

CHAPTER 12

Marx *contra* Negri

Value, Abstract Labor, and Money

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Introduction

In this chapter, I argue that Marx’s “labor theory value” (a term Marx never used) cannot be reduced to the problem of labor time alone, as these terms indicate a specific mode of how society is constituted as a whole [*Vergesellschaftung*]. We need, therefore, to make distinctions between value and value form, money and money form, capital and capital form, and so on. Consequently, I do not believe that Marx’s main concepts are, as Negri indicates in several of his works, “completely bankrupt,”<sup>1</sup> the consequence of which is, as I demonstrate, that we should be cautious about some of Negri’s conceptual innovations. In order to make my case, I recover and sharpen three of these concepts: I first discuss the concept of form (value); second, I treat the substance of labor (abstract labor); and third, I analyze the necessary form in which value is realized (money). I argue that a proper understanding of these three concepts ultimately leads to a more precise concept of capitalist social relations, which recognizes that they are tied together through the money form.<sup>2</sup>

Form

Negri defines historical materialism as a radical historicist notion: “Every result is only appreciable a *posteriori*; nothing is preconceived. [. . .] there

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1 is no *a priori*, no preceding intelligibility: there is only *a posteriori* truth  
 2 of what comes to pass.”<sup>3</sup> With this statement, he tries to underline two  
 3 things: (1) that there are no intrinsic laws to the development of capital,  
 4 as all of these developments ultimately depend on the labor class, that is,  
 5 the antagonism between labor and capital; and (2) that we are unable to  
 6 determine historical developments in advance through internal “dialectical”  
 7 or logical structures of the historical process. Here are three initial responses:  
 8 (1) though capital indeed depends on the labor antagonism, it can certainly  
 9 not be reduced to it, as we need a frame in which the antagonism becomes  
 10 *conceptually* intelligible; (2) though it is true that historical materialism is a  
 11 nonteleological discipline, it can be reconstructed teleologically *a posteriori*,  
 12 as Marx outlines in the introduction to *Grundrisse*<sup>4</sup>; and (3) though the  
 13 intelligibility of capitalism cannot come from an *a* historical point of view,  
 14 capitalism must be intelligible from within, otherwise we would not be  
 15 able to find its internal workings. As a consequence of the last point, with  
 16 Marx, we need to develop a strong notion of *form* in order to speak about  
 17 “the” capitalism or “the” capitalist mode of production. The rejection of the  
 18 concept of form as such would lead to the dissolution of the theoretical  
 19 perspective, which includes the attempt to offer a systematic reconstruc-  
 20 tion of the capitalist mode of social relations as a totality that is ultimately  
 21 determined by the value form of labor. This historically specific form of  
 22 labor allows us to speak of capitalism as an epoch. In *Capital* Marx writes:

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 24       The historical conditions of its existence are by no means given  
 25       with the mere circulation of money and commodities. It arises  
 26       only when the owner of the means of production and subsis-  
 27       tence finds the free worker available, on the market, as the seller  
 28       of his own labour-power. And this one historical pre-condition  
 29       comprises a world’s history. Capital, therefore, announces from  
 30       the outset a new epoch in the process of social production.<sup>5</sup>

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 32       What we find here is, admittedly, the controversial relation between  
 33       the history of capitalist social relations and their systematic conceptual  
 34       framework. Only both, the coming into being of capitalism as a historical  
 35       process *and* the systematic horizon, that is, the “epoch,” defines Marxist  
 36       reconstruction of society. Totality is here understood not only as conceptual  
 37       relations that are systematically reconstructed, but also as the historical pro-  
 38       cess *from which* they are reconstructed. The historical process, therefore, is  
 39       not beyond form, because otherwise we would no longer be able to speak of  
 40       “epochs,” “the” capitalism, “capital,” and so on. Negri’s radical immanentism  
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no longer allows us to systematize the social form as a whole, that is, *as that which develops*. Though it is true that we are unable to posit and speak from a universal and historically neutral position (which Marx denounces as the ideological position of classical political economists), we nevertheless need to claim that we have *internal* access to the form under which our theoretical standpoint becomes possible. The form that labor takes on in a system in which all social relations are determined by capital is the value form.<sup>6</sup> Consequently, as I discuss in the next sections, Negri's claim that we are no longer able to operate with the concept of value has the consequence that we are no longer able to see the *specificity* of labor and its relations under capitalist social relations. The relation between form and content is nicely expressed in Marx's famous letter to Kugelmann:

Every child knows that any nation that stopped working, not for a year, but let us say, just for a few weeks, would perish. And every child knows, too, that the amounts of products corresponding to the differing amounts of needs demand differing and quantitatively determined amounts of society's aggregate labour. It is self-evident that this *necessity* of the *distribution* of social labour in specific proportions is certainly not abolished by the *specific form* of social production; it can only change *its form of manifestation*. Natural laws cannot be abolished at all. The only thing that can change, under historically differing conditions, is the *form* in which those laws assert themselves. And the form in which this proportional distribution of labour asserts itself in a state of society in which the interconnection of social labour expresses itself as the *private exchange* of the individual products of labour, is precisely the *exchange value* of these products.<sup>7</sup>

What Marx has in mind is relatively clear: the goal is not to argue for a labor theory of value; rather, according to Marx, it is self-evident that labor is the substance of *any* society. We do not need a theory that demonstrates that labor is the substance of social wealth. Instead, the goal is to understand the historically specific form under which labor appears in a capitalist society.<sup>8</sup> The goal of a Marxist social theory, accordingly, is not a *universal* theory of labor, economy, and social form; rather, it is the attempt to make evident the social conditions of its own theorizing, which in our epoch is the interconnection of all social relations through private exchange, which means that all social relations are mediated in their thing-like form

1 and no longer appear *as* social relations. Though a general economic theory,  
 2 accordingly, should be rejected, we nevertheless need to claim that the his-  
 3 torical process allows us to reconstruct it in its form(s). But Negri's rejec-  
 4 tion of the concept of form as a historical a priori implies that we give up  
 5 on any intelligibility of these conditions and pushes us back to an empty  
 6 universalism. In fact, as soon becomes clearer, Negri universalizes most of  
 7 his concepts, such as labor, creativity, and love, neglecting some of Marx's  
 8 most important insights.<sup>9</sup> Taking away the concept of form, accordingly,  
 9 leads to two tendencies in Negri's work: on the one hand, he is forced to  
 10 ontologize his concepts (mainly through Spinoza and an ontological reading  
 11 of Marx); on the other hand, in order to keep up with his promise to be  
 12 truthful to history, he needs to claim that his ontological concepts are the  
 13 description of *real* social phenomena. As I point out in the next section, I  
 14 find this duality dissatisfactory, as it leads both to the loss of social media-  
 15 tion and to a problematic diagnosis of our contemporary social situation.

16 Furthermore, Negri's claim that we are thrown back to a radical a  
 17 posteriori position contradicts his own ongoing attempt to justify the intro-  
 18 duction of certain categories, such as immaterial labor, as objective "tenden-  
 19 cies" of our current epoch. Here, one might ask: What allows us to speak  
 20 of a tendency *toward* something, if we do not assume, at least, an intrinsic  
 21 intelligibility of the form under which this tendency can be observed? For  
 22 example, in the case of immaterial labor, it is clear that Negri and Hardt  
 23 are unable to justify their diagnosis on empirical grounds, as the majority  
 24 of labor on our globe is still traditional labor. In addition, as Camfield has  
 25 pointed out, the "development and global expansion of capitalism makes  
 26 wage-labour a tendentially world-historical social form of labour. But no  
 27 single socio-technical configuration of wage-labour [. . .] is ever globally  
 28 dominant."<sup>10</sup> Speaking of historical "tendencies" and *the* determining and  
 29 underlying role of immaterial labor, accordingly, is a highly speculative pro-  
 30 cedure, and is precisely *not* won a posteriori, as Negri claims.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, as  
 31 a projection into the future it is, instead, based on an a priori access to  
 32 those "tendencies," even if the a priori should not be understood in the  
 33 Kantian sense.

