

acking today. "The Diggers have something to say to twentieth-century socialists," as do the many other radicals of the seventeenth century who refused to worship the Protestant Ethic, writes Hill (1975:15).

Today, the critical outlook engendered by incipient capitalist development has been largely superseded by the view that compliantly accepts capitalist institutions as natural and ethically commendable. Given this historically induced amnesia and cultural stupefaction, it is important for us to take note of the critique offered us by the neophyte proletarians of the Third World today, whose labor and products are relentlessly absorbed by the world market but whose culture resists such rationalization.

Hard-headed realists will scornfully dismiss this cultural resistance as of little importance, but the destruction of precapitalist metaphysics of production and exchange was considered by at least two influential social theorists as mandatory for the successful establishment of modern capitalism. Weber regarded the magical superstitions associated with production and exchange to be one of the greatest obstacles to the rationalization of economic life (1927: 355), and in his essay *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* he reiterated the point. "Labor must . . . be performed as if it were an absolute end in itself, a calling. But such an attitude is by no means a product of nature. It cannot be evoked by low wages or high ones alone, but can only be the product of a long and arduous process of education. Today, capitalism once in the saddle, can recruit its laboring force in all industrial countries with comparative ease. In the past this was in every case an extremely difficult problem" (1958:62).

And as Marx observed, the transition to the capitalist mode of production is completed only when direct force and the coercive force of external economic conditions are used only in exceptional cases. An entirely new set of traditions and habits has to be developed among the working class until common sense regards the new conditions as natural. "It is not enough that the conditions of labor are concentrated in a mass, in the shape of capital, at the one pole of society, while at the other are grouped masses of men who have nothing to sell but their labor power. Neither is it enough that they are compelled to sell it voluntarily. The advance of capitalist production develops a working class, which by education, tradition, habit, looks upon the conditions of that mode of production as *self-evident laws of Nature*" (1967, 1:737; emphasis added).

Commodity Fetishism

If these "self-evident laws of nature" strike the neophyte proletarians with whom this book is concerned as unnatural and evil, then it is reasonable to ask why we regard our social form and economic process as natural. In suggesting an outline that an answer to this question might take, I will be charting the general problem with which this book is concerned.

At the outset some historical perspective is called for. It is too easily forgotten that at its inception industrial capitalism was described by an eloquent minority in Western Europe as profoundly inhuman and, in that sense, unnatural. With the maturation of the capitalist system, this sense of moral outrage was dissipated, and eventually even criticisms of that system were phrased in the quasi-objectivist categories of order and nature that were laid down by the capitalist structure of comprehension. At their best, such critiques commonly concentrated on the anatomy and function of capitalism, the systems it elaborates for securing surplus value, the unequal distribution of its profit, and so on. The critical insights that were forced on sensitive personalities who were exposed to the beginnings of capitalism, critics who often invidiously compared capitalism with bygone eras, contained this class of criticisms, too, but did so within a metaphysic that could not for a moment entertain or acquiesce in the new definitions of person and work that capitalism engendered. In 1851, John Ruskin wrote that the perfection of industrial products was neither a cause for celebration nor a sign of England's greatness, "Alas! if read rightly, these perfectnesses are a sign of a slavery in England a thousand times more bitter and more degrading than that of the scourged African or helot Greek" (1925, 2:160). It was not that the new system necessarily made people poorer, but "this degradation of the operative into a machine" which led men into an incoherent urge for freedom. Above all, it was the sense of self-alienation that poisoned life under capitalism and spurred the class struggle, for, "It is not that men are pained by the scorn of the upper classes, but they cannot endure their own; for they feel that the kind of labour to which they are condemned is verily a degrading one, and makes them less than men." This was what so appalled Ruskin. In his vision the system became a living critique of itself. "And the great cry that rises from all our manufacturing cities, louder than the furnace blast, is all in very deed this—that we manufacture everything there except men; we blanch cotton, and strengthen steel, and refine sugar, and shape pottery; but to bright-

en, to strengthen, to refine, or to form a single living spirit, never enters into our estimate of advantages" (Ruskin, 1925, 2:163). The romanticism entailed in critiques such as Ruskin's, of industrial capitalism and of laissez-faire represented a focal point around which *both* conservative and utopian socialist critics converged, elaborating nostalgic myths concerning the primitive or precapitalist past as a way of combatting bourgeois ideology and of spurring people into political action. Scientific theories of history and scientific socialism developed in reaction to such romantic notions. Usually, however, their development was very one sided: they gave utopian ideologies such a wide berth that they in fact validated bourgeois ideals while appearing to negate them. The uncritical validation and even adulation of what was essentially a bourgeois concept of "progress" and of the natural science model of society are among the most salient manifestations of this.

