Sociology and Psychology

Theodor Adorno opens his seminal 1955 essay “Sociology and Psychology” as follows:

For more than 30 years the tendency has been emerging among the masses of the advanced industrial countries to surrender themselves to the politics of disaster instead of pursuing their rational interests and, chief of all, that of their own survival. While they are promised benefits, the idea of personal happiness is at the same time emphatically replaced by threat and violence; inordinate sacrifices are imposed on them, their existence is directly endangered, and an appeal made to latent death-wishes. Much of this is so obvious to its victims that in endeavoring to understand its workings one finds it difficult to rest content with the decisive task of establishing the objective conditions of mass movements, and not to be tempted into believing that objective laws no longer obtain.¹

This begins to address what is, in essence, the same problematic that I rethink in what follows: If it is manifestly the case that a social form of subjectivity shaped in obedience to the objective social relations of capitalism has tended to “surrender [itself] to the politics of disaster” rather than to pursue — even in the name of its own survival — the rational interests of (say) revolution, does not this in itself already necessitate a mediation such that a Marxian critique of capital’s objective laws becomes commensurable with a theory of that same social form of subjectivity — that is, a social psychology?

Adorno, in envisioning such a theory, finds himself on one hand up against both
the positivistic approach of the social sciences (which would artificially unify the rift between the individual subject and society) and, on the other, vulgar materialism’s outright dismissal of “the subjective conditions of objective irrationality” (i.e., the dismissal of individual psychology as false consciousness mystifying the real ensemble of class relations). In contrast to the above approaches which view the capitalist totality positively, Adorno turns the ‘false consciousness’ of the alienated individual back on itself as also true — as a reflection of the “split between the living subject and an objectivity that governs [reality]” — to posit the individual as itself a manifest social form, “the jarring elements [of which] are invariably also moments of the social totality.” Adorno’s point, then, is that Marx’s social individual (perhaps better, or at least more emphatically denoted a social monad) is not merely a reified appearance arising from capitalist social relations. Nor is its psychology, as a consequence, simply a passive reflection of what counts as no more than an instance of false consciousness. For Adorno, (and in this essay), the social monad is a specific and definite social form historically determined by capitalism — a mediation of capitalism’s determinate sociality no less than the commodity and value forms themselves. Adorno, of course, does not employ precisely this terminology, but the theoretical import here is essentially the same, “the commensurability of individuals’” modes of behavior, the actual process of socialization, is based on the fact that as economic subjects they do not relate to one another at all immediately but act according to the dictates of exchange-value.” The fact that they “do not relate to each other at all” necessarily bears not only on the “individuals’ modes of behavior” as “economic subjects,” but on the form of subjectivity immanent to these individuals, as it is socially constituted by the apparent absence of any social relations. It would be a mistake, however, to conclude from this — as Adorno clearly does not — that the psychology belonging to these socially asocial individuals leaves the commodities they exchange to do what appears to be the actual socializing. (For example, Marx’s classic characterization of a society made up of dancing tables and other phantasmagoria of the fetishized society of commodities.) Commodity exchange, after all, can break down — as the contradictory union of exchange and use values flowers into a concrete instance of the crisis latent within the commodity form itself. Then the question clearly must arise as to the effect that the real breakdown of the objective social relations of commodity society has on the form of subjectivity belonging to the social monads who are nothing but the abstract agents of commodity relations. Although Adorno in “Sociology and Psychology” does not quite put it in such terms, it seems clear enough that this is the direction his thinking has begun to take.

**A Value-Critical Reading of Capital’s Subjective Dimension**

My aim in what follows is to contribute to contemporary efforts both to rethink and to theorize accordingly the subjective dimension of capitalism, in such a way as to be commensurate with the dramatic advances made by value-form critique...
(Wertkritik) in the theorizing of capitalism’s objective laws and tendencies. More specifically, by radically re-thinking the link mediating Marx with an historicized Freud — in a manner adequate to post-Fordist global capitalism — I aim to systematize further a theory of value-form society inclusive of but also emphasizing the subject unconsciously produced by and productive of that same society. In other words, it is precisely the question of what capital has made of us, the subject-form through which capital functions, that this essay seeks to confront, and to do this specifically by historicizing and critically reconstructing modern sociality as it is disclosed in Freudian theory in a way such that it can lend itself — albeit, unknowingly — to a critique of the capitalist subject-form (i.e., Marx’s “social individual,” or social monad).

Necessarily, then, this thesis relies on demonstrating the social monad to be both the form of appearance of capitalism and — as a more totalizing and fundamental abstraction than that of the highly mediated position of class — a category positing capitalist sociality itself:

Interpreting Marx’s analysis as a historically specific critique of labor in capitalism leads to an understanding of capitalist society which is very different from that of traditional Marxist interpretations. It suggests, for example, that the social relations and forms of domination that characterize capitalism, in Marx’s analysis, cannot be understood sufficiently in terms of class relations, rooted in property relations and mediated by the market. Rather, his analysis of the commodity and capital — that is, the quasi-objective forms of social mediation constituted by labor in capitalism — should be understood as an analysis of this society’s fundamental social relations. These impersonal and abstract social forms do not simply veil what traditionally has been deemed the “real” social relations of capitalism, that is, class relations; they are the real relations of capitalist society, structuring its dynamic trajectory and its form of production.

I intend to show the above by extrapolating from Marx’s reconstruction, in Capital Vol. 1, of the commodity: That is, the initial “elementary form” that is both the dialectical starting point and that which constitutes, in its immediate appearance, “the wealth of societies in which the capitalist mode of production prevails.” In Marx’s dialectical reconstruction of it, then, the commodity is revealed as what has itself already posited the value form society: As that which already embodies capital’s essential categories and thus capital’s structural tendency to “delink, to the greatest possible extent,” the accumulation of abstract wealth (exchange value) from its concrete aspect as the material wealth (use value) of society:
The commodity... is the fundamental structuring principle of capitalism, the objectified form of both the relations of people with nature as well as with each other.... It is not a use value that has value but, as the materialized objectification of concrete and abstract labor, it is a use value that is a value and, therefore, has exchange value. ...In its double-sidedness as concrete and abstract, qualitatively particular and qualitatively general-homogeneous, the commodity is the most elementary expression of capitalism’s fundamental character. As an object, the commodity has a material form; as a social mediation, it is a social form.11

It is from reconstruction of the commodity form in Capital Vol. 1 that we can infer that the positing of totality on its subjective side resides — not in the sociological category of class — but in the parallel and elementary subject-form of the monad. As Postone has argued, what is significant about the appearance of capitalist society as “a collection of individuals” is not that it conceals an ensemble of un-alienated, “real” social relations beneath its “made up” character; but rather, that this “decontextualized” character is itself “the form of social contextualization characteristic of capitalism”:

In Marx’s analysis... forms of mystification (of what he termed the “fetish”) most definitely are related intrinsically to their “content” — they are treated as necessary forms of appearance of an “essence” they both express and veil. Commodity-determined social relations, for example, necessarily are expressed in fetishized form, according to Marx: social relations appear “as what they are, i.e... as objective [sachliche] relations between persons and social relations between objects.” In other words, the quasi-objective, impersonal social forms expressed by categories such as the commodity and value... are [the] “real” social relations [of capitalism].12

As such, the subject as social monad is not only the determinate form of appearance of capitalism (as a socialization “captured by the division between subjects” as opposed to their manifest relation).13 Moreover, this subject form is itself that which presupposes the existence of a socialization — as capitalism is — that is neither consciously (nor in essence) oriented toward the production of humanity, “where production appears as the aim of mankind and wealth as the aim of production.”14 No less than the commodity, the simultaneously asocial and collectivized form of the monad — itself the embodiment of the all-sided competition of capitalist sociality — is a determinate relation produced and further reproducing a capitalism that in ever larger parts of the world has become virtually synonymous with neo-barbarism, “wherein both the market and the mechanical demiurge of the state have declared the majority of people superfluous,” or “monetary subjects without money.”15
In order to elaborate further the parallel between the commodity and the monad as both as forms of appearance and as embodiments of capital’s essential categories, my central aim will be to show that the categorical antagonisms exposed to view in Freud’s late theory of the subject (the antagonism between the libidinal and death drives) are, in fact, the obverse reflection of the categorical antagonisms embodied in the commodity (between material wealth and value). Ultimately, I intend to show that the determinate antagonisms embodied in these elementary forms (the commodity-form and that of the social monad) signal the obverse sides of the same social crisis — a latent contradiction that is actualized in post-Fordist global capital as a crisis of social self-reproduction become social self-destruction. I will elaborate this thesis further by arguing that Freud’s superficially mystified and biologized theory of the death drive, once shorn of its falsifying immediacies, can be seen to parallel the objectively social compulsions of valorization. This is a connection that appears latently in the crisis of what Robert Kurz has termed “the Fordist wars” — the two twentieth-century world wars — the first of which was what prompted Freud to revise his earlier theory by positing the presence, alongside the libidinal drives, of an opposing “death drive.” But the value-form’s activation of the death drive is made fully manifest in the crisis ongoing today: in the sheer pervasiveness of violence engendered as value realizes itself only at the expense of human needs and only through a process of systematic de-socialization. (Or more concretely, value now realizes itself only by declaring a mushrooming, precaritized and racialized population virtually unexploitable and superfluous). As such, the blind compulsion of valorization, engendered by and through the spontaneous actions of the social monad, increasingly realizes itself, in the rush towards terminal crisis, as a diktat of what Ernst Lohoff calls “social suicide.”

Broadly speaking, I hope that by elaborating the ways capitalist social relations are pathologized what follows might also serve to develop further the economic personifications argument frequently referenced from Capital — “the actors on the economic stage are merely personifications of the economic relations between them.” In this oft-cited claim, the very fact that Marx’s social individuals appear as capital’s “actors” — one whose aims appear both universalized and emptied out — signals a critical reversal. Value has become the identical subject/object of history. And it is precisely because the twentieth-century onward has emerged as a permanent (if occasionally alleviated) crisis of value that, as I would argue, this peculiar social form of subjectivity requires further systematization — and all the more emphatically today, as the manifold symptoms of what may well be capital’s terminal crisis — however prolonged and uneven — becomes more and more palpable, “falling production of surplus value at the same time as growing consumption of resources, overladen by the prospect of wars over increasingly scarce material resources, squandered in the valorization of capital, and for the chance to valorize the last remains.” Specifically, with the objective tendency of the rate of
profit to fall, the personifications foisted through the value-relation — That is, the rational agent who appears to actively subordinate all external conditions and so maintains a mythical, socially uplifting average rate of profit — no longer coalesce with the contemporary reality of the pathologized subject, in the thrall to ever more irrational aims and completely impotent regarding their effects. Indeed, as the possibility of exacting surplus today tends, “like value itself, toward zero” — such that the eventual realization of value projects itself into a fictitious post-crisis capitalist future — capital nevertheless continues to reproduce its economic relations in ever more perverse and barbaric forms via the pathological compulsions by which capital mediates itself through us: for example, the “social psychosis” of a collective subject driven to sacrifice “the life prospects of millions of people... for the sake of a desperate attempt to balance state budgets.”

