

Reviews & Debates

**THE RULE OF VALUE AND THE COMMUNIST ALTERNATIVE:  
A RESPONSE TO PETER HUDIS' MARX'S CONCEPT OF THE  
ALTERNATIVE TO CAPITALISM**

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This new study by Peter Hudis is based on a thorough and compelling reading of nearly all of Marx's work. It centres on a theme that many have seen as a distinct one subordinate to economic analysis, history, class struggle, politics, etc. The singular merit of Hudis's argument is that it shows that Marx was primarily a thinker of time, and thus of historical transition, so that the theory of post-capitalist society goes to the very heart of Marx's work as a thinking of capitalism as a transitory social form. Moreover, Hudis' analysis shows the deep coherence of Marx's analyses of proposed alternatives and that Marx's own view is rooted his account of the fundamental structure of capital as the production of value. The text proceeds chronologically with four chapters—the young Marx, the drafts of *Capital* (including *Grundrisse*), *Capital*, and the late writings—bracketed by an introduction and conclusion. The chronology shows the emergence of Marx's mature theory of value as expressed in the first volume of *Capital*, its use for evaluating proposals for post-capitalist socio-economic structure, and its relevance for assessing the record of Marxism in enacting that alternative. It is an excellent interpretation of Marx, both philosophically and politically, and deserves to be widely read.

Hudis reconstructs the argument of the first chapters of *Capital, Vol. 1* through the distinction between exchange-value and value, showing that Marx's previous work did not make this distinction. Beginning from the commodity, Marx shows that the comparability of commodity prices depends upon a common quality that constitutes their measure. This measure is in labour, but not labour in its concrete use. It is labour solely in its abstract form—the undifferentiated labour time of any human individual whatsoever. Commodities are exchanged as equals if the abstract labour expended on them is equal. However, this is not the actual labour expended, not even as measured by time, since that would make products produced by less efficient labour more expensive.

Abstract labour is abstract not only in the senses that it is labour of any sort whatever expended by any person whatever, but also in the sense that it is the labour that is socially necessary to produce the product at a given socio-historical juncture. Equivalence of socially-necessary labour determines equivalence of value embodied in commodities. Hudis calls this the “substance” of value (Hudis 2012, 150)<sup>1</sup> which, as we will see later, contains somewhat of an equivocation between the quantity and form of value.

The logical movement in Marx’s argument from the exchange of commodities, to labour, to abstract labour, Hudis describes as a movement from quantity to quality and from (necessary) appearance to essence (154). The necessity of the appearance of value through commodities accounts for the fetishism of commodities whereby the social relations of the producers appear to be relations between products (155-6). Seeing through appearance, or, more exactly, seeing that appearance is the necessary appearance of an essence, requires the standpoint of different social relations. Thus Marx discusses pre- and post-capitalist social relations of production to clarify the nature of capitalist production relations. So, a major component of Hudis’ argument is that “the alternative to capitalism” is not a sub-theme in understanding Marx but the central theme through which the necessary fetishist form of capitalist relations can be seen as such. It is a compelling argument, a species of the enlightenment argument that one must stand outside a certain form—in this case, capitalist social relations—for the essence of that form to be determinable. Since the essence of the capitalist form is the determination of exchange of commodities by the socially-necessary labour time that generates value, the essence of pre- and post-capitalist social forms is that they are not structured by value (6-8, 17, 154, 191). Alternatively stated, in non-capitalist social forms there is labour but not abstract labour.

Before considering the analysis of alternatives to capitalism that this starting point generates, let us consider some of the issues inherent in this concept of value. In my view, this is a correct understanding of the logic of the early chapters of *Capital, Vol. 1* that usefully shows it as a completion of Marx’s prior trajectory and the basis for other remarks in the *Grundrisse* and later, more politically oriented analyses. So, I do not want to argue with Hudis’ interpretation of Marx, since I believe his work to be of the highest scholarly level, except with respect to the concept of value itself. There are three issues here that deserve further probing with respect to the reduction of value to abstract labour and the concepts of simple labour and socially-necessary labour time.

First, let us note that value *never* appears as such. Even if we set aside local fluctuations in prices due to extrinsic factors, the price of a commodity never, in principle, corresponds to its value. Abstract labour is the source of value, and as Hudis

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<sup>1</sup> Further references to this book are given as page numbers in parentheses within the text without additional data.

comments on this crucial element of Marx's logic (150) of the "substance" of value, equal amounts of abstract labour *in principle* produce commodities of equal value, so that considering the system as a whole "the sum of all prices is equal to the sum of all values" (138), even though individual prices of commodities always diverge from their values. While Hudis recognizes that prices never correspond to values, he attributes this solely to the fact that "abstract labour is measured by a social average that is constantly fluctuating and changing, especially because of technological innovation" (138)—which is the difference between socially-necessary labour time and actual labour time in a given instance. Hudis' argument attempts to make the divergence between price and value a matter of this difference only, whereas, as we will see, Marx himself understood it to be an essential feature of the appearance-essence relation under capitalism.

While abstract labour is the sole determinant of value, according to Marx, value in the actual capitalist economy is shared between wages, capital, and landed property—known as the "trinity formula." As Marx put it in *Capital, Vol 3*, "In capital—profit, or still better capital—interest, land—rent, labour—wages, in this economic trinity represented as the connection between the component parts of value and wealth in general and its sources, we have the complete mystification of the capitalist mode of production ... ." (Marx 1971, 830). Since the actual value produced by a specific quantity of abstract labour is divided between capital, wages, and landed property, the value of the commodity does not correspond directly with the abstract labour that produces it. This is known historically as the "transformation problem" whereby many Marxist economists attempted unsuccessfully to find a way of rigorously relating price to value.<sup>2</sup> This failure has led many interpreters of Marx, especially those for whom explanation of the actual workings of capitalist economy was the fundamental concern, to abandon the concept of value. But it can be seen that the "transformation" of value into price is a problem that *in principle* cannot be resolved.

