

Differentials of Surplus-Value In The Contemporary Forms of Exploitation

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In order to comprehend the contemporary forms of exploitation we need to free ourselves from a certain idea of historicism that has influenced Marxism. The crisis of Marxism, announced by Althusser as having *finally* arrived 30 years ago, or its contemporary death, announced by many after the fall of actually existing socialism, are the occasion for taking the opportunity to reckon accounts with that tradition. Not only with dogmatic Marxism seeking ineluctable historical laws, but also with more critical versions of Marxism, when they employ categories like 'pre-capitalist' or 'pre-political' in order to characterise cases that are certainly contemporary, but *not yet* completely capitalist or adequate to the political form of the modern state.

If there is a way of comprehending that which today goes under the name of globalisation, this certainly passes by way of the assumption of the overcoming of the distinction between the first, second and third worlds. These levels are reciprocally interpenetrated,

1 This essay is the modified version of a paper presented in the section 'The Differential of Surplus-value: an indispensable feature of contemporary accumulation' (*Il differenziale di plusvalore: un tratto indispensabile dell'accumulazione contemporanea*) during the conference of 'Altreragioni', held in Bologna on the 1st and 2nd of May, 1998. After many years during which this article remained in the drawer, certain circumstances – above all, the intention to revivify a collective project on questions regarding contemporary forms of exploitation and the rethinking of a notion of historicity adequate to the problems of globalisation – have encouraged me to work on this old study again. I presented this text at the Conference of Historical Materialism "New Directions In Marxist Theory" held on 9 December 2006 in London. This text is the shorter and partial modified version of an essay that will be published in the next number of HM.

giving rise to the co-existence, in a striking spatial proximity, of high technological levels and absolute forms of extortion of surplus-value. The error would be to consider these forms of exploitation today as residual, or regressions to the 19th century. Rather, they must be understood as the forms most adequate to the current complex of capitalist relations of production. The inadequacy of a whole way of reasoning in terms of tendency and residue is now so obvious that one cannot disagree with the severe judgement of Chakrabarty when he affirms that to speak of a 'survival of an earlier mode of production' means to reason with 'stagist and elitist conceptions of history', and, in polemic with theories of 'uneven development', maintains that it is *historicist* to consider 'Marx's distinction between 'formal' and 'real' subsumption of labour [...] as a question of historical transition'.² But the same critique is also valid for a part of one of the most intelligent theoretical and political traditions of European Marxism: *l'operaismo* (workerism). Sooner or later it will be necessary to write the history of this tradition 'against the grain'. This tradition, after having begun from the perspective of the political centrality of the mass worker (*operaio massa*), went on to consider industrial labour as secondary and residual in as much, according to what Negri writes *today*, we live 'in a society characterised ever more strongly by the hegemony of immaterial labour'.³ Before conducting any theoretical reflection it would be necessary to ask: to which fragment of the planet do these analyses refer? And why are material labour and the most brutal forms of extortion of absolute surplus-value *not* residual in four-fifths of the planet? It is certainly not a case of a lack of information regarding the global phenomenology of labour. The problem regards the unrigorous categories adopted in order to read and intervene in the social relations. The problems seem to arise when the workerist gesture chases after the subject of antagonism in the historical process, whose *tendency* is carved out by looking at a postage stamp of the world. Beginning from this, a historical-philosophical rhythm is then ascribed to the rest of the planet.

In order to avoid surrendering to these historicist equations, according to which the industrial working-class today would stand in the same relation to immaterial labour as the peasants did to the industrial working-class in the nineteenth century, it is necessary to re-descend into the laboratories of production. It is necessary to follow the chains of valorisation that, with delocalisation, exit not only from the factory but which also cross national frontiers, and thus also the salary differentials from which capital profits. But a mapping of

2 Chakrabarty 2000, pp. 12-14 and note 37 on p. 261.

3 Negri 1998, p. 8.

delocalisation would be only a faded photograph in black and white without the vivid colours of living labour, of the migrant workers who, affirming their freedom of movement, clash with the capitalist interest to construct and preserve salary differentials within and outside Europe.