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### Labor

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38 The return to universalist concepts, especially to a universalist concept of  
 39 labor, is visible in Negri's and Hardt's theory in two ways: on the one hand,

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Negri and Hardt claim that labor in a post-Fordist society became immediately socialistic (which Negri calls “cooperative”)<sup>12</sup>; on the other hand, Negri turns to a concept of labor as “constituent power” that is immediately political in its creative and productive potential. In *Constituent Power*, he writes:

The theme proposed by Marx is that of the all-expansive creativity of living labor. Living labor constitutes the world, by creatively modeling, *ex novo*, the materials it touches. [. . .] In this process living labor transforms itself first of all. Its projection on the world is ontological, its prostheses are ontological, and its constructions are constructions of a new being.<sup>13</sup>

This Spinozist concept of labor as the world producing “being” and constituting power (any form of which is thought of as a negation and limitation) is, however, highly doubtful, as it leads to a removal of *any* historical and social mediation from the theory of labor.<sup>14</sup> The catchword here is *ex novo*, for even in the authoritative text for the constitutive function of labor in the early Marx, *The German Ideology*, Marx does not develop an account of labor as being *immediately* the source of social reality; rather, his theory of social labor is based on the claim that for the reproduction of human life the reproduction of the *means* of life—labor itself and nature—are presupposed. Importantly, this does not allow us to speak of labor as *ex novo* productivity. The fact that life *is* unable to reproduce itself through its own means makes its mediation by something outside of the activity itself necessary; either in the form of past activity, such as the use of tools and other forms of external memory, or in the form of the earth. In both cases, however, we are forced to think of labor as a social relation, which leads to the further consequence (developed against Feuerbach) that all social reality is mediated by its own objectivity [*gegenständlich vermittelt*]:

The production of life, both of one’s own in labour and of fresh life in procreation, now appears as a double relationship: on the one hand as a natural, on the other as a social relationship. By social we understand the co-operation of several individuals, no matter under what conditions, in what manner and to what end. It follows from this that a certain mode of production, or industrial stage, is always combined with a certain mode of co-operation, or social stage, and this mode of co-operation is itself a “productive force.”<sup>15</sup>

1 As is visible in these remarks, Marx develops a concept of produc-  
 2 tivity that is not simply reducible to an “economic” category; rather, it is  
 3 economic in a universal sense of social reproduction, which includes social,  
 4 self, and natural relations. The difference with Negri’s conception, however,  
 5 is that life cannot reproduce itself without it being mediated by *its products*  
 6 *and something external to itself* (earth, history, and others).<sup>16</sup> Cooperation,  
 7 hence, can never be immediate, as the “mode of cooperation” depends on  
 8 the mode—or “form”—of social reproduction. As Marx puts it in the first  
 9 of his Feuerbach-Theses, “Feuerbach wants sensuous objects, really distinct  
 10 from the thought objects, but he does not conceive human activity itself as  
 11 *objective* activity.”<sup>17</sup> With “objective activity” Marx does not mean, as Negri  
 12 does, that our subjective acts (such as perception or thinking) are creative;  
 13 rather, he wants to say that that all subjective activities are mediated through  
 14 their own products. As this “contains” the relation to the earth, the relation  
 15 between productive activity and product cannot be reduced to a subjective  
 16 relation. Instead, productive activities are objective [*gegenständlich*]. percep-  
 17 tion of objects, for example, is perception of *produced*, that is, social and  
 18 historical objects, which turns the act of perception into a social, histori-  
 19 cal, and natural act. Speaking of a relation, therefore, precisely means that  
 20 labor is mediated by the labored (and the laborers). In contradistinction to  
 21 Marx, according to Negri’s Spinozist vision, however, labor is immediately  
 22 productive, and, therefore, in regard to capitalist social relations, it is not  
 23 or no longer constituted by the value form. Negri confuses, in other words,  
 24 value as that which is formed [*gebildet*] by labor and the *form of labor* under  
 25 which this formation is possible. Statements such as “the world *is* labor”<sup>18</sup>  
 26 are therefore deeply ambiguous, for Marx’s concept of labor does not allow  
 27 us to turn it into a speculative concept of an *absolute identity* of labor and  
 28 reality. With the Marx of the *Grundrisse*, however, we should also point  
 29 out that labor, understood as production, cannot be reconstructed without  
 30 circulation and consumption. Marx’s claim that (abstract) labor is the sub-  
 31 stance of value therefore means neither that it is identical with the world  
 32 nor that it is immediately creative.

33 Negri claims (without real argument) that the distinction between  
 34 production and circulation “loses every importance” because in postindus-  
 35 trial societies “production is subsumed within circulation.”<sup>19</sup> In my view,  
 36 this claim is based on an ultra-objectivist reading of Marx, which claims  
 37 that Marx argued that production somehow takes place “before” circulation;  
 38 however, a more careful categorically inspired reading of *Capital* permits  
 39 us to understand that in the moment when money becomes “processing  
 40 money,” simple circulation turns into capital circulation and, because this  
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presupposes capitalized and monetarized labor, circulation is a *necessary* expression [*Darstellung*] of labor.

Negri's and Hardt's attempt to make labor immediately productive is combined with their claim that in our postmodern societies labor in fact has lost the value form: "These new forms of labor are immediately social in that they directly determine the networks of productive cooperation that create and re-create society."<sup>20</sup> In other words, the claim that labor is immediately creation is tied together with the claim that we find this type of labor in our contemporary post-Fordist reality. Accordingly, Negri and Hardt argue that we are living in a system in which the productive forces are communist and the social relations capitalist. This concept, however, falls back onto an anthropological level, as it forces Negri to think about network cooperation, communication, and creativity as simply human creativity, without reference to its social form and labor as being mediated. Given that even in a postmodern labor situation transportation, communication, and cooperation are mediated by technology as a *specific* historical form of social relations, the identification of communist productive forces<sup>21</sup> with "human" forces is doubtful, insofar as even a communist organization of labor that would leave its value-form behind would need to have a social form instead of simply being "human." The consequence of Negri's universalizing concepts is that he falls back onto an older Marxist vision that identifies communism with a return to an authentic realization of what it means to be human. This would be true even if Negri would reject the concept of humanity and speak of "singularities" that have no shared identity.

In contradistinction, I argue that the necessity of social form cannot be overcome, even if we admit that the antagonism between the "social character of production and the private character of appropriation"<sup>22</sup> has increased in cognitive capitalism. Negri's move away from the value form is supported by the attempt to show that in post-Fordist societies labor moves out of control sites, such as the factory,<sup>23</sup> and turns into immaterial labor, that is, the immediately productive nature of humans in their communications, creations, and thoughts. This development, according to Negri, is twofold: on the one hand, labor becomes increasingly independent of disciplinary mechanisms of capital; on the other hand, labor becomes increasingly immediately productive. "The growing immateriality," as Negri puts it, "does not eliminate the creative function of labor, but rather exalts it in its abstraction and its productivity."<sup>24</sup> The becoming identical of social reality and labor leads Negri to the assumption that labor as the substance of value is more important "than the forms which this may assume."<sup>25</sup> As Hardt and Negri argue, immaterial labor is intrinsically cooperative,

1 and, consequently, no longer needs capital to be organized. “Cooperation is  
 2 innovation, richness, and thus the basis of the creative surplus that defines  
 3 the expression of the *multitude*.”<sup>26</sup> Cooperation and the multitude move  
 4 outside the immediate control of capital. “This combination of autonomy  
 5 and cooperation means that the entrepreneurial power of productive labor is  
 6 henceforth completely in the hands of the post-fordist proletariat.”<sup>27</sup> Negri’s  
 7 problematic thesis about the becoming immediate of labor is connected to  
 8 another conceptual shift, namely, the reinterpretation of “abstract labor.”  
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### Abstract Labor