For the sum of values to be equal to the sum of prices, there would have to be a common measure of price and value in which this could be expressed. But this is exactly the problem: there is no common measure of the appearance of capitalist society and its essence. The difference between the trinity formula and the productivity of labour cannot be reduced to the difference between socially-necessary labour and actual labour. Two identical commodities, produced under identical conditions and quantities of abstract labour, will not have the same price unless the percentage division into capital, wages, and landed property is also identical. Since this could only be the case under contingent conditions, there is *no way to rigorously relate the quantity of abstract labour to commodity prices*. In other words, the "in principle" never holds. This essential disparity is due to the difference between the *appearance* of productivity in capitalist society in the

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<sup>2</sup> For an overview of the transformation problem, see Sweezy (1970) chapter VII.

trinity formula and the essence of that productivity in abstract labour. To attribute this disparity to the difference between socially-necessary labour and actual labour is to assume precisely the absent common measure of price and value. The consequence of this is that any correspondence between value and price could not be between individual values and prices, or between the sum of values and the sum of prices, but has to be in the relation between the sphere of price and the sphere of value—that is to say, in a concrete explication of the appearance-essence relation. Thus, since value never appears within the categories of capitalist society; its validity can only be in the relation between the sphere of prices as a whole and the *source* of that sphere in the productivity of labour. Therefore, even though value never appears within the sphere of prices as such, it could be a valid and necessary concept if it could be shown that the *sphere of prices as a whole* could only be understood through reference to value.

The second issue concerning value pertains to the measure of commodities by the abstract labour-time embodied in them. Such a relative measure presumes that a reduction can be made between skilled labour-power and simple labour-power—for, if no such reduction could be made, the concrete difference between labours would prevent an abstract standard rendering them comparable. No doubt it is difficult, perhaps impossible, to measure quantitatively the difference between any two concrete labours in terms of a multiple of simple labours. Again, there might be a motive here for abandoning the postulate of reduction to simple labour which would be a second reason for abandoning the concept of value. However, the theoretical postulate that skilled labour contains an exponential value of simple labour might be made credible by the fact that the capitalist system is a system, that similar commodities are equalized in price, such that the system itself presupposes such an exponential relation—even if its exact proportion cannot be determined in any given case.

The third issue regarding value is that socially-necessary labour-time is a measure that necessarily includes within itself a relation of the individual labour-time of abstract labour to the system of labour as a whole. For any temporal unit of abstract labour to be socially-necessary, it must be a certain determinate fraction of the whole labour-time expended on a given product. It may be impossible to actually measure this fraction, but it must be possible to say that the labour-time expended in making 1000 staples, for example, is higher in one productive unit than another. This can be indirectly measured: if we assume that the capital invested, the machinery utilized, landed property rented, and extraneous factors such as transportation are held constant, then the difference between the production prices of two enterprises making staples will be due to the percentage of socially-necessary labour they require. An enterprise making staples utilizing more than the socially-necessary labour will experience a pressure to lower that amount, whereas an enterprise using less will reap greater profit. So there is in the percentage of socially-necessary labour a capitalist mechanism tending to move capital toward enterprises with a lower percentage of socially-necessary labour—thus, a tendency to lower the amount of

socially-necessary labour. While socially-necessary labour may be impossible to measure as such, especially due to its dependence on social and historical factors,<sup>3</sup> nevertheless it is arguably an abstraction necessary to explain the tendency to reduce socially-necessary labour-time under capitalism. This tendency is rooted in the comparability that the concept expresses between the individual abstract labour-time in a given enterprise and the average labour-time across the whole system (with regard to a given product).

What do these conceptual issues regarding value mean for the relation between value and price? Recall: value never appears within the sphere of prices; the reduction to simple labour is a postulate whose proportion can never be determined; and socially-necessary labour-time represents a postulate concerning the relation between a given labour (part) and the system of labour (whole). The first conclusion seems to be that value and price can only be related as two systems and not as individual prices and values. Second, the concepts of reduction to simple labour and socially-necessary labour-time both postulate a proportionality between the individual production and the social production of a given product and, finally, of the whole production system.<sup>4</sup> If we reject the alternatives of abandoning one or all of these concepts, we are forced to recognize that the concept of value is an underlying concept of essence that could explain the *sphere of prices* (though no individual price) as a proportional relation between every specific, concrete labour and the whole system of production. We may say that this is exactly what makes capitalist production a system—that every part is related to the whole and the whole is expressed in each part.

The part-whole relation incorporated into this social proportionality of the social labour process in relation to individual labours is enabled precisely by the structure of capital as value-production. Capitalism is a system *precisely* because it incorporates into itself a measure that brings all individual labours in relation to the system of labours as such. This is the ground for the concept of abstract labour and of value itself. Labour thus has a dual function in capitalism, as Moishe Postone has clearly outlined, so that while “labor may seem to be purposive action that transforms matter in order to satisfy human

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<sup>3</sup> Marx argues that there is a “historical and moral element” in the determination of the value of labour-power unlike in the case of other commodities, where the value of labour-power is the “number and extent of his so-called necessary requirements” which “depend therefore to a great extent on the level of civilization attained by a country.” But if the values of other commodities are determined by socially-necessary abstract labour, then the value of reproducing labour-power will indirectly determine the values of other commodities. So, this difference must be one between direct and indirect determination by a historical and moral element and not a case of determination versus indifference (Marx 1977, 275).

<sup>4</sup> Thus, Deleuze is correct to see abstract labour as a “system of ideal multiple connections ... [which] is then incarnated in the concrete differentiated labours ... [through] the simultaneity of all the relations and terms which, each time and in each case, constitute the present” (Deleuze 1994, 186). However, Deleuze fails to see that Marx first shows the constitution of this abstract multiplicity to be required by the capitalist economy in order to then show why it always fails as such. It is not a theory of capital but its critique.

needs,” its real significance “in terms of the process of creating value... is its role as the source of value” (Postone 1993, 281).<sup>5</sup> Post-capitalist society, we may then conclude with Hudis, would contain no abstract labour and therefore no socially-necessary labour-time and also no value. What, then, would measure or regulate the relation between individual production and the system of production? There seems to be no such measure inscribed into the post-capitalist system.<sup>6</sup> This is where my concerns with Hudis’ representation of Marx turn toward a doubt about the communist alternative that he presents.

As Hudis argues, the coherence of Marx’s proposals for an alternative to capitalism is that they abolish the system of value through which surplus value is appropriated by the capitalist class. The issue that remains is to elaborate the part-whole relation implied by the abolition of the system of value. Hudis argues that neither state appropriation of the role of capitalist (165-8), nor socialist schemes that confuse actual labour-time with abstract labour-time (158-9), can abolish capitalism. He argues that Marx’s proposals are consistent in that they focus on the elimination of wage-labour, which means the elimination of abstract labour and value, but do not necessarily imply the elimination of local, subsidiary markets(192)—only a generalized, or universal, market, since that is based on wage labour. He argues that Marx’s proposals are consistent in that they focus on the elimination of wage-labour, which means the elimination of abstract labour and value, but do not necessarily imply the elimination of local, subsidiary markets (192) but only a generalized, or universal, market since that is based on wage labour. Nor does it imply an elimination of the determination of wages by actual labour time (194) -- which is not an average, nor based upon output, but “the natural measure of labour” (195). Post-capitalist society is thus marked by a system of labour oriented to the actual, concrete labour process in which subsistence is measured by actual time worked rather than the productivity of that time, so that there is no external standard imposed upon concrete labour which is “a varying and contingent standard” (196). In practice, Hudis supports cooperatives based on the free association of workers (179-82). While cooperatives in a capitalist economy may be forced to “become their own capitalist [since] ... the system of value-production informs or governs their decisions as to what to

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<sup>5</sup> On this dual function, see Hudis (150). Despite his agreement on this point, Hudis regards Postone’s theory as leading ultimately to regarding capital as the objectified agency under capitalism and undermining the subjective aspect of revolutionary action (16-21).

