

Cannibals and Animals of *Capital*¹

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For these inclofures be the causes why rich men eat vp poore men, as beafts doo eat graffe : These, I fay, are the Caterpillers and deuouring locuftes that maffacre the poore, & eat vp *the* whole realme to *the* destruction of the fame : *The Lorde mooue them !*

—Philip Stubbes, *Anatomy of the Abuses in England* (1583)³

INTRODUCTION

Years ago, while flicking through the index to Karl Marx's *Capital* volume 1, I came across a peculiar entry: 'cannibalism'. Though there is only one reference—which is found in the chapter on 'Absolute and Relative Surplus Value'—as any sane person would do, I of course immediately looked it up and forgot all about what it was I had actually been looking for. In the relevant section, Marx writes that,

[There] is no natural obstacle absolutely preventing one man from lifting himself from the burden of the labour necessary to maintain his own existence, and imposing it on another, just as there is no unconquerable natural obstacle to the consumption of the flesh of one man by another.⁴

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³ Philip Stubbes, *Anatomy of the Abuses in England in Shakespeare's Youth*, ed. Frederick J. Furnival (London: New Shakespeare Society, 1877-79), 114.

⁴ Karl Marx, *Capital Vol. 1* (London: Penguin Books, 2004), 647. In a footnote, Marx also informs us that 'according to a recent calculation' there are 'at least 4,000,000' non-metaphorical cannibals left in the world.

Just as the cannibal preys on the flesh of another, the capitalist preys on the labour of another: the worker. David McNally, in his excellent study of Marx and the monstrosity of capitalism, *Monsters of the Market* (2011), also emphasises its cannibalistic tendencies in reference to capitalists preying upon the labourers as cannibals prey upon their fellow men.⁵ While he does not give the reference, the point, of course, could be lifted straight from Marx's one mention of cannibals in *Capital*, and we will return to that quote later. However, in light of the broader point of McNally's book, I believe that there is more to this than a simple metaphor for the capitalist's devouring of the worker. In fact, I am not sure that it should be read as a metaphor at all – as McNally notes, 'Rather than merely provocative metaphors, then, Marx's monsters are signs of horror, markers of the real horrors of modern social life'.⁶ What, then, are the non-metaphorical implications of Marx's image linking exploitation with cannibalism?

In one sense, the cannibalistic devouring of another is always also a devouring of self; because the capitalist and the labourer are both human, any time one devours the other, he is in a symbolic sense at the same time devouring himself. However, as the labourer is forced to destroy his bodily self in the labour-process, he also falls victim to self-cannibalisation. Every product he consumes is the result of his own labour process—or one equivalent to it and, at least symbolically, indistinguishable from it, i.e., a result of *abstract labour*—and is his own life given concrete, material form. When he consumes a commodity, he consumes himself. This motif of cannibalism and self-cannibalisation is what I will explore in this paper. However, this is not just a question of symbolism, but also an ontological question. It pertains to the ontological status of the labourer (and to some extent of the capitalist). Thus, in order to explore the cannibalism of capital, I will also explore the relationship

⁵ David McNally, *Monsters of the Market. Zombies, Vampires and Global Capitalism* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 46.

⁶ McNally, *Monsters of the Market*, 115.

between labour under capitalism and the status of man⁷ as something ontologically distinct from animals in the early writings of Marx, as well as relate them to the contemporaneous writings of his two main theoretical partners in the 1840s, Moses Hess and Friedrich Engels. I will begin by examining the communist reading of Feuerbach in Hess's 1844-45 essay "On the Essence of Money", then I will examine Engels's *The Condition of the Working-Class in England*, which I will read with and through Hess, and finally I will turn to Marx's writings of the 1840s, especially the so-called *Economic and philosophical manuscripts*, again reading those through the lens of Hess (and Engels). After a theoretical interlude on McNally and capitalism's monsters, I will then follow this up with an investigation of the self-cannibalisation and animalisation—or, the cannibals and animals—of *Capital*.

At this early point, I should take care to note that I am not attempting to make a strong claim about the *influence* of Hess's account of the ontological status of man on Marx. Here, I follow Quentin Skinner's argument that the conditions for speaking of 'influence' should be extremely restrictive. In his classic text, Skinner mentions three such conditions:

(i) that there should be a genuine similarity between the doctrines of *A* and *B*; (ii) that *B* could not have found the relevant doctrine in any writer other than *A*; (iii) that the probability of the similarity being random should be very low (i.e., even if there is a similarity, and it is shown that it could have been by *A* that *B* was influenced, it must still be shown that *B* did not as a matter of fact articulate the relevant doctrine independently).⁸

Though I feel confident about (i), (ii) is somewhat sketchier and I have no way of asserting (iii), at least not within the scope of this relatively short paper. I am therefore content to establish an *affinity* of claims made by

⁷ A more contemporary as well as perhaps more accurate term would be 'human'. I only use the term 'man' for reasons of consistency with the somewhat dated English editions of Marx, Engels, and Hess's writings where it is usually given as the translation of the German *Mensch*, *Menschheit*, and *Mann* equally.

⁸ Quentin Skinner, "Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas", *History and Theory* 8, no. 1 (1969): 26.

Hess, Engels, and Marx about the debased bestiality of modern industrial society (i.e., capitalism) and a contention that each of them are not merely engaging in *rhetorical imagery* but is rather making *ontological arguments*. Whether those arguments depend on or influence each other is a different argument, which I—though I suspect that they do—am not prepared to make. Taking this methodological hedging *ad notam*, we begin with Moses Hess.

HESS, ENGELS, MARX

Moses Hess (1812-1875) was a communist and a Jew. To those unfamiliar with Hess's work, this might seem like an unfairly one-dimensional and reductionist description, perhaps even bordering on anti-Semitic tropes of 'Judeo-Bolshevism' etc. However, in the case of Hess, it really is a most accurate description of his intellectual output: Hess was the author of both the first book-length communist tract in German (*The Holy History of Mankind*, 1837) and the first Zionist ditto (*Rome and Jerusalem*, 1862). As such, it is most likely a description that Hess himself would have favoured (and Stathis Kouvelakis for example refers to Hess as 'a Jew and a Rheinlander',⁹ the latter of which is meant as a short-hand for socialist). Between his second book (*The European Triarchy*, 1841) and *Rome and Jerusalem* was a break of more than 20 years in which Hess developed his special brand of communist thinking, not through full-length systematic works, but in a disparate and eclectic way through dozens of articles, pamphlets, etc.¹⁰ Above all, these appeared in Young Hegelian organs such as the *Rheinische Zeitung*—for which he served as a foreign correspondent and editor and was a contender for the job as general editor which ultimately went to Marx¹¹—and the *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher* as well as in important Young Hegelian anthologies like Georg Herwegh's *Einundzwanzig Bogen*

⁹ Stathis Kouvelakis, *Philosophy and Revolution. From Kant to Marx* (London: Verso Books, 2018), 121.

¹⁰ Shlomo Avineri, *Moses Hess: Prophet of Communism and Zionism*, Modern Jewish Masters 1 (New York, NY: New York University Press, 1985), 79.

