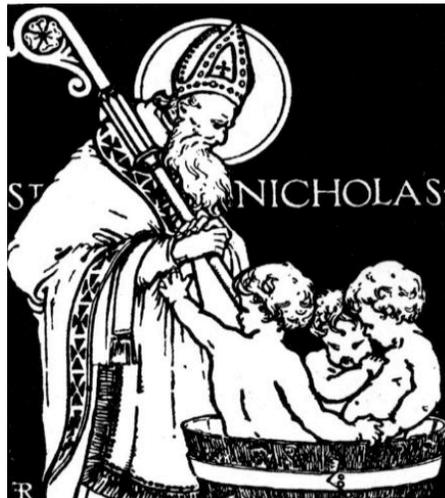


Marx in Jargon

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First Term: “*Bourgeoisdom*”

If ever Buffon’s word was true of any man it was in regard to Marx: The style is the man—the style of Marx is Marx.

Wilhelm Liebknecht, *Karl Marx. Biographical Memoirs.*¹

In his 1873 preface to the second edition of *Das Kapital*, Marx offers a brief report on the fortunes of his “critique of political economy” following its first submission to the public in 1867. The report is compact and polemical, dismissing in style the substance of a few representatively negative reviews, succinctly exposing their arguments for mere detractions—“with the skill of a great master of verbal fence,” as his English gentlemen

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contenders must have thought.ⁱⁱ The report occupies itself exclusively with reactions to *Das Kapital* in the bourgeois press, the official taste-making organs of *Bürgerthum und seinen doktrinären Wortführern*. “The bourgeoisie and its doctrinaire spokesmen”: Marx’s acidic motto for opponents from both the right and the left, both the celebrant practitioners of uncritical “*politische Ökonomie*” and their unwitting acolytes among the fashionable German peddlers of “dialectic in its mystified form.” In the first English translation of 1886, Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling render this motto as “bourgeoisdom and its doctrinaire professors.” “Bourgeoisdom” is not a word that would have tripped lightly from the lips of Marx’s Victorian English readers. They had not read it before. Moore and Aveling use it here for the first time in English. *Bourgeoisdom*. The word is cumbersome, grating and conspicuously jargonistic, stupidly weighed down with the echo of the German *dumm*, not to mention English boredom. Why did Moore and Aveling coin it? Why sharpen the satiric ring of Marx’s phrase? Not, presumably, in order to change the content of a proposition belonging to Marx, but on the contrary, so as to be sure to preserve it. Marx’s English translators wanted English readers for Marx; to make sure that those readers would be reading Marx, and not some bad equivalent of Marx, the English translators in this instance rewrote Marx in jargon. (The twentieth century translator of *Das Kapital* into English, Ben Fowkes, cleaned out the jargon by reverting to the better-established “bourgeoisie.”)ⁱⁱⁱ Moore and Aveling’s version is in this instance jargonistic where the original is not; but the translators must presumably have felt that, far from taking any liberty with Marx’s text or departing from the spirit of it, they had on the contrary kept that spirit alive. It would have been easy enough to give a warrant for this assurance, had one been demanded of them. The warrant is Marx’s own German. *Das Kapital* itself makes emphatic use of jargon, and even depends on jargon, at some of the most important moments of its argument.^{iv}

What is at stake in close attention to the letter of Marx’s text? Is it, in fact, exclusively to the *letter* of the text, what in the long tradition of German hermeneutics is called *der Buchstabe*, that this observation on the word “bourgeoisdom” pays attention? Are we not really thinking about the more complex and larger question of style? If we ask why Moore and Aveling (with Engels’s editorial blessing) invented a jargon equivalent for *Bürgerthum* when “bourgeoisie” had existed in English for almost two hundred years, is our question relevant only to a narrow discussion of translation practice, or is it a question about thinking in *Das Kapital* and thinking in *Capital*? How does Marx’s own writing help us to answer this question?

In his report on the reception of the first edition of *Das Kapital*, Marx wrote that the *Wortführer der deutschen Bourgeoisie*, literally “the spokesmen of the German bourgeoisie” (F: 98)—these *doyens* whom he brushes aside gently in the text of his preface with the mocking double epithet “learned and unlearned,” only then instantly to savage them in a stylish footnote as *breimäuligen Faselhäuse*, “mealy-mouthed babblers” (F: 98-99; MA: 20; MEGA II.8: 52)—these world leaders in words had berated [*schelten*] the *style* of his book. Marx was very sensitive to this criticism; or at least, he was sensitive to the possibility that its judgment of his book might be right, even if he was not disposed to feel vulnerable to the attacking performance of that judgment by the spokesmen of bourgeoisdom. “No one,” he wrote, “can feel the literary shortcomings in *Capital* more strongly than I myself.” (F: 99; MA 21; MEGA II.8: 52) The literary shortcomings: *die literarischen Mängel*. Why should a critique of political economy be vulnerable, as Marx

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felt that volume one of *Das Kapital* was, to the accusation of literary shortcomings, and why should no-one be able to feel these shortcomings more strongly than Marx? In his 1885 preface to the first edition of *Das Kapital* volume two, Engels describes the “not finally polished” language of the notes by Marx left to him after Marx’s death. They are in the “language...in which Marx used to make his extracts: careless style full of colloquialisms, often containing coarsely humorous expressions and phrases interspersed with English and French technical terms.”^v In his notes, at least, Marx relished doing jargon in different voices. For Engels, as the editor and compositor of Marx’s great work, “careless style” is a shortcoming in the obvious sense that it is the style of an unfinished text. But volume one is a finished, “polished” work when Marx comments painfully on its literary shortcomings. Where is the literary language in his book, and how is Marx measuring its importance? Is there in *Das Kapital* an implicit appeal, not to a *category* of judgment supposedly belonging to its readers called “aesthetic” judgment, but to their variously informed, variously experienced and variously practiced *taste* for literature?

Perhaps the most discriminating among the *Faselhänse* will judge his shortcomings of style more justly than Marx himself could ever judge them; but Marx says that no-one judges those shortcomings more severely [*strenger beurteilen*] than he does. It is important to understand what this comment by Marx means. It is not a Lukácsian or Althusserian “self-criticism” *avant la lettre*. Marx is not announcing to the readers of the second edition of his text the retraction of any part of its former content. There is no disciplinarian monologue in which a trace of ideology latent in style is confessed, exposed and eradicated. It is, on the contrary, a literary writer’s expression of anguish over a failure of his own literary writing that he recognizes but that he cannot simply emend. Why can he not simply emend it? Because the failure recognized by Marx is a failure of style, and style is successful when it is forceful, intensifying, illuminating and beautiful, and language is not capable of being *emended* into intensity or into illumination.

These last words do not sit altogether easily in criticism of Marx. Wilhelm Liebknecht could still sing, in 1896, as in the passionate tones of threnody, of how Marx’s “burning love of freedom” found “expression in flaming, annihilating, elevating words”^{vi}; but the admonition of the “revolutionary phrase” by Lenin later urged vigilance against descent into rhapsody, and innumerable mocking references to the rotten haloes and dazzling bad auras of poetic language made in common by authors as unlike as Trotsky and Mayakovsky might seem almost to prohibit outright words like “beauty” and “illumination” from serious discussion of *Das Kapital*.^{vii} What really is the use of discussing the force of Marx’s language as distinct from his theoretical propositions? Shouldn’t Marx’s comment about style be taken for a pragmatic confession of failure to put across his ideas as unambiguously as possible? What other failure of style could really matter to Marx? Do we not give undue and even harmful prominence to the problem of style, which may admittedly in some measure be ineliminable from any attempt to write prose, when we dwell on this comment of his? Is all such dwelling really just aesthetic idling, poisonous to the impulse and capacity to know injustice as Marx meant for us to know it? Will it not always be at the *expense* of Marx’s theory that we focus on his style, just as it was, in Goethe’s and Schiller’s view, at the *expense* of the spirit of Homer “as a whole” [*als Ganzes*] that Friedrich Wolf, the great philologist

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editor of the Homeric texts and the first modern historian of their compositorial construction, focused in his 1795 *Prolegomena to Homer* on the fact that the Homeric texts then available were not those that “flourished in the mouths of the Greeks,” but that they had been “altered, interpolated, corrected, and emended from the times of Solon down to those of the Alexandrians”?^{viii} Is *philologia*, now as at the end of the eighteenth century, in Marx’s case as in Homer’s, in competition with *theoria* for the resources of intellectual loyalty?

Das Kapital is constructed in a way that suggests how readers should begin thinking about these questions; but it does require that anyone who thinks about them should at least be its reader and not simply the curator of its concepts. It is constructed in parts that are both stylistically and methodologically distinct; more importantly, it is written in parts that are stylistically and methodologically disparate. Some parts are more *literarisch* than others. In his footnotes, for example, Marx clearly relishes the risk of style: the learned and unlearned are there transfigured by alchemical subscript into mealy-mouthed drivellers, no longer mere savants who are wrong in theory but now the slaverers of their knowledge, disgusting to the sensitive aesthetic ear. What does it mean that the first instance of direct satire against the *Kleinbürger*, “the petit bourgeois,” in *Das Kapital* occurs in a stylish footnote to a technical and unambiguous discussion of relative forms of value? The *Kleinbürger*, Marx writes in subscript, sees in the production of commodities the “*Weltgipfel menschlicher Freiheit und individueller Unabhängigkeit*,” that is, in Moore and Aveling’s *Capital*, “the ne plus ultra of human freedom and individual independence,” or in Fowkes’s *Capital*, “the absolute summit of human freedom and individual independence.” (MEGA II.8: 98; MA: 79; F: 161) Why is this satirical portrait, which might also be called an exhibition of bathos, mounted only in a footnote, and why in a potentially distracting footnote to a passage of important economic exposition?^{ix}