<sup>6</sup> I think that this is the problem to which George Henderson points in *Value in Marx: the persistence of value in a more-than-capitalist world* (47-55, 65-71). While Henderson suggests that this is why Marx saw post-capitalist society as the realization of value, it seems to me, and Hudis, clear enough that value is characteristic only of capitalist society for Marx. The valid point in Henderson’s mis-characterization, however, is that a post-capitalist society would have to reckon in some form the relation between individual product and social production. See my 2014 review of Henderson in *Socialist Studies/Études socialistes* 10, No. 1.

produce, how fast to produce, and in what form to produce” (180), a post-capitalist society would remove this external standard so that the social relations of workers would become transparent to themselves (159) and, thereby, there would also be a transparent relation between labour and its products (210). But if the products of one cooperative are to be exchanged, bartered, or passed on to another, some method of reckoning of the labour of one cooperative with another is implied—even if it only be through the products themselves.

Again, I have no argument with this political project as such. I rather have a doubt about its conception, a doubt that will take us back to the part-whole relation in my three earlier probes of Hudis’ use of the concept of value. The doubt is whether the very idea of socialism as an actual, concrete regime of labour depends for its escape from value on the presumption that such socialism is not a social system at all. If it is nothing more than “the concreteness of the concrete,” then there is no common measure, and without a common measure, how is it organized on a general scale? If it is not organized on a general scale, then it is not a system but a collection of heterogeneous parts without any common measure at all. If it is organized as some sort of system—let’s say a participatory democratic one—then there will need to be some deliberation that measures these parts and makes decisions about relative priorities. Such deliberation would be a form of systemic deliberation that would need to balance, prioritize, and in some way determine the relation between parts. How is such a measure possible without being in an important sense external to the concrete process of actual labour in each of the parts toward which Hudis’ argument proceeds? Let us go back to value.

There are three ways of viewing value in capitalist society: as the *source* of value, through the *form* of value, and regarding the *quantity* of value. Labour was established as the source of value not by Marx but by the political economists against whom he mounted his critique. Regarding Ricardo, as Hudis shows, “Marx indicates that positing labour as the source of value fails to get to the critical issue—the kind of labour that creates value” (137, cf. 8). Thus, labour as the *source* of value as discovered by classical political economy is synthesized by Marx with a critique of the *form* of value based in abstract labour through social proportionality.

Hudis has very little to say about the third, and more traditional, claim of Marxist economists that abstract labour determines the quantity of value.<sup>7</sup> Ernest Mandel sees only two aspects of value, missing the political economists’ claim that labour is the source of value, which he explains through the distinction between quantity and quality. “From a

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<sup>7</sup> The quantitative aspect of the theory of value clearly precedes Marx and is one of the main preoccupations of political economy. It would be consistent with the argument of this review to regard the persistence of the quantitative issue in Marx as a legacy from political economy in fact overcome by his own theory based upon, as Hudis says, synthesizing the *source* and *form* of value. See chapter 1 of Meek (1956).

quantitative point of view, the value of a commodity is the quantity of simple labour ... socially necessary for its production,” while “from a qualitative point of view, the value of a commodity is determined by *abstract* human labour” (1992, 38). Mandel argues that the quantity of value, as determined by abstract labour, accounts for price insofar as “these fluctuations (in prices) do not occur at random but around a definite axis” (Mandel 1971, 47). Moreover, he regards the difficulty of quantitatively measuring value as exclusively due to the difficulty of getting information because the books of capitalist enterprises are not available to public scrutiny (Mandel 1992, 45). To so maintain, he has to propose a relation, albeit a fluctuating one, between the quantity of abstract labour and the price of the product. Such a relation, it has been shown above, is impossible because it must necessarily be routed through conceptions that imply a common measure, postulates of a part-whole system-relation, and a distribution of surplus through the trinity formula. The conclusion that I proposed above is that the relation between value and price can only be in the relation between the sphere of prices as a whole and the *source* of that sphere in the productivity of labour. In short, the quantity can never in principle be determined.<sup>8</sup> Relative prices are determined through the socio-historical “moral” dimension of the trinity formula—nothing more or less.

The issue of the quantity of value is not central to Hudis’ argument, which centres on the form of value production; however his attempt to save some analogous version by equating the sum of value with the sum of prices illustrates his too-close proximity to the traditional Marxist versions of the alternative to capitalism that he wants to criticize. If there were such an identity between the totality of value and the totality of prices, then the totality of prices might in principle be organized on some other basis than value. Whether through the state or some democratically elected committee, traditional Marxism proposed to run the social economy as a whole. It thus assumed some form of measure of individual labours against other forms (Moore 1993).<sup>9</sup> Insofar as labour in post-capitalism is only concrete, actual labour and is not measured by what it produces, such a measure requires a measuring of a plurality of concrete particulars without any common measure—which is a clear impossibility. One might argue at this point that the final goal of communism would be such a condition of general wealth that no such measure would be required, but this in turn would imply that any currently foreseeable post-capitalism would be in compromise with some remnant of the production of value.

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<sup>8</sup> G. A. Cohen (1981) showed that the quantitative labour theory of value could not pertain due to its abstraction from the difference between the time of production and the time of buying-consumption. He argued as a consequence that labour does not create value per se, but the things that have value, which is a position entirely compatible with the one I argue.

<sup>9</sup> Stanley Moore (1993) argued with great erudition that Marx’s mature theory could only arrive at an implication for socialism, whereas Marx himself was philosophically committed to communism throughout his life.



