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Marx and the gendered structure of capitalism

Abstract I argue that Marx's central concern, consistent throughout his works, is to challenge and overcome hierarchical oppositions, which he considers as the core of modern, capitalist societies and the cause of alienation. The young Marx critiques the hierarchical idealism/materialism opposition, in which idealism abstracts from and reduces all material elements to the mind (or spirit), and materialism abstracts from and reduces all mental abstractions to the body (or matter). The mature Marx sophisticates this critique in his theory of the commodity fetish, in which exchange-value (the mind) abstracts from the use-value (the body) of the commodity. Although Marx aims to challenge capitalism by abolishing the hierarchical relation among binary oppositions, I show that in his early as well as his later writings on the working-class woman he reinforces hierarchical binaries, which points at the gendered unconscious structure of capitalism.

Key words abstraction · alienation · binary oppositions · early Marx · late Marx · working-class woman

1 Introduction

Marx's political philosophy does not strive towards a unified system. Rather, it is led by a plurality of doctrines, an ambiguous use of terminology, and unfinished drafts.¹ As Agnes Heller puts it: '[Marx's] greatness . . . is based precisely upon this brilliant lack of coherence. For this reason it is always possible to rediscover him.'² In my rediscovery of Marx I show that, throughout his political philosophy, Marx aimed to challenge and overcome hierarchical oppositions, which he considered as the core of modern, capitalist societies. Marx's challenge of capitalism was led by a dialectical approach. He aimed to 'start out' from what has been suppressed by the primacy of the mind in capitalist societies –

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the body and all those traits associated with it: practice, the object, and nature. However, Marx did not aim to introduce new hierarchies or to do away with binaries altogether. Rather, he aimed to abolish the hierarchical relation between binaries.

Contemporary readings of Marx have hinted at Marx's central concern with oppositions. An example is the critical theory reading of Marx provided by Moishe Postone, who, by mainly focusing on the later Marx, argues that Marx analyzed oppositions 'as forms of thought related to the structured and structuring social forms that are constitutive of capitalist society'.³ Another example is Bertell Ollman, who, by focusing on Marx's theory of alienation, points at Marx's challenge to oppositions.⁴ However, a reading which shows that Marx, consistent throughout his works, challenges and aims to overcome hierarchical oppositions, is currently missing. I aim to provide such a reading in this paper.

My reading of Marx counters then Marxian critics, who suggest a 'break' between the early and the late Marx. This break has been famously introduced by Louis Althusser,⁵ who argues that Marx's 'Thesen über Feuerbach' (1845) mark a sharp break in Marx's works, where we see the mature Marx emerging, in contrast to the young, 'immature' Marx, who remains stuck in essentialist thought.⁶ My reading of Marx shows his consistent concern with oppositions throughout his thought, which renders the claim of a 'break' in Marx untenable. Although he changes in the ways he presents and tackles the problem of oppositions, at the core of his political philosophy he aims to do away with the hierarchical relation between binaries. Despite his sophisticated critique on hierarchical oppositions, I also show that Marx, at certain instances of his texts, reinforces hierarchical thought.

These instances are especially salient in his writings on the working-class woman, who becomes linked to the 'despised body', which stands in an absolute opposition to the 'pure mind' (linked to the middle class and men).⁷ The reinforcement of binary thought in the works of a thinker, at whose core is the overcoming of such thought, supports my argument that hierarchical oppositions concern deep, unconscious structures of capitalist societies. The signifiers 'woman' and the 'working classes' as well as racial minorities are, mostly unconsciously, linked to what constitutes the negative side of hierarchical oppositions in capitalist societies: the body, the object, and nature. This link contributes to uphold the force of hierarchical oppositions and often undermines attempts, such as Marx's own, to abolish hierarchical relations between binaries.⁸

I will unfold my reading of Marx in the following six sections. In the second section, 'Marx's attempt to overcome hierarchical oppositions: revolutionary activity', I focus on reading 'Die Thesen über Feuerbach', where Marx advanced the concept of 'practical-critical activity' as a

means to oppose the primacy of theory over practice. In the third section, 'Alienation: the consequence of the mind/body opposition', I focus on *Nationalökonomie und Philosophie* (1844) and *Die Deutsche Ideologie* (1846) to counter those Marxian critiques that have accused Marx of introducing a notion of human essence with his theory of alienation. In the fourth section, titled 'Commodity fetishism: the basis of capitalist society', I show that the themes Marx elaborated in his early work re-emerge in his later work. I focus on *Das Kapital*, vol. I (1867), where Marx elucidates with his theory of commodity fetishism most profoundly that binary structures are at the core of modern, capitalist societies.