The most conspicuously *literarisch* part of *Das Kapital*, in which, if anywhere, style is at explicit and significant risk of failure, is part one of volume one. In particular, literary style is risked throughout the section of part one called “*Der Fetischcharakter der Ware und sein Geheimnis*,” that is, the fetish-character of commodities and its secret (influentially mistranslated in both English versions as “fetishism of commodities” and its secret, as if to suggest that the fetishism in question were nothing more than a mode of apprehending commodities, rather than the character of commodities themselves). This most literary part of Marx’s text is the part that Louis Althusser commands his French readers to regard as “extremely harmful.”^x *Das Kapital*, Althusser loudly insists in his own preface to it, is not, like that puerile literary work *The German Ideology*, in essence a “very ambiguous” book; it is, and it is imperative that workers in particular understand it to be, “a book of pure theory.”^{xi} For Althusser, there is, disastrously, jargon in Marx, especially in the section on fetishism, but the real, pure Marx is never and categorically must not be in jargon. What Marx called “literary shortcomings” are equivalent, on this view, to “literature,” any trace and all of it. In the phantom, immaculately conceptual language that would be fit to do the work of Althusser’s pure theory, all style will be contamination. Karl Kautsky in his study of Marx’s economic doctrines considered this most literary and stylish chapter on the fetish-character of commodities “one of the most important in the book, to which every student ought to pay special attention;”^{xii} but this is the same Kautsky later excommunicated by Lenin as

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a “renegade,” and recommendations of this sort can only strengthen the scientific Marxist’s resolve not to “give way to literature” (to borrow this phrase from an author who knew how hilarious and insufferable it is).^{xiii} Kautsky also judged, in 1887, that “it is precisely this chapter which has been most neglected by the opponents, and even by the supporters, of the Marxian doctrines.”^{xiv} If this was true in 1887, today the situation is the reverse. No part of *Capital* has received so much attention from literary theorists as part one, section four. Literary theory has made “commodity fetishism” one of its central and most prodigal motifs. And yet even those literary theorists apparently most skeptical or dismissive of Althusser’s disciplinary scaremongering (and comparable essays in repression) have consistently treated—and still now do consistently treat—*Capital*, and part one, section four in particular, almost or exactly as though it were “pure theory.” Literary theorists have done this even when they have declared as a basic principle of its interpretation that *Capital* “is not just constative, descriptive, truth-telling, but also performative, a speech act, a way of doing things with words.”^{xv} The merits and even the necessity of *philologia* have been recited in homage to the literary qualities of Marx’s writing, but this very homage has tended to invoke philology only in order then to *justify the invocation* in theoretical terms, rather than in order to reflect on the meaning of the text philologically.

I want to suggest in this article a number of reasons why *Capital* has been read, and is still now read, as “pure theory,” in ways that have in practice eliminated the problem of style from its interpretation despite numerous attempts to insist on the significance of that problem and even to formulate it; and I then want to discuss the style of the two texts of *Capital* and the style of *Das Kapital*, and of part one, section four in particular. I hope to show through this discussion, first, that Marx was the author not simply of a theory of capital and of social existence under capital but also of an immensely daring and complicated *satire of social existence under capital*, and that his analysis of “*Der Fetischcharakter der Ware und sein Geheimnis*” is, long before Debord conceptualised the term, a work of sustained, aggressively satirical “*détournement*” in which risks and failures of style are arguments in themselves, irreducible to theoretical propositions;^{xvi} and secondly, that resistance to philological interpretation of Marx among literary theorists, whether principled or unconscious, has contributed to a major misunderstanding of one of the most important ideas in *Das Kapital*.

Second Term: “*Gallerte*”

Conceived purely as a category of natural need, hunger can be quenched with grasshoppers and gnat-cakes, which many savages consume. But it is essential to the concrete hunger of civilized people that they should get something to eat which they do not find disgusting. In disgust and its opposite is reflected the whole of history.

Theodor Adorno, ‘Theses on Need.’^{xvii}

The misunderstood idea in *Das Kapital* is the idea that “*abstrakt menschliche Arbeit*” is a “*bloße Gallerte unterschiedsloser menschlicher Arbeit*.” (MEGA II.8: 70) One reason why this idea in *Das Kapital* has been misunderstood by readers of *Capital* is that it is not present in *Capital*. Moore and Aveling translate Marx’s phrase as “human labour in the abstract...a mere congelation of homogeneous human labour.” (MA: 45) Fowkes writes “human labour in the abstract...merely congealed quantities of homogeneous human labour.” (F: 128) These are mistranslations that cannot adequately be described as mere shortcomings in style; as this division of my article will show, they utterly transform the meaning of one of Marx’s most important ideas *and the thinking that it makes possible*. Why then are they accepted by readers of Marx as though they did not transform his thinking? Because, I will suggest, Marx has been read, and continues now to be read, as though his thinking had nothing to do with literariness and with style, not at least in any radical sense. A little attrition of figurative or tonal particularity in the passage from text to commentary can be regarded as trivial from the perspective of “pure theory” and its higher interpretive protocols. In other words, so long as Marx’s concepts can be specified, Marx’s style need only be enjoyed.

The most important way in which the meaning of Marx’s thinking is transformed, not only by his translators, but likewise and as though collaboratively by current literary theorists, is through their elimination of satire from *Capital*. Ideas not merely expressed by Marx, but pressed by him inextricably into the thick of a complex satire intended for a complex and divided audience, are rescued from that pressure and paraphrased into a form fit for “use” in Marxist cultural criticism. The elimination of satire is not obviously a conscious decision made by translators and theorists. More probably, it is negligence resulting from a rival solicitude. Commentary on “abstract human labour” in the English translations of Marx and in literary theoretical interpretation of *Capital* is dominated by solicitude for conceptual literalism. Readers of Marx want to get the concepts exactly right. Commentary is dominated by that solicitude to the point where Marx’s risks in style, his seizure, infiltration and parodic reuse of what he called “the jargon of Political Economy,” are not simply ignored but are programmatically decontextualized and obliterated.^{xviii} The product is a text boiled down from its original state of internal generic disintegration, stripped of its difficult collage of the poetic, the scientific and the jargonistic *within individual sentences and ideas*, its constitutive ambiguity and, most important of all, its satire, and transformed into a mere array of undifferentiated concepts for theoretical consumption.

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Capital does not include the idea, central to *Das Kapital*, that “*abstrakt menschliche Arbeit*” is a “*bloße Gallerte unterschiedsloser menschlicher Arbeit*.” It includes instead the substitute idea that “human labour in the abstract” is “a mere congelation of homogeneous human labour.” This substitute, imposed by Moore and Aveling and continued by Fowkes, has the considerable advantage that its conceptual content is much easier to specify than the conceptual content of Marx’s original phrase. Moore and Aveling’s extremely influential account of abstract human labor is as follows. Human labor described as having, in effect, a single origin (“homogeneous”), since we cannot see the multitude of its real origins in the commodities that are its products, is *frozen* in commodities: it is a “congelation,” from the Latin verb *congelare*, “to freeze together,” and the Latin noun *gelum*, “frost.”^{xix} Human labor is abstract when it is frozen: lifeless, cold and immobilized. The important word used in *Das Kapital* to describe the opposite condition of labor, that is, unabstract, living human labor, must then be *flüssig*, “flowing,” as when Marx writes that “*Menschliche Arbeitskraft im flüssigen Zustand oder menschliche Arbeit bildet Wert, aber ist nicht Wert*.” “Human labour-power in motion, or human labour, creates value, but is not itself value,” or “Human labour-power in its fluid state, or human labour, creates value, but is not itself value.” (MEGA II.8: 82; MA: 59; F: 142) This use of *flüssig* in *Das Kapital* is no doubt significant, and it of course is used by Marx to describe the lived experience of labor that is not represented in “abstract human labour.”^{xx} But whereas “flüssig” is a direct antonym of “congealed” and of “frozen,” “flüssig” is not a direct antonym of the word that Moore and Aveling and Fowkes translate as “mere congelation” and as “congealed quantities.” The word they translate using the abstract noun “congelation” is “*Gallerte*.” *Gallerte* is not an abstract noun. *Gallerte* is now, and was when Marx used it, the name not of a process like freezing or coagulating, but of a specific commodity. Marx’s German readers will not only have bought *Gallerte*, they will have eaten it; and in using the name of this particular commodity to describe not “homogeneous” but, on the contrary, “*unterschiedslose*,” that is, “undifferentiated” human labor, Marx’s intention is not simply to educate his readers but also to *disgust* them.

The image of human labor reduced to *Gallerte* is disgusting. *Gallerte* is not ice, the natural and primordial, solid and cold mass that can be transformed back into its original condition by application of (e.g. human) warmth; it is a “*halbfeste, zitternde*,” that is, a “semisolid, tremulous” comestible mass, inconvertible back into the “meat, bone [and] connective tissue” of the various animals used indifferently to produce it. The sixth volume of the popular encyclopaedia *Meyers Konversations-Lexicon*, published in Leipzig in 1888, provides the following entry.

Gallerte (also *Gállert*, old German *galrat*, middle Latin *galatina*, Italian *gelatina*), the semisolid, tremulous mass gained from cooling a concentrated glue solution. All animal substances that yield glue when boiled can be used in the production of *gallerte*, that is to say, meat, bone, connective tissue, isinglass, stag horns etc. It is easier to preserve *gallerte* by dissolving pure white glue (*gelatine*) in a sufficient quantity of water and letting it cool there. It is used in various dishes, *q.v.* jelly. Vegetable *gallerte* of lichen consists of lichen starch or algae slime and water. In particular it is prepared from Carragaheen, Icelandic moss and the like, and is often used, mixed with

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other medicaments, in medicine. Vegetable *gallerte* made of fleshy, sour fruits consists of pectins and water. Fruit jellies or jams are popular additions to other meals.^{xxi}

The jargon in this entry overflows. *Gallerte* is the undifferentiated mess of glue-yielding “*tierischen Substanzen*,” animal substances industrially boiled down into condiments, that is, into “*Beigaben*,” “additions” to meals rather than the staple nutrition of the meal itself. Marx says that “abstract human labour,” that is, both the units of human labour reduced to “labour power” and wages in the calculations of the capitalist (calculations conducted in “the jargon of Political Economy”), and human labour in general as “value” expressed in commodities, is “a mere *Gallerte* of undifferentiated human labour.” This “mere *Gallerte*” is the product not of reversible freezing but of irreversible boiling followed by cooling. Abstract human labour is, in Marx’s words, undifferentiated and *not* homogeneous, because it has a multitude of material origins (many workers contribute to the manufacture of each commodity, as political economy had recognised since Adam Smith’s analysis of the division of labour in *The Wealth of Nations*),^{xxii} but these multiple origins cannot be separately distinguished in the commodity which is the product of the aggregate of their activity. All that is meat melts into bone, and vice versa; and no mere act of scrutiny, however analytic or moral, is capable of reversing the industrial process of that deliquescence.

