

3. The Anthropological Form of Producing Individuals

3.1 Filling the Lacuna: Forms of Production of Individuals

According to form-analysis, social relations in capitalist societies, expressed in various forms such as money, capital, law, state, etc., have a fetishistic character. These interconnected, fetishized forms constitute the abstract structural connections, or the anatomy, or the ideal average of capitalist societies. As is well known, Marx's analysis of social forms is constrained to the examination of the economic structures that organize the social and technological labor processes involved in the production of goods and services. Consequently, his analysis elucidates uniquely the manner in which class separation, and thus class domination and exploitation, are reproduced and naturalized within capitalist societies. Nevertheless, this economic analysis is not exhaustive. A materialist study of social forms encompasses also the processes of reproduction of material life in its most basic sense, as well as the social forms through which this reproduction is organized. As materialist, socialist and Marxist feminist currents¹ have demonstrated since the 1970s, such processes of reproduction of material life include the generative reproduction of human life and the gender relations associated with it. In other words, the reproduction of capitalist societies as a whole encompasses the reproduction of labor-power and population, or "social reproduction", *stricto sensu*.²

1 The terms "socialist feminists", "materialist feminists", and "Marxist feminists" will be used interchangeably to refer to a shared commitment to understanding women's oppression as rooted in the socio-material relations inherent to capitalism, rather than as a mere consequence of biases, attitudes and ideologies.

2 The term labor-power refers to the ability of individuals to perform labor. "Labour-power exists only as the ability to work of a particular person, the labourer. But labourers grow old and die, and society's stock of labour-power cannot then be replenished without the birth of potential new labourers. Thus [...] it is necessary for labour-power to be reproduced that the labourer himself is reproduced". Susan Himmelweit and Simon Mohun, "Domestic Labour and Capital", *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, vol 1, no. 1 (1977), p. 16. According to Marx, under the conditions of commodity production, the expenditure of labor-power can be a source of value. Labor-power is the special commodity that realizes the self-valorization of value, which is the movement of capital, expressed in the formula $M-C-M'$ and, thus, the production

Interest in this particular aspect of social materiality was, indeed, initiated by Marx and Engels. In *The German Ideology*, they notoriously wrote, “men, who daily re-create their own life, begin to make other men, to propagate their kind: the relation between man and woman, parents and children, the *family*”.³ Even more famous is Engel’s expansion of this idea in *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State* where he wrote a passage that “became for a time, perhaps the most widely cited quotation in socialist-feminist scholarship”,⁴

According to the materialistic conception, the determining factor in history is, in the last resort, the production and reproduction of immediate life. But this itself is again of a twofold character. On the one hand, the production of the means of subsistence, of food, clothing and shelter and the implements required for this; on the other, *the production of human beings* themselves, the propagation of the species. The social institutions under which men of a definite historical epoch and of a definite country live are determined by both kinds of production: by the stage of development of labour, on the one hand, and of the family, on the other.⁵

It is important to highlight and to anticipate that the distinction between two “types of production” and, consequently, between people and things (or between humans and non-humans) as postulated by Engels represents a fundamental, anthropocentric assumption that remains unexamined. Furthermore, this is an analytical distinction that Engels draws from capitalist organization, which materially separates

of *surplus value*. The latter is the increase in value obtained with the movement of capital, the difference between M and M'. Labor-power is a special commodity and makes this possible because its use value is such that its consumption creates more value than its cost. The term “social reproduction” is a technical expression in recent Marxist feminist debate, defined as, “the activities and attitudes, behaviors and emotions, and responsibilities and relationships directly involved in maintaining life, on a daily basis and inter-generationally. It involves various kinds of socially necessary work – mental, physical, and emotional – aimed at providing the historically and socially, as well as biologically, defined means for maintaining and reproducing population. Among other things, social reproduction includes how food, clothing, and shelter are made available for immediate consumption, how the maintenance and socialization of children is accomplished, how care of the elderly and infirm is provided, and how sexuality is socially constructed”. Johanna Brenner and Barbara Laslett, “Gender, Social Reproduction, and Women’s Self-Organization: Considering the US Welfare State”, *Gender & Society*, vol. 5, no. 3 (1991), p. 314. It is useful to retain and add the term “*stricto sensu*” to avoid conflating this feminist notion of “social reproduction” with Althusser’s concept of the social reproduction of society as a whole. See Louis Althusser, *On the Reproduction of Capitalism. Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses*, trans. G.M. Goshgarian, Verso, London-New York, 2014.

3 Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, pp. 42–3.

4 Judith Butler, “Merely Cultural”, *Social Text*, no. 52/53 (1997), p. 271.

5 Frederick Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, Engels, MECW, vol. 26 (1882–1889), pp. 131–2. [emphasis added]

wage labor (production of goods and services in the commodity form) from the family sphere (production of individuals and consumption). Engels, however, projects this distinction trans-historically onto all types of social formations, as is evident, as he continues, “by the stage of development of labor on the one hand and of the family on the other”.⁶

The passages quoted above, in conjunction with Marx’s incidental remarks on the destruction of the family with the advent of capitalism in the first volume of *Capital*,⁷ represent the classic sites of Marx and Engels’ manifest engagement with the issue of generative production and gender relations. Indeed, this topic is at the heart of the Marxist project of analyzing fetishized social forms as early as 1845. In the fourth thesis on Feuerbach, in which the method of form-analysis and the new materialist program is set forth,⁸ Marx’s case study is the family. He writes,

Feuerbach starts off from the fact of religious self-estrangement [*Selbstentfremdung*], of the duplication of the world into a religious, imaginary world, and a secular [*weltliche*] one. His work consists in resolving the religious world into its secular basis. He overlooks the fact that after completing this work, the chief thing still remains to be done. For the fact that the secular basis lifts off from itself and establishes itself in the clouds as an independent realm can only be explained by the inner strife and intrinsic contradictoriness of this secular basis. The latter must itself be understood in its contradiction and then, by the removal of the contradiction, revolutionised. *Thus, for instance, once the earthly family is discovered to be the*

6 *Ibid.*

7 “Compulsory work for the capitalist usurped the place, not only of the children’s play, but also of independent labour at home, within customary limits, for the family itself. The value of labour-power was determined, not only by the labour-time necessary to maintain the individual adult worker, but also by that necessary to maintain his family. Machinery, by throwing every member of that family onto the labour-market, spreads the value of the man’s labour-power over his whole family. It thus depreciates it”. Marx, *Capital I*, pp. 517–8.