¹¹ Hess was turned down for being too radical! Cf. Kouvelakis, *Philosophy and Revolution*, 130.

aus der Schweiz (1843). After having asserted an eclectic mix of Messianism, Spinozism, and Hegelianism in his youth, combined with an insistence on the future as the relevant analytical category for the philosophy of history, a feature common to all Young Hegelians following August von Cieszkowski's seminal work *Prolegomena for a Historiosophy* (1838) which Hess explicitly invokes in his *Holy History of Mankind*,¹² Hess's theoretical framework narrowed down to two major sources during this maturing period: radical French communism and the philosophy of Ludwig Feuerbach – especially the Feuerbachian concept of 'species-being'.¹³

In a sense, in the early years of this period Hess is doing the reverse of Marx. While Marx is studying Hegel to find out what Germany *is not* but the more advanced European and North American states *actually are*¹⁴ (because "The Germans have *thought* in politics what other nations have *done*"¹⁵), Hess is giving preference to Germany over those nominally more modern states. While England, because of its more advanced social conditions, will be the seat of the next revolution, only Germany can bring this revolution to fruition; the English principle is particular (material, economic), while only the principle of the Germans is universal because it is Spirit. However, in order to fulfil the truth of German philosophy, the Germans must follow the French and move beyond mere intellectual triumph in order to wage a real struggle against the present conditions.¹⁶ In his 1845 essay "On the Essence of Money", which was originally intended for Marx and Arnold Ruge's *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher* and bears many striking resemblances to Marx's "On the Jewish

¹² Kouvelakis, *Philosophy and Revolution*, 122 ff.

¹³ Avineri, *Moses Hess*, 115 ff.

¹⁴ David Leopold, *The Young Marx* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 20 ff.

¹⁵ Karl Marx, *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right. Introduction*, in *Early Writings*, trans. Rodney Livingstone and Gregor Benton (London: Penguin Books, 1992), 250. Cf. also p. 245.

¹⁶ Kouvelakis, *Philosophy and Revolution*, 141.

Question” published therein,¹⁷ Hess is precisely railing (notes Julius Carlebach, ‘where Marx analyses, Hess preaches’¹⁸) against the spirit of the ‘huckstering world’ (*Krämerwelt*) and ‘money state’ (*Geldstaat*) of modern industrial society, i.e., capitalism, which he sees as the high-point of robbery, slavery, and particularist individualism, from the position of German philosophy.¹⁹ Thus, the society of particularism is criticised from the highest universal standpoint.

Hess’s preoccupation in “On the Essence of Money” is precisely to demonstrate how the essence of man is corrupted in this particularist form of society embodied in the money form. His approach is inherently Feuerbachian in that he applies Ludwig Feuerbach’s concept of alienation to social questions. In *The Essence of Christianity* (1841), Feuerbach had demonstrated how God was nothing but the product of man himself, and God’s attributes were the hypostasised attributes of man – it was ‘the transformation and dissolution of theology into anthropology’.²⁰ In his *Principles of the Philosophy of the Future* (1843), Feuerbach went even further and claimed that the categories of what he called ‘speculative philosophy’, i.e., Hegelianism, were nothing but ‘rational theology’ and thus only a doubly alienated image of man.²¹ In the same way that Feuerbach had revealed theology and speculative philosophy to be alienated forms of man’s essence, Hess attempts to reveal that the ‘huckstering world’ is also such an alienated form, or rather, that man is alienated from himself in that world. Hess adopts the key Feuerbachian term of ‘species-being’ (*Gattungswesen*), which

¹⁷ The extent to which this essay influenced Marx is contended. McLellan claims that Marx downright copied from Hess (David McLellan, *The Young Hegelians and Karl Marx* (London: Macmillan, 1970), 155). Carlebach makes the case that the essay did not influence Marx’s “On the Jewish Question”, but that it exerted a profound influence on the 1844 Paris manuscripts (Julius Carlebach, “The Problem of Moses Hess’s Influence on the Young Marx”, *The Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook* 18, no.1 (January 1973): 34-39). Avineri has no doubt that Hess influenced Marx (Avineri, *Moses Hess*, 115). Lademacher is more careful and gives primacy to Marx, but recognises the connection between them (Horst Lademacher, “Die politische und soziale Theorie bei Moses Heß”, *Archiv für Kulturgeschichte* 42, no. 2 (1960): 229-230).

¹⁸ Julius Carlebach, “The Problem of Moses Hess’s Influence on the Young Marx”, 32.

¹⁹ Avineri, *Moses Hess*, xyz.

²⁰ Ludwig Feuerbach, *Principles of the Philosophy of the Future*, trans. Manfred H. Vogel (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 1986), 4 (§1).

²¹ Feuerbach, *Principles of the Philosophy of the Future*, e.g. 5-6 (§§4-5), 12 (§9).

for Feuerbach is an anthropological concept derived from Hegel's concept of 'active reality' (*Wirklichkeit*) understood as being whose appearance is in accordance with its essence. Thus, the person who has species-being is a person whose existence or being (*Dasein*) is in accordance with the essence of his species, man, i.e., his humanity. What, then, is the essence of man? The answer for Hess is *sociality*. In the very first paragraph of the essay, Hess writes that, 'If they [men] are separated from their social life-medium, they can live as little as they can live bodily if separated from their bodily life-medium – when their life-air is taken from them.'²² In other words, man can live without community as little as he can live without air. This sociality, which forms the essence of man's species, mainly takes the form of 'intercourse' (*Verkehr*) or, as Hess writes, 'The mutual *exchange* of individual life-activity'.²³ As such, Hess's account of human essence is as something dynamic and processual. It is not a set or static thing but rather the active intercourse between a community of people: sociality. Here, Hess diverts from Feuerbach whose human essence is something given once and for all by nature, while for Hess it is processually developed in history.²⁴ 'The *human* essence', Hess writes, 'develops, as any essence, in the course of a *history* through many struggles and destructions', and he adds that, 'we still live in its struggles',²⁵ i.e., that this communal essence has not yet been realised in the above mentioned Hegelian sense of active reality. Contrary to Feuerbach, Hess does not imagine some original, lost unity of man with his nature-given essence; conversely, the struggle of history is the result of the fact that 'in the beginning they [man] could only maintain themselves as isolated individuals'.²⁶ The struggle of history is the development of man from individuality toward greater communality, from particularity toward universality. (Recall here that

²² Moses Hess, "Über das Geldwesen", in *Sozialistische Aufsätze, 1841-1847*, ed. Theodor Zlocisti (Berlin: Welt-Verlag, 1921), 159-160. The English translations are my own or are modified from the English translation by Adam Buick found on the Marxist Internet Archive, <<https://www.marxists.org/archive/hess/1845/essence-money.htm>>.

²³ Hess, "Über das Geldwesen", 160.

²⁴ Avineri, *Moses Hess*, 117.

²⁵ Hess, "Über das Geldwesen", 161.

²⁶ Hess, "Über das Geldwesen", 162.