Finally, I want at least to suggest in this analysis that an understanding of the latently pathologized social relations constituted by and through the process of self-valorization — and fully manifest in the current (terminal) crisis unfolding today — in fact hints at the social itself as the standpoint of a more adequate critique of capitalism, the latter now understood as a form of socialization that cannot be progressively affirmed except at the cost, ultimately, of affirming its own self-annihilation — a capitalism that has only itself to lose.

**The Significance of Wertkritik: A Critique of Exploitation within Capital versus a Critique of the Capitalist Social Form**

But why elaborate the above by historicizing Freud? No less, one would be forgiven if they were puzzled by the apparent absence of the cultural Marxism of the Frankfurt School as an established locus theorizing capital’s subjective dimension. (In this regard, Lukács’s *History and Class Consciousness* — best summarized in the concept of reification as an attempt to re-elaborate a broader and more flexible form of Marx’s concept of fetishization — really represents the first serious attempt to work out the question that I am now attempting to re-think via both *Wertkritik* and Freud). Since my essay, broadly speaking, hopes to re-elaborate capital’s subjective dimension in a manner adequate to the global crisis currently unfolding, I would suggest that such a project, in its very definition, necessitates a radical rethinking along the lines of contemporary value-form theory (the latter epitomized for me in the Germanophone tradition of *Wertkritik*, which begins by breaking with the limitations of labor movement Marxism or *Arbeiterbewegungsmarxismus*). As I will argue below, such a critique of traditional Marxism is called for not only regarding how it conceives capital’s objective dimension, but additionally, its assumptions regarding capital’s subjective side. Or, in other words, a traditionally inclined critique of capital’s subjective dimension — represented foremost by the Frankfurt school, despite its heterodox standing vis-a-vis the Marxist-Leninist orthodoxy still ascendant at the time of its founding — cannot simply be incorporated without qualification.
This remainder of this essay will explain the significance of its reinterpretation of the objective dimensions of capitalism, before seeking to extend and extrapolate Wertkritik in regard to capitalism’s subjective dimension (represented in Frankfurt School). By so doing, I will seek to justify why I have sought to re-elaborate this pathologized form of subjectivity as it is disclosed (if unwitting) in Freudian theory — as well as elaborate the stakes, if we should fail to fully confront such a form of relationality.

The crisis-oriented Wertkritik school — taking positions that in part stem from and converge with Moishe Postone (despite the latter’s consciously methodological bracketing of crisis theory) — has systematized a critique of the objective side of capitalist socialization, grounded in its immanently contradictory dynamic: as a historically specific form of objective dependence and abstract domination constituted by labor as a (nonconscious) socially mediating activity:

The system constituted by abstract labor embodies a new form of social domination... a form of social compulsion whose impersonal, abstract, and objective character is historically new... this form of domination is not grounded in any person, class, or institution; its ultimate locus is the pervasive structuring social forms of capitalist society that are constituted by determinate forms of social practice.²⁴

By rethinking the structuring categories of capitalism as above (i.e., abstract domination), contemporary schools of Marxian critical theory have sought to realize a more thoroughgoing critique of the capitalist social form. And specifically, by emphasizing how the structuring categories of a traditional Marxian critique (Arbeiterbewegungsmarxismus or workers’ movement Marxism, to use the term commonly employed by Wertkritik) tend to precipitate a more limited critique of exploitation within capitalism (i.e., “class domination”).

In essence, Wertkritik’s position here is that traditional Marxism, in emphasizing “the exploitation of labor” but failing to take into account labor’s non-conscious, socially mediating function under capital has tended to bury the more esoteric categories of Marx “beneath a mere redistributionist understanding... imagining a science that would be oriented toward devolving surplus value to the labor that creates it.”²⁵ As a socialization constituted by the objective necessity of labor and mediated behind the backs of those reproducing it, capital cannot be fully encompassed by a critique primarily framed in terms of a personalized and quasi-intentional form of domination (class), according to which the material products of labor are unequally distributed:

A characteristic of capitalism is that its essential social relations are social in a peculiar manner. They exist not as overt interpersonal relations but
as quasi-independent set of structures that are opposed to individuals, a sphere of impersonal ‘objective necessity’ and ‘objective dependence’. Consequently, the form of social domination characteristic of capitalism is not overtly social and personal…. Relative to earlier social forms, people appear to be independent, but they are actually subject to a system of domination that seems not social but objective.  

That is, while a critique of exploitation, as such, is socially important, it generally precipitates a focus purely on the level of distribution (i.e., of the products of labor which are unfairly expropriated) — as opposed to a critique of the determinate mode of production, and labor itself, as it constitutes the very fabric of society, “the value relation does not constitute itself in contradiction to labor, but rather encompasses labor as precisely another of its forms of appearance — labor is... itself already a ‘real abstraction’ no less than the commodity form.” And as such, a critique of distribution does not fully grasp the structuring categories of this social form. Capital, understood via the categorical distribution of value and material wealth, as asocial sociality, precipitates not simply the rationalizable aim for profit, but a contradictory dynamic beyond the conscious control of both capital and labor — as an end-in-itself now itself entirely dissociated from material necessity and the fulfillment of desire. 

Thus, in order to fully realize a totalizing critique of capitalist sociality, contemporary value-form theory has sought to demonstrate that social contradiction as it is traditionally conceived via class conflict (the antagonism between private ownership and exploited labor) is a highly mediated expression of capital’s contradiction, one whose presence is substantially eroded with the rise of Fordism (by definition the supersession of “self-regulating” liberal capitalism with state-planned consumption). What the juncture of state capitalism must incontrovertibly force us to confront — the flattening of class distinction even as social inequality substantially continues to deepen — are the limits of ‘traditional Marxism’s’ class standpoint as such, the affirmation of labor, against capital. Moreover, because Fordism is not a raising of the wage so much as the cheapening of the life means of the worker — there is no Fordism without Taylorism — the latter’s “transformation of worker into machine” ultimately reveals the category of labor as a determinate “source of unfreedom,” rather than a category to be realized or affirmed. 

This position is elaborated in Trenkle’s introductory essay, “Value and Crisis: Basic Questions,” wherein he explains that the category of labor (divided in Capital Vol. 1 between its abstract and concrete functions and traditionally read — at times by Marx himself — as simply mediating between man and nature) is itself already abstract. That is, even in its concrete form, labor — as the form of work constituted under capital — is not a natural category, but a socially determinate one. Trenkle explains:
What is socially and historically specific about... this form of labor is that in the first instance the fact that work is a separate sphere, cut off from the rest of its social setting... the historical establishment of labor is accompanied by the formation of further separate spheres of society, into which all those dissociated (abgespaltenen) moments [of non-labor] are banished, spheres [of social life] which take on an exclusive character. \(^{31}\)

Ultimately, Trenkle establishes here that labor-as-the-dissociation-of-social-life doubles as an instance of total social mediation, “only where commodity production has already become the determining form of socialization — in capitalism, that is to say, where human activity in the form of labor serves no other purpose than the valorization of value.” \(^{32}\)

In sum, *Wertkritik’s* value-critical standpoint, having established labor as a historically specific form of work not opposed to but determined by the value relation, makes possible an immanent critique of value-form sociality itself. This it does by rethinking the structuring categories of critique and by emphasizing that these structuring categories precipitate a systemic compulsion that escapes the control of both capital and labor. Specifically, *Wertkritik* and similar forms of value-form critique have emphasized that the affirmation of labor ultimately results in a critique that seeks to realize the essence of a monstrous form of socialization, affirming the supposedly concrete side of capitalism against its abstract side (i.e., as labor against capital) and thereby threatening a structural similarity to Fascism. \(^{33}\) Rather, the abolition of capital requires that labor serve not as the standpoint of critique, but as the object of critique; requires not the abolition of private property, but the abolition of value.

**Rethinking Capital’s Subjective Categories: The Frankfurt School**

Yet, if *Wertkritik’s* position epitomizes (in my view) an immanent critique of capital — a “theory of crisis founded on the critique of value” — it is (notoriously) undeniable that the mediation of this dynamic via its subjective dimension is under-theorized — and problematically so. \(^{34}\) I would argue that this is especially the case given that the traditional category for conceiving the subject, class, is jettisoned, potentially begging the question as to the character of the subject form responsible for the nonconscious reproduction of this system. Thus, in order to adequately address the continued reproduction of value-form sociality, I intend to elaborate briefly the basic issues of a traditionally inclined critique of capital’s subjective dimension: represented foremost by the Frankfurt school, and most systematically so in the (oppositional) critiques of Lukács and Adorno. The overwhelming issue when utilizing either György Lukács or Adorno today — notwithstanding that each critique is in its own right absolutely foundational — is the centrality afforded to class, which results in each critique passing over, in oppositional ways, the subject form that embodies and is in itself determinate of capitalist socialization (i.e., the social monad):
The form of domination related to this abstract form of the universal is not merely a class relation concealed by a universalistic façade. Rather, the domination Marx analyzes is that of a specific, historically constituted form of universalism itself... characterized by the historically constituted opposition of the abstract social sphere and individuals.... The modern opposition between the free, self-determining individual and an extrinsic sphere of objective necessity... is historically constituted with the rise of commodity-determined social relations, and is related to the more general constituted opposition between a world of subjects and a world of objects.\(^{35}\)

My point in returning to the category of the collectivized individual (and the antagonisms embodied in it) is essentially parallel to Wertkritik’s motivation, as they assert that the truly fundamental categories of capital are the antagonisms embodied in the commodity (and not labor as such, as appears in a traditional critique). Just as the examination of labor in abstraction of its determining objectifications (in the commodity) has resulted in the affirmation of this historically specific form of work that is itself what mediates a monstrous form of socialization; the category of class has — among other concerns — obscured, dismissed, and otherwise inconsistently affirmed this historically specific, determinate subject-form the social monad.

