

In the *first reading*, Marx reads his predecessor's discourse (Smith's for instance) through his own discourse. The result of this reading through a grid, in which Smith's text is seen through Marx's, projected onto it as a measure of it, is merely a summary of concordances and discordances, the balance of what Smith discovered and what he missed, of his merits and failings, of his presences and absences.

Marx very often explains these omissions by Smith's distractions, or in the strict sense, his *absences* : he did not *see* what was, however, staring him in the face, he did not grasp what was, however, in his hands. '*Oversights*' (*bévues*) all more or less related to the '*enormous oversight*', the confusion of constant capital and variable capital which dominates all classical economics with its 'incredible' aberration. This reduces every weakness in the system of concepts that makes up knowledge to a psychological weakness of 'vision'.

The original question as the classical economic text formulated it was: what is the value of labour? Reduced to the content that can be rigorously defended in the text where classical economics produced it, the answer should be written as follows: '*The value of labour () is equal to the value of the subsistence goods*

necessary for the maintenance and reproduction of labour ()'. There are two blanks, two absences in the text of the answer. Thus Marx makes us *see* blanks in the text of classical economics' answer; but that is merely to make us see what the classical text itself says while not saying it, does not say while saying it. Hence it is not Marx who says what the classical text does not say, it is not Marx who intervenes to impose from without on the classical text a discourse which reveals its silence -- *it is the classical text itself which tells us that it is silent* : its silence is *its own words*. In fact, if we suppress our 'slots', our blanks, we still have the same discourse, the same apparently 'full' sentence: '*the value of labour is equal to the value of the subsistence goods necessary for the maintenance and reproduction of labour*.' But this sentence means nothing: what is the maintenance of 'labour'?

This omission, located *by the answer* in the answer itself immediately next to the word '*labour*', is no more than the presence in the answer of the absence *of its question*, the omission of its question. For the question posed does not seem to contain anything by which to *locate* in it this omission. '*What is the value of labour?*' is a sentence identical to a concept, it is a concept-sentence which is content to *utter* the concept 'value of labour', an utterance-sentence which does not designate any omission in itself, unless it is itself as a whole, as a concept, a question *manqué*, a concept *manqué*, the omission (*manque*) of a concept.

They are invisible because they are rejected in principle,

repressed from the field of the visible: and that is why their fleeting presence in the field when it does occur (in very peculiar and symptomatic circumstances) *goes unperceived*, and becomes literally an undivulgeable absence -- since the whole function of the field is not to see them, to forbid any sighting of them. Here again, the invisible is no more a function of *a subject's sighting* than is the visible: the invisible is the theoretical problematic's non-vision of its non-objects, the invisible is the darkness, the blinded eye of the theoretical problematic's selfreflection when it scans its non-objects, its non-problems without seeing them, *in order not to look at them*

Such is Marx's second reading: a reading which might well be called '*symptomatic*' (*symptomale*), insofar as it divulges the undivulged event in the text it reads, and in the same movement relates it to *a different text*, present as a necessary absence in the first. Like his first reading, Marx's second reading presupposes the existence of *two texts*, and the measurement of the first against the second. But what distinguishes this new reading from the old one is the fact that in the new one the *second text* is articulated with the lapses in the first text.

Marx declared that he had '*inverted*' the Hegelian dialectic. This answer by 'inversion' was Marx's answer to the following (absent) question: what is the specific difference distinguishing the Marxist dialectic from the Hegelian dialectic? But this answer by 'inversion', like classical political economy's answer by 'the value of labour', is noteworthy in that it contains inside it an internal lack:

an interrogation of the inversion metaphor shows that it cannot itself think itself, and hence that it both points to a real but absent problem, a real but absent question outside itself, and to the conceptual emptiness or ambiguity corresponding to this absence, the *absence of a concept behind a word*. Treating this absence of the concept beneath the presence of a word as a symptom put me on to the track of the formulation of the question implied and defined by its absence.