CHAPTER 11

Reproduction

§ 6 Reproduction

With the temporality of circulation, I showed how capital becomes different from itself while remaining the same (as opposed to the formal difference between M′ and M). But this difference is no difference if it lacks all grounds. The grounding movement therefore identifies a real difference of capital from itself in the ‘other’ it expropriates, namely surplus labour. This then incarnates the movement of determinate reflection through which is comprehended the actual reproduction and accumulation of capital. The overall dialectic of our presentation of the capital relation begins with capital as formally presented, but then it is reflected into production, where it is understood that, underlying the surface form of capital, is the generation of surplus value in the production process. Finally, the unity of production with circulation grounds reproduction.

What is reproduced is the capital relation itself, together with the mass of capital in play. Production is mediated in circulation and yet circulation is mediated in production. Circulation informs the production process. Production shows its effects in the circulation of capital. So they are united in the actuality of reproduction, in which each side finds its effectivity vindicated. This has the M–C–M′ circular form, but also the ‘linear’ appropriation of living labour, made available to capital under the wage form. Capital sets the goal, and regulates production accordingly, while production supplies the surplus product to be formed as valorised-value.

On the one hand, the presentation of the value form pivots on the turn to production required to ground the emergence of surplus value. The treatment of production therefore presupposes that it is always already structured by the imposition of this aim. On the other hand, since production is obviously something taken up in all societies, should not the value form categories be taken as the specific social form in which we find the age-old problem now met? I argue that the pure forms of capital, having autonomised themselves from their bearers, have sufficient efficacy to regulate production in the interest of accumulation. Capital returns from production with its hard-won surplus, having engaged in the strenuous process of subsuming its other, labour. On the other hand, there is no surplus unless labour, and its means and material, act effectively as a simple production process, albeit subsumed under capital.
In circulation categories, including that of ‘accumulation’, I treated capital notionally in its form of self-reflection, but then, with the turn to production I reach a sphere of otherness in which it is really reflected in its difference from itself. Most importantly, I treated the dialectic of negativity in which living labour is always potentially resistant to capital. But from here on I ‘quiet’ that constitutive struggle methodologically, for the sake of looking at how capital proceeds on the basis of the hegemony it has secured in the subsumption of labour to its aims.

Circulation and production subsist only in their relation; for each on its own lacks determinate form, and it is hence shapeless chaos; something must be given to circulation, production must be vindicated by sale. Hence each is a determined determinant. However, a true unity is secured in that they are moments of the circuit of capital, which realises itself in their negative unity. Production, as the sphere where difference emerges in opposition to the identities of logical form, allows a surplus value to arise in the sphere of circulation.

This section, that on reproduction, virtually organises itself: it covers § 61 Simple Reproduction, § 62 Extended Reproduction, and finally § 63 Results of the Immediate Process of Reproduction.

§ 61 Simple Reproduction
I deal here with the immediate production process undergone by a typical capital. It is assumed here that any surplus value produced is consumed by the capitalist. (In the following sections, I consider the extended process of reproduction in which the surplus is invested.)

It is here that Marx makes his important diagnosis of the inversion of the law of appropriation, even at the level of simple reproduction. Following Marx, I develop the argument by finessing the issue of an ‘original’ capital investment altogether. Since all value is sourced in labour, ideally all the funds expended by capital must have been at some point accumulated from the exploitation of labour. Certainly, once the system is up-and-running, this has to be so; the fund accumulated at the end of one period provides the initial outlay at the beginning of the next period. Nonetheless, we seem to be committed to the original existence of a capital fund to get the process going. Whence comes this original capital? Does it arise for example, in the hands of the immediate producer as the result of their own labour?

Some such presupposition seems necessary, since only commodity owners with equal rights confront each other, and the sole means of appropriating the commodities of others is the alienation of someone’s own commodities, commodities which, however, could only be produced by labour. Now, however, property turns out to be the right to appropriate the unpaid labour of others.
or its product, and the impossibility on the part of the workers of appropriating their own product. The separation of property from labour thus becomes the necessary consequence of a law that apparently originated in their identity.