The tension in early efforts to persuade contemporaries that the new economic system was baneful stemmed from one critical factor: increasingly, the system was seen as natural. The outrage and despair in Ruskin's writing stem not merely from what might be called the "objective" features of life under capitalism, but preeminently from the fact that these features came to be seen by its members as part of the natural order of things. To meet this tension, writers like Ruskin resorted to eulogizing medieval society, its idealism and religious principles, its basis in cooperation rather than in competition, and its absence of industrial exploitation and drudgery. Although they were well aware of the political coercion in medieval times, they still held the viewpoint that the critical lesson for the present lay in the greater control that the worker had possessed over materials, tools, and time. In his essay on the nature of the Gothic, Ruskin counseled his contemporaries not to mock at the fantastic ignorance of the old sculptors, for their works "are signs of the life and liberty of every workman who struck the stone; a freedom of thought, and rank in scale of being, such as no laws, no charters, no charities can secure; but which it must be the first aim of all Europe at this day to regain for her children." In many instances Marx himself, in developing a scientific and unsentimental critical analysis of capitalism, found that in the contrast between capitalist and precapitalist societies he could best drive home the cruel disfiguration of humanity that capitalism represented to him.

The use of the contrast between medieval and capitalist society was not just a romanticized rhetorical device. Quite apart from the critical lessons inherent in such a contrast, it is significant that peasants and craftsmen the world over have displayed similar reac-

tions to the inner significance of capitalist organization. To understand this reaction it is helpful to analyze the salient differences between the use-value system that underlies peasant economics and the market basis of capitalism. Above all it is necessary to understand the way in which the market system of modern capitalism engenders a marketing mentality in which people tend to be seen as commodities and commodities tend to be seen as animated entities that can dominate persons. This socially instituted paradox arises because, unlike earlier forms of organization which joined persons into direct relationships for production and exchange (often predicated on their control over the means of production), the market interposes itself between persons, mediating direct awareness of social relations by the abstract laws of relationships between commodities.

The peasant mode of production differs from the capitalist mode in fundamental ways. Under capitalism the proletariat work force lacks the control over the means of production that peasants exercise. The peasant uses cash, not capital, and sells in order to buy, whereas the capitalist uses cash as capital to buy in order to sell at a profit, thus adding to capital and repeating the circuit on an ever-increasing scale lest the enterprise die. The peasant producer lives in a system that is aimed at the satisfaction of an array of qualitatively defined needs; contrarily, the capitalist and the capitalist system have the aim of limitless capital accumulation.

In the realization of this aim, capitalism stamps its products and its means of production with the seal of market approval—price. Only by "translating" all the varied qualities that constitute its products and means for creating them into one common "language," that of currency, can the generator of capitalism's vitality, the market, operate. Known as "commodities," goods and services under capitalism thus differ enormously from their counterparts in precapitalist systems of livelihood. Although they may in fact be the same articles, socially and conceptually they are very different. To take Aristotle's famous example, a shoe is a shoe, physically, whether it is produced for wear or for sale at a profit with the aim of accumulating capital. But as a commodity the shoe has properties that are in addition to its use-value of providing comfort, ease of walking, pleasure to the eye, or whatever. As a commodity the shoe has the exchange-value function: it can generate profit for its owner and seller over and above the use-value that it holds for the person who eventually buys and wears it. In its exchange-value the shoe is qualitatively identical with any other commodity, no matter how much they may differ in terms of their use-value properties—their

physical features, symbolic attributes, and so on. By virtue of this abstraction, which is based on market exchange and the universal equivalence of money, a palace is equal to a certain number of shoes, just as a pair of shoes is equal to a certain fraction of an animal's hide. Absurd as it seems when thus stated, this socially necessary fiction is a commonplace that underlies the fictional naturalness of identities on which the society depends and that guarantees its concept of objects and objectivity.