In the fifth section, 'The working-class woman in Marx's early writings', I explain Marx's critical view on the situation of the bourgeois woman in capitalist societies. I then focus on the early texts *Kritische Randglossen* (1844) and *Die Heilige Familie* (1844) to analyze Marx's problematic view on the working-class woman. I show that working-class woman becomes in these texts the despised 'masculinized' woman, who stands in opposition to the 'real feminine' bourgeois woman. In the sixth section, 'The working-class women in the late Marx', I mainly focus on *Das Kapital*, vol. I to explain Marx's conservative stances and moralistic interventions in relation to the working-class woman, which contradict his sharp critique put forward in relation to bourgeois women and his otherwise non-moralistic political philosophy. I explain these contradictions as the result of unconscious desires and fears that women (and men), who counter traditional female/male oppositions, incite.

2 Marx's attempt to overcome hierarchical oppositions: revolutionary activity

Marx composed 'Die Thesen über Feuerbach', a series of aphorisms, in the spring of 1845. The theses have often been read as Marx's attempt to exit theory and philosophy. As an example, Etienne Balibar argues that 'Die Thesen' 'demand a definite exit (*Ausgang*) from philosophy, as the only means of realizing what has always been its loftiest ambition: emancipation, liberation'.⁹ I suggest in my reading of 'Die Thesen' that Marx did not aim at an exit from philosophy or theory, since such an exit would imply a new hierarchy: this time with practice on top and theory below.¹⁰ I suggest that the central aim of Marx in 'Die Thesen' is to challenge the hierarchical theory/practice opposition.

Marx finds such an opposition operating in the works of Ludwig Feuerbach:¹¹ 'The chief defect of all previous materialism – that of Feuerbach included' is that 'he regards the theoretical attitude as the only genuinely human attitude, while practice is conceived and defined only in its dirty Jewish form¹² of appearance. Hence he does not grasp the

significance of “revolutionary”, or “practical-critical”, activity.¹³ Marx aims to counter these previous, ‘old’ forms of materialism, in which practice remains defined as the negative opposite pole of theory, with a *new* materialism, where ‘practical-critical activity’ is the tool of revolutionary activity. For Marx, not mere contemplation, but ‘practical-critical activity’, leads to changes in the existing inhuman *Verhältnisse*.

Marx repeats his challenge on the theory/practice opposition in the famous thesis 11: ‘The philosophers have only *interpreted* the world in various ways; the point, however, is to *change* it.’¹⁴ The question is: What does Marx mean with this term ‘practical-critical activity’ that can lead to such changes? First of all, he does not mean to do away with theory altogether. Instead of introducing a new hierarchy in which practice claims primacy over theory, Marx conceptualizes these two terms in a dialectical fashion: practice and theory are intertwined and dependent upon each other. Hence, there can be no absolute opposition between practice and theory. Marx’s putting of the term ‘practical’ in front of the term ‘critical’ in the notion of ‘practical-critical activity’ suggests such a reading on a symbolic level.

Marx aims to ‘start out’ from the practical. However, this ‘starting-out’ from the practical does not imply that Marx conceptualizes the practical as superior to the theoretical, since we need practice *and* theory to revolutionize the world. My reading of thesis 11 is supported by thesis 8, where Marx asserts: ‘social life is essentially *practical*. All mysteries which mislead theory into mystification find their rational solution in human practice and in the comprehension of this practice.’¹⁵ The solution to countering mystification, which is a result of theory’s abstraction from the practical, is for Marx not a practice that abstains from all theoretical reflection. Rather it is a practice that is *comprehended*. Practice needs theory in order to counter a theory that abstracts from practice and leads into another mystification.

In thesis 4, Marx explains that subjects create a religious, imaginary world because of their ‘inner strife and intrinsic contradictoriness’.¹⁶ For Marx it is not enough to do away with religion (as suggested by Feuerbach), since this leaves the source of why religion is created by subjects untouched: ‘The latter [the subject] must itself, therefore, first be understood in its contradiction and then, by the removal of the contradiction, revolutionised in practice.’¹⁷ Marx does not suggest here that revolutionary activity is an activity that can be carried out merely through practice. His argument is that we need both: we must *understand* the contradictions that lead subjects to create an imaginary world and this involves theoretical reflection.