This problematic, I would argue, represents a serious inconsistency within Lukács’s undertaking in History and Class Consciousness — perhaps the foundational text of a theory of the social form of subjectivity constituted by it.\(^{36}\) On one hand, it is here that Lukács establishes that the forms of manifestation of value generate not only the conditions of existence, but the form of consciousness, “understand[ing] reality as a social process... dissolves the fetishistic forms necessarily produced by the capitalist mode of production and enables us to see them as mere illusions which are not less illusory for being seen to be necessary.”\(^{37}\) But, on the other hand, this value-critical position — “wherein reality strives toward thought”\(^{38}\) — is posed in real tension with Lukács’ quasi-Weberian affirmation of individual rationality. I would say this is especially the case in Lukács’ rejection of psychoanalysis tout court as irrationalism, “its rejection of reality is wholesale... containing no concrete criticism.”\(^{39}\) A symptomatic, and pivotal issue here is that Lukács grounds his critique of capital by positively opposing proletarian labor to bourgeois ownership, the former as that which must be realized.\(^{40}\) Describing class as a standpoint, as that which must be affirmed, forces Lukács to reject the importance of the negative, specifically, in his desire to realize consciously the sociality of capitalism, rather than to unveil, and abolish, the unconscious compulsions of the subject form through which it functions.

While Adorno (especially in “Sociology and Psychology”) explicitly emphasizes the non-conscious reproduction of the totality of capitalism — thereby launching a damning critique of the idealized, self-determining rationality of its subject form
— this critique paradoxically exists side by side with the affirmation of the same monadic character: as a hermetic enclosure against (what appears in Adorno as) capital’s totalized, administrative universe. Postone explains this contradiction by arguing that while Adorno (following Pollock) rightly considers the categories of class and totality as understood in liberal capitalism, he does not “reconsider the source of the limitation of these categories, namely, the one-sided emphasis on distribution.”

Thus, he paradoxically maintains that the proletariat was the central contradiction of capital, one that is neutralized under state capital, “the rationality of self-preservation is ultimately doomed to remain irrational because the development of a rational collective subject, a unified humanity, failed to materialize.”

It ultimately becomes clear that with the reconsideration of class and totality as categories to be affirmed, social contradiction, and thus the self-reflexive ground of immanent critique, have vanished. Paramount in “Sociology and Psychology” is Adorno’s use of the unconscious to bring to light the ‘scars’ of totalitarian violence in the hope of lessening it, but it fails to recognize that the pathological is as much symptomatic of the social ‘wounds’ (i.e., of capital’s totalized universe) as it is of social contradiction.

Thus, in Adorno, the subject as social monad appears as a preserve against the dehumanizing pseudo-individuation of a universalizing apparatus, “a totality that no longer tolerates any hiding places in which an in any way autonomous subjectivity that has not been already processed by society could conceal itself.”

As such, the above critique (of both Lukács and Adorno) is in some sense the basis from which I argue that the ground for systematizing the subjective dimension of capitalism must necessarily begin — as Marx does for capital’s objective side — by retracing the elementary form of the monad as a “social hieroglyphic.” Just as value, as a purely social relation, falsely appears to be a thing thanks to the objectified form of the commodity; so too, the subject-form of the collectivized individual embodies and is in itself a social relation: the positing of a specific sociality occurring in abstraction from, say, conscious, erotic relationships or a purposive concern for the maintenance of life means. That is, the foundation of capital’s asocial sociality (the inner-contradiction of capitalist socialization between total sociability and radical asociality) is itself posited in this pathologized subject form.

Such a critique of the subjective dimension of capitalism, as an automatically and unconsciously produced socialization, must necessarily mediate itself vis-à-vis a theory and critique of its pathologized subject-form — now clearly manifest in capital’s terminal crisis — and arguably must at least set out from a historicized Freud.

**Immanent Critique in Marx and Freud: A Theory of Crisis Arising out of Capital’s Elementary Forms**

Firstly, any possible ground for a genuine mediation linking up Marx and Freud is to be sought on the level of method: namely, that both can be seen as initiating an
immanent social critique of capitalist socialization, beginning with the essential, contradictory forms under which it appears. Regarding Marx, of course, one can assume this claim as simply a given; but almost the opposite could be said of Freud. Therefore, the bulk of my argument below will seek to establish that the Freudian critique, while naturalizing what are in fact relations specific to value-form sociality, nevertheless offers an immanent account of only the subjective dimension of capital, once this critique is itself subjected to historicization. Framed as if a critique of primordial history, the tell-tale heart of Freud’s critique is its form: appearing (if much less systematically so and with much more limited scope) as the uncanny mirror of Capital.

Firstly, in the case of both Freud and Marx, the immanent foundation of critique is apparent in their distinct beginning and end points: retracing, from presumed social immediacy, elementary forms, which are critically reconstructed as both the form of appearance and the determinant mediations of (capitalist) socialization. Moreover, both the Marxian and Freudian critiques disclose these socially determinate forms (the commodity and the social monad, respectively) as antagonistic unities, embodying the immanent possibility of a social crisis. For Marx in Capital Vol. 1, the commodity manifests itself as the contradictory unity between use value and an exchange value (the latter the form of appearance of value). For Freud in Civilization and its Discontents the individual monad — by no means a self-contained, self-conscious rational unit — is determined by and further determines social existence according to universalized, unconscious instincts, which are divided between life/libidinal and aggressive drives (the latter as a form of appearance of the death drive). Finally, in the case of both Marx and Freud, the veiled third term, while actually existing, is tangible only in an externalized, mystified form. Value, in appearing, falsely, to reside inside the commodity as its positive content — discovering its authentic form of appearance only in the circulation of any arbitrarily given use value — actually discloses itself as a social relation obscured when one specific commodity acquires as its use value an independent value form (money). Likewise, Freud’s postulation of a death drive (the aim of life being, purportedly, to return to an inanimate state) appears as such only when projected outward as individual aggression or when condensed with the aims of the libido. Insofar as Freud stipulates that the death drive is a collectivized aim, not alleviated but continually reconstituted by the constraints of society (albeit in nothing like the following dialectical, de-mystified terms) Freud describes as a “drive” what is, effectively, no less than is value, a social relation.

Thus, in both cases, the tenuous cohesion of these elementary forms is itself the positing of a social crisis: the antagonistic aspects tenuously unified in the commodity, as well as the dual, antagonistic characteristics held together in the form of the individual, can just as easily be dirempted. When in the Grundrisse Marx justifies, “bringing the commodity forward” — as an end product that is in fact the positing of the specifically capitalist form of production — he accords central importance
to the fact that the commodity form is constituted as a unity of these antagonistic aspects — that “can just as directly split apart.” If the ramifications of this are not explicitly stipulated in the Grundrisse, they are certainly made explicit in Claus Peter Ortlieb’s “A Contradiction between Matter and Form.” Ortlieb asserts that in order to assess the true effect of continually increasing labor productivity, with its corollary goal of generating an eternal fountain of relative surplus value, it is necessary to examine such productivity’s objectified results in the contradictory forms of value and material wealth. Here, Ortlieb calculates what is already stipulated in Marx’s critical, demystified labor theory of value: that productivity directly varies with the mass of use values produced, but inversely with the mass of value mediated by the former. Hence, Ortlieb’s emphasis, that this same dual character of the commodity both embodies and is itself, what Marx terms capital’s “moving contradiction” — one that is continuously reproduced as capitalism works its way unceasingly even if unevenly towards its terminal crisis.

And, just as the diremption of the commodity reveals, in crisis, the blind dynamic beneath the frozen image of reality, it follows that the antagonistic character of the social monad as subject — as “an element of the movement of commodities and as an impotent observer of that movement.” That is, it splits apart as the pathologizing of such a subject becomes manifest. In the case of Freud, the full realization of the crisis embodied in the dual character of the individual is intellectually realized and rendered explicit in his late theory of the artificial group or die Masse — that is, mass society as it is instantiated by and through the crisis brought on by the “Fordist Wars.” Specifically, in Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego, Freud (reading the crowd as a social totality) reconstructs the ambivalent bond of identification occurring between members of the die Masse as merely the ideological displacement of the all-sided competition and violence at the core of liberal modernity, “the reversal of what was first a hostile feeling [the all-sided competition of social existence] into a positively-toned tie of the nature of an identification.” Ultimately, it is this ambivalent relation of identification (a narcissistic ‘mirroring the same’) which embodies, for Freud, a potential social crisis: as, during the First World War, this relation is no longer displaced as common spirit between pseudo-concrete universalized subjects, but manifestly appears as modernity’s foundation on violence brought home — as a collectivized fetishization of (self)-destruction. And from the above, Freud concludes (undialectically), the existence of an ontological antagonism between the life and the destructive instincts: an antagonism which both necessitates the formation of civilization to repress it and which is continually reconstituted and reactivated by the social domination necessary for civilization.

Thus, the real divergence here is that Marx’s immanent critique not only describes social contradiction (the diremption of value and material wealth) as a definite tendency due to the drive of each individual capitalist to exact relative surplus value and thus the drive to devalorize the commodities it produces absolutely vis-à-
vis capital as a whole. Rather, in Marx, social contradiction allows for a self-reflexive critique, able to ground its own conditions of possibility; and, moreover, allows for the immanent possibility of an alternative social formation. Freud, while positing the immanent threat of the death drive, regards the extant civilization stemming from the renunciation of the immediate gratification of the pleasure principle as the best of possible worlds: “the most irrefutable indictment of Western civilization and at the same time the most unshakeable defense of this civilization.” These divergences in method are suggestive in themselves of the political differences which follow. Freudian theory — by naturalizing its own historically specific conjuncture — assumes the impossibility of a preferable alternative and as such orients itself as a palliative therapy within a repressive, normative order.

In contrast, Marx’s dialectical materialism — which understands itself to be systematizing the historically determinate nature of its own social form — is thus oriented toward the immanent possibility of this form’s abolition, as freedom from capital’s dehumanization and pauperization. For, as Postone formulates what is perhaps the core argument appearing in the final pages of Chapter 1 of Capital Vol. 1, while “labor as such does not constitute society per se, labor in capitalism, however, does constitute society.”

Capital Vol. 1 captures the totality of modern social relations precisely because labor under capitalism is no longer merely the production of goods but functions instead as a socially mediating activity:

The dissolution of all products and activities into exchange values presupposes the dissolution of all personal (historic) relations of dependence in production, as well as the all sided dependence of the producers on one another. Each individual’s product is dependent on the production of others; and the transformation of his own product into the necessaries of his own life is similarly dependent on the consumption of others. Prices are old; exchange also; but the increasing determination of the former costs of production, as well as the increasing dominance of the latter over all relations of production only develop fully, and continue to develop completely, in bourgeois society... the reciprocal and all sided dependence of individuals who are indifferent to one another forms their social connection.