It is important to recognise that this account of abstract human labour in *Das Kapital* is not just an isolated instance of merely graphic metonymy. Marx does not simply use the word *Gallerte* as literary flavouring to his theory, a delectable condiment to the staple nutrition of concepts. It is not a word that can be separated out from the sentence that accommodates it and enjoyed as style rather than specified as a concept. On the contrary, it changes the meaning of other passages in the text. It makes possible part of the thinking that happens later on in *Das Kapital*. The image of human labour as *Gallerte* brings most forcefully to mind not the antonymical word *flüssig* and its substratum of literary echoes in the metaphysical tradition of Heraclitus, but another passage in *Das Kapital*, namely, the passage where Marx insists that labour is in reality a “...*produktive Verausgabung von menschlichem Hirn, Muskel, Nerv, Hand, usw.*,” “a productive expenditure of human brains, muscles, nerves, hands etc” (MEGA II.8: 75; F: 134). This list, trailing off into a throwaway terminal expression, “*und so weiter*,” “and so on,” which Marx elsewhere habitually uses to abbreviate illustrative lists of commodities and raw materials, is two things at once. It is of course a materialist reemphasis of the physical human experience at the origin of exchange value, that is, a labor theory of value; it is also, at the same time, a gruesome satirical echo of the allegorical account of abstract human labor as *Gallerte*. The living hands, brains, muscles and nerves of the wage laborer are mere “animal substances,” *ingredients* at the feast of the capitalist. The capitalist in turn is the great devourer of this undifferentiated human labor. He is not an individual, as Marx often says, but is “a mere embodiment of capital” (MA: 330), which makes him not just the oppressor of the workers in theory and in practice, but also gives him a specific role in Marx’s allegorical satire on consumption. The capitalist is roughly the industrial processing of the workers in reverse. The worker who starts out a real body and brain is reduced to *Gallerte* through submission to capitalist wage labor; and the capitalist who is in essence nothing but capital itself nonetheless assumes in his interactions with human beings the local habitation of a body and the name of an

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individual. This is what the worker and the capitalist are in Marx's allegorical satire on consumption, but Marx also says that this is what they are in reality, that is, in their "real economic relation" of which all juridical relation "is but the reflex." (MA: 96)

What then is the status of satire in Marx? Satire is not a literary ornament. It is not the surplus of style decorating an unambiguous substratum of conceptual content, *Dichtung* merely supervening on *Wahrheit*. Satire and allegory are, to use Marx's words, "phantoms formed in the human brain," but they are phantoms precisely as, and because, all theory and thinking are phantoms, "pure theory" no less than the most messily heterogenous and undifferentiated.^{xxiii} Satire and allegory are also, "necessarily," as Marx insists that phantoms in the brain must be, "sublimates of [men's] material life process, which is empirically verifiable and bound to material premises."^{xxiv} The opposition between phantom and material is a meaningful opposition in Marx, but it is not the opposition between unreal and real, or untruth and truth. It is itself a theoretical opposition, which is to say that the distinction it makes is never conclusively attested in experience with anything like the force of apodicticity which theory would claim on its behalf. As Marx puts it, "the characters who appear on the economic stage are but the personifications of the economical relations that exist between them." (MA: 97) The economic "stage" is allegorical *and* real, it is where economical relations are both acted and lived. William Cowper's rebuke of overeloquent and artificial preachers who with "histrionic mumm'ry...let down | The pulpit to the level of the stage" in book two of *The Task* is from the perspective of *Capital* a simple instance of bourgeois ideology: the stage is not the bathos of the pulpit; in reality, the pulpit is never anything but a prop on the stage.^{xxv} What is capital in reality? It is economic profit on wage labor and it is "vampire thirst for the living blood of labour." (MA: 282) "It must be acknowledged," writes Marx, again invoking *Gallerte* and hinting ambiguously at an horrific euphemism, "that our labourer comes out of the process of production other than he entered." (MA: 329-30)^{xxvi}

Gallerte is not just a specific commodity. It is, on satire's terms, the *paradigmatic* commodity, the "perfected non-world" of labor in a concentrated purchasable lump.^{xxvii} A lexicon of jargon floats in association behind it. It is the tremulous edible product of industrial *reduction* and *processing*. This satire on the reduction of labor is not itself further reducible to a mere concept, for the following reason. The difference between a concept and a satire is that satire is always at someone's expense. All Marx's writing, and not just those moments in it that make economic theory into an overtly literary exhibition, is satirical in this sense. Marx always writes at someone's expense. Someone must be the object of satire and someone must suffer by its influence; and that means not simply that someone must be ridiculed or described grotesquely and with exaggeration, but that the whole work of thinking in satire will be in the interests of some real people and contrary to the interests of others. From *Gargantua* to *Anti-Dühring*, *Peri Bathous* to the pompous scurrilities of Lacan's *Écrits*, thinking in satire is activated for one constituency of readers through its infliction on another. Satire is more than a modality of the picturesque: it is the concentrated literary exposure of social contradiction. It does not merely provide a distorted image of social reality, it is in active conflict with social reality. Who then suffers by Marx's account of abstract human labor, if it truly is a satire, and who is its object?

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The worker reduced to *Gallerte* meets with the most horrible fate available in Marx's satire on wage labor, but he is not the object of that satire. His suffering can hardly be increased by literature, and it is precisely in emphasis of this fact that Marx allocates to him the most repulsive fate in the drama. The worker's suffering is for Marx categorically different from the suffering of the bourgeoisie. The worker's suffering is not injured vanity, not discomfort over a grotesque image of himself, but "dehumanization" and "immiseration." The object of Marx's satire on abstract human labor is not the worker reduced to a condiment but the bourgeois consumer who eats him for breakfast. It is the bourgeois consumer who suffers by the influence of Marx's satire on abstract human labor because that satire is an allegory which condemns his unavoidable daily acts as disgusting. What ought to be the fluid labor of living human beings is instead a disgusting, paradigmatically unnatural food product for the bourgeois consumer, the "vampire which sucks out its [the proletariat's] blood and brains and throws them into the alchemist's vessel of capital."^{xxviii} But Marx, surely, is joking with his talk of vampires, and this, surely, is a book of theory before us, a "critique of political economy," from whose scientific perspective the vampire must surely be an impossible person? No, says Marx in the *Communist Manifesto*, the point is that the vampire is not yet impossible, and it remains the task of revolution to see that he is "made impossible."^{xxix} Its fetish-character may prevent the bourgeois consumer from seeing in *Gallerte* the brains, muscles, nerves and hands themselves; that is, the substance of the paradigmatic commodity may be undifferentiable back into the aggregate of its living human origins by any act merely of conscientious perception; but the bourgeois consumer who thus compulsorily worships the commodity as an idol is nonetheless cast by Marx's satire into the role of the child who daily begs to lick the cauldron clean after daily observing the mess of human misery boil in it. Can the bourgeois consumer exit the stage of this satire, protesting his abstinence or his vegetarianism? No, he cannot, because the rendering of human minds and bodies into *Gallerte* is not, on the terms of Marx's satire, an abuse of wage labor by the coven of leading unreconstructed vampires but the fundamental law of all wage labor. The satire, abruptly, at the moment when its object might wriggle free of it, is revealed in fact to be "theory." The bourgeois object of satire is pinned to the fourth wall, since all his means of moral defense—his philanthropy, his austerity, his temperance—are, as he knows, incapable of making the slightest impression on a fundamental law: he is a great respecter of fundamental law, and so he is reduced to something like the transcendent impotence of the candidate for everlasting life in supplication of a God he secretly knows to be his own invention. Social existence under capitalism is thus gruesomely primitivistic, not simply in that we bourgeois moderns behave toward commodities in the way that "*les anciens peuples...sauvages & grossiers*" or "*les Noirs & les Caraïbes*" of Enlightenment ethnography behaved toward their fetish idols,^{xxx} but in the still more disgusting sense that our most routine, unavoidable and everyday [*alltäglich*] act, the act of consumption of use value, that is, first of all, purchase, is in every case an act of cannibalism.

Style tends to be regarded as something that must be got right, either in translation or in reading, so that a concept represented in it can be specified and then put to use in larger and more important analyses; but this solicitude for the specification and use of concepts *after* style has been got right tends actually to diminish and enervate attention to style by reducing it to preparatory attention. The result in literary theory is, often

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enough, that style is got wrong in preparation for the theoretical use of the concepts represented in it. The satire on wage labor as the original abomination leading to compulsory everyday cannibalism is missed. We might say, more strongly still, that by getting style wrong, literary theory makes sure that it doesn't get style at all. Why should literary theory make sure that it doesn't get style in *Capital*? Literary theory does this in order to inoculate itself against its own proper object, literature, as if to say that literature is an upstart object for imagining that it has any claim to special propriety among the universe of text materials available for interpretation. In the case of Marx's account of abstract human labor, this apparently democratic impulse to equalize the historical modalities of text in fact performs what Marx describes as the invariable work of bourgeois ideology. It occludes social contradiction by reductively neutralizing satire into "concepts." Marx's account of abstract human labor is not only a theoretical indictment of bourgeois interests, it is literature irreconcilable with the standard of truth and interpretation that is the reflex of those interests, to the extent that bourgeois readers are compelled, in order to make their own kind of sense of it, to separate out its content from its style, to judge and contest the one and to enjoy or dislike the other, perhaps feeling that they in some sense stand accused by what Marx is saying, but not seeing that his entire way of saying it is from start to finish a satire at their own expense.