This may satisfy some, but it rests upon the idea that communism would not be a system, not a totality, because it would renounce any measure, since any measure is necessarily non-concrete. Such a goal is in that sense an attempt to reject abstraction altogether. Perhaps it might be more perspicacious to recognize that there can be no regime, or system, of the concrete—that the concrete always remains to be re-discovered under any common measure (Angus 1997, 186-97). This would not only imply that Hudis’ admirable politics of worker cooperatives will always require some measure between cooperatives but also that cooperatives can always themselves be accused of missing an important concrete dimension in their regulatory regimes. In short, life—which is the concrete—will go on. This requires some distance from Marx’s goal of communism if we understand communism—as I believe Hudis is correct to say that Marx thought of it—as an impossible system of the concrete.<sup>10</sup>

Apart from this residue of a traditional economist Marxism that infects the idea of an alternative by implying some form of management of the whole system, I think that Hudis fails to confront the more pressing theoretical issue of a post-value system and the related issue of the pertinence of this theoretical issue to the analysis of the capitalist system itself. Briefly, I have argued that 1) the concept of value underlies the sphere of price, and 2) concepts that postulate a part-whole proportionality of specific, individual labours and the production system are essential to understanding the capitalist system. From this point of view, the central issue is the very systematicity of capitalism itself, since it is value that expresses this systematicity and value that must be replaced in an alternative. By a system I mean an organized whole that attempts to represent all relevant factors within itself in proportional relation determined by a given measure. As explained above, it is possible that we might interpret communism as the rejection of any such measure, and therefore as not a system in this sense, but, in that case, it seems to become an ideal incapable of becoming a real, historical system. But, to the extent that some form of systemic organization is necessary—which means a reckoning of all forms of labour in some comparative form—communism seems to require some equivalent for value. Hudis’ argument for cooperatives is a valid implication from Marx’s work, but it evades the question of what form of organization, if any, is required among cooperatives to

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<sup>10</sup>This conclusion implies a critique of Hegel’s attempt to reconcile abstraction and concretion, an attempt which no doubt influenced Marx’s conception of communism, but I cannot get into that here other than to note the appendix containing Hudis’ translation of “Marx’s excerpt-notes on the chapter ‘Absolute knowledge’ in Hegel’s *Phenomenology of spirit*. There Marx notes that “Hegel keeps developing the tedious process of the beautiful soul, whose result is the pure universality of knowledge, which is self-consciousness. ... the concept is the knowledge of the self’s act within itself as all that is essential and all existence ...” (220). Such a self-enclosed absolute that is both content and totality would be a baleful influence on an alternative to capitalism and an even worse one if it were implied in the critique of capitalism itself.

construct a system of general production. If each cooperative can evade the capitalist external standard (159), it cannot become a pure internality to itself.

I will conclude with a suggestion. Labour as the *source* of value and value as underlying the sphere of prices, which Marx took over from the political economists, can be understood this way: capitalism *attempts* to formulate a complete and coherent system of prices extending to the whole of value. But this systematicity always in principle fails. The non-price externalities of clean air and environmental goods are the most obvious examples of this fact. Characterizing systematicity as an *attempt* in this sense means that what drives it forward is the putting of prices onto value in an ever-widening scheme that never arrives at its terminus. The form of value is the basis for capitalism to monopolize the productivity of labour and nature as commodity prices. The source of labour is the basis for a critique of this attempt, since labour always produces forms of value that are not-yet-commodified. This is the basis for the appearance-essence distinction whereby Marx attempts to take the thinker-reader from apparent systematicity, through the in principle failure of systematicity, toward the productivity of labour as the source of value. If this suggestion is accepted, it implies that communism indeed remains an ideal of concreteness never realizable as a system. If systematicity is the problem, then there can be no systematic escape.

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Reviews & Debates

**THE IDEAL IMMANENT WITHIN THE REAL:  
ON PETER HUDIS' MARX'S CONCEPT  
OF THE ALTERNATIVE TO CAPITALISM**

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**Abstract**

Self-emancipation and humanism—rejected by some Marxists as unnecessary in the development of historical materialist theory—are in fact embedded at the core of any meaningful historical materialism. This comes out clearly in Peter Hudis's *Marx's Concept of the Alternative to Capitalism*. The principle aim of the book is to unearth the “prefigurative”—the vision of a new post-capitalist world—from the writings of a Marx usually seen as agnostic on the question. The search for this prefigurative Marx leads directly to the issue of how to reconcile the objective with the subjective, the objectively determined laws of motion in the economy with the emergence of a mass revolutionary subject. In tackling this Hudis opens up areas of inquiry central to the development of counter-hegemonic theory and practice in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

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The overall aim of Peter Hudis in *Marx's concept of the alternative to capitalism* is to unearth “the prefigurative”—the vision of a new post-capitalist world—from the writings of a Marx usually seen as agnostic on the question. The search for this prefigurative Marx raises an old issue: how do we reconcile the objective with the subjective, the objectively determined laws of motion in the economy with the emergence of a mass revolutionary subject?

There was a strand of the 1960s and 1970s New Left which identified the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century heirs of Marx and Engels as being imprisoned by the objective: overly relying on the laws of motion imputed to capitalism. This “objectivism” led inexorably to a praxis of passivity: calmly waiting upon the final crisis, to which those laws of motion would inevitably drag us. This objectivism was often called “Second International Marxism” (Colletti 1974), invoking the theoretically over-determined, but often inert politics of the Socialist International, an inertia on full display when the vast majority of its member parties collapsed into national chauvinism with the outbreak of the Great War in 1914.

The healthiest threads of subsequent New Lefts, from the 1970s to the present, have recoiled from this objectivist fatalism and embraced notions of self-emancipation, insisting that socialist revolution requires a self-active subject, a mass self-active subject. In other words, it requires a left that totally embraces democracy, cooperation and coalition building. This self-emancipationist New Left could and can be found in rank and file opposition to bureaucratic unionism; in anti-racist, feminist, and LGBTQ movements; and in the anti-war and anti-imperialist movements that emerge every time imperialism slouches towards another bloody adventure in the Global South.

Hudis pens a clear and devastating précis of some contemporary “objectivist Marxists,” theorists who “contend that Marx’s critique of capital is best understood as an analysis of objective forms that assume complete self-determination and automaticity” (Hudis 2012, 9)<sup>1</sup>—historical materialists who take the only possible subject in historical change (human beings) and transform it (us) into the passive object of history—making “capital in the abstract” the sole “active” subject. For certain of these theorists—Rob Albritton for instance—it means a collapse of a theory of capitalism into a theory of the market, an insistence on, in other words, a complete separation of the market and the state—and thus a denial that state-intervention can ever be associated with capitalism (14). Inevitably, this becomes an apology for the great state-capitalist dead-end we know as Stalinism.

