, consists in an individual's production of an object specifically as an exchange-value and not to satisfy needs. When objects are produced as exchange-values for sale on the market, rather than as use-values for the producer him- or herself, labour acquires a "specific social character" when producers exchange commodities with each other. Hence, labour, like the commodity itself, must be both useful—insofar as it has to "satisfy a definite

social want"—and exchangeable, since it can satisfy the producer's wants only when the product is exchanged for another (84). Thus, socially-useful labour requires that what is produced "must not only be useful, but useful for others"—the labour itself is "the equal of all other particular kinds of labour" such that "all the physically different articles that are the products of labour, have one common quality, viz, that of having value" (85).

As producers in the capitalist mode of production do not relate to each other as individuals with commodities to sell, but instead as workers employed to produce commodities for sale, the commodification of labour-power[3] is evident. Producers, dispossessed of any means of production, have to sell their labour-power to those who own money, or exchange-value (Marx, 1973: 157), to pay for its reproduction. Where these individual producers are capable of producing to satisfy their individual, or particular needs, it is the "character of identical abstract human labour" which produces exchange-value in commodities (1906: 54), and which is in demand from the owners of the means of production. In this context,

> Activity, regardless of its individual manifestation, and the product of activity, regardless of its particular make-up, are always *exchange value*, and exchange value is a generality, in which all individuality and peculiarity are negated and extinguished. This indeed is a condition very different from that in which the individual or the individual member of a family or clan (later, community) directly and naturally reproduces himself, or in which his productive activity and his share in production are bound to a specific form of labour and of product, which determine his relation to others in just that specific way (1973: 157, emphasis in original).

[3] Labour-power as the ability of all humans to labour differs from labour (e.g. wage labour) itself, or the expenditure and realization of labour-power.

In capitalist social formations then, labour-power is a commodity itself that produces exchange-value in commodities. However, the social character of labour in the production of commodities is obscured when individuals relate to each other through an abstract sense of value (i.e., exchange-value) associated with commodities, such that the exchange of commodities appears dependent on naturalized market laws.

Reification, Adorno's Critical Theory, and Commodification

Emphasizing the specificity of commodity fetishism to capitalism in *History and Class Consciousness*, Georg Lukacs (1971) contends that commodity relations produce a reified form of consciousness in individuals. As a consequence of the abstract character of labour, "man's own activity, his own labour becomes something objective and independent of him, something that controls him by virtue of an autonomy alien to man" (87). This means that economic activity, which is the product of social individuals, "springs into being" as a "world of objects and relations between things"; these naturalized "laws" can be "gradually discovered by man", though it seems impossible that one should be "able to modify the process by [one's] own activity" (87).

For Lukacs, it is difficult, or impossible, for individuals to appreciate that production and exchange are sustained through their "own labour" rather than unchanging laws of supply and demand. In "consequence of the rationalisation of the work-process the human qualities and idiosyncrasies of the worker appear

increasingly as mere sources of error when contrasted with these abstract special laws". As such, neither

> objectively nor in his relation to his work does man appear as the authentic master of the process; on the contrary, he is a mechanical part incorporated into a mechanical system. He finds it already pre-existing and self-sufficient, it functions independently of him and he has to conform to its laws whether he likes it or not (89).

Active production and social relations are therefore "reified", or reduced to "quantifiable 'things'" (90). According to Lukacs, reification permeates all relations in capitalist social formations because labour-power as a commodity "depends on the emergence of the 'free' worker" who is able to sell it as "a commodity 'belonging' to him, a thing that he 'possesses'" (91). By accepting labour-power as a commodity, all other aspects of social life which are dependent on the sale of labour-power, from social reproduction (i.e., one's quality of life) to physical reproduction (i.e., "life chances"), also appear as static things to be obtained through rational calculation:[4] "Reification requires that a society should learn to satisfy all its needs in terms of commodity exchange" (90).

Critical theorists who are concerned with the effects of commodification and consumption on society (e.g., Adorno, 2001; Horkheimer, 1974; Fromm, 2004) have generally adopted the reification hypothesis alongside commodity fetishism to explain the modern consumer's reliance on things, rather than meaningful activity, in their daily lives. Adorno's oft-cited reflections on mass-culture and consumption concern the absorption of the cultural realm into the

[4] Lukacs' understanding of commodification draws on a Weberian notion of instrumental rationalization as motivating exchange relations in capitalist social formations.

realm of commodities. For Adorno, the veneration of exchange-value is not just limited to consumer goods, such as the coats and tables that Marx discusses at length, but is increasingly to be found in cultural goods with the development of a "culture industry": cultural or artistic goods serve "as an advertisement for commodities which one must acquire" in order to be able to appreciate culture in the first place (2001: 38). By purchasing a ticket for a concert, for example, Adorno argues that individuals are not expressing an admiration of the concert itself, but of the money they have paid for the ticket. In this case a consumer "has literally 'made' the success which he reifies and accepts as an objective criterion, without recognizing himself in it. But he has not 'made' it by liking the concert, but rather by buying the ticket" (38).

Hence, even in the cultural realm, use-values such as aesthetic enjoyment are destroyed and replaced by "pure exchange value" (39). One of the particularly sinister implications of commodified capitalist social relations, in Adorno's view, is the reification of enjoyment and leisure—ostensibly antithetical, for workers, to the alienating tendencies of their jobs—in the realization of further profit. In the creation of mass-culture industries, which encourage "regressive listeners" and apolitical culture (55), and leisure industries aimed at attaching exchange-values to activities of "free time", one's time away from work has been reified just as much as one's work life (189): "[t]he naturalness of the question of what hobby you have, harbours the assumption that you must have one […] in accordance

with what the 'leisure industry' can supply. Organized freedom is compulsory" (190).[5]

The commodification of daily life beyond even the labour relation, is now a topic of interest for many social theorists in general. In *Modernity and Self Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*, Anthony Giddens seeks to understand the idea of the personal "lifestyle" in the context of commodification, arguing that even individual identity is closely tied to the production of commodities. Rather than expressing themselves in opposition to the reifying forces of production and consumption, "[m]arket-governed freedom of individual choice becomes an enveloping framework of [an] individual['s] self-expression" (1991: 197). Unfortunately, in Giddens' analysis, commodification not only reifies people as individuals choosing only between things available on the market, it also fosters an unpalatable narcissism (cf. Lasch, 1979) among consumers intent on being "different from all others" at the expense of "developing a coherent self-identity" (1991: 200).

For Zygmunt Bauman, the connection of market-exchange and personal life means that urges and desires produced by the market are perceived as a "manifestation and proof of personal freedom" rather than "external (and thus offensive and annoying) coercion" (2008: 137). The line of enquiry that looks at

[5] Cf. Žižek's assessment of Lacan and the superego, in which he discusses the rise of the imposition, rather than the prohibition of "enjoyment": "Today's 'permissive' society is certainly not less 'repressive' than the epoch of the 'organization man,' that obsessive servant of the bureaucratic institution; the sole difference lies in the fact that in a 'society that demands to the rules of social intercourse but refuses to ground those rules in a code of moral conduct,' i.e., in the ego-ideal, the social demand assumes the form of a harsh, punitive superego" (1992: 103). One thus feels a need to enjoy instead of disdain social life.

the problematic treatment of an increasing number of elements of social life as commodities has become commonplace enough that many critiques of consumerism and privatization take the form of a criticism of commodification. Concerns with the treatment of public services as a set of consumer goods for acquisition by "citizen-consumers" echo Giddens' view of the consumer as a "self-directing" entity, making decisions based on what is made available by the market (Clarke, 2007). For other commentators, the neoliberal encroachment of the "free market over the public sphere" (Jubas, 2007) serves as concrete evidence of the enveloping tendencies of the market so lamented by critical theorists. Even personal faith can be accounted for in terms of commodities which endow one with a certain sense of "spiritual capital" (Verter, 2003; Park and Baker, 2007).

My concern with reification and commodification critiques is the implicit attribution of a "false consciousness" (Engels, 1968) to individuals as consumers. In many interpretations and appropriations of critical theory, people consume simply because they are guided by an impulse to spend money and buy commodities as a means of overcoming alienating working conditions and social relations,[6] regardless of what is actually in their best interests (as, for example, either workers whose human activity, labour, has been alienated from them, as in Lukacs and Adorno; or as individuals who, in Giddens' terms, are unable to express a properly "coherent self-identity" and instead become over

[6] This is related, in critical theory, to regulation through the "pleasure-principle": "any given process originates in an unpleasant state of tension and thereupon determines for itself such a path that its ultimate issue coincides with the relaxation of this tension, i.e. with avoidance of 'pain' or with production of pleasure" (Freud, 1922: 1).

individualized and narcissistic). However, the role of consumption, as I argued in Chapter One, is not so much its creation of self-motivated, individualistic consumers (this is really more an effect of consumption), but the reproduction of capital by creating a demand for further production. Thus, by the time one arrives at the analysis of the commodity as something consumed,[7] one is situated squarely within the terrain of individual wants and needs in relation to things, rather than the fluid and fraught social relations involved in the production and circulation of commodities.

This is probably why attempts to portray consumerism as a positive force that can actually empower citizens and restore a sense of agency, against the condemnations of critical theory, have fallen short for anyone who doesn't already subscribe to the (neo)liberal understanding of consumption as an expression of freedom. Michele Micheletti argues that "political consumerism" can provide a platform for ecological, ethical, and political activism (2003) when consumption "represents actions by people who make choices among producers and products with the goal of changing objectionable institutional or market practices" (2). Micheletti and Stolle see ethical consumption and consumer advocacy as a means of forcing corporate accountability and fostering progressive social change from the private sector through individual freedom of choice: "Capitalism is helping capitalism to develop a face of social justice (2008: 750). The agency imagined here, however, is still a capitalist, "free"-market sensibility

[7] Recalling the definition of "consumption" from the *Grundrisse* in Chapter One: "the product steps outside this social movement [of production, distribution, and exchange] and becomes an object of individual need, and satisfies it in being consumed (1973: 89).

in the sense that the agents are clearly defined as consumers who can influence a larger structure through their product choices. Or, to put it in Giddens' terms, "we all not only follow lifestyles, but in an important sense are forced to do so—we have no choice but to choose" (1991: 81). Yet, by focusing so intently on commodification, the agents depicted by commentators on the left are just as constrained as those posited by the "political consumer" movement, making it difficult to see how, short of negating consumption (i.e., false consciousness), individuals-as-workers can act as anything other than self-interested atoms.

Given that consumption is usually necessary for workers' physical and social reproduction by virtue of the dominance of capitalist social relations, a deeper investigation into circulation and exchange following production—some of the very social relations Marx argues are obscured through the fetishism of commodities—seems necessary. Otherwise, the discussion would be oriented around reification as "the moment in the process of alienation in which the characteristic of thing-hood becomes the standard of objective reality"; here, as Berger and Pullberg assert, alienation is "the process by which man forgets that the world he lives in has been produced by himself" (1966: 61). Norman Geras counters this argument, however, on the grounds that "if forgetfulness were all that was involved, a reminder should be sufficient to deal with the constituent problems of alienation" (1971: 75; cf. Brewster, 1966). As Althusser argues, it is not the "brutality" of reified "things" that one faces in capitalism; "it is a *power* (or a *lack* of it) over things and men. An ideology of reification that sees 'things' everywhere in human relations confuses in this category 'thing' […] every social

relation" (1965: 230n). In the sections that follow, then, I will analyze consumption in the context of enclosures, exchange, and accumulation in order to explain the material social relations surrounding it, and the aleatoric moments of class struggle that produce the conjunctures of a "de-reified" society (Brewster, 1966: 73).

Enclosures, Accumulation, and Class Struggle

The Methodological Individualism of Commodification Theory, and the Critical Realist Insistence on Social Relations

My decision not to focus on commodification and the proliferation of "things" is also based on a rejection of methodological individualism—a rejection which is a tenet of critical realism. Although Marx famously begins his investigation in *Capital* with "the analysis of a commodity" (1906: 41), Hans Ehrbar stresses that the commodity is not, subsequently, the "cell form" or the "atom that everything else [in capitalist society] is composed of" (2007: 226-7). If the commodity were the basic building block of capitalism, Ehrbar contends, Marx's starting point would be no different from that of the classical economists who began with the individual as the basis of society: "This would be methodological individualism starting with the individual commodity instead of the human individual" (227). However, "[s]ociety does not consist of individuals, but expresses the sum of interrelations, the relations within which these individuals stand" (Marx, 1973: 265). Thus, according to Ehrbar, Marx examines the practical activity of economic agents—in its most basic form, exchanging and using commodities—

"in order to make inferences […] about the invisible social relations enveloping these agents" (2007: 227).

Even if these relations are "invisible", they are by no means immaterial in the idealist sense of something which guides and regulates interactions between social individuals. Ehrbar describes social relations of exchange in the following way:

> If people exchange their commodities following a consistent and predictable pattern of exchange relations, then they respond to, and also reproduce and transform, an invisible network of social relations involving these commodities. Marx calls this network the "exchange relations" of the commodities. Of course, the decisions what to exchange for what are individual decisions, but the proportions in which these things can be exchanged are determined by the social exchange relations (236).

Given that "exchange value is the expression of a relation of production" (234), it is both "associated with a commodity" because it is generated in the production of commodities (through labour-power), and relative to commodities because "this surface expression of value takes the form of a relation between different commodities" (235).

While exchange-value itself is not objectively material (cf. Marx's quip: "So far no chemist has ever discovered exchange value in either pearl or diamond" [1906: 95]), it is a "generative mechanism" which "generates the exchange relations between commodities"—Marx thus calls it "value materiality" (Ehrbar, 2007: 237). Value materiality is "purely social", insofar as the producers of commodities "must watch over [them] that he or she receives reward for the labour placed in [their commodities]. That is, society remembers how much abstract labour was placed in [a] commodity, even if this fact is not inscribed in

the physical body of the commodity itself" (238). In analyzing social relations as the "things" many commentators fear they are reduced to in contemporary capitalist societies, one faces difficulty in examining the double-character of labour and value, in its production of use- and exchange-values, which give rise to the social relations that consumption reproduces.

Enclosures and Accumulation

Marx's analysis[8] of the commodity form, composed of a use-value and an exchange-value, indeed clearly reveals a "double, *differentiated* existence" (1973: 147, emphasis in original) in the commodity, which is, I hold, the root of the aleatoric moment in capitalism. That is to say that while exchange-value may be venerated and elevated to the highest importance, as Adorno would have it, the realization of a commodity's exchange-value cannot occur if producers, who are also inevitably consumers in a capitalist social formation, have no use for the commodity. To be sure, this realization equates, on one hand, with the third identity of production and consumption mentioned in the first chapter, which Marx says is "frequently cited in economics in the relation of demand and supply" (93). Additionally, however, as I will illustrate in Chapter Three, workers may have a need for commodities, but no legitimate means of acquiring them; or they may be forced to purchase commodities through credit, on which they might later

[8] "The original meaning of the word 'analyse' is 'decompose into its parts.' But since the commodity is already simple, there is nothing to decompose. What Marx really does is to use a series of second-order arguments to draw conclusions from the practical surface activity with commodities. But since Marx does not have the *concept* of second-order argument, he mislabels this procedure as an *analysis* of the commodity" (Ehrbar, 2007: 227, emphasis in original).

have to default. There is thus no guarantee that the working class operates entirely on a false consciousness that predisposes them to bourgeois interests, ostensibly at the expense of their own, just because they consume commodities.

This is telling with regard to the reproduction of capitalist social relations, which are by no means as guaranteed as explanations of reification and constant commodification might imply. After all, the differentiation of exchange-value from use-value in a commodity is specific to capitalism, created in what is now being called a continual[9] separation of producers from the means of production, the latter of which are all too often the basic necessities of life. The reproduction (or reinforcement) of relations of dispossession through enclosure, then, is what enables commodification, or the valorization of exchange-value in the first place. It is also the site of contingency and uncertainty in the capitalist mode of production, which is overcome momentarily in the act of consumption (since consumption realizes value and thus necessitates further production).

As Massimo de Angelis (2004) argues, capital does not simply commodify and accumulate according to "capital logic" (60), but is instead constantly enclosing and separating people from objects of nature, objects of production, and various other relations in order be able to reproduce this logic:

> The diverse movements comprising the current global justice and solidarity movements are increasingly acknowledging and fighting against this truism: by opposing attempts to relocate communities to make space for dams; by resisting privatisation of public services and basic resources such as water; by creating new commons through occupations of land and the building of communities; by struggling against patents which threaten

[9] This is in contrast to understandings of primitive accumulation, which locate it temporally prior to capital accumulation, meaning that primitive accumulation no longer occurs.

> the lives of millions of AIDS patients; by simply downloading and sharing music and software beyond the cash limits imposed by the market (57).

The problematic effects of neoliberal privatization, for which multinational corporations have fought, and often gained the rights to basic necessities such as water or the genomes of crops as commodities for sale, has certainly been documented (e.g., Klein, 2007): apparently inspired by Milton Friedman's neoliberal, globalizing policies which aimed at deregulating core and peripheral economies in the post-Fordist 1970s, both governments and multinational corporations engaged in "pre-emptive attack[s]" on unionized workplaces, farmers and peasants, and poor populations seeking the creation of welfare states (127-130) as a means of ensuring deregulations that would encourage true free-market equilibrium (60). However, de Angelis argues, fewer works systematically examine such privatization and commodification as effects on an ongoing primitive accumulation, which is constantly separating people from even the most basic means of production (2004: 59).

To be sure, a growing body of literature now deals with the enclosures of commons and the exclusion of the multitude from access to resources (Hardt and Negri, 2000); separation from "the common", which includes "human labour and creativity, such as ideas, language, affect, and so on" (Hardt, 2011: 136); or the continued primitive accumulation of formerly colonized, "third world" countries as a means of expanding capitalist markets worldwide (Sanyal, 2006). Yet, among Marxists in general, there is a "most paradoxical deficiency in the attempt to theorise enclosures as an ongoing feature of capitalist regimes" (de Angelis, 2004: 59), primarily because primitive accumulation is seen as something occurring

before capitalism, as a precondition that "*create[s]* and develop[s] markets for commodities such as labour-power and land". But, "[o]nce the job is done, we can stop talking about enclosures (or primitive accumulation) and need to talk about 'capital logic'" (60, emphasis in original). Unfortunately, this framework posits a "linear model of capitalist development" (61), making it difficult to account for social relations and struggles that do not conform to capitalist accumulation. This is inherently problematic for Sanyal, who notes the impossibility of theorizing the "pre-capitalist" development around the world according to the model of capital accumulation (2006: 40). It also makes difficult the task of theorizing "reversals" in primitive accumulation, when industry and other jobs relocate to other markets where production is cheaper: in Michigan, for example, "[i]t has become almost commonsensical that manufacturing, which […] accounted for almost 25 percent of all jobs in Michigan 10 years ago, will no longer produce good jobs" as "the state's long reliance upon industries that once produced 'middle-class' jobs is […] being restructured" (Lyon-Callo, 2008: 28).

