# The *Grundrisse* (The 1857-58 Manuscript)

## The Chapter on Capital: Part 13

*The Action of Living Labour in the Process of Production* (pp. 354-364)

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Up to this point, Marx observes, we have only talked about those two parts of capital equivalent to the wages paid to the workers (necessary labour) and that equivalent to profit (surplus labour). But there are two other parts of capital: the material of labour, and the instrument of labour.

> As far as the simple production process is concerned, labour presupposes the existence of an instrument which facilitates the work, and of a material in which it presents itself, which it forms. This form gives it its use value. This use value becomes exchange value through exchange, to the extent that it contains objectified labour. (Marx 1973, p. 354)

Marx refers back to a previous numerical example.[1] We saw a capital (advance) of 100 thalers: 50 for cotton yarn (material), 10 for the instrument (the spindle), and 40 wages. This last (the wages) was the equivalent of 4 hours' labour-time, and we assumed that a working day of 8 hours. This meant a capital (as product) of 140 thalers.

The product of the worker is 80 thalers (the monetary form of 8 hours' labour). This is what the worker "reproduces".

So what happens to the 60 thalers of materials and instrument? For the worker, the materials and instrument are use values, not exchange values. "His labour has given them a higher use value, and added objectified labour to the amount of 80 thalers to them, i.e. 40 thalers to reproduce his wages, 40 surplus time." (Marx 1973, p. 355) The worker has not created the labour objectified in the yarn and spindle: she has given them a *new form*, in which new labour has been incorporated.[2] "The previously objectified labour was the condition of *his* labour; it was necessary to make his labour what it is, [but] costs him no labour." (Marx 1973, p. 355) The worker does not *reproduce* the value of the means of production, she *preserves* it, through labour, by adding new value *to* them. As exchange values they exist independently of her labour.

[1] Marx 1973, pp. 344ff.

[2] "The only condition is that he should not waste them, and this he did not do, in so far as his product has use value, and a higher use value than before." (Marx 1973, p. 355)

It is beside the point that this may not be how it appears to the capitalist.

> The individual capitalist may imagine (and for his accounts it serves as well) that, if he owns a capital of 100 thalers, 50 thalers in cotton, 40 thalers to buy labour with, 10 thalers in instrument, plus a profit of 10% counted as part of his production costs, then labour has to replace his 50 thalers of cotton, 40 thalers subsistence, 10 thalers instrument plus 10% of 50, of 40 and of 10; so that in his imagination, labour creates 55 thalers of raw material, 44 thalers subsistence and 11 thalers instrument for him, together = 110. But this is a peculiar notion for economists [...]. (Marx 1973, p. 357)

Marx's point here is that the worker's labour is objectified as new value, and the preservation of the value already existing in the means of production *costs no additional labour*. "Like every other natural or social power of labour [...] this natural animating power of labour—namely that, by using the material and instrument, it preserves them in one or another form, including the labour objectified in them, their exchange value—becomes a *power of capital*, not of labour." (Marx 1973, p. 358)

Capital requires as its "original presupposition" the existence of money as money: "as money which has withdrawn from circulation and asserts itself *negatively* towards it, i.e. value which has become independent from and *against* circulation". (Marx 1973, p. 358)

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Earlier in the Manuscript—in the Chapter on Money—Marx talked about the three "functions" (or "determinations"—"*Bestimmungen*") of money: as measure of exchange value, as medium of circulation, and as "wealth as such". It is in this last function that money is the presupposition of capital—"as value which no longer enters circulation as equivalent, but is not yet potentiated as capital"—but money in this function is at the same time the *result* of capital, or, at least, of the product of capital.[3]

In other words, the increase in value that capital presupposes is the result of its own self-valorisation (Marx 1973, p. 359 has "self-realisation"), and this takes place independently of whether this results from absolute or relative surplus labour-time.

This increase in value is *produced* by living labour. It is a "new creation, and, more specifically, [a] creation of new values, because it is the objectification of new labour-time." (Marx 1973, p. 359) This production takes place alongside its *re*production of its own cost of reproduction—"that part of objectified labour time (of capital) which appears as an equivalent for the power of disposition over living labour capacity" (Mars, 1973, p. 359).

The preservation of the labour-time objectified in instrument and materials is preserved through the action of labour, because labour is labour: capital does not pay for this preservation; it pays for the reproduction of the labour capacity from which the living labour emanates.[4] In other

[3] Marx 1973 has at this point in the text (p. 359) a long subheading; there is no equivalent in the original text, and the paragraph which follows the subheading is a development of that which precedes it.

[4] Marx's formulation that this preservation "is a result *not of the quantity of labour*, but of its *quality* of being labour as such" (Marx 1973, p. 359) is clumsy; what he wants to say is that this act of preservation is a result of the qualitative (rather than quantitative) *aspect* of labour. There clearly *is* a relation between the quantity of labour involved in production and the mass of labour-time preserved (summarised by the measure of labour's productivity.)

words, the cost of the value-preserving use-value effect of labour is the cost of its reproduction *as labour*.