8 The link between the fourth thesis and the analysis of social forms, understood in the sense of the Marxist project of the critique of political economy, was initially identified by Backhaus. Backhaus traces an insightful parallel between Feuerbach’s theoretical move in the field of religion and Smith and Ricardo’s theoretical move in the field of economic theory. In the former, the apparent independence and substantiality of God is reduced to the unified essence of the human. Similarly, in the latter, the apparent independence and substantiality of value is reduced to the unified principle of human labor. At this point, however, “the chief thing still remains to be done.” The objective is to make the opposite movement of a reconstruction of the necessity of these independent forms and their objective semblance from the historically specific conditions of socialization of labor, from the social form of labor. See Backhaus, *Dialektik der Wertform*, p. 52. Reichelt states that Marx’s analysis of value-form in *Capital* is to be understood as fulfilling the program of the fourth thesis on Feuerbach on the level of political economy. See Reichelt, *Zur logischen Struktur des Kapitalbegriffs bei Karl Marx*, p. 24, 151; Elbe, *Marx im Westen*, pp. 79–80; and Francesco Aloe, personal communication.

*secret of the holy family, the former must itself be annihilated [vernichtet] theoretically and practically.*⁹

Despite these insights, Marx never fully developed the fourth thesis with reference to the family, and he frequently biologized the processes of generative reproduction, framing procreation as a natural relationship. Engels, for his part, also abandoned the dyad model of social materiality, giving primacy to the “production of means of existence”, to which the production of human beings was deemed subordinate. This oversight represents a lacuna of Marx’s theory, highlighted first by socialist materialist feminism in the 1970s and 1980s. A lively debate around the concept of domestic labor emerged following the publication of Margaret Benston’s seminal article, *The Political Economy of Women’s Liberation*, in 1969.¹⁰ Although the idea of the household as a site of women’s oppression and the term, “domestic labor”, were already circulating in previous feminisms,¹¹ this text was the first to originally thematize the category of domestic labor as work that was necessary to the reproduction of labor-power, and thus to capitalist society as a whole. As Susan Ferguson and David McNally observed in 2013, “Quite simply: without domestic labour, workers cannot reproduce themselves; and without workers, capital cannot be reproduced. It is difficult to overstate the significance of this single move”.¹²

Since that time, standard Marxism has been accused of failing to adequately address the issue of domestic labor. This is due to the fact that Marxism posits the primacy of the relations under which wage labor is performed, overlooking, or “invisibilizing”, domestic labor.¹³ While materialist feminists converged on this charge of

9 Marx, *Theses on Feuerbach*, Marx and Engels, MECW, vol. 5 (1845–1847), p. 4. [emphasis added]

10 Margaret Benston, “The Political Economy of Women’s Liberation”, *Monthly Review*, vol. 21, no. 4 (1969), pp. 13–27.

11 Juliet Mitchell, “Women: The Longest Revolution”, *New Left Review*, no. 1 (1966), pp. 11–37.

12 Susan Ferguson and David McNally, “Capital, Labour-Power, and Gender-Relations: Introduction to the *Historical Materialism* Edition of *Marxism and the Oppression of Women*”, Lise Vogel, *Marxism and the Oppression of Women: toward a Unitary Theory*, Brill, Leiden, 2013, p. xix.

13 According to Marx, the value of labor-power is determined, as is the case with all other commodities, by the labor-time necessary for its production and reproduction. Every individual necessitates means of subsistence, encompassing not only food and clothing, housing and fuel, but also education, training, etc. Marx concludes that the labor-time necessary for the production of labor-power is identical to that required for the production of the means of subsistence. In other words, the value of labor-power is equivalent to the value of the means of subsistence necessary for the maintenance of its owner. See Marx, *Capital I*, p. 274 ff. Marx does not see, however, an element that distinguishes the commodity of labor-power from any other commodity. In the case of a normal commodity, the value of the means of production used to produce it forms part of the value of the same commodity, as well as the new value added by the labor that creates the finished product from these means of production. “This is not the case with the commodity labor-power: its value is determined solely by the

invisibilization, their debate generated two interrelated questions: “Does domestic labour produce (surplus-)value?” and, “Does domestic labour constitute a mode of production unto itself, distinct from the capitalist mode?”¹⁴. A crucial theoretical result of the debate was the assertion that labor-power is *not produced capitalistically* and, thus, domestic labor is not a form of value-creating labor. Two prominent figures in the debate, Hartmann¹⁵ and Vogel,¹⁶ tend to agree on this point, despite holding general positions that are typically regarded as antithetical.¹⁷ The theoretical fallacy of equating domestic labor with value-producing labor on the grounds that it generates the labor power that generates surplus value for capital was pervasive. It was championed by operaist feminists who, despite adopting this mistaken notion, recognized and efficiently deployed its potential for political mobilization.¹⁸

In sum, it is irrefutable that in capitalist societies there is at least one kind of production which is not *directly* organized by the forms of capitalist production, namely the production of labor-power, which coincides with the (re)production of its owner.¹⁹ Three questions, however, arise from this conclusion. They are: 1) What

value of the means of subsistence that have to be purchased on the market. Reproductive labor carried out in the household (housework, childrearing), primarily by women, does not form a part of the value of labor-power”. Therefore, Marx is wrong in asserting that the determination of the value of labor-power is just like that of the other commodities. He fails to recognize this distinctiveness and, consequently, the centrality of domestic labor and the production of individuals which, in the end, is not produced capitalistically. To conclude, “the restriction of the value of labor power to the costs of reproduction [means of subsistence] is a functional necessity of capitalism. [...] The fact that the daily value of labor-power (the value *required* for its own reproduction) is lower than the value that can be *created* in a day by the use of labor-power (through expenditure of labor-power) is the foundation of the ‘occult quality’ of value to create new value”. Heinrich, *Karl Marx’s Capital*, pp. 94–5.