Hudis, however, makes it clear that the alternative to Albritton’s objectivism cannot be found in the subjectivism of people like Antonio Negri. The insistence, by theorists such as Negri, that the laws of motion of capitalism are determined by class struggle can appear as a very tempting turn in critical theory, a way of asserting “agency” into the development of the economy. But its subjectivist face is, at the very least, a substantial over-correction to contemporary determinist historical materialism (26-32), and is sometimes worse: a back door through which hegemonic ideas can easily flow. Take the following widely adhered-to “class struggle as the objective” syllogism

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<sup>1</sup> Further references to this text are made with only the page number in parentheses.

1. Class struggle drives up wages;
2. Wage increases lead to declining profit rates;
3. Declining profit rates lead to crisis.

This “class struggle” historical materialism sounds quite radical, but in fact accepts a key tenet of neoliberal political economy—that capitalism’s economic problems are not inherent to capital itself, but can rather be laid at the feet of labour, of workers’ struggle for a living wage. These workers are described as militant by the historical materialists and greedy by the neoliberals. Historical materialists give this a radical gloss and say “our struggle for higher wages necessarily points towards a revolutionary rupture with capitalism.” But it has actually proven much easier for neoliberals to make the case that “we can avoid crisis if we don’t allow a struggle for higher wages”. In any case, the whole class struggle syllogism collapses in on itself when wages increase during periods of capitalist expansion: which, of course, is when wages do, in fact, increase.

A good portion of how we resolve the tension between the objective and the subjective turns on an assessment of Marx’s intellectual debt to the German philosopher Hegel. This has been a particularly annoying nugget on which the objectivists put much weight. If there is a subjectivist Marx, they argue, it is the young Marx, the Marx too influenced by Hegel. Once the maturing Marx gets over his youth, he also gets over Hegel, and embarks on “real” economics in his monumental study of capitalism. The mature Marx has made the move from liberal moralism to scientific socialism. This story is, however, not true. Hudis unearths the Marx of 1875 (i.e. the “old Marx” not the “young Marx”) and gives us the following: “My relationship with Hegel is very simple. I am a disciple of Hegel, and the presumptuous chattering of the epigones who think they have buried this great thinker appear frankly ridiculous to me” (5, n.7).

Let’s approach the main issue of the book from a different angle—why do any of us do what we do? Some of us try to analyze the laws of motion of capital. But none of us begin with “Capital” in the abstract. We begin with famine in Bangladesh, war in Vietnam, segregation in the Deep South, attacks on the right to choice on abortion, Minamata disease rearing its head in Akwesasne, police killing of Black youth in Ferguson, the exposure of the mass epidemic of sexual violence through the scandals swirling around Jian Ghomeshi and Bill Cosby. These are our motivations, and because of these issues of social justice (or rather our rage against social injustice) we start asking questions. Peter Hudis shows this was how it was for Marx as well. Hudis quotes a lovely letter from the 19 year old Marx, addressed to his father, a letter in which Marx says that he will no longer counterpose the ideal to the real—he will now be completely committed to Hegelianism (38). This is the same young Marx whose “very earliest writings also display a powerful feeling for *social justice*” (39). This “feeling for social justice”, Hudis is

arguing, remains integral to and embedded in his later analytic (political economic) dissection of “the real”. The admonition to no longer counterpose the ideal to the real does not mean: “be a materialist not an idealist”. It means “look for the ideal immanent within the real”. The essence of Hudis’s book is that within our real (actually existing capitalism) there has to be immanent an ideal (an emergent or possible socialist society) and that Marx knew this, even if he did not focus on it or make a big deal about it.

Hudis takes us on a journey to show that this ideal, immanent within the real, is only realizable through real, active, human agency. This is not only visible in Marx’s youthful 1843-1844 writings on Alienation, but equally so in the voluminous first, second and third drafts of *Capital* and in the three volumes of *Capital* itself. Here in mid-life when analyzing the laws of motion of capitalism, and a few years later when the late Marx interrogates the distant past (the nature of pre-class society) or contemporary events (the Paris Commune)—in all circumstances it is humans who emerge as the subject of historical change—labouring humans to be precise. At the centre of the story of *Capital* is the struggle of labourers to reduce the length of the working day. The story of the different phases of pre-class society is the story of the evolution of different phases of human labour. The story of the Paris Commune is the heroic story of the political and economic agency of human artisanal labourers in that moment of collective democracy. The essence of this millennia-long story of human agency is the push towards real democracy and real freedom. For Marx, “Freedom of the will is inherent in human nature” (40). This freedom is not contingent or “zero-sum”—that is, freedom for me and lack of freedom for others. For Marx, the meaning of freedom was identical to that espoused by Rosa Luxemburg: “Freedom is always the freedom of the one who thinks differently” (Luxemburg 1961, 69).

Understanding the limited and in fact “unfree” nature of contingent freedom certainly means a break from Stalinism, a political tendency associated with a horrifying 20<sup>th</sup>-century regression to mass forced labour in the Gulag. In a certain sense, that is why this book has been written. Stalinism has existed on many levels. The word signifies: a counter-revolution against Soviet power; a totalitarian state structure in the post-Thermidor society; the apologetic historical materialism carried by Stalinist epigones in the West; and the shadow over Western historical materialism, where any emergence of humanism or a historical subject immediately implies a critique of actually existing communism—and is therefore pushed into the background. Theoreticians might well be critical of the first two or even the first three of these significations of Stalinism. But the fourth—the denial of human agency in the historical process—is deeply embedded in the structuralism of Althusser, Poulantzas, Albritton, and others. In this sense, their theories, and the theories of other historical materialists who bury the subjective under the fictive self-movement of structures, are intimately linked to Stalinism’s long shadow.

The truth is, historical materialism is inconceivable without a human subject—and this is true not just for Marxism but also for Marx himself. Focusing on the question of humanism, insisting on a “subjectivism” as part of the essence of historical materialism, opens the door to what an alternative to capitalism will look like. We can “prefigure” socialism, if we accurately comprehend actually existing mass subjectivity.

How will labour lose its alien crust? How will production become something performed for human need, and not for private greed? Here an old fact becomes less accidental and more central to Marx’s thought—his love of the Paris Commune. There is a famous quote from Marx’s study of the Paris Commune where he says that the commune was “the political form at last discovered under which the economic emancipation of labour could be accomplished” (quoted in Lenin 1964, 436). This remains a beautiful and compelling statement. However, Hudis (185) uses a richer and much deeper translation of Marx’s original quote: “Such is the Commune—the political form of the social emancipation, of the liberation of labour from the usurpation of the (slaveholding) monopolies of the means of labour” (Marx 1975, 487). This version makes it absolutely clear – the solution to the objective contradictions of capitalism lies in the subjective actions of the labourers.