I In Marx's Laboratory

It is necessary to rethink the conceptual structure that makes it possible for us to comprehend the contemporary capitalist forms of exploitation, to retrace Marx's movement from *the abstract to the concrete*. It is not a case of giving merely an objective representation of the processes currently underway. We have to understand the subjective insurgencies that disarticulate the process, because the political task is their rearticulation on new foundations.

In the celebrated 'Preface' of 1859 Marx delineates the progressive process of universal history according to definite stages. The Asiatic, classical, feudal and bourgeois modes of production are qualified as 'progressive epochs', with respect to which the bourgeois is 'the last antagonistic form of the process of production'. Marx liberated himself with difficulty from this historical-philosophical (*geschichtsphilosophisch*) legacy, perhaps only during the maturation of the conceptual structure of *Capital*. Directly confronting the Asiatic modes of production and the Russian populists⁴, he understood that there are not predetermined stages of capitalist development. In a letter at the end of 1877 to the Editor of *Otecestvennye Zapiski*, he wrote that his sketch of the genesis of capitalism in Western Europe could not be transformed 'into a historical-philosophical theory of universal development, predetermined by fate, for all peoples, regardless of the historical circumstances in which they find themselves'. He had learnt that one could never understand historical phenomena 'with the *passe-partout* of a philosophy of history whose supreme virtue is to be suprahistorical'.⁵ Marx arrived at this acquisition by making an idea of the development of the forces of production interact with the concrete replies of history, that is to say, the *histories* of the struggles that, interacting with the atemporal historicity of capital, co-determine its history.

The hasty liquidation of the notion of value has not helped us to comprehend Marx's rethinking of this conceptual structure during the

4 Marx overcomes his own Eurocentrism towards the end of the 60s, opening himself to the problematic of 'peripheral' Russia: cf. Dussel 1990, ch. VII.

5 Cf. Marx's reply to N.K. Michajlovskij in a letter to the editor of *Otecestvennye Zapiski* at the end of 1877 in *Marx Engels Collected Works (MECW)* 24, 201.

years of writing *Capital*.⁶ For Marx, the notion of value constituted a problem. It was for this reason that he continually returned to it. In 1858, he still considered Ricardo's theory of value to be correct.⁷ Four years later, however, it is presented as a bearer of a confusion between *values* and *prices*.⁸ The year is significant, because, even if it does not signal the exact moment in which Marx completely abandoned the Ricardian theory, it at least indicates the context: the entire period between 1861 and 1863, during which Marx compiles a good 23 notebooks of economic writings. The problem troubles him not only during the preparation of *Capital*, but also after, forcing him to revise the diverse editions and even further, to intervene in the French translation. Marxian philology provides us today an enormous quantity of material for comprehending the sense of this *work in progress*. It is probably useful to seek, not some solution of Marx's to the question of value, but rather, to retrace Marx's gesture, that is, to pose once again the problem that is inside the question of value.

Continuing to reflect on the value-form, Marx emphasises always more forcefully both the *social* nature of the relation of value, and its historically determinate character. 'First, that which should be noted straight away: the general or abstract character of labour is, in the production of commodities, its *social* (*gesellschaftlich*) character, because it is the character of the *equality* (*Gleichheit*) of the labours incorporated in the different labour products. This determinant form of *social* labour (*Diese bestimmte Form der gesellschaftlichen Arbeit*) distinguishes commodity production from other modes of production'.⁹ The abstract character of labour refers to the *social* character of the labour of the production of commodities, which is characterised as a form of production specifically capitalist and distinct from any other mode of production.

6 The overvaluation of the *Grundrisse*, set against *Capital*, has also not helped, at least in Italy. Negri still invites us today to re-read the *Grundrisse* as a theoretical anticipation of the mature capitalist society, written by a Marx who 'tells us that capitalist development leads to a society in which industrial labour (in as much as it is immediate labour) is now only a *secondary* element in the organisation of capitalism'. (my italics) (Negri 1998: 7-8). Tronti, however, had already presented the *Grundrisse* as a 'more advanced book' in regard both to the *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* and to *Capital* (Tronti 1966: 210). In the attempt to seek the action of the revolutionary subjectivity imprisoned, according to Negri, in the categorical objectivisation of *Capital*, Marx's rethinking of that conceptual structure has been entirely disregarded. However, it was a rethinking whose vital substance was instead constituted by the concreteness of class conflicts.