William Burroughs did not go far enough. The point is not to make "everyone see what is on the end of every fork," but to make *you* see, as Kafka attempted, that no one but you could eat from this fork, since this fork was intended for you.

Third Term: "Fétichisme"

At five in the evening, the coast, which we had always on our left, changed in aspect. The palm trees seemed to be in alignment with the shore, like the avenues with which French Châteaux are decorated: nature delighted thus in recalling the ideas of civilisation, in the very country where this civilisation was born and where, today, ignorance and barbarism reign.

Chateaubriand, 'Voyage d'Égypte.'^{xxxii}

The concept of fetishism in *Das Kapital*, insofar as there is a concept, has its origin in Marx's reading and thinking about a French essay in theoretical ethnography published in 1760, Charles de Brosses's *Du Culte des Dieux Fétiches, ou Parallèle de l'ancienne Religion de l'Égypte avec la Religion actuelle de Nigritie*. This derivation of the concept of fetishism in *Das Kapital* has been often noticed and reported as fact;^{xxxii} but astonishingly, the entire transmission of the concept from de Brosses to Marx has received no comment from Marx's literary theoretical interpreters. Marx's habit of misquoting famous authors in order to twist their language into a contradiction of its original meaning is well known: Goethe is *détourned* in a footnote mocking Proudhon; commodities are Shakespeare's Dame Quickly in reverse; and the preface to the first edition of 1867 is concluded with the high literary flourish of Dante *détourned*, "Go on

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your own way, and let the people talk,” instead of the original “Follow me, and let the people talk.” (F: 161, 93)^{xxxiii} However well known this habit of Marx’s may be, no commentator on book one, section four, “*Der Fetischcharakter der Ware und sein Geheimnis*,” has yet examined Marx’s reuse of de Brosses’s jargonistic neologism in the light of this habit or as an instance of it. No-one, that is to say, has yet interpreted the concept of fetishism in *Capital* as a *détournement*. The passage of the term “*fétichisme*” from eighteenth century, aristocratic French into nineteenth century, communist German, and into Moore and Aveling’s English; the violent resituation of the term out of ethnography which celebrates the enlightenment of European culture into a critique of political economy which seeks to expose that culture’s fundamental injustice; the implicit satire, not simply against superstitious thinking and behavior, but against the centuries-long continuity of bourgeois civilized disgust at “superstition” itself, activated by the reappearance of the term in a context for which it was not originally fitted; the whole involuted literary and satirical structure of Marx’s reuse of the concept has been routinely ignored, as though *Capital* straightforwardly invited its readers to extract from it something called “the theory of commodity fetishism.” Each time this theory is extracted, the impurities of style and satire are washed away with the caustic of “pure theoretical” paraphrase.

Althusser is not merely the most egregious culprit. He is the unacknowledged legislator of the majority of literary theoretical readings yet produced. When Althusser insists on “the necessity of reading Marx’s text *very closely*,” his text becomes an exhibition of Freudian *Verleugnung* or disavowal in reverse: the adamant *avowal* of “reading,” pushed at us in overtly pedagogical commands, conceals the real, underlying *disavowal* of reading in his interpretation of *Capital*.^{xxxiv} Althusser’s hyperbolic disciplinarianism—Read *very closely!*—echoes an instance of Lenin’s. “It is impossible completely to understand *Capital*,” Lenin infamously wrote, “without having thoroughly studied and understood the *whole* of Hegel’s *Logic*.”^{xxxv} For Althusser it is possible completely to understand *Capital*. On these terms, the interpretation of Marx becomes fundamentally inimical to “reading” Marx the moment interpretation imports any problem or difficulty of its own into the work of pure theoretical comprehension.

Theorists who might disavow this purgation of “reading” nonetheless do not transgress against its rule that *Capital*, including the section on the fetish-character of the commodity, be read as “pure theory.” A representative treatment, more subtle of course than Althusser but innocent of any transgression of his rule, is this by Laura Mulvey:

The Marxist concept [of fetishism] is derived from a problem of inscription: that is, the way in which the sign of value is, or rather fails to be, marked onto an object, a commodity. It is in and around the difficulty of signifying value that commodity fetishism flourishes.^{xxxvi}

Mulvey’s account is similar to the majority of accounts now current.^{xxxvii} Fetishism in Marx is a concept, the concept is derived from a problem, and the problem is a conceptual one. Commodity fetishism then flourishes in and around a conceptual problem. Sticking to Mulvey’s own terms, we might ask: if the inscription of value, or rather, of “the sign of value” has already failed, how can anyone be blamed for not reading that inscription? Already the expenses of satire are discounted. There is

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nothing disgusting about failing to read the already failed inscription of a sign of value onto an object. Nothing could be more innocently remote from the cannibalism and idol worship of savages than theoretical perplexity over the vicissitudes of signification. If this is the fetishism we engage in, we have nothing to worry about, however much we may yet have to speculate on. But we cannot take Mulvey's account of Marx on its own terms, because it completely excludes from view the most important fact about the "concept" of fetishism in *Capital*, namely, that it is a satirical and ersatz concept, insofar as it is a concept at all, and that it is derived not from poststructuralist reflection on problems of inscription but from Marx's ironic reading and *détournement* of an eighteenth century essay in racist ethnography. Mulvey both excludes philological thinking from her own reflections on Marx and ignores the philological work done by *Capital* itself. The exclusion is good for theoretical efficiency. With every trace of philology excluded from the theoretical equation, fetishism is a concept and *Capital* is theory. Besides being a one-sided and impoverished description of Marx's writing and thinking, the definition of fetishism as a practice that flourishes "in and around the difficulty of signifying value" leads to a vision of problem-solving (instead of revolution) that any vampire would find deliciously sanguine. "For Marx," writes Mulvey,

the value of a commodity resides in the labor power of its producer. If this labor power could ever inscribe itself indexically on the commodity it produces, if it could leave a tangible mark of the time and skill taken in production, there would be no problem.^{xxxviii}

No problem of what kind? Are we meant to conclude that the bourgeois consumer is a fetishist because labor power fails to inscribe itself indexically on its object? Is it the inaptitude of labor power for acts of indexical inscription that makes the bourgeois consumer into a cannibal? No, because in the rarefied atmosphere of pure theoretical interpretation, sanitized of any reference to Marx's satire, his literary allegory and his aggression, there is no room for the word "bourgeois" in the sense that Marx meant it. "Bourgeois" becomes jargon, the diction of a superannuated political attitude, a verbal embarrassment; and rather than seeing how pure theory itself contributes to this jargonization of revolutionary language through its discounting of satire, the practitioners of pure theory instead imagine that the jargonization was long ago complete and that their avoidance of revolutionary language is nothing but sobriety and responsive realism. The failures of indexicality may yet be someone's fault, in some just about imaginable appendix to Mulvey's analysis; but her analysis is constructed without reference to the possibility that Marx's whole account of the practice of fetishism is already at someone's expense, that the description of fetishism in *Capital* is a satire irreconcilable with the standards of truth maintained in the interests of bourgeois realism. *Capital* is processed into a book of pure theory. Drop the satire and no-one gets hurt.

But Marx's thinking in *Capital* is philological as well as satirical, just as the risks of style in his satire are themselves the work of thinking and not a mere decoration of it. To understand what Marx means by the fetish-character of commodities, and why fetishism in *Capital* is at best only ambiguously a "concept," we need to reconstruct the literary composition of his chapter, paying close attention to its satirical transformations of its

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literary source material; and we need to ask at whose expense the theory is written, and what kind of expense Marx meant to inflict by it.

Charles de Brosses was the first to use the word “*fétichisme*,” a word that his first readers must surely have found jargonistic, and his long essay offers the first theoretical commentary on it.^{xxxix} His essay cannot however be made to qualify on Althusserian terms as “pure theory.” Giorgio Agamben’s criticism of de Brosses, that his “astonishment...before the fetish not only has no reason to exist, it betrays a forgetfulness of the original status of objects,” is a good example of how the attempt to read *Du Culte des Dieux Fétiches* as pure theory ends up occluding what is most characteristic and important about the essay.^{xl} Throughout the essay de Brosses protests on behalf of his own constituency of enlightened moderns, that is to say, sane and mature, monotheistic European intellectuals capable of abstract reasoning (and not the vulgar working people of 1760), that “one cannot prevent oneself from being astonished by the fact that nations and ages [*siècles*] so remote from each other should agree on the same idea” (that is, the idea that inanimate objects and animals must be worshiped).^{xli} This confession of astonishment recurs throughout the essay. Both the *disgusting* phenomenon of fetish worship itself and the global and transhistorical epidemic of its practice, spanning the centuries and the continents from ancient Egypt to the present-day “nation” of Africa, are irresistibly astonishing to anyone disciplined by the practice of rational inquiry into the causes of appearances.^{xlii} The astonishment which Agamben, in a gesture of Heideggerian reproof, dismisses as “forgetfulness of the original status of objects” is for de Brosses not simply a shortcoming of *Dasein* before the ontic, remediable by an act of phenomenological remembrance, but a form of polite, literary socializing among equals, a way of dramatizing and giving confessional literary color to his recognition of the kindred intelligence of his readers.^{xliii} We, gentlemen readers, must irresistibly be astonished by the practices of savages, since our literary astonishment, most emphatically performed—and not any straight ethnographic empiricism, had this even been imaginable in 1760—will give proof that our difference from savages is by now an intellectually and morally categorical difference and not merely one of degree. The practice of literary astonishment is *irresistible* in the sense that it fulfills a moral imperative and is evidence of civilized thought. *Judge then of my astonishment*, as the conventional English appeal is flourished throughout the late eighteenth and the nineteenth century. It is the attitude of the equable inquirer, innocent of perversity, confronted by some extravagance that gives him the chance to establish sympathetic mutuality with his readers on the grounds of their common difference from the stupid and the unenlightened. The attitude, that is, which Samuel Beckett parodies in the figure of the divinely appointed inquirer Jacques Moran, astonished by the impertinence of his pubescent son in *Molloy*. Whatever we might think is its psychogenesis or its significance for a theory of objects, de Brosses’s astonishment before the practice of fetish worship was then and is now an irreducibly literary and conversational astonishment. It may ambiguously be good material for a modern diagnosis of the psychic symptoms of enlightenment; but for Marx, it was first of all unambiguously good material for a satire on the conventional literary means of establishing defensive moral mutuality among aristocrats. De Brosses’s astonishment is the artificial testimony of the author’s involuntary reflex, a moral reaction to barbarism, and the sympathy of his readers will be all the more readily forthcoming since it will

