8. The dialectic of labor and time

Marx in unfolding the category of capital, then, relates the historical dynamic of capitalist society as well as the industrial form of production to the structure of abstract domination constituted by labor when it is both a productive activity and a socially mediating activity. I shall now specify this relation by examining more closely how, according to Marx's critique, the fundamental social forms of capitalism shape the character of both this historical dynamic and this form of production. Rather than proceeding by directly investigating Marx's analysis of the sphere of production, however, I shall discuss the most salient structural features of that sphere by first taking a "step backward," as it were, and considering further the implications of the initial categories of Marx's analysis. This will clarify certain important characteristics of the capital form which might not be apparent were I to examine the sphere of production more directly. In particular, this will allow me to elaborate the central importance of the temporal dimension of value to Marx's analysis. Such an approach will elucidate the specificity of the dynamic of capital and lay the groundwork for articulating Marx's understanding of the social constitution of the process of production. Once I have analyzed the determinate character of the dynamic of capitalism on this fundamental level, I shall return, in Chapter Nine, to examining central aspects of Marx's treatment of the sphere of production in light of this analysis.

By first considering the implications of Marx's initial categories for an analysis of the dynamic of capital and of the process of production, the interpretation presented in this chapter will be able to clearly locate the basic contradiction of capitalist society—and, hence, the possibility of social critique and practical opposition—in the double-sided social forms grasped by the Marxian categories, rather than between these social forms and "labor."

This approach will make clear how my reinterpretation of Marx's basic categories grounds a reconceptualization of the nature of capitalism, in particular, of its contradictory dynamic, in a way that does not privilege considerations of the market and private ownership of the means of production. It provides the basis for analyzing the intrinsic relationship between capital and industrial production, and for investigating the possible relation between the development of capital and the nature and development of other large-scale bureaucratic institutions and organizations of postliberal capitalist society. (An investigation based
on this interpretation would ground socially and specify historically these institutions and organizations, and, in doing so, provide the basis for distinguishing between economic and administrative mechanisms that are bound or related to the capital form, and those that would remain necessary even if capital were abolished.)

The immanent dynamic

I have focused thus far on the centrality to Marx's critical theory of his conception of the dual character of the fundamental social forms of capitalist society, and have tried to clarify the nature of, and distinction between, the value dimension of the forms (abstract labor, value, abstract time) and their use value dimension (concrete labor, material wealth, concrete time). At this point, I can examine their interrelations. The nonidentity of these two dimensions is not simply a static opposition; rather, the two moments of labor in capitalism, as productive activity and as a socially mediating activity, are mutually determining in a way that gives rise to an immanent dialectical dynamic. It should be noted that the following investigation of the dynamic relation of productivity and value presupposes fully developed capitalism; this relation is the core of a pattern that only fully comes into its own with the emergence of relative surplus value as a dominant form.

In examining the significance of the distinction between concrete labor and abstract labor in terms of the difference between material wealth and value, I showed that although increased productivity (which Marx considers an attribute of labor's use value dimension) does increase the number of products and, hence, the amount of material wealth, it does not change the magnitude of total value yielded within a given unit of time. The magnitude of value, then, appears to be a function of abstract labor time expenditure alone, completely independent of labor's use value dimension. Behind this opposition, however, there is a dynamic interaction between the two dimensions of commodity-determined labor, as becomes evident when the following example is examined closely:

The introduction of power looms into England, for example, probably reduced by one half the labour required to transform a given quantity of yarn into woven fabric. The English hand-loom weaver in fact needed the same amount of labour-time as before to effect this transformation; but the product of his individual hour of labour now only represented half a social labour-hour, and consequently fell to one half its former value.1

Marx introduces this example in the first chapter of Volume 1 of Capital to illustrate his notion of socially necessary labor time as the measure of value. His example indicates that when the commodity is the general form of the product, the actions of individuals constitute an alienated totality that constrains

and subsumes them. Like his exposition of value in Volume 1 more generally, this example operates on the level of the social totality.

It is significant for our purposes that this initial determination of the magnitude of value also implies a dynamic. Let us assume that, before the power loom was introduced, the average hand-loom weaver produced 20 yards of cloth in one hour, yielding a value of $x$. When the power loom, which doubled productivity, was first introduced, most weaving still was done by hand. Consequently, the standard of value—socially necessary labor time—continued to be determined by hand-loom weaving; the norm remained 20 yards of cloth per hour. Hence, the 40 yards of cloth produced in one hour with the power loom had a value of $2x$. However, once the new mode of weaving became generalized, it gave rise to a new norm of socially necessary labor time: the normative labor time for the production of 40 yards of cloth was reduced to an hour. Because the magnitude of value yielded is a function of (socially average) time expended, rather than the mass of goods produced, the value of the 40 yards of cloth produced in one hour with the power loom fell from $2x$ to $x$. Those weavers who continued to use the older method, now anachronistic, still produced 20 yards of cloth per hour but received only $\frac{1}{2}x$—the value of a socially normative half hour—for their individual hour of labor.