7 Marx to Lassalle, 11th March 1858: 'You yourself will have found in your economic studies that in the development of profit Ricardo falls into contradiction with his (correct) determination of value': *MECW* 40, 286-7.

8 Marx to Engels, 2nd August 1862 in *MECW* 41, 394-398.

9 K. Marx, *Ergänzungen und Veränderungen zum ersten Band des «Kapitals»* (Dezember 1871-Januar 1872), in *MEGA*², II/6, pp. 28-9.

This passage is fully intelligible when reading the seventh chapter ('The Labour Process and the Process of Producing Surplus-Value') as simultaneously presupposed by and the result of that which precedes it¹⁰. Due to a 'will to a system', Marx developed abstract labour and value before the process of valorisation. This order has generated the illusion of being able to historicise simple commodity production, distinguishing it from capitalist production in the strict sense.¹¹ A reading of this type gives rise to a metahistorical theory of value. At the same time, it develops diachronically conceptual determinations that should instead be understood synchronically. This way of seeing has generated, as we will soon see, the misunderstanding of the paradigm in two stages and the extension of the commodity form to non-capitalist modes of production. For Marx, on the other hand, the commodity exists only in a specifically capitalist constellation of the mode and relations of production: 'What I proceed from is the simplest social form in which the product of labour presents itself in contemporary society, and this is the "commodity"'.¹² This acquisition allows us to understand the constitutive categories of capital as entirely operative from the origin of the capitalist mode of production. That means that when we speak of capital it is necessary to assume as given the entire conceptual constellation.

It was an error to read the development of capital in evolutionist terms: politically, this view has coincided with that of progress. Thus not only is any society denied the possibility of leaping over the 'natural phases' of its development, but forms of exploitation are laid out diachronically, when they are instead completely complementary. This is the case of absolute and relative surplus-value, that is, of the extortion of surplus-value by means of a lengthening of the working day and the intensification of labour through the introduction of machines. The passage from formal subsumption to real subsumption, from the extortion of absolute surplus-value to relative surplus-value, is not marked according to a paradigm of stages¹³ in which the first

10 Cf. Bellofiore 2004, pp. 170-210; Finelli 2005, pp. 211-23.

11 It was Engels who linked the category of "simple mercantile production" to the part on the commodity in *Capital*, thus giving an historicist interpretation of capitalist development: cf. Hecker 1997, pp. 119-126: 'Engels's explanation of simple commodity production as feudal production represents the attempt of the historicisation of social relations' (ibid, p. 122).

12 K. Marx, 'Marginal Notes on Adolph Wagner's *Lehrbuch der Politischer Oekonomie*' (1881-82), in *MEW*, Bd. 19, p. 369; *MECW* 24, 531-562.

13 It should be remembered that the term 'subsumption', regularly used until the end of the 1860s, became less frequent in *Capital*, even though never disappearing completely. Badaloni noted something significant in this regard, emphasising how the term 'Unterwerfung' (submission) takes the place of 'subsumption', 'with an analogous meaning to that of real subsumption and nevertheless without the historical reference to two stages that to a certain extent entangle the concept of subsumption' (Badaloni 1984, pp. 20-1). The

gives way to the second.¹⁴ The passage from the third part ('The Production of Absolute Surplus-Value') to the fourth ('The Production of Relative Surplus-Value') is marked by the final lines of chapter ten, where the workers, 'as a class', succeeded in establishing a state law on the duration of the working day. If in fact 'the creation of a normal working-day is [...] the product of a protracted civil war, more or less dissembled, between the capitalist class and the working-class'¹⁵, capital responds to the war with an augmentation of the productive force of labour by means of machines. 'Progress' is measured by this intensification of exploitation. For this reason, it is unrealistic, even when not in bad faith, to prophesise the liberation of labour by means of machines within capitalist relations of production, when the use-value of labour remains intrinsically capitalist. *Innovation* is a response to the insurgency of living labour. That means that capital introduces new machinery because it is compelled to, both by the unruliness of the workers and the physiological limit reached in the exploitation of labour power.