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function to consolidate in their minds “*l'accord unanime des hommes intelligens & des nations éclairés*,” the unanimous agreement of intelligent men and enlightened nations.^{xliv}

De Brosses, of course, is not content simply to remain paralyzed in this attitude of polite astonishment, like the *homme sauvage* paralyzed in superstitious reverence before a snake or a wooden idol “forged by the excess of his stupidity.”^{xlv} The drama of literary astonishment involves a second act. He recovers wit enough to propose a theoretical account of why fetishism has been and is still an indigenous practice in otherwise widely contrasting and historically unconnected cultures.

When one sees similar practices among men living in ages and in climates so far removed from each other, who have nothing in common besides their ignorance and their barbarism, it is still more natural to conclude that man is made this way; that for man left in his rough and savage natural state, unformed and uninstructed by imitation, primitive morals and the means of production [*les façons de faire*] are the same in Egypt as in the Antilles, the same in Persia as among the Gauls: everywhere the same mechanism of ideas, from which the same actions follow. And if one is surprised by this particular point, which indeed seems very strange; if one is astonished to see fetishism widespread among all the uncultivated peoples [*les peuples grossiers*] of the universe, and in all times, and in all places; to explain this phenomenon one need only recollect the proper cause of it already cited: it is the constant uniformity of the savage man with himself; his heart exposed perpetually to fear, his soul greedy without pause for hope, deliver up his ideas to error and deviation and carry him off into a thousand acts devoid of sense; his mind, without culture and without reasoning, is incapable of apperceiving the little that it finds of the connection between causes and the effects that wait on them. Since no-one is astonished to see children fail to elevate their minds above their dolls, to see them believing that their dolls are animate and acting with them accordingly, why should he be astonished to see people whose life passes in continual infancy, and who are never more than four years of age, reason without the least accuracy, and act according to how they reason? Minds of this calibre are the most common, even in the ages of enlightenment and among the civilized nations.^{xlvi}

Literary astonishment is, in de Brosses, the conventional prologue of theoretical illumination. *If one is astonished* (and one must be astonished, since the enormity of the facts is irresistible), *one need only recollect*. Theoretical illumination is the recollection of what is natural and manifest but tends in practice to be forgotten or overlooked. What the recovery of wit after astonishment in this case establishes is that *les peuples grossiers* are of course infants. The drama of astonishment is de Brosses's, he is at once its enlightened author and the protagonist of its comic action. The infant cannibals of the universe have a specific part to play in the noble comedy of de Brosses: they are the monsters who are domesticated through de Brosses's disciplining of his own astonishment with the cool instrument of theoretical reason. Once the “*liaison entre causes & effets*” is heroically restored to view by our ethnographer protagonist, the comic bewilderment of misidentifications and cross-nakedness is all resolved, and there, in the limelight of theoretical illumination, standing before us, the audience of mutual

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sympathisers, is the monster unmasked—it is our own child, tenderly observed from above, prattling at its toys in a paradise of innocence!^{xlvi}

Fetishism in *Du Culte des Dieux Fétiches* is not a “concept,” it is the subject of a drama. The drama depends on a specific historical *dramatis personae* with specific relations between them. The luminary astonished by the cannibal does not remain astonished: the action and coherence of the drama require that he should discipline his astonishment and rescue the cannibal. The second act of ethnographic inquiry, *after* the confession of moral astonishment, is to put in place the “*liaison entre causes & effets*” even and precisely in those circumstances apparently most uncongenial to rational thinking: the *mise en scène* of comic bewilderment and misidentification. What this literary practice of astonishment and discipline creates and depends on is the image of the stupefied individual, which it then satirically dominates as the specimen subject of its work of theoretical diagnosis. The figure of the stupefied individual is conceived in the drama of literary astonishment and its theoretical disciplining; and the stupefaction of this figure can then be defined, in part circularly, as his inability to act out that same drama as its protagonist, his lifelong confinement to a cameo, in other words, the incapacity of the savage for astonishment at what is imperatively astonishing and his inability to discipline the astonishment he cannot feel. This is the ethnographic negative mirror image instituted by the drama of astonishment and its disciplining. The practice of illumination defines itself through literary and theoretical definition of the stupefied figure who is incapable of it. The ethnographer establishes his own maturity, what Kant famously called his *Mündigkeit*, the condition of intellect necessary for autonomous life, through his diagnosis of the infantilism of barbarians.^{xlvi} The whole drama is thus a satire, ostensibly at the expense of a barbarian figure that modern ethnography would dismiss as a figment, but covertly at the expense of still infantile moderns whose lightly distorted image is locked in that figment as in an obligatory cameo. The drama is a satirical exercise in establishing sympathetic mutuality between members of the same class. As the French scholar M. V. David has commented, “one mustn’t forget that *Dieux fétiches* is not merely a learned work, but also an innovative and polemical work.”^{xlvii} Not, that is, merely a theory of fetish worship, but a stylish attack on the commonalty of fetishists still the majority in “the ages of enlightenment and among the civilised nations.”

Slavoj Žižek is one of the few theorist commentators on Marx’s concept of fetishism to offer a brief discussion of de Brosses’s essay.¹ His interpretation of “*fétichisme*” in de Brosses might seem to be saying something similar to what I have said about the drama of literary astonishment and theoretical disciplining; but there is a significant difference between his account and mine. Žižek writes:

The notional background for fetishism...lies in evolutionist universalism: “fetishism” has a place within the notion of a universal human history progressing from the lower stage (the veneration of natural objects) to the abstract spiritualized stage (the purely spiritual God); it allows us to grasp the unity of human species, to recognize the Other, while none the less asserting our superiority. The fetishist Other is always “lower”—that is to say, the notion of fetishism is strictly correlative to the gaze of the observer who approaches the “primitive” community from the outside.^{li}

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This seems at first glance to be something like the point I'm making. I argued that the figure of the stupefied individual or savage is instituted by de Brosses through a drama of literary astonishment and theoretical disciplining. This figure is not, however, the equivalent of Žižek's "fetishist Other," and is not exchangeable for him, because he is not in de Brosses's essay the product of "the gaze of the observer," he is the product of a satirical literary conversation. Žižek's fetishist, on the contrary, is not a *dramatis persona*, he is a psychic projection. His appearance is not made, as the appearance of the figure of the stupefied individual is made, in the *mise en scène* of literary writing seeking to establish sympathetic mutuality with readers of a specific class; his appearance is fabricated by "us" when we "recognize the Other, while none the less asserting our superiority." In other words, Žižek's interpretation of de Brosses's "fetishist" is psychoanalytic and not literary, and his account of the fabrication of the image of the fetishist is a theoretical account of how "our superiority" is asserted. Žižek is reading de Brosses not as literature in conversation with a specific historical class but as material for a generalised and abstract diagnosis of the mechanisms of narcissism. *Du Culte des Dieux Fétiches* is processed and reduced into material for pure theory.

When Žižek moves on in his argument from de Brosses to Marx, the only transmission of the concept of fetishism visible to his gaze is a purely theoretical transmission. The language of de Brosses's essay is nowhere mentioned or implicated, and there is no consideration nor even any recognition of the fact that Marx *read* an antiquated and objectionable, racist and aristocratic, unscientifically ethnographic essay called *Du Culte des Dieux Fétiches*.^{lii} Žižek's only direct question, similar to Mulvey's, is how Marx and Freud displace "the notion of fetishism" with respect to its previous anthropological use.^{liii} My point is that Marx did not displace a notion. He wrote a stylish and satirical *détournement*, not simply of the word "*fétichisme*" or of the concept of "*fétichisme*" in de Brosses, however Marx may have interpreted that concept, but of the whole drama of literary astonishment and theoretical disciplining that institutes the figure of the stupefied fetishist in de Brosses. Unlike Žižek, Marx read de Brosses as literature. His chapter on the fetish-character of commodities is a satirical exploitation of the literary shortcomings of de Brosses.

Marx plunges us into astonishment at the beginning of his analysis of the fetish-character of commodities. He does this at a moment of stylistic transition that is abrupt and even dramatic. We pass from a table illustrating the money form and a number of abstract illustrations of value equivalence in algebraic expressions, directly into the famous first sentences of part one, section four:

Eine Waare scheint auf den ersten Blick ein selbstverständliches, triviales Ding. Ihre Analyse ergibt, daß sie ein sehr vertracktes Ding ist, voll metaphysischer Spitzfindigkeit und theologischer Mucken.

A commodity appears, at first sight, a very trivial thing, and easily understood. Its analysis shows that it is, in reality, a very queer thing, abounding in metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties.

