

## Wealth Begins with Human Need: Machines Can't "Read," or Remediating Marx's *Capital*, Volume 1

Johannah Rodgers

This project began, as many of my projects do, at the invitation of Jill Magi. In this instance, asked to engage with The Tamiment Library/Wagner Labor Archive, my response began with some very simple but, I feel, pressing questions related not only to this project, but to several other creative and academic projects that I am involved with as a writer and as a teacher of writing in an educational system that is becoming increasingly industrialized: what does it mean to be able to write? what does it mean to be able to read? To respond to these questions, one must choose a perspective to answer them from.

Education is currently—or perhaps always has been—big business. As such, it only makes sense that an industrial model would emerge. In an era in which certain humans may very well be becoming—or have already become—commodities, one can only point to or point out this fact and ask questions about humans and machines, their relationships, and the potential consequences of these relationships. Karl Marx is not the only author to have considered these relationships. However, he did so in ways that, I believe, remain pertinent and relevant. As part of a project having to do with how texts function and how humans and machines interact with these texts, I combine human and machine reading in a remediation of the first chapter of the first German edition of Marx's *Capital*, Volume 1.

What follows is a textual compilation that includes work by me, Karl Marx, the translator Albert Dragstadt, the electronic compiler Steve Palmer, the editors of the website Marxists.org, librarians and other staff members at the Tamiment Library, the Library Committee at the Reference Center for Marxist Studies, and the authors, designers, and printers of several pamphlets related to labor education projects and housed in the Wagner Labor Archive. The following text was read aloud and accompanied by a projection of a short video, which can be accessed via this link: <https://vimeo.com/123200344>.

## Wealth Begins With Human Need\*

Johannah Rodgers, Karl Marx, Albert Dragstadt, Steve Palmer, The  
Tamiment Library/Wagner Labor Archive

Wealth begins with human need.

The science of commodities may be in the form of society.  
One kind of relationship is expressed in bootblacking, soap,  
gold, wheat and iron. A geometrical example, its visible figure  
Is labour. Segments of time, like hour, day, might seem to change  
yarn into cloth, but

After propitious weather, impropitious weather.  
In a small volume of space, Jacob doubts that  
Diggings discovered in wild conditions can be  
The coat. From this viewpoint, the coat is not a coat.

Incarnations lurk in the deployments of useful labour.  
Where a need for material wealth is, labour is the precondition of  
Existence. Different instances lurk inside the coat.  
What is more, now we recall 10 yards of linen, 20 yards of linen,  
Objective expressions of the same person.

Today, trousers make tomorrow shifting friction.  
A banker plays a big role. The simple human being is merely  
quantitative. Various proportions of linen are human.  
If one coat  $x$ , then two coats  $2x$ .  
But now assume that this contrary motion expresses purposeful activity.

In extensions of time, fruitfulness lurking must be value.  
A specific quantum, relative constant, sterility.

Growing flax in place of sheep now influences our power of abstraction.  
Linen makes its earthly appearance, swats different flies.  
By equating both things it reveals itself as meaning.

In its mundane reality (coat) is composed exclusively of labor.  
In reality this crystal is very murky. A web of flax turns into chimera.  
But labour counts as coat since it is woolen comfort, buttoned up essence,  
An equivalent. The jumping off point of all difficulties.

Similarly cannot express concrete labour insofar as fashion considers  
The mystery. As far as the coat is concerned, the coat is doing the coat,  
however modest it may be. On the one hand, being is an equivalent  
Just as the coat was.

In the expression "linen was equated," the linen relates itself to  
Consequently.

Coffee = tea = iron = wheat = labour.

Is as if alongside

Lions, tigers, rabbits and all other actual animals. Just as linen was  
Completely indifferent to hence, now counts as labor, expressions of values  
Counting only quantitatively.

A possessor is indifferent to human needs. At the same time,  
Evanescent, the coat holds, coffee follows tea and is socially valid.  
Imagine actually, reciprocally, in linen.

Fashion precisely is the reason why they did not become family, which is wha  
all human "socialness" must be.

Just as, lurking, they obtain in a contradictory, exclusive kind of  
As, if. Illusion strengthens itself as metamorphosed by the fact that  
Twenty yards of linen = one coat = etcetera.

But each of these equations reflexively, obviously, specifically,  
Conceptually, is a sensual thing.

The table remains wood. The mystical character is human brain, nerve,  
Muscle, organ of perception or labour. Labour. Labour.  
Labour. Necessity compels the totality.

The shipwreck begins. Books are required.

All relationships contained therein were one part.

But another part must be the manner of this division,

Comparable only in such a case to labour, transparently comes the puzzling.

Objectified husks concealed unconsciously instinctive in their brain.

The mystery lurking under the apparent motions.

The producers lie, which veils the insanity.

But if coat, boot, etcetera, then the social appears in exactly this insane  
Form. Historically determined, social relationships, persons, appear as  
Objects to one another.

The umbilicus-labour-can only disappear as fog.

So if commodities could speak, they would say:

"Now just listen, 'Riches are the attributes of man; value is the attribute  
of commodities'; now is an immediate contradiction.

\* This text is compiled from text taken from an English translation by Albert Dragstedt of the first chapter of the first German edition of Karl Marx's *Capital*.

**Source:** Albert Dragstedt, *Value: Studies By Karl Marx*, New Park Publications, London, 1976, pp. 7-40.

**Transcribed:** by Steve Palmer.

**Accessed:** by Johannah Rodgers on January 20, 2015

<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1867-c1/commodity.htm>

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