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13 In line with feminist critiques of Marx’s value concept, Negri and Hardt  
 14 argue that today *all* productive activities, especially activities such as repro-  
 15 ductive and care work (mainly done by women), should be “recognized  
 16 as labor.”<sup>28</sup> In my view, this universalization of productive labor is based  
 17 on an incorrect identification of concrete and abstract labor. For example,  
 18 no one would argue that reproductive labor is not concrete labor; rather,  
 19 Marx’s argument is that, as long as certain social activities remain outside  
 20 of realized value, that is, outside of exchange and circulation, labor is not  
 21 value-creating, which is what is meant by abstract labor within capitalism.  
 22 For value creating labor is labor that takes on the value form, that is, the  
 23 money form, thereby making it abstract as opposed to concrete labor. In  
 24 capitalism, only labor that becomes part of the M-C-M circulation, that  
 25 is, part of “processing money.” Put simply, only surplus value production  
 26 is productive under capitalism (which includes the reproduction of social  
 27 members that are indirectly paid). As long as it is not subjected to the money  
 28 form, labor cannot be exploited for surplus value, and, hence, it remains  
 29 concrete labor that only indirectly takes part in the valorization process.  
 30 Put simply, as soon as labor takes on the money form, that is, becomes  
 31 paid, valorized, and universally exchangeable, labor becomes subjected to  
 32 “processing money” and, through its entrance into the general commodity  
 33 and money circulation, it becomes what Marx calls “abstract labor.” This  
 34 important distinction between concrete and abstract labor no longer makes  
 35 sense within Negri’s universe because with the end of the value form the  
 36 distinction between concrete and abstract labor becomes obsolete. As value  
 37 is not a natural property of things, but, instead, it is considered as *purely*  
 38 *social*, “abstract” does not refer to a property of concrete use things pro-  
 39 ducing acts. Put differently, abstract labor is *not* a form of concrete labor.  
 40 If Negri’s position is correct, however, abstract labor would collapse into  
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concrete labor, which then would turn into the “substance” of value. Under 1  
capitalism, however, as Marx claims in *Capital*, the substance of value is not 2  
labor as such, but, instead, abstract labor, which is labor that has its use 3  
value in producing surplus value, that is, labor that has become subsumed 4  
under the universal form of all social relations through capital. This can 5  
only occur through abstract labor’s exchangeability.<sup>29</sup> Sadly, Negri’s usage 6  
of these important terms is at times confusing. For example, by “abstract 7  
labor” Negri understands “labor in general, labor without respect to its 8  
specific form,”<sup>30</sup> which he then interprets at times as immaterial labor (e.g., 9  
communication) or as “living abstract labor.”<sup>31</sup> This take on abstract labor 10  
is, however, precisely the opposite of what Marx has in mind with the 11  
introduction of this term in *Capital*, inasmuch as the term functions here 12  
to indicate the *specific* way in which the social synthesis [*Vergesellschaftung*] 13  
is being established in capitalist societies. Abstract labor is therefore *not* 14  
without form, because its apparent “formlessness” *is* its form, namely, com- 15  
modified labor. In capitalism independent and private labor is synthesized 16  
through its exchangeability (that is, the total value form), which includes 17  
the money form and exchange. Therefore Marx says the following: “*It is only* 18  
*by being exchanged* that the products of labour acquire a socially uniform 19  
objectivity as values, which is distinct from their sensuously varied objec- 20  
tivity as articles of utility.”<sup>32</sup> Alternatively, as Marx puts it in the fetishism 21  
chapter of *Capital*: “by equating their different products to each other in 22  
exchange as values, they equate their different kinds of labour as human 23  
labour,”<sup>33</sup> which is to say that the real abstraction that occurs in our daily 24  
exchange praxis and within circulation establishes a society, namely, in which 25  
all concrete properties of labor disappear behind their thinglike form, that 26  
is, as money in our pockets. This necessary realization of the value form in 27  
exchange and the constitution of abstract labor as the “substance of value” 28  
is only possible once capital (that is, processing value) has established itself 29  
as the primary form of labor, which then, in turn, leads to the yet invisible 30  
inclusion of labor in the circulation process of commodities and money. 31  
On the surface of circulation, the genetic constitution of the circulation 32  
process turns upside down and its traces, as Marx puts it, disappear in their 33  
results.<sup>34</sup> Curiously though, the concept of fetishism has almost no place in 34  
Negri’s philosophical world, for with the collapse of value in our postmodern 35  
societies the objective turn of social-relations into natural properties and 36  
thing-like relations falls away. For Negri, then, the whole social mechanism 37  
and the constitution of social reality in their totality must be transparent 38  
to its members, as only with the value form can the true wealth of social 39  
production show up in a perverted, that is, opposite form, insofar as the 40  
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1 value form determines now *how* sociality is constituted, namely, as produc-  
 2 ers that produce independently from each other. Social totality, accordingly,  
 3 constitutes itself unconsciously and independent from its producers.<sup>35</sup> As a  
 4 consequence, then, with the downfall of the value form the “topsy turvy”  
 5 effects are no longer in place, and an ideology critique à la Žizek and  
 6 the Frankfurt School becomes superfluous in Negri’s philosophical universe  
 7 (which he shares with some classical forms of Marxism).

8       Moreover, the concept of surplus value only makes sense as long as  
 9 we can make a distinction between necessary labor and surplus labor. Labor,  
 10 as Marx puts it,

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 12       [C]an satisfy the manifold needs of the individual producer him-  
 13       self only insofar as every particular kind of useful private labour  
 14       can be exchanged with, i.e. counts as the equal of, every other  
 15       kind of useful private labour.<sup>36</sup>

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 17       But Negri’s thesis about the total transformation of all labor into  
 18 productive labor implies that the distinction between labor and nonlabor  
 19 no longer exists, which, as Henninger pointed out,<sup>37</sup> is logically incoher-  
 20 ent; for, with the total transformation of all human activity in productive  
 21 activities the concept of surplus value would fall away and, accordingly,  
 22 the concept of necessary labor, too. In addition, the thesis that the differ-  
 23 ence between paid time and unpaid time would be eliminated—to say the  
 24 least—it would be empirically doubtful.<sup>38</sup> A better interpretation of the  
 25 phenomenon of the apparent extension of labor into all human activities,  
 26 such as communication and affections, might include the observation that  
 27 we are currently witnessing the return of absolute surplus value production  
 28 through the implicit extension of the workday: professors write articles after  
 29 dinner, respond to email from their students while checking their email in  
 30 bathrooms; managers take their work folders home in order to work dur-  
 31 ing the weekend, and so on. Consumers even work without payment for  
 32 Google. Precarious workers are forced to take on several jobs. The retirement  
 33 age increases. As Karl Reitter has pointed out, the constitution of surplus  
 34 value and capital is intrinsically related to the class conflict because only  
 35 the class conflict determines the relation between socially necessary labor  
 36 and socially unnecessary labor through the extension of labor time (absolute  
 37 surplus value) and the intensification of labor productivity (relative surplus  
 38 value).<sup>39</sup> As we are at a point (at least in a few Western countries) where  
 39 the production of relative surplus value comes to certain limits, we move  
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back to the attempt to extend the labor time itself, especially within the lower classes. Negri's thesis that all labor is productive and creates value under the condition of post-Fordism, hence, does not make much sense, because this would imply that we no longer produce surplus value, which is not only theoretically hard to argue for, but makes no sense empirically. Consequently, Negri's turn toward control and power leads to a mystification of the economic structures involved. He writes:

*Value has everywhere escaped capitalist control.* Or rather, it has overflowed and its presence is fully and widely felt: it circulates among the factories and in the metropolies, and even in the tropical areas hitherto untouched by industrialization. [. . .] Capital can only control the process if in the globalization of capitalist relations of production, i.e., the establishment of a world market [. . .], if such a control is political in nature. The capitalist elite is a political elite, and as such it forges technological instruments which are adequate both for the extension and for the intensity of the control which is to be exercised.<sup>40</sup>