14 Ferguson and McNally, “Capital, Labour-Power, and Gender-Relation”, p. xx.

15 Heidi Hartmann, “The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism: Towards a More Progressive Union”, *Capital & Class*, vol. 8 (1979), pp. 1–33.

16 Lise Vogel, *Marxism and the Oppression of Women: toward a Unitary Theory*, Brill, Leiden, 2013.

17 In the literature, a classification of Marxist-feminist theories has emerged that distinguishes between Dual (or Triple) System Theory and Unitary Theory. Hartmann would be considered an exemplar of the former school, whereas Vogel is regarded as the pioneering figure of the latter, which is currently exemplified by Social Reproduction Theory. See Cinzia Arruzza, “Remarks on Gender”, “Remarks on Gender”, *Viewpoint Magazine*, September 2, 2014, <https://viewpointmag.com/2014/09/02/remarks-on-gender/> accessed on 9th June 2025. It can be argued, however, that Hartmann’s Dual Systems Theory is, in fact, a unitary theory of the mode of production in an extended sense. In addition to capitalist forms, the forms of production of individuals should also be taken into account and cannot be reduced to class relations.

18 Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Selma James, *The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community*, Falling Wall Press, Bristol, 1972. The political mobilization is the famous campaign “Wages for Housework”, which developed from 1971 onwards and extended to Italy, Germany, Switzerland, Great Britain, Canada and the United States.

19 This is confirmed also by Heinrich, *Die Wissenschaft vom Wert*, pp. 260–1.

is, then, the *form* of this production? 2) What types of domination are intrinsic to this form? And, 3) How is this form connected to those of capitalist production?

The domestic labor debate of the 1970s and 1980s, and more recent queer revisions, yielded similar answers.²⁰ Regarding the form of production (1), a number of concepts have been proposed, including: “mode of reproduction” (Bridenthall), “domestic mode of production” (Delphy), “mode of production of domestic labor” (Harrison), “the individuals’ mode of production” (Wittig), “sex/gender system” (Rubin), “production of people in the sex/gender sphere” (Hartmann), “domestic labour as production” (Himmelweit and Mohun), “sexuo-affective production” (Ferguson and Folbre), “technology of gender” (De Lauretis) and “the sexual mode of production” (Butler).²¹ Despite their differences, these concepts all point to the recognition of a *specific form* of the generative reproduction process.

Regarding types of domination (2), these concepts are unanimously related to gender domination, defined variously in terms of patriarchy, a binary sex/gender system, or a heterosexual matrix. Although the connection between reproduction and gender relations appears self-evident, it is crucial to acknowledge that, in theory, there are no inherent limitations to the speculation that in “more imaginative societies”,²² the (re)production of individuals, including “biological” reproduction, could be entirely detached not only from a heterosexual matrix or a binary sex/gender system and its correlated domination, but also from a sex/gender system *tout court*.

The dynamics of connection with the forms of capitalist production (3) is the question that has undoubtedly sparked the most impassioned, theoretical debates.

20 A detailed and thorough examination of these positions is beyond the scope of this book. Instead, I will simply mention the key concepts that have been proposed as answers to the three questions.

21 Renate Bridenthall, “The Dialectics of Production and Reproduction in History”, *Radical America*, vol. x, no. 2 (1976), pp. 3–11; Christine Delphy, *The Main Enemy: a Materialist Analysis of Women's Oppression*, trans. Lucy ap Roberts and Diana Leonard Barker, Women's Research and Resources Centre Publications, London, 1977; John Harrison, “Political Economy of Housework”, *Bulletin of the Conference of Socialist Economists*, vol. III, no. 1 (1973), pp. 35–52; Monique Wittig, “The Category of Sex”, Louise Turcotte (ed.) *The Straight Mind and Other Essays*, Beacon Press, Boston, 1992, pp. 1–8; Gayle Rubin, “The Traffic in Women: Notes on the ‘Political Economy’ of Sex”, Rayna R. Reiter (ed.), *Toward an Anthropology of Woman*, Monthly Review Press, New York and London, 1975, pp. 157–210; Hartmann, “The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism”; Himmelweit and Mohun, “Domestic Labour and Capital”; Ann Ferguson and Nancy Folbre, “The Unhappy Marriage of Patriarchy and Capitalism”, Lydia Sargent (ed.), *Women & Revolution: A Discussion of the Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism*, Black Rose Books, Montréal, 1981, pp. 313–39; Teresa de Lauretis, “The Technology of Gender”, *Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film, and Fiction*, Indiana University Press, Indianapolis, 1987, pp. 1–30; Butler, “Merely Cultural”.

22 Hartmann, “The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism”, p. 16.

A classic formulation of this question is, “Does domestic labor constitute a mode of production unto itself, distinct from the capitalist mode?” Strategies to answer this question derive from two basic positions: first, the conceptualization of domestic labor as a distinct mode of production, co-existent with, but distinct from the capitalist mode; and second, the extension of the concept of the “mode of production” itself to include sexual and gender regulation and generative functions.