In the beginning, it appears that the capital employed must be advanced from funds accumulated in some way independently of the unpaid labour of others, and that likewise the fact that free labourers are available for hire in the labour market is a happy accident for capital. But the capital relation in its action transforms these conditions of its existence into its consequences. Although the capitalist believes that he lives off profits, and retains his original capital, in truth he consumed the original capital after a limited number of cycles of reproduction; the capital he throws afresh into each new cycle soon consists of nothing but the surplus value extracted from the labourers in previous cycles therefore. What at first was merely a starting point becomes, by means of nothing but the continuity of the process, by simple reproduction, the characteristic result.

So the exchange of equivalents is now turned round in such a way that the result is the continual appropriation by the capitalist of the surplus labour of others. The relation of exchange between capitalist and worker becomes a mere semblance belonging only to the process of circulation; it becomes a form alien to the reality of the transaction itself, and merely mystifies it.

The property laws of commodity production undergo an inversion, so that they become laws of capitalist appropriation. Notice that here these property laws are not pre-capitalist ones, but those ‘derived’ from commodity production itself. For nothing is formally changed when labour power itself becomes a commodity. The workers treat their own labour as a property alienable at will through a contract. The capitalist purchases this labour power along with the means of production. From a juridical point of view this is an equal relationship. Buyer and seller contract as free persons, who are equal before the law; each dispose only of what is their own, and they exchange equivalent for equivalent. So it is not necessary that such an ‘inversion’ in the material content of the relationship of private property be marked by any difference in the legal form of property. This continuity of legal form is extremely convenient for the bourgeoisie because it allows them to confuse two different kinds of private property, one of which relies on the labour of the producers themselves, and the other on the exploitation of the labour of others.

This interpretation of the inversion abandons the historical perspective, with its problematic of causal genesis, in favour of an account of ‘genesis’ in logical terms, that is, it articulates the ground of the system’s self-production. We do not presuppose here a mode of simple commodity production giving rise out of its own development to capitalism. Such a history is a ‘virtual’ one.
It is history as it must be written from the vantage-point of capitalism as a given totality retrojecting its interior moments into the ‘past’, as if an imaginary simple commodity production were its foundation and justification.

It is the logic of this system that is investigated here in order to show the inversion of ‘the law of property’ involved. If we presuppose capital already exists, then we leave aside its historical genesis as a field of inquiry. What I do is to point out that it stands in a logical relation of inversion to its own logical preconditions. As capitalist commodity production, it logically presupposes simple commodity circulation, yet inverts ‘the law of property’ derivable from it, namely that the commodity must have been produced by its owner’s labour. This change in the relation of labour to property is truly a ‘dialectical inversion’. But this inversion should be understood as a ‘virtual’ rather than a ‘real’ process. What we have is a totality of capitalist commodity production which posits it as an interior moment forever already sublated. The virtual ‘original capital’ is a vanishing moment, since capital posits itself as its own condition.

§ 62 Extended Reproduction
Whereas in simple reproduction the surplus is assumed to be drained off, in extended reproduction it is taken to be re-invested. Extended reproduction exhibits the intentionality of capital in its pure form because the reinvestment of new value changes the apparent end (surplus value) into means (for further accumulation). There is here a moment of ‘standing back’, and gathering itself together (M + m), verifying that the motive for investing M still holds for M’, in order to launch a new project.

§ 63 Results of the Immediate Process of Reproduction
Since, before workers enter the process, their own labour has already been estranged from them, appropriated by the capitalist, and incorporated with capital, it now, in the course of the process, constantly objectifies itself so that it becomes a product alien to them. Therefore, the workers constantly produce objective wealth, in the form of capital, an alien power that dominates them and exploits them, and the capitalist just as constantly produces labour power separated from its own means of realisation, in short the workers as waged labourers.