Though it might be true that in some areas of our informational knowledge economy it becomes increasingly difficult for capital to directly control the labor process, to conclude from this observation that value somehow escapes capitalist control because labor in the form of immaterial labor increasingly becomes socialized labor seems to go too far,<sup>41</sup> because the form of value is still in place and the valorization process is still determined by the distinction between socially necessary labor and surplus labor. Speaking of classes, even if the multitude is conceived to be the new universal "class" (which, according to Negri, is *external to any form*<sup>42</sup>), it is still tied to the systematic difference between value and surplus value, that is, the value form of labor. As long as this is in place, the labor of the multitude cannot be placed outside of or external to capital. The class relations *seem* to be the ground of the capital-labor relation; in truth, however, the classes are the result of the value form and, hence, cannot be thought of as an independent category. Finally, if capital *would be* external to labor, then it could not be defined as the valorization of labor. Negri tends to reify "capital," as if it would be the case that we *first* labor and *then* capital (as a thing or money in someone's pocket) parasitically subsumes labor. This thesis, however, is incorrect because *the way in which* we labor is already structured by capital *as a social relation*.

## Value Form

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3 In Marx, the form of value refers to a concept that conceptualizes the social  
4 totality of capitalism. So it is not reducible to a “pure” economic concept.  
5 Indeed, the concept of value-form, as Reitter has argued against Negri, refers  
6 to relations of the capitalist mode of production.<sup>43</sup> Marx’s attempt to ren-  
7 der visible the genesis of the money form is based on his attempt to show  
8 that *universal exchangeability* determines capitalist social totality. As Philipp  
9 Metzger has underlined, Negri defends an “ultra-substantialist” theory of  
10 value, that is, a theory that takes value to be constituted independent of  
11 exchange, money, and capital.<sup>44</sup> This strong position has come increasingly  
12 under attack by recent Marxist discussions, such as the new German readings  
13 of Marx created since the 1970s. As communication—instead of labor<sup>45</sup>—  
14 now becomes the “substance of the form of value”<sup>46</sup> and the laboring process  
15 has the same extension as the social, Negri argues that value can no longer  
16 be defined outside of exchange: “there is no possibility of anchoring a theory  
17 of measure on something extraneous to the universality of exchange.”<sup>47</sup> The  
18 irony of this position, as we have already pointed out, is that Marx *him-*  
19 *self* argues that the value form cannot be developed without exchange, as  
20 exchange is the necessary realization of the value form—which goes along  
21 with the newer reception of Marx that dates from the 1970s in (West-)  
22 Germany.<sup>48</sup> It is wrong to claim that we “first” have a value form and “then”  
23 exchange; rather, as the value form is the form of labor under capitalism,  
24 labor takes on a universal exchangeability and therefore, as I pointed out  
25 earlier, it becomes abstract. The abstractness of labor is precisely the effect of  
26 it taking on a form that is totally independent from its natural properties.  
27 Value realizes itself exclusively “as a social process,”<sup>49</sup> which does not mean  
28 that the exchange and circulation process (as long as we do not understand  
29 that it already contains exchanged labor) produces value; for, value cannot  
30 exist without exchange and, ultimately, capital circulation. What Marx calls  
31 “objectivity of value” [*Wertgegenständlichkeit*] is a specifically social objectiv-  
32 ity.<sup>50</sup> Expressed in Lukacsian terms, value is the expression of the relationship  
33 between each social element and the social totality. Value, put differently,  
34 is the *form of capitalist objecthood* [*Gegenständlichkeit*]:

35  
36 [T]his relation determines the objective form [*Gegenständlich-*  
37 *keitsform*] of every object of cognition. Every substantial change  
38 that is of concern to knowledge manifests itself as a change in  
39 relation to the whole and through this as a change in the form  
40 of objectivity itself.<sup>51</sup>  
41

Accordingly, it does not make much sense to claim that the “limit of Marx’s considerations consists in his reducing the form of value to an objective measure,”<sup>52</sup> as the “form of value” is independent from the problem of how to determine the magnitude of value. Value theory and the so-called labor theory of value are not the same. In fact, the term “measure” does not appear in *Capital* before the chapter on money. However, as long as we assume that people labor for the reproduction of their existence, we need to assume that there is a socially necessary labor time that is needed for this reproduction, which includes the reproduction of all goods, knowledge, transportation, communication, technologies, and so on. Any attempt to extend the time that is used in addition to this time of reproduction and any attempt to reduce socially necessary time through the intensification of labor is the attempt to produce surplus value. Furthermore, Negri’s claim “that the form of value is the very ‘communication’ which develops among productive forces”<sup>53</sup> is imprecise, because, even if we assume that the new *substance* of value would no longer be abstract labor but would, instead, be “communication” or “collective intelligence,” this would not imply that this new form of labor would not be subjected to universal exchangeability, that is, to the form of value, according to which (to repeat the point) all labors become equalized, given that they are taken to be identical through the exchange process.<sup>54</sup> As a consequence, the “measure” of value cannot be reduced to labor time alone; rather, the measurement becomes money, as it is money that realizes the total value form and the possibility that *all* commodities can express their value in *the same* equivalent.<sup>55</sup> The subjectivist concept of value that Negri favors against Marx, as a consequence of the foregoing, leads to paradoxes. For example, Negri and Hardt claim that “what counts as labor, or value-creating practice, always depends on the existing values of a given social and historical context.”<sup>56</sup> However, we must acknowledge that it is precisely the other way around: value determines what counts as labor under its form.

### Money Form

From the foregoing we can conclude that the establishment of the value form is only possible through the money form. Exchange value, as Marx clarifies it in his *Notes on Adolph Wagner*, is the *form of appearance* of value: the same, the universal, is *worth*. Exchange presupposes the sameness of what we exchange (quality), that is, in their relationality C – C needs to *be* the same (social substance), which cannot be a natural property of C. This

1 sameness, however, is asymmetrical, as only one C can be in the position  
 2 of being an equivalent for the other. Their sameness and exchangeability,  
 3 consequently, is the result of the social process and not, as agents believe  
 4 in their daily interactions, a property of the thing that they exchange (e.g.,  
 5 commodity or money). Commodity fetishism, accordingly, is objectively  
 6 established through the commodity form and it is not a “mental” or “con-  
 7 scious” relationship that individuals have toward things. I do not claim,  
 8 in line with Marx, that labor is the “source” or “cause” of value; rather,  
 9 value is the way in which labor exists and unfolds itself.<sup>57</sup> Put differently,  
 10 we do not have “first” labor and “then” value as its product. Only if the  
 11 substance of value is abstract labor and only if labor constitutes itself as  
 12 monetized labor, then the social reality constituted by abstract relationships  
 13 and universal exchange of things through which all individuals are mediated  
 14 exists. Questions about form imply, hence, an investigation of the *object of*  
 15 *economics*, that is, of social synthesis. This point, as I pointed out already in  
 16 the last section, remains vague in Negri’s theory. In Marx’s words:

17  
 18       The general form of value, C, results from the joint action of  
 19       the whole world of commodities, and from that alone. A com-  
 20       modity can acquire a universal value-expression [*Wertausdruck*]  
 21       only by all other commodities, simultaneously with it, expressing  
 22       their values in the same equivalent; and every new kind of com-  
 23       modity must follow suit. It thus becomes evident that since the  
 24       thinglike character of value [*Wertgegenständlichkeit*] is merely the  
 25       social reality [*Dasein*] of these things, as this social reality can be  
 26       expressed by the totality of their social relationality alone, and  
 27       consequently that the value form must be a socially valid form.<sup>58</sup>  
 28