At the same time, it is not enough to merely understand and contemplate these contradictions in order to revolutionize them. We must *do* something in order to change them, and this involves *practice*. ‘Once the earthly family is discovered to be the secret of the holy family,’ asserts

Marx in thesis 4, 'the former must then itself be destroyed in theory and practice.'¹⁸ For Marx, both are crucial for revolutionary activity: practice and theory – there is no hierarchy between them.¹⁹ Practical-critical activity is the tool to revolutionary change and becomes the defining moment in communism. Daniel Brudney suggests that in communist society 'a split between the theoretical and the practical is absent'.²⁰ I disagree with such a reading of Marx's notion of communism.

In *Nationalökonomie und Philosophie*,²¹ Marx argues that in communist society the 'senses have . . . become theorists directly in their practice'.²² He does not suggest that the split between theory and practice has ceased to exist. Rather, what has ceased to exist is the primacy of theory, which abstracts from and devalues practice. What Marx aims at with his conception of 'practical-critical' activity, which is the defining moment of communist society, is a dialectical relationship between theory and practice. As Agnes Heller argues, there will be no 'purely intellectual' or 'purely manual' activity in Marx's future society.²³ Yet this does not mean that the difference between intellectual and manual activity (or theory and practice) has ceased to exist. Rather, what has ceased to exist is their hierarchical arrangement.

In the famous thesis 6, Marx is concerned to challenge another hierarchical opposition: the hierarchy between the subject and nature.²⁴ 'Feuerbach resolves the essence of religion into the human essence', states Marx. 'The essence of man is no *abstraction* inherent in each single individual. In its reality it is the ensemble of the social relations.'²⁵ What is at stake in thesis 6 is the problem of abstraction.²⁶ If subjects abstract from the object (society), then we are left with some problematic notion of a human essence, which Marx counters throughout his works. The moment the subject aims to get rid of her or his dependence upon the object, he argues, human essence 'can be regarded only as "species", as an inner, mute, general character which unites the many individuals *in a natural way*'.²⁷

However, Marx's dialectical approach to the subject/nature opposition implies that he does not aim to get rid of all notions of human nature, which he reiterates in *Die Deutsche Ideologie*. Here he argues that the subject cannot be 'divorced from all its empirical conditions of life . . . separated from the world that forms its basis and from its own body'.²⁸ Marx did not discard the notion of human nature. Rather, he was concerned that the primacy of the subject in capitalist society leads to an abstraction from nature and with that to an abstract individual. His central aim was then to abolish the hierarchical relation between the subject/nature opposition. Given Marx's sophisticated critique of this opposition, I find Sebastiano Timpanaro's definition of materialism somewhat misguided. 'By materialism', he argues, 'we understand above all acknowledgement of the priority of nature over "mind"'.²⁹

The problem with this definition of materialism is that it introduces a new hierarchy – the hierarchical opposition between nature and the subject, which Marx himself aimed to challenge. Although Marx aims to start out from nature to counter the primacy of the subject in capitalist society, he does not suggest a priority of nature over the subject. Such a suggestion merely creates a new hierarchical opposition, which leads to the same as the priority of the subject over nature, an ‘abstract – isolated – individual’.³⁰ It is important to emphasize Marx’s assertion that ‘the abstract individual . . . belongs to a particular form of society’.³¹ This particular form of society is modern, capitalist society, in which the primacy of the subject reigns over and against nature. In capitalist society we encounter fundamentally *alienated* subjects.

3 Alienation: the consequence of the mind/body opposition

Nationalökonomie und Philosophie (1844), the text in which Marx elaborates his theory of alienation, is the one most responsible for his reputation as an essentialist thinker or an ‘immature Hegelian’.³² The critique runs as follows: if there is something subjects are alienated from in capitalist society, as Marx argues, then this ‘something’ Marx has in mind must be a human essence. This text is taken as proof of Marx’s early unreflected essentialism, which he (so the critique goes) abandons in his later works, starting with thesis 6 elaborated above. In my reading of this text, Marx did *not* introduce some notion of human essence with his theory of alienation. On the contrary, Marx aimed to express with this theory that a notion of human essence, which is the result of hierarchical oppositions – in which one side of the pole (the subject) abstracts from the other side (her or his nature) – *leads* to alienation.