Hudis makes the point that this is not a momentary observation of Marx, but rather the crystallization of a notion of alternatives to capitalism immanent in his entire method. The barrier to seeing these alternatives is created in large part by the influence of Stalin and Stalinism. It cannot, however, be reduced to this influence. Remember—the Rosa Luxemburg quote above was directed not at Stalin and the Stalinists, but rather Lenin and the Leninists, for whom freedom too often meant precisely the contingent freedom critiqued by Marx.

Some of Lenin’s political positions are completely in tune with a self-emancipationist left. The Lenin of 1906 argued about the necessity “really to apply the principles of democratic centralism in Party organization” by which he did not mean more centralism, but rather more democracy. He called for party members “to work tirelessly to make the local organizations the principal organizational units of the Party in fact and not merely in name, and to see to it that all the higher-standing bodies are elected, accountable and subject to recall” (Lenin, cited in Liebman 1975, 51). The application of democratic centralism, understood this way, “implies universal and full *freedom to criticize*, so long as this does not disturb the unity of a *definite action*” (Lenin 1962, 443). Equally important is the Lenin of 1902, who threw down a “tribune of the oppressed” gauntlet which resonates to this day. “[T]he Social-Democrat’s ideal should not be the trade-union secretary, but the tribune of the people, who is able to react to every manifestation of tyranny and oppression, no matter where it appears, no matter what stratum or class of the people it affects” (Lenin 1961, 423).



But there were other sides to Lenin's politics. A "subjectivist" correction to passive determinism can—and often does with Lenin—represent a false freedom. Lenin and the Leninists were fiery opponents of Second International passivity. But their subjectivist corrective tended to shift agency from the mass to the minority organized in a vanguard party. Over time this evolved into a voluntarist subjectivism, a subjectivism which pressed so hard against the passivity of the Second International that the link between theory and practice was eventually completely broken.

The study of the Bolshevik experience cannot be reduced to a study of Lenin and the Leninists. Lenin's was just one wing of what was a mass, variegated phenomenon. Within the Bolsheviks, there were self-emancipationist tendencies. The rank and file militants, most of them Bolsheviks, organized in St. Petersburg's Inter-District Committee (the *Mezhrayonka*, whose supporters were known as the *Mezhrayontsi*) are a superb example. This self-emancipationist wing of Bolshevism was often at odds with the Leninists. The specific dispute with the *Mezhrayontsi* was Lenin's insistence, from 1912 on, of a hard-break from all other tendencies other than the Leninist. The *Mezhrayontsi* respectfully disagreed, and—in defiance of the Leninist leadership-in-exile—implemented on the ground what we would today call "coalition building" or a "united front strategy", building a network that would play a key role in the February 1917 Revolution (McKean, 1990; Thatcher, 2009). But by 1918 and 1919, it was the Leninist wing which came to dominate both the Bolshevik party and the new Russian state.

This state tried to impose its will on an impoverished, semi-peripheral, largely peasant country and force it onto a path of socialist revolution. The Russian masses were with them when that revolution led to the overthrow of the Czar. But when an extreme voluntarist subjectivism pushed the Bolsheviks to try and force the pace of history, the Bolsheviks lost the masses. With first a minority of the working class—and then increasingly just a Russian minority within a multi-national empire, and then increasingly just that section of the Russian minority organized in the party, state or Red Army—this subjectivism led to an increasingly substitutionist approach to revolution. It also led to increasingly desperate and doomed adventures, the 1920 invasion of Poland and the 1921 armed uprising in Germany (the March Action) being just two (Kellogg, 2013).

Both of these cul-de-sacs—that of the Second International passive objectivists and the Third International Leninist voluntarist subjectivists—proved fertile soil on which to nourish the Stalinist monstrosity which rose on the bones of the shattered Russian Revolution. At the level of theory, an "objectivist" reductionism imposed itself on two generations of Stalinist-influenced theoreticians, Althusserians and Poulantzans for instance, reducing capitalism to structures, reducing praxis to either passivity or uncritical party-building (critiqued brilliantly by E.P. Thompson in his *Poverty of Theory* (1978)). At the level of practice, the dead-hand of determinism was periodically replaced

by the red-hand of a really horrendous voluntarism. Stalin's Third Period abroad and Stakhanovism at home, Mao's Great Leap Forward and Cultural "Revolution"—these and others were the barbaric heirs of a refusal to acknowledge the limits imposed by material reality. If for Lenin and the Leninists, subjectivism was a political mistake—a mistake in large measure forced on them by isolation, poverty and desperation – then for Stalin and the Stalinists subjectivism became something more—it became a crime.

A central task in this discussion is to challenge mechanical understandings of the way in which consciousness changes inside the working class. According to Hudis:

He [Marx] consistently holds throughout his life that revolutionary consciousness spontaneously emerges from the oppressed in response to an array of specific material conditions. He does not hold that such consciousness is brought "to" the masses "from without"—in direct contrast to Lasalle, Kautsky and Lenin, who held the contrary position. At the same time, Marx does not equate the *consciousness* that emerges from the oppressed with revolutionary *theory*. The latter does not emerge spontaneously from the masses, but from hard conceptual labour on the part of theoreticians. Revolutionary theory needs to elicit and build upon mass consciousness, but it is not reducible to it (80–81).

A large part of the archaeology performed by Hudis involves digging into Marx's "voluminous excerpt notebooks, most of which were unknown until recently" (2, n. 1). The existence of "voluminous excerpt notebooks" is interesting in itself. Why, we might ask, did Marx find it necessary to so diligently copy out excerpts from the works he was reading? Perhaps the answer to this is not "subjective"—i.e., having to do with the personal work habits of Karl Marx—but rather "objective"—i.e., having to do with the context in which Marx was writing. He was, after all, living through what with the benefit of hindsight we can identify as a very, very early stage of capitalism. It must have been difficult indeed to peer inside this early capitalism and extract from it a sense of its dynamics, let alone a sense of a possible socialist future which might emerge from the struggle against this system. Seen this way, we can understand that: a) there is in fact a prefiguration of a post-capitalist society inherent to Marx; but b) given the opaqueness of the context in which he was writing, he was understandably reluctant to articulate his notion of post-capitalism, and is therefore rarely explicit; and c) from both of these flows the need for the big archaeology engaged in by Hudis. What results is summarized by Hudis very clearly:

Marx's entire body of work shows that a new society is conditional upon a radical transformation of labour and social relations. The measure of

whether such a transformation is adequate to the concept of a new society is the abolition of the law of value and value-production by freely-associated individuals.