Although an increase in productivity results in more material wealth, the new level of productivity, once generalized, yields the same amount of value per unit time as was the case prior to its increase. In discussing the differences between value and material wealth, I noted that the total value yielded in a social labor hour remains constant, according to Marx: ‘‘The same labour, therefore, performed for the same length of time, always yields the same amount of value, independently of any changes in productivity.’’ This example clearly indicates, however, that something does change with changes in productivity: not only does increased productivity yield a greater amount of material wealth, but it effects a reduction of socially necessary labor time. Given the abstract temporal measure of value, this redetermination of socially necessary labor time changes the magnitude of value of the individual commodities produced rather than the total value produced per unit time. That total value remains constant and simply is distributed among a greater mass of products when productivity increases. This, however, implies that, in the context of a system characterized by an abstract temporal form of wealth, the reduction of socially necessary labor time redetermines the normative social labor hour. The social labor hour in this example had been determined by hand-loom weaving in terms of the production of 20 yards of cloth; it then was redetermined by power-loom weaving in terms of the production of 40 yards of cloth. Although, then, a change in socially general productivity does not change the total amount of value produced per abstract time unit, it does change the determination of this time unit. Only the

2. Ibid., p. 137.
hour of labor time in which the general standard of socially necessary labor time is met counts as a social labor hour. In other words, the social labor hour is constituted by the level of productivity. (Note that this determination cannot be expressed in terms of abstract time. What has changed is not the amount of time which yields a value of \( x \) but, rather, the standard of what constitutes that amount of time.)

Productivity—the use value dimension of labor—does not, then, change the total value yielded per abstract time unit; it does, however, determine the time unit itself. We are thus faced with the following apparent paradox: the magnitude of value is a function only of labor expenditure as measured by an independent variable (abstract time), yet the constant time unit itself apparently is a dependent variable, one that is redetermined with changes in productivity. Abstract time, then, is not only socially constituted as a qualitatively determinate form of time, but it is quantitatively constituted as well: what constitutes a social labor hour is determined by the general level of productivity, the use value dimension. Yet although the social labor hour is redetermined, it remains constant as a unit of abstract time.

I shall investigate the temporal dimension of this paradox below, but at this point it should be noted that Marx’s example implies that the two dimensions of the commodity form interact. On the one hand, increased productivity redetermines socially necessary labor time and thereby changes the determinations of the social labor hour. That is, the abstract temporal constant which determines value is itself determined by the use value dimension, the level of productivity. On the other hand, although the social labor hour is determined by the general productivity of concrete labor, the total value yielded in that hour remains constant, regardless of the level of the productivity. This implies that each new level of productivity, once it has become socially general, not only redetermines the social labor hour but, in turn, is redetermined by that hour as the “base level” of productivity. The amount of value yielded per unit of abstract time by the new level of productivity is equal to that yielded by the older general level of productivity. In this sense, the level of productivity, the use value dimension, is also determined by the value dimension (as the new base level).

This process of the reciprocal determination of the two dimensions of social labor in capitalism occurs on the level of society as a whole. It is at the heart of a dialectical dynamic intrinsic to the social totality constituted by commodity-determined labor. The peculiarity of the dynamic—and this is crucial—is its treadmill effect. Increased productivity increases the amount of value produced per unit of time—until this productivity becomes generalized; at that point the magnitude of value yielded in that time period, because of its abstract and general temporal determination, falls back to its previous level. This results in a new determination of the social labor hour and a new base level of productivity. What emerges, then, is a dialectic of transformation and reconstitution: the socially general levels of productivity and the quantitative determinations of so-
cially necessary labor time change, yet these changes reconstitute the point of departure, that is, the social labor hour and the base level of productivity.

This treadmill effect implies, even on the abstract logical level of the problem of the magnitude of value—in other words, before the category of surplus value and the wage labor—capital relation have been introduced—a society that is directionally dynamic, as expressed by the drive for ever-increasing levels of productivity. As we have seen, increased productivity results in short-term increases in the amount of value yielded per unit time, which induces the general adoption of the newer methods of producing; however, once these methods become generalized, the value yielded per unit time returns to its older level. In effect, those producers who had not yet adopted these new methods are now compelled to do so. The introduction of still newer methods of increasing productivity bring about further short-term increases in value. One consequence of the labor time measure of wealth, then, is that as the temporal constant is re-determined by increased productivity, it induces, in turn, still greater productivity. The result is a directionally dynamic in which the two dimensions, concrete labor and abstract labor, productivity and the abstract temporal measure of wealth, constantly re-determine one another. Because, at this stage of the analysis, we cannot explain the necessity that capital accumulate constantly, the dynamic outlined here, does not represent the fully developed immanent historical logic of capitalism. It does, however, represent the initial specification of this logic and delineates the form growth must take in the context of labor-mediated social relations.

The reciprocal re-determination of increased productivity and the social labor hour has an objective, lawlike quality that is by no means a mere illusion or mystification. Although social, it is independent of human will. To the extent that one can speak of a Marxian "law of value," this treadmill dynamic is its initial determination; as we shall see, it describes a pattern of ongoing social transformation and reconstitution as characteristic of capitalist society. The law of value, then, is dynamic and cannot be understood adequately in terms of an equilibrium theory of the market. Once one considers the temporal dimension of value—understood as a specific form of wealth that differs from material wealth—it becomes evident that the form of value implies the above dynamic from the outset.

Note that the market-mediated mode of circulation is not an essential moment of this dynamic. What is essential to the dynamic of capitalism once it has been

3. As I have discussed, people in capitalism do not act directly in this regard on the basis of considerations of value, according to Marx; rather, their actions are shaped by considerations of price. A complete analysis of the underlying structural dynamic of capitalism, as grasped by the critique of political economy, would therefore have to show how individuals constitute this dynamic on the basis of its forms of appearance. Because my intention here, however, is only to clarify—on a very abstract logical level—the nature of this structural dynamic, I shall not address such considerations of the relation of structure and action.
The dialectic of labor and time

constituted fully is the treadmill effect, which is rooted in the temporal dimension of the value form of wealth alone. If the market mode of circulation does play a role in this dynamic, it is as a subordinate moment of a complex development—for example, as the mode by which the level of productivity is generalized.² That such generalization results in a return of the amount of value to its original level, however, is not a function of the market; it is a function of the nature of value as a form of wealth and is essentially independent of the mode by which each new redetermination of the abstract temporal frame is generalized. As we shall see, this pattern is a central moment of the form of growth Marx associates with the category of surplus value. To focus exclusively on the mode of circulation is to deflect attention away from important implications of the commodity form for the trajectory of capitalist development in Marx’s critical theory.