Absolute and relative surplus-value are not to be thought in a diachronic succession, but synchronically in an historical-temporal *multiversum*. Relative surplus-value is such only *in relation* to absolute surplus-value: relative surplus-value not only does not replace absolute surplus-value, but necessitates, for its own realisation, an increase of the quantity of socially produced absolute surplus-value. The use of machines in production allows the exploitation of labour with a greater intensity with respect to the social average of exploitation, and it is precisely this *differential* quota that constitutes relative surplus-value. As we will see, this gap must necessarily be covered by a production of absolute surplus-value, which thus, far from being an archaic form of capitalist exploitation or a residue of the nineteenth century, is the form of extortion of surplus-value most adequate to our times.

The existence of conditions of labour where the working day is notably longer than 8 hours and the wages are below the conditions of survival - that is, high absolute surplus-value - is not to be attributed to past capitalist forms that live on only in economically depressed zones. Rather, it is a case of the result and the presupposition of the

paradigm of two stages is still present in the so-called unedited sixth chapter, with respect to which, however, it should be noted that when Marx commenced the writing of the definitive text of the first book of *Capital*, in 1866, he eliminated the part of the manuscripts containing the sixth chapter, of which he left only a summary in the first edition. He eliminated even that in the second edition. Cf. Antonowa 1982, pp. 63-72.

14 This 'historicising' formulation is found in the writings of Negri from the 1970s to Negri and Hardt 2000, pp. 254-55: 'At a certain point, as capitalist expansion reaches its limit, the processes of formal subsumption can no longer play the central role'.

15 *MECW* 35, 305.

'progress' of capital. The more capital uses technology and thus machines, the more elevated therefore the mass of surplus-values that is produced, so much the more must the direct extortion of absolute surplus-value increase.

II In the Laboratory of Production. On the Reciprocal Implication of Absolute and Relative Surplus-Value

Let us stay for a moment in Marx's laboratory. Here we discover that the distinction between value and exchange-value is a late acquisition of Marx. After the confusion of the *Grundrisse* follows the attempt to find a conceptual rigour in the writings of the 60s, until the formulation of the 'Randglossen zu Adolph Wagners *Lehrbuch der politischen Ökonomie*'. It is important to understand exchange-value, beyond some logical-conceptual shifts present even in the writings of the mature Marx, *not* as the objectification of labour immediately spent in the production of a determinate commodity, but as an expression of the quantity of social labour objectified in the commodity: 'that which determines the magnitude of the value of any article is the amount of labour socially necessary, or the labour time socially necessary for its production'.¹⁶ It is in *Capital* that we find the highest level of conceptual determination of social labour, and it is this determination that needs to be assumed in order to test Marx's entire theoretical edifice. That which needs to be clear, and which also contains a moment of real difficulty, is that the labour objectified in the *exchange-value* of a commodity does not correspond to the quantity of labour immediately spent in its production. Instead, it is the fruit of a mediation with socially allocated labour. In this sense, the expression individual value (*individueller Wert*) is a contradiction in itself: not only because, as Marx emphasizes in the *Marginal Notes on Wagner* in 1881-82 – the dates are important in this case – 'exchange-value in the singular does not exist'¹⁷, but because it presupposes a value determined quantitatively by labour individually employed in the production of this commodity, and not by social labour. This, on the other hand, is not a definite size once and for all. Rather, it is variable and its variability *retroacts* on the determination of the quantity of social labour contained in a commodity. If the general conditions inside which a certain quantity of commodities are produced change, then – Marx affirms – a reverse effect (*Rückwirkung*) takes place on them.¹⁸ It

16 MECW 35, 48.

17 K. Marx, 'Marginal Notes on Adolph Wagner's *Lehrbuch der Politischer Oekonomie*' (1881-82), MECW 24, 531-562.

18 Cf. *Ökonomisches Manuskript 1861-1863*, Teil 1, in MEW, Bd. 43, p. 75.

is possible that a determinate quantity of labour time already objectified in a commodity changes due to a change in the social productivity of labour, which reacts on the exchange-value of the commodity itself.