Hess is criticising precisely a societal principle of particularity, money, from the universal vantage point of German philosophy.) This development, Hess says, occurs in accordance with the development of man's productive forces. When man was not able to produce enough for all the stronger robbed the weaker, because man's sociality was as underdeveloped as his productive forces.²⁷ However, as the productive forces have developed to the extent of excess, misery is now caused not by lack and shortage but instead precisely *by* excess:

England penetrates into the most remote parts of the Earth in search of *consumers*, but the *whole Earth* is or soon will be too *small a market* for its products... so that Malthusian theory... is in actual fact the *opposite of truth*.²⁸

Where the expanded productive forces should have brought about the realisation of man's social essence, instead they have brought wanton and widespread destruction and misery. The reason is that over the course of human history, man has come to place his essence, his species-being, outside of himself, first in God and Christianity, which Hess calls 'the logic of egoism',²⁹ and since in *money*. By depositing his species-being, his essence, in money, man suffers a loss of humanity, Hess argues. The breaking of communal bonds (or rather, their underdevelopment) results in a relapse to a Hobbesian state of war of all against all, where the animal becomes the truth of man, rather than the opposite, and where social exchange is perverted by individualism and greed and becomes exploitation.³⁰ Writes Hess,

What *God* is for *theoretical* life, *money* is for the *practical* life of the inverted world: the *externalised* [entäußerte] *capacity* of men, their *commercialised life-activity*. Money is *human value* expressed in numbers... for human beings who buy and sell themselves are *slaves*. Money is the congealed blood

²⁷ Carlebach, "Hess and Marx", 32.

²⁸ Hess, "Über das Geldwesen", 163-164.

²⁹ Hess, "Über das Geldwesen", 166. Christianity, to Hess, is the projection of human flourishing into an imagined, idealised afterlife and the normalisation of egoism, slavery, and human misery in this life. In his criticisms of religion, Hess is in many ways simply paraphrasing Feuerbach's claim that God is man's own hypostasised essence which in turn comes to dominate man. However, Hess also details an intimate connection between Christianity and capitalism, something never achieved by Feuerbach.

³⁰ Kouvelakis, *Philosophy and Revolution*, 147.

and sweat of those wretched ones who themselves bring their inalienable property, their only capacity, their life-activity itself to the market in order to exchange it for this *caput mortuum* called *capital* and thus to live *cannibalistically* off their *own flesh*. And we are all these wretched scum! We can emancipate ourselves *theoretically* from the *inverted world-consciousness* as much as we like, but so long as we do not also remove ourselves *practically* from the *inverted world* we are forced to, as the saying goes, howl with the wolves. Yes, we *must* continually *alienate* [*veräußern*] our essence, our life, our only free life-activity, if we are to eke out our *miserable existence*. We continually *buy* our *individual existence* with the *loss of our freedom*.³¹

Capital is a *caput mortuum*, a ‘dead head’, money is congealed blood and sweat, and we who bring our life-activity, or labour, to the market are nothing but cannibals living off of our own flesh. These grotesque, almost gothic horror-like metaphors of flesh, blood, and bodily existence are not accidental. It is the juxtaposition of the abstract world of money to the corporeal world of living human beings, just as theoretical life is juxtaposed to practical life. No matter how free we become in our theoretical life, i.e., how much we rid ourselves of God, we will not be really free—*practically free*—until we also rid ourselves of practical life’s counterpart to God: money. Thus, the essence externalised by man in money is not a theoretical essence like the one externalised in God, rather it is a practical one. The un-freedom and alienation of man is not just imagined or theorised, it is concrete, practical, actual – *ontological*. And it is an ontological un-reality (*Unwirklichkeit*) which we are forced into by our concrete existence in this practical life. *We must*, as Hess writes, ‘howl with the wolves’. This choice of metaphor is not accidental either. In Feuerbach’s philosophy, man’s species-being is what sets him apart from animals.³² Because man is able to take himself and thus his entire species as the object of his thought, his consciousness is elevated to a level which distinguishes him ontologically from animals:

³¹ Hess, “Über das Geldwesen”, 166.

³² See e.g. Feuerbach, *Principles of the Philosophy of the Future*, 8-11 (§7), 69-70 (§53).

The brute [*das Tier*] is indeed conscious of himself as an individual—and he has accordingly the feeling of self as the common centre of successive sensations—but not as a species [*Gattung*]: hence, he is without that consciousness which in its nature, as in its name, is akin to science.³³

Because man takes his own species as his object, man is a universal being as opposed to the particularity of the individual animals. Even man's senses are imbued with this universality and are thus 'elevated to an independent and theoretical significance and dignity; universal sense is understanding; universal sensation, mind. Even the lowest senses, smell and taste, elevate themselves in man to intellectual and scientific acts.'³⁴ *Universality* is the true principle of man; a loss of this universality is thus a loss of the superior ontological status it bequeaths to him ('we need not also here reach beyond the realm of sensation in order to recognize man as a being ranking above the animals'³⁵) and a regression to an animal state. That this is true in the case of capitalism, i.e., under the rule of the particularist principle of money, is emphasised by Hess's continued use of animal imagery. Man under capitalism is not species-man but 'animal-man' (*Tiermensch*)³⁶ and men are reduced to *Raubtiere*, beasts of prey. In the money state, Hess writes,

reigns... a poetry-less freedom of beasts of prey based on the *equality of death*. In the face of money, *kings* are no longer entitled to conquer, because they, the *lions* of the animal-men, have here just as little right as the sinister *priests* still have a right to refresh themselves with the smell of cadavers [*Leichenduft*] because they are its *hyenas*.³⁷

Life under the rule of money is a life of slavery; man is not man, only beast. The solution to this is to replace the particularist principle of society, money, with a communal one: 'After [our forces and faculties] had

³³ Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, trans. George Eliot [Marian Evans] (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 1 (§1). Feuerbach's point on the etymological relationship between *Wissen* and *Wissenschaft* is lost in translation.

³⁴ Feuerbach, *Principles of the Philosophy of the Future*, 69 (§53).

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ Hess, "Über das Geldwesen", 183.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

developed we will only mutually ruin ourselves if we do not pass on to communism'.³⁸ Communism, then, is the realisation of man as species-man because it is the realisation of the social principle in history. It is the rescue of man from the level of bestiality, of macabre cannibalism and slavery, and the establishment of freedom.

As Gareth Stedman Jones has convincingly argued, in the early 1840s Friedrich Engels takes over this conception of alienated life in capitalism as an ontological loss of humanity in the Feuerbachian mould from Hess, who later famously claimed to have been the one to 'convert' Engels to communism in 1842.³⁹ In his first major work—and indeed the first full, book-length tract in the Marxist canon—*The Condition of the Working Class in England* (1845), Engels is therefore preoccupied with demonstrating this ontological loss of humanity empirically in the industrial slums of Northern England.⁴⁰

At the surface level, Engels's depiction of the working class slums of the English industrial north is mostly one of *moral degeneracy*. In the chapter called 'Results', Engels describes monstrous levels of drunkenness, obscene sexual behaviour (including homosexuality, which was obscene to Engels's 19th century Victorian sensibilities, but also incest and even paedophilia), neglect of family duties, rampant crime, contempt for public morals, and general debauchery among the working classes. However, this 'follows the relentless logic' of their class position and is the inevitable consequence of the bourgeoisie's domination of the workers: 'When people

³⁸ Hess, "Über das Geldwesen", 186.