Those who advocate the first strategy, such as Benston, Harrison, and Delphy, despite their differences,²³ emphasize the material autonomy and self-sufficiency of the reproduction of the domestic mode, which they conceptualize as a class system in its own right, remaining, somehow, at a pre-capitalist stage.²⁴ As for the second strategy, the shared thesis is that the material reproduction of societies encompasses both the production of goods and services and the production of people. Neither aspect alone is materially self-sufficient, or capable of self-reproduction. The production of things requires people, and the production of people requires things. Nevertheless, at a formal level, the relations that organize these two aspects differ, necessitating an investigation into the *modes* in which these two aspects are organized. Bridenthal speaks of “dialectics” between what she labels production and reproduction.²⁵ Hartmann speaks of “partnership”, defined as a coexistence that is not necessarily functional or univocal between what she calls patriarchy and capitalism.²⁶ Himmelweit and Mohun speak of interdependency and mutual influence.²⁷ Broadening the concept of the mode of production, serves to illuminate more precisely the dynamics of the connections amongst the social forms of these relations (question 3), the production of goods and services (i.e. means of subsistence and of production) and production of labor-power.

Given that social forms are historically specific modes of organizing certain relations, one must start from historical fact. Historically, the differentiation of a purely economic sphere is a constitutive feature of capitalism. It is absent in pre-capitalist societies, which do not distinguish between economic production and regenerative life processes. In pre-capitalist societies, there was a unity of production and generative reproduction within peasant families. In contrast, in capitalist societies, there

23 Benston views it as a residual pre-capitalist mode, Harrison as a client mode, and Delphy as a mode that underlies and sustains the capitalist one.

24 For a critical examination of these positions, see Himmelweit and Mohun, “Domestic Labour and Capital”, pp. 21–2. On Delphy, see Arruzza, “Remarks on Gender”. These conceptualizations do not fully account for the separation between economic production and regenerative processes that are characteristic of capitalism. For this reason, they tend to view the domestic mode of production as a dual entity, encompassing both the production of goods and services within the family and the production of individuals.

25 Bridenthal, “The Dialectics of Production and Reproduction in History”, p. 5.

26 Hartmann, “The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism”, p. 17.

27 Himmelweit and Mohun, “Domestic Labour and Capital”, p. 21.

is a separation between the production of goods and services, which occurs within private capitalist enterprises, and generative (re)production, which occurs within private families.²⁸ As evidenced by socialist feminist discourse, in standard Marxism, the field of material (re)production is reduced to the production of goods and services, the social relations of production and the relations intrinsic to the sites of goods production. Thus, within this context, “labor-power is treated as a vital input to production, but nowhere is labor-power taken seriously as an output of production”.²⁹ In light of the expanded concept of mode of production, however, it is possible to take into account and address the daily and generational production of individuals and labor-power. Then, “for the purpose of illuminating family forms and domestic relations, we need to *invert our perspective*, analysing goods production as a process of labour-power’s consumption, while seeing the domestic consumption of food and shelter as a process of labour-power’s production”.³⁰ Starting from this description, the following diagram may refine these insights and better conceptualize the dynamics of connection between the production of individuals and the production of goods and services.³¹

It is important to note that the focus is not on defining the specific content of the social form organizing the production of individuals, be it the “sex/gender system”, or “heteronormativity”, or “patriarchy”, etc. (question 2). This is because the separation, represented by the dashed line, has no meaning in terms of gender relations. Therefore, the content of the specific form can only be identified through a dedicated analysis of the production of individuals. Those analyses focus on “what happens”, so to say, within the lower oval and “discover” that this form has to do with the production of gendered individuals and cishetero-sexist domination. Unlike the political and legal forms examined by the State derivation debate (see section 2.1), the relationships concerning the production of individuals are not logically deducible from capitalist commodity production.³²

28 Ursula Beer, *Geschlecht Struktur Geschichte. Soziale Konstituierung des Geschlechterverhältnisses*, Campus, Frankfurt a.M.-New York, 1991.

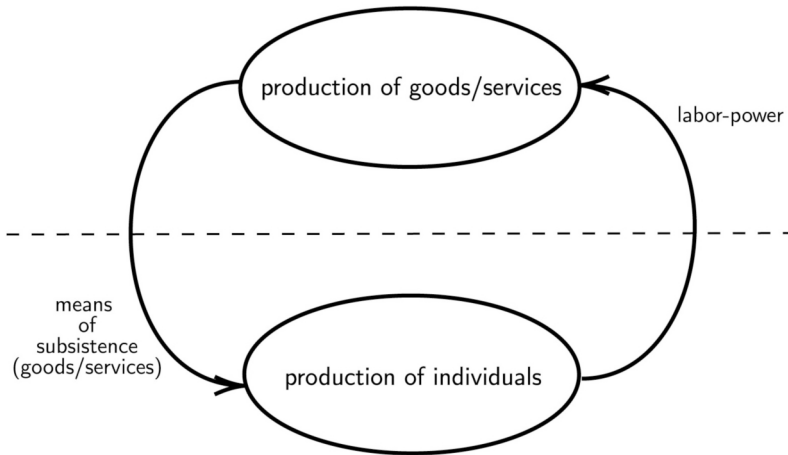
29 Wally Secombe, *A Millennium of Family Change: Feudalism to Capitalism in Northwestern Europe*, Verso, London-New York, 1992, p. 11.

30 *Ibid.* [emphasis added]

31 The material developed in this section further elaborate on the ideas presented in Francesco Aloe, Chiara Stefanoni, “Animals in Capitalist Societies. Conceptualizing the Anthropological Form”, paper presented at 20th Annual Historical Materialism Conference, SOAS University, London, UK, November 10, 2023. For a fully developed theory of gender as a social form of the production of individuals, see: Chiara Stefanoni, Francesco Aloe, “From Marxist Feminism to Queer Materialist Theory: Conceptualizing Gender as Social Form”, *Bollettino filosofico*, vol. XXXX (2025), forthcoming.

32 This raises the question of whether there is a pre-eminence among modes of production, that is, whether the capital relation directs the generative relation in some way. In Aloe and Stefanoni, “Anatomia della nazione”, p. 369, we argued in favor of this pre-eminence: “In this

Diagram 1: The diagram offers a qualitative reinterpretation of Marx's well-known schemas of reproduction. The two elliptical shapes represent the social forms that organize these two productions, the dashed line represents their separation.



