CHAPTER 4

CAPITAL AS IT PROCEEDS FROM ITSELF

The development of the "becoming of capital" had disclosed the point at which capital "comes into existence" as "the product." As such, it contains in itself the contradiction and mediation that had gone before. Contradiction and mediation are now expressed in the higher price of the commodity, which represents the property of surplus value. We saw in the last chapter that Marx's exposition of the nature of surplus value had benefited from Hegel's exposition of die Sache Selbst. In a section that follows, Marx is concerned to show that the essence of surplus value is a function of a relation between the "whole" and the "parts" of capital. Once he has determined the ground of the production process, he must then analyze the composition of the product.

1. THE PARTS OF CAPITAL AND THE FORCE OF THEIR EXPRESSION

In producing a commodity, labor acts to preserve both the use values and the exchange values that comprise the simple production process. The capitalist obtains two things free of charge. He obtains the surplus labor that increases the value of his capital; and, in addition, he gets the use value and exchange value of previously objectified labor.

Labor is the real foundation of the product of capital. Labor is fixed in the commodity. Its form-giving activity is the "temporality" of the commodity. The commodity therefore has another content as ground of its existence besides the form and matter that distinguish one thing from another. Living labor's form-giving activity has served as the substrate of the commodity's existence. Because labor is a moment of the self-preservation and multiplication of capital, it is exchange value that in truth is the "temporality" of the commodity. Labor acts to preserve the use value of the material conditions of production, and thereby preserves capital.

A distinction is made within the commodity between its form and matter—its material existence—and the "eternal existence" of value. The latter is surplus value that is a consequence of the distinction between necessary and surplus labor time. Marx states:

If the capitalist employs labor only in order to create surplus value—to create value in addition to that already present—then it can be seen as soon as he
orders work to stop that his already present capital as well becomes devalued; that living labor hence not only adds new value, but, the very act of adding a new value to the old one, maintains, eternalizes it.\(^3\)

The product possesses within itself "eternal value" as a consequence of the worker’s activity, which is itself a moment of capital. Capital appropriates labor’s activity, and thereby eternalizes itself in the form of the product. It is thus the "law of capital" (Gesetz des Kapital) to perpetuate itself in the form of surplus value; and it does this by creating more and more surplus labor. Marx presents us with a brief excursus on the "law of capital," and the way in which it works to structure a world according to its needs (N 325, MEW 253).

The "law of capital" is realized only gradually and as a consequence of acting on and shaping successive generations of laborers. The population of society must increasingly reflect capital’s "ceaseless striving" (rastlose Streben) toward the general form of wealth. The many use values that issue from the production process will increasingly be a result of surplus labor. This "ceaseless striving" continues until capital has created and molded a world according to its own needs.

The logical form of this exposition clearly reflects indebtedness to Hegel’s exposition of the way in which essence emerges into the immediacy of being. Hegel demonstrates that since "the thing" is a result of the "self-propelling content" of essence, it is a determinate being that nevertheless is an essential immediacy. A distinction is therefore to be noted between its appearance as a mere determinate being and an "enduring element," or an "eternal element." He states: "According to the first side it is a determinate being, but one which is contingent, unessential and, in keeping with its immediacy, is subject to transition, coming-to-be and ceasing-to-be" (Nach der ersten Seite ist er als ein Dasein, aber als ein zufälliges, unwesentliches, das nach seiner Unmittelbarkeit dem Übergehen, Entstehen und Vergehen unterworfen ist) (SL 501, STWII 151). In its material existence, "the thing" is subject to transitoriness. Yet insofar as it is not merely determinate being, but rather essential immediacy, it possesses an "enduring element" within itself; it possesses an essential content. Hegel states: "According to the other side, it is the simple content determination exempt from this flux, the enduring element of it" (Nach der andern Seite ist er die einfache, jenem Wechsel entnommene Inhaltsbestimmung, das Bleibende desselben) (SL 501, STWII 151).

Hegel shows that a distinction between mere immediacy and an "enduring element" necessarily results in a distinction between mere appearance and the "law of appearance"—an "inwardly diverse content," and a "determinate, essential content" (SL 502, STWII 151-52). The