

# Aesthetic Investigations

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## The Aesthetic Dimensions of Marx's Anthropological and Political Thought

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**Abstract:** The paper explores some of the underappreciated aesthetic dimensions of Marx's writings by beginning with a brief criticism of the two interpretative positions which tend to dominate such discussions. The first is a form of crude determinism which reduces art and all other 'superstructural' forms to ideological expressions of the social relations with which they are bound-up. The second reading is based upon a romantically conceived emphasis upon Marx's earlier works at the expense of later insights. What both of these views ignore to differing degrees is the developmental philosophy which lies behind Marx's claims about aesthetics. Our interpretation regards Marxism as an emancipatory project predicated upon the creation of the conditions necessary for the free and full realization of each and every individual. The cultivation of one's creative capacities and aesthetic sensibilities is an essential component of what Marx refers to as a 'totally developed individual'.

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This paper explores some of the underappreciated aesthetic dimensions of Marx's writings through a criticism of the two basic interpretive positions which tend to dominate commentaries on the subject. The first and arguably more predominant of the two interpretations is based upon a rigid reading of the relationship between base and superstructure in Marx's late writings, effectively reducing all forms of art to ideological reflections of the economic foundation of society. The second reading, focusing instead on the early works, is usually centred around a romantically conceived notion of spontaneity and equally vague conception of creative activity. Whereas both of

these tendencies gravitate around rather one-sided emphases on the early and late writings respectively, the following essay examines the philosophical continuities which thread together the various phases in the process of Marx's intellectual maturation and which colour his aesthetic theory as a whole.

Our interpretation, in contrast to those just mentioned, regards Marxism as an emancipatory project predicated upon the creation of the conditions necessary for the free and full realisation of each and every individual. According to Marx, this would include, in addition to the developed intellectual and moral powers, the developed aesthetic capacities required for producing and appropriating beauty. The cultivation of these creative capacities and aesthetic sensibilities is an essential component of the all-sidedness of a 'totally developed individual'.<sup>1</sup> This explains why, in the *Grundrisse*, he insists that the presupposition for socialism is the 'general reduction of the necessary labour of society to a minimum', and that this would 'then correspond to the artistic, scientific etc. development of the individuals in the time set free, and with the means created, for all of them'.<sup>2</sup> This 'saving of labour time' is a precondition for a society composed of such 'universally developed individuals' and, at the same time, a condition which would be continually reproduced by their free association with one another.<sup>3</sup>

We can trace the origins of Marx's idea of the 'totally developed individual' back to the philosophical writings of the 1840s where he first elaborated his conception of the human 'species being' as 'universal and therefore free being'.<sup>4</sup> As a result of his critical engagement with Hegel's philosophy, he regarded the unfolding of '*world history*' as nothing more than the 'creation of [humanity] through human labour', i.e. the working-out of humanity's 'essential powers', including the aforementioned aesthetic sensibilities and creative capabilities.<sup>5</sup> This conception of human nature—as something only realised through and as a result of a historical process of self-creation—is also a direct appeal to the Aristotelian notion that the 'nature' of any given being is what it is in its most 'fully developed' form.<sup>6</sup> This Aristotelian anthropology informs not only Marx's fundamental conception of human nature or 'species-being', but also his emancipatory political project. The actualisation of these universal potentialities was, for Marx, the ultimate 'goal of human development', while '*[c]ommunism*' was the 'necessary form' that such a 'future' society would have to assume in order to realise that goal.<sup>7</sup> As he and Engels famously described it in *The Communist Manifesto*, such a society would therefore be governed by the principle that the 'free development of each is the condition for the free development of all'.<sup>8</sup>

We will demonstrate that neither of the interpretations referred to adequately consider aesthetics within the context of Marx's broader philosophy of human development. These general—and to this day taken for granted—trends in *Marxist interpretations* of Marx's writings have acted as *interpretative barriers* to truly appreciating the aesthetic as an integral moment of Marx's emancipatory project. Marx's writings have certainly shaped, and

continue to shape, aesthetic philosophy, but only in an *indirect* way through the mediation of thinkers such as Lukacs, Adorno, Benjamin and Marcuse. In contrast to much of contemporary secondary literature, the following offers a close and careful reconsideration of the neglected aesthetic dimensions of Marx's work.