³⁹ Moses Hess, "ddd". Of course, the existence of such a letter does not in and of itself prove anything, certainly not a concrete theoretical influence of Hess's upon Engels. However, the claim has been a staple in the scholarly literature on Engels's intellectual development since at least the late 19th century. It should be mentioned though that Engels himself, in an 1843 article in the Owenite newspaper *The New Moral World*, claims that Hess was the first of the Young Hegelians to become a communist, cf. Friedrich Engels, "Progress of Social Reform on the Continent", in *Marx-Engels Collected Works* 3 (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1973), 406.

⁴⁰ Gareth Stedman Jones, "Engels and the Invention of the Catastrophist Conception of the Industrial Revolution", in *The New Hegelians. Politics and Philosophy in the Hegelian School*, ed. Douglas Moggach (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 207.

are placed under conditions which appeal to the animals only, what remains to them but to rebel or to succumb to utter bestiality?’⁴¹ These bestial acts are not only morally repulsive but are such as ‘against which human nature revolts’,⁴² i.e., contrary to or opposite of what human nature is or ought to be. The working classes, living under these conditions and behaving in the way that they do, do so because they are forced to by the logic of capitalism, and this domination reduces them to something contrary to human nature.

This framing of Engels’s account as the natural and inevitable consequence if not even the true inner essence of the forces of industrial society was what made it truly shocking. While repulsive, Engels’s account of the workers as some kind of sub-human beings would not have surprised the English or European elites in and of i. Throughout the 1830s and 40s, people like Robert Carlyle and Edward Chadwick had made similar sociological observations, and especially the trope of the physician visiting the ‘sick’ patient of the proletariat was a well-established genre of literature in its own right. But Engels’s account was something else. His framing takes the form of a literal as well as metaphorical descent from the polished façades of the high streets of Manchester and into the slums. Engels describes how, in Manchester, the city is laid out in such a way that the ruling elite can move from their homes via the high street and to their ‘places of business’ without ever being confronted with the working class or their living conditions.⁴³ When he makes his descent, Engels is however not only descending behind the façade and into the slum, he is also making a decidedly Hegelian move from appearance to essence, suggesting ‘not merely unfamiliar contiguity but also unsettling inner interdependence’.⁴⁴ Manchester is a living physical manifestation of the discrepant relationship between

⁴¹ Friedrich Engels, *The Condition of the Working-Class in England*, in *Marx-Engels Collected Works* 4 (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1975), 423-424. Translation modified.

⁴² Engels, *The Condition*, 366.

⁴³ Engels, *The Condition*, 348.

⁴⁴ Stedman Jones, “Engels and the Industrial Revolution”, 206.

appearance and essence which characterises Hegelian unreality (*Unwirklichkeit*) – it is, in Hess’s words, a *Schein- und Lügenwelt*:

The world of shopkeepers [*Krämerwelt*] is the *practical* world of illusion and lies [*Schein- und Lügenwelt*]. – Under the appearance of the most lively intercourse, the most deadly separation of every man from all of his fellow men; under the appearance of an inviolable property guaranteed to everyone their capacity is taken from them in reality; under the appearance of the most total freedom, the most total servitude.⁴⁵

The divide between the appearance and the essence of bourgeois industrial society begets a society of *fissure*. Man is divided into exploiters and exploited, bourgeois and proletarians. In the city, this manifests itself physically as the separation of bourgeois and working class areas. As such, money—man’s alienated essence of the practical world—drives itself like a wedge into the lives of men and separates them. Their bodily lives are colonised by capital and they are forced by virtue of their class position to live in certain areas and in certain ways that are beneath the dignity of human beings – contrary, as mentioned above, to human nature itself.

Given that the workers are living in conflict with human nature and are thus *something other* than human, and given that they are obviously not plants, rocks, or celestial bodies, **the most logical conclusion⁴⁶** is that Engels, like Hess, believes that existing under the grotesque regime of capitalism has reduced the workers to *animals*. Engels confirms this:

Thus, the workers are also morally cast out and ignored by the class in power, just as they are physically and intellectually. The only provision made for them is the law, which fastens upon them when they become obnoxious to the bourgeoisie – as against irrational animals [*die unvernünftigen Tiere*], they are treated to but one form of education – the whip, the brutal and not convincing but intimidating violence. There is, therefore, no cause for surprise if those workers who are treated like animals [*die so*

⁴⁵ Hess, "Über das Geldwesen", 180-181.

⁴⁶ Kunne der ikke også eksistere en ontologisk kategori mellem dyr og menneske?? Ikke fuldendt menneske, men heller ikke dyr; menneske *in potentia*. Hess: ikke *Tier*, men *Tiermensch*.

wie Tiere behandelten Arbeiter], actually become animals; or if they can maintain their consciousness and feel their humanity [*Menschheit*] only by cherishing the most glowing hatred, the most unbroken inward rebellion against the bourgeoisie in power. They are only human so long only as they feel the wrath against the reigning class; they become animals [*sie werden Tiere*] the moment they bend in patience under the yoke, and merely strive to make life endurable while abandoning the effort to break the yoke.⁴⁷

That this reduction to the level of animality is not only rhetorical but ontological is further supported by the use of animal imagery similar to Hess's throughout the text, but, more importantly, also by empirical fact (which is Engels's true purpose; Hess has already 'proven' *theoretically* that the animal becomes the principle of man under the rule of money, Engels wants to prove it *practically*): Engels describes the living-quarters of the workers as 'pig sties' and even describes how one man had made a living in an actual cow's stable.⁴⁸

Quotes like the one above are common throughout, especially in the chapter on "Results", and in all of these places Engels juxtaposes the two same things, namely the literal and ontological reduction of the workers to animals on the one hand and the violent wrath of the working class toward the ruling bourgeoisie on the other; class-violence is the counterpart to class-based squalor. For this reason, the social revolution that Engels, like Hess, predicts to take place in England will be as violent as the class hatred of the proletarians. Writes Kouvelakis,

With a purely proletarian revolution he associates the terrifying, simultaneously fascinating and repellent imagery of sheer destruction, of the unleashing of blind violence – in a word, of the victory of the modern barbarians described throughout *The Conditions*: the proletarians.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Engels, *The Condition*, 411. Translation modified.

⁴⁸ Engels, *The Condition*, 353, 377; 363-364.

⁴⁹ Kouvelakis, *Philosophy and Revolution*, 227.

While not putting much faith in the reform movements of the ruling classes, Engels hopes that the spread of communist theories among the proletarians will temper the violent nature of the revolution.⁵⁰ Communism, to Engels, is thus not the ideology of this violent revolution, which is instead seen as the natural consequence of the dehumanisation of the workers. Rather, communism is above and beyond the differences of politics and the division of people into classes; communism as a principle is an expression of the universal nature of man against the particularism of modern industrial society. It is an expression ‘not of class particularity but of concrete universality’.⁵¹ As in Hess, the realisation of the true species-nature of man is the realisation of man’s true social nature, his communal being. ‘Communism’ it thus not a theory of the revolution *per se* but rather an expression of the historical development of man’s essence according to its true communal principle, or, in the later words of Marx and Engels together, ‘We call communism the *real* movement which abolishes the present state of things’.⁵²

The ontological status of man vis-à-vis his alienated life under capitalism is also taken up by Marx, most decidedly in the Paris manuscripts of 1844, the so-called *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*. However, traces of the discussion can be found earlier as well, both in the Kreuznach manuscript of 1843 (Marx’s manuscript for a critique of Hegel’s *Philosophy of Right*) and in both of his essays for the *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher*, the “Introduction” to the planned critique of Hegel and “On the Jewish Question” (both written in 1843 but printed in 1844). In the Kreuznach manuscript for example, we are told that ‘*Estate* is based on the supreme law of the *division* of society, but, in addition, it separates man from his universal essence, it

⁵⁰ Engels, *The Condition*, 582-83.