According to the theory, phenomenology, and behavior of the market, the regulation of social activity is computed by men coldly calculating their egoistic advantage over one another within a context organized by the interaction of products depending on prices and profit margins. The organic conception of society is here dissolved by two synergistic processes: communality and mutuality give way to personal self-interest, and commodities, not persons, dominate social being. The exchange ratio of commodities mediates and determines the activities of people. Hence, social relations between persons become disguised as the social relations between things. What is more, the prices of commodities are constantly varying beyond the foresight and control of persons; thus, individuals are even more subject to the whim of the marketplace. People relate to one another not directly but through the mediation of the market guiding the circulation and relations of commodities. Their livelihoods depend on the relations established by commodities, and the market becomes the guarantee of their spiritual coherence. The market established basis of livelihood becomes in effect a constantly lived out daily ritual, which, like all rites, joins otherwise unconnected links of meaning into a coherent and apparently natural network of associations. The commodity paradigm for understanding humanity, social relations, and the world at large now predominates.

In the case of labor the transmutation in status and meaning that occurs with this shift in paradigm is highly critical. As a commodity, labor becomes the disguised source of profit to the employer in a transaction that appears to be the equal exchange of values so long as those values are judged as commodities. But labor is not only an exchange value, a numerical quantity of labor power. What the capitalist acquires in buying the commodity of labor power as an exchange-value is the right to deploy the use-value of labor as the intelligent and creative capacity of human beings to produce more use-values than those that are reconverted into commodities as the wage. This is Marx's formulation, and it is important that we clearly understand the two planes on which his argument works.

The capitalist system ensures the social institutions by which the

free worker, bereft of the means of production, can be manipulated into working longer than is required for the production of goods necessary for his or her survival. In a twelve-hour working day, for example, the worker creates goods in six hours that are equivalent, as commodities, to the wages received. But the hidden mechanism that ensures the creation of surplus out of a situation that appears as nothing more than the fair exchange of equivalents is the movement back and forth of labor as an exchange-value and labor as a use-value. We tend to lose sight of this and the crucial importance of the noncommodity nature of labor if we adhere only to the simple arithmetic of the argument, which in this example displays a surplus of six hours labor-time. The commoditization process conceals the fact that within the matrix of capitalist institutions, labor as use-value is the source of profit. By the purchase of the commodity of labor power, the capitalist incorporates labor as a use-value into the lifeless constituents of the commodities produced. "Living labour must seize upon these things and rouse them from their death-sleep, change them from mere possible use-values into real and effective ones" (Marx, 1967, 1:183).

The ultimate consequence and meaning of these procedures is that the commodities themselves appear as the source of value and profit. The commodity definition of human labor and its products disguises both the humanly creative and social basis of value and the exploitation of that creativity by the market system.

The quantity of this disguised exploitation can be measured as surplus labor-time accruing to the employer, but the quality of that exploitation cannot be measured. The feeling of atomization and bondage which is the phenomenology of the market-based system is elusive because it is taken as natural. To the ideologues of the burgeoning capitalist system it appeared as efficient, natural, and good. But there was another view—a shocked disbelief that people could accept alienation as natural. "We have much studied and perfected, of late, the great civilized invention of the division of labour," wrote Ruskin in the mid-nineteenth century. "Only we give it a false name. It is not, truly speaking, the labour that is divided; but the men—Divided into mere segments of men—broken into small fragments and crumbs of life, so that all the little piece of intelligence that is left in a man is not enough to make a pin, or a nail, but exhausts itself in making the point of a pin or the head of a nail" (1925, 2:162-63). Divided psychologically by the market orchestration of the division of labor, producers are also separated from their products. Their labor creates and enters into the form of their products, which are then sundered from their grasp. In precapitalist econo-