This investigation of the abstract determinations of capitalism’s dynamic suggests that although the market mode of circulation may have been necessary for the historical genesis of the commodity as the totalizing social form, it need not remain essential to that form. It is conceivable that another mode of coordination and generalization—an administrative one, for example—could serve a similar function for this contradictory social form. In other words, once established, the law of value could also be mediated politically. One implication of this abstract logical analysis, then, is that abolishing the market mode of coordination and overcoming value are not identical.

Earlier, we described the category of capital as a dynamic social form. We now have begun to examine more closely the nature of its dynamic character and indicate how it ultimately is rooted in the interaction of value and material wealth, abstract and concrete labor—that is, the interaction of the two dimensions of the commodity form. This dynamic represents the first outlines of the immanent historical logic of capitalism, which results from the alienated character and temporal determination of labor-mediated social relations. It abstractly foreshadows a central characteristic of capital, namely, that it must accumulate constantly in order to exist. Becoming is the condition of its being.

Abstract time and historical time

I have begun to examine how the dialectical interaction between the use value dimension of social labor in capitalism and its value dimension generates a historical dynamic. The interaction between the two dimensions of the commodity form can also be analyzed in temporal terms, with reference to an opposition between abstract time and a form of concrete time peculiar to

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capitalism. In order to clarify the significance of this opposition I shall also extrapolate its implications on a more socially concrete level.

As we have seen, the interaction of the two dimensions of the commodity form involves a substantive redetermination of an abstract temporal constant. This abstract temporal measure of value remains constant, yet it has a changing, if hidden, social content: not every hour is an hour—in other words, not every hour of labor time counts as the social labor hour that determines the magnitude of total value. The abstract temporal constant, then, is both constant and non-constant. In abstract temporal terms, the social labor hour remains constant as a measure of the total value produced; in concrete terms, it changes as productivity does. Yet because the measure of value remains the abstract temporal unit, its concrete redetermination is not expressed in this unit as such. Increased productivity is, to be sure, expressed in the proportionate decrease in the value of each individual commodity produced—but not in the total value produced per hour. Nevertheless, the historical level of productivity does bear on the total value produced, if only indirectly: it determines the socially necessary labor time required to produce a commodity; this temporal norm, in turn, determines what constitutes a social labor hour. It has become clear that, with increased productivity, the time unit becomes “denser” in terms of the production of goods. Yet this “density” is not manifest in the sphere of abstract temporality, the value sphere: the abstract temporal unit—the hour—and the total value produced remain constant.

That the abstract time frame remains constant despite being redetermined substantively is an apparent paradox that I have noted. This paradox cannot be resolved within the framework of abstract Newtonian time. Rather, it implies another sort of time as a superordinate frame of reference. As we have seen, the process whereby the constant hour becomes “denser”—that is, the substantive change effectuated by the use value dimension—remains nonmanifest in terms of the abstract temporal frame of value. It can, however, be expressed in other temporal terms, with reference to a form of concrete temporality.

In order to elaborate the character of this other sort of time, I must examine further the interaction of the use value and value dimensions of labor in capitalism. In a sense, changes in productivity move the determination of socially necessary labor time along an axis of abstract time: socially necessary labor time decreases with increased productivity. But, although the social labor hour is thereby redetermined, it is not moved along that axis—because it is the coordinate axis itself, the frame against which change is measured. The hour is a constant unit of abstract time; it must remain fixed in abstract temporal terms. Hence, each new level of productivity is redetermined “back” as the base level, yielding the same rate of value. Nevertheless, a new level of productivity has indeed been achieved, even if it is redetermined as the same base level. And while this substantive development cannot change the abstract temporal unit in terms of abstract time itself, it does change the “position” of that unit. The
entire abstract temporal axis, or frame of reference, is moved with each socially
genral increase in productivity; both the social labor hour and the base level
of productivity are moved “forward in time.”

This movement resulting from the substantive redetermination of abstract time
cannot be expressed in abstract temporal terms; it requires another frame of
reference. That frame can be conceived as a mode of concrete time. Earlier, I
defined concrete time as any sort of time that is a dependent variable—a function
of events or actions. We have seen that the interaction of the two dimensions
of commodity-determined labor is such that socially general increases in pro-
ductivity move the abstract temporal unit “forward in time.” Productivity, ac-
cording to Marx, is grounded in the social character of the use value dimension
of labor. Hence, this movement of time is a function of the use value dimension
of labor as it interacts with the value frame, and can be understood as a sort of
concrete time. In investigating the interaction of concrete and abstract labor,
which lies at the heart of Marx’s analysis of capital, we have uncovered that a feature of capitalism is a mode of (concrete) time that expresses the motion of
(abstract) time.

The dialectic of the two dimensions of labor in capitalism, then, can also be
understood temporally, as a dialectic of two forms of time. As we have seen,
the dialectic of concrete and abstract labor results in an intrinsic dynamic char-
acterized by a peculiar treadmill pattern. Because each new level of productivity
is redetermined as a new base level, this dynamic tends to become ongoing and
is marked by ever-increasing levels of productivity. Considered temporally, this
intrinsic dynamic of capital, with its treadmill pattern, entails an ongoing direc-
tional movement of time, a “flow of history.” In other words, the mode of
conce time we are examining can be considered historical time, as constituted
in capitalist society.