A juncture overlooked by Freud, capitalism constitutes a decisive rupture from the social evolution of pre-capitalist, tributary systems, which are reproduced via overt and personalized relations of domination — under which all aspects of social life, including labor and the production of wealth are subordinated. That is, in contrast to capital, premodern sociality is mediated via conscious relations of power: “if, therefore, one were to write the theory of the tributary mode of production, the title of the work would have to be Power instead of Capital [...] and the title of the first
It is only under capitalism that social reproduction becomes unconscious, asocial sociality, attaining an objectivity that seemingly exists over and above the individuals it produces:

Looked at from one side, the commodity’s rise to dominance as a form of wealth leads to the formation of a highly socialized system... at the same time, the reduction of wealth as such to wealth in its commodity form signifies a systematic desocialization... under which social relations exist only as relations between things... [and wherein] the social effect and social reality [of these products] appear totally irrelevant.

Because Freud does not understand the death drive as something historically constituted by and through capital, he is forced to consider the crisis embodied in capital’s social-monad-as-subject as a literally biologized and thus inescapable death drive. As Marx says of materialists in general, “The crude materialism of the economists who regard as the natural properties of things that are social relations of production among people, and qualities which things obtain because they are subsumed under these relations.” As such, Freud characterizes the crisis this drive represents — the threat of unmitigated destruction — as immanent to a civilizational order that nevertheless cannot but be preserved. In other words, with abstraction from its historical determinants, crisis becomes, in Freud, a tautology.

“As If” a Drive: The Pathologized Violence of Value-Form Relationality

This is to say that critical Marxists should not take seriously the pervasive violence of modern sociality as it is brought to light in Freud’s materialist critique. As the historically determined relationality through which we as subjects confront one another, such pathologized, all-sided violence is (non-consciously) socially constitutive and constituting; and in this sense, perhaps best conceptualized ‘as if’ a drive:

The truth of the whole sides with one-sidedness, not pluralistic synthesis: a psychology that turns its back on society and idiosyncratically concentrates on the individual and his archaic heritage says more about the hapless state of society than one which seeks by its ‘wholistic approach’ or an inclusion of social ‘factors’ to join the ranks of a no longer existent universitas literarum.

In other words, despite the many credible indictments of Freudian theory (whether Marxian or otherwise) critical social theory still cannot, as it often has, comfortably throw out the antagonism of the death drive to the life instincts as simply specious:
and precisely because Freud does instigate an immanent (if also uncritical) theory of the pathologized relations of value-form sociality. This argument above is perhaps most systematically and cogently made in Ernst Lohoff’s “Violence as the Order of Things and the Logic of Extermination,” which argues that while Freud’s materialist approach definitely masks the “constitutive but buried connection” between the death drive and the commodity subject, this theory is indisputably an immanent critique of capitalism’s systematic foundation on violence:

“As in Hobbes and Hegel before him, in Freud the constitutive but buried connection between violence and the commodity subject is brought into view. Like his predecessors, of course, he can only reveal this intimate relation by clouding its specific character and turning it into something transhistorically and naturally given, substituting projection for repression. The projective character of Freud’s phylogenetic myth can scarcely be ignored.”^65

In particular, Lohoff argues that the character of the death drive discloses not violence as such, but its specific form of manifestation under capital. This is not at all to suggest that pre-capitalist societies were inherently peaceful, “to be sure, the propensity for violence was well known in traditional societies... as a medium of oppression.”^66 Rather, the fact that social violence appears to Freud as a drive (i.e., as a collectivized aim and not qualitatively differentiated, as a function of power), necessarily corresponds to the historically specific scope of violence under capital, which appears as uniquely universalized and decontextualized: “violence in the context of commodity society transformed itself into the foundation of all subject forms.”^67

As such, the death drive according to Freud must be treated as actually existing, precisely because of the rigorously immanent, if superficially biologized approach he adopts: beginning, not from an unfounded conception of totality according to abstract concepts, but empirically retracing what is seemingly immediate — that elementary form, the subject as a self-enclosed, monadic unit. Just as the commodity is not merely what it appears—a purely thingly substance — but appears instead as an objectification of value (itself a social mediation), so too, the social monad does not, as it appears in capitalism, assert pure self-interest (as if fully manifested in outright competition or aggression). Rather than merely being compelled as individual acts, it falls under a more general compulsion (here, the death drive). Likewise, Freud posits as socially decisive an apparently objective, universalized aim by which all other desires are coded — and under which erotic and material satisfaction are, to put it in value-critical terminology, dissociated.^68 Moreover, just as Marx’s critique self-reflexively accounts for itself via the contradictory dynamic of capitalism (as it is posited in the elementary form of the commodity), Freud’s critique accounts for
itself in the surfacing of the pathological, wherein ‘normality’ becomes visible in its true light:

The mental life of human individuals, when subjected to psycho-analytic investigation, offers us the explanation with the help of which we are able to solve a number of riddles in the life of human communities, or at least set them in true light. ⁶⁹

This is essentially to say that, if ahistorically, Freud nevertheless grounds a self-reflexive and immanent critique, via the surfacing of the pathological as social contradiction—the latter posited as an ‘elementary’ (and antagonistic) social form of subjectivity—as the social monad.

As such, once Freud’s theory of the subject is realized as projective in character (rather than written off as an acritical reified reflection), the death drive can be seen to constitute the obverse reflection of the objective laws of capital in crisis laid out by Marx. As the unconscious dimension of value mediated society, the death drive parallels the objective social compulsion of valorization, indifferently to and — contemporaneously as the current, arguably terminal crisis of capitalism continues to unfold — in conflict with actual human needs as fulfilled by material wealth. Just as for Freud the crisis of civilization is not the exclusive result of the seemingly self-interested, aggressive desires of individuals but is actually the external manifestation of a historically specific death drive; for Marx, the competition between capitals (and individuals) is truly the expression of social interest — the contradictory drive of capital in general to de-valorize itself.

Indeed, insofar as the socioeconomic reality of today only now fully begins to correspond to the fundamental categories as laid out in the first chapter of Capital Vol. 1 — so too does Freud’s instantiation of the death drive come into its own as an actually existing category, fully manifested as the operative compulsion under contemporary global capital. ⁷⁰

In the succession of the economic categories, as in any other historical, social science, it must not be forgotten that their subject—here, modern bourgeois society—is always what is given, in the head as well as in reality, and that these categories therefore express the forms of being, the characteristics of existence. ⁷¹

That is, as the repercussion of capital’s central antagonism today becomes actualized, we as critical Marxists can no longer afford to shrug off Freud’s postulation of a death drive as a conjunctural, affective reaction or as bourgeois ideology any more than we would be willing to shrug off the First World War as an isolated episode of self-destructive violence, having nothing to do with the continued reproduction of
value-form sociality. As Robert Kurz has wryly put it, the violence of the First World War is hardly an isolated manifestation, external to the essence of capitalism:

In the prevailing bourgeois-democratic ideology, characteristic of its self-deception and historical distortion is that it seeks, as far as possible, to detach the inner contradiction of capitalism from... world catastrophe in the transition to the second industrial revolution. Even if begrudgingly compelled to connect the ‘Ur-catastrophe’ of the First World War with the genuinely capitalist processes of colonialism, imperialism and the arms race of competing emergent national economies (although mostly from a perspective [which regards them] as somehow ‘time-conditioned’ excesses, having nothing to do with the true essence of capitalism), the apologetic bourgeois and liberal thinking of the West follows a different pattern for the period after 1918, in order to blur the traces of blood still continuously left behind by the unfolding of capitalist history.\footnote{72}

But today, least of all, can the death drive be discounted, as a chronically crisis-ridden global capitalism in its own paroxysms of hyper-violence reaches the immanent limits of its global self-valorization and hence of its and all of humanity’s self-reproduction. On the one hand, the fundamental antagonism intrinsic to the commodity makes itself felt in its complete disregard for human needs: If the destruction of real material wealth is necessary for the preservation of value in the system, then such material will be not given to the largely unemployed labor force it has pauperized, but destroyed:

if the destruction of material wealth serves the valorization of value, then material wealth will be destroyed... into this category [falls]... environmental destruction: the long-term fertility of the soil... air and water of a quality that can be breathed and drunk... biodiversity and undamaged ecosystems... or a climate that is hospitable to human life.\footnote{73}

But as the self-end of value continues to demand unrelenting devotion from the subject it has so continuously reproduced that it comes to resemble time’s carcass, the antagonistic character of the latter becomes, in parallel fashion, fully dirempted. That is, where this subject is compelled, in its powerlessness over the objective social processes, to postpone the unrealizable aim of valorization, whether in the form of regressive collective identities or in the form of the mob, the resulting uninhibited violence and destruction that cannot, as, in appearance can the realization of value, be continuously deferred, become, not only in appearance but in actuality ends in themselves.\footnote{74}

It is in this sense that social crisis for Marx, and the crisis of civilization for Freud (systematized in Capital and Civilization and its Discontents, respectively) become one
and the same: despite a real scarcity of resources and the increasingly superfluous population of a now virtually unexploitable, de-socialized reserve army of the unemployable, the objective, social drive of valorization compels capitalists personified to destroy the material conditions of life.

**Capitalism and Its Discontents: Abstract Labor and Abstracted Erotics in Freud**

To further substantiate the idea that Freud and Marx articulate obverse sides of the same social crisis, I next want to fully demonstrate a claim made, in brief, earlier: that Freud’s conception of the evolution of civilization from its archaic roots is necessarily a projection of the drives constituted by and through value-form sociality. On a fundamental level, the naturalization of this social form is endemic to Freud’s corpus: but it is most directly visible in *Civilization and its Discontents* (and other such anthropological works as *Totem and Taboo*) in Freud’s assumption that civilization, from its very beginnings, is mediated by the necessity of labor (rather than power). That is, by ontologizing the socially mediating function of abstract labor as an aspect of civilization per se, Freud further projects necessity as constituting the predominant category of unfreedom throughout civilization. Namely, Freud hereby veils the historically determinate form of necessity that is, under capitalism, socially synthetic —with a wholly imaginary natural scarcity of existence:

Th[e] naturalization of abstract domination is reinforced by the overlapping of two very different sorts of necessity associated with social labor. Labor in some form is a necessary precondition—a transhistorical or “natural” social necessity — of human social existence as such. This necessity can veil the specificity of commodity-producing labor — that, although one does not consume what one produces, one’s labor is nevertheless the necessary social means of obtaining products to consume. The latter necessity is a historically determinate social necessity... Because the specific social mediating role played by commodity-producing labor is veiled, and such labor appears as labor per se, these two sorts of necessity are conflated in the form of an apparently valid transhistorical necessity: one must labor to survive.75

Further symptomatic of this naturalization is that the character of labor in Freudian theory mirrors precisely its unique character under capital as ontological: as abstract, asocial activity that excludes the material, sexual realm. This is to say that, for Freud as well as for Marx, labor has attributed to it a socially mediating abstract function, with the exception of course that for Freud labor is understood ontologically.