⁵¹ Kouvelakis, *Philosophy and Revolution*, 228.

⁵² Karl Marx & Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology*, in *Marx-Engels Collected Works* 5 (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1975), 49.

transforms him into an animal',⁵³ and later, echoing Feuerbach's distinction of man from animal as pertaining to man's ability to act consciously of himself as a species, we are told that, 'To be a conscious part of a thing means to take part of it and to take part in it consciously. Without this consciousness the member of the state would be an animal'.⁵⁴ Several more comments of this sort are scattered throughout the manuscripts of this period, and Marx's analysis of money in "On the Jewish Questions" bears a striking resemblance to Hess's in "On the Essence of Money", which Marx might or might not have read in manuscript while writing his own essay. (As mentioned, Hess's text was originally meant for Marx and Ruge's *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher* in which Marx's essay appear. Hess had sent an almost complete manuscript to Ruge, but scholars disagree as to whether Marx could have seen this before he began writing his own text. The question hinges on whether or not one believes that Marx composed the majority of the essay while still in Kreuznach, where he could not have seen Hess's manuscript, or only after meeting Ruge in Paris, where he could have. While McLellan for example thinks that Marx downright plagiarises Hess, Carlebach denies this and provides convincing, albeit still inconclusive, evidence that Marx did write most of his essay in Kreuznach and thus could not have known the content of Hess's essay.⁵⁵) Marx's very Hessian analysis of money can also be seen in the first pages of the *Excerpts from James Mill* (1844), where Marx describes money as a form of human alienation. Human social activity is externalised in an alien object, money, which then comes to serve as an 'alien mediator' of this same activity.⁵⁶ Under the auspices of this alien mediator, man becomes a slave in the same way as to God, and the cult of money 'becomes an end in itself'.⁵⁷ Marx continues:

⁵³ Karl Marx, *Critique of Hegel's Doctrine of the State*, in *Early Writings*, trans. Rodney Livingstone and Gregor Benton (London: Penguin Books, 1992), 148.

⁵⁴ Karl Marx, *Critique of Hegel's Doctrine of the State*, 187.

⁵⁵ Cf. footnote 17.

⁵⁶ Karl Marx, *Excerpts from James Mill's Elements of Political Economy*, in *Early Writings*, trans. Rodney Livingstone and Gregor Benton (London: Penguin Books, 1992), 260.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

Hence this *mediator* is the lost, estranged *essence* of private property, private property *alienated* and external to itself; it is the *alienated mediation* of human production with human production, the *alienated species-activity* of man.⁵⁸

Man is inherently a social animal, Marx argues, and as a social animal, his activity must take the form of exchange (*Verkehr*). However, given the premise of private property, i.e., of particularism, this exchange must take the form of value. As such, it ceases to be ‘a social, human movement, it is no *human relationship*: it is the *abstract relation* of private property to private property’⁵⁹ of which money is the externalised existence. There is thus something inherently *inhuman* about money, which is tied to the fact that man is abstracted from his social (universal) nature. Marx’s most thorough engagement with the topic, however, is in the 1844 Paris manuscripts, most notably in the section of the first manuscript called “Estranged Labour”. For this reason, this is where we will focus the bulk of our attention.

In the third manuscript, in the section called “Critique of Hegel’s Dialectic and General Philosophy”, Marx in a very pronounced way serves up the Feuerbachian motif of ‘species-being’:

The *real, active* relation of man to himself as a species-being, or the realization of himself as a real species-being, i.e. as a human being, is only possible if he really employs all his *species-powers* which again is only possible through the cooperation of mankind and as a result of history - and treats them as objects, which is at first only possible in the form of estrangement.⁶⁰

Not only does the terminology of a ‘species-being’ echo Feuerbach, but the emphasis on the historicity and development of man’s communal existence, ‘the cooperation of mankind’, also bears close resemblance to Hess. The genius of Hegel’s *Phenomenology*, Marx continues, is precisely that it grasps man’s development as

⁵⁸ Marx, *Excerpts from James Mill*, 261.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, in *Early Writings*, trans. Rodney Livingstone and Gregor Benton (London: Penguin Books, 1992), 386.

such a process, as a 'self-creation' – but also that this development involves a process of alienation and sublation of this alienation.⁶¹ In this way, Marx departs somewhat from Hess's framework in that nothing in Hess's analysis suggests that the alienation is *necessary*. It is practical and real, but it seems possible for Hess that man could have developed along the lines of his communal essence and realised his humanity without first being theoretically and practically alienated in God and money. Here, Marx instead adopts the model of appropriation and reappropriation from the *Phenomenology*. Hegel's theory falls in four stages: appropriation, objectification, alienation, and re-appropriation. The first moment consists in the first contact of self-consciousness with the domain of appearance, which it stupidly and indiscriminately consumes. The second moment is the objectification of consciousness, self-consciousness 'loosing' itself in its externalisation understood as the negation of the original appropriation of the world of appearances. Third, the moment of alienation – self-consciousness is split in an internal and an external moment, an essence and an appearance, the subjective and the objective; it is 'beside itself'. But this third moment of alienation is also what makes possible the fourth moment of re-appropriation: self-consciousness finds itself again, essence and appearance becomes one in the absolute subject-object.⁶²

In *The Condition of the Working-Class in England*, Engels employs a similar structure with the industrial revolution as the seminal event. Here, the workers (and hence man) live in original harmony, consuming nature. By the cataclysmic event of the industrial revolution the workers are forced into the world, which they were before only one-sidedly devouring, and become alienated, after which the workers are existing only in their inhumanity; as they are split between their communal nature and their unfree existence, so the capitalist

⁶¹ Marx, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, 386.

⁶² I take this summary of the Hegel's productive theory from Norman Levine, "Marx's First Appropriation of Hegel", *Critique* 33, no. 1 (2005): 138-140. See also Norman Levine, *Marx's Discourse with Hegel* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 223-225.

world itself is split between essence and appearance. Overcoming this dividedness (alienation), the working class gains consciousness as a class, i.e., becomes ‘the Proletariat’, and launches a collective attack on capital until they achieve final victory of communism, the real communal principle of man, through the abolition of competition and private property.⁶³

While Engels gives primacy in his account to the empirical investigation of the later stages in the application of Hegel’s schema to industrial England (the inhuman alienation and the anger of the proletariat), Marx, in the section on “Estranged Labour”, gives primacy to a theoretical investigation of the dehumanising process of estranged labour itself, i.e., how the alienation of the individual worker actually happens in the labour process itself, not just in society as a whole. Marx’s notion of estrangement or alienation in this text is quintessentially Feuerbachian. Alienation is the *Entäusserung*, or externalisation, of the species-being of man in something outside of him which then comes to dominate him. Just as social intercourse was for Hess man’s species-being, for Marx it is ‘labour, *life activity, productive life*’.⁶⁴ What is more, species-man is *conscious* of his work as his species-activity, just as for Feuerbach true man is the man that takes himself as his object, i.e., is conscious of his species. What estranged labour is, is precisely automatic, *unconscious* labour (the worker as a machine) and as such it ceases to be free life-activity and becomes instead *necessary activity*. This estranged productive activity leads to the estrangement of the worker from his product:

This fact expresses merely that the object which labour produces, its product, stands opposed to it as *something alien*, as a *power independent* of the producer... It is the same in religion. The more man puts into God, the less he retains within himself. The worker places his life into the object; but now it no longer belongs to him, but to the object... What the product of his labour is, he is not... The more the worker *appropriates* the external world, sensuous nature, through his labour, the more he deprives

⁶³ Engels, *The Condition*, 307-342. Cf. Stedman Jones, “Engels and the Industrial Revolution”, 208-209.