It is therefore not an accident that capitalist and worker continue to confront one another in the market as buyer and seller; for the process of capitalist production, seen as a process of reproduction, produces not only commodities, not only surplus value, but it also reproduces the capital relation itself, on the one hand the capitalist, on the other the waged labourer. It is clear from this that the question of the origin in time of the capitalist system is a separate
question, once we demonstrate the ability of the system to constitute itself as a self-reproducing totality. Capital is self-subsistent.

If capitalist production presupposes a division between the product of labour and labour itself, between the objective conditions of labour and subjective labour power, then this foundation of the process reproduces itself through the transformation of labour into surplus value. The most important result of reproduction is that the capital relation is itself reproduced. However, this relation is properly termed the ‘capital relation’ because capital preserves itself, or even accumulates, while alienated labour remains impoverished and unable to escape the relation. This is true even though capital depends upon the appropriation of alien labour; for labour enters the relation on capital’s terms.

Methodologically, an important point of closure is here reached. At the outset of the systematic presentation, exchangeable commodities were presupposed as simply given; now commodities are presented as products of capital; so the beginning is itself the result of the form predicated on it.

What now follows from the fact that, to reproduce itself, capital produces commodities? It means that the value form has now been presented with a ‘content’. All the forms discussed in Division I are those under which are expressed the value of the commodities for which production is responsible.

However, what about those things, taking the shape of commodities, but which are not produced by capital? We are now in a position to remark a real difference between these and capitalistically produced commodities. This is not possible at the level of simple commodity circulation. Now, however, we are able to distinguish those commodities that belong to the sphere of generalised commodity production from others, because their value is the outcome of capitalist production; they are grounded in it. Other commodities are not so grounded.

Why, however, is a stipulative definition of value as the expression of capital better than one immediately referring to the expression of labour? The answer is that only the dialectical development of the form of capitalist production posits value as both its presupposition and result; only in this context is labour, now conceptualised in the shape of waged labour, demonstrably a condition of it. Conversely, non-products must be excluded from counting as genuine values, albeit many are priced.

But is not this distinction somewhat factitious? For I insisted at the outset that the exchange relation comprehends heterogeneous material. It helps if I introduce here the notion of ‘real definition’. It is common in science to address a chaotic manifold of phenomena discriminated by superficial features. Then order and law are introduced to it in such a way that the central category is given a firmed-up real definition, usually related to its attributed causal power.
Much that cannot be explained by this is now declared outside the scope of the new theoretical domain.

So, here, value, originally a surface phenomenon thrown up by exchange, is given a real definition as the outcome of capitalist production. Hence, I now say only those commodities expressing value thus defined ‘count’. Capital, indeed, *defines itself* as their origin, we might say.

*Remark:* For an illustration, consider pneumonia, originally defined as a syndrome of symptoms. An excellent explanation of it was found in the presence of a certain bacterium. Yet not all cases were related to it. The other cases were then set aside, and given their own terms, for example ‘Legionnaires’ disease’.

In sum, commodities grounded in capitalist production are properly distinguished from putative others, as embodying value and surplus value.

Since it posits its own presuppositions, capital may claim to reproduce itself. However, thus far this result remains abstract. The individual capital depends on inputs from other capitals, and it must dispose of its outputs. So only capital as a system may be self-sufficient. In Division III the system of capital is articulated; there reproduction will be outlined on a social scale.

**Summary**

Reproduction is thematised in two stages: simple reproduction and extended reproduction. Any supposed ‘original capital’ is eliminated from the presentation when capital posits itself as its own condition in the circular movement of M–C–M’. From the point of view of the architectonic of the presentation, the most significant result of reproduction is the mass of commodities that at the outset had to be taken as given. However, the reproduction of a single capital is comprehensible only if we turn to thematise reproduction on a social scale.