mies, the embodiment of the producer in the product is consciously acknowledged, but in a capitalist system it is essential that this embodiment be "exorcised." Contrary views are outrageous, indeed, revolutionary. In his novel *Seven Red Sundays* concerning anarcho-syndicalists at the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War, Ramon Sender depicts a worker who was just released from jail hurrying to his old building construction site, a theatre, to glory in the finished building. "What-Oh! My good walls, noble lines, curving steel and glass! How the light sings in the round eye of a gable!" The manager refuses him entry. "But I worked on this job for more than six months." "If you did work, they paid you for it—clear out." The manager pointed to the door. The worker pointed to the inside staircase. "I'm going up. When I've seen everything, I'll look in to say goodbye. Or I'll stay here if I like. All this . . . is more mine than yours" (1961: 20-21).

In his discussion of Maori exchange, Marcel Mauss concludes that the underlying basis of that form of society is the reciprocity that is associated with the belief that an article that is produced and exchanged contains the life-force (*hau*) of the person and objects in nature from whence the article derived. Indeed, if this were not acknowledged and reciprocity not insured, fertility itself would be jeopardized (1967).

However, in capitalist society this embodiment of person in product is exorcised in keeping with the norms of bourgeois private property. The embodiment is "paid for" by the wage or the selling price, just as "ownership" of any commodity is transferred at the time of sale. In the capitalist lexicon to buy or to sell means to claim or to lose all attachment to the article that is transferred. The relations of product to producer and to the productive social milieu, as well as to nature, are forever sundered. The commodity assumes an autonomy apart from human social activities, and in transcending that activity the relations between commodities subjugate persons, who become dominated by a world of things—things that they themselves created.

But this domination is mystifying. It is unclear what is happening. In fact it appears so natural that the issue of dominance rarely arises; in this sense the commodity form has truly subjugated the consciousness of persons who are endowed with a long capitalist heritage, but not, it would seem, the consciousness of those peasants with whom we are concerned—persons just beginning to experience capitalism. Instead, they are anthropomorphizing their subjugation in the figure of the devil, redolent of the power of evil.

By reacting in this manner to capitalist culture they are living tes-

timony to the legacy of ideology through the ages that has assailed market exchange as something unnatural—a social form that undermines the basis of social unity by allowing creativity and the satisfaction of need to be subverted by a system that puts profit seeking ahead of people and that makes man an appendage of the economy and a slave to the work process instead of the master of it. As Marx noted, even in his later and less sentimental writings, the question in ancient society was always what form of society and economy could best serve the needs of man, and no matter how constrained and narrow that society may now appear to be, how much more satisfying and noble it was when man was the aim of production.

The distinction between use-value and exchange-value corresponds to these different forms of economic process: on the one hand, we have the aim of satisfying natural needs; on the other hand, we have the drive toward accumulation of profits. This distinction is usually traced back to the economic doctrine that was propounded by Aristotle, who saw a clear difference between what he called the correct use of an article, for example, a shoe meant for a foot, and the incorrect use of an article, production and exchange to make a profit. This was not an argument against exchange per se; neither was it an argument based simply on an appeal to ethical imperatives. Rather, it followed from the reasoned argument that found profit making detrimental to the foundations of a subsistence economy and destructive of the good society in general. This distinction between use-value and exchange-value, between the satisfaction of natural needs and the satisfaction of the profit motive, is a persistent theme in the history of economic theorizing in the West, especially in the writings of the medieval Schoolmen. Marx himself was heavily indebted to Aristotle's observations on the matter, as his many favorable comments in this regard bear witness. When Luther ascribed usury and the early manifestations of capitalism to the workings of the devil he was merely giving vent to the outrage and pain that many persons felt toward the flowering of the profit motive and the subjugation of social relations to the economic laws of commodities. For them this was certainly not a natural phenomenon.

Yet, in a mature capitalist system this fiction acquires the stamp of fact. The essential elements of its industrial enterprise—land, labor, and money—are organized in markets and are dealt with as commodities. From the use-value perspective, however, these elements are not commodities. "The postulate that anything bought and sold must have been produced for sale is emphatically untrue in regard to them," writes Polanyi. "Labor is only another name for a

human activity which goes with life itself, which in turn is not produced for sale but for entirely different reasons." And he concludes, "The commodity definition of labor, land, and money is entirely fictitious" (1957:72).