⁶⁴ Marx, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, 328 f.

himself of *means of life*... The culmination of this slavery is that it is only as a *worker* that he can maintain himself as a *physical subject* and only as a *physical subject* that he is a worker...⁶⁵

We could go on. The heart of the matter is this: ‘So much does the realization of labour appear as loss of reality that the worker loses his reality to the point of dying of starvation.’⁶⁶ By externalising his human essence, his life-activity (labour), in a product that is strange to him and which, given the premise of private property, can only end up as value and money,⁶⁷ the worker also hands off the core of his humanity itself. Why does he do it? Because he is *forced to*; it is not the satisfaction of a need, i.e., the fulfilment of the labourer’s life-activity, but ‘a *means to satisfy needs outside of itself*’⁶⁸ – in other words, to get *money*. (We see here Marx echoing Hess’s ‘wretched ones’ who are forced to bring their life-activity to the market to exchange it for the *caput mortuum* of capital.) The result of this process, Marx writes,

is that man (the worker) feels that he is acting freely *only in his animal function* – eating, drinking and procreating, or at most in his dwelling and adornment – while in his human functions *he is nothing more than an animal*. What is animal has become human and what is human has become animal.⁶⁹

Because the worker is not free in his actual life-activity, which has instead become a necessary activity, he seeks a substitute freedom in the activities he shares with the animals and in the process becomes one.

THE MARXIST GOTHIC

As we have seen above, in the 1840s Moses Hess, Friedrich Engels, and Karl Marx shared a commitment to analysing and describing the debasement of the workers as a form of animalisation that is not just a rhetorical

⁶⁵ Marx, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, 324-325.

⁶⁶ Marx, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, 324.

⁶⁷ Cf. above, p. 17.

⁶⁸ Marx, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, 326.

⁶⁹ Marx, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, 327. My emphases. Translation modified (the final sentence is missing in the Penguin edition but is included in both the English *MECW* and German *MEW* editions, cf. *MECW* x, x, and *MEW Ergänzungsband I*, 515).

strategy but an ontological fact, an analysis grounded in their Feuerbachian and Young Hegelian theoretical framework. In the following, before moving on to tracing this ontological argument in *Capital*, I will first briefly connect this reading of Hess, Engels, and Marx to David McNally's idea of a 'Marxist Gothic' and the 'capitalist grotesque'.⁷⁰

In *Monsters of the Market*, McNally sketches the contours of the Marxist Gothic as a reading of Marx's *Capital* emphasising the journey through the underworld of capitalism, 'visiting the secret dungeons that harbour labouring bodies in pain'.⁷¹ It is the insistence that in the capitalist production process as described by Marx, the negative destruction of human bodies is also a positive social and economic act, a re-constituting of a social order, just like the Dutch anatomical theatres of the 17th century that McNally analyses.⁷² As such, in the Marxist Gothic there is a strong connection between the socio-political and economic on the one hand and the physio-ontological condition of the individual workers as well as the working classes on the other. McNally traces a historical development from the enclosures of the commons in 16th century England through to the classics of political economy analysed by Marx where symbols of monstrosity increasingly become connected with poverty and anti-market behaviours. This, McNally argues, is why we should take Marx's metaphors of monstrosity seriously. Rather than simply literary embellishments, they are an appropriation of the monstrous discourse of capitalism:

⁷⁰ The phrase 'Marxist Gothic' or 'Gothic Marxism' has also been popularised by China Miéville and can be traced, in part, to Margaret Cohen's *Profane Illumination* (1994). However, McNally's use of the term implies somewhat different concerns than Cohen's post-Marxist project, cf. McNally, *Monsters of the Market*, 1-16 and Margaret Cohen, *Profane Illumination. Walter Benjamin and the Paris of Surrealist Revolution* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1994), 1-15. For an investigation, see Adam Turl, "A Thousand Lost Worlds: Notes on Gothic Marxism", in *Red Wedge*, June 4, 2015, <<http://www.redwedgemagazine.com/evicted-art-blog/a-thousand-lost-worlds-notes-on-gothic-marxism>>.

⁷¹ McNally, *Monsters of the Market*, 138.

⁷² McNally, *Monsters of the Market*, 31.

As Marx searched for a means of depicting the actual horrors of capitalism – from child-labour, to the extermination of North America’s indigenous peoples, from the factory-system to the slave-trade – he reworked the discourse of monstrosity that emerged with the rise of capitalism.⁷³

This is the *capitalist grotesque*. It is the invisible way in which monstrosity—or at least what is termed as monstrosities in the discourses of capitalism—becomes normalised and naturalised ‘through the colonisation of the essential fabric of everyday-life’,⁷⁴ most notably our very corporeal existence in the world. This is also what Søren Mau argues: that one of the distinguishing features of the economic power of capital is its ability to perform a form of ‘metabolic domination’ by inserting itself into the very fabric of the human metabolism, between the humans and the extra-somatic organs on which they rely, i.e., the tools of production.⁷⁵ In the words of Andreas Malm, humans ‘actively order matter so that it solidifies their social relations’,⁷⁶ and under capitalism the matter thus organised includes the metabolism of the human body itself.

Inserting itself into the very flesh of the worker’s bodily existence, capital becomes more than a social relation. It becomes a social relation *in the concrete*, or, as Marx calls it, a ‘real abstraction’. Value is not just something we imagine, like the speculative concept of ‘Fruit’ which Marx mockingly describes in *The Holy Family*,⁷⁷ but rather something with actual corporeal existence in and through the objects that it inhabits. It has an ontological status. According to McNally, this is precisely the point of Marx’s analysis in the famous fetish-section of chapter 1. Here, Marx, in his approach to the capitalist grotesque, ‘*de-fetishises by way of re-embodiment*’.⁷⁸ He shows how concepts such as the ‘abstract labour’ extracted from the theories of political

⁷³ McNally, *Monsters of the Market*, 13.

⁷⁴ McNally, *Monsters of the Market*, 2.

⁷⁵ Søren Mau, *Mute Compulsion. A Theory of the Economic Power of Capital* (Ph.D. diss., University of Southern Denmark, 2019), 108 ff.

⁷⁶ Andreas Malm, *The Progress of this Storm. Nature and Society in a Warming World* (London: Verso, 2018), 143.

⁷⁷ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Holy Family, or Critique of Critical Criticism*, in *Marx-Engels Collected Works* 3, 5-211 (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1975), 57-59.