### I. BASE AND SUPERSTRUCTURE IN THE LATE MARX

The first misinterpretation regarding the role that aesthetics plays within Marx's writings rests upon a vulgar materialism and crude determinism. A typical example of this sort of tendency can be found in the work of Georgi Plekhanov, who asserted that the 'art of every nation is determined by its psychology; its psychology, by its conditions; and that, in the 'last analysis', these are 'determined' by the 'state of its productive forces and its productive relations'. This is 'the materialist view of history'.<sup>9</sup> Plekhanov even goes so far as to consider the question of a Marxian aesthetics to be reducible to a matter of Darwinian selection.<sup>10</sup> This wholly reflective theory of superstructural forms is grounded upon a shallow understanding of Marx's 1859 'Preface' to the *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*:

In the social production of their existence, men inevitably enter into definite relations, which are independent of their will, namely relations of production appropriate to a given stage in the development of their material forces of production. The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which arises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the general process of social, political and intellectual life. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness . . . The changes in the economic foundation lead sooner or later to the transformation of the whole immense superstructure. In studying such transformations it is always necessary to distinguish between the material transformation of the economic conditions of production, which can be determined with the precision of natural science, and the legal, political, religious, artistic or philosophic—in short, ideological form[s].<sup>11</sup>

In the usual manner of interpreting this passage, all forms of art are reduced to superstructural forms that are more or less ideological expressions of the fetishised social relations with which they are bound. The more sophisticated and nuanced meaning behind the claim that 'material life conditions the general process of social, political and intellectual life' is, admittedly, lost in the somewhat simplistic formulations provided by these prefatory remarks. This is why Engels later acknowledged that he and Marx were 'partly to blame' for the tendency of so-called 'Marxists' who 'sometimes lay more

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stress on the economic side than is due to it.' These 'Marxists', he concluded, produced the 'most amazing rubbish' insofar as they effectively treated economic conditions as the only determining element:

According to the materialist view of history, the determining factor in history is, in the final analysis, the production and reproduction of actual life. More than that was never maintained either by Marx or myself. Now if someone distorts this by declaring the economic moment to be the only determining factor, he changes that proposition into a meaningless, abstract, ridiculous piece of jargon. The economic situation is the basis, but the various factors of the superstructure . . . also have a bearing on the course of the historical struggles of which, in many cases, they largely determine the form. It is in the interaction of all these factors and amidst an unending multitude of fortuities . . . that the economic trend ultimately asserts itself as something inevitable. Otherwise the application of the theory to any particular period of history would, after all, be easier than solving a simple equation of the first degree. We make our history ourselves but, in the first place, under very definite premises and conditions. Of these, the economic are ultimately decisive. But the political, etc., and even the traditions still lingering in people's minds, play some, if not a decisive, role.<sup>12</sup>

In the context of criticising the vulgarisers of historical materialism, Engels insisted that '[w]hat all these gentlemen lack is dialectics . . . So far as they are concerned, Hegel might never have existed.' They arraign the 'cause on the one hand and effect on the other', but 'fail to see that this is an empty abstraction' as the 'whole great process takes place solely . . . in the form of interplay' in which 'nothing is absolute and everything relative'.<sup>13</sup> As he reiterated in yet another letter, the economy is but one moment among a series of internally-related elements which react upon one another within a complex social totality.

Political, juridical, philosophical, religious, literary, artistic, etc., development is based on economic development. But all these react upon one another and also upon the economic base. It is not that the economic position is the cause and alone active, while everything else only has a passive effect. There is, rather, interaction [between the different elements of the socio-historical totality].<sup>14</sup>

A more insightful way of interpreting Marx's claims about base and superstructure would be to 'comprehend' all historical transformations, as well as the corresponding 'coincidence' between 'self-change' and the 'chang[ing] of circumstances', as acts of 'revolutionary practice [*praxis*]'.<sup>15</sup> Marx elaborates this notion of "revolutionary practice" in *Capital* when he writes that the human being 'acts upon external nature and changes it, and in this way . . . simultaneously changes [its] own nature'.<sup>16</sup> This principle of praxis should

be contrasted with what he referred to as a mechanical materialism which excludes the transformative capacities of human beings. This materialism would have to account for the fact that, according to Marx, the economic base of society is itself an expression of human activity, mental and manual. In the end, all of the products of the productive powers of social labour must be regarded as *objectifications* of the human mind created by the human hand, or, as the ‘power of knowledge, objectified’—proving that in the end the ‘conditions of the process of social life’ can ‘come under the control of the general intellect’ and the ‘immediate organs of social practice’.<sup>17</sup>