Fictitious indeed! But then how does one explain the persistence and strength of this fiction? What makes it so real? How is it that labor, which "is only another name for a human activity which goes with life itself," is seen as a thing detached from the rest of life? In the Bolivian tin mines and in the plantation fields of the Cauca Valley this fiction is understood as a disturbingly dangerous and unnatural state of affairs and is credited to no less a figure than the devil, whereas to those of us who live in a well-developed capitalist culture this cultural convention has now become part of the state of nature.

The answer obviously lies in the way that the market organization of life's activities imprints reality and defines experience. Reality and the mode of apprehending it become defined in commodity terms that are based on the epistemological canons of atomistic materialism. Man is individualized, as are all things, and organic wholes are broken into their supposed material constituents. Irreducible atoms related to one another through their intrinsic force and causal laws expressed as mathematical relationships form the basis of this cosmology, and in so doing, embody and sustain the commodity fiction of social reality. This mechanical and atomistic view of reality, the basis of which was outlined in the works of Descartes and Galileo, found its most perfect expression in the physics and metaphysics of Isaac Newton, who may with all justice be regarded as the father of modern science and as the man who gave to capitalist apprehension the legitimizing and final smack of approval that only science can now endow.

If, in accordance with this outlook we regard our economy as natural, are we not construing a picture of our society in every way as fanciful as that of those newcomers to the commodity system who can understand it as the workings of the devil? If they can see the maintenance or the increase of production under capitalism as somehow bound up with the devil and thereby make a fetish of the productive process, do we not also have our own form of fetishism in which we attribute to commodities a reality so substantial that they acquire the appearance of natural beings, so natural in fact that they appear to take on a life-force of their own?

Take the capitalist folklore that fills the financial section of the *New York Times* (April, 1974), for example. We read of the "economic climate," of the "sagging dollar," of "earning booming ahead," of "cash

flows," of treasury bills "backing up," of "runaway" and "galloping" inflation, of "climbing interest rates," of "bear markets" and "bull markets," of factories referred to as "plants," of "money growing" in accordance with investment, of how "your investments can go to work for you," and so on. The active mood predominates: "the London pound closed firmly at \$2.402, up strongly from the opening of \$2.337," and "weakness in the market was widespread and reflected the performance of the 15 most active issues." "Despite gasoline shortages and uncertain supplies, 10 of the 15 most active issues traded on Monday could be classed as travel-oriented." "Can the individual investor still find happiness in the market?" asks the muse, who on reflection answers, "Today there are dozens of ways to put your capital to work." A Chicago banker is reported as saying, "A general feeling seems to persist that something had definitely gone wrong with what had come to be regarded as the natural order of economic, financial and commercial life." The price of copper bears no proportion to the value of the coins into which it is minted; one spokesman for an important producer said, "While our selling price is killing us, we do have contractual and other obligations to deliver, whether we like to or not." Splitting his time between New York and his plant in Italy, Joe can't afford to waste time when he's dealing with his bank. That's where Bob comes in. "As far as I'm concerned," Joe says, "Bob is Chemical Bank." Hence, "Our Man is your bank—Chemical Bank. The businessman, when his needs are financial, his reaction is chemical."

These metaphors are common manifestations of what Marx referred to as commodity fetishism occurring in a developed capitalist culture, wherein capital and workers' products are spoken of in terms that are used for people and animate beings. It is money as interest-bearing capital that lends itself most readily to this type of fetishism. Capital appears to have an innate property of self-expansion, and this property diffuses into all economic life since in capitalism money is the universal equivalent and mediator between persons and all objects.