The historical time to which I refer clearly differs from abstract time, although
both are constituted socially with the development of the commodity as a to-atalizing form. I have argued that abstract time, defined as an abstract independent
framework within which events and actions occur, emerges from the transfor-
mation of the results of individual activity, by means of a total social mediation,
into an abstract temporal norm for that activity. Although the measure of value
is time, the totalizing mediation expressed by “socially necessary labor time”
is not a movement of time but a metamorphosis of substantial time into abstract
time in space, as it were, from the particular to the general and back. This
mediation in space constitutes an abstract, homogeneous temporal frame that is
unchanging and serves as the measure of motion. Individual activity then takes
place in, and is measured with reference to, abstract time but cannot change that

6. See Lukács, “Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat,” in History and Class Con-
time. Although changes in productivity move the abstract time unit historically, that historical movement is not reflected in abstract time. Abstract time does not express the motion of time, but constitutes an apparently absolute frame for motion; its equable constant "flow" is actually static. Consequently, the amount of value yielded per unit time, being a function of that time, remains constant regardless of changes in productivity. The entire frame is reconstituted but does not itself express this reconstitution: the movement of the frame is not reflected directly in value terms.

Historical time, in this interpretation, is not an abstract continuum within which events take place and whose flow is apparently independent of human activity; rather, it is the movement of time, as opposed to the movement in time. The social totality’s dynamic expressed by historical time is a constituted and constituting process of social development and transformation that is directional and whose flow, ultimately rooted in the duality of the social relations mediated by labor, is a function of social practice.

This historical process has many aspects. I shall consider only a few fundamental determinations of this process, but all imply, and provide the ground for, the more concrete aspects of the dynamic analyzed by Marx. In the first place, as noted, the dynamic of the totality entails the ongoing development of productivity, a development that distinguishes capitalism from other societies, according to Marx. It involves ongoing changes in the nature of work, production, technology, and the accumulation of related forms of knowledge. More generally, the historical movement of the social totality entails ongoing, massive transformations in the mode of social life of the majority of the population—in social patterns of work and living, in the structure and distribution of classes, the nature of the state and politics, the form of the family, the nature of learning and education, the modes of transportation and communication, and so on. Moreover, the dialectical process at the heart of capitalism’s immanent dynamic entails the constitution, spread, and ongoing transformation of historically determinate forms of subjectivity, interactions, and social values. (This is implied by Marx’s understanding of his categories as determinations of forms of social existence, grasping both social objectivity and subjectivity in their intrinsic relatedness.) Historical time in capitalism, then, can be considered as a form of concrete time that is socially constituted and expresses an ongoing qualitative transformation of work and production, of social life more generally, and of forms of consciousness, values, and needs. Unlike the "flow" of abstract time, this movement of time is not equable, but changes and can even accelerate.

A characteristic of capitalism, then, is the social constitution of two forms of

9. The development of the capital form could, then, serve as the starting point for a sociohistorical examination of changing conceptions of time in the West since the seventeenth century.
The dialectic of labor and time

time—abstract time and historical time—that are related intrinsically. The society based upon value, upon abstract time, is, when fully developed, characterized by an ongoing historical dynamic (and relatedly, the spread of historical consciousness). In other words, the Marxian analysis elucidates and grounds socially the historically dynamic character of capitalist society in terms of a dialectic of the two dimensions of the commodity form that can be grasped as a dialectic of abstract and historical time. He analyzes this society in terms of determinate social forms that constitute a historical process of ongoing social transformation. The basic social forms of capitalism, according to Marx, are such that people in this social formation create their own history—in the sense of an ongoing, directional process of social transformation. Because of the alienated character of these forms, however, the history they constitute is beyond their control.

Historical time, then, is not just the flow of time within which events take place but is constituted as a form of concrete time. It is not expressed by the value-determined form of time as an abstract constant, as "mathematical" time. We have seen that the social labor hour is moved within a dimension of historical time that is concrete and does not flow equably; yet the abstract temporal unit does not manifest its historical redetermination—it retains its constant form as present time. Hence, the historical flow exists behind, but does not appear within, the frame of abstract time. The historical "content" of the abstract temporal unit remains as hidden as does the social "content" of the commodity.

Like this social "content," however, the historical dimension of the abstract temporal unit does not represent a noncapitalist moment; it does not, in and of itself, constitute the standpoint of a critique that points beyond that social formation. As opposed to Lukács—who equates capitalism with static bourgeois relations and posits the dynamic totality, the historical dialectic, as the standpoint of the critique of capitalism—\(^\text{10}\)—the position developed here shows that the very existence of an ongoing, "automatic" historical flow is related intrinsically to the social domination of abstract time. Both forms of time are expressions of alienated relations. I have argued that the structure of social relations characteristic of capitalism takes the form of a quasi-natural opposition between an abstract universal dimension and one of "thingly" nature. The temporal moment of that structure also has the form of an apparently nonsocial and nonhistorical opposition between an abstract formal dimension and one of concrete process. These oppositions, however, are not between capitalist and noncapitalist moments, but, like the related opposition between positive-rational and romantic forms of thought, they remain entirely within the framework of capitalist relations.

Before examining further the interaction of the two forms of time in capitalism, I shall first continue to investigate their differences—in particular, those

\(^{10}\) Lukács, "Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat," pp. 143–49.
differences between historical time and the frame of abstract time which are implied by the differences between material wealth and value. As we have seen, the frame of abstract time, intrinsically related to the value dimension, remains constant with increased productivity. The social labor hour in which the production of 20 yards of cloth yields a total value of \( x \) is the abstract temporal equivalent of the social labor hour in which the production of 40 yards of cloth yields a total value of \( x \): they are equal units of abstract time and, as normative, determine a constant magnitude of value. Assuredly, there is a concrete difference between the two, which results from the historical development of productivity; such a historical development, however, redetermines the criteria of what constitutes a social labor hour, and is not reflected in the hour itself. In this sense, then, value is an expression of time as the present. It is a measure of, and compelling norm for, the expenditure of immediate labor time regardless of the historical level of productivity.