Firstly, a primary indication of Freud’s naturalization of capitalist relationality is that he takes, as his point of departure, not the manifest relation between subjects, but their division from each other—in the absence of the overt, direct relations of
dependence and obligation that reproduce early civilization. That is, Freud takes as his point of departure the form of the monad as a structuring category of socialization, as such, “To the modern, Newtonian view (see also Leibniz’s ‘windowless monads’) [there corresponds] a concept of human society that no longer takes as its point of departure the commonality of its members but their separation/division from each other.”

Because Freud naturalizes this historically determinate form of subjectivity—imagining civilization as a collection of individuals—he likewise imagines, just as the bourgeois economists do, that such a mythologized civilization would have begun via an originary social contract meant to prevent outright the otherwise certain manifestation of individual aggression, maintaining the security of survival. This security is instantiated via subordination to the taboos of the primal father: which Freud further imagines as the compulsion to work, in the abstract, as if it were transhistorically the case, that “the aim of humanity is production.”

Moreover, Freud imagines that the “work” necessary to sustain civilizational security would mandate the restriction of the libidinal aims to a steadfast affection for mankind in general. Here, Freud reasons that such an abstraction from libidinal aims is necessary in order to sustain a society for work in common, because sexuality does not allow bonds that are strong enough to function as social mediation. Or, in other words, he assumes that sexuality is naturally expressed as a monogamous, private relation—such that sexuality is constituted as entirely self-sufficient between merely two individuals, and thus would not sustainably bind together a large community. Indeed, Freud characterizes civilization and sexuality as antithetical:

Sexual love is a relationship between two individuals, in which a third can only appear superfluous or disturbing, whereas civilization depends on relationships between a considerable number of individuals... [Eros] clearly betrays the core of his being, his purpose of making one out of more than one, but when he has achieved this in the proverbial way he refuses to go any further.

In Freud’s view, because of the necessarily limited social bond made possible by sexual love, it could not protect against the aggressive, destructive impulses that manifest themselves between different groups—that which necessitates the formation of civilization in the first place.

It is precisely the above conception of civilization and sexuality as antithetical that betrays, in Freudian theory, a naturalized, capitalistic character, “the form of social contextualization characteristic of capitalism is one of apparent de-contextualization.” That is, it appears in Freud as social reproduction qua socially abstract universal affection. Apparent in Freud’s conceptualization above is both an ahistorical character, in that sexuality as such supposedly cannot, constitute a form of social, political reproduction; and a hidden projective one—such that an asocial reproduction of
society wherein man is ontologically “born into scarcity” can thus only be mediated by necessity against starvation — as labor.⁸¹ In the first case, as Michel Foucault cogently demonstrates in the *History of Sexuality*, pre-modern Platonic love (although not without its share of abstract idealism), functions as a kind of practical social tutelage whose public character is specifically visible in that it functions, among other things, as a kind of apprenticeship for technical skills.⁸² Moreover, this classic example is not an exception so much as the rule regarding premodern social forms in which maintained and reproduced the fetishism of power necessitates that the relations between people are fetishized (or, in Freudian terminology, cathected).⁸³ In other words, in pre-modernity (i.e., pre-capitalism), social reproduction by no means appears as abstract affection entirely liberated from its physical, sensuous aspects, but relies on conscious, tangible personal relationships to reproduce itself—politically and educationally. Only under the modern social form, after labor itself (per the value relation) comes to mediate the social (unconsciously, and indirectly, in the absence of direct, structural relations of dependency) do the public and practical aspects of Eros undergo abstraction into categorizable personhoods (with sexuality relegated to the private realm).

Symptomatically, Freud argues (transhistorically), not that personalized relations of dependence secure social reproduction, but that this occurs through the sphere of work itself, “[work] attaches the individual firmly to reality... for his work at least gives him a secure place in a portion of reality, in the human community.”⁸⁴ Outside of this, community is secured only by abstract masculinist affection, “of which women are little capable.”⁸⁵ Ultimately, that Freud conceives the sublimation of sexuality as necessary to sustain civilizational security, qua labor, can only be symptomatic of the fact that work, in Freud, is already naturalized as an abstraction and labor is endowed with a synthetic, mediating function that is contentless, a withdrawal from life. As Trenkle has argued regarding the already abstract category of labor in capital:

abstracting means withdrawing or withdrawing from something... what is socially and historically specific about... this form is that in the first instance the fact that work is a separate sphere, cut off from the rest of its social setting. Whoever works is working and doing nothing else. Relaxing, amusing oneself, pursuing personal interest, loving, and so on—these things must take place outside or at least must not interfere with its thoroughly rationalized functional routines... for this reason, that is, as a result of the exclusion of all the moments of non-labor from the sphere of labor — the historical establishment of labor is accompanied by the formation of further separate spheres of society, into which all those dissociated (abgespaltenen) moments are banished, spheres which take on an exclusive character.⁸⁶
Work, peremptorily dirempted from Eros, appears in Freud as, necessarily, a naturalization of capitalist labor, a withdrawal from social life: “civilization is the obeying of the laws of economic necessity, since a large amount of the psychical energy it uses for its own purposes has to be withdrawn from sexuality.”

“The War of All Against All”: The Social (and Self-Undermining) Compulsions of Valorization and the Death Drive

Yet Freudian theory, if properly historicized as a critique of capital, is hardly dismissible as a reification: and precisely because, as above, Freud retraces and reconstructs the ideal, immediate thought-forms of modern socialization so as to critically posit its actually existing tendencies (albeit in abstraction from the real governing structures of the social form it critiques). Or, Freud’s dogged and reified materialism accurately conceives of the modern social totality via its unconscious, driving compulsion in that Freud (unknowingly) parallels Marx, in opposing free satisfaction not with economic necessity rather than with the constraints of power. Although Freud clearly does not understand this necessity to be socially synthetic, as does Marx, this formulation can only describe modern social relations. No less, like Marx, Freud posits this relationality as, undeniably, self-undermining: That is, the latter’s positing of the threat to socialization (civilization) as a threat coming from within civilization as its own veiled, objective social drive. For Freud, the drive is towards the inward goal of death. Freud originally defines the death drive, in Beyond the Pleasure Principle, as a self-destructive one, “the aim of all life is death [since] looking backwards, ‘inanimate things existed before living ones.” In Civilization and its Discontents, Freud revisits this drive, exploring its tangible implications as an inclination toward aggression: as that which civilization originally represses, it persists in the unconscious as a continued threat of disintegration. However, Freud does not revoke here his understanding of the primary drive as in fact the drive toward self-destruction:

It might be assumed that the death instinct operated silently within the organism toward its dissolution, but that of course, was no proof. A more fruitful idea was that a portion of the instinct is diverted towards the external world and comes to light as an instinct of aggressiveness and destructiveness. In this way the instinct itself could be pressed into the service of Eros, in that the organism was destroying some other thing, whether animate or inanimate, instead of destroying its own self. Conversely, any restriction of this aggressiveness directed outward would be bound to increase the self-destruction which is in any case proceeding.
That Freud formulates with cogency that capital’s unconscious dimension — the obverse reflection of the objective laws constituting value-form sociality — is specifically apparent in that this instinct toward aggressiveness, while manifesting itself as a competition between monadic, individual interests, is, in essence (as competition is in Marx), the external expression of a generalized (social) compulsion. Indeed, Marx’s conception of competition directly overlaps with Freud’s treatment of the death drive as a veiled substance whose form of appearance is outwardly directed aggression as the war of all against all. Moreover, Freud’s use of this dictum to characterize (capitalist) society’s foundation on violence critically diverges from its emergence in Hobbes to parallel its use in Marx. For Marx specifically argues that the war of all against all enacted in the necessity of valorization (as free competition) is merely the manifest form of the real, reciprocal dependence of value-mediated society:

The real point is not that each individual’s pursuit of his private interests promotes the totality of private interests, the general interest. One could just as easily deduce from this abstract phrase [free competition] that each individual reciprocally blocks the assertion of the others’ interests, so that, instead of a general affirmation (my emphasis), this war of all against all produces a general negation. The point is rather that private interest is itself already a socially determined interest… bound to the reproduction of its conditions and means.

In other words, for Marx, capitalist competition hardly operates as the negative function understood by Adam Smith and other bourgeois economists: as the breaking up of monopolies and, as such, the realization of individual freedom. Rather, its real function as a law is as a mechanism of mutual compulsion. Specifically, it is the compulsion to increase productivity by decreasing the socially necessary labor time and thus decreasing the mass of labor employed toward valorization. As such, what free competition really represents for capital in general is its immanent contradiction, insofar as this compulsion is the real de-valORIZATION of labor-power. It is that which maintains, by constantly renewed self-valorization the total value in the system. Because, of course, it is value that reproduces the social under capital, this drive threatens the destruction of the social itself.

Crucial to solving the puzzle of how the law of competition seems to go against the fundamental self-interest of all capitalists is Marx’s assertion that the absolute value of the commodity is immaterial to the capitalist who produces it. Rather, only its relative value is important, such that the capitalist realizes whatever value he advanced, in addition to the surplus carried along with it. While the labor theory of value, in Marx’s formulation of it, clearly denotes that the value of commodities (including the commodity of labor power itself) is inversely proportional to productivity; on the
other hand, relative surplus value and productivity are directly proportional. This loophole is fully realized with the advent of “real subsumption,” or the necessity of obtaining relative surplus value (the impossibility of extending the working day, or obtaining absolute surplus value). Hence, the individual capitalist, seeking only to drive down the price of the labor power by increasing productivity, drives down the socially necessary labor time by forcing all other capitalists to adopt this new standard. Crucially, this process creates an increased mass of use value over which is spread the same (exchange) value. The effect is as follows: the said capitalist must create a more extensive market in order to realize the value embodied in this larger material mass — but this can only be done by selling his products below their social value. However, this does not cause a loss of value for this capitalist in the singular, who, having increased the relative portion of the working day, is thus able to appropriate greater surplus value even by devaluing his own products.