The arrow on the left represents the flow of means of subsistence, produced by capital as commodities, which stream to private families, providing them with the objective conditions for generative (re)production. The arrow on the right represents the flow of labor-power thus generated, which is sold as a commodity and moves to capitalist enterprises, providing them with the subjective conditions for valorization. The dynamics of the relationship between the form of the production of goods and services, i.e. capital, and the social form organizing the production of individuals are functionally interdependent, in constant mutual interaction and perturbation, exerting indirect influence on each other. They therefore constitute two interconnected social forms in a structural coupling, entangled in an interlocking structure of domination.

framework, if it is true that the peculiar dynamics of the capitalist mode of production – from which it is possible to identify structural goals and efficiency criteria for the orientation of power relations – have their direct field of action in the economic and political/state spheres, however, with their specific goals, they permeate all social spheres at various levels and thus provide ‘a general illumination which bathes all the other colours and modifies their particularity’ (Marx, *Grundrisse*, p. 107)”. This question, however, is only meaningful at the level of concrete, not formal, processes. At this concrete level, the production of wealth tends to dominate, for example, by correlating national population decline with situations of economic crisis, unemployment, war, or disease. Certainly, there are situations in which the needs of reproduction of individuals have been prioritized over commodity production, for example during the lockdowns in the first months of the COVID-19 pandemic.

3.2 Anthropological Form: Producing Individuals as *Human*

Engels, in the aforementioned passage that is among the most frequently cited quotations in socialist-feminist scholarship, describes the production of individuals as, borrowing terms from the natural sciences, “the production of human beings themselves, the propagation of the species”.³³ Consequently, the debate on the form of production of individuals and capital within the context of Marxist feminism, as well as the original diagrammatic elaboration proposed in the previous section, has been centered on the production of human individuals and intra-human relations of domination. Nonetheless, this definition as well as the differentiation between the production of “things” and “people” are anthropocentrically biased. Why is the production of individuals (and thus the analysis of gender and capital relations) immediately qualified as the production of individuals *of the human species*? This question represents a lacuna in Marxian theory and a fundamental blind spot that persists even in feminist-queer theories. The relations of domination between humans and non-human animals, or “species troubles”, are grossly overlooked. This oversight is a consequence of a particular social form that both reifies and naturalizes the anthropological matrix of the production of individuals. To bring into view this theoretical result, it is necessary to remove the anthropocentric clause and consider the production of animal individuals, *both humans and non-humans*, leading to a series of fundamental inquiries: 1) What can be said about this form of production within the framework of Marxist analysis of capitalism in its ideal average? 2) How is it interconnected with the social forms of gender relations and capital?

From the perspective of relations of domination between humans and non-human animals, certain historical differences between pre-capitalist and capitalist societies are apparent. In pre-capitalism, there was a substantial unity between animal production and the generative reproduction of humans within the peasant family. This is the scenario depicted by Marx as, “patriarchal rural industry of a peasant *family* which produces corn, *cattle*, yarn, linen and clothing for its own use”,³⁴ exemplified using two related concepts: “domesticity” and “*societas*”. The concept of “domesticity”, as defined by historian Richard Bulliet, provides a framework to understand a period in human-animal relations when social, intellectual, and economic structures normalized daily contact with animals.³⁵ Daily contact implied the domestic, generative production and exploitation of various animals for different purposes and according to their usefulness in order to potentially enable the self-sufficiency of patriarchal, rural industry. This was achieved through an interlocking of all the

33 Engels, *The Origin of the Family*, p. 132.

34 Marx, *Capital I*, p. 171. [emphasis added]

35 Richard W. Bulliet, *Hunters, Herders and Hamburgers. The Past and Future of Human-Animal Relationships*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2005, p. 3.

functions disclosed by the specific qualities of animals.³⁶ Daily contact also entailed that “most people slaughtered their own chickens and hogs, or watched their butcher carve steaks and chops from a fat-sheathed carcass”.³⁷

The concept of *societas*, which can be translated as “relation, community”, was first introduced by the ancient Roman author and naturalist, Pliny the Elder, in his writings, to delineate the relationships between humans and other animals. This concept has been subsequently revived by the contemporary philosopher, Tristan Garcia, who writes, “*Societas* gives concrete expression to a common bond between the specific capacities of different animals and what one species in particular, the human species, can make use of. *Societas* denotes both the human species’ inclusion in the same community, and the possibility of exchanges between humanity and other animals”.³⁸ This concept, despite its naturalistic flavor, elucidates the notion of a utilitarian and anthropocentric communality between humans and animals within a self-sufficient and closed productive nucleus. Thus, the peasant family represents the spatial and functional unity of the organization of the production of individuals, both human and animal.

In contrast to pre-capitalist societies, capitalist societies are distinguished by the separation of animal production and the generative reproduction of humans occurring within the private family unit. The household becomes an exclusively human space for the production of human individuals, severed from the production of animal individuals, which occurs in the economic sphere and is organized by capital forms. The concept of “postdomesticity”, introduced by Bulliet as opposed to “domesticity”, embraces this separation. Postdomesticity refers to a stage in human-animal relations in which people are physically and psychologically distant from the animals that produce the products they use,³⁹ and “treat animal products as industrial commodities and live animals as raw materials to be processed in the most efficient way possible”.⁴⁰ Garcia characterizes this separation as, “Becoming predominantly urban. [...] Humanity restricted its everyday acquaintance with other animals to companion species, nature reserves, zoos, and symbolic functions”.⁴¹

Adapting the previous diagram, this specific historical separation becomes:⁴²

36 Benedetta Piazzesi, *Così perfetti e utili. Genealogia dello sfruttamento animale*, Mimesis, Milano-Udine, 2015, pp. 26–39.