Historical time in capitalism, on the other hand, entails a unique process of ongoing social transformation and is related to ongoing changes in the historical level of productivity: it is a function of the development of the use value dimension of labor in the context of the commodity-determined social totality. It is significant that Marx analyzes productivity in terms of the use value dimension of labor (that is, the social character of concrete labor) as follows:

The productivity of labour ... is determined amongst other things by the workers' average degree of skill, the level of development of science and its technological application, the social organization of the process of production, the extent and effectiveness of the means of production, and the conditions found in the natural environment.\(^{11}\)

This means that the productivity of labor is not bound necessarily to the direct labor of the workers; it also is a function of scientific, technical, and organizational knowledge and experience, which Marx regards as products of human development that are socially general.\(^{12}\) We shall see that in his account, capital unfolds historically in such a way that the level of productivity becomes less and less dependent on the direct labor of the workers. This process entails the development in alienated form of socially general forms of knowledge and experience which are not a function of, and cannot be reduced to, the skills and knowledge of the immediate producers.\(^{13}\) The dialectical movement of time we have been considering represents the initial determinations of Marx's analysis of capital's historical unfolding.

When the use value dimension of labor is measured, it is—unlike the value dimension—measured in terms of its products, the amount of material wealth it

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13. See, for example, *Capital*, vol. 1, pp. 443–58, 482, 509, 549.
produces. Not being bound to immediate labor, it is not measured in terms of the expenditure of abstract labor time. The measure of material wealth also can have a temporal aspect, but in the absence of the form of temporal necessity associated with the value dimension, this temporality is a substantive function of production—the amount of time actually required to produce a particular product. This time is a function of objectification and not a norm for expenditure. The changes in this concrete time of production which occur with the developments of productivity are changes reflecting the historical movement of time. This movement is generated by a process of social constitution related to an ongoing accumulation, in alienated form, of technical, organizational, and scientific knowledge and experience.\textsuperscript{14} It follows from the discussion thus far that, within the framework of Marx’s analysis, certain consequences of this accumulation—that is, consequences of the social, intellectual, and cultural developments that ground the movement of time—can indeed be measured, either in terms of changes in the quantity of goods produced per unit time, for example, or in terms of changes in the amount of time required to produce a particular product. The historical developments themselves, however, cannot be measured: they cannot be quantified as dependent variables of abstract temporality (that is, in value terms), even though the requirements of the social form of value mold the concrete form of production in which the accumulation of knowledge, experience, and labor is objectified. The movement of history, then, can be expressed indirectly by time as a dependent variable; as a movement of time, though, it cannot be grasped by static, abstract time.

One important aspect of Marx’s conception of the trajectory of capitalist society’s historical dynamic has become apparent at this initial stage of the investigation. His fundamental categories imply that, with the unfolding of the dynamic driven ultimately by the commodity form of relations, a growing disparity arises between developments in the productive power of labor (which are not necessarily bound to the direct labor of the workers), on the one hand, and the value frame within which such developments are expressed (which is bound to such labor), on the other. The disparity between the accumulation of historical time and the objectification of immediate labor time becomes more pronounced as scientific knowledge is increasingly materialized in production. Consistent with Marx’s distinction between value and material wealth, the great increases in productivity effected by science and advanced technology are not, and cannot be, accounted for adequately in terms of abstract labor time expenditure, whether manual or mental—including the time required for research and development, and the training of engineers and skilled workers.

This development can be understood with reference to the category of historical time. As we shall see in considering the trajectory of production, with the development of scientifically and technologically advanced production, in-

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., pp. 482, 510.
increases in productivity also express the accumulation of socially general past experience and labor, as well as the frequently discontinuous increases in general knowledge that occur on the basis of this preserved past. The dynamic of capitalism, as grasped by Marx’s categories, is such that with this accumulation of historical time, a growing disparity separates the conditions for the production of material wealth from those for the generation of value. Considered in terms of the use value dimension of labor (that is, in terms of the creation of material wealth), production becomes ever less a process of materially objectifying the skills and knowledge of the individual producers or even the class immediately involved; instead, it becomes ever more an objectification of the accumulated collective knowledge of the species, of humanity—which, as a general category, is itself constituted with the accumulation of historical time. In terms of the use value dimension, then, as capitalism develops fully, production increasingly becomes a process of the objectification of historical time rather than of immediate labor time. According to Marx, though, value necessarily remains an expression of the latter objectification.

The dialectic of transformation and reconstitution

The historical dynamic characteristic of capitalist society, as analyzed by Marx, is not linear but contradictory. It points beyond itself but is not self-overcoming. I have examined, on an abstract and preliminary level, certain differences between production based on the objectification of immediate labor and that based upon historical time. Were it not for the dual character of capitalism’s social forms, the development of production could be understood simply as a technical development entailing the linear supersession of one mode of production by another according to the following historical pattern: In the course of capitalist development a form of production based upon the knowledge, skills, and labor of the immediate producers gives rise to another form, based upon the accumulated knowledge and experience of humanity. With the accumulation of historical time, the social necessity for the expenditure of direct human labor in production gradually is diminished. Production based upon the present, upon the expenditure of abstract labor time, thus generates its own negation—the objectification of historical time.

A number of theories of modernity—for example, those of “postindustrial society”—are based on such an understanding of the development of production. This evolutionary understanding is not fully adequate to the nonlinear character of capitalist production’s historical development. It presupposes that the form of wealth produced remains constant, and that only the method of its production, understood solely in technical terms, changes. Within the framework of Marx’s analysis, such an evolutionary development would be possible only

15. Ibid., p. 508ff.
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if value and material wealth were not very different forms of wealth. Because of the double character of capitalism’s structuring forms, however, this development represents only one tendency within a much more complex, dialectical historical dynamic. Marx’s analysis of value as a structuring social category neither treats the development of production simply as a technical development—whereby a mode of production based primarily on human labor is superseded by one based on science and technology—nor, however, does it ignore the great changes effected by science and technology. Rather, on the basis of the distinctions between value and material wealth, abstract and concrete labor (and, implicitly, abstract and concrete time), Marx analyzes production in capitalism as a contradictory social process that is constituted by a dialectic of the two dimensions of the commodity form.