The result of this compulsive repetition in contemporary global capital becomes increasingly manifest: it represents the real, shrinking possibility of exacting surplus, and thus the decreasing possibility of valorization. In this regard, Ortlieb systematically assesses that as a progressively higher rate of exploitation is achieved by increasingly driving down socially necessary labor time, the mass of surplus value spread over the mass of material produced can only decrease absolutely. Indeed, as the amount of surplus time becomes increasingly higher in proportion to necessary labor time, the amount of surplus value extracted becomes incrementally lesser and lesser: “with unlimited growth in productivity, [the rate of surplus value] tends, like the total value, toward zero.” 94 Indeed, in post-Fordist capitalism — identifiable as such in that the effects of productivity here render an enormous amount of labor power permanently unexploitable — the semblance of the continued total growth of value is in actuality, “the creation of a new basis for accumulation in... the systematic anticipation of future value in the form of fictitious capital” as claims to value in the form of bonds, stocks, etc. “now [too] reaching its limits.” 95 This transformation is systematically delineated in Trenkle’s “Labor in the Era of Fictitious Capital.” That fictitious capital — as the structurally necessary postponement of the absolute limits of valorization — no longer merely promotes capitalist valorization but indeed, in contemporary society, has itself become the essential ground of the system. The implications here are not only that capital’s real foundation of valorization in labor no longer exists, but that, even as fictitious capital would seem to postpone such a crisis, its continued reproduction of the capitalist process results in a critical short-circuiting, in “accumulation without valorization.” 96 The indefinite postponement of valorization, which cannot possibly be realized via its no-longer-extant-foundation, not only runs the risk of destroying capital in general, but moreover, realizes the social compulsion of valorization only at the expense of social reproduction:
While the production of material wealth until the end of Fordism was merely an extrinsic means to augment abstract wealth, it at least implied a direct (if instrumental) relationship... but when the systemic function of material wealth is reduced to providing imaginary material for the anticipation of future value, indifference toward the content, conditions, and consequences of that production intensifies to the extreme. The accumulation of abstract wealth is delinked from its material side to the greatest extent possible. [Thus] the continual destruction of... social coexistence... is becoming [capitalism's] essential content. In the most conspicuous embodiment of this dynamic, countries in crisis like Greece, Spain, and Portugal are being forced to shut down large segments of their social and health systems... in the name of the (notoriously illusory) expectation that the state will at some point be able to pay its debts. In these cases, the outright destruction of material wealth becomes the reference point for further accumulation of fictitious capital.  

Thus — and possibly for the first time — contemporary society manifests clearly the categorical antagonisms in Marx and Freud (as material wealth against value, and the libidinal against the death drives) as social crises — and, moreover, as the same social crisis. Since labor as such reproduces the social, the compulsion of valorization even as this ground has evaporated has come to result in actual social self-destruction. On one hand, this manifests itself in the sheer pervasiveness of violence “characterized by autonomous operators running amok, killer sects, warlords of every description, and transnational NGO’s of another — terrorist — stripe.” That is, as Robert Kurz has argued in Weltordnungskrieg, the “terminal stage of the capitalist end in itself” realizes itself in (the re-emergence of) a war of all against all. 

The anomic condition of a “war of all against all,” first emerged in the transition to a totalized system of exploitation and statehood at the beginning of modernity; and, with the inevitable end of modernity through the barbaric dissolution and self-destructive process of this system, it emerges again... on a planetary scale. However, the character of these anomic relations of violence unconsciously reflects the difference between the beginning and end... [While] the early modern period, circa the Thirty Years’ War, did not represent consciously defined goals, this horizon implicitly determined the course of events and gave the actors a certain logical orientation.... The postmodern anomic has the horizon of only dissolution and destruction... negatively globalized humanity... pushed to the limit of objectivized fetish-relations.
Moreover, made palpable in such a logic of annihilation, the sheer abstractness of the commodity subject’s “destructive will” intimates not merely the “destruction of the ‘other’... for the purposes of self-preservation at all costs,” but the desire for self-destruction, the futility of existence under the aegis of value.\(^{101}\)

**How Solutions to the Contemporary Crisis becomes Dystopic in Marcuse: The Importance of Capital’s Essential Categories (Value versus Material Wealth)**

Finally, while it is clear that contemporary capitalism truly has reached its absolute limits, it is also clear that this reality is not liberating, but destructive—in the absence of a social movement, “the transition to a liberated society of whatever kind presupposes conscious human action. But it does not follow from this that in the absence of such a transition capitalism can continue to function without a care: it could also end in horror.”\(^{102}\) In this regard, Marcuse’s *Eros and Civilization* attempts, more or less, to articulate the immanent form of such a liberated society, and uniquely, by addressing both of these social crises. While absolutely crucial to the above analysis, and certainly path-breaking, Marcuse’s answer to the above (joint) crisis is, essentially, limited by the conjuncture under which it is conceived — which is to say that it, as a traditionally inclined critique, shares in the aforementioned problems discussed of the Frankfurt school. Symptomatic here is that Marcuse’s solution to the above social crisis is not, ultimately, structurally different than Freud’s refutation of the workability of ‘communism’, understood as the abolition of private property and with it and the satisfaction of human needs—with Freud’s logic here being “aggressiveness was not created by property.”\(^{103}\) Despite its uncritical nature, this is a riposte worth mentioning: because, in the sense that Freud’s death drive (mirroring the contradictory tendency of capital to destroy, ultimately, the social host on which it depends) is in fact the social compulsion, under the value relation, of literal social self-destruction, Freud actually launches a correct refutation of the idea that with the redistribution of wealth, all social problems will ultimately be solved. This is certainly not to imply, on the part of Freud, any sophisticated understanding of Marxism (or intentions parallel to it); but that due to the value-critical immanence of his methodology, Freud is nevertheless able to intuitively reject such a solution to the crisis of modern socialization as problematic. Marcuse does not place sufficient emphasis on capital’s critical and defining antagonisms and thus this solution is inherently limited to being a critique of distribution within the value-form. (When I say this, I refer to the essential antagonisms as posited, per *Wertkritik’s* reading of the first chapter of *Capital Vol. 1*, between material wealth and value, and between total sociability and radical asociality — rather than simply the exploitation of labor). Specifically, here, Marcuse skews capital’s abstract form of domination and thus the historically determinate form of necessity as it appears in Marx: that is, he opposes free satisfaction to relations of power (as instrumental reason) rather than to an objective and socially synthetic necessity. As such, Marcuse’s emphasis on
administrative domination (as the locus of an imperative to extract an amount of labor unnecessary for material wealth) ultimately hypostatizes the form of labor under capital as a transhistorical category — and stunts the impetus of some potentially more radical conclusions.\textsuperscript{104}

On one hand, Marcuse correctly pinpoints the locus of capital’s crisis as its sheer productivity: Under Fordism labor becomes so enormously productive that the total amount of social labor expended could ideally be reduced. Here Marcuse argues that a surplus repression of sexual drives structures the relations of production, such that “the inhibitions are imposed... by a hierarchical distribution of scarcity, by the... interest in domination.”\textsuperscript{105} As such, Marcuse argues that the immanent possibility of increasing leisure time outside the toil of labor would depend not on realizing abundance for all, but lowering the absurd standard of living such that productivity only need fulfill basic human needs universally with distribution according to need. Actually, in \textit{Capital Vol. 1}, Marx argues much the same thing: industrial technology could be used to free labor from toil. However, this is conditional: technology, when its use value is subsumed by capital, the value relation cannot but further enslave its workers. The problem here is that Marcuse makes necessary labor to refer to material necessities — a certain standard of living, unjustly distributed abundance, etc. That is, Marcuse does not treat productivity as embodying this central antagonism of material wealth and value, but instead treats it as the problem of domination — of falsely perpetuated scarcity that perpetuates unnecessary labor. But in \textit{Capital Vol. 1} socially necessary labor refers to a socially synthetic and quasi-objective form of necessity. It is not, then, domination that perpetuates an unnecessary amount of social labor in spite of such high productivity; but rather, that the creation of new sectors of mass production offset the effect of the “monstrous compression of work” (i.e., the real reduction of socially necessary labor time) that Fordist productivity represented.\textsuperscript{106} As such, the effect of this enormous increase in productivity after Fordism has literally freed labor, not from toil but from the means to appropriate subsistence; truly positing that unfreedom under capital is due to necessity, and not immediately to domination (as power).

Moreover, by limiting his critique to one of domination as the locus maintaining a hierarchical, material scarcity — that is, a critique of distribution — Marcuse actually ontologizes the toil of labor as a fact of human existence.\textsuperscript{107} Contingently, Marcuse argues not for the abolition of labor, the form of life it maintains and the totality it generates, but rather posits that while labor can never be a realm of freedom, decreased domination for the sake of profit would “release time and energy for the free play of human faculties outside the realm of alienated labor.”\textsuperscript{108} This becomes, if anything, even more apparent in Marcuse’s “On the Philosophical Foundation of the Concept of Labor in Economics”: even as labor is realized as a site of unfreedom, it simultaneously becomes an inescapable one — which could be ameliorated (via the concept of “play”) but not abolished.\textsuperscript{109} For, while the concept of play initially appears
as an immanent possibility created by the contradictions of capital itself, the issue here is that Marcuse naturalizes the bifurcation of labor and social life (or play) that constitutes capitalism, (as if the already abstract concrete form of capitalist labor as an existential category of human activity is inseparable from this solution). Moreover, by so doing, Marcuse in actuality hypostatizes the two antagonistic sides of the capitalist totality: both what it ‘intends’ and what it dissociates. Play — formulated as the suspension of the directed control over the effect of social production — describes, precisely, an unconsciously produced totality: that is, both capitalism as “total sociability” oriented according to an intentional drive for profit and its latency as “systematic de-socialization” wherein social reality, the social effect of objects is irrelevant. Within Marcuse’s ontological understanding of labor, play exists not as freedom ‘outside’ capitalist domination, but merely represents the activities and realities it dissociates (including, in effect, the enormous amount of labor power rendered permanently unexploitable after the ‘provisional resolution’ of Fordism). In effect, hypostatized here are both antagonistic sides of the capitalist totality—thereby rendered inescapable.