The concept of commodity fetishism is meant to point out for us that capitalist society presents itself to consciousness as something other than what it basically is, even though that consciousness does reflect the superficial and hypostatized configuration of society. Fetishism denotes the attribution of life, autonomy, power, and even dominance to otherwise inanimate objects and presupposes the draining of these qualities from the human actors who bestow the attribution. Thus, in the case of commodity fetishism, social relationships are dismembered and appear to dissolve into relation-

ships between mere things—the products of labor exchanged on the market—so that the sociology of exploitation masquerades as a natural relationship between systemic artifacts. Definite social relationships are reduced to the magical matrix of things. An ether of naturalness—fate and physicality—conceals and enshrouds human social organization, the historical human significance of the market, and the development of a propertyless wage-earning class. Instead of man being the aim of production, production has become the aim of man and wealth the aim of production; instead of tools and the productive mechanism in general liberating man from the slavery of toil, man has become the slave of tools and the instituted processes of production. As Thorstein Veblen observed, industry has become synonymous with business and people have been duped into asking, “What is good for business?” rather than ask “What is business good for?”

In surveying the opinions of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century British economists and statesmen on the question of capital and interest, Marx sarcastically pointed out that in their eyes it becomes “a property of money to generate value and yield interest, much as it is an attribute of pear trees to bear pears. . . . Thus we get the fetish form of capital and the conception of fetish capital . . . a mystification of capital in its most flagrant form” (1967, 3:392). Elsewhere in the same chapter of *Capital* Marx quotes at length from economists and from economic journals of the mid-nineteenth century. He highlights the biological metaphors that their views of money so strongly suggest. “Money is now pregnant.” “As the growing process is to trees, so generating money appears as innate in capital in its form as money-capital.”

Benjamin Franklin’s *Advice to a Young Tradesman* (1748) could just as well have been the target of Marx’s irony. Franklin states: “Remember, that money is of the prolific, generating nature. Money can beget money, and its offspring can beget more, and so on. Five shillings turned is six, turned again it is seven and threepence, and so on, till it becomes a hundred pounds. The more there is of it, the more it produces every turning, so that the profits rise quicker and quicker. He that kills a breeding-sow, destroys all her offspring to the thousandth generation” (cited in Weber, 1958:49).

At the same time these fabulous fancies were systematically interwoven with the weltanschauung of *homo oeconomicus*, the supposed epitome of rationality. How could such a mutually reinforcing combination of rationality and fantasy so systematically coexist? What gave conviction to these biological metaphors? The answer lies in the peculiar and unique character of the social relations em-

bodied both in capital and in the commodities produced in the capitalist mode of production.

Marx argued at great length and from a variety of viewpoints that these social relations of production impressed themselves on everyday consciousness in such a way that the entire process of production and the generation of the laborers’ surplus value—the context in which capital works—is overlooked or slighted to the extent that the social process of capital reproduction and expansion may easily appear as a property inherent in the commodity itself, rather than of the process of which it is part. This socially conditioned appearance is a mystification in which the entire social context conspires, so to speak, to mask itself. In this process of decontextualization, profit no longer appears to be the result of a social relation, but of a *thing*: this is what is meant by *reification*.

Marx made his views on this very clear when he compared the formula for interest-bearing capital with what he called merchant’s capital.

The relations of capital assume their most externalized and most fetish-like form in interest bearing capital. We have here M-M’, money creating more money, self-expanding value, without the process that effectuates these two extremes. In merchant’s capital, M-C-M’, there is at least the general form of the capitalist movement, although it confines itself solely to the sphere of circulation, so that profit appears merely as profit derived from alienation; but it is at least seen to be the product of a social *relation*, not the product of a mere *thing*. [1967, 3:391]

The same point permeates Marx’s writings; for instance, in this passage from the *Grundrisse* he expresses his antipathy to the crude materialism that he sees as fetishism. “The crude materialism of the economists who regard as the *natural properties* of things what are social relations of production among people, and qualities which things obtain because they are subsumed under these relations, is at the same time just as crude an idealism, even fetishism, since it imputes social relations to things as inherent characteristics, and thus mystifies them” (1973:687).

Appealing to nature, to the paradoxical extreme wherein certain lifeless things are seen as animated, is merely one historically specific manifestation of that probably universal tendency whereby any culture externalizes its social categories onto nature, and then turns to nature in order to validate its social norms as natural. Durkheim saw this attempt to invoke the principle of biological determinism

in the ideology of primitive society, and Marx spotted the same phenomenon in the genesis, acceptance, and use of Darwinism. "The whole Darwinist teaching of the struggle for existence is simply a transference from society to living nature of Hobbes' doctrine of 'bellum omnium contra omnes' and of the bourgeois-economic doctrine of competition together with Malthus' theory of population. When this conjuror's trick has been performed . . . the same theories are transferred back again from organic nature into history and it is now claimed that their validity as eternal laws of human society has been proved" (cited in Schmidt, 1971: 47).