A deterministic interpretation of Marx’s materialism lapses into the very same error which Marx accused the vulgar political economists of committing: viz., treating ‘what are social relations of production among people’, and the ‘qualities which things obtain because they are subsumed under these relations’, as if they were the ‘*natural properties* of things’.<sup>18</sup> The ‘chief defect of all previous materialism’ is that ‘things, reality, sensuousness are conceived only in the form of the *object* ... not as *human sensuous activity, practice*, not subjectively ... [It] does not conceive human activity itself as *objective activity*’.<sup>19</sup> This type of materialism effectively removes human agency from its essential role in the historical process, privileging material conditions over the labour objectified in them and the forms of activity which continuously create and recreate them anew. Relying on such a facile rendition of the base-superstructure model would therefore reduce art to nothing more than an epiphenomenal expression of the economic conditions of its time and place, ignoring that Marx’s own writings emphasise the self-determining character of ‘human’ activity, including, of course, aesthetic activities.

There is, according to Marx, an integral connection between our subjective capacities and the objective conditions of production. However, this relationship by no means resolves itself into a simple one-to-one correspondence which reduces artistic and superstructural forms to the economic conditions of the society to which they belong. In the ‘case of the arts’ (Marx uses the example of ‘Greek art’), not only must it be ‘recognised that certain forms of art, e.g. the [Homeric] epic ... are possible only at an undeveloped stage of artistic development,’ but that certain ‘periods of their flowering are out of all proportion to the general development of society, hence also to the material foundation, the skeletal structure as it were, of its organisation.’ Nonetheless, even this disproportionate flourishing of ‘Greek art’ had a materialist connection to the ‘general development of society’:

Greek mythology is not only the arsenal of Greek art but also its foundation. Is the view of nature and of social relations on which the Greek imagination and hence Greek [mythology] is based possible with self-acting mule spindles and railways and locomotives and electrical telegraphs? ... All mythology overcomes and dominates and shapes the forces of nature in the imagination and by the imagination; it therefore vanishes with the advent of real mastery over them.<sup>20</sup>

According to Marx, however, the 'difficulty' lies not in grasping that classical art was 'bound up with certain forms of social development'. Rather, the real difficulty—especially if one relies upon a crude interpretation of the meaning of 'historical materialism'—is trying to comprehend his concluding remark that the 'beautiful unfolding' of antiquity can 'still afford us artistic pleasure' today.<sup>21</sup> While Marx certainly criticised forms of philosophy, religion, and art for being part of the ideological superstructure of capitalist society, here we encounter Marx reaffirming the objective and universal character of genuinely human modes of thinking, feeling, and creating. In fact, his own writings contain rather insightful considerations of truth, justice, and beauty, renewing those perennial philosophical questions concerned with the conditions necessary for living a truly 'Good Life'. Hence, although this is a 'stage never to return', he tells us that a socialist society would nonetheless 'strive to reproduce' the 'truth' of Greek art 'at a higher stage' of social development.

## II. MARX'S ANTHROPOLOGICAL PHILOSOPHY

As we will elaborate in the concluding portion in this paper, such a 'higher stage' of society presupposes conditions in which individuals are free to create and enjoy beauty within relations of mutual recognition and in the time set free for all. For now, however, this broader question of the relationship between material conditions and aesthetic capabilities brings us to the second interpretation which must be considered. This reading attempts to overcome the inadequacies of the first, but often goes no further than vague allusions to the concept of human creativity found in Marx's earlier works. A typical example of this interpretive tendency is found in "Aesthetics: Liberating the Senses" by William Adams. Adams contends that Marx's aesthetic philosophy is grounded in certain 'anthropological assumptions', and yet these are precisely the assumptions which he himself leaves unexplored. It is indeed correct to suggest that Marx's humanism was rooted in the idea of 'essential human powers', but his description of the 'aesthetic significance and possibilities' of these essential powers (as involving 'creative imagination', 'creative powers', 'artistic craft and aesthetic contemplation') is left unarticulated and undertheorised.<sup>22</sup> While attempting to investigate what the 'young' Marx understood by 'essential human powers', his conclusion gets no further than postulating that this early Marx may have 'envisage[d] the possibility' of socialist aesthetic practices on the basis provided by these 'deep, and perhaps intrinsically human, creative needs'.<sup>23</sup>