(MEGA II.8: 100; MA: 81; F: 163)

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Our delivery into astonishment comes not at first but at second glance. Or rather, there is no second glance [*Blick*], since the second act of perception in this satirical double take is already an act of analysis. The drama of astonishment and discipline played out in de Brosses is instantly enlarged: astonishment is no longer the comedy of misidentification which sets the stage for the moment of reconciliation with nature accomplished by theoretical reason, astonishment now belongs to theoretical reason itself. We are astonished only when we do the work of analysis, and not before. The *mise en scène* of comic bewilderment in *Das Kapital* is not our astonishment but our confidence. We think we understand very well what commodities are, but this confidence is nothing but the vanity of a *dramatis persona* given to incessant acts of ludicrous misidentification. Commodities are obvious, self-explanatory, trivial and everyday objects, just as for Diderot's Jacques the fatalist every event, however unexpected or unintelligible, is obviously just the everyday workings of destiny and providence "*écrit là-haut*," "written up above."

The stage is set, in this prologue to theoretical illumination, for a literary conversation that will illuminate sympathetic mutuality between Marx and his readers by pointing its analysis at the dupes of universal confidence. All that needs to be established is that the person incapable of astonishing himself through an analysis of commodities is an infant, or a barbarian, or a cannibal, and finally that whatever kind of monster this person might be, he is *not us*. But in the space of a sentence that most comfortable and sympathetic prospect is denied; in fact, it is conjured by Marx *in order* that it may be denied. Marx does not simply deny that the commodity is a self-explanatory object. He also, just as significantly, denies that we can expect on the basis of this denial to enjoy sympathetic mutuality as readers of his work. A literary conversation is conjured and rejected. We who are the readers of this book will also be the subject specimens of its diagnosis. Mutual apprehension of the commodity, this "very strange thing" (F: 163), if possible at all, will require from us not a glance but an analysis; and we are told immediately that the analysis required will bring to light a wildly unfamiliar and recondite image of the commodity, an image that is, first of all, so complex and daunting that only the professional thinker will be able to comprehend it, but also an image that is in fact so astonishing, so abundantly metaphysical and theological, that no imaginable act of theoretical disciplining can be expected to free us from the astonishment it causes. We will not be reconciled to this strange thing, it will not be shepherded by our common sense into the limelight of conclusive theoretical illumination, and if we are the protagonist of this drama of unexitable astonishment and impossible discipline it is on the basis that our act of heroic resolution is scheduled to take place off-stage at some moment after the drama has finished.^{liv} We will not be the person who performs that act because the person is impossible; we are instead the person, like the infant vampire who licks clean the cauldron of *Gallerte*, who is real by negative virtue of not yet being impossible. On this basis, not on the basis of our comic sympathies and delusory confidences, we are invited to proceed into Mr. Marx's arcane disquisition on the "secret" of the commodity.

Marx's readers, as invited into the drama of *Capital*, are not, as de Brosses's readers are, the companions of the author and the sympathetic participants in his enlightened conversation. Demystification of the commodity in *Capital* is aggressively satiric: we grow up beyond the Kantian "self-imposed immaturity" of unthinking confidence, we

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leave a phantom home on the promise of a material home, only to be lodged by analysis itself in a mysterium more nauseatingly intricate and Byzantine than anything in the playground of phantoms we were so proud to grow out of. “The religious reflex of the real world,” Marx tells us in the course of his analysis,

can, in any case, only then finally vanish, when the practical relations of everyday life offer to man none but perfectly intelligible and reasonable relations with regard to his fellowmen and to nature.
(MA: 91-2)

Whereas “analysis” might be expected to bring us a little closer, at least, to the “real world” in whose reflex Marx tells us we are incarcerated, just as it does for de Brosses; and whereas we might in theory expect that our relations should become just a little more “intelligible and reasonable,” if not yet “perfectly” so, through our practice of analysis, since, after all, analysis is nothing but the application of intelligence and reason; as it turns out, we are taught by Marx that no approach of this sort will be made by us, that analysis of our world is impassable astonishment at it, because we ourselves are the condition of impossibility of “perfectly intelligible and reasonable relations.” Why then should analysis be attempted, if the practice of it amounts in this way not just to a confirmation of the impotence of the intellectual aspiration to virtue and *Mündigkeit* but to an active deepening of that impotence? The commodity, we are astonished to discover, is “transubstantiation” and “metamorphosis,” its analysis conducted by the materialist Karl Marx in the jargon of Catholic mysteries and ancient myth. We knew this language to be jargon before reading *Das Kapital*, and, equipped with our knowledge that it is jargon, we had been able to reject the use and the authority of it. Now we are told that our analysis of “metaphysical” commodities must indulge this same old language, still as much a jargon as ever, but this time, we might think, a jargon repeated as farce, with us readers as its hilariously masked and unmasked clowns and rustics. Why must we?

The answer to that question is that the section on the fetish-character of commodities in *Das Kapital* is a satire at the expense of the readers I have been calling “us.” The readers I have been calling “us” are bourgeois readers. The drama of anguished response to Marx’s *détournement* of the function of “analysis” that I just now acted out is anticipated by *Das Kapital*, whose satiric expectation is that readers locked into that internal monologue of objections and bewilderment will on instinct revert to mere theoretical mastery over it. This is what bourgeois readers do: the instinct is a class instinct. They may not deny that the state of affairs described by Marx is in some sense their own fault, at least on Marx’s own terms; but they will nonetheless find the imputation of direct culpability to be, in theoretical terms, a dead end, merely an incitement to intellectual claustrophobia and sanctimonious gestures of abstract repentance; and so, to grow out of that dead end, they will make use of Marx’s “concepts” as though those concepts were, for them, the substratum of important meaning in *Capital*, extricable *in toto* from the mess of satirical accusation and prophylactic analysis and, not *reuseable*, but useable in any new context of criticism whatever, from the criticism of fallibility in indexical sign-inscription to the criticism of “presence in general.”^{lv} In his recent essay on fetishism in Marx, Jean-Luc Nancy writes:

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Behind the unveiled secret, another more convoluted secret cloaks itself—one that perhaps will never be revealed absolutely: it is that of presence in general, which might never be exempt of fetishism, that is, of the force of the desire by which I reach toward this presence in order to see it, touch it, and savor it, at least from the moment that “presence” does not designate the inert being of what has been put there (what has been placed there) and which is not even *there*, nor there, nor beyond, no matter where it is placed.^{lvi}

The abandonment of dead-end criticism in favour of open-ended thaumaturgy is just one among many trends in bourgeois theoretical mastery over the concepts of *Das Kapital*, one among many ways that a bourgeois reader can discount the expenses of Marx’s satire against him. What this passage by Nancy does which lots of other theoretical trends also do is to discover, “behind” the problem dramatised by Marx, some other, more primordial problem, some “convoluted” dimension of the problematic itself which proves more amenable to exclusively theoretical treatment the more obdurately it can be imagined to resist revealing itself. Nancy frees theory from the expenses of satire in the same tradition as Heidegger, the long tradition of commentary on Heraclitus’s aphorism *phusis kruptesthai philei*, “nature loves to hide;”^{lvii} but theorist authors who claim loyalty to altogether different trends make what amounts to the same move. Thus Žižek:

Beneath the apparently humanist-ideological opposition between “human beings” and “things” lurks another, much more productive notion, that of the mystery of substitution and/or displacement: how is it ontologically possible that the innermost “relations between people” can be displaced on to (or substituted by) “relations between things”?^{lviii}

“Whether questions are essential,” wrote Adorno, “can only be judged by the answers given.”^{lix} There is perhaps a dimension of the problematic that is transcendently amenable to pure theory, a dimension in which the most perfectly intelligible and reasonable questions are those which cost so little to ask that the challenge for thinking becomes, not to answer them, but to ask them with such enormous prodigality and largesse in the management of concepts that their unit cost within the economy of theoretical interrogation is finally reduced to nil.

The fetish-character of commodities described by Marx is truly an intellectual dead end. It does cramp the reader into a gesture of abstract repentance that cannot be other than sanctimonious. This compression is its satire, the literary thinking that declares that its standard of truth is irreconcilable with the expectation that astonishment will be disciplined into recollection of the natural and manifest. *Das Kapital détourns* not just the jargon of *Du Culte des Dieux Fétiches*, but its whole satiric drama of sympathetic mutuality and rescue; and it blocks the reductive processing of its *détournement* into an array of concepts to be held at the disposal of theory by anticipating that this is what bourgeois readers will want to do with it. Any interpretation of Marx that forgets the *dramatis persona* of the bourgeois reader, who is of course living and real, that passes over him in silence, or conjures some elaborate theoretical periphrasis to take his place, is a complacent misinterpretation to the full extent that it discounts the expense of Marx’s satire. That expense is not a concept in *Das Kapital*, it is the lived infliction of

world picture 1

the text on intelligent readers who may reject the jargon of “transubstantiation” in its Catholic use just as they will reject its “joking” use in Marx’s analysis of the commodity, but who nonetheless continue, “unthinkingly” or not, to eat human beings transubstantiated by industrial reduction into the base of *Gallerte* in every commodity on the market.

It hardly needs to be said, I hope, that in arguing that Marx is satire, *détournement*, drama and jargon, I am in no way saying that *Das Kapital* is “not true.” What I am saying is that the standard of truth in *Das Kapital* is a spectrum extending from the literal to the irreducibly satiric, and that this spectrum of truth is reduced to an undifferentiated, tremulous and semisolid mass of veracity by pure theoretical accounts of Marx too intelligently claustrophobic to inhabit the dead end of a terminally obdurate contradiction. But despite all the discounts on offer, this contradiction in reality persists, and it is just as terminal now as it was in 1867. Bourgeois reader, this dead end is intended for you.

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ⁱ Wilhelm Liebknecht, *Karl Marx: Biographical Memoirs*, trans. E. Untermann (London: The Journeyman Press, 1975). [1st in German, 1896; English translation 1st published, 1901]: 75. Cf. Turgot, *Textes choisis et préface*, ed. Pierre Vigreux (Paris: Dalloz, 1947), 60, where Turgot’s editor makes the identical claim about the prose of a rival political economy: “It has been said with good reason that *the style is the man himself* [le style est l’homme même]. Turgot’s style is particularly characteristic.” My translation.