This goal is not achieved, however, merely by some act of revolutionary will. It is achieved by discerning and building upon the elements of the new society that are concealed in the shell of the old one. This includes elucidating the forces of liberation that arise against capitalist alienation—which includes not only workers but all those suffering the ills of capitalist society, be they national minorities, women, or youth—which Marx referred to as the “new forces and passions” for the “reconstruction of society” (206).

The capitalism of our day may not be the late capitalism announced by Ernest Mandel two generations ago (1975), but it is certainly at the very least post-adolescent. In this more mature and therefore less opaque capitalism we can use the method of Marx—a critical apprehension of contemporary mass subjectivity—to add details to our sketch of post-capitalism. Perhaps we can go further than accepting an economic definition of class which limits us to adding on to the working class the struggles of “new forces and passions”, and instead expand our notion of the proletariat to include these new forces and passions. That will mean when assessing capitalism and post-capitalism, in order to hear today’s working class, we will have to listen to the experiences of all of today’s subaltern struggles: from the strikers wildcatting against Walmart to the Zapatista uprising, the World Social Fora, Occupy, Idle No More, civil society in Gaza and the protesters on the streets of Ferguson. Here we will encounter sites of struggle with evolving and instructive lessons in participation and democracy, lessons from which our generation of historical materialists can learn immensely. If we free ourselves from a narrow objectivism (and economism) and let ourselves listen to the new notions of freedom emerging from these contemporary movements against neoliberalism, against imperialism, against racism, and for popular sovereignty, then—after rescuing Marx from Althusser and Negri—perhaps we might be able to rescue democracy from the neoliberals. Peter Hudis has given us a very helpful set of tools with which to approach such a task.

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Comment

**RETHINKING MARX FOR TODAY: A RESPONSE TO PAUL  
KELLOGG'S AND IAN ANGUS'S REVIEWS OF MARX'S CONCEPT  
OF THE ALTERNATIVE TO CAPITALISM**

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The thoughtful commentaries by Paul Kellogg and Ian Angus on *Marx's Concept of the Alternative to Capitalism* provide a welcome opportunity to further discuss the conception of a post-capitalist society. Kellogg acutely captures the spirit of my work in writing, "Historical materialism is inconceivable without a human subject...the solution to the objective contradictions of capitalism lies in the subjective actions of the laborers." This infers that historical materialism is inconceivable without responding to the specific questions posed by these subjects. Those I call "objectivists" may not be interested in such an endeavor, since, as Kellogg notes, they tend to "bury the subjective under the fictive self-movement of structures"—which he rightly says is "intimately linked to Stalinism's long shadow." But are those who stress spontaneity and self-activity any more successful in connecting to the subject if they refrain from responding to its questions concerning alternatives to capitalism? While it true that the *actions* of subjects of revolt are key to transcending capitalism, that is just as true of the *theoretical* questions posed by them. These include: "What happens after a revolution? Is it inevitable that a new bureaucracy or ruling class will take over afterwards? Is freedom truly possible in a world in which no viable alternative to capitalism appears anywhere in sight?"

Of course, there are still those who contend that it is utopian and futile to delineate a post-capitalist society, since Marxism commands us to critique the existing conditions from which it can immanently emerge. But the argument is inherently self-refuting, for two reasons. First, if the analysis of present-day conditions is of such overriding importance, why act as if we are still living in the mid-nineteenth century, when Marxism took shape as a reaction against "utopianism"? If it is imperative to delineate political perspectives on the basis of present-day realities, why repeat the truths of a different era? Is it really self-evident that traditional objections to envisioning a new society retain their validity today, after almost 100 years of Stalinism and failed revolutions? Second, if the task of Marxist theory is to critique material realities, why presume that a comprehensive discussion of a post-capitalist future is out of order? If the future is immanent within the present, one must be logically consistent enough to

acknowledge the need to articulate what that future is. Since dialectical thought teaches us that the object generates its own categories of knowledge, the critical analysis of capital, the object of Marx's entire body of work, cannot help but illuminate aspects of its alternative.

To be sure, Marx refrained from making this the focal point of his work—largely because his commitment to proletarian revolution required *separating* himself from utopian blueprints that were developed irrespective of a materialist analysis of existing conditions. He bent the stick, *as he had to given the realities of his time*, away from any detailed discussion of the future. But we face a different set of realities today, when “the long shadow cast by Stalinism” and failed revolutions pose the gravest barrier in the way of effective anti-capitalist action.

Ian Angus's concerns tend to be of a somewhat different order, in that he notes (correctly) that I place more emphasis on the *form* of value than the *quantity* of value in discussing how Marx's critique of capitalism is premised upon a specific understanding of the transcendence of value production. Post-Marx Marxists have largely failed to grasp the radical implications of Marx's critique of value because they emphasized the quantitative side. But as Marx writes in *Capital*, there is nothing mysterious about the quantitative determination of value by labor-time:

It does not occur to the economists that a purely quantitative distinction between the kinds of labor presupposes their qualitative unity, or equality, and therefore their reduction to abstract human labor... It is one of the chief failings of classical political economy that it has never succeeded, by means of its analysis of commodities, and in particular their value, in discovering the form of value which turns value into exchange-value (Marx 1976, 173, 174).

Marx extended this critique to the “socialist” neo-Ricardians, who stressed the quantitative determination of value as a way to more equitably “organize exchange.” He was unequivocal in his critique, as seen in his interminable battles with Proudhon. And as I show in my book (Hudis 2012, 93-99), the infatuation with the quantitative determination of value was taken up, in modified form, by twentieth century orthodox Marxists who tried to determine how it could be utilized as a planning coordinate either for a “socialist” society or the transition to one. But since my argument is that such approaches, whether pursued by figures such as Paul Sweezy or Ernest Mandel, is completely wrongheaded, there was no reason for me to make the quantitative determination of labor time my focus.

This is mere background to Angus's broader concern regarding the relation of value and price. If the latter is the form of appearance of the former, and the former is

abolished, what is the *measure* that governs social relations in a post-capitalist society? Marx clearly addresses this in the *Critique of the Gotha Program*, in stating that in the “lower” phase of socialism or communism *actual labor time is the measure* for distributing the elements of production. Individuals obtain from the common storehouse a given amount of goods and services that correspond to the *actual* amount of labor time they contribute to the cooperative or community. This marks a radical break from capitalism, since living labor is no longer reduced to an abstraction through the power of socially necessary time. Production for the sake of value and exchange value comes to an end, but exchange based on an “equal standard” or *measure—actual amounts* of labor time—persists. Since some may work longer hours than others there will be inequities in the amount of remuneration. This is inevitable, since “Right can never be higher than the economic structure of society and its cultural development which this determines” (Marx 1989, 86). In contrast, when we reach a higher phase of communism, a different principle prevails—“From each according to their ability, to each according to their need” (Marx 1989, 87). No longer is remuneration based on the amount of labor time contributed by the individual. Actual labor time ceases to be a measure of social relations. *No “equal standard” or measure of any sort applies in a higher phase.* The producers simply withdraw from the common storehouse what they need, and they give to society what they can, based on their natural and acquired abilities.