In order to more adequately appreciate the 'anthropological assumptions' which lie behind Marx's early thoughts on aesthetics, we must recognise from the outset the role played by his concept of the 'species-being'. As he put it in the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*, the capacity for 'conscious life activity' is the essential 'determination' which 'distinguishes' the charac-

ter of the human species.<sup>24</sup> Using the example of ‘bees’ as a contrast, Marx characterises this mode of ‘life activity’ as distinct from that of other animals inasmuch as the human makes its ‘life activity itself the object’ of its ‘will’ and ‘consciousness’.<sup>25</sup> His early exposure to Kantian aesthetics is apparent in this anthropological distinction. In juxtaposition to mere animal activity (e.g., ‘bees’ and the ‘products that bees make’), Kant defines the end-in-itself activity of ‘art’ as ‘production through freedom’, i.e. through a ‘will that places reason at the basis’ of its actions.<sup>26</sup> It was within the context of an Aristotelian anthropology, mediated not only by Kant, but also by the influence of Hegel and Feuerbach, that Marx articulated his own conception of the species-essence (*Gattungswesen*). Only as conscious life-activity is ‘activity free activity’, and only in this way do human beings come to relate to themselves as ‘*universal* and therefore *free* being[s].’ By emphasising the universality of human nature, Marx places a more substantive form of creativity at the very centre of his philosophical anthropology. If the animal ‘produces one-sidedly’ according to the ‘standard’ of the ‘species to which it belong[s]’, the emancipated individual ‘produces universally’ and ‘in accordance with the standard of every species’, ‘know[ing] how to apply everywhere the inherent standard to the object’. The connections between these anthropological premises and aesthetics in Marx’s thought are plainly revealed when he concludes that genuinely human activity produces in ‘accordance with the laws of beauty’.<sup>27</sup>

In *Capital*, Marx reiterates that the unique character of ‘human labour’ is that it is ‘conscious’, allowing for the possibility of ‘enjoy[ing]’ the ‘free play’ of our own ‘physical and mental powers’:

what distinguishes the worst architect from the best of bees is that the architect builds the cell in his mind before he constructs it in wax. At the end of every labour process, a result emerges which had already been conceived by the worker at the beginning, hence already existed ideally. Man not only effects a change of form in the materials of nature; he also realises his own purpose in those materials . . . Apart from the exertion of the working organs, a purposeful will is required for the entire duration of the work. This means close attention. The less he is attracted by the nature of his work and the way in which it has to be accomplished, and the less, therefore, he enjoys it as the free play of his own physical and mental powers, the closer his attention is forced to be.<sup>28</sup>

Here, ‘conscious[ness]’ denotes the potential for activity to operate with a ‘purpose’ and in accordance with universal laws. This is a ‘purpose we are conscious of’ and which determines our will and the ‘mode’ of our ‘activity’ with the ‘rigidity of a law’. Insofar as we are concerned with the supreme purpose of aesthetic production, such activity would take place with the ‘laws of beauty’ in mind. Hence, rather than espousing an abstract concept of creativity and romanticised form of spontaneity, as Adams presents it, Marx’s

understanding of human potential was predicated upon the capacity to know and actualise objective values. Genuine creativity demands consciously willing forth the beautiful as an essential moment of a good life. In addition to the virtuosity necessary to produce and appropriate beautiful objects, a community composed of such 'universally developed individual[s]' would also have a developed *need* for beauty, just as they would also need *relations* which enable the shared experience of beauty. Again, this is in fact the highest purpose of a communist society: to empower each and every individual to create and enjoy the conditions necessary for such a truly good life, producing and appropriating truth and beauty within ideal ethical relations.