In the preceding chapter, I discussed primitive accumulation as the initial creation of working classes through the massive, violent dispossession of the landless from the means of production. Rather than to suggest that primitive accumulation merely represents a moment in European history when feudal social relations began to give way to capitalism, however, I aimed to illustrate the creation of a working class which depends for its employment, and thus continued wages and means of subsistence, on consumption and the reproduction of the capitalist mode of production. This separation is not necessarily indicative of one

moment in the development of capitalism, from which capital accumulation grows, and ultimately supersedes. As Marx himself maintains, capital accumulation "reproduces the separation and the independent existence of material wealth as against labour on an ever increasing scale", such that accumulation "merely presents as a continuous process what in primitive accumulation appears as a distinct historical process" (1971: 217; 311-2).

The Separation of Use-Value and Exchange-Value; the Separation of Workers from the Means of Production; Class Struggle

The double nature of the commodity as use-value and exchange-value is crucial to the generation of profit and the accumulation of capital. As is well-known, the movement of capital can be expressed M—C—M', where money is invested in the process of producing commodities for the purpose of generating more money. Marx states,

> a certain quantity of values is thrown into circulation for the purpose of drawing a larger quantity out of it. The process by which this larger quantity is produced is capitalist production. The process by which this larger quantity is realized is the circulation of capital (1909: 53, emphasis in original).

Thus, the capitalist who aims to generate value for the purpose of investment is unconcerned with the use-value of the commodity, "nor does he consume it personally" (54).

The movement of capital, characteristic of the capitalist mode of production, therefore differs from the "simple circulation of commodities". The circuit C—M—C expresses a situation in which commodities are produced with a

specific use-value in mind, such that they may be sold for money, which can be used to purchase more commodities (1906: 165):

> The simple circulation of commodities – selling in order to buy – is a means of carrying out a purpose unconnected with circulation, namely, the appropriation of use-values, the satisfaction of wants. The circulation of money as capital is, on the contrary, an end in itself, for the expansion of value takes place only within this constantly renewed movement. The circulation of capital has therefore no limits (169).

The acquisition of exchange-value, however, requires that those who produce commodities come into contact with them by means of exchange, which is to say, that producers are separated from their products: a capitalist "could not be a capitalist at all, nor undertake to exploit labor, unless he enjoyed the privilege of owning the material requirements of production and finding at hand a laborer who owns nothing but his labor-power" (1909: 54).

The circulation of capital may be a limitless process, insofar as, unlike acquiring products with an eye for their use-value which has an eventual saturation point, there are no bounds on the amount of capital that can be accumulated. There are, however, obstacles in the social relations of capitalist production to infinite accumulation. For de Angelis, "either capital […] makes the world *through commodification and enclosures*, or it is the rest of us—whoever that 'us' is—that makes the world through counter-enclosures and commons. The net results of the clashes among these forces Marx called 'class struggle'" (2004: 61, emphasis in original)—the antagonisms between classes that arises through stratification and the unequal division of surplus value. This explanation of social relations runs contrary to the marginalist view of separation, wherein the

enclosure of the commons is merely based on a concept of calculable, amoral action (Castro Caldas, Costas, and Burns, 2007: 28) in which "individuals pursue their own interests, even if they are able to acknowledge that their quest will undermine the interest of all" (Castro Caldas et al., 2007: 26; cf. also Coase, 1988; Hardin, 1968).

As de Angelis argues, however, the assumption that "the commons are a free-for-all space from which competing and atomised 'economic men'[10] take as much as they can" fails to acknowledge that "there are no commons without community within which […] access to common resources are negotiated" (2004: 58); that is, that neither a commons nor an enclosure can exist in the absence of social relations. Althusser similarly emphasizes class struggle as a "process without a subject" (1976: 51), since it is not "Man", in the sense of abstract individuals, who "makes history", but relations: "the relations of production […] and other (political, ideological) relations" (1972: 186). The notion of Man as an atomistic subject is an "exaltation of the person" (1976: 51) and a properly bourgeois practice, insofar as "personhood" and classes of such individuals are specific to the capitalist mode of production. Each class, he argues, "has *its own* individuals, fashioned in their individuality by their conditions of life, of work, of

[10] Martin (2009) argues that marginalism is not necessarily antithetical to the study of social structures and relations: "The critical realist ontology of social structure bolsters, rather than undermines, the universal relevance of marginalism" (525). He acknowledges that structures "are a material cause of human action", rather than "just a continually generated pattern reducible to individual activity" (526). He cites the argument, "rational choice is a power that can be exercised or not, and so its applicability to explaining any social phenomena is a matter to be empirically assessed rather than a theoretical *sine qua non*" (525).

exploitation, and of struggle" (53, emphasis in original).[11] This is why Althusser contends that it is insufficient to examine only the exploited classes or the exploiting classes—"you have to go beyond […] the idea of two antagonistic groups of classes, to examine the basis of the existence *not only* of classes but also of the antagonism between classes: that is, the *class struggle*" (1976: 50, emphasis in original).

Some of the early, brutal techniques for dispossession—which constitute some of the most obvious forms of class struggle on the part of the "owners of money"—have already been discussed in the previous chapter, such as the forceful expulsion of the peasantry from land and the enactment of laws to criminalize unemployment (cf. Marx, 1906: 785-806). Indeed, the use of coercive measures to reinforce the gains for capital created by separation is noted in economic literature: "even if property rights could be perfectly defined and attributed, the enforcement of those rights would require an external authority" (Castro Caldas et al., 2007: 25-6).[12] However, every encounter between classes, whatever those classes may be, forms an aleatoric materialism: "every encounter is aleatory in its effects, in that nothing in the elements of the encounter prefigures, before the actual encounter, the contours and determinations of the being that will emerge from it" (Althusser, 2006: 193).

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[11] The reproduction of workers-as-consumers, who are created through a continued separation from the means of production, is the subject of the next chapter.

[12] This "external authority" in Regulationist terms is the various practices that make up the mode of regulation in any regime of accumulation, such as forms of state intervention.

Coercive class struggle is by no means a guarantee of a predictable outcome, evinced, for Althusser, by Marx's description of primitive accumulation in England as an "encounter" between "'the owners of money' and the proletarian stripped of everything but his labour-power. 'It so happens'", however, "that this encounter took place, and 'took hold', which means that it did not come undone, but *lasted*, and became an accomplished fact […] inducing stable relationships" (197, emphasis in original). Recalling from the earlier discussion in the first chapter on the origin of enclosures of common land, however, the initial class struggle was not one between capitalist and proletariat, but aristocratic landowners and peasants clashing over land for use as sheep walks (in the case of the former), and common crop land (in the case of the latter).

There was a certain unpredictability that the encounter between the landless and the merchant class, the latter of whom were able to accumulate capital successfully through exchange, with the emergence of a class that was entirely reliant on merchants to acquire products, would create capitalism. Such an aleatoric understanding of history means that encounters, if they are to be "lasting" and produce "stable relationships" and "tendential laws" (197), must continually reproduce their social relations; not incidentally, that is why Marx writes in terms of *tendencies*, correcting his previous mechanistic sense of capitalist development. Hence, according to Marx, in order that the "objective conditions of living labour appear as *separated, independent* […] values opposite

living labour capacity as subjective being" (1973: 461, emphasis in original),[13] "the production process can only produce [separation] anew, reproduce it, and reproduce it on an expanded scale" (462). Thus, separation through forms of dispossession and enclosure, or "primitive accumulation", is part and parcel of capital accumulation, meaning that capital accumulation is always contingent on the successful reproduction of both encounters and stable relationships. Consequently, capital accumulation is also hardly a guaranteed, reified process.

Circulation and Cultural Valuation

The reproduction of separation is endemic to capitalist production by virtue of the circuit of the production of value. Marx argues that "[t]he circulation of commodities"—that is, through distribution and exchange—"is the starting point of capital" (1906: 163). Crucially, commodities only enter into circulation as exchange-values, not as use-values, which implies that those who produce such objects are not producing them as the direct satisfaction of their own needs, but because they are wage-labourers:

> Circulation as the realization of exchange value implies: (1) that my product is a product only in so far as it is for others; hence suspended singularity, generality; (2) that it is a product for me only in so far as it has been alienated, become for others; (3) that it is for the other only in so far as he himself alienates his product; which already implies (4) that production is not an end in itself for me, but a means (1973: 196).

Circulation in itself specifically implies the circulation of exchange-values, either as products or labour, and "in particular, exchange values in the form of *prices*"

[13] Here, the objective conditions of living labour appear as alien, in the form of exchange-values, while living labour capacity as subjective being "appears […] as use-value" (461-2).

(187, emphasis in original), unlike the methods of exchange found in other modes of production, such as bartering, paying in kind, or feudal servitude (187-8).

Exchange-value is expressed as the price of a commodity through the money-form: "Money is here posited, thus, as the *measure* of exchange values; and prices as exchange values measured in money" (189, emphasis in original). Exchange-values become, "ideally", money as a result of prices, which for Marx, are actually the "precondition of monetary circulation";[14] "in the act of exchange, in purchase or sale, they are *really* transformed into money, exchanged for money, in order to then be exchanged as money for a commodity" (193, emphasis in original). Of course, the actual movement of commodities from sellers to buyers is accomplished in the physical act of distribution, through forms of non-productive labour in shipping and transportation. However, the exchange of money does transfer ownership of the commodity, if not the commodity itself. Then, "what is realized in the opposite direction in this circulation, whether by purchase or sale, is again not the commodities, but their prices" (194). It is through this movement, Marx contends, that the commodity is an exchange-value—exchangeable precisely because, as I have already discussed, the commodity contains, as a value, "definite masses of congealed labour-time" (1906: 46).

[14] Again, separation is implicit. According to Marx, "[a] developed determination of prices presupposes that the individual does not directly produce his means of subsistence, but that his direct product is an *exchange value*, and hence must first be mediated by a social process, in order to become the *means of life* for the individual" (1973: 193, emphasis in original).

The value of a commodity—including the labour that produces it, its exchange-value, and its use-value—is thus not determined in a purely rational, economic fashion, *contra* claims that "[m]icroeconomics has successfully explained human behaviour" where production and consumption are concerned (Coto-Millan, 2003: 1). The enclosure of culture and lifestyles within the realm of production and commodities, such that production is entwined within the socio-cultural and political spheres (Read, 2003); and the "changing spatial contexts of everyday public life" including "the interdependence of the private space of subjectivity, media and commodity consumption" (Shields, 1992: 1) make it difficult to assess the rationality of producers and consumers as the sole effects on the value of a commodity.

David Harvey notes Marx's insistence on

> a certain kind and measure of value which is being determined by a process that we do not understand[15] and which is not necessarily our conscious choice, and that the manner in which these values are being imposed on us has to be unpacked. If you want to understand who you are and where you stand in this maelstrom of churning values, you have to first understand how commodity values get created and produced and with what consequences—social, environmental, political and the like. […] So Marx insists that we must understand what commodity values and the social necessities that determine them are all about (2010a: 21).

[15] Although we may not understand these processes, Marx's contention need not be taken as an indictment of the false consciousness of consumers, especially when read through realist metatheory. As Datta points out, sociological realism holds that "the social world is taken to exist independently of our knowledge or awareness of it. For example, one need not understand or even be aware of labour market forces and the workings of contract law to be an employee" (2012: 104). This then implies that value is constituted through material practices that exist independently of the consumer's consciousness (and thus, their rational decisions), although they could certainly investigate these processes themselves.

It is not so much that all cultural values and kinds of lifestyles are becoming increasingly reified and valorized for their exchange-values, then, but that value (and, as a result, price) is already heavily dependent on the same social relations and conditions that culture in which culture is produced. It would, in short, be difficult to separate either commodity values or cultural values from the social relations that produce them, meaning that any assessment of "value" cannot rely on an individual's needs and preference alone.

In contemporary capitalist societies, after all, circulation is further mediated by "the expanded role of promotion" (Wernick, 1991: 19), which "herald[s] the beginnings of a change in the very constitution of market society" (18). For many cultural theorists, advertising is, again, part of the reifying process of capital which "links culture and the economy" by "linking customers to products" (Ciochetto, 2011: 173). Adorno contends, "under monopolistic mass culture", advertising becomes

> information when there is no longer anything to choose from, when recognition of brand names has taken the place of choice, when at the same time the totality forces everyone who wishes to survive into consciously going along with the process (2001: 85).

Fredric Jameson notes that the assimilation of capital interests and advertising with culture in "postmodern" societies is so pervasive that advertisements, which merely create "well-informed" market actors who consume culture in Adorno's formulation, are themselves a kind of culture (1984: 55). Baudrillard also argues that individuals are "becoming ever more susceptible to advertising in the *indicative*—that is, to its actual *existence* as a product to be consumed at a

secondary level, and as a clear *expression* of a culture" (1996: 166, emphasis in original).

My concern here, however, is less with the ostensibly negative effects of advertising and mass culture on individuals or the degradation of culture and values in general, and more with the subtle expression of political interests through class struggle in the circulation of commodities and capital. While some commentators have even reduced the reproduction of capitalist economies to the successful functioning of advertising (Ciochetto, 2011), it is important to note that the working class is at times forced, in a capitalist society, to consume regardless of whether or not they are inculcated by promotional culture, in order to reproduce themselves.[16] The role of advertising is, instead, a form of class struggle on the part of capitalists in the creation of these same workers as consumers "and so attributing to them *a priori* a social identity linked firmly to that role" (Wernick, 1991: 35). As I will show in Chapter Three, this process in part explains why many individuals identify more favourably with the role of the consumer than that of the worker.

Workers can be constituted as consumers, as a means of ensuring that the exchange-value of commodities will be realized, but further, as individuals with predilections for specific kinds of commodities. In this context, Andrew Wernick argues, "[b]eing is reduced to having, desire to lack" (35). Indeed, this is certainly how marginalists perceive individual actors in capitalist social formations—in cruder terms, they desire commodities as rational actors who know that they must

[16] Unless, that is, they engage in other forms of class struggle, such as stealing or pirating commodities.

engage in the discomfort or disutility of work to obtain what they lack (Birck, 1922: 11). In acquiring these objects, however, a state of equilibrium is supposedly reached that ameliorates this discomfort. As a result, objects have their "own individual curve of utility, which shows what effect the successive consumption has upon the strength of my desire" (16). Even those marginalists who disparage attempts to treat individuals as completely rational actors still acknowledge the methodological individualism of motives and desires, such as "aspirations and other affections of human nature" as "incentives to action" that can be measured "by the sum of money, which [a person] will just give up in order to secure a desired satisfaction; or again by the sum which is required to induce him to undergo a certain fatigue" (Marshall, 1966: 12-13).

It is possible to read even Pierre Bourdieu's intervention in the realm of capital accumulation as a quasi-marginalist one, in spite of his contention that economism obliterates the socio-cultural workings of "cultural capital", "social capital", and "symbolic capital" (1986: 46). Although the accumulation of economic capital plays, for Bourdieu, an important role in the reproduction of a social formation, he claims that it is "impossible to account for the structure and functioning of the social world unless one reintroduces capital in all its forms and not simply the one recognized by economic theory" (46). Individuals also accumulate culture capital, or "cultural knowledges, competences" (1993: 7); social capital, as the "aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more ore less institutionalized relationships" (1986: 51); and symbolic capital, which is "accumulated prestige"

(1993: 7). Although Bourdieu seeks to emphasize the importance of the socio-cultural realm in shaping the actions of individuals against strict economism, there exists the possibility that the different forms of capital can be "converted" into one another through "transformation, which is needed to produce the type of power effective in the field in question" (1986: 53-4). This is especially obvious in the case of symbolic capital, functioning as a "'credit' which, under certain conditions, and always in the long run, guarantees 'economic' profits" (1993: 75). Hence, possessors of the forms of capital found in the socio-cultural realm still "give up" certain amounts of capital to acquire their satisfactions, which, ironically, may even be economic capital for the purpose of acquiring more forms of cultural or symbolic capital in the form of commodities.

The assumption that value originates solely in the maximization of the utility of a commodity, however, relies on the depiction of the market as a neutral mechanism, unburdened by class struggle and uneven social relations,[17] "for delivering to consumers—for better or worse—the goods and services they want" (Wernick, 1991: 42). Yet, such a conception of value is also indicative of consumption as the singular moment in the circuit of the production of value in Marx's terms, where the commodity truly does become an instrument or "servant"

[17] Capital, Marx argues, "presupposes wage labour; wage labour presupposes capital. They reciprocally condition the existence of each other" (1978c: 209). Wage labour is never just a means of earning a wage in order to purchase commodities, however, since a worker does not merely produce the commodities they are paid to work on, but also exchange-value, which, in the form of capital, is specifically advantageous primarily to capitalists (210). This relationship has not gone entirely unchallenged by the working class that capital increases, though, insofar as unionization and collective bargaining represent attempts at security on the part of workers against the tumult of capital expansion and decline.

of individual need through exchange-value: "consumption *ideally posits* the object of production as an internal image, as a need, as drive and as purpose" (1973: 92, emphasis in original). Thus, by the time one arrives at the moment of consumption in capitalist social relations, exchange-value will have been realized such that the particular regime of accumulation in which the consumption takes place stands a good chance of reproduced. Consequently, a theory of commodification predicated on reification through consumption may give the impression of the unending reproduction of capitalist social relations themselves.

As indicated in Chapter One, however, the Regulation School, which holds that capitalism has been characterized, since the Industrial Revolution, by different kinds of regimes of accumulation, maintains that stability or equilibrium is never permanent in a capitalist social formation. There

> exist weak points, or zones where corrective mechanisms can break down. In that event a direct threat is posed to the reproduction of the invariant element, and hence to the existence of the system itself. When this happens, the system reacts as a totality to plug the gap by modifying the form of regulation [i.e., through institutions, reforms, even social and political attitudes]. A change in regime takes place, in a morphological transformation that may be more or less considerable. Ruptures are one such transformation (Aglietta, 2000: 20).

While consumption may be sufficient in some instances for reproducing a particular regime of accumulation, it also poses problems, as in the case of the transition from Fordism to post-Fordism discussed in the first chapter, when markets become saturated and must expand. In cases like this, the realization of exchange-value for capitalists, and the need for further production, can lead to overproduction, decreasing demand, and the decline of profits unless new markets can be found. This can, then, signal the emergence of a new regime, which in

itself is a form of class struggle to adapt to changing market conditions. It is also indicative of the reality of consumption as a moment in an unstable process where simply completing the circuit of production is not always a guarantee of reproduction.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have sought to emphasize the contingency of the circuit of the production of value, rather than to portray capitalist social relations as reified and unchanging. Critics of commodification all too often reduce such social relations to the very static "things" they criticize, so that all of society appears to reflect the choices, decisions, and individual tastes associated with the singular moment of consumption itself. In these cases, workers are often seen as expressing preferences for superficial commodities rather than their interests in socialism. This instance is singular, because it deals only with the appropriation of objects by individuals, where the value of the object is realized as a commodity that can satisfy a need (or "desire", in utilitarian terms), rather than a generality, like the combination of socially-useful labour in the act of production. The relations of the circuit of the production of value, in which workers have struggled and continue to struggle over enclosures and displacement, or exchange-values and cultural values, or employment conditions, are not always addressed.