⁷⁸ McNally, *Monsters of the Market*, 135. Emphasis in original.

economy in the previous sections of the chapter are based on the embodied corporeality of the workers. As McNally writes, without this corporeality the monstrous cannot exist, the ‘spectral and vampiric powers of capital cannot take flight’.⁷⁹ Abstract labour is not just abstract in the sense that it is ideal or theoretical, but in the original sense of the word *abstractus*: it is labour disembodied and removed from the labourers who perform it; it is the integrity of the bodily worker-tool metabolism dissected.⁸⁰ As such, Marx’s monstrous metaphors—his tales of the destruction of human bodies in *Capital* and therefore of the humanity of these bodies—are, as already stated, not just illustrative metaphors or flourishing language play. Writes McNally,

The essence of capitalist monstrosity is its transformation of human flesh and blood into raw materials for the manic machinery of accumulation. Rather than merely provocative metaphors, then, Marx’s monsters are signs of horror, markers of the real terrors of modern social life.⁸¹

Thus, when Marx speaks of the capitalists as ‘cannibals’ in *Capital*, he is not just speaking metaphorically, but with theoretical force. He is talking about the actual flesh and blood of the capitalist process of production.

Analysing the emerging discourse of monstrosity in early English capitalism, McNally writes—in reference to the quote by Stubbes given as an epitaph to this paper—that, ‘What characterises monstrous humans in such a discourse [of cannibalism] is their role as destroyers of social bonds and obligations’.⁸² This is precisely the point of the animal imagery of Hess and Engels. Hess’s descriptions of the particularist *Krämerwelt* were exactly such gothic and monstrous ones as referenced by McNally: money is congealed blood and sweat, capital a severed head. Money inserts itself into the social world of man and corrupts it, it severs the bonds of communality and transform men into beasts of prey. In Engels’s text, which focuses more or less exclusively on the *living conditions* of the working classes, this becomes even more obvious. The capitalist grotesque has

⁷⁹ McNally, *Monsters of the Market*, 134.

⁸⁰ McNally, *Monsters of the Market*, 14.

⁸¹ McNally, *Monsters of the Market*, 115.

⁸² McNally, *Monsters of the Market*, 46.

colonised the very fabric of life and inserted itself into the human metabolism by creating a wedge between exploiters and exploited that is not merely theoretical but physically scars the city. As a consequence, the worker is reduced in his social and communal life to behaving like the kind of being he has already been reduced to ontologically, i.e., as an animal. This is also the point of Marx's comments in "Estranged Labour": when labour becomes alienated, man instead finds himself realised in mere animal activities – sleeping, eating, and fornicating. Colonised by the capitalist grotesque, what was supposed to be man's species-activity, his work-life, becomes alienated when his bodily metabolism is sundered as he is cut off from his extra-somatic organs, his tool. Instead, the activities of his spare time that he shares with the animals becomes his whole existence, becomes his new metabolism and the worker, in turn, becomes an animal.

ANIMALS, CANNIBALS, AND CAPITAL

We now return to the quote given in the introduction where Marx decidedly links the monstrosity of cannibalism with the exploitative process of capitalist production, which, as we have already seen, is also a form of dehumanisation. **Noget mere...**

Second, and more importantly, the fact that the buying and selling of labour power, like that any other commodity, happens under the assumption of free and equal individuals, which production does not:

He [the possessor of labour power] and the owner of money meet in the market, and enter into relations with each other on a footing of equality as owners of commodities, with the sole difference that one is a buyer, the other a seller; both therefore are equal in the eyes of the law.⁸³

⁸³ Marx, *Capital*, 271.

The part of *Capital* most marked by descriptions of the wretchedness of the working class, is the chapter on the length of the working day.⁸⁴ In this very historical and descriptive chapter, Marx provides the reader with countless examples of the lengths capital will go to in order to extract the extra penny from the worker, especially with regard to overworking him. However, the disregard for the health and well-being of the workers extend to all aspects of their daily life. Every fibre of the worker's body is colonised by the capitalist grotesque. Marx's colourful descriptions of the squalor this results in leaves nothing much to imagination and strongly resembles Engels's ditto in *The Condition of the Working-Class* some 20 years earlier. In one memorable passage, Marx describes the adulterated bread eaten by the workers by saying that 'Englishmen, with their good command of the Bible, knew well enough that man... is destined to eat his bread in the sweat of his brow', but, he adds, 'they did not know that he had to eat daily in his bread a certain quantity of human perspiration mixed with the discharge of abscesses, cobwebs, dead cockroaches and putrid German yeast, not to mention alum, sand and other agreeable mineral ingredients'.⁸⁵ This total disregard for the health of the worker comes from the fact that 'experience generally shows to the capitalist ... a constant excess of population'⁸⁶, and Marx continues,

Capital, which has such 'good reasons' for denying the sufferings of the legions of workers surrounding it, allows its actual movement to be determined as much and as little by the sight of the coming degradation and final depopulation of the human race, as by the probable fall of the earth into the

⁸⁴ Though chapter 15 also provides many such examples.

⁸⁵ Marx, *Capital*, 359.

⁸⁶ Marx, *Capital*, 380.

sun... Capital therefore takes no account of the health and the length of life of the worker, unless society forces it to do so.⁸⁷

But, Marx says, this is not the fault of the individual capitalist, it does not depend on his individual will or whether he is good or bad. Rather, under free competition this behaviour is caused by the ‘immanent laws of capitalist production’, which ‘confront the individual capitalist as a coercive force external to him’. There is thus a clear connection between the degrading treatment of workers and the impersonal dominance of capital – it is in the ‘relentless logic’ of capitalism, as Engels says. Like in Engels’s book, which Marx had obviously read and references throughout *Capital*, this degradation takes place beneath the surface. As Gareth Stedman Jones argues, *Capital*, like *The Condition of the Working-Class*, can also be seen as relying on the juxtaposition of appearance with essence.⁸⁸ Just as Engels moves from the beautiful and seemingly civilised high streets of Manchester into the slums of the working class quarters in order to reveal the mystery (*Geheimnis*) of industrial England, so Marx, between parts 2 and 3 of *Capital*, moves from the equal and fair exchange process and into the unequal sphere of production; here, there is ‘No admittance except on business’, and the capitalist sure means business:

When we leave this sphere of simple circulation or the exchange of commodities... a certain change takes place, *or so it appears*, in the physiognomy of our dramatis personae. He who was previously the money-owner now strides out in front as a capitalist; the possessor of labour-power follows as his worker. The one smirks self-importantly and is intent on business; the other is timid and holds back, like someone who has brought his own hide to the market and now has nothing else to expect but – a tanning.⁸⁹

⁸⁷ Marx, *Capital*, 381.

⁸⁸ Stedman Jones, “Engels and the Industrial Revolution”, 206.

⁸⁹ Marx, *Capital*, 280. My emphasis.

Apart from the magnificent prose and the clear reference to the degradation of the worker into beast, Marx here also clearly distinguishes between essence and appearance in the transition from exchange to the production process. It only *appears* that there is a change in *dramatis personae* – in reality, this was the secret of exchange all along, just as the Irish quarter was the secret of Manchester’s high street. What we are about to be told is thus the true essence of everything we have learned until now. The apparently equal exchange of commodities hides an unequal process of production as its true content and precondition. From the formally equal act of transaction constituted by the exchange of money for labour power arises the unequal relation of dominance in production. The apparently free labourer becomes unfree as soon as the move is made from exchange to production; in Hess’s words, ‘under the appearance of the most total freedom, the most total servitude.’⁹⁰ This is the ‘descent’ of *Capital*, that from the apparent freedom in the sphere of exchange and into the true and degraded slavery of the sphere of production.