Since such abstractions are characteristic of capitalist societies, alienation is its central feature. As Ollman rightly argues: ‘An “abstraction” is a part of a whole whose ties with the rest are not apparent; it is a part which *appears* to be a whole in itself. According to Marx, to hold that the world is actually composed of such “abstractions” is evidence of alienation.’³³ In *Nationalökonomie und Philosophie*, Marx argues that the subject is the result of her or his productive activity.³⁴ He praises here Hegel for acknowledging the subject as a process, as a result of her or his own productive activity. However, he complains that Hegel, like his followers, the Young Hegelians, knows and recognizes only abstract, mental production. Moreover, Hegel, Marx argues, recognizes only the positive side of work and not its negative side.

I agree with Tom Rockmore that Marx’s critique on Hegel does not imply that he abandoned philosophy.³⁵ Rather, Marx develops and transforms Hegel’s central ideas as he sets out to critique the negative side

of productive activity with his theory of alienation. Marx elucidates four moments of alienation: (1) alienation in the act of production; (2) alienation from the product of work; (3) alienation from the subject's species-being; and as a consequence of these three forms of alienation, (4) the alienation of the subject from other subjects.

(1) *Alienation in the act of production* occurs for Marx through the *division of labor* in modern, capitalist societies. In *Die Deutsche Ideologie*, we find Marx's most sustained discussion of the division of labor in his early work. Here he argues that the 'division of labor only becomes a real division from the moment the separation between material and mental production has entered'.³⁶ For Marx, the division of labor is not problematic in itself. It becomes problematic only when the split between material and mental production becomes construed as an absolute. According to Marx, 'the production of ideas, of conceptions, of consciousness is at first directly interwoven with the material activity'.³⁷ However, in modern, capitalist societies, where we encounter an absolute opposition between material and mental production, these productive activities *appear* as separated from each other and lead to the alienation that is characteristic of such societies.

Marx returns to this theme in *Das Kapital*, vol. I, when he states that 'headwork and handwork' are naturally unified. In the capitalist mode of production, however, they are 'divided into a hostile opposition'.³⁸ The moment material and mental production is divided, each subject, Marx argues, 'obtains a specific, exclusive circle of activity that is forced upon [her/]him and from which [she/]he cannot get out'.³⁹ This implies that the subject is subsumed under a specific work activity through which the subject 'does not affirm [herself/]himself but denies [herself/]himself'.⁴⁰ Marx is not proclaiming a specific essence of the subject that is denied to her or him through the capitalist mode of production. Rather, what Marx aims to tell us is that the subsumption of the subject under a specific work activity creates a 'one-sided nature', which is in fact anything but natural.

This essence is the result of a specific mode of production that needs such 'natures' for its own preservation. In communist society, argues Marx in a famous citation, one is not restricted to a one-sided activity of either mental or material work, but can partake 'today in this, tomorrow in that, to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, engage in cattle-breeding in the evening and also critique the food, whatever pleases one, without ever being a hunter, fisher, herder or a critic'.⁴¹ Again, Marx does not argue that in communist society there are no differences between mental and material production. However, what has ceased to be constitutive is their absolute opposition and hierarchy, which sets critical activity (mental production) above and in opposition to material production (fishing, herding, and so on).

(2) For Marx, *alienation from the product of work* implies not only that the product of work activity becomes 'an object, an external existence', but also that the life that the subject in her or his work activity 'has conferred on the object confronts [her/]him as something hostile and alien'.⁴² As the division of labor becomes more advanced, which creates an extended productive power, the hostility of the work product becomes stronger.⁴³ The productive power is experienced by subjects not as their 'own, united power, but an alien power that stands outside themselves', which comes to subjugate them.⁴⁴ Since alienation from the product of work is somewhat difficult to understand in the context of his early works, I will come back to this form of alienation in the next section, when I discuss *Das Kapital*, vol. I.