29       Put differently, the form of value indicates that (1) each C is related  
 30       to *all* Cs; (2) the universal relationability must be expressed (in money);  
 31       (3) the value form is the form of social relations. Sociality itself is therefore  
 32       the object of economic theory. Value and its universal expression, processing  
 33       money (capital), is the object of Marxist philosophy because value is the  
 34       *form of sociality* in capitalist societies. Marx notes,

35  
 36       As the dominant subject [*übergreifendes Subjekt*] of this process,  
 37       which it alternately assumes and loses the form of money and  
 38       form of commodities, but preserves and expands itself through  
 39       these changes, value requires above all an independent form by  
 40       means of which its identity with itself may be asserted. *Only in*  
 41       *the shape of money does it possess this form.*<sup>59</sup>

The last sentence of this quotation is decisive, as it helps us see that the money form is not some inessential addition to the value form, and that it is, instead, its essential realization. Given that Negri's interpretation of Marx is based on an "ultra-substantialist" concept of value, he leaves the money form—and, if we take into account that capital is self-related money, also the capital form—aside. Negri's position is made clear in the following passage:

Money no longer functions as mediation between labor and commodity; it is no longer a numeric rationalization of the relationship between wealth and power; it is no longer a quantified expression of the nation's wealth.<sup>60</sup>

Though it is true that in recent decades even (neo)liberal economists and philosophers are becoming increasingly skeptical about monetary expressions of social wealth, it is wrong to claim that money is the mediator between labor and commodity, the thesis of which is to be found, rather, in standard economic accounts of exchange. Instead of being the mediator between labor and commodity, money is the *form through which* (potentially) all entities and all social relations become, not only ideally but also in reality, equalizable, and as money is the truly existing universal, they therefore become expandable. Both money and labor, valorized labor, is the necessary condition and the core of the dynamic nature of capitalism, even under conditions of intelligent production. Given Negri's extensive discussions of the *Grundrisse*, the reduction of money to a mediator between labor and commodity is even more astonishing.

Social reproduction, in other words, cannot be appropriately grasped if we reduce it to simple exchange, as in our times this exchange has a capitalist form: commodities *are* only commodities if they are universally in exchange, that is if they can express their value in one universal equivalent, which, in turn, presupposes that all social relations are (in principle) related to the universal equivalent. This *universal and ongoing* movement, however, are only possible if commodities take on the money form. Money establishes itself as the identical and universal in all exchange, and, because the capitalist mode of production determines social reality, ultimately, for all entities. The money fetish is, hence, the source of all other fetishized relations. As Marx puts it in the *Grundrisse*,

With money on the other hand, its substance, its materiality, is itself its form, in which it represents wealth. If money appears as the general commodity in all places, so also does it in all times.



1 It maintains itself as wealth at all times. Its specific durability.  
 2 It is the treasure which neither rust nor moths eat up. All com-  
 3 modities are only transitory money; money is the permanent  
 4 commodity. Money is the omnipresent commodity; the com-  
 5 modity is only local money.<sup>61</sup>  
 6

7 This durability, omnipresence, and permanence of money can only be  
 8 infinitely established once capital literally *moves* money and turns it into a  
 9 self-feeding circle. As Tony Smith puts it, “unlike previous modes of pro-  
 10 duction, capitalism is not merely a system in which money is used. It is a  
 11 monetary system [. . .] [M]oney forms the center of the social universe,”<sup>62</sup>  
 12 which leads to a *universal subordination* of (potentially) everything, including  
 13 the earth, to the money form, even ideals, human wants, desires, and so  
 14 on. This is to say that the goals that are supposed to ideally “guide” capi-  
 15 talism (such as freedom, liberty, justice, and human flourishing), according  
 16 to its past and current noncritical liberal social-political philosophers, are  
 17 not realizable.

18 To be fair, Negri does discuss the problem of money in some of  
 19 his early works<sup>63</sup> and in his remarks on financial capital. In his remarks  
 20 on the problem of money, Negri implicitly confirms the popular opin-  
 21 ion that the financial sector has separated from production and the “real”  
 22 economy. Money, as Negri puts it, is now the “opposite of labor,”<sup>64</sup> insofar  
 23 as labor in the form of immediately productive and creative individuals  
 24 (social worker) has moved outside the economic reach of capital, which,  
 25 in turn, can only politically control labor. According to Negri, the interna-  
 26 tional bourgeoisie “now expresses itself only through financial command,  
 27 in other words, through a command that is completely liberated from the  
 28 demands of production.”<sup>65</sup> Independent from the need to discuss reified  
 29 concepts such as “labor versus capital,” we should note that the claim about  
 30 the total separation of labor from money does not make sense as long as  
 31 we assume that there is capital, because capital can *only* exist as valorized  
 32 labor, which, in turn, is only possible through monetized labor. Labor can  
 33 only enter the circulation process because it is monetarized. To repeat the  
 34 point, monetarization renders the distinctions between value and surplus  
 35 value as well as between relative and absolute surplus-value possible. The  
 36 claim that money, especially in the form of financial capital, is the “oppo-  
 37 site” of labor, that is, is independent from production, in fact, is a form  
 38 of what Marx calls “capital fetishism,” because it requires the assumption  
 39 that capital can “work on its own.” The observation that the financial sec-  
 40 tor operates increasingly autonomously is correct, but this distance is only  
 41



possible because the financial sector and the investment sector are based on a temporal extension of the present toward the future. Put differently, the present financialization is in truth a financialization of the future, that is, of future productivity.<sup>66</sup> Fictitious capital, we could say with Marx, is based on claims that express expectations about *future labor*. Consequently, fictitious capital is not opposed to capital; rather, it is its extreme realization, as it takes on non- (not yet) existing productivity.

### General Intellect

I already offered some remarks about the return of “speculative sentences” in Negri’s philosophy. Similarly, the discussion of the general intellect and the status of the “machine fragment” in recent Italian radical philosophy is based on the idea that “production is already completely communication,”<sup>67</sup> insofar as the general computerization and the ever growing transformation of productive relations into scientifically based knowledge relations seem to lead to the bankruptcy of traditional notions of production.<sup>68</sup> Negri nicely summarizes,

What is the project which capital imposes on this moment of development? A) It is, first of all, the destruction of the factory, and in particular the liquidation of the hegemony of the Taylorized process of labor. The analysis of labor is deepened and its organization becomes progressively more decentralized spatially. It is instead focused on social knowledge, on the capitalization of the social laboring networks: in short, it concentrates on the exploitation of a working figure which extends well beyond the bounds of the factory. We call this figure the social worker. B) The project also involves the computerization of society, and in particular the productive use of communication and the transfer of the program of control of society from the outside (the factory) to the inside (communication) of society itself.<sup>69</sup>

As is well known, the origin of these ideas about communication and knowledge can be found in Marx’s so-called machine fragment and in his reflections on the general intellect in connection with a possible break down of capitalism through the role of knowledge in the *Grundrisse*. Though a full reconstruction of this long debate is not within the scope of this chapter,<sup>70</sup> I offer some final remarks regarding this issue. The tendency

1 to idealize knowledge and the general intellect in connection with the the-  
 2 sis about production and communication (which I discussed earlier)—“the  
 3 labor of the cyborg”<sup>71</sup>—leads to a mystification of knowledge, especially as  
 4 Negri (and Hardt) do not offer an analysis of the *production of knowledge*,  
 5 which would lead to the insight that all of knowledge production becomes  
 6 increasingly possible and depends on surplus-value production, or, put dif-  
 7 ferently, it takes on the value form. Additionally, identifying knowledge  
 8 with the “sciences” is naive:

9  
 10       When labor is recognized as immaterial, highly scientific [. . .]  
 11       (when [. . .] it is defined as a social function of the community),  
 12       we can see that from laboring processes follow the elaboration of  
 13       networks of social valorization and the production of alternative  
 14       subjectivities.<sup>72</sup>