The same point might be made regarding Newtonian physics and the role of human beings who are subordinated to the impersonal controls of the self-regulating market, the central institution if not the "solar system" of capitalist economy. Newton's scheme earned the undying admiration of Adam Smith, the foremost theoretician and eulogist of the capitalist market. To Smith, Newton's system was "everywhere the most precise and particular that can be imagined, and ascertains the time, the place, the quantity, the duration of each individual phenomenon." It seemed to him to fit perfectly with the world of everyday experience. "Neither are the principles of union which it employs such as the imagination can find any difficulty in going along with." The Newtonian principles of union were not only applicable to gravity and the inertness of matter, but were "the same which takes place in all other qualities which are propagated in rays from a center." All of this amounted to "the discovery of an immense chain of the most important and sublime truths, all closely connected together, by one capital fact, of the reality of which we have daily experience" (1967: 107-8). For William Blake, Newton was the symbol of market society and its oppressive use of technology and empire, and he assailed those very "principles of union" that Adam Smith found so congenial. Historians of science, as Margaret Jacob recently pointed out, have often presumed that the new mechanical philosophy triumphed in England because it offered the most plausible explanation of nature. Whether or not it does that, it was the correspondence of Newtonianism with the cosmology of the capitalist market that best accounts for its acceptance. "The ordered, providentially guided, mathematically regulated universe of Newton gave a model for a stable and prosperous polity, ruled by the self-interest of men" (1976: 17-18). It was this reciprocating replication of market society in nature and of nature in market society that allowed Newtonianism to triumph and consummate the mechanical "principles of union" into a holy and scientifically impervious truth of all being. E. A. Burt draws our atten-

tion to the following phenomenological features of Newtonian metaphysics, features which have direct implication for our discussion of commodity fetishism and its associated philosophy.

Here were those residual souls of men, irregularly scattered among the atoms of mass that swam mechanically among the ethereal vapors in time and space, and still retaining vestiges of the Cartesian *res cogitans*. They too must be reduced to mechanical products and parts of the self-regulating cosmic clock. . . . Wherever it was taught as truth the universal formula of gravitation, there was also insinuated as a nimbus of surrounding belief that man is but the puny and local spectator, nay irrelevant product of an infinite self-moving engine . . . which consists of raw masses wandering to no purpose in an undiscoverable time and space, and is in general wholly devoid of any qualities that might spell satisfaction for the major interests of human nature. [1954: 300-301]

The crucial point is that in the fetishism of commodities we encounter a general formula for the principles of union that apply to capitalist culture as a whole and guide social awareness, and this formula, according to Marx, is rooted in the relations of production and exchange as they impress themselves on consciousness in the work-a-day world. Briefly, this formula states that the social relation is consummated in the relationship of a thing to itself and that ontology lies not in a relational gestalt but squarely within the thing itself. Atomized, self-encapsulated things, what Burt refers to as "raw masses," become the prime objects of analysis because their meaning and properties appear to lie within themselves alone. True explanation and understanding now rest on a conception of principles of union that reduce whole phenomena to their simplest parts, and ultimate causality is to be found in the unchanging movement of elementary physical atoms. This dominance of "thinghood" tends to obliterate people's awareness and to efface their capacity for moral evaluation of the bio-logic and socio-logic of relationships and processes, particularly socioeconomic activities and relationships. This is not to say that in this view things as such cannot be related to other things, and harmoniously related at that. Newton's scheme of the planets and Adam Smith's view of the self-regulating market are the outstanding examples of corpuscular interrelatedness forming a harmonious totality, much as modern systems theory does today. However, the binding relations are viewed as external to the individuated things, the identity and power of which is given in themselves alone.