(3) Both of these forms of alienation, the alienation from the product of work and the alienation in the act of production, are related to Marx's third form of alienation, *alienation from the subject's species-being*. For Marx, 'free, conscious activity is [woman/]man's species character'.⁴⁵ Because of the separation between mental and physical productive activity, which forces subjects into one or the other side of the opposition, such a free and conscious work activity is not possible in capitalist societies. This led, according to Marx, to an alienation of the subject from her or his species-being. In my reading of Marx, this notion of a 'species-being' does not refer to an essentialist moment in Marx. Rather, I understand this form of alienation as consistent with Marx's critique on the subject/object opposition. The subject, according to Marx, is a part of a generality, what Marx calls here the 'species-being'. Since in capitalist societies the subject abstracts from such a generality (the object), she or he becomes alienated from her or his species-being.⁴⁶

(4) The abstraction of the subject from her species-being leads us to the fourth form of alienation elaborated by Marx: the *alienation of the subject from other subjects*. For Marx, an 'immediate consequence of the fact that [woman/]man is estranged from the product of [her/]his labor, from [her/]his life activity, from [her/]his species-being is the estrangement of [woman/]man from [woman/]man'.⁴⁷ Marx hints here at a central consequence of the capitalist mode of production, with its separation of mental and material productive activity: the instrumental character of capitalist relations, and with that the sense of *having* that permeates all relationships between humans.⁴⁸ He expresses this with the following statement: 'We consider the object only as ours, when we *have* it and when we use it.'⁴⁹

For Marx, in communism the subject does not abstract from the species-being, but acknowledges herself or himself to be a member of such a generality. In communism, 'subjectivity and objectivity, spirituality and materiality, activity and passivity lose their antithetical character, and thus their existence as such antitheses'.⁵⁰ In Marx's future

society not the binaries themselves, but their antithetical character, their appearance as an absolute opposition, has ceased to exist. Only through a critique of hierarchical oppositions can we overcome the alienating character of capitalism.

4 Commodity fetishism: the basis of capitalist society

In *Das Kapital*, vol. I, a late work of Marx written in 1867, Marx elucidates the problems of the mind/body opposition as he identified it in his earlier works by elucidating the central elements of capitalist society, the commodity form, money, and capital. It is important to note that these categories of Marx's critique are not purely economic categories, as has often been argued.⁵¹ Rather, Marx shows us with these categories that hierarchical oppositions are indispensable to the project of capitalism. Moreover, although Marx starts out to explain the nature of the commodity, then proceeds to explain money, followed by capital, the chronological introduction of these terms does not suggest a progression from the commodity form leading to capitalism. Rather, Marx starts out with the commodity form, because he believed its inherent binary structure to be at the core of modern, capitalist societies.

In chapter 1 of *Das Kapital*, vol. I, Marx starts out to explain *das Ding*, the work product, with his concepts of *use-value* and *exchange-value*. The use-value refers to the 'body' and exchange-value to the 'mind' of *das Ding*. Whereas use-value satisfies particular needs, exchange-value (or value) allows the product to circulate, to be exchanged with another product.⁵² In order for a product to be able to circulate, its use-value needs to be transformed into an abstract category, an *equivalent*. For Marx, 'the equivalent form of a commodity is the form of its immediate interchange-ability with another commodity'.⁵³ The equivalent abstracts from the use-value of *das Ding* and turns it into an exchange-value. The work product, according to Marx, only becomes a commodity when it is transformed into an exchange-value and circulates as such. The commodity thus possesses a dual character: it appears in its particular form as a use-value and in its general or equivalent form as an exchange-value.

The problem that Marx perceives in relation to the exchange-value or the commodity is the same problem he sees in the abstract categories of the Young Hegelians: 'If we abstract from its [the product's] use-value, we also abstract from the bodily components and forms, that constitute its use-value . . . All its material components are erased.'⁵⁴ The abstract category (the commodity) is based upon the abstraction from its bodily or material elements, which are the particular work activities implied in the work product. The exchange-value, argues

Marx, erases the 'different concrete forms of labor, they do not differ any longer, but are all reduced to the same human work, abstract human labor'.⁵⁵ For Marx, human labor, like the commodity, also possesses a dual character in capitalist societies: as concrete labor, it produces use-values; as abstract human labor, it produces exchange-values.