By transforming the world in accordance with these 'laws of beauty', humanity would at the same time transform itself, objectively affirming its own 'essential powers' in the world which it recreates. All objects, Marx wrote, would

become for [us] the objectification of [ourselves], become objects which confirm and realise [our] individuality . . . Thus [humanity] is affirmed in the objective world not only in the act of thinking, but with all [the] senses . . . Just as only music awakens in man the sense of music, and just as the most beautiful music has no sense for the unmusical ear . . . the meaning of an object for me goes only so far as my sense goes . . . Only through the objectively unfolded richness of [humanity's] essential being is the richness of subjective human sensibility (a musical ear, an eye for beauty of form—in short, senses capable of human gratification, senses affirming themselves as essential powers of humanity) either cultivated or brought into being.<sup>29</sup>

Hence, as he put it in the *Grundrisse*, aesthetic activity does not merely 'create an object for a subject', it 'creates [the subjectivity of] a public which is sensitive to art and enjoys beauty'.<sup>30</sup> In other words, the enjoyment of a beautiful piece of art implies an audience with the developed capacities to appreciate its beauty. After all, a beautiful object can only 'exist for me insofar as my essential power exists for itself as a subjective capacity'.<sup>31</sup>

In addition to these aesthetic qualities, Marx emphasised the need to cultivate our moral and intellectual powers—and, indeed, to develop and enjoy all of our essential capacities. He explicitly claims that the society that is most fully developed produces the individual in the 'entire wealth' of his or her 'being', viz., the 'rich' *sensibilities* of a person '*profoundly endowed with all the senses*'.<sup>32</sup> The cultivation of these aesthetic sensibilities of individuals—e.g., their taste for beauty, good music, and fine food—is a task which involves the 'labour of the entire history of the world'.<sup>33</sup> The 'real wealth' of this *truly sensitive* individual would not only be reflected in the sensuous richness of his or her needs and in the capacities necessary to satisfy those needs, but also in the social wealth of his or her relations with others. In a capitalist society, however, the development of the 'physical and mental senses' has been replaced

with the ‘sheer estrangement of *all* these senses’.<sup>34</sup> Under the presuppositions of capital, the aesthetic development of individuals is stunted by intellectually impoverishing conditions. The ‘care-burdened, poverty-stricken man,’ as Marx puts it, ‘has no sense for the finest play,’ no *need* for Shakespeare or Sophocles.<sup>35</sup>

### III. THE AESTHETIC DIMENSIONS OF MARX’S THEORY OF UNIVERSAL DEVELOPMENT

This is why Marx criticises the ‘bourgeois form’ of ‘wealth’ for confining the artistic, creative, intellectual, etc., development of the great mass of individuals within the most narrow and one-sided limits. The division of labour and social relations of production in a capitalist society restricts the realisation of the individual’s potential within definite barriers, reducing the working-out of her creative capacities and essential powers to a mere means in the production of surplus-value. The individual ‘does not develop freely his physical and mental energy but mortifies his body and ruins his mind’.<sup>36</sup> The wage-worker is ‘divided’ into a ‘fragment’ and reduced to a ‘crippled monstrosity’, a one-sided functionary whose own activities, needs, and relations come to confront her as alien and hostile powers opposed to her self-realisation as a more fully-developed ‘social being’.<sup>37</sup> This is why Marx writes that, in a higher mode of production,

the partially developed individual, who is merely the bearer of one specialised social function, must be replaced by the totally developed individual, for whom the different social functions are different modes of activity he takes up in turn.<sup>38</sup>

This is precisely what he defines in the *Grundrisse* as the real ‘wealth’ of a socialist society: namely, the ‘universality of individual needs, capacities, pleasures, [and] productive forces’. What else is ‘wealth,’ he asks, but the

absolute working-out of [our] creative potentialities, with no presupposition other than the previous historic development, which makes this totality of development, i.e. the development of all human powers as such the end in itself, not as measured on a predetermined yardstick? [A society in which we do] not reproduce ourselves in one specificity, but produce our totality? Striv[ing] not to remain something [we have] become, but [remain content only] in the absolute movement of becoming?<sup>39</sup>