ⁱⁱ The phrase is John Henry Newman’s from his famous letter to Charles Kingsley of January 17th 1864. Newman, *Apologia Pro Vita Sua*, ed. Ian Ker (London: Penguin, 2004) 368.

ⁱⁱⁱ MA: 25-26; F: 103. Throughout this article I adopt the following convention for referring to three texts of volume one of *Das Kapital*: “MA” for *Capital*, trans. Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling, ed. Friedrich Engels (New York: Modern Library, 1936 [1st pub. 1886]); “F” for *Capital*, trans. Ben Fowkes (London: Penguin, 1990 [1st pub. 1976]); “MEGA II.8” for *Das Kapital* [2nd German ed. 1872] in *Marx-Engels-Gesamtausgabe* (Berlin: Dietz, 1975) II.8 (1989). Further references to these three texts will appear in parenthesis.

^{iv} Marx was never a straightforward despiser of jargon, but always regarded it as one language material among many, capable both of conscious and unconscious, as well as of effective and ineffective use. In other words, his attitude to jargon in general was never simply contemptuous, but was sometimes an artistic and literary attitude. The puritanical rejection of jargon as corrupt language unreuseable in serious argument is from Marx’s perspective pompous and undialectical. One of Marx’s scornful observations on “critical criticism” at the beginning of *The Holy Family* is that “it scorns writing for experts, it writes for the general public, banning all outlandish expressions, all ‘Latin intricacies, all professional jargon.’” Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Collected Works*, Vol. 4 (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1975), 9. Among the unfinished notes for volume two of *Das Kapital*, written in what Engels called Marx’s “careless style,” there is an ironic reference to “the jargon of Political Economy.” Karl Marx, *Capital*, Volume II (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1986), 223. The reference is ironic because Marx refers with this phrase to the everyday language of capitalist employment practices, not to any specialised vocabulary beyond the reach of factory workers. Marx had enough respect for his readers not to imagine

that they needed protecting from recondite diction and erudite allusions; he also had enough contempt for them to relish imagining their discomfort over the same diction and allusions.

^v Karl Marx, *Capital*, Volume II (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1986), 1.

^{vi} Wilhelm Liebknecht, *Karl Marx: Biographical Memoirs*, 76.

^{vii} Criticism of “poetic” language by Marxists usually amounts to an excursus from the more central criticism of “idealism.” It is a criticism dominated by a particular tradition of Marxist polemic, the fighting rhetoric of Bolshevik anti-Platonism. See for example Nikolai Bukharin, *Philosophical Arabesques*, trans. Renfrey Clarke (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2005), 245: “...there will be no room for the hypertrophy of the ‘spiritual,’ under the influence of which the object evaporated, as it were, being transformed (not in reality, of course, but in the heads of philosophers) into an ‘idea,’ a ‘concept,’ or some other emaciated, cachectic abstraction located on the upper contours of thought.” This even when Bukharin was in prison awaiting his show trial: a *locus amoenus* with a notable history of prompting exactly the consolations of antimaterialist philosophy which Bukharin completely rejects. Cf. Surrey’s poem on his incarceration in the Tower of London, “The stormes are past, these cloudes are overblowne,” in particular line 8, where the hypertrophy of the spiritual within the prisoner is set against the atrophy of valid freedom in the world at large, according to the convention of Boethian consolation: “Thraldom at large hath made this prison fre.” Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey, *Poems*, ed. Emrys Jones (Oxford: Clarendon, 1964), 33.

^{viii} F.A. Wolf, *Prolegomena to Homer*, trans. Anthony Grafton et. al. (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1985), 209. Goethe’s riposte, in which he berates Wolf for turning Homer into a “patchwork,” is his poem “Homer wieder Homer” [“Homer versus Homer”]. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Sämtliche Werke*, Vol. 13.1, eds. Gisela Henckmann and Irmela Schneider (München: Carl Hanser Verlag), 179. Schiller called Wolf’s account “barbaric.” See James I. Porter, *Nietzsche and the Philology of the Future* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2000), 311. On Wolf’s *Prolegomena* as “the first modern history of an ancient text,” see Anthony Grafton, *Commerce with the Classics: Ancient Books and Renaissance Readers* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1997), 174.

^{ix} Moore and Aveling’s translation is felicitous in echoing the original author of the term and the concept “bathos” in English, Alexander Pope. Pope satirically argued that in the current “flourishing” state of British trade (in 1728), language, like other natural materials used in manufacture, was subject to the “Golden Rule of Transformation,” namely, that any object or value can be turned into its opposite and diminished to the point of absurdity in the interests of trade. Bathos is the good practice of this *Golden Rule*, the “the *non plus ultra* of true Modern Poesie!” *The Art of Sinking in Poetry. The Prose Works of Alexander Pope*, ed. Rosemary Cowler. Vol. II: The Major Works, 1725–1744 (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), 186. Marx’s analysis of “Der Fetischcharakter der Ware und sein Geheimnis” is a latter-day *Peri Bathous*, an art of subliming in consumption.

^x Louis Althusser, “Preface to *Capital* Volume One [1969],” *Lenin and Philosophy and Other essays*, trans. Ben Brewster (London: NLB, 1971), 92.

^{xi} *Ibid.*, 71, 74.

^{xii} Karl Kautsky, *The Economic Doctrines of Karl Marx*, trans. H.J. Stenning (London: A. & C. Black, 1925 [1st pub. 1887]), 11.

^{xiii} Samuel Beckett, *Molloy; Malone dies; The unnameable* (London: Calder, 1997), 139.

^{xiv} Karl Kautsky, *The Economic Doctrines of Karl Marx*, 11.

^{xv} J. Hillis Miller, “Promises, Promises: Speech Act Theory, Literary Theory, and Politico-Economic Theory in Marx and de Man,” *New Literary History*, Vol. 33, No. 1 (Winter 2002), 7.

^{xvi} Debord’s most direct commentary on *détournement* is an article co-authored with Gil Wolman, “Mode d’emploi du détournement [1956],” Guy Debord, *Œuvres*, ed. Jean-Louis Rançon and Alice Debord (Paris: Quarto Gallimard, 2006), 221–229. For a kind of practical guide to *détournement* that gives examples of the method in action, see Debord’s “Relevé provisoire des citations et des détournements de *La Société du spectacle*,” *Œuvres*: 862–872. Debord wrote this “provisional statement” in 1973 for the translators of his famous text, to make sure that they would preserve intact its artifice of parodic and transformed literary citations (many of which are transformed citations of *Le Capital*).

^{xvii} Theodor Adorno, “Thesen über Bedürfnis (1942),” *Gesammelte Schriften*, Band 8, ed. Rolf Tiedemann (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1972), 392. My translation.

^{xviii} Marx, *Capital*, Volume II, 223.

^{xix} The first definition of “congeal” in *A Copious and Critical English-Latin Lexicon founded on the German-Latin dictionary of Dr. Charles Ernest Georges* (London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1847) is “to freeze,” then “to cause or make to c, congelare (by letting athg get cold).”

^{xx} For a recent account of living labour as “the fundamental human faculty” trapped in agonistic opposition with abstract labour, see Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (London: Penguin, 2006), 144–6.

^{xxi} “Gallerte.” *Meyers Konversations-Lexikon* (Leipzig: 1888), Vol. 6: 857. My translation. The German text is accessible online at http://peter-hug.ch/lexikon/1888_bild/06_0857.

^{xxii} For the most famous and seminal passage on the division of labor, which takes as its example the “very trifling manufacture” of pins, see Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, eds. R. H. Campbell and A. S. Skinner (Oxford: Clarendon, 1979), 14–15 (Vol. 1, Book I, Ch. 1, paragraph I.1.3).

^{xxiii} Cf. Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, ed. C.J. Arthur (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1974), 103: “Philosophy and the study of the actual world have the same relation to one another as masturbation and sexual love.” A satirical remark at the expense of puritanical readers disgusted by the obscene, no doubt; but also a suggestion that the appetite for the study of phantoms and the satisfaction to be gained from it is at a basic level identical to the appetite for and satisfaction to be gained from the study of material. For Althusser, Marx stopped masturbating once and for all when he discovered sexual love in the bower of scientific bliss; but might not a little permanent recidivism in this case be the spice of new life?

^{xxiv} *Ibid.*, 47.

^{xxv} *The Task*, II. 563–4. *The Poems of William Cowper*, Vol. II: 1782–1785, ed. John D. Baird and Charles Ryskamp (Oxford: Clarendon, 1995), 153. Marx sees in what the bourgeoisie finds bathetic the image of bourgeois culture itself. The bourgeoisie itself creates the stage and the mirror and all the instruments of vanity that it loathes. It engenders and then acts the censor and diagnostician of its own bathos. For Cowper as for Pope, bathos is the name of an offence against natural truth and value; for Marx, bourgeois bathos is the literary symptomatology of bourgeois economic success.

^{xxvi} Cf. Marx and Engels, *The Holy Family: Collected Works*, Vol. 4, pp. 36–7: “Since in the fully formed proletariat the abstraction of all humanity, even of the semblance of humanity, is practically complete; since the conditions of life of the proletariat sum up all the conditions of life of society today in their most inhuman form; since man has lost himself in the proletariat, yet at the same time has not only gained theoretical consciousness of that loss, but through urgent no longer removable, no longer disguisable, absolutely imperative *need*—the practical expression of *necessity*—is driven directly to revolt against this inhumanity, it follows that the proletariat can and must emancipate itself.”

^{xxvii} The phrase is by Ernst Bloch, cited in Georg Lukács, “Realism in the Balance,” *Aesthetics and Politics*, ed. (London: N.L.B., 1977), 42.

^{xxviii} Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte. Later Political Writings*, ed. and trans. Terrell Carver (Cambridge: CUP, 1996), 120. I am grateful to Robbie Ellen for reminding me of this passage and ushering the vampire into this article.