15  
 16       The hope expressed here is that not only knowledge in general, but  
 17 scientific knowledge in particular, is a form of human activity that can  
 18 no longer be controlled by capital. Though there might be some truth to  
 19 this claim, it tends to romanticize brainpower. For, instead of claiming  
 20 that production determined by knowledge becomes *external* to capital, one  
 21 could argue the exact opposite, namely, that the general intellect becomes  
 22 increasingly dependent on valorization. As Reitter has pointed out, instead  
 23 of focusing on the capitalized process of knowledge production (through  
 24 research institutions and companies) postoperaists tend to reduce this rela-  
 25 tion to a linear process in which capital subjects knowledge *after* it has  
 26 been produced.<sup>73</sup> Put in Negri’s dualist expression, capital became “absol-  
 27 utely parasitical, in principle and in practice.”<sup>74</sup> As almost all knowledge  
 28 nowadays depends on technologies that need to be produced by large-scale  
 29 industries, knowledge production is from its beginning intermingled with  
 30 the overall circulation of capital.<sup>75</sup> Monsanto is just around the corner as  
 31 bioscientists research new genetic configurations that not only lead to bet-  
 32 ter crops but also lead to the next generation of biochemical weapons. In  
 33 addition, the sciences became themselves marketable. In this vein, it is  
 34 my impression that Negri does not acknowledge that with the immense  
 35 increase in productivity in recent decades the productivity *in* the sciences  
 36 became increasingly dependent on investment into military research and the  
 37 health system (broadly understood). Negri and Hardt’s attempt to reduce  
 38 war to a political (capital) category fails, accordingly, as they override  
 39 knowledge and network socialization without taking into account how the  
 40 real production of these networks come about. Indeed, scientific knowledge  
 41

has close ties to war and destruction. With the latter aspects taken into account, we can acknowledge that knowledge production is deeply embedded within the capitalist state and its coercive apparatuses, which are needed to secure that society reproduces itself on the current economic level. In this way, knowledge is not a public good, as Moulrier-Boutang claims. It is, hence, too easy to say that it *could* be a public good, especially because this would repeat the old myth about the neutrality of technology in the field of knowledge production. Do we need to remind ourselves that right at the beginning of his analysis of the valorization of labor in *Capital*, Marx points out that the valorization of living labor depends on the extension of the valorization process beyond a life time, that is, beyond the finite limit of labor time in individuals, toward the inclusion of the “next” generation of laborers?<sup>76</sup> The limitless valorization process, in other words, posits the finitude of life as an inner limit to be overcome. The important role of health and the increasing role of medical research as a state-run task are closely related to the economic reproduction of society, to its members as productive individuals, and to death, which, in addition, is linked up with the development of technology and knowledge production through high-powered research processes.<sup>77</sup> Finally, as the expansion of capital starts to subsume all natural and biological sources in order to make them productive, the role of knowledge and the general intellect is deeply ambiguous, which Marx himself was unable to foresee.<sup>78</sup>

Consequently, the “liberating” and emancipatory potential that Negri sees in the general intellect is the cause of wealth disparities, class structure, ecological devastation, and exploitation. The investments into research lead, as we can see especially in the U.S. system, and *even within* the academic system, to a class system of a few elite institutions and a mass of average educational “facilities,” a neo-feudalist professorial upper class and an abject class of precarious teachers and low-level academic workers. In addition, this leads to the reproduction of extreme wealth disparities through what is in some places called “advancing knowledge; advancing lives.” Finally, the increase of productivity and the advances of the sciences lead, at the same time, to a disproportional exploitation of the earth, especially of energy and the biosphere. Virtually all advances in the sciences lead to technologies that disproportionately increase energy consumption. These ecological problems, which Marx intentionally does not call “nature,” but, instead, earth, are not really addressed in Negri’s philosophy, and it is my impression, as I argued in the first part of this chapter, that the ecological dimension is not addressed in his work because this would entail a substantial reconceptualization of Negri’s notion of immediately productive labor, which leads to a concept

1 of labor that is intrinsically tied to its naturalness and to the earth as the  
 2 extension of the living individual. If it is indeed true, as Negri states, that  
 3 freedom is a “productive force,”<sup>79</sup> then it seems to be too abstract to identify  
 4 this freedom with the production of knowledge, labor “as such,” and the  
 5 multitude as the carrier of this abstract labor capacity, especially if we take  
 6 into account that the “free” productive force is intrinsically tied to the earth  
 7 as the second source of wealth. The earth, conceived in its social-material  
 8 form, however, remains external to productive life.

9

10

11

### Conclusion

12

13 Antonio Negri is certainly one of the most inspiring political philosophers of  
 14 our time. Even if one does not agree with some of his ideas and concepts,  
 15 his apparently limitless creativity, his joyful optimism, and his sensibility  
 16 for what is “in the air” in our contemporary times are truly admirable. The  
 17 critique of a few selected concepts of Negri’s philosophy that I developed  
 18 in this chapter, therefore, should not be taken as hostile comments. The  
 19 opposite is the case: thinking about Negri not only helped me go back to  
 20 some fundamental concepts that determine the Marxian legacy, but also  
 21 determine the extent to which they are still useful today. Though I find  
 22 Negri’s political philosophy, especially his ontology of constituting power,  
 23 very productive and intellectually challenging, particularly because we find  
 24 in it an alternative to the now-dominant liberal framework for thinking  
 25 about law, democracy, and society, as we saw, I have doubts that his overall  
 26 attempt to free himself from the Marxian background is successful. In sum,  
 27 we should remain doubtful of Negri’s claim that we already live in “a” society  
 28 that “that no longer bases the production of wealth on the exploitation of  
 29 labor time.”<sup>80</sup>

30

31

32

### Notes

33

34

1. Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt, *Labor of Dionysus: A Critique of the State-Form* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 10.

35

36

2. I develop more ideas regarding the money form and the idea of a social-material concept of schematism in my forthcoming book *The Capitalist Schema: Time, Money, and the Culture of Abstraction* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2014).

37

38

39

3. Antonio Negri, “Twenty Theses on Marx: Interpretation of the Situation Today,” *Marxism Beyond Marxism*, eds. S. Makdisi, C. Casarino, and R. E. Karl (London: Routledge, 1996), 158.

40

41

4. Marx demonstrates that the historical process is not teleological (a position he already reached in *The German Ideology*; for this see Andreas Arndt, *Karl Marx: Versuch über den Zusammenhang seiner Theorie* [Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2011], 68–73), but that categories that already appear during the course of history, such as money, can be historically reconstructed from *within* more complex societies: “Bourgeois society is the most developed and the most complex historic organization of production. The categories which express its relations, the comprehension of its structure, thereby also allows insights into the structure and the relations of production of all the vanished social formations out of whose ruins and elements it built itself up, whose partly still unconquered remnants are carried along within it, whose mere nuances have developed explicit significance within it, etc. Human anatomy contains a key to the anatomy of the ape.” Karl Marx, *Grundrisse* (London: Penguin, 1993), 105. See Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Werke*, vol. 23 (Berlin: Dietz, 1990), 183–184. (I quote the Penguin editions of the *Grundrisse* and *Capital*, and the German edition of *Werke*. All other translations can be found online at [www.marxists.org](http://www.marxists.org). I have indicated where I have altered the translation.)

5. Marx and Engels, *Werke*, vol. 23, 184; Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1 (London: Penguin, 1990), 274.

6. According to Negri, though, labor “itself” is in post-Fordist societies more important “than the forms which this may assume” (Negri, “Twenty Theses on Marx,” 152), as for him already in his Spinoza interpretation the concept of form is a negative concept. For this, see Karl Reitter, *Prozesse der Befreiung: Marx, Spinoza, und die Bedingungen eines freien Gemeinwesens* (Münster: Westfälisches Dampfboot 2011), 353.