On this basis, it becomes possible to appreciate the famous refrain from the *Critique of the Gotha Programme* which discusses the possibility of the ‘all-round development of the individual.’ A society composed of such individuals is only really possible after the enslaving subordination of the individual to the division of labour, and therewith also the antithesis between mental and physical labour, has vanished; [only] after labour has become not only

a means of life but life's prime want.<sup>40</sup>

These ideas about the 'absolute working-out of [our] creative potentialities', and about a free association of 'totally developed individual[s]', were rooted in Marx's earlier critiques of the one-sided development which occurs as a direct result of the division of labour. In 1846, he and Engels had insisted that a 'communist organisation of society' would have to break these fetters imposed upon activity by allowing all individuals to cultivate their multifaceted abilities and satisfy their all-round needs, including their artistic abilities and aesthetic sensitivities:

The exclusive concentration of artistic talent in particular individuals, and its suppression in the broad mass which is bound up with this, is a consequence of division of labour . . . [W]ith a communist organisation of society, there disappears the subordination of the artist . . . to some definite art, making him exclusively a painter, sculptor, etc.; the very name amply expresses the narrowness of his professional development and his dependence on division of labour. In a communist society there are no painters but only people who engage in painting among other activities.<sup>41</sup>

Thus, in Marx's vision of an emancipated and truly human society, individual development would not be fettered by an 'exclusive sphere of activity', i.e. there would be no 'fixation of social activity'.<sup>42</sup> The idiosyncrasies of the partially developed individual would be replaced with a more totally developed one. Yet, in addition to a diversity of needs, capacities, and relations, this theory of intellectual, moral, and artistic development also implies that there are certain objective and universal 'standard[s]' for such activities, including those aforementioned 'laws of beauty'. This conception is a direct appropriation of the Hegelian idea of substantive universality.

When I will what is rational, I do not act as a particular individual . . . The rational is the high road which everyone follows and where no one stands out from the rest. When greats artist complete a work, we can say it had to be; that is, the artist's particularity has completely disappeared and no mannerism is apparent in it. Phidias has no mannerisms . . . But the poorer the artist is, the more we see of himself, of his particularity and arbitrariness.<sup>43</sup>

This objective basis suggests, furthermore, that 'free activity' is not mere play, as Marcuse preferred to characterise it, but a more or less concentrated and even strenuous effort required to develop one's overall virtuositities.<sup>44</sup> Marx makes this point quite clearly in the *Grundrisse* in critical remarks which he directs against Smith and Fourier. On the one hand, he criticises Smith's idea that 'labour' is necessarily a 'curse', and, on the other, Fourier's notion that 'free' activity is simply 'play'.

[Smith was] right, of course, that, in its historic forms as slave-labour, serf-labour, and wage-labour, labour always appears as repulsive . . . [But] even the semi-artistic worker of the Middle Ages does not fit into his definition . . . [In a free society,] labour becomes attractive work, the individual's self-realisation, which in no way means that it becomes mere fun, mere amusement, as Fourier, with grisette-like naïveté, conceives it. Really free working, e.g. composing, is at the same time precisely the most damned seriousness, the most intense exertion.<sup>45</sup>

At a higher stage of social development, labour would be 'attractive work', *truly enjoyable* activity, but it would by no means be reduced to 'mere play, mere amusement'. Marx reiterates elsewhere in the *Grundrisse* that '[l]abour cannot become play, as Fourier [and Marcuse] would like'.<sup>46</sup> However, the 'abstract antithesis' between labour and 'free time' which exists 'from the perspective of bourgeois economy' would indeed be overcome and abolished. Under the alienating conditions of capitalism this 'antithesis' and 'contradiction' is experienced as the desire for time outside of wage-labour. This free time is then understood merely as 'idle time', as 'leisure time', instead of as 'time for higher activity'—that is, 'free time' reserved for the expenditure of energy on activities that are ends in themselves.<sup>47</sup>

This is the philosophic basis for the distinction which Marx sketches out between the 'realm of necessity' and the 'true realm of freedom' in a communist society. In the realm of necessity, we are engaged in instrumental activity, distinct from the sort of end-in-itself activity which takes place within the 'true realm of freedom'. In an emancipated society, therefore, the time and energy spent in the realm of necessity would be 'reduced to a minimum'.<sup>48</sup> It would have to 'free everyone's time for their own development'.<sup>49</sup> In other words, the 'saving of labour time [would be] equal to an increase of free time, i.e. time for the full development of the individual'.<sup>50</sup> The aesthetic capacity to appreciate and produce beauty implies 'free time and energy' for such development: free time to both enjoy developed senses and to develop them further, processes which essentially take place simultaneously. According to Marx, capitalism has been integral to creating the foundation necessary for this future society to exist. He wrote that capitalism has, 'despite itself, [been] instrumental' in 'reducing labour time' in its 'necessary form' in order to expand its surplus form, and, as an unintended consequence, has created the preconditions necessary for realising a free association of 'universally developed' individuals. 'Capital is itself the moving contradiction', inasmuch as it creates the foundations for a higher form of society based upon 'free[ing] everyone's time for their own development'.<sup>51</sup>