Capitalist social relations are certainly rarely as fixed as the theory of reification might imply, especially given that their aim is not the production of

relations or community bonds around the mere reproduction and maintenance of existing conditions, but the generation of unlimited wealth (Marx, 1973: 540):

> Capital posits the *production of wealth* itself and hence the universal development of productive forces, the constant overthrow of its prevailing presuppositions, as the presupposition of its reproduction. Value excludes no use-value; i.e. includes no particular kind of consumption etc., of intercourse etc. as absolute condition; and likewise every degree of the development of the social forces of production, of intercourse, of knowledge etc. appears to it only as a barrier which it strives to overpower (541, emphasis in original).

I therefore examined primitive accumulation, or separation, as a process that is part of capital accumulation, rather than a stage in history that precedes capitalism, in order to be able to discuss the aleatoric tendencies of capital in which social relations are always in flux owing to contingency and class struggle. As de Angelis argues, "[d]espite the accumulating evidence of real social struggles against the many forms of capitalist enclosure, the fact that capital encloses is not something that has been sufficiently theorised by critical social and economic theory" (2004: 57). Thus, instead of focusing on consumption as a process which determines all forms of social interaction, I alluded to the successful production of the act of consuming commodities as a successful form of class struggle on the part of capitalists. In the next chapter, then, I will discuss the identity of workers-as-consumers.

Chapter Three:

Workers-as-Consumers:

Rethinking The Political Economy of Membership

Introduction: The Ontology of the "Consumer"

In this chapter, I argue that the concept of consumption functions as a normative trope in a great deal of Western Marxist literature. It is treated as a moment in the productive process in which workers are subordinated to the capitalist mode of production at the expense of their working-class interests in favour of socialism and communism (Marx and Engels, 1977; 1978a). As I argued in Chapter Two however, consumption does not guarantee the reproduction of social relations even if it reproduces capital, because of contingent social conditions and class struggle. There is, consequently, a need to re-evaluate the negative normative status associated with the "consumer" in critical Marxist theory as an ontological category that explains the worker-consumer's membership in a capitalist social formation. Production and consumption are inseparable in Marx's analytic throughout his work. Both moments have an identity or commonality that helps one describe and explain both physical and social reproduction. Yet, the correspondence this implies between the worker and the consumer is in some cases altogether unnoticed in much Western Marxist literature, or acknowledged merely as a kind of social problem.

According to David Shumway, this has to do with the tense relationship Marxist theorists have with consumption and consumer culture in light of

commodity fetishism. Although Marx's understanding of fetishized commodities refers to a "mistake about the locus of value and the origins of capital" (2000: 5), Western Marxist theorists, such as those belonging to the Frankfurt School, have typically suggested that commodity fetishism inspires an endless lust after alienated objects of labour, the consumption of which is antithetical to the worker's real class interests. There is also a "gendered" division of labour, in which women are targeted primarily as consumers (Karatani, 2005) who transform "paycheque[s] into goods and services in order to maintain the members of the family household" (Luxton, 1987: 170), as well as "capricious" and "hedonistic" shoppers who spend a lot on frivolous things (Cronin, 2000: 274). In spite of the clear, reproductive role of women in capital (in contrast to men, who are typically considered productive in their work outside the home), this problem, Juliet Mitchell argues, had "become a subsidiary, if not an invisible element in the preoccupations of socialists" (1966: 12) in the late twentieth century. And, with the decline of socialist politics, consumerism has since been treated as an issue, as I have illustrated, of individual impulse.

As a consequence of this approach, "consumption" has become more an object of normative judgment than a moment in the circuit of the production of value. For many Marxists, consumption appears to hinder revolutionary political development, which requires the active political participation of the working class. The analytical cost of this normative association however, is the development of an ontology of the consumer within the relations of the production of value, as members of the working class who confront commodities

at the intersection between use-value and exchange-value. I take up this task, in order to theorize workers, consumers and the political economy of social and political membership based in multiple material, contingent contradictions, rather than binary class interests. Indeed, just because workers, as part of the relations of production, consume, they are not necessarily interested in reproducing the forces of production through the accumulation of capital that interests the bourgeoisie.

Critical Marxist theory has, in the past, undoubtedly given "priority to ascetic labour over hedonistic consumption" (Turner and Rojek, 2001: 80) in direct contrast to the measurement of "personal feelings such as pleasure, satisfaction, lack of pain, etc." through consumption in liberal economics (Coto-Millan, 2003: 7). However, this has put Marxist and leftist politics in the position of appearing to "oppose the desires of the working class for their fair share of consumer goods" (Shumway, 2000: 2). In treating consumption normatively as an unfortunate consequence of capitalist false consciousness, the ontological status of consumption in capitalist social formations is obscured: just as capital is reproduced by consumption and the demand for more production, so too do those who do not own the means of production depend on consumption to reproduce their labour-power. The worker is thus inseparable from the consumer, and, although this type of subjectivity is far from simple, it is necessary to examine the identity between workers and consumers in order to avoid the "responsibilizing"[1] rhetoric about worker-consumers as lacking in restraint and fiscal discipline.

[1] In treating the "consumer" and consumption normatively, as an ethical problem in society that has to be solved to avoid exploitation, workers are "responsibilized" for their consumption, which is to say, consumers are compared

Labour and Subjectivity

The notion of human beings, possessing a transformative power in labour, is prevalent in many Marxist understandings of subjectivity, especially under conditions of exploitation in capitalist social formations. The "worker subject" in Marxist theory, distinguishable based on the capacity for fulfilling labour, stands in opposition to the self-interested liberal individual with a "propensity" for exchange (Smith, 1976: 17) who thereby satisfies desires through consumption (Birck, 1922; Marshall, 1966; Coto-Millan, 2003).[2] Individuals, for Marx and subsequent Marxists, are instead "productively active in a definite way", and thereby "enter into these definite social and political relations" (1978a: 154): how individuals interact with each other, what they produce, and how they are governed is dependent on the existence of some or other mode of production

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with a "moral agency as [a] necessary ontological condition" (Shamir, 2008: 7) to the success of social improvement. In an almost neoliberal fashion, responsibilization works in a "quasi-juridical form, where the ethical subject refers his conduct to a law, or set of laws, to which he must submit" (Foucault, 1985: 29); such subjects are "'empowered' to deal with their problems responsibly", which entails a "responsibility for governing future harmful consequences" of actions (O'Malley, 2008: 458), and "choice, personal responsibility, control over one's own fate, self-promotion, and self-governance" (Rose, 2000: 329).

[2] Hence Marx's (1978c) claim: "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*—i.e., it does not demonstrate how they arise from the very nature of private property. Political economy does not disclose the source of the division between labour and capital, and between capital and land. When, for example, it defines the relationship between wages and profit, it takes the interests of the capitalists to be the ultimate cause" (70, emphasis in original).

(including their combination). Modes of production themselves, however, are indicative of the way individuals appropriate and produce with the objects of nature, or the "sensuous external world. It is the material on which [one's] labor is manifested, in which it is active, from which and by means of which it produces" (1978d: 72). Yet, under capitalist social relations, workers employed for the purposes of production, having been separated from the means and production, are estranged from their labour. In selling labour-power as a commodity, by means of which the worker obtains a wage and access to productive forces owned by the capitalist, workers, for Marx, produce vast amounts of wealth and receive little in return. Workers are therefore alienated, or estranged, from their labour.

In his famous formulation, Marx argues that "[i]n estranging from man (1) nature, and (2) himself, his own active functions, his life-activity, estranged labour estranges the *species* from man. It turns for him the *life of the species* into a means of individual life" (1978c: 75, emphasis in original). It comes as little surprise, then, that the revolutionary course of the *Communist Manifesto* (1977) includes the redistribution of property and the means of production among the working classes or masses[3] and the fostering of a working-class consciousness; a goal which has also been explicitly stated in the revolutionary movements inspired by Marxist political programmes (Lenin, 1961; 1965; Mao, 1934). Marxist commentary on the formalism of liberal citizenship, as merely prescribing a set of equal rights to the population regardless of social

[3] Revolutions in "peripheral" societies without a highly developed capitalist mode of production, such as China in the early to mid twentieth century, have relied on alliances between "rural producers whose mode of life most closely approximates that of urban workers" as one exploited class (Goodwin, 2001: 21).

stratification, has also focused on the need for reducing substantial inequalities as part of a political programme (Turner and Rojek, 2001: 203; Poulantzas, 1978; Wood, 1995: 237).

Exercising Control Through Consciousness: A Contribution of Western Marxism

In spite of some of the arduous working conditions and alienating consequences of capitalism, the development of a politicized and unifying working-class consciousness has proved to be difficult. After European countries where capitalism was ostensibly developed failed to follow suit with the Russian Revolution of 1917—supporting instead nationalistic and fascist regimes—many Western Marxists began to study the conditions causing working class political stultification as a means of understanding how workers' subjectivity could be used to maintain the capitalist state. I already examined some of these contributions in Chapter Two, through an analysis of the concepts of reification (Lukacs, 1971) and the commodification of social life. The work done by members of the Frankfurt school certainly helps highlight the integration of capitalist production and daily social life with the emergence of mass-produced, visually-marketed goods (Benjamin, 1973), the "culture industry" as emphasized by Adorno (2001), and consequently "commodity-men" who "worship things" rather than relations and so feel alienated and unfulfilled (Fromm, 2004). Consumption therefore appears as a detriment to the development of a revolutionary class-consciousness. As a result, many Marxists became interested

in the socio-cultural and political elements that condition and maintain such passive relationships with the economic sphere.

Indeed, for most Western Marxists, a theoretical expansion of superstructural categories such as culture and politics, or "civil" and "political society", is necessary for making it possible to understand the perpetuation of capitalist social relations. Gramsci's intervention in this regard has had significant impact. He emphasizes "two major superstructural 'levels': the one that can be called 'civil society', that is, the ensemble of organisms commonly called 'private', and that of 'political society' or 'the State'" (1971a: 12). Civil society, for Gramsci, corresponds to the exercise of "hegemony"[4] by a dominant class in society, while political society concerns "direct domination" and "juridical government" (12). Hegemony therefore serves an ideological function:[5] in considering the subordination of the working class as a subaltern population, it is necessary to understand subtle exercises of power beyond coercion and domination. A powerful "social group […] must already exercise 'leadership' before winning governmental [political] power (this is indeed one of the principle conditions for winning such power)" (1971b: 57). As a result, one should expect to observe "hegemonic activity even before [a class's] rise to power, and […] one

[4] Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (1989) consider hegemony to be a kind of closed system, which incorporates the heterogeneity of a social formation to ensure its reproduction, while simultaneously making it impossible to think about anything external to the social formation.

[5] As Althusser points out, Gramsci refers "exclusively to the reality that [he] christens Hegemony (without telling us just what the word might mean!)"—except as "the idea that it is possible to decipher everything about the terribly material nature of production and exploitation (hence of the class struggle in production) and the terribly material nature of the constraints and practices of the law, of the political and ideological class struggles" (2006: 145).

should not count only on the material force which power gives in order to exercise an effective leadership" (59).

For Gramsci, the unity of a ruling class "is realised in the State", such that "subaltern classes, by definition, are not unified and cannot unite until they are able to become a 'State': their history, therefore, is intertwined with that of civil society" (52). Hegemonic struggles between classes can either disrupt a mode of production and its social relations—Gramsci anticipated this outcome in advocating the role of "organic", subaltern intellectuals rather than sympathetic bourgeois intellectuals in the working class struggle (1971a)—or preserve them. Although Gramsci comes close to addressing the means by which a social formation reproduces its relations of production, rather than just the mode of production itself (Althusser, 1971), he never elaborates a clear connection between production, consumption, and reproduction. While the Frankfurt School elaborates a very reified conception of the mode of production as built on meaningless consumption, Gramsci's less deterministic approach is perhaps too spurious. In some instances, it almost appears that the reproduction of a social formation, and thus the subjugation of subaltern working classes, is caused by the perpetuation of hegemonic ideas alone (Althusser, 2006).

Interpellating the Working Class as the Working Class and the Constitution of Subjectivity

It is primarily in Althusser's "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses" however, that subordination and subjectivity are explicitly connected with the

notion of a successful state as reproducing both the mode of production and relations of production (1971). I outline Althusser's subjectivity of the working class, and its potential and limitations for understanding the worker-as-consumer in this section. Althusser argues that "[a]s Marx said, every child knows that a social formation which did not reproduce the conditions of production at the same time as it produced would not last a year" (127). In contrast to a repressive model of ideology, which restrains subjectivity through economic, cultural, and political subordination, subjectivity, for Althusser, enables workers to actively and "freely" participate in the conditions of their subordination to capital reproduction.

When Althusser emphasizes the reproduction of capitalist social formations, he distinguishes between "the reproduction of the means of production"—the accumulation of capital through production and consumption—and "the reproduction of the productive forces […] i.e., the reproduction of labour power" (1971: 130). In short Marxists need to theorize the reproduction of the working class alongside the conditions of capital accumulation. What is perhaps most crucial for Althusser, in comparison with other Western Marxists, is the "individual" subject as an ideological effect which contributes to the sustainment of highly competitive regimes of accumulation. Not entirely unlike Gramsci, Althusser delineates coercive from ideological power. Repressive forms of power constitute "Repressive State Apparatuses" (RSAs), "i.e. the police, the courts, the prisons; but also the army, which (the proletariat has paid for this experience with its blood) intervenes directly as a supplementary repressive force in the last

instance […]; and above this ensemble, the head of State, the government and the administration" (137).

In contrast to RSAs however, he insists on a predominantly ideological sphere (which roughly corresponds to the liberal, as well as Hegelian and Gramscian conception of "civil society") in which groups of people are trained as differentiated, individual subjects of a capitalist social formation. Althusser's materialist understanding of ideology means that ideology functions through the practices of subjects. The

> "ideas" of a human subject exist in his actions, and if this is not the case, it lends him other ideas corresponding to the actions (however perverse) that he does perform. […] [T]hese practices are governed by the rituals in which these practices are inscribed, within the material existence of an ideological apparatus, be it only a small part of that apparatus (170).

Hence, then, why Pascal proclaimed, "more or less: 'Kneel down, move your lips in prayer, and you will believe'" (170).

Consequently, "the category of the subject is only constitutive of all ideology insofar as all ideology has the function (which defines it) of 'constituting' concrete individuals as subjects" (171, parentheses in original). In his well-known formulation of ideological "interpellation", Althusser contends that it is precisely the "'obviousness' that you and I are subjects—and that this does not cause any problems" through which ideology operates (172):

> the individual is interpellated as a (free) subject in order that he shall submit freely to the commandments of the subject, i.e. in order that he shall (freely) accept his subjection, i.e. in order that he shall make the gestures and actions of his subjection "all by himself". There are no subjects except by and for their subjection. That is why they "work all by themselves" (182, parentheses in original).

There is, therefore, nothing outside of ideology and nothing prior to it (175). Individuals are interpellated by other individuals, and through social relations, though Althusser affords a lot of emphasis to the role of "Ideological State Apparatuses" in this process. The institutions which comprise these apparatuses are: "the religious ISA, the educational ISA, the family ISA, the legal ISA, the political ISA, the trade-union ISA, the communications ISA", and "the cultural ISA" (143).

Ideological state apparatuses are responsible for continuously reproducing a working class that is able, and, most importantly, quite willing to freely aid the accumulation of capital. ISAs have "inculcated children and adults with specific ways of imagining—thinking about and thus understanding—their places within and relationships to the societies in which they lived" (Wolff, 2005: 225). Through the practices of their daily lives, rather than by external impositions to consciousness, the working class reproduces itself as such: the function of ideology, for Althusser, is not a consequence of alienation from one's "species being", because "individuals are always-already subjects" (1971: 176). There is, in this formulation, no original subject who is made falsely conscious through alienation, because subjectivity precedes the individual: "Before its birth, a child is […] always-already a subject, appointed as a subject in and by the specific familial ideological configuration in which it is 'expected' once it has been conceived" (176).

The individuation of subjects, for the purpose of classification, continues throughout one's life and career. Beginning with school—the "educational ISA",

which is one of the most dominant ISAs in contemporary capitalist social relations—children learn, whether through "old or new methods, a certain amount of 'know-how' wrapped in the ruling ideology" (155). They reproduce a class of workers, alongside a managerial petty bourgeois class, and a class of capitalists by training children according to "the ideology which suits the role [they have] to fulfill in class society" (155). While those who would become managers and capitalists are taught about "human relations", the ability to give orders, evaluate ideas, and even "manipulate the demagogy of a political leader's rhetoric" (156), working-class children learn professional skills alongside a "'national' and a-political consciousness" (155) which serves them in their subordinate roles.

Empirical studies have certainly documented some of the glaring discrepancies in the expectations of working-class students versus middle- and upper-class students. While schools attended primarily by middle- and upper-class students tend to focus on "meeting individual needs of children—thereby reflecting the choice of a more competence-based pedagogy in a less heavily framed context" (Hempel-Jorgensen, 2009: 440), schools in working-class areas which cater to such students generally emphasize "behaviour management" and discipline (439). Thus while middle- and upper-class institutions are more likely to see their students excel academically by meeting and "exceed[ing] national targets" (440), working-class schools are more likely to see students struggle with basic skills, not to mention the curriculum itself (439).[6] Pierre Bourdieu (1973;

[6] Some commentators have noted an overall shift in educational practices, however, in the direction of neoliberal post-Fordism. Where students from working-class backgrounds were more likely to be taught about developing skills

1990) accounts for this stratification in terms of the accumulation of "social" and "cultural capital" on the part of the middle- and upper-classes: in the case of education, cultural capital confers qualifications and an understanding of the importance of these qualifications for the purposes of gaining prestige and furthering a successful career in order to "convert" this capital into economic capital (1986: 47).