As the worker is dragged from the sphere of exchange into the sphere of production, he simultaneously drags his own hide to be skinned and tanned.⁹¹ He does this himself, because he is forced to do so – he only *appeared* free in the sphere of exchange, while in reality he was already acting out of necessity (‘Why the free worker confronts him in the sphere of circulation is a question which does not interest the owner of money’⁹²). He must do it in order to preserve his life, but instead, by throwing himself into capitalist production, he destroys it. Already in the Paris manuscripts, Marx tells us that ‘The worker becomes poorer the more wealth he produces, the more his production increases in power and extent’,⁹³ and further on ‘The more the worker *appropriates* the external world, sensuous nature, through his labour, the more he deprives himself of the

⁹⁰ Hess, “Über das Geldwesen”, 181.

⁹¹ Marx, *Capital*, 280.

⁹² Marx, *Capital*, 273.

⁹³ Marx, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, 323.

means of life'.⁹⁴ But now, in *Capital*, Marx shows that the life of the individual worker to capital is nothing; he can die for all it matters, there are plenty more where he came from. Capital, famously, is a vampire, and as a vampire it will suck the worker dry until nothing is left but the drained husk:

It must be acknowledged that our worker emerges from the process of production looking different from when he entered it. In the market, as owner of the commodity 'labour-power', he stood face to face with other owners of commodities... The contract by which he sold his labour-power to the capitalist proved in black and white... that he was free... But when the transaction was concluded, it was discovered that he was no 'free agent'... that in fact the vampire will not let go 'while there remains a single muscle, sinew or drop of blood to be exploited'.⁹⁵

Here we have the metaphors of the Marxist Gothic in full force. This destruction of the worker's life appears both concretely (he is worked to death) and as the ontological loss of humanity. The thing 'sucked dry' by the vampire of capital is precisely the worker's *life-activity*, labour, that which makes him a species-being. He therefore becomes an animal.

The worker, brought from the marketplace and into capitalist production like an animal brought to the abattoir, is not the only one slaughtered for his hide. Marx likens children to silk-worms, saying that 'This [shortening the working day] did not, however, prevent them... from spinning silk for 10 hours a day out of the blood of little children', and, he continues, now likening the children to cattle, 'The children were quite simply slaughtered for the sake of their delicate fingers, just as horned cattle are slaughtered in southern Russia for their hides and their fat'.⁹⁶ Children are not the only ones likened to cattle; also the worker proper is transformed by the division of labour in manufacture 'into a crippled monstrosity' as he is used only for one facet of his creative power, 'just as in the states of La Plata they butcher a whole beast for the sake of his hide

⁹⁴ Marx, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, 325.

⁹⁵ Marx, *Capital*, 415-416. Marx is quoting Engels, "Die englische Zehnstundenbill".

⁹⁶ Marx, *Capital*, 406.

or his tallow'.⁹⁷ Marx quotes Postlethwayt to say that English workers are 'hard-driven animals'⁹⁸ and a Dr Simon to say that the living quarters of the workers 'In its highest degrees... almost necessarily involves such negation of all delicacy, such unclean confusion of bodies and bodily functions, such exposure of animal and sexual nakedness, *as is rather bestial than human*'.⁹⁹ The agricultural worker Marx names explicitly as an animal and says that 'of all the animals kept by the farmer, the labourer... was thenceforth the most oppressed, the worst nourished, the most brutally treated'.¹⁰⁰

Applying the Marx of the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, we saw above that this animalisation happens, because the worker hands off his own humanity in the externalisation of his life-activity as a commodity. In an economy dominated by the market and the capitalist mode of production, the product of the worker becomes a commodity through the value form, which, as Marx said already in the *Excerpts from James Mill* quoted above, is the inevitable result of production on the premise of private property. For a commodity to have value, Marx' argues in *Capital*, it is necessary to reduce the concrete labour the worker preforms in the production process to abstract labour, or, as Marx describes it 'There is nothing left of them in each case but the same phantom-like objectivity; they are merely congealed quantities of homogeneous human labour, i.e. of human labour-power expended without regard to the form of its expenditure.'¹⁰¹ The commodities can only exist as commodities if they are dissected from the living human being who has produced them. Thus, the labouring bodies that are destroyed physically both in the production process and in the lives imposed on them by capital have already been erased as even human in the very form of the things they produce, the commodity and the value form.

⁹⁷ Marx, *Capital*, 481.

⁹⁸ Marx, *Capital*, 386.

⁹⁹ Marx, *Capital*, 812-813.

¹⁰⁰ Marx, *Capital*, 830.

¹⁰¹ Marx, *Capital*, 128.

How does this translate to a form of cannibalism? In two ways. Firstly, the capitalist—as Marx says in the quote directly invoking cannibals—cannibalises on the worker both metaphorically and physically in the production process. He eats up the worker as a human and leaves only the worker as animal, who is then also destroyed bodily. Both the worker and his humanity are thus devoured by the capitalist. Secondly, the worker is forced to engage in acts of *self-cannibalisation*. In externalising himself in the products and of his labour, the worker deposits his essence in the commodities. Then, in consuming the commodities, *the worker consumes himself*. However, this might be where the metaphor breaks down. If the worker externalises his humanity in the product and becomes an animal who then consumes the commodity, is he not just an animal eating something human? That would not be cannibalism *per se*, but rather a ‘beast of prey’ in Hess’s words. On the other hand, it is *his* humanity that is externalised in the product. Even if the worker has been reduced to an animal, it is still his own lost humanity that he is devouring. In this sense, we are dealing with a more fundamental kind of cannibalism. It is not that the worker is devouring something that is *like* himself (cannibalism understood as eating a member of your own species)¹⁰², but that he is *actually devouring himself*. The worker becomes, after all, not just an animal, but a self-devouring animal – a cannibal.

CONCLUSION

In this paper, I have demonstrated how there is an affinity not only between the rhetorical strategies but also between claims as to the ontological status of man made by Hess, Engels, and Marx. Further, through the theoretical framework of the Marxist Gothic and the concept of the ‘capitalist grotesque’, I have traced these themes of an ontological animalisation and cannibalism to *Capital*, Marx’s mature *magnum opus*. Paraphrasing Marx—who in “On the Jewish Question” details how the Christian world has ‘dissolved back

¹⁰² Though we could point to the fact that the labour embodied in the commodity is precisely the worker’s *species*-activity, and as such it in fact is not just a *member* of his own species that he is devouring, but *his species as such*.

into Judaism', i.e. the principle of money, and hence how we have all in a sense 'become Jews'—we could say that through the reduction of each and every one of us to the level of bestial animality by the capitalist grotesque, we have all become cannibals. Or, once again quoting Hess, 'Money is the congealed blood and sweat of those wretched ones who... live *cannibalistically* off their *own flesh*. And we are all these wretched scum!¹⁰³

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¹⁰³ Hess, "Über das Geldwesen", 166.

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