37 Bulliet, *Hunters, Herders and Hamburgers*, p. 4.

38 Tristan Garcia, *Form and Object*, trans. Mark Allan Ohm and Mark Allan Coburn, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 2014, p. 210.

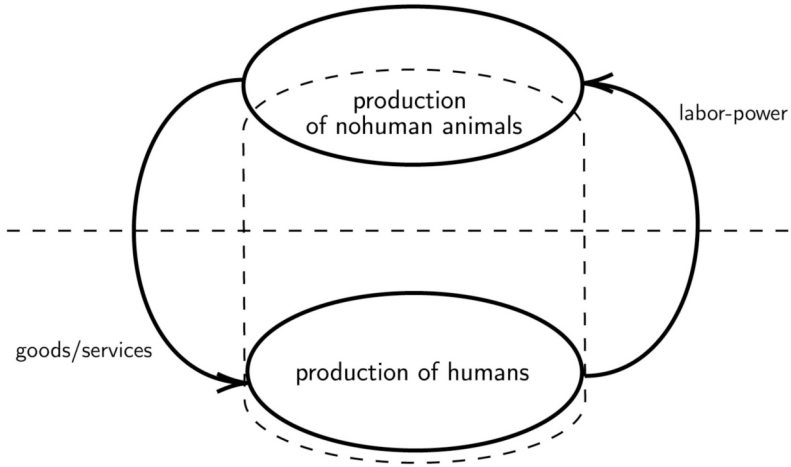
39 Bulliet, *Hunters, Herders and Hamburgers*, p. 3.

40 *Ibid.*, 177.

41 Garcia, *Form and Object*, p. 212.

42 Aloe and Stefanoni, “Animals in Capitalist Societies”.

Diagram 2



The two ovals, representing the production forms of goods and services (capital) and of individuals (gender relations), respectively, remain. The dotted line continues to represent their separation, and the arrows continue to represent the output and input commodity flows. The addition to this diagram, the dashed elliptical shape, represents the totality of the production of individuals, both human and non-human. This dashed shape comprises the entire lower oval, the generative reproduction of humans, and intersects with the upper oval, the production of non-human animals, which is directly organized by capital and distinctly separated from human production. Therefore, the structure of the separation between humans and non-human animals *coincides precisely* with the separation between capitalist production of goods and services and the production of human individuals, represented by the dashed, horizontal line.

Regarding question 2), this diagram implies that the social form of human domination over non-human animals is identical to the structural coupling between capital and the form of generative reproduction, because this coupling is precisely what continually reproduces and naturalizes the separation between humans and non-human animals. This is expressed in the following formula: $A \cong K \rightleftharpoons G$ (A represents the form of human domination over animals; K represents capital; G represents gender form).

The term “anthropological form” derives both from this Marxist theoretical foundation, and from ideas put forth by Agamben in relation to the “anthropological machine” and the ongoing reproduction of the separation between humans and non-

human animals that it denotes.⁴³ The concept of anthropological form signifies, in a non-anthropocentric and materialist sense, the Agambenian insight that, “*Homo sapiens* is neither a clearly defined species nor a substance; it is, rather, a machine or device for producing the recognition of the human”⁴⁴, operating through a dual process of inclusion and exclusion.

In capitalist societies, the individual is produced as a gendered subject – represented in the lower oval – to be pumped – represented by the right arrow – as commodity labor-power into the capitalist production of goods and services. This *ipso facto* produces him or her⁴⁵ as distinct from animals. Simultaneously, the latter are produced as commodities and are thus excluded from the human category. Together with other commodities, animals and animal products, such as meat, other animal-sourced foods, medicines, entertainment involving animals, clothes, and more, stream to private families – represented by the left arrow – thereby providing them with the objective conditions for generative reproduction. In this way, they are fundamentally included in the production of human individuals.

Diagram 2 permits an abstract-conceptual reconstruction of the anthropological form, therefore a reconstruction *ex-post*. Integrating a diachronic dimension will elucidate certain structural requirements that constitute the conditions of possibility pertaining to the social form of human-animal relations and animal domination in capitalist societies.

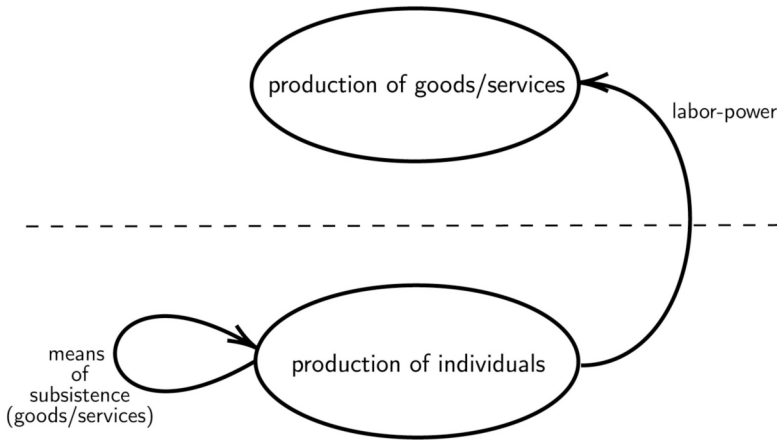
Both the separation between the production of goods and services, on the one hand, and the production of individuals, on the other, are fundamental aspects of capitalist societies, represented in the diagram by two ovals. The upper is organized by capital form. With regard to the lower, complex internal processes organize the production and reproduction of individuals. It seems reasonable to posit that, even in the early phases of capitalism, the daily and generational production of human and non-human animals was still organized according to some pre-capitalist forms. Not only was the intact, extended patriarchal family a major armature along these lines. Just as importantly, a large portion of the means of subsistence, (crucially food) was produced by households themselves or obtained by independent farmers and artisans. This can be represented by a loop (see Diagram 3).

43 Giorgio Agamben, *The Open. Man and Animal*, trans. Kevin Attell, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 2004, pp. 33–8.