The ideology that reproduces the working class is therefore not "a diagnosis implying in the most oblique and scholarly manner that the proletariat was suffering from a kind of collective brain damage" (Parkin, cited in van den Berg, 1988: 508), but a set of practices, "governed by the rituals of the ISAs" (Althusser, 1971: 181), that "obtains from [individuals] the *recognition* that they really do occupy the place [ideology] designates for them as theirs in the world, a fixed residence: 'It really is me, I am here, a worker, a boss or a soldier!" (178, emphasis in original). Ideology is ideological, for Althusser, precisely because it is not the consequence of direct coercion, but of a kind of freedom. "Yes, the subjects 'work by themselves'", he writes:

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and abilities useful for engaging in paid work (Willis, 1978), recent emphasis on "entrepreneurship education" amongst all children, and the promotion of "a general enterprising attitude—'inner entrepreneurship'" (Komulainen, Korhonen, and Räty, 2009: 631) in European, and Canadian and American Schools (Gibb, 2002) encourages a vision of the individual "where the person is not contingent upon external effects but an autonomous self-governing individual". Consequently, "individual entrepreneurial initiative, flexibility, self-reliance and self-responsibility […] challenges the routine, rule-following behaviour demanded by Fordist production" (Komulainen et al., 2009: 645). Of course, this does not preclude the reproduction of a working class, which is still constrained materially, though it does shed light on the issue of multiple forms of interpellation, to be addressed below.

> They 'work by themselves' in the vast majority of cases, with the exception of 'bad subjects' who on occasion provoke the intervention of one of the detachments of the (repressive) State apparatus. But the vast majority of (good) subjects work all right 'by themselves', i.e., by ideology […]. They 'recognize' the existing state of affairs […], that 'it really is true that it is so and not otherwise' […]. Their concrete, material behaviour is simply the inscription in life of the admirable words of the prayer: '*Amen – So be it*' (181, emphasis in original).

This form of subjectivity, which freely reproduces itself, thus also contributes to the reproduction of labour power, since it ensures that individuals will continue, for the most part, to reproduce their material conditions of existence as workers.

Workers and Consumers

The Althusserian conceptions of ideology and interpellation are useful insofar as they do not rely on notions of false consciousness to explain the persistence of capitalism, insisting instead on the reproduction of both the means of production and the working class itself as a material practice that constitutes daily life and existence, regardless of whether it is enjoyable or not. However, insofar as ideological state apparatuses are responsible for establishing subjectivity even prior to the existence of the actual subject, as in the case of a family who has, for instance, already named an unborn child, and who expects to raise her or him in a certain fashion, ISAs appear to play a productive, instead of reproductive, role themselves. This is problematic on the grounds that the worker, as an ontological category, is produced through the continual separation of producers from the means of production, rather than through interpellation (i.e., workers are not produced by the state, but in the process of primitive and capital accumulation).

This encounter, as I argued in Chapter Two, also suggests that workers as a class must consume in order to appropriate the products of their labour.

In the following sections of this chapter, however, I contend that the worker-as-consumer is always a problematic identity for capitalists, given that capitalists aim to keep the workers' total compensation (or, more precisely, the price of labour power) as low as possible. And yet, the working class, as the largest class in the social formation, must also purchase commodities to spur commodity reproduction and capital accumulation. The difficulty in appealing to interpellation as the force that reproduces relations of production, then, is the inability to account for antagonisms and contradictions of an aleatoric, or contingent class struggle between capitalists and workers—something that Althusser acknowledges when he notes that the "reproduction of the relations of production, the ultimate aim of the ruling class", which is the capitalist class in contemporary social formations, cannot "be a merely technical operation training and distributing individuals for the different posts in the 'technical division of labour'" (183). In avoiding the false consciousness of consumption posited by some critical theorists, though, Althusser also avoids the question of consumption altogether, even though it is important for considering capital reproduction. Thus, in the following sections, I will explicate the identity of the worker-consumer engaged in forms of class struggle, as a means of overcoming the normative trap associated with consumption in critical theory.

Commodity Fetishism and Consumers: Distinguishing Use-Value From Exchange-Value

In order to really understand consumption as a form of reproductive practice, albeit a precarious one, it is crucial to return to commodity fetishism and the distinction between use-value and exchange-value. While the contingent moment between value as something appropriated by individuals and value as created by the market is evident in Althusser's later materialism of the encounter, his formulation of ideological state apparatuses is too rigid to account for the contingencies and unevenness of working class struggle. Some commentators have even suggested that interpellation is similar to "the conception of socialization offered by functionalist sociology" since "there is no basis for 'interpellations' of oppositional forms of subjectivity" (Benton, 1984: 107). Hindess and Hirst argue that "the theory of the reproduction of the relations of production assigns a necessary 'function' and then seeks apparatuses to perform it" (1977: 30).[7] As such, workers appear to be consistently reproduced in accordance with the needs of capital—with the exception of those few "bad subjects" who incur the wrath of the repressive state apparatuses to keep them in line.

[7] Althusser anticipates similar criticisms in *Machiavelli and Us* (2000) when he argues that Maciavelli's *The Prince*, as a political manifesto (14), interpellates a not-yet-existent prince and people, not unlike the *Communist Manifesto*'s call to the otherwise-downtrodden working class to become revolutionary in "the ideological place occupied by that theory [of the communists]" (127-8). In these cases, ideological state apparatuses emerge as secondary to revolutionary individuals or forces (92).

In opposition to this view, as noted above, is the position of Frankfurt School critical theory, and its insistence on the perpetuation of capitalist social relations through forms of deceptive advertising which valorize the exchange-value, or worth of the product to be consumed. This creates mindless consumers who must buy endlessly because they are never satisfied with the material objects at their disposal. These particular subjects are, as alienated workers, only capable of considering the social world as things rather than a set of social relations.

According to Shumway, commodity fetishism has typically been used as a means of explaining the allure of commodities on the market to alienated, reified individuals: Laura Mulvey, for example, reads the deception presented by commodities at a visual level, that depends on "the erasure of marks of production, any trace of indexicallity [*sic*], the grime of the factory, the mass molding of the machine, and most of all, the exploitation of the worker". Subsequently, a commodity appears with "a seductive sheen, as it competes to be desired" (cited in Shumway, 2000: 7). Shumway claims that this, among other readings of the visual allure of commodities in consumption relies on Walter Benjamin's application of commodity fetishism to consumption:

> The more industry progresses, the more perfect the imitations which it throws on the market. The commodity is bathed in a profane glow; this glow has nothing in common with the glow that produces its "theological capers," [i.e., the fetishism that Marx attributes to commodities] yet it is of some importance to society (Benjamin, 1973: 105).

Indeed, as far as Shumway is concerned, Marx's "favorite example in *Capital*, a bolt of cloth", serves to demonstrate that he is unconcerned with the "visual appearance of commodities 'in the market place'":

> Even if the bolt of cloth were silver mylar, it still would not achieve its value *as a commodity* by its "seductive sheen." The cloth's value as a commodity lies in its potential for exchange, that potential existing because of the labor required to make the cloth. What commodity fetishism masks is not the fact of labor or production, but the source of exchange-value: the exploitation of workers. A bolt of muslin masks that as effectively as an Armani suit (2000: 7, emphasis in original).

Consequently, Marx is not suggesting that if everyone understood the terrible conditions in which commodities are produced, they would no longer want them, or that they would stop valorizing the worth of the product. Rather, "what is mysterious is the belief that the exchange of mass quantities of such things seems to generate value all by itself"—"[i]t is no mystery for Marx why people want things", which is "a matter of use-value" (8).

Regardless of what the use-value consumers see in products is, they buy them to satisfy some need or want they can only acquire through exchange. They are thus not seeking to realize exchange-value, or necessarily to valorize it, but to obtain something useful to them. As Howard Engelskirchen remarks, the labour of the worker is structured in such a way that one "produce[s] separately from others". Thus, "in order to obtain the means to sustain her own existence and to produce again, she *must* resort to exchange" (2007: 207, emphasis in original). Because the circulation of capital does not require any specific form of use-value for accumulation, capitalists can invest in any number of commodity production processes so long as they realize surplus value, as evinced by M—C—M'. Consequently, workers employed throughout various industries, in complex divisions of labour, produce commodities for which they themselves have no use, on the assumption that such commodities are still necessary for others. It follows

then, that it is only through consumption, or the appropriation by others of exchange-values, that use-value is realized.

The working class consumes then—not because they have unnecessarily fetishized commodities as alienated objects with mysterious powers (all the while unknowingly perpetuating exploitation), but because they require the use of these objects to fulfill a variety of needs, wants and desires. As a result, the interests of consumers cannot always be aligned with the interests of capitalists who hope to reproduce capital through consumption. Use-value can be obtained through forms of struggle, if necessary, in spite of the potential detriment to capital accumulation. Consumers also generally do not consider the implications of their consumption on the market and the impact on profits: overproduction is not usually understood as overly problematic (except to those who consciously object to exploitative and environmentally wasteful practices) since goods are readily available at cheap prices, even though profits can stagnate as a result.

Workers as Consumers and the Dual Articulation of Subjectivity

The Valorization of the Consumer

Much like the divisions, in the form of distribution and exchange, that obscure the identity between production and consumption, the identity or commonality between the worker and consumer is by no means a unified one insofar as the distribution of commodities with exchange-values has certainly led to the elevation of the consumer as the subject *par excellence* in contemporary capitalist social formations. According to Kojin Karatani, "consumption is the only place

where surplus value is finally realized, and for this objective precisely, the only place where it is subordinated to the will of consumers/workers" (2005: 20). From a Marxist perspective, this does not necessarily mean that consumption comes to represent the ultimate form of agency imagined in utilitarian economics, where the realization of desires drives the market, or Daniel Bell's (1973) "postindustrial" society in which individuals cultivate selves and lifestyles through mass consumption (127); rather, it implies an aleatoric moment in which workers-as-consumers are able to engage in class struggle which may not ultimately reproduce capital (for example, cutting back on household purchases, growing food in a garden and making as many meals as possible to avoid grocery store and restaurant prices, or fixing and handing down clothing and cars rather than buying new things). Karatani certainly acknowledges, after all, the limits of consumption-driven agency as an appendage of capital accumulation, especially when it comes at the expense of worker movements (2005: 295).

To be sure, liberal forms of consumer agency are envisioned strictly with the goal of reproducing capital, where consumption becomes a practice of satisfying desires and self-expression by acquiring objects of utility. It can also be a political platform aimed at "humanizing" capitalism and ameliorating concerns about the production process, be they labour-oriented or ecological. Consumers can boycott the products of corporations with questionable ethical practices, or "buycott" (Micheletti, 2003) other commodities, in which they choose to support socially responsible production by purchasing from specific companies with specific practices.

Contemporary consumer rights movements are organized around enabling governments "in achieving or maintaining adequate protection for their *population as consumers*" (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2003, emphasis added). They are, consequently, aimed at providing a forum for individuals to act as consumers, with the goal of preventing harm from sellers to buyers, such as financial loss for consumers (Faure, Ogus, and Philipsen, 2009), the selling of unsafe or inadequately tested products (Bach and Newman, 2010), or protecting consumer information and privacy (Castells, 2001; Coleman, 1990).

The consumer advocacy movement has grown substantially since the end of the twentieth century:[8] while consumers often felt, at the end of the 1970s and beginning of the 1980s, that consumer complaints were unlikely to be taken seriously, (Sigelman and Smith, 1980), today consumer rights are protected by law and even provide a platform for ecological, ethical, and political activism (Micheletti, 2003). "Socially-conscious" consumers have recently started to engage in political consumerism, believing strongly in "the political connection between our daily consumer choices and important global issues of environmentalism, labor rights, human rights, and sustainable development" (2). Buying "ethically", from local markets which avoid the environmental costs of lengthy transportation, or from collectives that hand-make items, or even supporting companies which ostensibly do not use third world labour, represent some of the ways people express their beliefs through consumer choices.

[8] Along with the ostensible rise of postindustrialism and the decline of the labour movement.

Rather than participating solely in traditional forms of political engagement to voice concerns, such as voting in elections or supporting and joining political parties, Micheletti argues that many people now consume as a way to express themselves politically, by bridging private "lifestyle politics" (74) with global economic concerns: "This politicization of products represents […] a shift in understanding of the origin of problems and the responsibility of individual consumers and citizens in problem-solving efforts" (75). Some commentators see consumer movements as positive outlets for political expression among those who may otherwise feel disenfranchised from traditional forms of participation, such as young people (Harris, Wyn, and Younes, 2010). The underlying theme, in praise of consumer movements and rights, seems to be the spread, and further democratization of democratic politics and participation to all spheres of life, from the economic to the public to the private.

All of this serves, however, to distance the notion of the consumer from that of the worker, insofar as these movements are not, as Karatani maintains, "movement[s] of workers qua consumers, and consumers qua workers" (2005: 295), but of consumers as apparently free agents who make choices among things on the market. Consequently,

> In the monetary economy, buying and selling as well as production and consumption are separated. This introduces a split in the workers' subject: as workers (the sellers of labor-power commodity) and consumers (the buyers of capitalist commodities). In consequence, it comes to appear as if corporations and consumers were the only subjects of economic activities (20).

This split subjectivity is doubtless the product of capital enclosures—workers cannot merely consume the products (and/or services, experiences, etc.) they

produce, but in general consume according to market exchange in order to come into contact with commodities.[9]

Yet, the reproduction of this dual relation cannot be explained by recourse to interpellation alone, given that the two forms of subjectivity, worker and consumer, appear antithetical to each other.[10] Although Althusser acknowledges that an individual can be hailed by different sources, he is less able to address the possibility, at least in "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses", that such an individual will respond to conflicting interpellations since he can only claim that the individual will "recognize that the hail was 'really' addressed to him, and that 'it was *really* him who was hailed" (1971: 175, emphasis in original). As a consequence, the possibility of the conflicting interpellation on one hand as a consumer—a positive category—and a worker on the other—a less attractive existence—becomes problematic, especially since the category "worker" is undesirable for both workers, who see work as an arduous means to a meager existence, and capitalists who wish to cut production costs.

As Marx states, workers employed by any one capitalist are certainly thought of as workers in this specific relation owing to their immediacy in the generation of surplus value: "the relation of *every* capitalist to *his own workers* is the *relation as such of capital and labour*, the essential relation". Yet, "*apart from*

[9] Unless they acquire them by other means, considered illegitimate in the capitalist social formation, such as through piracy, contraband, or theft. Social unrest and riots, such as the London riots in the summer of 2011, are examples of this.

[10] As Marx illustrates, capitalists seek to pay workers according to their needs for the basic reproduction of labour-power, but a population on a limited income does not spend a great deal of its own accord. The working class, as workers, is usually urged to be frugal and save (Marx, 1906), rather than to spend and consume.

his workers, the whole remaining working class confronts him as *consumer* and *participant in exchange*, as money-spender, and not as worker" (1973: 420, emphasis in original). Consequently,

> What precisely distinguishes capital from the master-slave relation is that the worker confronts him [the capitalist] as consumer and possessor of exchange values, and that in the form of the possessor of money, in the form of money he becomes a simple centre of circulation – one of its infinitely many centres, *in which his specificity as a worker is extinguished* (420-1, emphasis added).

Marx certainly stresses the capitalist's restriction of worker consumption, by way of wages, to only that necessary for the reproduction of labour power (422). As a result, however, the reproduction of capital is always precarious because workers do not always possess the means to spend their wages on more than basic necessities.

Relative Surplus Value, Credit, and the Contingency of Consumptive Reproduction

The concept of the process of interpellation, taken to be an element of class struggle, enables an analysis of dual subjectivity as a means of successfully reproducing capital against the contingencies of tumultuous production and capital relations. The interpellation of individuals as rational agents who express a preference for goods, services, experiences, and lifestyles appeals to a sense of freedom—and, importantly, one that can benefit the capitalist mode of production—instead of the restraints of laborious servitude or frugality. This kind of discourse has taken hold at such a level that holding rights, which guarantees a certain amount of legal status in a social formation, is often conceived on the

same level as consumption, as elaborated above. In order for consumption to be received as a positive alternative to exploitation, material factors that enable consumption, such as adequate wages, are necessary to shift the class struggle in the direction of capital reproduction.

Richard Wolff traces the successful reproduction of the worker-consumer subject in the United States through increasing relative surplus value, in contrast to the minimal wages paid to workers (2005: 229). Marx defines "relative surplus value" as "the surplus value arising from the curtailment of the necessary labour-time, and from the corresponding alteration in the respective lengths of the two components of the working day [necessary labour and surplus labour]" (1906: 345). Thus, an increase in relative surplus value requires an increase "in the productiveness of labour", so as to "shorten the labour-time socially necessary for the production of a commodity, and to endow a given quantity of labour with the power of producing a greater quantity of use-value" (345). It is therefore possible to decrease the length of the working-day required for generating enough value, paid in the form of wages to the worker for the reproduction of labour-power, by revolutionising the means of production and introducing newer and more efficient forms of technology. As a result, the price of commodities on the market drops because it is possible to produce larger quantities of commodities in less time, such that it also takes less time to generate enough value to compensate the worker for his or her labour-power (346).

American capitalists, Wolff notes, were able to use their surpluses to obtain inexpensive raw materials from around the world, employ a managerial

class for the purpose of further increasing efficiency among workers, and develop new forms of technology. Production costs consequently decreased, and with them, the price of commodities on the market being sold to workers. Thus, Wolff argues, "[c]apitalists could raise their workers' wages far more slowly than the workers raised their delivery of surplus to the capitalists because every dollar of the workers' wages could buy ever more of the consumer goods whose costs kept falling" (2005: 229). In receiving a wage that is adequate for the consumption of material goods (which form the basis of one's self-expression and lifestyle), Wolff suggests that workers are less likely to feel exploited, meaning that there is less resistance to capitalism and consumerism.

Wolff acknowledges the duality of the exploited subject in capitalist social relations as both a worker and a consumer, which, he argues, can be accounted for through interpellation. Workers

> have been systematically subjected to/by an ideology that defined and celebrated them as consumers first and positively (and workers as secondary and negatively). Individual worth, for themselves and for others, became measurable above all by one's achieved level of consumption. And that level of consumption came to be understood as the appropriate reward for their individual contribution to production—that is, for their exploitation. The "manipulation" of the masses entailed in such consumerism was possible because it "latched onto" something real enough in workers' lives: the need for a compensation, rationale, and justification for the alienation and exhaustion of extreme exploitation (230).

While it is certainly the case that not all workers are satisfied with consuming as a remedy for the ills of exploitation,[11] retaliations against consumption generally occur at the level of individual rather than collective action. By living lives on the

[11] There will always be "bad subjects", even for Althusser.

"social margins", which may include artistic (i.e., non-productive) endeavours, turning to religion, the use of drugs and alcohol, or engaging in crime, Wolff finds that ideology inculcates subjects "such that if they revolted against consumerist society," it "should not aim at displacing capitalist in favor of communist class structures" (231).