Yet, Marx also claims that even the 'work of material production' in a socialist society would become transformed into an aestheticised process involving 'self-realisation, objectification of the subject, [and] hence real freedom'.<sup>52</sup> This is why Adams goes astray when he suggests that the early 'aesthetic

model' has been *displaced* by the mature Marx's critique of political economy. The 'revolutionary aim' of a socialist society is still directed toward 'liberating the senses', but, he concludes, its 'meaning has been altered' irreparably in comparison to the anthropology of the earlier works. 'No longer is it the intrinsic nature of work' which develops our aesthetic sensibilities and artistic abilities, but exclusively the 'time outside of work, beyond the realm of necessity, during which the creative powers of individuals will be exercised'. The 'liberation' of our aesthetic elements and our artistic aptitudes is still 'realised, [but now] outside of the productive process', effectively 'abandoning the [earlier] demand that the labour process itself be transformed'. According to Adams, then, even in a higher social formation labour would remain 'alienated labour'.<sup>53</sup> Yet, Marx explicitly claims that the activities taken-up within the remaining portions of the 'realm of necessity' would prove to be not only 'favourable to', but also 'worthy of', our own 'human nature'.<sup>54</sup> To suggest otherwise is to forget that the labourer can develop a 'definite relation . . . to the thing he [or she] works on, and to his [or her] own working capabilities', regarding their own work as 'attractive work' and as a potentially 'positive, creative activity'.<sup>55</sup> In this sense, a free association of fully developed individuals would overcome the aforementioned 'abstract antithesis' between 'free time' and 'labour time' which exists from the 'standpoint' of the 'bourgeois' mode of production and which still burdens Adams' understanding.

'Really free working', however, does not turn merely upon the question of cultivating our intellectual and aesthetic capacities, nor merely in freeing up the time necessary for that development. This process of 'self-realisation' can only take place within the most ideal ethical relations. Such relations are in fact the only context within which these creative capacities can be developed to their fullest extent and most meaningfully enjoyed by all. This is expressed in the famous remark from *The Communist Manifesto* that the 'free development of each is the condition for the free development of all'.<sup>56</sup> This principle characterises the ethical character of social life within a communist society as one constituted by the mutual recognition between 'universally developed' individuals. This is why Marx describes these relations of mutual recognition as the only social form fit for 'human beings'. In truly *human* production,

[each] of us would have . . . affirmed himself and the other person . . . In my production I would have objectified my individuality . . . In your enjoyment or use of my product I would have the direct enjoyment both of being conscious of having satisfied a human need by my work, that is, of having objectified man's essential nature . . . confirmed both in your thought and your love . . . Our products would be so many mirrors in which we saw reflected our essential nature. This relationship would moreover be reciprocal.<sup>57</sup>

This speaks to the foundational principle and the ethical aim of Marx's revolutionary political orientation, evident in his 1844 statement that, in this 'human' way of relating with others, the 'affirmation of the object by another' would 'likewise' be one's 'own gratification'.<sup>58</sup> As an essential moment of the good life, artistic activities would therefore be done for the sake of the shared experience of creating and enjoying beauty. After all, if we

[assume] man to be man and his relationship to the world to be a human one then you can exchange love only for love, trust for trust, etc. If you want to enjoy art, you must be an artistically cultivated person.<sup>59</sup>.

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### NOTES

1. Marx 1990, 618.
2. Marx 1993, 706.
3. Marx 1993, 711.
4. Marx 2005a, 275.
5. Marx 2005d, 304-305.
6. Aristotle 1995, 1252b7-1253a2.
7. Marx 2005d, 306.
8. Engels and Marx 1995, 105.
9. Plekhanov 1970.
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