The notion of retroaction (*Rückwirkung*) allows Marx to explain a change in value that has its origins 'outside (*außerhalb*)' of the process of production, and specifically following a change of the cost of raw materials or the introduction of a 'new invention'.¹⁹ This important Marxian understanding is possible only within a constellation that is clear on the *social* character of the labour that valorises value: 'The value of a commodity is certainly determined by the quantity of labour contained in it, but this quantity is itself socially (*gesellschaftlich*) determined. If the amount of labour-time socially necessary for the production of any commodity alters...this reacts back on all the old commodities of the same type, because...their value at any given time is measured by the labour socially necessary to produce them, i.e., by the labour necessary under the social conditions existing at the time.'²⁰ In other words: the changes in the intensity of social labour react back on the commodities already produced, causing a change in the labour time objectified in them²¹.

If *Capital* represents the high point of categorical elaboration, it is here that we must find the most mature consequences of this way of understanding social labour and exchange-value. As already seen, "The real value of a commodity, however, is not its *individual*, but its *social* value; that is to say, its value is not measured by the labour-time that the article costs the producer in each individual case, but by the labour-time socially required for its production."²² If therefore the value of a commodity depends upon the labour time objectified in it, it should be kept in mind that this labour time is not that effectively employed for the production of a given use-object, but can be either greater or smaller than that. The generic human labour time objectified in the substance of value must be adjusted to the time that social labour would need to carry out that same job. *Surplus value is not a quantifiable amount within the accounting of a single firm.*

The idea, recurring in numerous places in Marx's analysis and taken up by Kautsky²³, according to which surplus-value would be

19 MECW 35, p. 318.

20 MECW 35, p. 318.

21 See M. De Angelis, Value(s), Measure(s) and Disciplinary Markets, in «The Commoner», n. 10 (2005), in <http://www.commoner.org.uk/10deangelispdf>.

22 MECW 35, p. 434.

23 In Kautsky the linear depiction of surplus-value is represented in the following schema: A—C—B; where AC represents the 'line of time of necessary labour' and CB the 'time of excess labour'. According to this schema, shortening the time of necessary labour (AC) gives an augmentation of excess labour: this would be *relative surplus-value*. The lengthening of the

determined by the labour time that exceeds that which would be necessary for the worker employed by an individual capital to produce his own wages, is a simplification. Let us suppose that the singular commodity value — and from this, surplus-value — can be calculated in a linear way, that is to say, based upon the time of labour that exceeds that which is necessary to replenish the wage. On the other hand, the value produced, which is an objectivation of *social* labour, is not deductible from the labour actually expended in a single productive process. If the productive force of the latter is below the productivity of social labour, it can happen that, despite wages in this particular sector are pushed downward and the labour time upward, the production of surplus labour remains very low²⁴.

The case that can happen is that an hour of work of high intensity corresponds to two hours of social labour, in the places where the society as a whole still does not use technological innovation. This exchange, where one is equal to two, violates only the intellectual principles of whomever holds to grade-school mathematics; the value of commodities in general, and therefore also of those produced with technological innovation, is its social value, that is, the quantity of *social labour* objectified in it. This phenomenon imposes itself violently in the world market, where an increase in the productive power of labour through the introduction of a new machine counts as an increase in the intensity of labour if the capitalist can sell the commodities at a superior price, equivalent to the labour necessary to produce the same commodity on the part of other capitalists who still lack that technological innovation. The fact that the labour time effectively expended is inferior to that which is socially necessary changes nothing in the relationship, except that the capitalist, selling the commodity at its value, appropriates social surplus value, and therefore exchanges one hour of labour for two. "Hence the capitalist who applies the improved method of production appropriates and devotes to surplus labour a greater portion (*Extramehrwert*) of the working day that the other capitalists in the same business."²⁵ Beyond numbers, the *Extramehrwert* that is appropriated by the capitalist corresponds to the quantity of social surplus value that he can

working day (AB) constitutes instead *absolute surplus-value*. Cf. Kautsky 1972, p. 102. Kautsky's error consists substantially in understanding the time of necessary labour as the time of labour necessary for the maintenance of the worker (pp. 78-9).

24 The segment AC of the linearschema (see previous note) can be shortened by reducing wages, but the value of labour-power and, therefore, the quantity of labour that this costs, must be calculated on the basis of the labour productivity which is socially necessary and *not* on the basis of that individual labour.