In the act of preservation of the labour-time of the instrument and materials what is preserved is not their *form*, but their *substance*: the former is their physical (material) nature as use values; the latter "viewed economically, [...] is objectified labour time." (Marx 1973, p. 360)

Marx now says:

> There is an indifference on the part of the substance towards the form, which develops out of merely objectified labour time, in whose objective existence labour has become merely the vanished, external form of its natural substance, existing merely in the external form of the substantial (e.g. the form of the table for wood, or the form of the cylinder for iron); no immanent law of reproduction maintains this form in the way in which the tree, for example, maintains its form as a tree (wood maintains itself in the specific form of the tree because this form is a form of the wood; while the form of the table is accidental for wood, and not the intrinsic form of its substance); it exists only as a form external to the substance, or it exists only as a substance. (Marx 1973, p. 360)

This is a complex thought (or set of thoughts). This is what I think Marx means.

The commodity's substance ("economically speaking") is objectified labour-time; its form is whatever use value it is (cotton yarn, say). Yet this substance is "vanishing"—in the Hegelian sense, in that its existence is not dependent on the material form of the commodity. The substance can find expression in a new form (as wood may be chair, or a table, and still be wood): this is the "indifference" of the substance to its form. There is nothing *given* about the form that labour-time can take (there is no "immanent law"): it exists materially only in what it actually exists as, whatever this may be.

But "[t]he dissolution to which its substance [but Marx says "*Stoff*", material ("stuff"), not "*Substanz*"; Marx 2006, p. 272)] is prey therefore dissolves the form as well. However, when they [the use values in which labour-time is objectified] are posited as conditions of living labour, they are themselves reanimated." (Marx 1973, p. 360) The action of labour "dissolves" the material form of the use values concerned, the labour-time along with it, but, in the case of instrument and material, this latter is "reanimated" in the newly-constituted form of the product. In this process the relation between form and substance is not longer one of "indifference", since now this relation is "posited as a moment of the action of living labour." (Marx, 1973, p. 360)

Living labour realises itself in the instrument and material and their transformation through its *purposive* action in the process of production. "Labour is the living, form-giving fire; it is [i.e. expresses iself as] the transitoriness of things, their temporality, as their formation by living time." (Marx 1973, p. 361)

In production, the "transitoriness'" of things (their transformability) is the source of their usefulness: they are useful *because* they are transformable. When, say, cotton becomes yarn, and yarn becomes fabric, and the fabric is dyed, cut, etc., two things happen. First, the substance of the cotton is preserved across multiple forms. Second, the material acquires a more useful form, until finally "it has obtained at the end the form in which it can directly become an object of consumption, when, therefore, the consumption of the material and the suspension of its form satisfies a human need, and its transformation is the same as its use." (Marx 1973, p. 361)

In each stage before its final consumption, the material (here, cotton) is "posited in a specific relation to a further kind of labour. If this labour were not to take place, then not only has the form been posited in it uselessly, i.e. the previous labour is not reaffirmed by new labour, but the material is also spoiled." (Marx 1973, p. 361) Thus it is one of the use values of living labour, insofar as it preserves a previous stage of production, to preserve both the material and the substance of the commodity in question.[5] But labour does not do this separately from its other use value functions, but simultaneously with them. Labour therefore "has the property of preserving the existing use value by raising it, and it raises it by making it into the object of new labour".[6] (Marx 1973, p. 361) And it is in this act of preservation of use value in the form of higher use value that the objectified labour-time is also preserved. But this latter only occurs to the degree that the process of production is a capitalist process of production and its product a product of capital. "*For capital*, this preservation is the preservation of the amount of objectified labour *by* the production process; for *living labour* itself, it is merely the preservation of the already present use value." (Marx 1973, p. 363)

The very existence of capital depends on "the separation of labour from its objective moments of existence—instruments and material [...]." (Marx 1973, p. 364) In the process of production, in the "process of work itself", however, this separation is "suspended"; were it not for this suspension, production could not take place. "The process of the realisation of capital [i.e. the valorisation process of capital: "*Der Verwerthungsprocess des Capitals*"] proceeds by means of and within the simple production process, by putting living labour into its natural relation with its moments of material being. But to the extent that labour steps into this relation, this relation exists not for itself, but for capital; labour itself has become already a moment of capital." )Marx 1973, p. 364)

[5] Marx notes that in this procession towards final consumption the material successively assumes *higher* use value form.

[6] Marx emphasises at this point that all he has said about the material that enters the production process applies equally to the instrument(s) of labour as well. "The increased productivity which it [the isntrument] lends to labour creates more use values and thereby replaces the use value eaten up in the consumption of the instrument." (Marx 1973, p. 362)

## References

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