Wolff's insistence on interpellation is certainly founded when one considers the rhetoric from capitalists and advertisers, which perpetuates the myth of the autonomous individual, whose freedom—fast becoming enshrined as a protected right—to choose between commodities on the market constitutes the satisfaction of all desires (Wernick, 1991). Indeed, the line between economic consumers and political citizens has been blurred: individuals as citizens are increasingly hailed, or interpellated, as rational agents who make choices between commodities and services offered by their governments, couched in the responsibilizing language that "[i]ndividualization and active citizenship stress the need for people to take more individual responsibility for solving problems" (Micheletti, 2003: 8).[12]

Hence, addressing deficiencies in public services in contemporary capitalist societies usually engenders commodification or the privatization of government-sponsored programmes (McBride, 2005) such as healthcare in Canada, the United States, and the National Health Service in the United Kingdom (Allsop, Jones, and Baggot, 2004; Baggot and Jones, 2011; Bonell and Hilton, 2002; West, 2006), "market-driven choice" in education (Corbett and

[12] Many political scientists also consider partisan politics in a similar fashion, as a choice between party "brands" in the "political" marketplace.

Norwich, 1997; Dixon, Tope and Van Dyke, 2008; Robertson, 2010; Thompson, 2006), and even in criminal justice services (Williams, 1999). Consequently, access to services and information often becomes a "consumer issue rather than an issue of basic rights that accompany citizenship" (West, 2006: 244), such that freedom is reframed as free access to citizenship rights as *consumer* rights" (Cronin, 2002: 308, emphasis in original). It comes as little surprise, then, that individuals recognize themselves primarily, as Wolff argues, as consumers first, identifying only as workers in the immediate context of their exhausted and exploitative work lives (2005: 230).

While Wolff's explication accounts for the recognition, on the part of workers, which promotes the consumer entity that contributes to the reproduction of capital, an analysis of the forms of class struggle in his analysis of relative surplus value and the rise of consumerism is conspicuously absent. I consider this problematic on the grounds that, by Wolff's own admission, the discrepancy between increasingly large commodity outputs and minimally-rising workers' wages contributes to dropping prices and affordable commodities, thereby allowing workers with limited salaries to consume products beyond their basic necessities. It is, therefore, the ability to increase relative surplus value that enables capitalists in overcoming the dilemma Marx raises concerning minimal payment for the basic reproduction of labour-power, against the need for a consuming class. However, generating greater relative surplus value requires, as Wolff notes, the introduction of improved forms of technology and machinery into the workplace, a managerial class to promote efficiency, and the ability to

purchase cheaper raw materials—all of which, I argue, constitutes forms of class struggle on the part of the owners of the means of production, aimed at lowering the cost of production to enable capital reproduction.

The introduction and democratization of credit among consumers represents further expansion of subtle class struggle against the working class, since credit, as Jean Baudrillard points at, forces individuals to freely consume for the sake of the reproduction of their way of life (1996: 160). "A single generation has witnessed the eclipse of notions of patrimony and of fixed capital", he argues, on the grounds that "objects once acquired were owned in the full sense, for they were the material expression of work done". Such commodities ostensibly represented "repayment for the past and security for the future. They were, in short, a capital" (158-9).

Currently, however, "the motors of our whole present system of buying first and paying off later in labour" include "[p]recedence of consumption over accumulation, forward flight, forced investment, speeded-up consumption, [and] chronic inflation (implying the absurdity of saving)" (160, parentheses in original). While Wolff's argument—that the promise of consumption acts to mitigate the conditions of labour exploitation—explains how workers justify their situations through consumption, Baudrillard implies that the concept of credit gives one a way of understanding why workers continue to project their exploitative employment into the future. Credit, he states, functions similarly to feudalism, "reminiscent as it is of the arrangement under which a portion of labour would be allocated in advance, as serf labour, to the feudal lord". Where

feudal conditions imply bondage and coercion, the modern consumer represents the interpellated, free subject, since they "spontaneously embrace and accept the unending constraint that is imposed on them. They buy so that society can continue to produce, this so that they can continue to work, and this in turn so that they can pay for what they have bought" (160).

Yet, as it is now fairly well-known, purchases on credit all but guarantee the reproduction of capital and capitalist social relations, since they transform contractual relations of exchange between consumers and capitalists to obligations between third party creditors and consumer debtors. The massive accumulation of debt by consumers threatens to drastically change, or destroy, the regime of accumulation predicated on mass-consumption and credit, perhaps even as a result of intervention from the mode of regulation: according to Callinicos, some commentators see government bailouts for banks as creating "moral hazard" by encouraging irresponsible lending and unsustainable debt (2010: 93).

Where the accumulation of debt was once considered problematic and associated with a lacking work ethic, there is now an "acceptance that credit facilitates consumption and is part of modern society" (Szmigin and O'Loughlin, 2010: 599; Roberts and Jones, 2001; Baudrillard, 1996: 157). However, there is certainly no guarantee that those who purchase on credit are "empowered, sovereign consumer[s]" who make rational decisions (Szmigin and O'Loughlin, 2010: 602-3), or that they can even properly manage debt. In some cases, as Richards, Palmer, and Bogdanova report, where lenders target customers through "demographic and lifestyle information", people may be "given far more

unsecured credit than they can afford to repay, such as 100% of their salary and credit card limits that have moved the product on from being a short-term financial purchasing instrument into a source of long-term debt" (2008: 502). Workers as "virtual paupers", or members of the relative surplus population who can always be disposed of when there is "no use for [their] surplus labour" (Marx, 1973: 604), are thus constantly in a position whereby they may actually disrupt the reproduction of capital by defaulting on loans and debts as a form of class struggle in the event that they are unable to pay.

Here, class struggle is framed in terms of the opposition between use-value and exchange-value. Capitalists generally seek to produce commodities with as little cost as possible, with an eye to ensuring the lowest price possible for exchange on the market (except, perhaps, in the case of monopolistic conditions). But, as Shumway contends, "consumers do not buy in order to exchange; goods are of value to them for the manifold uses to which they may be put" (2000: 12). The same may be said for the immaterial commodities, such as services and experiences (e.g., kinds of contemporary lifestyles predicated on the appropriation of socio-cultural commodities such as cultural knowledge and appreciation, travel, and the identity formation implicit in these experiences), that also characterize advanced capitalist economies. While the act of consumption does contribute to the reproduction of capital, the total fetishism of exchange-value, exemplified by Adorno's statement that "[i]f the exchange form is the standard social structure, its rationality constitutes the people" (cited in Shumway, 2000: 11), does not necessarily follow.

The successful reproduction of capital certainly implies, in most cases, the continuation of employment opportunities that enable the working class to reproduce itself. However, workers are not constrained solely by a capitalist economy for their own reproduction insofar as the ultimate aim of their appropriation of commodities is for use-value. This does not preclude obtaining useful commodities through borrowing and credit—in which case exchange-value will not have been fully realized, as the extension of credit to someone generally implies an inability to pay immediately in full for a commodity in the first place (Baudrillard, 1996)—or through the criminal activities of Althusser and Wolff's "bad subjects".

Membership and Inclusion: Working-Class Belonging in Capitalist Social Formations

As the foregoing analysis has shown, the working class by no means occupies a strictly production-based niche in capitalist social relations. Thus, although workers certainly do, and historically have struggled very aggressively over their conditions of exploitation in the workplace, they are not constituted as members of the working class only through their "transformative" labour-power. Instead, as consumers of commodities, they engage in exchange for different reasons than capitalists perpetuate exchange (viz., for acquiring use-value rather than profit), so that the extent of what can be called "working class interests" is diffused throughout the totality of capitalist social relations, and not just in production. As producers, labourers, and workers in general, the working class has by no means

always been included under the legal protection of capitalist social formations: aside from the struggles for recognition of workers' rights that characterized the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Marx also points to the systemic forms of inequality found in liberal rights that privilege property owners (1978e), through individual private property rights against the pretense of equal political rights for all.

Yet, even these struggles are not totally sufficient to locate a binary contradiction between the interests of workers-as-producers and capitalists, the results of which are supposed to be revolutionary upheaval. While workers may be disadvantaged by their lack of ownership and control over the means of production (the most common characteristic that describes an otherwise broad and diverse class), they are not totally excluded from belonging to a social formation, which they may find themselves included in through processes of subjectification that are influenced by contingent events and encounters. The concept of "belonging" in a capitalist social formation has, after all, basically been reduced to consuming. In possessing rights as consumers, workers are "re-presented" within the social formation, meaning the material activity they engage in is not merely presented (i.e., a form of existence and physical reproduction, like wage-labour), but actively encouraged by capitalists as well as political, legal or cultural ISAs as potentially beneficial to the reproduction of the social formation. As I have argued, these potentially reproductive moments are also contingencies in which forms of class struggle can manifest as a consequence of contradictions in

the modes of regulation in a regime of accumulation, rather than in a general class contradiction.

Though there is certainly no doubt that Marx envisioned the demise of capitalism at the hands of a disenfranchised proletariat (1977; 1978c; van den Berg, 1988; Karatani, 2005), Karatani's insistence on the necessity of a workers' movement of workers-qua-consumers is pertinent in light of the ontological identity of workers-as-consumers. The working class, which has only labour-power to sell as a commodity in the absence of owning means of production sufficient for social reproduction, is at a disadvantage in a social formation where private property and the accumulation of goods and access to services is the hallmark of individual freedom and success. According to Alain Badiou, the current state of the historical-social situation is characterized by the reinforcement of the existence of bourgeois property, and with it, socio-economic advantage:

> In Marx's work, the presentation of the bourgeoisie is not elaborated in terms of the State; the criteria for the bourgeoisie are possession of the means of production, the regime of property, the concentration of capital, etc. To say of the State that it is that *of* the bourgeoisie has the advantage of underlining that the State re-presents something that has already been historically and socially presented (2005: 106, emphasis in original).

To use Karatani's terms, it "is in selling […] that the *asymmetrical* […] *relationship* with the other is laid bare" (1995: 123, emphasis added), insofar as workers-as-workers are constantly forced to sell (i.e., commodify) their labour power. It is only as consumers, or buyers of commodities, that they achieve any *re*-presentation in capitalist social formations, where the purchase and ownership of private property is held in the highest regard. As re-presented consumers, both

with consumer rights and the liberal rights of individual property owners, workers may contribute to the reproduction of capital and capitalist social relations.

The working class is a large element of liberal capitalist social formations, but their inclusion, beyond commodity production and distribution, has not always been recognized in legal and political relations. Although workers are now entitled to protective labour laws, regulations, workers' rights and social welfare programmes are, as Slavoj Žižek maintains, hardly intrinsic to the capitalist mode of production: the things "we identify today with liberal democracy and freedom (trade unions, universal vote, free universal education …) were won in a long, difficult struggle of the lower classes in the nineteenth century; they were far from a natural consequence of capitalist relations" (2011: 104, parentheses in original; cf. Hobsbawm, 1987). Moreover, the provision of laws and regulation does not mean that working and consuming conditions are adequately policed, or that there is adequate enforcement and successful prosecution necessary to establishing the common law. The so-called drift to the left in liberal democracies (van den Berg, 1988), in which certain freedoms, protections, and rights are standard and legally enforceable for individuals as workers, as well as combinations or unions, is thus the result of small-scale and large-scale class struggle.

The existence of rights for certain individuals, in and of themselves, is no guarantee of political re-presentation in which those who have been granted rights attain equality with those who are represented.[13] It is certainly not a guarantee of

[13] As Badiou makes clear, "re-presentation" by the State does not totally equate to constitutional representation, but to the continued presentation (e.g., through a

complete emancipation from socio-political constraints. After all, as Anthony Woodiwiss notes, "historically rights arrived with capitalism, its specific social divisions, and its privileging of capital over the individual" (2005: 137). Rights, and the laws which enforce them, should therefore by no means be taken as neutral institutions (Gordon, Swanson, and Buttigieg, 2000: 1) which perpetually expand to include the re-presentation of everyone (Balibar, 2008: 536). However, the particular structure of rights, as forms of appeal and political agency held by individual "rights bearers" is a reflection of the overall re-presentation of bourgeois interests, or the social relations of capital. The re-presentation of workers as consumers can be beneficial, from the point of view of capital, of the reproduction of capitalist social relations by virtue of ensuring that discourses about rights, legal appeals, or challenges to oppression take the form of a politics focused on individual concerns rather than class struggles.

As Woodiwiss defines them, those who hold rights are "entities legally considered to possess 'personality' – that is, *legally deemed to be morally autonomous agents* – and therefore capable of taking decisions and accepting responsibilities" (2005: xi, emphasis added). This point is made the clearest in considering the rights which mandate all interactions between subjects, and designate what liberties one has as a person in a capitalist social formation: rights are a "legally enforceable set of expectations as to how others, most obviously the state, should behave towards rights bearers. These expectations may take the form of limitations on, and/or requirements of, the behaviour of others" (xi). Rights,

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form of ideology which reproduces this) of the bourgeois regime of private property and capital (2006: 106).

and the state administration that enforces them, are "merely the symptom, the expression of other relations upon which State power rests" (Marx and Engels, cited in Pearce, 1989: 111). Law, as Frank Pearce argues, "clarifies, codifies, supports or modifies practices that have often developed relative independently of it" (102).

According to Marx's critique of rights (1978e), liberal citizenship assumes the "egoistic" individual as a kind of human nature, around which political rights must be established for the protection of personal liberty in the liberal tradition deriving from Locke. The natural, "so-called rights of man", on one hand, are "simply the rights of […] man separated from other men and from the community" (42), conceived as originally asocial and self-motivated beings:

> To understand political power right, and derive it from its original, we must consider what state all men are naturally in, and that is, a state of perfect freedom to order their actions and dispose of their possessions and their persons, as they think fit, within the bounds of the law of nature, without asking leave, or depending upon the will of any other man (Locke, 2003: 101).

Marx, though, identifies the ownership of property as the "practical application of liberty" and the expression of self-interest (1978e: 42), which is ostensibly limited through interaction with other individuals in a society. That is to say in the Lockean liberal tradition, for Marx, individuals consider other individuals as restraints on their liberty, inasmuch as they threaten to infringe on natural freedoms (cf. Weber, 1978). Yet, "[n]one of the supposed rights of man […] go beyond the individual separated from the community, withdrawn into himself, wholly preoccupied with his private interest" (43). As a result, the notion of political citizenship, which facilitates the interactions of individuals, is "declared

to be the servant of egoistic 'man'", given that political society functions only for the purpose of preserving natural rights and ensuring the liberty of individuals is never contravened.

Political rights, in Marx's view, only provide for abstract guarantees, including equality before the law and electoral rights, in contrast to civil rights, which include freedom of religion (41), and the right to own property (42). The application of political rights alongside the rights of man, consequently, obscures material differences in wealth and property ownership, such that treating all citizens equally actually constitutes a form of inequality:

> Right, by its very nature, can consist only in the application of an equal standard; but unequal individuals (and they would not be different individuals if they were not unequal) are measurable only by an equal standard insofar as they are brought under an equal point of view (1978f: 530).

To consider that all individuals, regardless of class, wealth and income, property ownership or education, are equal in a juridical sense is the perpetuation of a system of inequality. Crucially, this works under the guise of "a discourse of formal egalitarianism and universal citizenship" which is in fact advantageous for the bourgeoisie (Brown, 1995: 99). As an outlet of legal recourse against some forms of injustice, and thus a means of being represented in a bourgeois social formation, the working class has to adopt the position of purchasers in the moment consumption (which they must also do in most cases to acquire commodities, as I have argued).

Liberal rights, according to Marx, thus already presuppose the privileging of civil society, private rights, and property ownership (or the buying over the

selling relationship). While consumption is clearly posited by those who see it as a form of liberal agency as either a form of political action, or means of ameliorating worker exploitation through lifestyle acquisition, liberal rights have constituted workers-as-consumers on the grounds that buying in order to own property has always been legally recognized and privileged, over selling and labouring. As I noted in my critique of liberalism, in the absence of being able to produce for oneself when the means of production are owned by someone else, consuming is one of the only ways for workers to obtain use-values legally. Similarly, re-presentation in any of the favourable elements of a capitalist social formation, such as being able to enjoy the objects of production or protection by the law, often requires that workers consume, and identify as consumers.

The re-presentation of the worker-as-consumer does not necessarily mean, however, that all of the constituents of the working class have been "duped" into accepting the premises of liberal freedom, or acting on behalf of bourgeois interests for capital accumulation. The complexity of working class subjects evidenced in the identity between workers as consumers instead serves to illustrate how difficult it is to locate workers exclusively in the domain of production, since ideally they must also be actively engaged in reproduction of their own lives, and with them, a social formation. Similarly, liberal notions of inclusion based on legal and political representation are too narrow and static to account for the processual nature of social relations, which, as the history of workers' rights indicates, is always in flux, contested, and at the centre of class struggle.

This is why, for many contemporary Marxist commentators, it is difficult to separate the superstructure, including the realm of politics, from capital (e.g. Read, 2003; Karatani, 2005; Wood, 1995). Conflict in social formations is better situated, not in terms of a general antagonism between class interests which determines all forms of political action and struggle, but as an accumulation of "local and particularistic" class struggles—as Ellen Wood argues, "the organization of capitalist production itself resists the working-class unity which capitalism is supposed to encourage" (1995: 45). Indeed, as I have argued in this chapter, the working class is constituted by a multiplicity of social relations by virtue of the identity between production and consumption, making it nearly impossible to distill a purely labour-oriented class position and politics. This identity, made all the more complex, albeit noticeable, by the direct appropriation on the part of "capitalist production" of "the production of culture, beliefs, and desires", which can be advertised and marketed as commodities and lifestyles for purchase (Read, 2003: 2). Although traditional labour politics advocate workers' rights and freedoms alongside the liberal conceptions of individual rights, the binary between workers as producers and consumption as antithetical to working class interests is difficult to maintain: Jason Read argues instead that capitalist social relations actually entail a "micro-politics" of struggle at the level of "day-to-day social existence and, ultimately, subjectivity itself" (2). Consumption, as a moment in the circuit of the production of value that allows workers some agency in reproducing, or failing to reproduce capital, is therefore a primary instance of class struggle rather than a hindrance to working-class politics.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have argued for an understanding of the category "consumer" as part of the worker subject that is created through capitalist enclosure and separation from the means of production. Although Althusser's concept of interpellation does in fact explain how individuals come to recognize themselves as consumers whose desires can be satisfied through consumption (thereby ensuring a certain level of capital reproduction), interpellation cannot account for the existence of a worker who is at the same time a consumer, given that the worker appears to be altogether separated, through a complex division of labour, from the consumer. It is instead in the initial separation of workers from the means of production that workers are both producers of exchange-value, in order that commodities may be exchanged on the market, and necessarily consumers of use-value, since they only acquire useful products through consumption. It is also in the distinction between use-value and exchange-value that class struggle, on the part of both the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, disrupts the continuous reproduction of capital within the social formation that the notion of interpellation implies. The class struggle, then, can be accounted for in a political economy of values, as a struggle between the value of exchange and capital accumulation on one hand, and social life on the other.

As a consequence, I have insisted on the consumer as an ontological category, in contrast to the normative character assigned to consumption in much critical Marxist theory: consumption is an inevitable component of working class

existence, even to the point where the consumption of commodities for their use-value occurs regardless of whether it is beneficial to capital accumulation or not. Such an understanding of consumption in fact indicates the extent to which critical theory, which adopts the perspective of production against liberal consumption, remains trapped in a liberal problematic.