25 MECW 35, p. 436.

withdraw from the society to the extent that he is an extractor of relative surplus value.

In this way a greater number of hours of work concretely performed pass through the hands of the capitalist who utilizes a greater productive power of work without violating the law of equivalence. The *difference* between capitalists who exploit work of different productivity is *therefore necessary* so that it will be possible to extract relative surplus value from the advantage that springs from the technological innovation. This can be seen not only on a worldwide scale, where capital is continually in search of masses of absolute surplus value, but also within the western metropolises and even within the same corporation, broken up into apparently independent productive segments and in competition with each other: capital is in any case searching for the maximum gap possible between the intensity of labour in phases that, even if they are part of the same cycle, are recomposed through circulation.

The differential quota between a given intensity of labour and social labour is concretely realised through a transfer of value from production spheres in which the intensity of labour is lower relative to those in which capital exploits labour at an intensity that is higher than the social average. The immediate repercussion of a technological innovation is a *prolonging* of labour time wherever the innovation is not yet employed: "One of the first consequences of the introduction of new machinery, before it has become dominant in its branch of production, is the *prolongation* of the labour-time of the labourers who continue to work with the old and unimproved means of production."²⁶ The introduction of a new machine generates an increase in relative surplus value, an increase that, in order to be realised, must be sustained by a proportional increase in the extraction of *absolute surplus value*, where the innovation has not yet been employed. The relative surplus value is *relative* in this sense, because it, to be real, must be placed in *relation* to absolute surplus value. To the extent to which the capitalist that takes advantage of a technological innovation *realises* at least a part of the relative surplus value that is potentially his, this surplus value takes form through a social transfer of value from productive areas of high absolute surplus value towards those of high relative surplus value. The relative increase in the labour productivity and of the surplus value in some sectors of production leads to a de-valorisation of labour-power that could also manifest itself as growth of the exploitation of reproduction work — whether waged or unwaged. Indeed, we should always keep into consideration

26 K. Marx, *Oekonomisches Manuskript 1861-1863*, Teil 1, in MEW 43, Berlin, 1990, p. 323.

the quantity of labour that is indirectly commanded by capital through a wage.

Only when Marx clarified further the nature of exchange-value, he was able to show that the machine not only does not create value, but it also *does not produce surplus value*: "As machinery comes into general use in a particular branch of production, the social value of the machine's product sinks down to its individual value, and the following law asserts itself: surplus value does not arise from the labour-power that has been replaced by the machinery, but from the labour-power actually employed in working with the machinery."²⁷ When a technological innovation becomes widespread, the growing intensity of labour obtained through its employment becomes socially dominant and there is less chance of extracting quotas of social surplus value from the means of production of relative surplus value.

The production of surplus value make use of machines in two ways: one, indirectly, through the devalorisation of labour-power following the expulsion of workers replaced by machines; second, relative surplus value *stricto sensu*, exploiting the sporadic introduction of machines. The latter circumstance is that which allows the exploitation of labour of a greater intensity than the social average, such that the individual labour objectified in *this* commodity is less than the quantity of socially average labour.²⁸ And we know by now that only the latter determines exchange-value.

When the intensity of labour obtained by a technical innovation becomes socially dominant, it unleashes "the most ruthless and excessive *prolongation of the working day*, in order that he may secure compensation for the decrease in the relative number of workers exploited by increasing not only relative but also absolute surplus labour."²⁹ The extraction of relative surplus value generates, in those parts of the world where workers' resistance is lower, a great mass of absolute exploitation. This means that the introduction of new machinery is not a pre-determined route in the history of all countries, but on the contrary different capitals in head-to-head competition with each other in the world market must seek out or create geographic areas with different labour powers having different wages and productive powers.³⁰ If the reciprocal implication of the various forms of surplus value are grasped, then it is only out of faith in some progressive and Eurocentric philosophy of history that it is possible to consider some forms of production as backward and wage labour, extended to the whole world, as residual.