Abolishing and Appropriating Capital’s “Made” Social Relations: Or the Social Itself as Standpoint

The point of working through Eros and Civilization is to argue that distribution, domination, and most of all, labor, are all forms that are determined by the value relation. And, insofar as global civilization is reproduced under this relation, it has meant, in capital’s terminal crisis, the compulsive self-destruction of the social as such. Given that the crisis of contemporary capitalism has today made clear that the affirmation of totality would be the affirmation of a secondary barbarism, this essay has broadly intended to explore at least schematically how a critique which makes visible the pathologized, subjective dimension of capitalism might inform the stakes and might assist in precipitating an alternate standpoint of critique — and specifically via the immanent formation — not of class — but of the absolutely unique character of capital’s automatic, made social relations:

People in capitalism constitute their social relations and their history by means of labor. Although they also are controlled by what they have constituted, they ‘make’ these relations and this history in a different and more emphatic sense than people ‘make’ pre-capitalist relations (which Marx characterizes as spontaneously arisen and quasi-natural [naturwüchsig]).

Just as the contradictory dynamic of capitalism provides the essential ground for reconstituting its productive potential (driven by the self-end of value) for the fulfillment of social, material needs, it also allows the realization that the social
relations automatically ‘made’ under the same socially synthetic end might be, alternatively, re-made. And, following what Marx has shown in *Capital Vol. 1*, the immanent reconstitution of the value-form’s subjective dimension would entail unveiling its historically specific, contradictory form — asocial sociality — as posited via its elementary form (the subject as social monad). Both sides, essentially, depend on consciously realizing (and ‘not only abolishing, but appropriating’) what are in fact social relations constituted in an alien form.\(^{114}\)

I want to suggest, therefore, the unveiling of this dynamic (via the newly critical standpoint that now becomes fully perceptible thanks to a historicized Freud) as a crucial counterpart to an immanent critique of the capitalist social form, beyond the critique of intentional exploitation within capital. Specifically, I want at least to suggest in this analysis that an understanding of the value-form’s latently pathologized and even suicidal (a)social form of subjectivity — what capital has made of us — in fact hints at the social itself as the standpoint of a more adequate critique of capitalism, the latter now understood as a form of socialization that cannot be progressively affirmed except at the cost, ultimately, of affirming its own self-annihilation — a ‘made’ sociality that has only itself to lose. Admittedly, this claim requires a great deal more in the way of analysis and self-criticism: in particular, in regards to how the critique this essay attempts would translate to a workable standpoint of praxis inseparable from its theoretical results.
Notes
3. “Sociology and Psychology” 69, 77.
5. “Sociology and Psychology” 74.
6. Karl Marx, Capital: A Critique of Political Economy Vol. 1, trans. Ben Fowkes (New York: Penguin Books, 1990). See, for example, the passage: “Circulation bursts through all the temporal, spatial and personal barriers imposed by the direct exchange of products, and it does this by splitting up the direct identity present in this case between the exchange of one’s own product and the acquisition of someone else’s into the two antithetical segments of sale and purchase. To say that these mutually independent and antithetical processes form an internal unity is to say also that their internal unity moves forward through external antitheses. These two processes lack internal independence because they complement each other. Hence, if the assertion of their external independence [äusserliche Verselbständigung] proceeds to a certain critical point, their unity violently makes itself felt by producing — a crisis. There is an antithesis, immanent in the commodity, between use-value and value, between private labour which must simultaneously manifest itself as directly social labor, and a particular concrete kind of labor which simultaneously counts as merely abstract universal labor, between the conversion of things into persons and the conversion of persons into things; the antithetical phases of the metamorphosis of the commodity are all the developed forms of motion of this immanent contradiction. These forms therefore imply the possibility of crises, though no more than the possibility. For the development of this possibility into a reality a whole series of conditions is required, which do not yet even exist from the standpoint of the simple circulation of commodities” (209).
7. The one sense in which Adorno’s critical-theoretical stance here coincides with but does not exhaust my own in what follows has to do with his privileging of the exchange abstraction — the exchange of equivalents — and the fact that the exchange relation itself becomes apparently the sole constituent of commodity society per se — to the possible exclusion of other social constituents and other mediate forms of the value-relation such as labor itself.
8. See Heiko Feldner and Fabio Vighi, Critical Theory and the Crisis of Contemporary Capitalism (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015) 5. Feldner and Vighi’s critique develops, in a “parallactic” sense the critique of political economy (Marx) with the critique of the libidinal economy. A central presupposition of their critique is that the mediate link between Marx and Freud is itself only possible to fully theorize through a value-critical understanding of capitalist socialization; and via the latter’s more esoteric categories (That is, such is not possible via a critique that affirms the more
sociological category of class, or one which views the category of totality positively).


10. Marx, *Capital* Vol. 1 125. In *Time, Labor, and Social Domination* Postone writes of these lines: “Thus, Marx has shown that the statement with which *Capital* begins — the wealth of societies in which the capitalist mode of production prevails, appears as an ‘immense collection of commodities’ is only apparently valid. In capitalism, abstract temporal measure rather than concrete material quantity is the measure of social wealth. The difference is the first determination of the possibility in capitalism that, not only for the poor, but for society as a whole, poverty (in terms of value) can exist in the midst of plenty (in terms of material wealth). Material wealth in capitalism is, ultimately, only apparent wealth” (194).


12. Postone, *Time, Labor and Social Domination* 62 and 174. Essentially, this follows Postone’s critique of totality as it is positively conceived in traditional Marxism (i.e., constituted by real or un-alienated relations of labor which are veiled by the decontextualized appearance of capitalist socialization. On the “made” relations of capitalism, I refer to Postone’s distinction between the ‘made’ relations of capital; as opposed to quasi-natural character of pre-capitalist social relations as formulated in *Time, Labor and Social Domination*, 165-66.


15. Ernst Lohoff, “Violence as the Order of Things and the Logic of Extermination” and “Off Limits, Out of Control: Commodity Society and Resistance in the Age of Deregulation and Denationalization,” *Marxism and the Critique of Value*, eds and trans. Neil Larsen, Mathias Nilges, Josh Robinson, and Nicholas Brown (Chicago: MCM’ Publishing, 2014). “Even in classical bourgeois parts of society, the ideal of the ego-sovereign, controlled from within, has probably never been realized to the degree that is often ascribed to it. Subject form and external guidance... are not contradictory” (“Violence as the Order of Things” 245). And: “If both the market and the mechanical demiurge of the state declare that the majority of people are superfluous, do they demonstrate anything other than their own superfluity?” (“Off Limits, Out of Control” 170).

16. Freud’s discovery of the drives and especially the death drive (*Thanatos*) as the second of two broad categories of drives (the first being the erotic/life instincts (*Eros*) occurs relatively late in the progression of his work. This theory represents a major theoretical revision from the centrality of the Oedipus complex and the broader sense of the unconscious that appears in his earlier work.


19. Marx, Capital Vol. 1 179: “As we proceed to develop our investigation, we shall find, in general, that the characters who appear on the economic stage are merely personifications of economic relations; it is as the bearers of these economic relations that they come into contact with each other.”

20. Essentially, I argue here that the hidden kernel of Marx’s “economic personifications” argument — aside from how it discloses the alienating objectification of relations under capital — is an epistemological claim. In Hegel’s pre-capitalist schema of the lord and bondsman, for example, the lord is never doubled as a “personification,” in the thrall of aims that are not his own. Regarding “the identical subject/object.” For more, see Postone in Time, Labor and Social Domination 75: “Marx suggests that a historical Subject in the Hegelian sense does indeed exist in capitalism, yet he does not identify it with any social grouping, such as the proletariat or humanity. Rather, Marx analyses it in terms of the structure of social relations constituted by forms of objectifying practice and grasped by the category of capital (and hence value).” See as well: Neil Larsen, “Lukács sans Proletariat, or Can History and Class Consciousness Be Rehistoricized?” Georg Lukács: The Fundamental Dissonance of Existence, eds. Timothy Bewes and Timothy Hall (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2011).


22. See Peter Samol “All the Lonely People: Narzißmus als adäquate Subjektform des Kapitalismus,” Krisis 4 (2016). Samol divides the above subjective manifestations (the rational subordinating agent versus irrational impotence) according to the Oedipal and Narcissistic pathologies. The argument here is that the former pathology appears in capitalism in an extremely limited sense and thus only fully corresponds to liberal capitalism. Rather, the narcissistic pathology, emerging with the instantiation of mass society proper, is the adequate subject of capital one that is fully manifest in crisis capitalism. The specific phrase, “completely impotent regarding its effects” is paraphrased from Feldner and Vighi’s Critical Theory and the Crisis of Contemporary Capitalism, 79. See also, Juliet Flower MacCannell, Regime of the Brother: After the Patriarchy (New York: Routledge, 1991).


28. As Postone argues, “The significance of the social contradiction goes beyond the narrower economic interpretation as the basis of economic crises in capitalism... It should not be understood simply as the social antagonism between laboring and expropriating classes; rather, social contradiction refers to the very fabric of society, to a self-generating “nonidentity” intrinsic to its structures of social relations—which do not, therefore, constitute a stable unitary whole” (*Time, Labor, and Social Domination* 88). Regarding ‘Fordism’ (and in particular, its relation to the contradictory ground of capitalist socialization), Lohoff contextualizes the rise of state-planned consumption (superseding “self-regulating” liberal capitalism) as a deferral of capital’s essential contradiction between “total sociability” and “radical asociality”: “a society that actually sought to drive absolutely every expression of life through the needle’s eye of the exchange of equivalents would become incapable of self-reproduction. To avoid breaking itself apart, commodity society is bound to de-systematize certain components of the social production of wealth, but only so as to subsume them indirectly within the commodity form.” (“Off Limits, Out of Control” 156). See also Robert Kurz, *Schwarzbuch Kapitalismus: Ein Abgesang auf die Marktwirtschaft* (München: Ullstein Taschenbuchverlag, 2002). Kurz offers a thorough account of how the Fordist “planned investment in consumption” temporarily resolves the lag between investment in the means of production and consumption.


30. See Robert Kurz, “Henry Ford und die Geburt der Auto-Gesellschaft,” *Schwarzbuch Kapitalismus: Ein Abgesang auf die Marktwirtschaft* (München: Ullstein Taschenbuchverlag, 2002) 421-444. Kurz demonstrates that despite its appearance of philanthropic aims, Fordism is in essence not an increase of the wage so much as a cheapening of the life means of the worker — and specifically via the scientific management of labor, the “transformation of the worker into machine” (435). In effect, then, this enormous increase of productivity is only offset by the creation of new sectors of mass production (requiring massive amounts of additional labor) embodied in the form of the automobile as a mass consumption good. See also Postone, *Time, Labor, and Social Domination* on the “pessimistic turn” of critical theory, which with the advent of state capitalism critically reconsiders the notion that labor constitutes “the basis of general human freedom” (103).