The realm of consumption, by virtue of the valorization of property relations in the social formation, is also the only place in which working class interests have the potential to be represented in the context of a set of social relations that emphasizes autonomous individuals above class interests. Yet, the commonality of workers as consumers indicates the complex nature of working class "belonging" in a social formation. This ultimately forces theorists to consider the mundane and quotidian aspects of class struggle and contingency, in contrast to broad, overarching political programmes that seek to counter liberal notions of membership and freedom. Thus, the suggestion that workers as consumers are alienated by the mystery of fetishized commodities and can never realize their true interests, is a normative understanding of consumption which, *contra* liberal economics and rational consumer models, merely succeeds in abstracting the worker out of social relations while neglecting the role of consumption and use-value. In the final, following chapter, I will address this problematic abstraction through a typology of subjectification in the four moments of the circuit of the production of value, in order to elaborate the theoretical weaknesses of the model of general class antagonism from the

perspective of workers as producers alone, as well as a micro-politics of struggle, against capitalist interests.

Chapter Four:

A Materialist Typology of Subjectification in the Circuit of the Production of Value

Introduction

In this chapter, I develop an alternative way of analyzing and theorizing the imbrication of people in overdetermined relations of subjectification. By subjectification, I mean the creation of an individual subject through the observance of "codes of behaviour" (Foucault, 1985: 29) and morality, or "a set of values and rules of action recommended to individuals through the intermediary of various prescriptive agencies" (26). But, "far from constituting a systematic ensemble, [subjectification] form[s] a complex interplay of elements that counterbalance and correct one another, and cancel each other out at certain times" (26). I approach the problem of the subject from the perspective of subjectification rather than interpellation because of the determination implied in interpellation. Foucault's concept of subjectification, however, is compatible with an aleatoric materialist approach to the extent that aleatory materialism requires one to think about the constitution of subjects imbricated in "the social bases of power" (Datta, 2007: 292) and a possible "rearrangement of social relations" (294), so as to reflect the "complex interplay" of elements of subjectivity.

As the identity between workers and consumers elaborated in the preceding chapter illustrates, it is not possible to classify and analyse individuals as either primarily consumers who seek work and employment as a means of

satisfying desires; or only as workers whose interests as labourers are obscured in the process of commodification. Indeed, many Marxist theorists who advocate the transformative power of labour as constitutive of human nature are forced into the binary terms of production against consumption, in their opposition to the self-interested individual. However, the classical antagonism between the bourgeoisie and the accumulation of capital on one hand, and the proletariat and the reproduction of labour-power on the other, has often been called reductionist because it reduces all socioeconomic and political tensions to a question of broadly-defined class interests.

Here, in contrast to this conventional view, I contend that the working class, which is categorized as such precisely because its members do not own the means of production and must work for a wage (Engels, 1969b; Marx, 1906; 1977),[1] is subject to what Althusser calls an "accumulation of 'circumstances'" which forms an "active contradiction" (1969: 99). Contrary to the "general contradiction" between "two antagonistic classes" (99) commonly found in Marxist literature, I argue that the circuit of the production of value overdetermines subjectification, and with it socio-political membership, in capitalist social formations through each of the four moments of production, distribution, exchange, and consumption, contributing to an accumulation of circumstances and a "micro-politics" of class struggle. In the remainder of this

[1] This definition avoids the pitfalls of an essentialist notion of "species-being", where the working class is defined in humanist terms of the capacity for transformative labour. Consequently, the concept "working class" can also account for those in non-productive sectors necessary for the distribution and exchange of commodities and information, so that it is possible to understand working-class subjectivity in all moments of the production of value.

chapter, I lay out an analytic for better grasping how each of these moments is ultimately overdetermined through capitalist production by examining the circuit of the production of value in each of its four instances.

Overdetermination and the Marxian Problematic: Avoiding Reductionist Abstractions

The insistence in classical political economy on the autonomous, self-interested individual, who engages with others in economic and social exchange only as a means of satisfying one's own wants and needs (Smith, 1976: 17-18) represents the abstraction of "single individuals in civil society" for Marx (1978g: 145). In contrast, as presented above, the younger Marx (and later, Western Marxists) argue that individuals never exist in the absence of social relations, but instead as members of classes motivated by particular interests:

> Economic conditions first transformed the mass of the people of the country into workers. The combination of capital has created for this mass a common situation, common interests. This mass is thus already a class against capital, but not yet for itself. In the struggle, […] this mass becomes united, and constitutes itself as a class for itself. The interest it defends becomes class interests (Marx, 1978h: 218).

Hence, capitalist social relations are supposed to be inherently antagonistic, insofar as the interests of the working class, which range from the adequate reproduction of labour-power to emancipation from an alienating and exploitative production process, are at odds with bourgeois interests in capital accumulation. Thus, "the antagonism between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie is a struggle of class against class, a struggle which carried to its highest expression is total

revolution… is it at all surprising that a society founded on the opposition of classes should culminate in brutal 'contradiction'" (219). Class society is based on an inherent antagonism then, which can only be overcome through struggle, and not socio-economic equilibrium or democratic decision-making.

As Althusser points out however, Marx's early reading of class antagonism, inspired as it was by the revolutionary climate in Europe in 1848, has given rise to an understanding of history progressing, not "by its *bad side*",[2] but "by *the other side,* the 'good' side, the side with the greatest *economic development,* the greatest growth, with its c*ontradiction reduced to the purest form* (the contradiction between Capital and Labour)" (1969: 98, emphasis in original). Thus, many revolutionary parties in the later nineteenth century "forgot that, in fact, this simple quintessence of *contradiction* was quite simply *abstract*: the real contradiction was so much one with its 'circumstances' that it was only discernible, identifiable and manipulable *through them and in them*" (98, emphasis in original). What such a reading of history amounts to, is an abstraction of the particular conditions of the working class in one "general contradiction": "the contradiction between the forces of production and the relations of production" (99), through which historical development is later read.

[2] A reference, Althusser notes, to Marx and Engels' depiction of the progression of history according to "the worse side for the rulers", but perhaps also to "those who expect history *from another side*" (98, emphasis in original)—viz., revolutionaries who assume that a general contradiction inevitably works in favour of the working class regardless of the uneven development in a social formation that hinders any kind of smooth teleology (e.g., the existence of landowning peasants in nineteenth century Russia, and the continued "problems" that agrarian populations pose to working class revolutions, as petty bourgeois entrepreneurs who can also be exploited).

This, for Althusser, is indicative of how early Marxism[3] remains trapped in the terms of a Hegelian problematic, which, as a "definite theoretical structure", constitutes "the absolute determination of *the forms in which all problems must be posed*, at any given moment" (2009: 26, emphasis in original). While the younger Marx insists on a materialist reading of history, *contra* idealism, his explication of the unfolding of history and reaching a "truly human life" is still visibly couched in the language of alienation (1978d: 121), much like the estrangement of the Hegelian spirit. Consequently, any movement of capitalist history, according to Althusser, appears to be the result of an inherent tension between two classes, which determines the nature of social relations as well as the outcome:

> [T]he reduction of all the elements that make up the concrete life of a historical epoch (economic, social, political and legal institutions, customs, ethics, art, religion, philosophy, and even historical *events*: wars, battles, defeats, and so on) to one principle of internal unity, is itself only possible on the *absolute condition* of taking the whole concrete life of a people for the externalization-alienation […] of an *internal spiritual principle*, which can *never definitely be anything but the most abstract form of that epoch's consciousness itself*: […] *its own ideology* (1969: 103, emphasis in original).

Marx's later analysis and explanation of the working class in capitalist social relations is more theoretically rigorous, however, which is precisely why the four instances in the circuit of the production of value, rather than the general

[3] I am not endorsing Althusser's earlier formulation (1969) of the "epistemological break" in Marx, in which the *German Ideology* ostensibly represents a rupture from all of Marx's Hegelian influences. Althusser later suggests that Marx's work is not so dichotomous (2006), and the identities between production and consumption, or workers and consumers, which I have analyzed are certainly evidence of this.

contradiction, are so useful in examining subjectification. These moments enable an analysis of struggles and contradictions at different instances that cannot always be explained in terms a general antagonism between producers and capitalists—this is especially important in thinking about the roles of non-productive or service sectors that are so prevalent in contemporary social relations.

As Althusser argues, consideration of the exploitation of the working class in isolation as determining social relations is a problematic approach to class struggle, because class struggle is not simply the relationship of two antagonistic classes (1976: 50).[4] Class struggle instead encapsulates the contingent encounter between classes, in particular material conditions, and the effects of such a struggle, which are not always predictable. This can also be called the "vast accumulation of 'contradictions'" that "comes into play in the same court, some of which are radically heterogeneous – of different origins, different sense, difference levels and points of application – but which nevertheless 'merge' into a ruptural unity [i.e., the possibility of revolution]" (1969: 100, emphasis in original)—what Althusser calls the "overdetermination" of the social formation, or the "totality, the infinite diversity" (1969: 103).

Overdetermination implies that contradictions and struggles that contribute to the uneven development of capitalist social formations are not the "pure phenomena of the general contradiction", but arise from the relations of production, superstructures, and conjunctures: "if the 'differences that constitute

[4] See Chapter Two.

each of the instances in play […] '*merge*' into a real unity, they are not '*dissipated*' as pure phenomena in the internal unity of a *simple* contradiction. The *unity* they constitute in this 'fusion' into a revolutionary rupture, is *constituted by their own essence and effectivity*" (100, emphasis in original).

By contrast, however, the "underdetermination" of the totality by forms of class struggle offsets overdetermining factors such as production as being completely deterministic. Underdetermination accounts for the inevitable contingencies in the structure of any social formation, which, in themselves, are still elements of and produced by the totality. Althusser refers to this as an "index of determination" which has an "index of effectivity", by which "we may understand the character of more or less dominant or subordinate and therefore more or less 'paradoxical' determination of a given element or structure" (2009: 118). Consequently, for Althusser, "the 'contradiction' is inseparable from the total structure of the social body in which it is found" (1969: 101), meaning that a general contradiction, in dialectically idealist or mystificatory terms, does not define a social formation. Any kind of overarching contradiction is dependent on the accumulation of material circumstances to define it and the uneven development of both capital and its contradictions.

In the remaining sections of this chapter, I will examine worker subjectification in the context of the contradictions of production, distribution, exchange, and consumption, as overdetermined by capitalist social relations and underdetermined by class struggle. I proceed from the Foucauldian notion of subjectification, or subject formation, rather than Althusser's interpellation,

because of the complex nature of subjectivity. As noted in Chapter Three, the theory of interpellation has difficulty accounting for the possibility of multiple interpellations of the subject (as in the case of individuals as both workers and consumers). The process of subjectification, however, deals with the complexity of "counterbalances" and "corrections" to various elements in the process of constituting the subject (Foucault, 1985: 26) in a manner similar to the overdetermination of social relations, and underdetermination by class struggle.

Warren Montag argues that the anti-humanism of Althusser and Foucault in fact forms a reciprocality, in their attempts to problematize the very notion of the individual (1995: 56-7). Consequently, it is possible to read a certain amount of theoretical continuity, or complementarity between Althusser and Foucault. For Foucault, power relations, rather than ideology, are responsible for constituting and correcting the subject at the level of "knowledges" about the bodies they operate on (73). Yet as Datta argues, "[s]ocial relations have primacy over power relations since relations determine the place of the exercising of power actualizing the asymmetrical potentialization present in-and-as-its effects" (2007: 293). As it is Althusser's aleatory materialism that deals with social relations and the "specific modalities by which modes of social organization constitute actual existence" (293), it is possible to consider subjectification through the aleatoric effects of class struggle and the circuit of the production of value.

Production

Production is the first instance that overdetermines subjection in the circuit of the production of value (figure 4.1). In this section, I show that production is a generality in the totality of the capitalist social formation, where the "totality" refers to a "decentred structure of dominance" (Brewster, in Althusser: 2009: 360). As I will explicate, production thus overdetermines worker subjectivity, but against the underdeterminations of forms of class struggle, the realization of value, and the process of circulation.

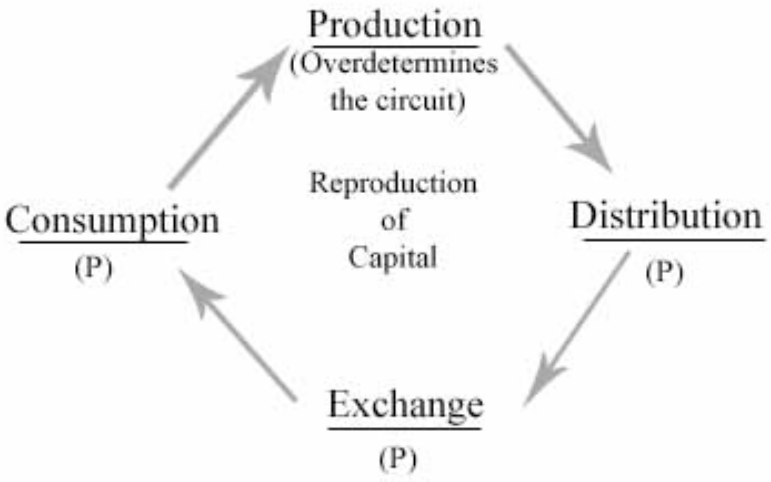

Figure 4.1
The Circuit of the Production of Value

Production as Generality in the Circuit of the Production of Value

As I noted in the first chapter, Marx calls production, in the circuit of the production of value, a "generality" (1973: 89), as the appropriate "starting point"

for the method of political economy: "socially determined individual production" (83) is the basis of a social formation on the grounds that "men, developing their material production and their material intercourse, alter, along with this their real existence, their thinking and the products of their thinking" (1978a: 155). Production is a generality[5] because the "production of ideas, of conceptions, of consciousness, is at first directly interwoven with the material activity and the material intercourse of men, the language of real life" (154). In short, production is responsible for producing a social formation, because how the material world is formed determines development and the practical activity of groups and individuals who inhabit it. One must be able to think about the type of social formation that has been produced, and under what conditions, or what it produces, before one can think about the activity of individuals and the division of labour.

While certain determinations of production appear in many historical epochs, others are entirely specific to a mode of production:

> [E]ven though the most developed languages have laws and characteristics in common with the least developed, nevertheless, just those things which determine their development, i.e. the elements which are not general and common, must be separated out from the determinations valid for production as such, so that their unity – which arises already from the identity of the subject, humanity, and the object, nature – their essential difference is not forgotten (1973: 85).

[5] Admittedly, production is "an abstraction", which is something I have avoided on the grounds that abstracting can be reductionist, but it is "a rational abstraction in so far as it really brings out and fixes the common element and thus saves us repetition. Still, this general category, this common element sifted out by comparison, is itself segmented many times over and splits into different determinations" (1973: 85). Thus, the Marxian departure from production is a methodological decision for grasping the totality, rather than an attempt to reduce social formations to their productive moments.

Production as a generality in the production of value (in contrast to the species-being of individuals)[6] refers to a set of practices, which, taken together, enables one to distill the activity that is responsible for the emergence of a social formation. The contradictions of the production process in the capitalist social formation therefore play a large role in overdetermining the totality of social relations and their combinations and articulations (i.e., the ways in which elements of the totality are related to and dependent on the whole [Althusser, 2009: 111]).

Subjectification Through Production: The Working Class and Virtual Pauperism

In a very narrow sense, the subject envisioned in the process of production is usually the alienated and exploited worker, constituted as a subject through unfortunate labour conditions that favour the capitalist class at the expense of the working class. As Andrew Collier states, economies driven by exchange-value rather than use-value "[have] effects on the intensity of [worker] exploitation", since "more money is always wanted" (2004: 74). For example,

> [i]n a medieval village, the lord of the manor exploited the serfs. He ate a lot more than they did, but he only had one stomach, so there was a limit. There was therefore no point in exploiting the serfs more than enough to get his supply of food. But if the village started producing for the world market, there would be no limit to how much he would try to get out of them, for it can all be cashed in money (74).

In the process of exploitation, workers are also alienated, or estranged, from their work. Workers are estranged not only from the products of their labour when they

[6] See Chapter Three.

are appropriated for sale on the market, but also from nature (because they do not own the materials on which they work), other workers (with whom they are constantly in competition), and their species-being, as labour becomes an arduous and unfulfilling activity (Marx, 1978d: 75-7). As a consequence, workers suffer physically in their impoverished lives, often relegated to urban ghettos where they own no property (Engels, 1978).

In his analysis of the changing shape of the "postindustrial" society, Daniel Bell argues that a new "structure of occupations" in the direction of information technologies reduces the number of industrial workers, as well as the relevance of Marx's understanding of society, and increases the "professional and technical class" in the labour force (1973: 125).[7] To be sure, manufacturing industries have relocated overwhelmingly to countries in the so-called "third world" (Sanyal, 2006), as well as China (Bernard, 2009: 6) such that most OECD member countries have witnessed a decrease in jobs in manufacturing sectors by up to 30 percent between 1990 and 2003 (5). This does not, however, signal the end to subjectification through production, even if Bell conflates manufacture and the industrial worker with the working class itself (1973: 125-6).

[7] In spite of Bell's assessment of the relevance of Marxism, Marxist theorists themselves have attempted to re-theorize class and its relation to production with the changing division of labour. Nicos Poulantzas observes the "fractions" arising in the working class owing to the "political control" held by workers in the managerial strata or in information sectors over unskilled workers and labourers (1975; cf. Grabb, 2002: 149). Eric Olin Wright similarly examines exploitation on the basis of "differential benefits that some people gain by having higher levels of skill or credentials" (Grabb, 2002: 162), or through their placement in the organization of the division of labour (Wright, 1985). This means then, that the working class, which does not own the means of production, is an increasingly fragmented and complex collective.

As the Marxian definition of production in the circuit of value indicates, the term refers to all production in capitalist social formations, from manufacturing and goods to information and intellectual property, in addition to those workers who are responsible for producing each of these types of commodities. Forms of production also determine "the consciousness of men" (Marx, 1978a: 155), which is to say, the way they imagine the workings of the social formation, as well as their subjectivity (Althusser, 1971). This explains why capitalist social formations, as I argued in Chapters Two and Three, consider the ownership of private property, which enables the accumulation of capital, a fundamental form of freedom and of paramount importance to the functioning of a vibrant, healthy, dynamic society.

Recalling the analysis of the relative surplus population and virtual pauperism from the first chapter, however, the ownership of private property is precisely predicated on the dispossession of groups and individuals from the means of production: this ranges from access to land and natural resources needed to sustain oneself, to information and intellectual property, the contents of which can be used to the benefit of the reproduction of labour-power. In forcing the working class to produce for others, and exploit their labour-power, in order to access the means of production and a living wage (i.e., means of social reproduction), workers become virtual paupers who are always at risk of losing their jobs in the event they are no longer needed as the migration of manufacturing industries only serves to illustrate. If a worker is unable to produce commodities or "necessaries", then "he cannot obtain them through exchange"

(Marx, 1973: 604), which, as discussed above, is the mode of commodity acquisition in capitalist circulation.