44 *Ibid.*, 26.

45 The binarism (him or her) is appropriate in this context, given that the form produces as recognizable only male or female subjects.

Diagram 3



Surely, a correlation exists between the two spheres. This is represented by the right arrow in Diagram 3 pointing from the bottom to the top, signifying a process of “picking up” of labor-power. This coincides with the moment labelled by Marx as the *‘formal subsumption of labor’*, which is an already existing labor process that initially does not occur under the command of capital, but is subordinated to capital. The distinction from similar pre-capitalist organizations consists in the fact that laborers work for a capitalist, and are thus selling their labor-power.⁴⁶

The two elliptical shapes in Diagram 3 adhere to different logics, thereby engendering a state of conflict.⁴⁷ Namely, at the abstract level, in the capitalist mode of production, there is an intrinsic imperative of endless valorization, which imposes itself through the coercive laws of competition, driving towards the destruction of the material conditions of reproduction and naturalization. In a situation of formal subsumption, these destructive tendencies are connected to the production of absolute surplus value, attainable by a potentially limitless extension of the work day, longer than is necessary for the self-preservation of the laborer, so that the capitalist may appropriate the surplus value thereby generated.⁴⁸ Consequently, capital inher-

46 “Handicraftsmen who previously worked on their own account, or as apprentices of a master, should become wage-labourers under the direct control of a capitalist”, Marx, *Capital*, p. 645.

47 The Marxist feminist Nancy Fraser similarly speaks of “social contradiction” inherent in the deep structure of capitalist society. [...] Neither intra-economic nor intra-domestic, it is a contradiction *between* those two constitutive elements of capitalist society”. She refers to this as “social-crisis tendency of ‘capitalism as such’”. Nancy Fraser, “Contradictions of Capital and Care”, *New Left Review*, vol. 100 (2016), p. 103.

48 For a detailed account of the capitalist process of production, see Heinrich, *Karl Marx's Capital*, pp. 99–108.

ently poses a mortal threat to the (re)production of the very labor-power it needs to exploit. This is a direct threat to the Engelsian “propagation of the species”, or Marxist feminist “social reproduction”.

The solution to this crisis involves a dual transformation.⁴⁹ On the one hand, the transformation of the form of production of individuals, with a new specific arrangement – be it a “sex/gender system”, or “heteronormativity” – and the separation of the production of animals from this arrangement, which is transformed now into capitalist organization.⁵⁰ On the other hand, the transformation of the relations between capitalist forms and forms of production of individuals – from “picking up” to structural coupling (disruption of the loop and appearance of the left arrow and establishment of the cycle), i.e. the constitution of the anthropological form. It is crucial that the transformation of the relations and the “content” of the form of generative reproduction are one and the same process. This is of the upmost importance. The constitution of structural coupling and the concomitant transformation of that form is, in fact, precisely what allows a fully capitalist structure to unfold and take root, marked, not so much by absolute surplus value, but by the production of relative surplus value.⁵¹

On a detailed level, the production of relative surplus value is achieved through the reduction of necessary labor time, i.e. the part of the working day during which the value of all the products that the workers require for their own (re)production is created, through the *intensification* of labor time (cooperation, division of labor), and the continuous improvement of productive assemblages, such as machinery. Unlike the absolute extension of working hours, this compression process does not necessarily possess a fatal tendency to destroy labor power. Of course, when productivity is increased by the introduction of machines, this also leads to an extension of working hours, as well as to shift work and night work, to achieve the longest possible running time of the machine. As a consequence of the increase in productivity, however, technical development may accelerate, raising the standard of living of the

49 Other processes that are part of this “solution” to be considered are the establishment of a legal workday, a minimum wage, and regulations concerning occupational health and safety or state welfare measures with legal provisions (such as, insurance policies) first imposed through workers’ struggles, therefore happening at the *dispositif* level of the capital form and nation form. *Ibid.*, 207 ff.

50 In other words, the capitalist organization of the production of animals and their zootechnical transformation can be described as part of the process of subsumption of agricultural labor.

51 “The lengthening of labor-time is, however, only possible within limits, thus the *typically capitalist method* for increasing exploitation is the production of ‘relative surplus value,’ and through the implementation of increasingly expensive machines at that”. *Ibid.*, 150. [emphasis added]

working class simultaneously with rising profit, and, eventually, a shortening of labor-time.⁵²

The production of relative surplus value is only possible through the *real subsumption* of labor under capital, as defined by Marx. Real subsumption signifies that the labor process is revolutionized in its entire organization. That is, “the capitalist mode of production creates the material guise of production corresponding to its social form”.⁵³ Nevertheless, this dynamic, the production of relative surplus value, or real subsumption, is subject to an indispensable precondition: the majority of means of subsistence consumed in the working-class household must be *capitalistically* produced. This is the only means to achieve the significant decrease in the value of labor-power that would result in the increase of profits.⁵⁴

In terms of the diagrammatical representation, only under these conditions will the left arrow appear, representing the effective establishment of the coupling. Nuclear families become totally dependent on commodities for subsistence, thereby reducing the time required for reproductive labor, such as cooking. Conversely, labor power is expended for the majority of the working day in the process of valorization. From a Marxist-feminist point of view, commodity consumption is part of the process of labor-power's production, organized by a new form of generative reproduction. This means that the coupling of capital and the generative form, thus the anthropological form, and the separation of humans and animals it perpetuates, is essential to the anatomy of the ideal average of capitalist societies. The anthropological form produces individuals as humans and declares or inscribes the population *as human*, thus ensuring reproducibility, against the destructive tendencies specific to capitalism and in favor of its own conditions of existence. The process of production of individuals is given by an anthropological matrix whose “invisibility” is a consequence of the fetishized anthropological social form.

The “golden structure” (Diagram 2) of capitalist societies is realized in this case, where structural coupling is perfectly balanced, enabling the anthropological form

52 *Ibid.*, 104–5.