The interaction of these two dimensions is such that value is not simply superseded by the accumulation of historical time, but continually is reconstituted as an essential determinant of the social formation. This process, which entails the retention of value and the forms of abstract domination associated with it, despite the development of the use value dimension, is intrinsic structurally to the basic social forms of capitalism grasped by Marx’s fundamental categories. In examining the most abstract determinations of capitalist society’s dynamic in terms of the interaction of these two dimensions, we saw how each new level of productivity both redetermines the social labor hour and, in turn, is redetermined by the abstract time frame as a base level of productivity. Changes in concrete time effected by increased productivity are mediated by the social totality in a way that transforms them into new norms of abstract time (socially necessary labor time) that, in turn, redetermine the constant social labor hour. Note that inasmuch as the development of productivity redetermines the social labor hour, this development reconstitutes, rather than supersedes, the form of necessity associated with that abstract temporal unit. Each new level of productivity is structurally transformed into the concrete presupposition of the social labor hour—and the amount of value produced per unit time remains constant. In this sense, the movement of time is continually converted into present time. In Marx’s analysis, the basic structure of capitalism’s social forms is such, then, that the accumulation of historical time does not, in and of itself, undermine the necessity represented by value, that is, the necessity of the present; rather, it changes the concrete presupposition of that present, thereby constituting its necessity anew. Present necessity is not “automatically” negated but paradoxically reinforced; it is impelled forward in time as a perpetual present, an apparently eternal necessity.

For Marx, then, the historical dynamic of capitalism is anything but linear and evolutionary. The development—which I have grounded, on a very abstract logical level, in the double character of labor in capitalism—is at once dynamic and static. It entails ever rising levels of productivity, yet the value frame is perpetually reconstituted anew. One consequence of this peculiar dialectic is
that sociohistorical reality is increasingly constituted on two very different levels. On the one hand, as I have pointed out, capitalism involves an ongoing transformation of social life—of the nature, structure and interrelations of social classes and other groupings, as well as the nature of production, transportation, circulation, patterns of living, the form of the family, and so on. On the other hand, the unfolding of capital involves the ongoing reconstitution of its own fundamental condition as an unchanging feature of social life—namely, that social mediation ultimately is effected by labor. In Marx’s analysis, these two moments—the ongoing transformation of the world and the reconstitution of the value-determined framework—are mutually conditioning and intrinsically related: both are rooted in the alienated social relations constitutive of capitalism, and together they define that society.

The Marxian concept of capital, examined on this very fundamental level, is an attempt to grasp the nature and development of modern capitalist society in terms of both temporal moments, to analyze capitalism as a dynamic society that is in constant flux and, yet, retains its underlying identity. An apparent paradox of capitalism, within this framework, is that, unlike other social formations, it possesses an immanent historical dynamic; this dynamic, however, is characterized by the constant translation of historical time into the framework of the present, thereby reinforcing that present.

To analyze modern capitalist society in terms of the domination of value (and, hence, the domination of capital) is thus to analyze it in terms of two apparently opposed forms of abstract social domination: the domination of abstract time as the present, and a necessary process of ongoing transformation. Both forms of abstract domination as well as their intrinsic interrelation are grasped by the Marxian “law of value.” I have noted that this “law” is dynamic and cannot be grasped adequately as a law of the market; at this point I can add that it categorically grasps the drive toward ever-increasing levels of productivity, the ongoing transformation of social life in capitalist society, as well as the ongoing reconstitution of its basic social forms. It reveals capitalism to be a society marked by a temporal duality—an ongoing, accelerating flow of history, on the one hand, and an ongoing conversion of this movement of time into a constant present, on the other. Although socially constituted, both temporal dimensions lie beyond the control of, and exert domination over, the constituting actors. Far from being a law of static equilibrium, then, Marx’s law of value grasps as a determinate “law” of history, the dialectical dynamic of transformation and reconstitution characteristic of capitalist society.

The analysis of capitalism in terms of these two moments of social reality suggests, however, that it can be very difficult to grasp both simultaneously. Because so many aspects of social life are transformed more and more rapidly as capitalism develops, the unchanging underlying structures of that society—for example, the fact that labor is an indirect means of life for individuals—can be taken to be eternal, socially “natural” aspects of the human condition. As a
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result, the possibility of a future qualitatively different from modern society can be veiled.

This brief investigation of the dialectic of the two dimensions of the basic forms of capitalist society has shown how, according to Marx’s analysis, production based on the expenditure of abstract present time and that based on the appropriation of historical time are not clearly distinguished modes of producing in capitalism (whereby the latter gradually supersedes the former). Rather, they are moments of the developed capitalist process of production which interact in a way that constitutes this process. Consequently, production in capitalism does not develop in a linear fashion. The dialectical dynamic does, however, give rise to the historical possibility that production based on historical time can be constituted separately from production based on abstract present time—and that the alienated interaction of past and present, characteristic of capitalism, can be overcome. It is this possible future separation that allows one to distinguish between the two moments of the sphere of production in the present, that is, in capitalist society.