For Marx, it is only "in the mode of production based on capital [that] pauperism appears as the result of labour itself, of the development of the productive force of labour". Employment itself is always contingent, insofar as it is further the condition of production based on capital that [a worker] produces ever more surplus labour, [so that] it follows that ever more necessary labour is set free. Thus the chances of his pauperism increase" (604).[8] One of the great feats of the capitalist mode of production, as I argued in Chapter One, is its production of a "relative surplus population", such that regardless of the industry that any given workers are employed in, they can be expendable in the presence of more efficient workers and technology which expand surplus labour. The worker-subject, as constituted by production with capital accumulation in mind, is a member of the relative surplus population which can be drawn upon to produce value, as far as the capitalist is concerned, and released from employment when s/he becomes redundant. He or she also, according to Kawashima, inevitably comes to view, and actually competes with, others as self-interested individuals vying for job opportunities (2005: 621).

But, while membership in the relative surplus population is certainly overdeterministic with regard to how the working class must earn a living in order

[8] As Marx and Engels also argue in the *Communist Manifesto*, "The growing competition among the bourgeois, and the resulting commercial crises, make the wages of workers ever more fluctuating. The unceasing improvement of machinery, ever more rapidly developing, makes their livelihood more and more precarious" (1977: 89).

to reproduce itself, this does not necessarily determine working-class subjectivity as always reproducing the capitalist social formation. In the most obvious sense, workers who are unemployed members of the relative surplus population consume less (if at all) and drastically disrupt the accumulation of capital when unemployment is widespread. As JoAnn Wypijewski points out, the decline of manufacturing industries in the United States has had a particularly problematic effect on workers' abilities to reproduce themselves, when workers are subordinated to the ownership of production and capital: "mass termination [is now] a reasonable profit-maximizing tactic" (2006: 141), with an "estimated 30 million Americans, from line workers to professionals, hav[ing] been thrown out full-time jobs as part of a business strategy. Three-quarters of them go on to lower-paying jobs or never work again" (142).

Although workers may reproduce capital by consuming as a way to ensure their representation as free agents in society, other moments in the circuit of the production of value also contribute to subjectification and social belonging: saturation of markets and stagnating profit has consequences for employment, as does the underconsumption this can cause. While capitalist production overdetermines subjectivity, subjectivity is always at the edge of a void, given the precariousness of capital production and reproduction. To summarize, the working class is subordinated under a mode of production that valorizes private property and capital accumulation. This means that they are constituted as subjects who must sell their labour-power to earn a living, such that many belong to the social formation as producers of use-values and exchange-value. While this

form of subjectivity is predominant, in the existence of a relative surplus population that all workers (productive and non-productive) belong to, it is not the only form of subjectification.

Distribution

Distribution as a Particularity in the Circuit of the Production of Value

The forms that distribution takes in any given social formation are particular to that formation, which is why distribution is a particularity rather than generality in the circuit of the production of value. Distribution, in short, is part of the mode of regulation in a regime of accumulation. According to Marx, the "relations and modes of distribution […] appear merely as the obverse of the agents of production" because the "structure of distribution is completely determined by the structure of production" (1973: 95). Distribution is thus inherently related to the mode of production, because it is responsible for dividing the objects of production among the population in accordance with the "social laws" of a formation—such as, in capitalist society, supply and demand—in contrast to the process of exchange, which takes place among individuals or groups of individuals (89).[9] Distribution also hinges on the forms of regulation specific to a regime of accumulation that enable or facilitate the flow of commodities for capital on the market, such as unionized production and a system of stable wages

[9] While distribution is usually associated with distribution of means of production and commodities through the circulation of capital and wages, there is also the possibility, as a result, of a redistribution of goods, income, or public services through structural reforms (Kagarlitsky, 1999: 73), or changes to the neoliberal modes of regulation.

(in Fordism) or lack thereof (in post-Fordism), tax benefits, or the existence of redistributive social programmes.

Distribution and Contingency: The Possibility of Reproducing, or Failing to Reproduce Capital

Distribution does not necessarily temporally follow the moment of production, because production is constantly influenced in its capacity by localized forms of distribution. On one hand, "distribution appears as a social law which determines [the individual's] position within the system of production within which he produces" (Marx, 1973: 96). While the distribution of individuals to wage labour seems to precede production, this situation presupposes "the existence of capital and landed property as independent agents of production" (96). However, concerning social formations themselves, a certain amount of distribution must in fact precede production, as when a group of conquerors redistributes land among their own people, imposing a new form of distribution, or when larger feudal estates were broken into smaller portions, but also when land and resources are redistributed by those opposing enclosures and dispossession (de Angelis, 2004).

Even in established social relations of the capitalist social formation, production and distribution are quite closely related. Marx locates ground rent, interest, profits, and wages under the heading "distribution", in contrast to land, labour, and capital as elements of production. Yet, in "the case of capital, now, it is evident that it is posited doubly, (1), as agent of production, (2) as a source of income, as a determinant of specific forms of distribution". The same can be said

for elements of distribution: "Interest and profit thus also figure as such in production, in so far as they are forms in which capital increases, grows, hence moments of its own production". Wages, similarly, correspond with the wage labour of production, since wages are necessary for the distribution of capital and commodities on the market among workers. As a result, Marx concludes, it "is altogether an illusion to posit land in production, ground rent in distribution, etc." (1973: 95).

In the most concrete instances, distribution simply appears as the distribution of the commodities of production, and therefore as "quasi-independent of production" (96)—that is, the direct consequence and the next step after production, in the production of exchange-value. Since an object is only a commodity when it is on the market seeking an exchange-value, the "product is really finished only when it is on the market", such that the "movement through which it gets there belongs still with the cost of making it" (534).[10] Here, the connection of the service sector (i.e., non-productive labour)—that is elevated, along with consumption, as one of the defining elements of the contemporary "postindustrial" society—with productive sectors is evident. This makes any separation of production from distribution, as a means of characterizing regimes of accumulation, a superficial distinction. Additionally, the existence of a productive and a non-productive sector, both of which are crucial to the actualization of the commodity form, establishes a kind of contradiction which

[10] Hence, class struggles over wages and compensation intervene at the level of distribution, since workers' wages are partially responsible for distributing commodities.

perhaps contributes to a general contradiction between the forces of production and the relations of production, but cannot be said to be immediately determined by it: the differentiation of workers according to productive and unproductive labour means that some work, without which capital could not reproduce itself, is nonetheless not always inherently reproductive.

Many workers in service industries are employed precisely for the purpose of transporting commodities to the market and promoting their existence (e.g., in warehouses and in shipping, or in advertising and sales) in order to facilitate consumption. These workers thus provide a service that is "a use value, which does not increase capital" (272) as far as capitalists are concerned, in contrast to productive labour which produces exchange-values. As such, they are not engaged in "value-creating, productive labour", which, from the point of view of capital accumulation, is necessary for reproducing the social formation:

> This is the consumption of revenue, which, as such, always falls within simple circulation; it is not consumption of capital. Since one of the contracting parties does not confront the other as a capitalist,[11] this performance of a service cannot fall under the category of productive labour (272).

Accordingly, distribution is necessary for capital accumulation and expansion, but also represents a detriment to its reproduction in allocating a certain amount of revenue into what it terms non-productive labour.

However, in general, paying workers, whether as non-productive or productive labourers, in wages as a means of distributing commodities always

[11] Exchanging goods or services for use-value with others is a staple of many social formations; what differentiates the capitalist social formation, and capitalists, for Marx, is producing for exchange-value.

contains the possibility that workers may not return to the market as consumers, ready to reproduce capital. In this respect, subjectification through distribution is particular, like distribution itself, to the social formation of which it is a component. Workers in productive sectors are constituted as wage-earning subjects who can potentially distribute capital in paying for products, while workers in non-productive sectors, who are also paid wages that serve the aforementioned role, can be responsible for commodity distribution itself. Thus, workers forced into unemployment or lower-paying jobs (cf. Wypijewski, 2006; Lyon-Callo, 2008) as a result of industry decline are less likely to spend a lot on consumption, which in turn affects the distribution of commodities and the number of jobs needed in this distribution.

Each of these circumstances represents a particular instance, however, rather than a perpetual state of being, such that while subjectification through distribution is overdetermined by production (and what is produced), contingencies and class struggle may underdetermine the successful distribution of capital and commodities. Workers are, aside from producers, agents of commodity distribution, who are, in this instance, subordinated to the movement of commodities on the market. Yet, unemployment (i.e., the influence of the relative surplus population created through production) can affect the demand for commodity distribution. It is also the case that workers in non-productive sectors are also a drain on capital resources when exchange-value is not realized as often owing to lower rates of consumption.

Exchange: A Particularity in the Circuit of the Production of Value

The moment of exchange, much like distribution, is a particularity in the circuit of the production of value owing, once again, to its overdetermination by production. The act of exchange "appears as independent of and indifferent to production" (99) in classical political economy, where, as Marx notes, individuals are said to coalesce in exchange relations out of self-interest and "in anticipation of 'civil society'" (83); but also, arguably, in marginalist economics which posits labour relations and the engagement in work as a means of satisfying a desire through consumption (Birck, 1922). As Marx maintains, however, exchange relations are always overdetermined by production, because exchange, following distribution, ultimately leads to the actualization of the object as a commodity through consumption—"To that extent, exchange is an act comprised within production itself" (Marx, 1973: 99). Particular forms of exchange, determined by the social formations they are a part of, engender particular forms of subjectification. In the capitalist mode of production, subjectification through exchange occurs as a result of antagonism over use-values and the social lives they enable, or exchange-values and the profits they generate.

Subjectification Through Exchange: Exchange-Value and the Accumulation of Capital

As noted in Chapter Two, critical Marxist theory has typically argued that workers in consumer capitalist societies are reified as subjects thanks to the fetishism of commodities: according to Lukacs, when "the commodity structure […] penetrate[s] society and […] remould[s] it in its own image" (1971: 85), "a man's activity becomes estranged from himself, it turns into a commodity which […] must go its own way independently of man just like any consumer article" (87). As a result, all social relations appear as are reified. This problem is further complicated by the constant promotion and advertising of commodities to individuals as consumers, who are attracted by the "profane glow" of commodities (Benjamin, 1973: 105), rather than their basic use-value.[12] The allure of commodities therefore appears to be their exchange-value, or the price paid for them on the market, as the purest exemplification of the integration of commodity logic in workers' lives: subjectification understood in this context would imply that workers are subordinated to the allure of capital and commodities by paying the necessary exchange-value that they valorize.

At least as far as Marx's own problematic extends, however, commodity fetishism does not imply ignorance about the use-value of objects as "a thing that interests men" (1906: 95), but instead a belief that value is generated

[12] Cf. also Trachtenberg: "By animating commodities, by giving them voice and motion, advertising performed the symbolic process Marx discerned. In the world of the ad, social relations assume 'the fantastic form of relations between things'" (1982: 139).

spontaneously in the exchange of goods, regardless of the labour invested in them (Shumway, 2000). I therefore argue that the subjectification of workers under exchange is not accomplished through their excessive veneration of exchange-values so much as it is in their acquisition of use-values through a process of exchange which contributes to capital accumulation and reproduction. Workers must produce commodities for circulation as exchange-values before they can consume them as useful products—all of this is a consequence, as discussed above in Chapters Two and Three, of the separation of workers from the means of production, which thereby separates production and consumption through distribution and exchange. In general, they must first produce exchange-value for capitalists to earn wages, and secondly contribute to the realization of exchange-value and the accumulation of capital in the purchase of goods. Hence, production once again overdetermines exchange, without necessarily directly, or *mechanistically*, determining its every moment and manifestation.

Commodities have a dual character because they are produced as exchange-values, or use-values, for others (Marx, 1906: 48).[13] The worker is subsumed under the exchange relation by virtue of her or his production of exchange-values: "that which determines the magnitude of the value of any article is the amount of labour socially necessary, or the labour-time socially necessary for its production" (46). Exchange-value is therefore "socially necessary labour-time and it is measured by money (although only after intervention of processes

[13] "His commodity possesses for himself now immediate use-value. Otherwise he would not bring it to the market. It has use-value for others; but for himself its only direct use-value is that of being a depository for exchange-value, and consequently, a means of exchange" (Marx, 1906: 97).

of distribution and exchange)" (Fine and Saad-Filho, 2008: 171, parentheses in original). As workers constantly produce use-values for others, they are also subordinated to the pervasive way of life in the social formation, which is, as Richard Wolff notes, largely constituted by conspicuous consumption as "measures of the good life" (2005: 230).

Although workers are interested in the use-value of commodities (Shumway, 2000: 8; Marx, 1906: 95)—regardless of whether use of the commodity represents the satisfaction of a basic need or an elaborate desire—they only come into contact with them through exchange. For the capitalist, this is not so much the benevolent fulfillment of a worker's needs as it is necessary to the accumulation of capital (M—C—M'), since he or she aims to realize the value of the commodity "irrespective of whether [it] has or has not any use-value" for the buyer (98). Hence, there is some contingency in the market meeting the needs of consumers, especially when goods are overproduced and no longer have much use-value owing to an abundance of them.

As workers must participate in forms of exchange to acquire commodities that correspond with what they need, they indeed participate in the reproduction of capital (i.e., capitalists earn profit through this exchange, which is facilitative of the reproduction of capital), with the exception of those instances in which commodities are illegally acquired (which is to say, exchange-value is not realized). However, because exchange is a form of contract, where the transfer of money transfers ownership of the commodity, individuals engaging in exchange are involved in a contractual obligation as individuals, meaning they possess some

legal status. In transgressing legal appropriation, a "juridical relation" between individuals is implied, which usually "expresses itself in a contract, whether such a contract be part of a developed legal system or not, is a relation between two wills, and is but the reflex of the real economical relation between the two" (Marx, 1973: 96). Consequently, subjectification through exchange relies on the notion of the interpellated "individual", rather than the mass of undifferentiated workers making up the relative surplus population. It is also what makes subjectification through consumption, as an individual act, possible. Here, one can see how subjects at any given moment in the circuit of the production of value can be treated as completely different entities, depending on the arrangement of social relations in the totality.

Consumption: A Singular Moment in the Circuit of the Production of Value

By locating consumption in the circuit of the production of value and in a broader set of social relations, the aim of the previous chapters has been to demonstrate that, while consumption is a singular instance, it is never determined primarily by individuals, their interests, desires, orientations or practices. The identity between production and consumption, and, by association, that between producers and consumers, is indicative of the impossibility of abstracting consumption as the driving force of social relations: as Marx contends, in the most basic sense consumption is the (re)production of human beings, and production enables consumption.

In capitalist social relations, however, production and consumption are separated and mediated through distribution and exchange, which fundamentally alter how objects of production are consumed. Thus, the "conclusion we reach is not that production, distribution, exchange and consumption are identical, but that they all form members of a totality, distinctions within a unity" (1973: 99). In Althusserian terms, each moment "is inseparable from the total structure of the social body in which it is found" (1969: 101), with production overdetermining the circuit: "Production predominates not only over itself, in the antithetical definition of production, but over the other moments as well. The process always returns to production to begin anew" (Marx, 1973: 99). Consumption is a singularity in the process, then, not because it is influenced above all by singular individuals (as is the case in classical political economy), but because once the exchange-value is realized, the commodity is finally removed from the circuit, and the social relations in which it was produced, and is of use to only to the individuals who purchased it.

Subjectification Through Consumption: The Reproduction of Capital, and the Reproduction of Labour-Power

From the perspective of capital, there is no doubt that the act of consumption reproduces capital and, ideally, the capitalist mode of production (Althusser, 1971; Baudrillard, 1996; Marx, 1973: 95; Packard, 1960). Workers must purchase commodities in order to satisfy their needs, which in turn requires that further production take place so that they will be able to continue to fulfill their needs in

the future. Bernard Stiegler points to the "role of the exploitation and functionalization of a *new energy*, which is not the energy of the proletarianized producer (labor as pure labor force) […] but rather the energy of the *proletarianized consumer*—that is, the consumer's *libidinal* energy" (2010: 25, emphasis in original). As a consequence of these processes, the owners of the means of production are able to accumulate ever more capital, the acquisition of which sustains a mode of production oriented around value and capital. At the level of individual consciousness, workers come to view themselves as consumers above all else, because they are interpellated by corporations and companies, advertising, and the State itself as individuals expressing their desires through market choices rather than as workers (Wolff, 2005; cf. also Althusser, 1971).[14]

As argued in Chapter Three, capitalists certainly can appeal, especially through advertising, to the worker as a consumer with purchasing power—an altogether more pleasant association than the drudgery of work—while rights in "civil society" are geared toward the preservation of the purchase of property, rather than protection of workers' freedoms. However, the circuit of the production of value is not totally synonymous with social relations themselves under the capitalist mode of production. The dual subject formation of the worker-consumer is certainly a contentious one, insofar as it embodies the contradiction between use-value and exchange-value. Accordingly, I categorize consumption, as the completion of the circuit of the production of value, as the moment under which one finds the greatest accumulation of contradictions, given

[14] See Chapter Three for a more in-depth discussion of interpellation and worker subjectivity.

that all other instances in the circuit lead to consumption. There are contradictions in production, where workers must produce in spite of having been separated from the means of production; contradictions in distribution, by relying on unproductive labour and distributing wages, as well as "redistributive social efforts" like social programmes and tax rebates, as a means of circulating commodities with no guarantee that this will successfully reproduce capital; contradictions in exchange insofar as capitalists seek exchange-value regardless of use-value, while workers are concerned with use-value (this is, of course, mediated heavily by what they can afford to pay for commodities). The moment of consumption therefore represents the condensation of multiple contradictions, or Althusser's "accumulation of contradictions", which is why capital reproduction is quite precarious.

Consumption thus appears to represent the "general contradiction", at least in complex, consumer capitalist societies, because it is indicative of an antagonism between the "forces of production and the relations of production, essentially embodied in the contradiction between two antagonistic classes" (Althusser, 1969: 99). Yet, the subject is perhaps also at its most underdetermined, and hence, on the verge of a "void", in the moment of consumption as a result of the number of contradictions contained in the moments that lead up to consumption. Dispossessed workers seeking to obtain use-values are not necessarily simultaneously interested in the accumulation of capital, nor are they even guaranteed to be reproducing their labour-power as a use-value for capitalists in the act of consuming: they may instead be reproducing themselves as

members of the relative surplus population, or simply forced to migrate, which, from the perspective of class struggle, is an altogether more volatile situation.