From another point of view, however, this is a gross deception since these apparently self-bounded and potent things are merely the embodiments and concretizations of relationships that bind them to a larger whole. Their identity, existence, and natural properties spring from their *position* in an all-encompassing organic *pattern* of organization in which things are understood as but partial expressions of a self-organizing totality. The properties and activities of things may then be explained holistically and "structurally" as manifestations of their reticulate intelligibility as parts of an organic whole and not as products of mechanical causation and corpuscular collisions. If attention is focused on a single thing, as it must be at some point in any analysis, then that thing is seen as containing its relational network and surrounding context within itself; the thing is a system of relationships.

On the other hand, if the atomistic view prevails, as it does in our culture, then the isolated thing in itself must inevitably tend to appear as animated because in reality it is part of an active process. If we "thingify" parts of a living system, ignore the context of which they are part, and then observe that the things move, so to speak, it logically follows that the things may well be regarded or spoken of as though they were alive with their own autonomous powers. If regarded as mere things, they will therefore appear as though they were indeed *animate* things—fetishes. Capital, for instance, is often compared to a tree that bears fruit; the thing itself is the source of its own increase. Hence, reification leads to fetishism.

Fetishism: Precapitalist versus Capitalist

In contrast to this subordination of persons to things, persons in precapitalist societies and the products they create and exchange are seen as intermeshed. Yet, in these societies, too, such products may acquire lifelike qualities. Thus, products may become fetishes, but they do so for reasons completely different from those outlined above for a society based on commodity exchange. In the precapitalist mode of production there is no market and no commodity definition of the value and function of a good, and the connections between producers and between production and consumption are directly intelligible. Products appear to be animated or life endowed precisely because they seem to embody the social milieu from which they come.

For instance, in his analysis of Maori exchange Mauss said it was as though there existed a life-force (*hau*) within the goods and ser-

vices exchanged, which compelled their reciprocation. According to Mauss, the Maoris believed that the very goods themselves were thought to be persons or pertain to a person, and that in exchanging something one was in effect exchanging part of oneself (1967). In his work *Primitive Man as a Philosopher*, Paul Radin discusses the Maori concept of personality together with examples taken from other primitive cultures and points out the insistence on multiple dimensions of the ego and its extension into past and future. The various elements can become dissociated temporarily from the body and enter into relation with the dissociated elements of other individuals and with nature. He concludes his analysis by stating that in such a philosophy the ego is intelligible only as it is related to the external world and to other egos. A connection is implied between the ego and the phenomenal world, and this connection assumes the form of an attraction and compulsion. "Nature cannot resist man, and man cannot resist nature. A purely mechanistic conception of life is unthinkable. The parts of the body, the physiological functions of the organs, like the material form taken by objects in nature, are mere symbols, *simulacra*, for the essential psychical-spiritual entity that lies behind them" (Radin, 1957 : 273-74).

In other words, the fetishism that is found in the economics of precapitalist societies arises from the sense of organic unity between persons and their products, and this stands in stark contrast to the fetishism of commodities in capitalist societies, which results from the split between persons and the things that they produce and exchange. The result of this split is the subordination of men to the things they produce, which appear to be independent and self-empowered.

Thus, the devil-beliefs that concern us in this book can be interpreted as the indigenous reaction to the supplanting of this traditional fetishism by the new. As understood within the old use-value system, the devil is the mediator of the clash between these two very different systems of production and exchange. This is so not only because the devil is an apt symbol of the pain and havoc that the plantations and mines are causing, but also because the victims of this expansion of the market economy view that economy in personal and not in commodity terms and see in it the most horrendous distortion of the principle of reciprocity, a principle that in all precapitalist societies is supported by mystical sanctions and enforced by supernatural penalties. The devil in the mines and cane fields reflects an adherence by the workers' culture to the principles that underlie the peasant mode of production, even as these principles are being progressively undermined by the everyday experience

of wage labor under capitalist conditions. But until the capitalist institutions have permeated all aspects of economic life and the revolution in the mode of production is complete, the lower classes will persist in viewing the bonds between persons in their modern economic activities for what they really are—asymmetrical, non-reciprocal, exploitative, and destructive of relationships between persons—and not as natural relations between forces supposedly inherent in potent things.

PART

The Plantation

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