At this point, I can return to the category of socially necessary labor time. We have seen that this category represents the transformation of concrete time into abstract time in capitalism, and, as such, expresses a temporally normative compulsion. My preliminary examination of capitalism’s immanent dynamic has shown how this objective, impersonal compulsion exerted on individuals is not static but is itself continually reconstituted historically. The producers not only are compelled to produce in accordance with an abstract temporal norm, but must do so in a historically adequate fashion: they are compelled to “keep up with the times.” People in capitalist society are confronted with a historically determinate form of abstract social necessity whose determinations change historically—that is, they are confronted with a socially constituted form of historical necessity. The notion of historical necessity has another meaning, of course—that history necessarily moves in a determinate fashion. This discussion of Marx’s initial categories has shown that, according to his analysis, these two aspects of historical necessity—the changing compulsion confronting individuals, and the intrinsic logic impelling the totality—are related expressions of the same form of social life.16

This investigation implies further that the category of socially necessary labor time also has another dimension. Given that value is the form of social wealth

16. It should be clear that the sort of historical necessity grounded socially by the Marxian categories pertains to the development of the social formation as a whole. It does not refer directly to political developments within countries and among countries, for example. These could, conceivably, be investigated in terms of the historical “metalogic” analyzed by Marx; to do so without considering necessary mediations and contingent factors, however, would be reductionist. By the same token, to criticize Marx’s analysis from the standpoint of a more contingent plane of historical development is to confuse levels of analysis and social reality which should be distinguished.
in capitalism, socially necessary labor time should be understood as socially necessary in an additional sense: it implicitly refers to labor time that is necessary for capital and, hence, for society so long as it is capitalist, that is, so long as it is structured by value as the form of wealth and surplus value as the goal of production. This labor time, accordingly, is the expression of a superordinate form of necessity for capitalist society as a whole, as well as for individuals, and should not be confused with the form of necessity Marx refers to in his distinction between "necessary" and "surplus" labor time. As we have seen, this is a distinction between the portion of the workday in which the workers labor for their own reproduction ("necessary" labor time) and the portion that is appropriated by the representatives of capital ("surplus" labor time). In this sense, both "necessary" and "surplus" labor time are subsumed under "socially necessary labor time" in all of its ramifications.

The category of value, in its opposition to that of material wealth, then, signifies that labor time is the stuff of which wealth and social relations are made in capitalism. It refers to a form of social life in which humans are dominated by their own labor and are compelled to maintain this domination. The imperatives grounded in this social form, as I shall discuss further, impel rapid increases in technological development and a necessary pattern of ongoing "growth"; yet, they also perpetuate the necessity of direct human labor in the process of production, regardless of the degree of technological development and of the accumulation of material wealth. It is as the ultimate ground of these historically specific imperatives that labor, in its dual character as productive activity and as a historically specific social "substance," constitutes the identity of capitalism, according to Marx.

It should be clear by now that the complex dynamic I have been investigating is the essential core of the Marxian dialectic of the forces and relations of production in capitalism. My reading indicates, first, that this dialectic is rooted in the double character of the social forms that constitute capitalist society—in the value and use value dimensions of labor and of socially constituted time; and, second, that it perpetuates the abstract compulsion of temporal necessity in both its static and its dynamic dimensions. By grounding this dialectic's fundamental features on such an abstract logical level, I have shown that, in Marx's analysis, it is rooted neither in a purportedly fundamental contradiction between production and distribution, nor in private ownership of the means of production—that is, in class conflict; rather, it stems from the peculiar social forms constituted by labor in capitalism which structure such conflict. This understanding of the developmental pattern and possible negation of capitalist society differs greatly from that associated with approaches proceeding from the notion of "labor" that define the contradictory dialectic of capitalism in traditional terms.

We have seen, if only on a preliminary logical level, how the two dimensions

of social labor dynamically re-determine and reinforce one another. Nevertheless, in my discussion of the differences between production based on the appropriation of historical time and that based on the expenditure of abstract present time, I have also shown that these two dimensions are fundamentally different. In Marx’s analysis, the ground for capitalism’s contradictory character is precisely the circumstance that, while these two dimensions are very different, they, nevertheless, are bound together as two moments of a single (historically specific) social form. The result is a dynamic interaction in which these two moments re-determine one another and in such a way that their difference becomes a growing opposition. This mounting opposition within a common framework does not, as I have shown on a very abstract level, result in any sort of linear evolutionary development wherein the underlying basis of the present is quasi-automatically overcome and superseded. Even at this level one can see that it would result in a growing intrinsic structural tension.

In the traditional interpretation, capitalist relations of production remain extrinsic to the process of production, which is constituted by “labor.” The contradiction between the forces and relations of production is, therefore, seen as one between production and distribution, that is, between existing social “institutions” and spheres. Within the framework developed in this work, however, that contradiction is within these “institutions,” spheres, and processes. This suggests that the capitalist process of production, for example, must be understood in social as well as in technical terms. As I shall elaborate, even the material form of this process can be analyzed socially, in terms of the growing internal structural tension, the “shearing pressure,” that results from the two structural imperatives of the dialectic of transformation and reconstitution—achieving ever-higher levels of productivity and producing a surplus of value.

It is the non-identity of the two dimensions of the basic structuring forms of capitalism, then, which imparts an intrinsic dialectical dynamic to the social formation and unfolds as its basic contradiction. This contradiction both shapes social processes and institutions in capitalist society and grounds the immanent possibility of its historical negation.

My analysis of the dialectic of labor and time has shown clearly that Marx, far from adopting labor and production as the standpoint of a historical critique of capitalism, focuses his critical analysis precisely on the socially constitutive role played by labor in that society. Hence, Marx’s idea that capitalism’s contradictory character gives rise to a growing tension between what is and what could be does not posit industrial production and the proletariat as the elements of a postcapitalist future. In Marx’s understanding the basic contradiction of capitalism is not one between one existent social structure or grouping and another; rather, it is grounded in the capitalist sphere of production itself, in the dual character of the sphere of production in a society whose essential relations are constituted by labor.