7. Marx and Engels, *Werke*, vol. 32 (Berlin: Dietz, 1990), 552.

8. Sabine Nuss in her excellent work on intellectual property raises a similar point against Negri. She argues against Negri that historical changes of labor do not necessarily imply form changes. Moreover, she demonstrates that our contemporary “knowledge society” cannot be reconstructed without taking a Marxist conception of private property relations into account. See Sabine Nuss, *Copyright and Copyriot: Aneignungskonflikte um geistiges Eigentum im informationellen Kapitalismus* (Münster: Westfälisches Dampfboot, 2006), 209.

9. I have criticized Negri’s and Hardt’s concept of love in a forthcoming essay entitled “Against Essentialist Conceptions of Love: Towards a Social-Materialist Conception of Love,” in *Symposium: Canadian Journal for Continental Philosophy*.

10. David Camfield, “The Multitude and the Kangaroo: A Critique of Hardt and Negri’s Theory of Immaterial Labour,” *Historical Materialism* 15 (2007): 37.

11. At some point, Negri seems to acknowledge the tension between his immanentist position and the claims that come out of this position. He tries to justify the conceptual reconstruction through what he calls “common ethical consciousness” and “common ethics of responsibility,” but it remains unclear how this is related to the historicist positions he seems to defend in other works. (See Antonio Negri, *Reflections on Empire*, trans. Ed Emery [London: Polity, 2008], 61.) In addition, whereas Marx assumed at least an “average” concept of capitalism as the object of

1 his theoretical reconstruction of our social reality, Negri no longer gives any justifi-  
 2 cation of how he develops his concepts methodologically, from his *observations* to  
 3 his *theoretical* reconstructions.

4 12. Negri's use of the term "cooperative" is confusing, as Marx uses the term  
 5 for the organization of the labor process under the command of the capitalist (his-  
 6 torically this can change): "When numerous workers work together side by side in  
 7 accordance with a plan, whether in the same process, or in different but connected  
 8 processes, this form of labour is called co-operation." Marx and Engels, *Werke*, vol.  
 9 23, 344; Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1, 443.

10 13. Antonio Negri, *Insurgencies: Constituent Power and the Modern State*, trans.  
 11 M. Boscagli (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 326.

12 14. Similarly, the concept of the multitude is conceived in terms of absolute  
 13 constitution: "Focusing on the making of the multitude, then, allows us to recognize  
 14 how its productive activity is also a political act of self-making." Antonio Negri and  
 15 Michael Hardt, *Commonwealth* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), 175.

16 15. Marx and Engels, *Werke*, vol. 3 (Berlin: Dietz, 1990), 29.

17 16. This rather Aristotelian schema is still visible in *Capital*. Even before Marx  
 18 describes the labor process, he already indicates that concrete labor always *depends*  
 19 on "materials" (*Stoffe*); for the translation problems of *materielle*, *sachlich*, *dinglich*,  
 20 and *stofflich*, see Wolfgang Fritz Haug, *Das 'Kapital' lesen: Aber wie?* (Berlin: Argu-  
 21 ment Verlag, 2013), 188–189.

22 17. Marx and Engels, *Werke*, vol. 3, 5.

23 18. Negri and Hardt, *Labor of Dionysus*, 11; my emphasis.

24 19. Negri, "Twenty Theses on Marx," 157.

25 20. Negri and Hardt, *Labor of Dionysus*, 10.

26 21. As Negri puts it (differently): "I believe that the value of the socialized  
 27 worker's labour—and thus his/her power—is to be attributed to the substance of  
 28 laboring cooperation which s/he represents. S/he represents cooperation, commu-  
 29 nication and created value." Antonio Negri, *The Politics of Subversion: A Manifesto*  
 30 *for the Twenty-First Century*, trans. J. Newell (London: Polity Press, 2005), 118.

31 22. Carlo Vercellone, "Vom Massenarbeiter zur kognitiven Arbeit: Eine histo-  
 32 rische und systematische Betrachtung," *Über Marx hinaus*, eds. M. van der Linden  
 33 and K. H. Roth (Hamburg: Assoziation A, 2011), 528; my translation.

34 23. Negri and Hardt, *Labor of Dionysus*, 9.

35 24. Negri, "Twenty Theses on Marx," 152.

36 25. *Ibid.*

37 26. Negri, *Insurgencies*, 322.

38 27. Antonio Negri, "Constituent Republic," *Radical Thought in Italy: A Potent-*  
 39 *tial Politics*, eds. P. Virno and M. Hardt (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota  
 40 Press, 1996), 215.

41 28. Negri and Hardt, *Labor of Dionysus*, 9.

29. To be more precise: abstract labor is constituted through exchange, that  
 is, through and behind the back of social agents. For this, see Marx and Engels,  
*Werke*, vol. 23, 87 and 101.

30. Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (New York: Penguin Press, 2004), 144. 1
31. Negri, "Twenty Theses on Marx," 167. 2
32. Marx and Engels, *Werke*, vol. 23, 87; Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1, 166; my emphasis. 3
33. *Ibid.*, 88; *ibid.*, 167. 4
34. Marx and Engels, *Werke*, vol. 23, 107. 5
35. See Haug, *Das 'Kapital' lesen*, 195, where he argues against Harvey's subjectivist concept of fetishism. 6
36. Marx and Engels, *Werke*, vol. 23, 87; Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1, 166. Consequently, the so-called law of value that simply counts labor time expended is misguided inasmuch as only concrete labor can be measured in time. Abstract labor cannot be measured in time, as it establishes itself behind the back of social agents in the *realization* of value. For this see Michael Heinrich, *Die Wissenschaft vom Wert: Die Marxsche Kritik der politischen Oekonomie zwischen wissenschaftlicher Revolution und klassischer Tradition* (Münster: Westfälisches Dampfboot, 2011), 209. 7
37. Max Henninger, "Abschreibung des Wertgesetzes? Kritische Anmerkungen zur Marx-Interpretation Antonio Negris," in *Grundrisse*, col. 28, [www.grundrisse.net/grundrisse28/wertgesetz.htm](http://www.grundrisse.net/grundrisse28/wertgesetz.htm). 8
38. Camfield, "The Multitude and the Kangaroo," 45. 9
39. Reitter, *Prozesse der Befreiung*, 93. 10
40. Negri, *The Politics of Subversion*, 106. 11
41. In addition, as Sayers has pointed out against Negri and Hardt, immaterial labor is as material as ever: "Symbolic labor is no exception: it involves making marks on paper, agitating the air and making sounds, creating electronic impulses in a computer system, or whatever. Only in this way it is objectified and realized as labor. In the process, it affects—creates, alters—subjectivity. *All* labor, it should be noted, does this." Sean Sayers, "The Concept of Labor: Marx and His Critics," *Science and Society*, vol. 71, no. 4 (October 2007:445). 12
42. For Negri's struggle with this concept as something that is beyond form, see Antonio Negri and Cesare Casarino, *In Praise of the Common: A Conversation on Philosophy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 93–98. 13
43. Reitter, *Prozesse der Befreiung*, 107. 14
44. Philipp Metzger, "Werttheorie des Postoperaismus," *Phase 2* 42 (Spring 2012), <http://phase-zwei.org/hefte/artikel/werttheorie-des-postoperaismus-63/>. See also Reitter, *Prozesse der Befreiung*, 105. 15
45. It remains unclear why communication—even if we would agree with Negri that communication in post-Fordist societies is the most central category—would be opposed to labor (instead of taking it as one form of labor). 16
46. Negri, "Twenty Theses on Marx," 152. The fact that in post-Fordist societies the factory no longer is the center of production is not an argument against the value form or the law of value, for the factory is only one way in which capital can organize labor. See Reitter, *Prozesse der Befreiung*, 109. 17
47. Negri, "Twenty Theses on Marx," 152. 18