53 *Ibid.*, 118.

54 The capitalistic production of most means of subsistence reduces the necessary labor time and increases the surplus labor time that can be appropriated. Individual capitalists, oriented toward profit maximization, introduce a technological upgrading of machinery that, by lowering production costs below the social average, enables them to acquire extra surplus value. This extra value persists as long as the upgrading and, with it, the decrease in the value of the produced commodity are not generalized by competition. To the extent that the produced commodity enters, directly or indirectly, into the means of subsistence of labor-power, given that the value of labor power is equal to the value of the means of subsistence, the value of labor-power also decreases. Moreover, the concept “profit” is not accurate in this context. The correct analytical category is the rate of surplus value. For a comprehensive discussion of these concepts, see *Ibid.*, 99–103, 121.

to function ideally and without obstacle. This represents the state of greatest “splendor” of capitalist societies and their effective unfolding, which coincides with the greatest levels of reification and naturalization of their forms of domination and exploitation.⁵⁵ Nonetheless, the destructive tendencies inscribed within the production of absolute and relative surplus value, such as the systematic blindness of capital to its own conditions of existence, persist.⁵⁶ These tendencies can be conceptualized as causing a perturbation or a disruption to the anthropological form in the sense that they perturb or disrupt the equilibrium of the structural coupling between capital and the specific arrangement of the generative form, as well as the human/animal separation, by affecting the smooth functioning of the reproduction cycle to the point of open conflict.

To conclude, by incorporating the analysis of the anthropological social form of production of individuals and its respective *dispositifs* into the study of capitalist societies, it is possible to direct attention toward certain qualitative changes as well as structural constants in human-animal relations that are often obscured by the accentuated continuity and uniformity of the cultural models underlying concepts such as speciesism, anthroparchy⁵⁷ and “war against animals”.⁵⁸ An illustrative example is the centralization of slaughterhouses and farms far from cities, cou-

55 A historical realization of such a structure involves the establishment of three elements that began in the late nineteenth century and took hold in the twentieth. First, Fordism, in which standardized products were produced on the assembly line for mass consumption and wages were raised (at least for a certain segment of the workforce: white, full-time production workers), leading to the mystification of the wage form and the naturalization of class exploitation. Second, the establishment of the *dispositif* of heterosexuality, which includes the nuclear family as the site of consumption of commodities and reproduction of individuals, a strong gender hierarchy in which the woman is the “angel of the home”, and the pathologization of “perverts”. Aloe and Stefanoni, “Anatomia della nazione”, pp. 370–4. Third, the establishment of the dietary *dispositif* (meatification of the diet) and the zootechnical transformation (breeding and slaughterhouses). Here is the naturalization of species domination. Interestingly, Ford’s moving assembly line was inspired by the disassembly line he saw when he visited Chicago’s famous Union Stock Yard slaughterhouse.

56 Fraser’s social-crisis tendency.

57 “Anthroparchy literally means ‘human domination’, and I see anthroparchy as a social system, a complex and relatively stable set of relationships in which the ‘environment’ is dominated through formations of social organization which privilege the human. [...] the ‘environment’ [...] be defined as the non-human animate world and its contexts – including the whole range of multifarious animal and plant species”. Erika Cudworth, “Most Farmers Prefer Blondes: The Dynamics of Anthroparchy in Animals’ Becoming Meat”, *Journal of Critical Animal Studies* (2008), pp. 33–4.

58 According to Dinesh J. Wadiwel, humans’ relationship to animals, for the most part, precisely does constitute an actual state of war, literally and materially. The concept of “war” describes more accurately a relationship that is “primarily hostile”, that is more often than not “combative or at least focused upon producing harm and death”, and that entails such “a monstrous

pled with the “meatification” of standard or average diets. This is the outcome of a specific historical *dispositif* – which will be analyzed in detail in the next chapter – that emerged from the conflictual relationship of different social forms (Diagram 3). Such centralization is not conceivable as a historically specific arrangement of biological-naturalistic survival, such as meat-eating. Rather, it can be viewed as a concrete social solution that allows for the production of human individuals as necessary for the reproduction of capitalist societies.

deployment of violence and extermination”. Dinesh J. Wadiwel, *The War Against Animals*, Brill, Leiden, 2015, pp. 5, 6.

4. The Dietary *Dispositif*

4.1 *Dispositifs* of the Anthropological Form

An abstract-conceptual reconstruction of the anthropological form provides a framework for understanding the structural conditions for human domination over non-human animals in capitalist societies, and opens to historical-social analysis certain configurations of animal domination. The anthropological form materializes as three specific *dispositifs* to be explored historically:

1. The dietary *dispositif*: the network which enables the exploitation of nonhuman animals for human feeding. Textile and clothing production with animal-derived components are interconnected to the food supply chain as well, as in the case of leather;
2. The pharmaceutical-experimentation *dispositif*: the network regarding the exploitation of non-human animals as experimental subjects both in the development of new drugs (for use in humans and other animals, such as farm animals, to augment productivity) and in various other fields of scientific research (bio-engineering, cognitive science, ethology, etc.);
3. The entertainment-pet *dispositif*: the network regarding the exploitation of non-human animals for human “leisure” (zoos, theme parks, movies, safaris, dog and cat breeding, wild animals trafficking, etc.).

To grasp the qualitative transformation, the birth of the dietary *dispositif* will be explored historically, with respect to meat production. Since the latter half of the nineteenth century, the dietary *dispositif* in capitalist society has been centered upon meat. As Baics and Thelle put it, “meat, in particular, occupies a critical juncture for nineteenth-century food systems because no other food item was so intricately connected to urban modernity”.¹ Urbanization was a fundamental process of the nineteenth century, with the urbanized population growing rapidly between 1820 and

1 Gergely Baics and Mikkel Thelle, “Introduction: Meat and the Nineteenth-Century City”, *Urban History*, vol. 45, no. 2 (2018), p. 184.