^{xxix} Marx and Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, trans. Samuel Moore (London: Penguin, 2002), 238. “This person must...be swept out of the way, and made impossible.”

^{xxx} Charles de Brosses, *Du Culte des Dieux Fétiches, ou Parallèle de l’ancienne Religion de l’Égypte avec la Religion actuelle de Nigritie* [Paris: 1760], Facsimile edition (Westmead: Gregg International, 1972), 237.

^{xxxi} Chateaubriand, *Itinéraire de Paris à Jérusalem* (Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1968 [1st 1811]), 373. My translation.

^{xxxii} The origin of the now “Marxist” word and concept “fetishism” in de Brosses has been pointed out by, *inter alia*, Mikhail Lifshitz, *The Philosophy of Art of Karl Marx*, trans. Ralph B. Winn (London: Pluto, 1973 [in Russian, 1933; 1st English translation, 1938]), 36. On the contribution of de Brosses’s commentary to the history of the concept in general, see Roy Ellen, “Fetishism.” *Man*. New Series, Vol. 23, No. 2. (Jun., 1988): 213–235.

^{xxxiii} “*Segui il tuo corso, e lascia dir le genti*” instead of “*Vien retro a me, e lascia dir le genti*.” *Purgatorio*, Canto V, line 13. Régis Debray in *La puissance et les rêves* [Paris: Gallimard, 1984], 117] mistakes Marx’s *détournement* of Dante for the sweet new style of the original: “«*Segui il tuo corso e lascia dir le genti*»—*conseil de Dante au chercheur*.”

^{xxxiv} Louis Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, 92.

^{xxxv} V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 38 (Moscow, 1963), 180.

^{xxxvi} Laura Mulvey, "Some Thoughts on Theories of Fetishism in the Context of Contemporary Culture," *October* 65. (Summer, 1993), 8.

^{xxxvii} Mulvey's account seems to follow Fredric Jameson, *Signatures of the Visible* [(London: Routledge, 1992), 188], unhesitatingly confirming what for Jameson was described as one possible option for interpreting Marx: "if commodity fetishism can in one way be usefully described as "the effacement of the traces of production from the object," then aesthetic dereification will naturally enough be identified as the will to deconceal those traces."

^{xxxviii} Laura Mulvey, "Some Thoughts on Theories of Fetishism in the Context of Contemporary Culture," 9.

^{xxxix} For the first appearance of the word and de Brosses's first defense of it, see *Du Culte des Dieux Fétiches*, 10.

^{xl} Giorgio Agamben, *Stanzas: Word and Phantasm in Western Culture*, trans. Ronald L. Martinez (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993 [in Italian, 1977]), 35.

^{xli} "On ne peut s'empêcher d'être étonné que des nations & des siècles si distains se soient recontrés sur un pareille idée." Charles de Brosses, *Du Culte des Dieux Fétiches*, 164. All translations from de Brosses are my own.

^{xlii} On what is today the obvious racism and mythographic license of de Brosses's ethnography, see Peter Mark, "Fetishers, 'Marybuckes' and the Christian Norm: European Images of Senegambians and Their Religions, 1550-1760," *African Studies Review*, Vol. 23, No. 2. (September 1980): 91-99. On de Brosses's parallel account of primitive language acquisition and the "natural order," see Gérard Genette, *Mimologies*, trans. Thaïs E. Morgan (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1994 [in French, 1976]): 65-90.

^{xliii} Heidegger's neo-Schillerian discourse on the status of objects for primitives is at *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper Collins, 1962), 113: "...for primitive man, the sign coincides with that which is indicated. Not only can the sign represent this in the sense of serving as a substitute for what it indicates, but it can do so in such a way that the sign itself always *is* what it indicates. This remarkable coinciding does not mean, however, that the sign-Thing has already undergone a certain 'Objectification'—that it has been experienced as a mere Thing and misplaced into the same realm of Being of the present-at-hand as what it indicates. This 'coinciding' is not an identification of things which have hitherto been isolated from each other: it consists rather in the fact that the sign has not as yet become free from that of which it is a sign. Such a use of signs is still absorbed completely in Being-towards what is indicated, so that a sign as such cannot detach itself at all."

^{xliv} Charles de Brosses, *Du Culte des Dieux Fétiches*, 201. Nietzsche of course raised this conventional gesture of astonishment and its emphasis on the mutuality of the enlightened to an art and a philosophy in itself. A dividend of the same impulse is still at work in the majority of Lacan's writing, though often in bafflingly crude form. "Do not, however, get the idea that I address myself to everyone at large. I am speaking to those who are savvy, to the nonidiots," writes the psychotherapist in the spirit of pastoral benevolence. Jacques Lacan, *Televisión: A Challenge to the Psychoanalytic Establishment*, trans. Denis Hollier, Rosalind Kraus and Annette Michelson, ed. Joan Copjec (New York: Norton, 1990), 3.

^{xlv} Charles de Brosses, *Du Culte des Dieux Fétiches*, 12.

^{xlvi} *Ibid.*, 184-6.

^{xlvii} Cf. Benjamin Constant, *Adolphe* (Paris: Flammarion, 1989 [1st in 1816]), 54-5: "L'étonnement de la première jeunesse, à l'aspect d'une société si factice et si travaillée, annonce plutôt un cœur naturel qu'un esprit méchant."

^{xlviii} See Kant, "An Answer to the Question: What Is Enlightenment?" collected in *What Is Enlightenment? Eighteenth-Century Answers and Twentieth-Century Questions*, ed. James Schmidt (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 58-64: "Enlightenment is mankind's exit from its self-incurred immaturity [*selbstverschuldeten Unmündigkeit*]" (58). The maturity of the enlightened individual in Kant's sense is a kind of autonomy and self-determination. Marx's description of the commodity in part one, section three of *Capital* is a negative mirror image of the enlightened *mündig* person, as well as a contribution to the larger theoretical account of his present impossibility: "Since no commodity can stand in the relation of equivalent to itself, and thus turn its own bodily shape into the expression of its own value, every commodity is compelled to choose some other commodity for its equivalent, and to accept the use-value, that is to say, the bodily shape of that other commodity as the form of its own value." MA: 65. Marx is of course using the commodity as a marionette to satirise the *unmündig* person, whose realist theoretical portrait is given in Theodor Adorno's description of compulsory psychic compromise enforced by

capitalism. See *Negative Dialectics* (London: Routledge, 1973), 152: the “individual must harmoniously stylize the contrary course of the world and heteronomously obey it, against his own better insight.” In German, *Gesammelte Schriften*, Band 6 (2003), 155.

^{xlix} M. V. David, “Les idées du 18e siècle sur l'idolâtrie, et les audaces de David Hume et du Président de Brosses,” *Numen*, Vol. 24, Fasc. 2. (Aug., 1977): 91. My translation.

^l A passing comment on Marx’s interest in de Brosses is made by Jean-Luc Nancy, “The Two Secrets of the Fetish,” trans. Thomas C. Platt, *Diacritics*, Vol. 31, No. 2. (Summer, 2001): 4. Terrell Carver twice notes the derivation, but makes no comment on it except to say, inaccurately, that “Marx used the word ‘fetish’ in this [i.e. de Brosses’s] eighteenth- and nineteenth-century sense.” “Marx’s Commodity Fetishism,” *Inquiry*, 18 (1975), 50. See also his *The Postmodern Marx* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), 15. Carver claims in *The Postmodern Marx* to be interested in bringing interpretation of Marx up to date by subjecting his works to the full pressure and illumination of postmodern hermeneutics, but in the event this means for Carver little more than deference to already existing post-structuralist theories of interpretation (Foucault’s “regime of truth,” etc). Marx is not treated as literature that requires close reading, but as text that requires theories of textuality. Cf. Ernesto Laclau’s review of *The Postmodern Marx* in *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 95, No. 4. (Dec., 2001), 976, where the consequences of this treatment are manifested in the admiring jargon of theoretical recuperation: “A great deal of literature has tried to discover the “true” Marx, but we get from Carver a fascinating unveiling of the multiplicity of the Marxian text, of the various discursive sequences whose unity results from contingent articulations rather than from any underlying univocal principle. Seen from this angle, the work of Marx appears as a sort of microcosm in which we find, in nuce, all the potential and often contradictory trends of the history of Marxism in the century following the founder’s death.”

^{li} Slavoj Žižek, *The Plague of Fantasies* (London: Verso, 1997), 98.

^{lii} Neither is it clear from Žižek’s account that he himself had read de Brosses when he wrote it. He never cites the book directly, but says in a footnote that he “draws on” Alfonzo Iacono. *The Plague of Fantasies*, 124.

^{liii} *Ibid.*, 105.

^{liv} As Marshall Berman writes, “the audience [of *Capital*] finds itself onstage.” *Adventures in Marxism* (London: Verso, 1999), 85. I would add: *and nowhere else*.

^{lv} As the entry on “commodity fetishism” by Ben Fine in Tom Bottomore’s “up-to-date guide to the basic concepts of Marxism” (p.xii) puts it, “The simplicity of commodity fetishism makes it a starting point and example for analysing non-economic relations. It establishes a dichotomy between appearance and concealed reality (without the former necessarily being false) which can be taken up in the analysis of IDEOLOGY.” *A Dictionary of Marxist Thought*, 2nd, ed. Tom Bottomore (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), 102. There is no mention of de Brosses either in this entry or in the entry on “fetishism” by Michèle Barrett.

^{lvi} Jean-Luc Nancy, “The Two Secrets of the Fetish,” 6.

^{lvii} An excellent philological account of this tradition of commentary is Pierre Hadot, *The Veil of Isis: An Essay on the History of the Idea of Nature*, trans. Michael Chase, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2006).

^{lviii} Žižek, *The Plague of Fantasies*, 105.

^{lix} Theodor Adorno, *The Jargon of Authenticity*, trans. Knut Tarnowski and Frederic Will (London: Routledge, 2003), 43. *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, Band 6. (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1970), 448.