27 MECW 35, p. 530.

28 MECW 35, p. 530.

29 MECW 35, p. 531.

30 Interesting is the argument of Marini 1991, p. 8-10.

Formal subsumption is the basis of capitalist production as the production of surplus value in a process whose end is the production of commodities for the market; real subsumption presents itself instead as a specifically capitalist form because it doesn't allow the previous social relations to remain, but revolutionises the technical processes of production and the formation of social groups (*gesellschaftliche Gruppierungen*).³¹ To these two forms should also be added a third form, rarely studied: that of the hybrid or intermediate forms (*Zwitterformen*) of subsumption.³² Marx speaks of them for the first time in *Capital*. They are forms in which surplus labour is extracted by means of direct coercion (*direkter Zwang*), without there being formal subsumption of labour to capital. Marx observes how these forms can indeed be understood as forms of transition, but can also be reproduced in the background of large scale industry. The hybrid forms, though they are not formally subsumed to capital and though labour is not given in the form of wage labour, fall under the command of capital. That allows us to comprehend the contemporaneity of apparently anachronistic forms like *slavery*, which are not mere residues of past epochs, but forms that, though with an altered physiognomy, are produced and reproduced in the background of the *current* capitalist mode of production.

The exploitation of child labour in Asian countries and hours of work up to eighteen a day³³ are not cases of capitalist underdevelopment, but express the current levels of production of social surplus value.³⁴ If we assume all the way through the reciprocal co-penetration between absolute and relative surplus value, the distinction between North and South of the world, between first, second and third world, or if one prefers, between *core*, *semi-periphery* and *periphery* with 'advanced' and 'backward' capitalisms, lose a great part of their significance. It is no longer possible to reason in terms of *tendencies* and *residues*: the various forms of exploitation are to be understood in a historical-temporal *multiversum*, in which they interact within the contemporaneity of the present. This interlinking should be followed *materially* along the lines of the differences between national salaries. Analysis and practical intervention here should succeed in fusing together.

31 *MEW* Bd. 23, p. 533, transl. *MECW* 35, p. 645.

32 A happy exception is the work of P. Murray, who recalled my attention to hybrid subsumption: Murray 2004; Murray 2000, p. 122.

33 On the conditions of labour in China see Chan and Xiaoyang 2003, pp. 559-584.

34 Globalization makes political command capitalistically productive that asserts itself along the border to conserve the valorizing potential of wage differentials. See the work of Sacchetto 2004. See also Gambino 2003. On the non-residual character of forced labour and the processes of enslavement of contemporary labour-power, see Zanin 2002.

Globalisation renders the political command that it exercises along the borders capitalistically productive in order to conserve the valorising potential of differential wages. This command is manifested over migrant workers without any niceties. Sovereignty, rights of citizenship and control of the borders operate economically in order to delineate different wage areas that can be preserved only by reducing to a minimum the movements of labour power from one area to the other.³⁵ The chains of valorisation cross a multiplicity of wage areas, national and intranational, using those differentials profitably. Delocalisation makes the difference of the intensity of labour and of wage levels capitalistically productive: that would not be possible without a political command over the migrant flows. These migrant flows therefore justly rank highly among the forms of workers' resistance to control and the forms of self-determination of the wage against capital. The migrant workers are not bare life but labour power that, violating the borders, tends to disrupt the division of labour and national differentials of wages. The policies of regulation of the migrant flows, on the other hand, are economic policies of segmentation of the labour market and of the demarcation of wage differentials. All the contemporary forms of the removal of wage differentials should thus be investigated as subjective insurgencies in tension with wage labour.

As if the assembly lines had exited from the factory in order to undertake a long world tour, the chains of valorisation cross the borders of states, profiting from the national differentials of wages. In this context, political command over the borders and capitalist command over labour power are fused. The spectral nature of this interweaving is manifested in the policies against migrants and in the detention centres for migrants, the so-called 'Centres of temporary stay' (*Centri di Permanenza Temporanea*). In order to comprehend these processes it is urgently necessary to go back down into the laboratories of production, in order to be able to comprehend the production process of valorisation in a snap shot. We must also, however, free ourselves from the comfort-blanket of a teleological philosophy of history not yet deactivated in the notion of 'tendency'. There aren't any short cuts.

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35 There have been attempts of practical intervention in this direction in recent years. An element of these can be seen in Raimondi and Ricciardi 2004.

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