Taking, as an example from discussions on the gendered division of labour, the notion that women are targeted as primary consumers (in contrast to men, as producers), one can find two distinct depictions of female consumers. On one hand women, as Cronin notes, have been portrayed unflatteringly as consumers given to hedonism and capriciousness (2000: 274), who may in some cases be indirectly eager to reproduce capital and its associated social relations in pursuit of superficial commodities. On the other, however, is the notion of women as generally (although not always) responsible for household finances and spending, or converting wages into goods and services for the family (Luxton, 1987: 170). In some cases, the hedonistic consumer is subdued altogether by altruism: "Mothers often curtail their own consumption… in favour of serving family needs" (Peterson, 2005: 511). During times of economic downturn, women may engage in what Peterson calls the "informalisation" of "neoliberal restructuring" (511), in which, owing to welfare cuts and underemployment, many women seek "informal activities as a strategy for securing income" as a "survival strategy for sustaining households" (511-12). However, it is worth noting that, on the side of commodity purchases, cutting back on consumption or finding alternative ways to satisfying needs by, for example, making things oneself, or repairing rather than buying new things, also represents a form of class struggle that disrupts the accumulation of capital.

The volatility of capital accumulation is thus a result of unemployed, or underemployed workers who constitute the relative surplus population requiring other means of sustaining and reproducing themselves, regardless of the benefit to capital. However, even employed workers who acquire commodities on credit (in which they obtain commodities as use-values, but their contractual obligation is to a third-party creditor rather than the capitalist, such that debt can accumulate and realizing exchange-value is all but guaranteed) certainly pose a risk to the reproduction of capital. As David Harvey notes, such situations are common in contemporary capitalism, especially following the financial crises of the 1970s, the solutions to which required a "neoliberal ideological and practical political turn that was to be deployed worldwide in the struggle to perpetuate and consolidate capitalist class power". They involved "crush[ing] the power of labour, initiat[ing] wage repression, let[ting] the market do its work, all the while putting the power of the state at the service of capital in general and finance capital in particular"—all of which contributed to the recent crisis of 2008 (2010b: 172). Thus as Marx states, if the "honest and 'working' lumpenproletariat" has anything to do with capital, they are generally interested in money as a means to obtaining commodities as use-values. Such a worker is concerned "directly with the general form of wealth, tries to enrich himself at the expense of his improvised friend, thus injuring the latter's self-esteem, all the more so because he, a hard calculator, has need of the service not *qua capitalist* but as a result of his ordinary human frailty" (1973: 273, emphasis in original).

Even when consumption does reproduce capital, the stability of capitalist social relations is never guaranteed, as the saturation of markets (Jonsson, 1995) and the "over-accumulation of capital" (Aglietta, 2000: 353) discussed in Chapter One indicates. This can lead to stagnating profits, which is usually rectified through market expansion internationally. The need to reestablish an equilibrium through socio-political modes of regulation, generally leads to the establishment of a new regime of accumulation (353), in which certain capitalist social relations are not reproduced and disappear in class struggle. For example, the decline of mass production in the West, and with it, industrial jobs and the decline of Fordism, was an effort to overcome the limitations of market saturation and stagnating profits. As a result, the working class reacted by consuming less initially, in a climate where wages were not regulated by certain production standars. Thus the seemingly stable form of mass consumption under Fordism gave way to a regime in which consumers had to purchase on things such as credit, if they were to maintain certain lifestyles. Although consumption is generally considered the most reifying point of capital, in which falsely-conscious consumers are created for the purpose of blindly reproducing capital, consumption in the context of the circuit of the production of value illustrates the existence of a subject, and a social formation, which is in reality far more contingent and contested.

The Subjection of Workers in the Totality

Subjection in the totality of the social relations of the capitalist mode of production is therefore never static, either as a form of alienated species-being, or related directly to productive labour itself. Instead, it is a struggle with a condensation of multiple contradictions. At every stage in the circuit, as the foregoing analysis has illustrated, different forms of contradictions are generated, meaning that workers never occupy one static position in the capitalist social formation as the broadly categorized, exploited and dominated working class.

- *In production:* workers are subject to the contradictions of private property, where they must produce for the market in order to receive a living wage because they do not own enough property required for their reproduction as social persons.
- *In distribution:* workers receive wages, which enables the distribution of commodities.
    - Workers engaged in non-productive labour, such as in the service sectors, are also employed in distribution, which represents a contradiction at the level of capital: distribution is needed to bring products to the market, but the work of distribution generates no exchange-value itself and is therefore not an element of capital accumulation. Thus, even if workers in the service sector are not productive labourers, they are still members of the working class because they have to sell their labour-power. They therefore

contribute to the class struggle by virtue of their necessary contribution to production by enabling the circulation of goods, which, importantly, is only a use-value for capitalists and does not generate profit.

- *In exchange:* workers must purchase products, thereby realizing exchange-value for the capitalist class, in order to obtain the commodities as use-values from which social life is made and remade. Continued capital accumulation and the successful reproduction of capital is not guaranteed.
- *In consumption:* the working class, as the relative surplus population, must consume to meet its needs irrespective of whether this consumption reproduces labour-power for the purpose of capitalist production. Consumption may, therefore, represent a drain on natural and human resources, without enough production to constitute the reproduction of a social formation.

In all cases, production predominates and overdetermines the circuit of the production of value, but it does not mechanistically determine it, as the number of underdetermined contradictions and contingencies generated at each instance indicate. The notions of overdetermination and underdetermination locate the antagonisms and the contradictions of the circuit of the production of value in a materialist terrain, because it is not reliant on the notion of a general contradiction between two opposing classes and interests to regulate and guide the progression of history (see figure 4.2).

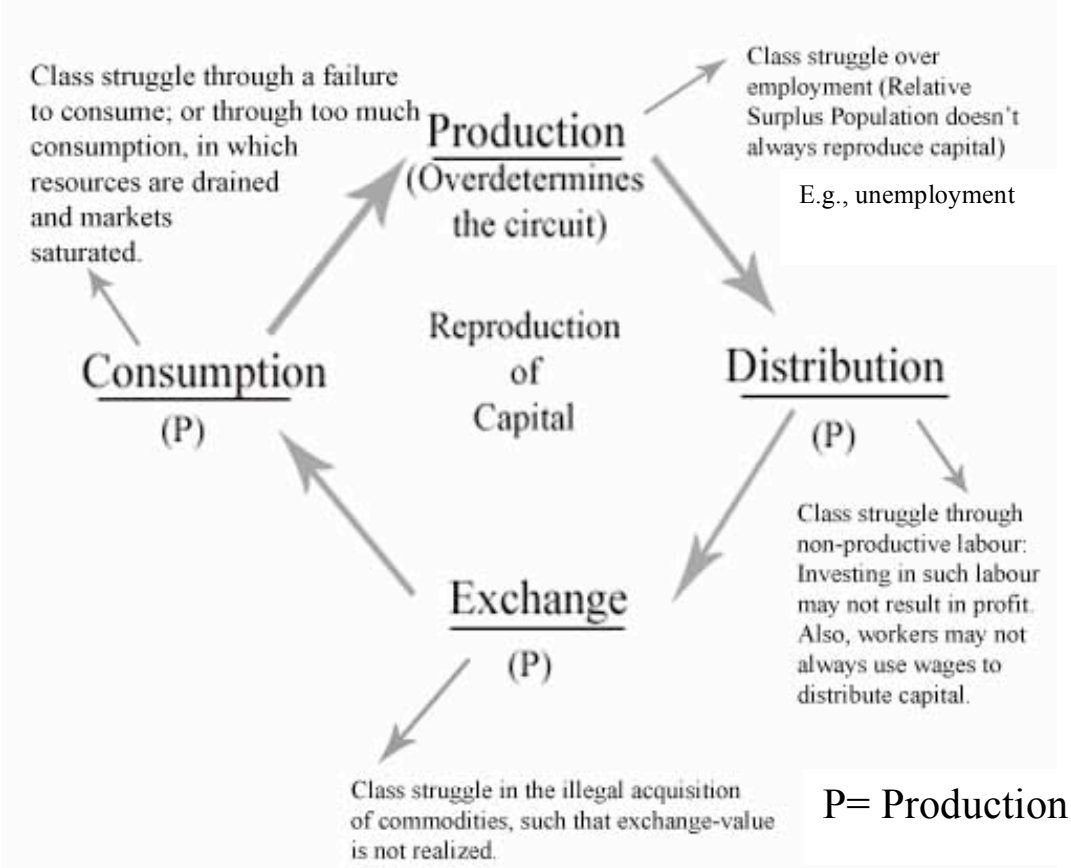

Figure 4.2
Contradictions and the Reproduction of Capital

Rethinking Political Economy in the Capitalist Mode of Production: The Micro-Politics of Class Struggle in the Circuit of the Production of Value

The complexity of capitalist social relations means that the capitalist mode of production operates, according to Jason Read, on an increasingly "micro-political" level. By this, he means that capitalist production has "either directly appropriated the production of culture, beliefs, and desires or it has indirectly linked them to the production and circulation of commodities" (2003: 2), such that capitalism is part of a day-to-day social life, as well as subjectivity. Jonsson notes the transformation of capitalism and production, from social formations

polarized between the bourgeoisie and the working poor in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, to complex "information" societies where mass consumption and an increase in the standard of living diminished working-class politics in favour of individualization (1995). It is not surprising, then, that contemporary forms of class struggle are not always centred around classical "proletarian" issues, such as the length of the working day,[15] but "increasingly involve contestations over subjectivity, over how the knowledges, desires, and relations of labor are to be utilized or exploited" (Read, 2003: 14). Indeed, while class struggle transforms social relations, it too is transformed in the process, which is why the notion of an accumulation of contradictions, rather than a deterministic general contradiction between classes, is beneficial to understanding complex social formations.

As a consequence, Hardt and Negri suggest that the complex, globalized "institutional framework in which we live is characterized by its radical contingency and precariousness, or really by the unforeseeability of the *sequences of events*—sequences that are always more brief or more compact temporally and thus ever less controllable" (2000: 60-1). Here, "[n]ew figures of struggle and new subjectivities are produced in the conjuncture of events" because "although [they] are indeed antisystemic, […] they are not simply negative forces" (61). As the foregoing analysis of subjectification in the circuit of the production of value

[15] Although struggles over working hours do manifest as work life increasingly overlaps with home life, as when employees use work phones and emails during weekends or vacations and holidays; or personal life, such as using Facebook at work, which causes the potential for lost productivity. In these cases, desires (for personal or family time, etc.) are implicated with the spread of information technologies that contribute to the restructuring of the working day.

illustrates, many of the forms of class struggle that contribute to worker subjectivity arise out of a need to successfully reproduce oneself, which can be achieved in any number of imaginative ways (in the context of capitalist production), rather than as a direct challenge to capital itself (although this is certainly also possible). The question of a "micro-politics" of class struggle, in which the most quotidian events can become political owing to their relation to capital and product, thus stands in contrast to the general conflict of two opposing, antagonistic classes.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have outlined the forms of worker subjectification in each of the four moments in the circuit of the production of value, production, distribution, exchange, and consumption. I argued for a materialist typology of subjectification, which does not assume a general class antagonism, except as the aggregate of multiple contradictions accumulating at every stage in the circuit of the production of value. The differing kinds of class struggle that take place throughout the processes of production, distribution, exchange, and consumption, mean that membership in the capitalist social formation is never determined purely through a static class position, as either a worker or a capitalist, but is instead a fluctuating process overdetermined by production.

Conclusion

In this thesis, I have advocated a rethinking of consumption for the purpose of analyzing contradictions and contingencies in the reproduction of capital and social life. This approach, I find, makes it possible to conceptualize the potential of social transformation in everyday life, rather than in general class contradictions. I thus investigated the possibility of a "micro-politics" of class struggle, predicated on the contingencies inherent in the circuit of the production of value and the reproduction of labour-power and social life. Marx uses the circuit of the production of value, comprised of production, distribution, exchange, and consumption, as an illustration of the moments leading up to the reproduction of capital. Consumption forms an identity with production, since the two instances are inseparable. It is the singular moment in which the products of social relations are appropriated by groups and individuals as use-values, spurs further commodity production (1973: 89) by "reproduc[ing] the need" for objects of production (92). It is also the instance where the "commodity is realized as exchange value" for capitalists, when consumers exchange money for commodities (187). Consequently, consumption, in the Marxian problematic, is responsible for the reproduction of capital.

As I argued, however, the reproduction of capital is never an uninterrupted, continuous process, nor is it entirely synonymous with the reproduction of capitalist social relations. The working class, as consumers, can disrupt the circuit in any number of contingent ways, either through blatantly

"antisystemic" actions (Hardt and Negri, 2000) or by virtue of the need to reproduce themselves regardless of the benefit to capital. Thus, on one hand individuals may, for example, engage in theft and piracy instead of legitimately acquiring commodities as a means of protesting commodity prices. But, on the other, contingency can also strike at the level of household reproduction, where consumers default on credit and loans they cannot afford out of necessity. Political actions therefore occur at the level of class struggle through the state as a strategic-relational field of contestation (Poulantzas, 1978), especially when large-scale consumer default results in government bailouts (Callinicos, 2010), such that the state rather than creditors assumes debt and must tax consumers.

In cases like this, consumers acquire the use-value of commodities they purchase for a short period of time, without simultaneously realizing the exchange-value of the commodities. As is now well-known, the accumulation of consumer debt over time has dangerous consequences for capitalist markets: the 2008 credit crisis, according to Alex Callinicos, has "developed into a full-scale global economic and financial crisis marked by the first fall in global output since the Second World War" (2010: 6; cf. also Harman, 2009). The interference of the political into a faltering regime of accumulation also generates further political controversies about austerity measures, while forcing other members of the working class to alter or give up aspects of their lifestyles for the sake of their own reproduction. An accumulation of such contingent events constitutes, then, what C. Wright Mills calls the "public issues of social structure", rather than the

mere "personal troubles of milieu" (1959: 8), the former of which can easily disrupt the circuit of the production of value.

The moment of consumption therefore warrants considerable investigation, particularly in light of the Regulation School analysis of the post-Fordist regime of accumulation, where mass consumption predominates in the absence of wage regulations. Such a regime of accumulation is characterized by "the growth of the new middle classes and individualist consumerism", as well as a growing "service sector that undermined the strong power positions of the labour movements", a globalized division of labour, and expanded markets (Jonsson, 1995: 17). While other sociologists refer to this particular conjuncture as the "postindustrial" "information" society (e.g. Bell, 1973), they often do so at the expense of a theory of commodity production, mistakenly assuming that the decline of industrial manufacturing in the West is synonymous with the end of production in general. In fact, however, it is the very nature of production itself in contemporary complex capitalist societies that enables one to think of a micro-politics of class struggle through the circuit of the production of value.

As Jason Read argues, capitalist production is no longer the classical image of factory production, in contrast to labour-power, but operates instead through the production of lifestyles themselves (2003). One is therefore a consumer in every aspect of one's life, instead of merely in the context of the obviously defined economic market. Rather than calling this a reification of social relations, in which all elements of social life become "things" and commodities that follow the tenuous laws of market exchange (Lukacs, 1971), however, the

state of affairs known as "mass consumerism" represents a social formation based in contingency where capital reproduction, and the reproduction of social relations, is not necessarily guaranteed. Indeed when Marx, and subsequent Marxists in the critical theory tradition, assume that the act of consumption inevitably reproduces capital, they overlook the uncertainty that Marx himself attributes to capital accumulation elsewhere.

Much in the same way that an identity exists between production and consumption, such that according to Marx, one finds "productive consumption" and "consumptive production" (1973: 91), so too is there an identity between producers and consumers—what Stiegler calls "proletarianized consumers" (2010: 25)—such that the worker is also inevitably a consumer. This identity exists owing to the dispossession of workers from the means of production through the process of primitive accumulation (Marx, 1906), which requires workers to consume, through the exchange of money, the products that they have produced (Karatani, 2008). Although primitive accumulation has been treated as a precursor to capital accumulation, the enclosures of "commons" (Hardt, 2011), such as the privatization of public resources and space, or the commodification of culture and knowledge, represent the continued dispossession of the working class from means of production (de Angelis, 2004) as a means of increasing capital accumulation along with market expansion. The intended consequences of these enclosures are the commoditization of the commons, which people have to consume as commodities and which, from the perspective of capital, will hopefully generate profits.

The identity of the worker-as-consumer has several important implications for Marxist theorizing about consumption, capital reproduction, and class politics. To begin with, the consumer cannot be a normative category, founded in the workers' "false consciousness" about the detriment of exchange-value on workers' ostensibly "true" interests in socialism, if workers have to consume in general to reproduce themselves. Although they are not necessarily familiar with the functions of the circuit of the production of value (Harvey, 2010a), Shumway contends that the use-value of a commodity is not really in question for most workers, who appreciate that they require commodities to satisfy their needs and wants. What is less understood is the process by which exchange can generate large amounts of value (2000).

Thus, secondly, the entire circuit of the production of value must be taken into account when considering the place of the working class in contemporary capitalist social formations, not just the moment of production. While socially-necessary labour time is responsible for the production of value according to the labour theory of value, value still cannot be realized in the absence of socially-determined need or want for commodities (Marx, 1906; Harvey, 2010a). These needs and wants are in part constituted through the regime of accumulation they are produced within: "The mode of regulation […] involves all the sectoral and national peculiarities which explain the adjustment process that connects production and social demand" (Boyer, 1990: xiii). The increasingly socio-cultural focus of production means that capitalism functions through the totality of social relations of production, distribution, exchange, and consumption, rather

than in the classical antagonism between the forces of production and the relations of production. While production overdetermines social relations, an accumulation of contradictions (Althusser, 1969) in the contingent, aleatory encounters of class struggle characterizes the unevenness of social relations, rather than a general antagonism between two distinctly homogeneous classes struggling to reproduce themselves against the contradictory needs of each other. Working class subjectivity is therefore not defined on the basis of productive, transformative labour-power (i.e. a "species-being"), but is instead constantly over- and underdetermined in relation to the moments of the production of value. Workers, for example, in non-productive sectors struggle over different issues than workers in productive sectors, and they may face new, albeit related, struggles as consumers.

Thirdly, then, thinking through consumption helps to better theorize transformations in a social formation, through class struggle and contradictions. The aleatoric forms of class struggle engendered by the circuit of the production of value can certainly transform social relations on both the small and large scale. In the process, class struggle itself is transformed. This is why, according to Read, struggles over exploitation strictly related to production, such as the length of the working day, have subsided as struggles over distribution, exchange, and the circulation of commodities, or the production and ownership of knowledge and intellectual property, increase (2003): the complexity of the mode of production means that worker exploitation is equally as complex.

It is important, then, that Marxists acknowledge the reproduction of the working class and the role of consumption in this process, rather than focusing explicitly on production and reproduction of the means of production and capital. Being able to think about the totality of capitalist social relations is crucial to thinking about complex capitalist societies. It is also necessary for conceptualizing a Marxist politics that addresses the material conjuncture it is located within.

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