The exchange-value is the element of the commodity that leads us to its *gespenstige Gegenständlichkeit* (ghostly objectivity).⁵⁶ For Marx, once the work products are turned into a commodity, 'nothing is left of them but a ghostly objectivity, a mere *Gallerte* of undifferentiated human work'.⁵⁷ In *Das Kapital*, vol. I, Marx elucidates this *gespenstige Gegenständlichkeit* famously as the *fetish-character* of the commodity. The work product turns into a fetish, precisely because its transformation into exchange value implies an abstraction from its use-value, its bodily components. As Marx expresses it, the exchange-value of commodities is 'distinct from their palpable and real bodily form. It is, that is to say, only an ideal or imaginary form'.⁵⁸ However, there is a slight difference between what humans establish in the realm of thoughts and the commodity, which Balibar explains:

In the one case, that thing is an 'idol,' an abstract representation which seems to exist all on its own in the ethereal realm of ideas (Freedom, Justice, Humanity, Law), whereas in the other it is a 'fetish,' a material thing which seems to belong to the earth, to nature, while exerting an irresistible power over individuals (the commodity and, above all, money).⁵⁹

What is the irresistible power that money has over individuals? For Marx, money plays the role of the general equivalent in the world of commodities.⁶⁰ Whereas with the commodity there is a slight possibility of difference between different commodities, money manages to erase 'all qualitative differences of commodities'.⁶¹ Money is the privileged general equivalent, which, according to Marx, not only 'erases all qualitative difference between commodities' but is the 'radical leveller of all differences'.⁶² Thus, we are confronted in money with *the* fetish, with exchange-value (the mind) that manages to abstract itself completely from use-value (the body). It is precisely this incarnation of pure exchange-value in money that accounts for its irresistible power over subjects in capitalist society. 'The enigma of the money fetish', says Marx, 'is only the becoming visible of the eye blending commodity fetish'.⁶³ Although Marx argues that exchange-value is nothing else but a *Spuk* (specter) in our heads, this does not mean that it does not have all-too-real effects upon subjects.

Capital, like the commodity and money, also has a double character: on the one side, exchange-value constitutes an abstract dimension – this is the famous Marxian notion of *surplus-value*;⁶⁴ on the other side, the specific dimension (the body) is the work that the working class

performs, which lies behind and is erased through abstraction. According to Marx, the original source of surplus-value is a use-value, the labor power of the worker. However, for surplus-value to exist, this use-value of labor power needs to be transformed into an exchange-value, a commodity. For Marx, this is the precondition of capitalism.⁶⁵ Expropriation created a class of subjects that had nothing but their labor power to sell on the labor market, so it was necessary that another class could transform its means of production into capital.⁶⁶ This means of production, as part of capital, is what Marx calls 'dead work', which become 'enlivened' through the blood of 'living work', i.e. the labor power of the worker.

Here the meaning of Marx's notion of *alienation through the product of work*, which seemed difficult to grasp in *Nationalökonomie und Philosophie* and *Die Deutsche Ideologie*, becomes clearer: the alien power, the work product of the worker, that confronts the worker is nothing else but capital. Throughout *Das Kapital*, vol. I, Marx underlines the hostile and alien character of capital by signifying it as a 'vampire',⁶⁷ a 'dead work, that only enlivens itself through the vampire-like sucking in of living work and that lives, the more it sucks in from it'.⁶⁸ The question is, what can one do to stop this blood-sucking enterprise whose consequence is that one side of the opposition becomes richer and the other side poorer and where everybody is alienated?

Marx argues in his late work that the commodity, money, and capital 'express the forms of being, the determinations of existence . . . of this *specific* society'.⁶⁹ It is precisely this *specific* upon which Postone bases his general argument that we can overcome these determinations: 'the overcoming of capitalism must occur on the basis of historically constituted values that represent the transcendence of the sorts of internally related, anti-nomic oppositions . . . that characterize the capitalist social formation.'⁷⁰ In a similar vein, Agnes Heller argues that 'where the oppositions are reciprocally arranged and interdependent, total revolution is the only way [for Marx] of transcending this opposing pair'.⁷¹ I am certainly sympathetic to Postone's and Heller's optimistic reading of Marx and the prospect of overcoming capitalism. However, can one *transcend* the hierarchical oppositions that characterize capitalist society?

In my reading of Marx, Marx did not argue that we actually could. Marx, consistent throughout his works, did not aim to transcend binary oppositions. Rather, Marx aimed to abolish the hierarchical relations between oppositions, but the binaries as such are meant to remain. Moreover, Marx was aware that attempts to challenge hierarchical binary oppositions are a difficult enterprise, since they concern deep, unconscious structures in capitalist societies. Thinkers such as Jean-Joseph Goux have shown us that Marx understands hierarchical oppositions as referring to unconscious symbolic structures.⁷² Marx helps us then to understand