33. This position is most systematically elaborated in Robert Kurz, *Schwarzbuch Kapitalismus*, and specifically, the section entitled “Arbeitsstaat und Führersozialismus.” Such an argument is also articulated throughout *Wertkritik*. There is also the related argument to be made here that the
affirmation of working class identity has often resulted in the disassociation of racialized and
gendered others, just as abstract labor itself does in practice.
35. Time, Labor, and Social Domination 163-164.
36. Georg Lukács, History and Class Consciousness, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1971). On one hand, History and Class Consciousness truly epitomizes an immanent social critique: both in its central mandate — “for the dialectical method, the central problem is to change reality” (3) — and because this mandate is realized via the necessarily contradictory nature of capitalist totality — as both the possibility of capital’s overcoming, and the self-reflexive ground of critique. However, as I have tried to elaborate, Lukács’ basis of contradiction in the internal antagonism between the forces and relations of production as manifested in class conflict, contradictorily affirms labor (and totality) as that which is to be realized, the standpoint of critique — and thus remains a critique of distribution. See also György Lukács “What is Orthodox Marxism?” in History and Class Consciousness.
38. Lukács “What is Orthodox Marxism?” 2.
40. Time, Labor, and Social Domination 83. Also, per Postone, “totality, according to Lukács, is veiled by the fragmented and particularistic character of bourgeois social relations, and will be realized openly in socialism. The totality, then, provides the standpoint of his critical analysis of capitalist society” (Time, Labor, and Social Domination 73).
41. Time, Labor, and Social Domination 98.
42. Adorno, “Sociology and Psychology” 78.
43. Time, Labor, and Social Domination 98.
44. “Sociology and Psychology” 73.
45. “Sociology and Psychology” 76.
46. See, Marx, Capital Vol. 1 in his characterization of the the immediate, mystified appearance of the commodity: “Value, therefore, does not have its description branded on its forehead; it rather transforms every product of labor into a social hieroglyphic” (167).
47. “Off Limits, Out of Control” 156.
49. Time, Labor, and Social Domination 164.
50. Time, Labor, and Social Domination 164.
51. Marx, Grundrisse 881.
52. Ortlieb, “A Contradiction between Matter and Form” 82.
53. “A Contradiction between Matter and Form” 82.
54. Here, I paraphrase the above characterizations, both of crisis and the splitting apart of capital’s subject from “Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat” in Lukács’ History and Class
Consciousness. As the adamant reader of Lukács will note, I have reversed the sense of these moments: for example, I read ‘crisis’ in an immanent and objective sense (value) — rather than as Lukács parses it, in terms of class (i.e., the self-realization of the proletariat) when he writes, “the image of a frozen reality that nevertheless is caught up in an unremitting, ghostly movement at once becomes meaningful when this reality is dissolved into the process of which man is the driving force” (181). Likewise, I pose value, and not the proletariat, as the subject of history.

55. Sigmund Freud, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, trans. James Strachey. (London: The Hogarth Press, 1949). The aforementioned centrality of die Masse or the artificial group as a social category appears in Freud’s late theory and is essentially concurrent with the realization of mass society via WWI. Regarding the realization of mass society, see Robert Kurz “Die Urkatastrophe des 20. Jahrhunderts” in Schwarzbuch. Freud’s focus on the “artificial group” represents a radical theoretical revision wherein Freud positions the category of “the crowd” as socially determinant and essentially dispenses with the centrality of the Oedipal pathology. In this essay, I will reference the aforementioned late period of Freud’s almost exclusively, taking the category of die Masse as an essential category of capital; and reading (as has been argued elsewhere) the Oedipal pathology as a highly mediated one that only fully corresponds to the rigid paternalist and class distinctions of liberal capital (and more specifically Victorian culture). In this regard, see: Peter Samol’s “All the Lonely People: Narzissmus als adäquate Subjektform des Kapitalismus” and Juliet Flower MacCannell’s, *Regime of the Brother: After the Patriarchy*.


60. Marx, *Grundrisse* 156.


63. *Grundrisse* 687.

64. Sociology and Psychology 70.

65. Lohoff, “Violence as the Order of Things” 238.

66. “Violence as the Order of Things” 241.

67. “Violence as the Order of Things” 241.


69. Sigmund Freud, “Lecture X,” *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1989) 207. Regarding the more general meaning here, see Peter Gay’s introduction to *Group Psychology* in *The Freud Reader* (New York: WW. Norton & Company, 1989) 627: “Freud wrote little explicit social psychology. One reason for this ’neglect’ may be found in... his brief study presented
here: he thought the individual and social psychology to be virtually the same.”


71. *Grundrisse* 106.


73. “A Contradiction between Matter and Form” 112.

74. “Unrelenting devotion” is Walter Benjamin’s formulation. I reference this specifically as it appears in Feldner and Vighi’s *Critical Theory and the Crisis of Contemporary Capitalism*, which begins with an explanation of the former’s statement, “Capitalism is not only a mode of production, but also a religion” (8). “Time’s carcass” is Marx’s formulation but I reference it as it appears in Evan Calder Williams, “Fire to the Commons” in *Communization and its Discontents: Contestation, Critique, and Contemporary Struggles* ed. Benjamin Noys, (New York: Minor Compositions, 2012) 184. The latter half of this same sentence follows closely from Samol’s “All the Lonely People” (46). There is also a reference here to Lohoff’s “Violence as the Order of Things,” as he characterizes the contemporary “post-statist violence” now entirely diredpted from “any connection to political ends,” as an end in itself (260).

75. *Time, Labor, and Social Domination* 161. While the general meaning (and quotation) in this sentence follows Postone, the specific term, “socially synthetic” is from Sohn Rethel, *Intellectual and Manual Labor* (New York: McMillan, 1978). I use it essentially as a shorthand to demarcate the historically determinate function of necessity in capitalism, according to the following distinction in: “the convenient adjective ‘socially synthetic’... [or] ‘synthetic society’ distinguishes the ‘man-made’ structure of exchange society from primitive tribal society.” But I use this term in a different sense and with another range of meaning from that of ‘social synthesis.’ The first “synthetic” applies only to commodity societies, the second “social synthesis” is understood as a general and basic condition of human existence, with no historical limits” (37).

76. Kurz, “Die Substanz des Kapitals.” (Translation is Neil Larsen’s).


81. “Violence as the Order of Things” 239.
82. Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality: Vol. 1: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1990). While Foucault’s critique begins with historicizing power, it ends by effacing the mechanisms that operate upon the individual. Arguably indicative here is that Foucault does not account for the rupture occurring at the onset of capitalism, where the social is mediated not by power but labor.

83. See Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verso, 1989) on the distinction between pre-capitalist and capitalist forms of fetishistic misrecognition: In capital “the place of fetishism has shifted from inter-subjective relations to relations ‘between things’” (22).

84. *Civilization and its Discontents* 130.

85. *Civilization and its Discontents* 59. The masculine manifestation of the commodity subject is also noted in “Violence as the Order of Things” 240.

86. “Value and Crisis: Basic Questions” 3.

87. *Civilization and its Discontents* 55, 59. In *Civilization and its Discontents*, Freud’s phrasing, “economic necessity” does not refer only to psychic economy (as would be its assumed referent in most instances). Freud elaborates that “love and necessity” as Eros and Ananke — referring therefore to an assumed scarcity or “external necessity” that creates the compulsion to work. On the passage cited, Freud explicitly speaks of “the work of civilization” as necessitating a withdrawal from sexual life; and specifically, even, that “the economic structure of society... influences the amount of sexual freedom that remains.” See also, Lohoff’s critique in “Violence as the Order of Things” 239.

88. *Time, Labor, and Social Domination* 174: “Because labor in capitalism is not really free of nonconscious social determination, but itself has become a medium of social determination [...] the alienated abstract social relations that are mediated by labor [...] constitute a framework of ‘objective’, apparently nonsocial constraints within which self-determining individuals pursue their interests—whereby ‘individuals’ and ‘interests’ seem ontologically given rather than socially constituted.”


90. *Civilization and its Discontents* 78.


92. *Grundrisse* 156.


94. “A Contradiction between Matter and Form” 98.

95. Trenkle, Norbert Trenkle, “Labour in the Era of Fictitious Capital,” trans. Joe Keady, *Krisis* 3 (2015). Here, Trenkle delineates the Third Industrial Revolution (microelectronics) as marking a qualitative change in the relation between labor and capital: under which increase in productivity, the massive amount of labor made redundant cannot be compensated for via the development of new production sectors (as under Fordism).

96. Trenkle, “Fictitious Capital.”

97. “Fictitious Capital.”

98. “Violence as the Order of Things” 260.


In “Die Metaphysik der Moderne und der Todestrieb des entgrenzten Subjekts,” Kurz delineates a “logic of annihilation” per the “destructive will” of the commodity subject, as the process of valorization reaches its absolute limits and the subject “can no longer represent itself in the world of things” (70). Kurz elaborates, “The abstractness of this destructive will reflects the self-contradiction of capitalist relations in a double sense: on the one side it aims at the destruction of the ‘other,’ seemingly for the purpose of self-preservation at all costs, [while] on the other side there is simultaneously a will toward self-destruction, which the futility of their own market economy existence executes.” My translation.

Marcuse does not see Freud as reflecting specifically capitalist relations that are projected into an archaic past. This is an essential divergence between Marcuse’s and Adorno’s reading of Freud. Marcuse suggests Freud expresses something older than the capitalist social form.
quite possibly is related to why Marcuse speaks of capitalist relations as ‘repressive’ rather than productive.

108. *Eros and Civilization* 156.

109. Herbert Marcuse, “On the Philosophical Foundation of the Concept of Labor in Economics” *Telos* Vol. 16 (Summer 1973). Here, Marcuse characterizes the “already abstract” concrete form of capitalist “labor” as a transhistorical category of human activity, arguing that “in the totality of human existence, labor is necessarily and eternally “earlier” than play: it is the starting point, the foundation, and principle of play insofar as play is precisely a breaking off from labor, and a recuperation for labor” (15). The issue at stake is that Marcuse assumes a bifurcation of labor and social life in both ancient civilizations and capitalism; however, only under capital are labor and play (or social life) constituted as separate spheres.


111. “Off Limits, Out of Control” 155.

112. “Off Limits, Out of Control” 156.