Such a future seems unimaginable—to those raised in a society based on value production. It seems inconceivable that people would freely give to society without any measure that determines their “just” compensation. Would not some hierarchical or legal authority be *impelled* to decide that for them? But that is Marx’s exact point in discussing the lower phase of communism: “Right can never be higher than the economic structure of society and its cultural development which this determines.” Only when we have learned to relate to one another based on a measure intrinsic to our subjectivity, actual labor time, is it possible to develop to the point where we can abolish social relations based on measure altogether.

Angus remains unconvinced, as seen in his concern over what measure would govern relations between cooperatives. This is an important issue, since Marx was aware that national coordinating bodies between them would be needed. He stated in his Inaugural Address to the Working Men’s International Association in 1864,

We speak of the cooperative movement, especially the cooperative factories raised by the unassisted efforts of a few bold “hands.” The value of these great social experiments cannot be overrated... At the same time, the experience of the period 1848 to 1864 has proved beyond doubt that, however in principle, and however useful in practice ... cooperative labor



ought to be developed to national dimensions, and, consequently, to be fostered by national means (Marx 1985, 11-12).

He does not go in detail into how to achieve this; nor does he spell out the principle that would govern exchanges between the communities. But given his many discussions of a post-capitalist society, this much is clear: he does not envision any kind of formal (quantitative) pricing mechanism to serve as the measure. It is here where Angus goes astray, writing “But if the products of one cooperative are to be exchanged, bartered, or passed on to another, some method of reckoning of the labor of one cooperative with another is implied.” A big “if,” mon frère! Marx states very clearly in the *Critique of the Gotha Program*, “Within the collective society based on common ownership of the means of production, *the producers do not exchange their product*” (Marx 1989, 85). Marx is insistent that even in the most initial phase of a new society, no standard or measure that is independent of the self-activity of the subject is permissible. Democratically elected planning bodies would of course discuss whether the amount of time taken in creating a given product in a cooperative was injurious to the health or condition of laborers and/or the natural environment and make proposals according. But this is to be determined by the subjects themselves, through *an exchange of ideas and activities*—not through a material force (either the state or market) that exists independently of them.

Angus, however, is undeterred: he wants not only a pricing system but “a *totalizing* pricing system” in a post-capitalist society. He goes so far as to write, “If there were such an identity between the totality of value and totality of prices, then the totality of prices might in principle be organized on some other basis than value.” This, I must confess, is rather odd. Marx never ceases to remind us that the totality of values equals the totality of prices, but never once does he suggest “the totality of prices might in principle be organized on some other basis than value.” The reason is rather basic: a totalized price system can exist only in the presence of the money-form, which is the universal generalization of abstract, alienated labor. It is of course possible to have some kind of pricing system prior to the capitalist emergence of a universal equivalent, but a “totalizing” price system can only exist if there is a totalized system of value production. What kind of “totalizing pricing system” without value does Angus actually have in mind? He doesn’t say, and I doubt that the logic of his argument will permit him to say it.

Which brings us to the question of *system*. Angus is right that a totalizing system presumes a common measure. Capitalism is the first totalizing system, since it is completely governed by the drive to augment value. It is therefore no accident that it is only with capitalism that political economy emerges as a systematic theory. A systematic theory is possible only if its object presents itself in the form of a system. Socialism and communism, for Marx, represents a break from such a systemic totality in that human self-activity, and not its predicates, directs and governs social relations. The lower phase

can be viewed as a kind of system (though a de-totalized one), insofar as the distribution of the elements of production (and they alone!) are governed by a uniform measure—actual labor time. A higher phase, on the other hand, represents a transcendence of this transcendence. With the separation between individual self-activity and social existence overcome, society does not present itself to its members as a separate system. If it did, we would still be living in the “pre-history” of humanity. This is why the very last thing that “communism seems to require [is] some equivalent for value.”

Though space limits prevent me from giving this issue its due, what grounds much of Angus’s discussion is the claim that “the ‘transformation of value into price is a problem that *in principle* cannot be resolved.” This is a surprising declaration, given that it was solved long ago—as seen in the work of the Temporal Single-System Interpretation of Marx’s value theory (see Kliman 2007). The more recent work of Fred Mosely (2016), coming from a different direction, has made a similar case. There is no logical contradiction between Marx’s discussion of value and price; nor are they what Angus calls “two systems.” Value-Price in Marx’s work is posited as a single system on different levels of abstraction. At issue is not Marx’s failure (contra von Bortkiewicz and his many “Marxist” followers) to convert to a system of values into a system of prices, but rather the failure of many commentators of Marx to grasp the logical consistency between the discussion of value in Volume One and price in Volume Three of *Capital*.<sup>1</sup>

Lastly, while there is a difference between the “real” value of a commodity as determined by socially necessary labor time and its “apparent” value as designated in the arbitrary movements of prices, I argue that Marx’s critique of capitalism goes much deeper than this essence/appearance dichotomy. He takes issue with the social totality itself, both in its essence and forms of appearance. Marx is not trying to develop a better system of organizing exchange than provided by capitalism. He thinks the only way to exit capitalism is to uproot the social relations of production that make necessary this distinction between essence and appearance in the first place. As Kellogg indicates, Marx offers no *objectivist* solution to these issues. Instead of conceiving of an alternative form of subjective activity that remains dominated by objective forms of its own making, Marx envisions new subject-subject relations—that is, *new human relations*. It is about time that theoreticians got down to addressing this largely unthematized dimension of the revolutionary project.<sup>2</sup> We would do well to follow the implications of the comment Marx

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<sup>1</sup> See Roberts (2016): “There are not two ‘states of capitalism’ (one with values and one with money or prices). Marx’s view is a single state system. So there is no ‘mistake’ or logical contradiction in Marx’s explanation of the transformation of values into prices. The so-called transformation problem of values into prices and money does not exist.”

<sup>2</sup> For my most recent work that seeks to explore this in terms of the dialectic of race and racism, see Hudis 2015.

made in 1843, and which defined all his subsequent work: “All emancipation is a reduction of the human world and relationships to humanity itself” (Marx 1975, 168).

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