- 1 48. See especially Hans Georg Backhaus, *Dialektik der Wertform* (Freiburg:  
2 ca ira 2011); Heinrich, *Die Wissenschaft vom Wert*; and the collection of essays in  
3 Helmut Reichelt, *Neue Marx Lektüre: Zur Kritik sozialwissenschaftlicher Logik* (Ham-  
4 burg: VSA, 2008). For an overview of the complex (West-)German debate after  
5 1945, see Ingo Elbe, “Soziale Form und Geschichte: Der Gegenstand des Kapital  
6 aus der Perspektive neuerer Marx-Lektüren,” *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie* 58,  
7 no. 2 (2010) and *Marx im Westen: Die neue Marx-Lektüre in der Bundesrepublik seit*  
8 *1965* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2010); for a critique of these positions see Haug,  
9 *Das ‘Kapital’ lesen*, 103–174.
- 10 49. Marx and Engels, *Werke*, vol. 23, 98.
- 11 50. Heinrich, *Die Wissenschaft vom Wert*, 217.
- 12 51. Georg Lukacs, *Geschichte und Klassenbewusstsein*, Frühschriften II, Werke  
13 Bd. 2 (Bielefeld: Aisthesis Verlag, 2013), 185, and *History and Class Consciousness:*  
14 *Studies in Marxian Dialectics*, trans. R. Livingston (New York: Random House,  
15 1972), 13.
- 16 52. Negri, “Twenty Theses on Marx,” 151.
- 17 53. *Ibid.*, 152.
- 18 54. The claim that communication is the new form of labor is shared among  
19 radical Italian philosophers and economists; for example, see Maurizio Lazzarato,  
20 “Immaterial Labor,” in *Radical Thought in Italy: A Potential Politics*, eds. Virno  
21 and Hardt (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 137, and Christian  
22 Marazzi, *Capital and Affects: The Politics of the Language Economy*, trans. Giuseppina  
23 Mecchia (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2011), 20.
- 24 55. Marx and Engels, *Werke*, vol. 23, 80.
- 25 56. Negri and Hardt, *Labor of Dionysus*, 9.
- 26 57. To repeat the point, even if we would assume that labor somehow lost  
27 its value form (as Negri claims), we could not conclude that all of a sudden labor  
28 would return to its “immediate” productivity or use value production. Making this  
29 claim repeats the old Marxist error of assuming that use value production is uni-  
30 versal *and* could be realized as communism (somehow stripping away the history  
31 of production and returning to some abstract “human” production).
- 32 58. Marx and Engels, *Werke*, vol. 23, 80; Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1, 159; trans-  
33 lation modified.
- 34 59. *Ibid.*, 169; *ibid.*, 255; my emphasis.
- 35 60. Negri, “Constituent Republic,” 216. See also Negri and Hardt, *Empire*  
36 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 281.
- 37 61. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Werke*, vol. 42 (Berlin: Dietz, 1990),  
38 159; Marx, *Grundrisse*, 231.
- 39 62. Tony Smith, *Globalisation: A Systematic Marxist Account* (London: Hay-  
40 market Books, 2009), 174.
- 41 63. For an overview of how money was conceived in operaism and postopera-  
ism, see Steven Wright, “Revolution von oben? Geld und Klassenzusammenhang  
im italienischen Operaismus,” *Über Marx hinaus*, eds. M. van der Linden and K.  
H. Roth (Hamburg: Assoziation A, 2011).



64. Negri, “Constituent Republic,” 216. 1
65. Ibid. 2
66. See Michael Wendl, *Machttheorie oder Werttheorie: Die Rückkehr eines einfachen Marxismus* (Hamburg: VSA Verlag, 2013), 82. 3
67. Negri, “Twenty Theses on Marx,” 160. 4
68. The reduction to and, ultimately, the *identification* of labor with, communication, however, is a logical claim, for it posits an identity between two activities as the “super-subject” of reality. 5
69. Negri, “Twenty Theses on Marx,” 163. For a similar description, see Negri and Hardt, *Labor of Dionysus*, 10. 6
70. For an excellent overview, see Riccardo Bellofiore and Massimiliano Tomba, “Lesarten des Maschinenfragments: Perspektiven und Grenzen des operaistischen Ansatzes und der operaistischen Auseinandersetzung mit Marx,” *Über Marx hinaus*, eds. M. van der Linden and K. H. Roth (Hamburg: Assoziation A, 2011). 7
71. Negri and Hardt, *Labor of Dionysus*, 10. 8
72. Ibid., 13. 9
73. Reitter, *Prozesse der Befreiung*, 134. 10
74. Antonio Negri, *The Porcelain Workshop: For a New Grammar of Politics*, trans. N. Wedell (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2008), 70. 11
75. I do not want to dismiss the intellectual force of Negri and Hardt’s argument, as I agree with the general intuition behind their claims, namely, that the possibility of emancipation needs to be found within the capital-labor relation. These tendencies, however, seem to be more ambiguous than they admit, however. A similar idealization of scientific knowledge can be found in one of the strongest supporters of Negri and Hardt. According to Moulrier-Boutang, “Science and knowledge, in their mechanisms of production and in their positive effects, are quasi-public goods” because the “brain power” that we find in networks, computerized markets, and the development of immaterial goods, such as brands, is a form of “collective intelligence,” which sounds like the return of the Hegelian world spirit onto the postoperaist scene. Yann Moulrier-Boutang, *Cognitive Capitalism*, trans. Ed Emery (London: Polity, 2012), 30. 12
76. Marx and Engels, *Werke*, vol. 23, 185–186. 13
77. Negri and Hardt deal with this aspect through their concept of “biopolitics.” My comments in this section remain somewhat broad and are overall dissatisfactory. I simply want to point out that an analysis of knowledge production and its system of social relations is more important than Negri seems to acknowledge. 14
78. Marx does not reduce the sciences to “pure” sciences (finding laws, chemistry, basic physics, etc.). For example, in *Capital*, we find an extensive discussion of how the capitalization of agriculture destroys the earth, but he did not see the sciences turning themselves into a system that takes on an industrial character. His claim that the capitalist acquires knowledge “for free” (see Marx and Engels, *Werke*, vol. 23, 407) seems to be wrong, if applied to the current situation, as investments need to be made into the sciences, which—if they are public—take away possible profits. I find Reitter’s position contradictory on this score, as on the one hand, he 15

1 claims that state-run programs threaten logical capital, but, on the other hand, he  
2 argues for science as an unproductive part of production. See Reitter, *Prozesse der*  
3 *Befreiung*, 128 and 134.

4 79. Antonio Negri, *Goodbye Mr. Socialism: Antonio Negri in Conversation*  
5 *with Raf Valvola Scelsi*, trans. P. Thomas (London: Seven Stories Press, 2006), 17.

6 80. *Ibid.*, 53.

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CHAPTER 13

The Risk of Subjectivity

Negri beyond Adorno

*Timothy S. Murphy*

The work of Antonio Negri, in both its scholarly and militant forms, can be understood as an enormous running wager, with continuously increasing stakes, on the persistent viability of collective social transformation. This particular wager is one that many influential contemporary theorists consider a sucker's bet. Consider Jean-François Lyotard's judgment, from *The Postmodern Explained*:

The promise of emancipation was rekindled, championed, and expounded by the great intellectual, that category born of the Enlightenment, defender of ideals and the republic. Intellectuals of today who have chosen to perpetuate this task in ways other than a minimal resistance to every totalitarianism, who have been imprudent enough to nominate the just cause in conflicts between ideas or powers—the likes of Chomsky, Negri, Sartre, Foucault—have been tragically deceived. The signs of the ideal are hazy. A war of liberation does not indicate that humanity is continuing to emancipate itself. Nor does the opening of new markets indicate humanity's increasing wealth.<sup>1</sup>

The wager on emancipation or social transformation is “imprudent” in that it seems to be based on what Lyotard considers the “tragic deception” of idealized progress or development, the grand meta-narrative whose critique is Lyotard's most widely recognized contribution to contemporary theory.

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