The fundamental contradiction of capitalism, then, lies between the two di-
dimensions of labor and time. On the basis of the investigation thus far, I can describe this contradiction as one between the socially general knowledge and skills whose accumulation is induced by the labor-mediated form of social relations, on the one hand, and this form of mediation itself, on the other. Although the value basis of the present and, hence, the abstract necessity expressed by socially necessary labor time, is never automatically overcome, it comes into growing tension with the possibilities intrinsic to the development it has induced.

I shall elaborate this contradiction below, but at this point I wish to return to the question of the historical dialectic. The interpretation I have presented here extends the scope of this dialectic beyond the laissez-faire epoch of capitalism but also limits it to the capitalist social formation. My analysis of Marx’s initial categories has shown, if only abstractly, that his conception of the dual character of capitalism’s structuring social forms implies a historical dialectic. By socially grounding the directional dialectical dynamic in a way that specifies it historically as a feature of capitalist society, this investigation reinforces my contention regarding the historical determinateness of Marx’s categories and his conception of an immanent logic in history.

It also helps to distinguish three modes of dialectical interactions that are intertwined in Marx’s analysis. The first, which is best known and most commonly referred to, can be characterized as a dialectic of reflexive constitution through objectification. It is expressed, for example, by Marx’s statement at the beginning of his discussion of the labor process in *Capital* that people, by acting on external nature and changing it, change their own nature. In other words, for Marx, the process of self-constitution involves a process of externalization, both for humanity and for individuals. Skills and abilities are constituted practically, through their expression. Marx’s conception of history frequently has been understood in terms of such a process. However, my discussion of the twofold character of capitalism’s social forms has demonstrated that this process of self-constitution through labor, even when labor is understood broadly as any externalizing activity, does not necessarily entail a historical development. For example, the material interactions of humanity with nature are not necessarily directionally dynamic; there is neither a theoretical ground nor historical evidence for maintaining that the reflexive effects of concrete labor’s objectifications must be directional. The sorts of immanent necessity and directional logic that are central to the dialectical development I have been examining are not intrinsic to the interactions of a knowing subject with its objectifications—whether these interactions are understood individually or in terms of the interactions of humanity with nature. In other words, a directional logic is not intrinsic to those activities which can be termed forms of concrete labor.

18. Ibid., p. 283.
19. Lukács can be interpreted in this way: see “Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat,” pp. 145–49, 170–71, 175–81, 185–90.
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A second dialectical interaction in Marx's mature theory is one of the reciprocal constitution of determinate forms of social practice and social structure. In Capital, as I have noted, Marx begins to develop a complex dialectic of deep structure and practice, mediated by the forms of appearance of the former as well as by the subjective dimensions of the various social forms. Such an analysis allows one theoretically to overcome objectivistic and subjectivistic interpretations of social life so as to reveal the valid moments and distorted aspects of each. Nevertheless, this sort of dialectic is also not necessarily directional; it can entail the reproduction of a form of social life that has no intrinsic historical dynamic.

Both of these dialectical interactions can exist in some form in various societies. What distinguishes capitalism, according to Marx, is that both become directionally dynamic because they are embedded in, and intertwined with, an intrinsically dynamic framework of objectified social relations, which is constituted by a third sort of dialectical interaction—one rooted in the double character of the underlying social forms. As a result, the social structures of capitalism that constitute and are constituted by social practice are dynamic. Because, moreover, the intrinsically dynamic relations that mark capitalism are mediated by labor, humanity's interaction with nature does indeed acquire a directional dynamic in capitalism. What ultimately gives rise to this historical dynamic, however, is the twofold character of labor in capitalism, not "labor." This directionally dynamic structure also totalizes and renders dynamic the antagonism between producing and expropriating social groupings; in other words, it constitutes such antagonism as class conflict.

My investigation of the implications of the temporal dimension of value, then, has shown that Marx's analysis uncovers the basis of a dialectical developmental logic in historically specific social forms. His analysis thereby shows that there is indeed a form of logic in history, of historical necessity, but that it is immanent only to the capitalist social formation, and not to human history as a whole. This implies that Marx's mature critical social theory does not hypostatize history as a sort of force moving all human societies; it does not presuppose that a directional dynamic of history in general exists. Rather, it seeks to explain the existence of the sort of ongoing directional dynamic that defines modern society, and to do so in terms of historically determinate social forms.

20. For example, Marx's analysis of value and price indicates the "rational core" of approaches based on the premise of methodological individualism or of the notion that social phenomena are the aggregate results of individual behavior. At the same time, the Marxian analysis embeds such approaches historically by showing the historically specific social constitution of that which they take to be socially ontological (for example, the maximizing rational actor).

constituted by labor in a process of alienation. This analysis implies that any theory that posits an immanent logic to history as such—whether dialectical or evolutionary—without grounding this logic in a determinate process of social constitution (which is an unlikely proposition), projects as the history of humanity the qualities specific to capitalism. This projection necessarily obscures the actual social basis of a directional dynamic of history. The historical process is thereby transformed from the object of social analysis into its quasi-metaphysical presupposition.

22. The notion that the commodity form is the ultimate ground for capitalism’s complex historical dynamic calls into question any transhistorical opposition between a conception of history either as a single, homogeneous process or as the result of the intersections of a variety of social processes with their own temporalities. My effort to ground socially—on a very abstract logical level—the historically dynamic character of capitalism suggests that although capitalism is not necessarily marked by a unitary, synchronous, homogeneous historical process, it is, as a whole, historically dynamic in a way that distinguishes it from other forms of social life. The relations among various social levels and processes are organized differently than they would be in a noncapitalist society; they become embedded in a general, socially constituted, temporally directional, dialectical framework.