

9. Gender as Forms of Value*

Introduction

Compared with the total field of human activity in our society, the area that can in any sense be regarded as determined by the biological sex difference is quite small. Nevertheless, through most activities there exists a social differentiation of the sexes, a gender division. Why do we treat and experience people as genders? Why is gender the first qualification we make, in our assessment of others? Why does gender, if it is only the social consequence of a natural differentiation, appear as the crucial question in the development of the personality?

In daily interaction, gender appears as use value, not as economic value. It appears as a human property that is tied to sex, whether transferred by socialization or by biological programming. Most theories of gender share the view of gender as use value. Gender is seen as a quality, a 'something' which, however, immediately acquires a double shape; female and male. We act as if gender were a use value of people, a basic trait in the same sense as biological sex and age.

The social power of this apparent use value poses some intricate questions for the analysis of capitalism. The capitalist mode of production is five centuries old. During this period, all human relations have changed in a manner quite inconceivable to any earlier epoch. Wage-labour dominates all other forms of labour, and monetary rationality has transformed all traditional depen-

dencies. Capitalism has developed into global imperialism in which two superpowers dictate the future of the world. Traditional dependencies and modes of labour are either wiped out or restructured so as to serve the supreme force of capitalism, the struggle for profit.

Precapitalist remnants or traditions cannot explain a family and gender relationship which emerged with capitalism. It cannot explain why patriarchy, the surplus labour of women, has re-emerged again and again in new forms. Modern patriarchy must be a product of capitalism, whatever the original influence of precapitalist patriarchal relations.

But this conclusion seems to raise an insoluble problem. The gender relations, to which patriarchy obviously is closely connected, appear as a pattern of equal reciprocity. Male and female genders appear as use value characteristics, more or less directly based on sex. Now, how does it happen that these *use values* retain such an amazing social power in a society based on production of *value*?

There are two possible types of answer, of which the first is the conventional one. Either, the gender system exists more or less independently of capitalist economy; or it is indeed a value system, though expressed in use values. In the present article, the latter viewpoint is outlined, and Marx's study of the value forms is used as a point of departure (Marx 1970, 1975; also Hegel 1969).

Marx regarded his value form analysis as a disclosure of the world of labour through the world of commodities. Solving the riddle of use and exchange value in what he called 'the simple form' of value, he wrote to Engels that he had discovered the very core of capital; 'the whole secret of the monetary form, and therefore *in nuce*' (in germ-form) 'of all the bourgeois forms of the labour product' (Marx 1975, p. 10).

The reader is in for a discussion of gender as an exchange phenomenon. However, marxist value analysis differs from most social exchange theories on three main scores. It discards the subjective concept of value based on utility in favour of an objective concept based on labour. Secondly, it claims that value relations express but simultaneously distort the true social character of

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labour. Thirdly, labour, not exchange, is regarded as the basic element. But according to the second premise, the labour processes can be revealed only when the value mask of labour is discarded – or in Marx's words, when the value hieroglyphs are deciphered (Marx 1970, p. 79).

The gender system

I regard gender not as something we are, but as something we do. We need analytical precision if we are to understand how we are doing it. Therefore, I isolate the interaction in which the sex difference is a relevant social property, referring to it as a separate gender system.

Feminists may disagree with this view. Women are oppressed throughout society, not only in the reproductive sphere or through the gender system. Though formally gender-neutral these other contexts are patriarchal orders just as much as the pronounced gender frame.

It is true that the formulation of sex as a social property and of gender roles and identities differs from the basic forces of capitalist patriarchy. Underneath the circulation aspect of social interaction of which gender is a part, entirely different processes occur. But the main part of women's labour is directed through the family arrangements of the gender system or in close connection to it. Gender expresses, and also regulates, an important part of the sexual division of labour.

The gender system refers to the exchange aspect of social interaction where people's acts and experiences vary directly with their physical sex. Institutionalized gender interaction, as in the institutions of marriage, divorce and the marriage market, form the core of the system. Beyond that, there is a zone of explicit, but not really institutionalized, gender rituals and patterns, which in turn borders on a huge field of interaction, which is gender-relevant but usually not explicitly so. The extramarital love affair and the implicit gender relations of the workplace are examples.

gender not only circulation mode

Woman and man

The most simple and common gender relation throughout these three fields of interaction is the direct relation between woman and man. However, the gender system does not include all and any relation between the two sexes. The gender relation is the one in which the persons related are related 'as sexes' – not, for example, as adults, musicians, car-drivers.

Now, as is well known, who is defined as really adult, who gets to be a musician, who drives cars – all these relate to the relationship between men and women. However, they are by no means identical with the gender relation, as any person who treated the car as sex would soon discover. The fact that the direct gender relations co-exist with other relations and are surrounded with secondary or symbolic connections (the car as a sex symbol) should not obscure the analytical distinction.

In our society, people are treated and experienced 'as sexes', and the ease by which this is done contributes to the illusion that people as sexes is nature's eternal order. What is nature's order is people's sex, the biological sex difference. The subtle but fundamental change from people's sex to people as sex is the focus of our enquiry.

Gender roles and identities seem to be individual and even deeply personal phenomena. Gender appears as a form of reciprocity rather than a form of value. In marriage, for example, gender assumptions form the core of the obligations and rights of the partners and what they regard as a just relationship (Haavind, ch. 8). The interaction is characterized by long-term reciprocity rather than calculated exchange and by individual considerations rather than the anonymity associated with value.

Obviously, gender is a distinction connected with the physical sex of the person, and as such it is not an individual matter. It divides people into two anonymous categories. But it does not seem anonymous – on the contrary, the anonymity and non-individuality of gender attraction appears as the gate to individual fulfilment within a pair relationship.

How can this height of individuality, the man–woman relation,

sex by itself carries no abstraction

be regarded as a *value* relation? Does not the enormous personal element preclude any definition of 'exchange', 'commodity' and 'value' here? Why should human labour manifest itself in the thing-like qualities of persons as sex, if it is continuously manifested directly and concretely in the real relation of man and woman?

What may be termed the cash concept of value underlies these objections. Value relations, in this view, are the extreme opposite of reciprocity, and abstract labour means absolutely and universally abstracted labour, with no limits or determinants. The monetary distortion of the value form theory will be discussed later on. Here, it should be noted that Marx's 'simple form of value' is indeed a form of individual reciprocity, not of market exchange – and if the gender dyad contained nothing *more*, further value analysis would end then and there.

Still, the gender dyad also contains a negation of the individual element. This is brought to the fore in the marriage market rather than in marriage itself; the two institutions may be regarded as *phases* in the gender system which illuminate two different aspects of one and the same gender relation. The first is characterized by dyadic interaction, the other by extended exchange – and most, possibly all, gender interaction belongs to one or the other phase. *The marriage market* consists of exchanges, not of reciprocity, and the exchange concerns rights to future personal services. ^{in the sense of a commodity} The commodities are evaluated through a system of shadow prices, in terms of gender attractivity. The non-personal nature of the exchange and the hard edge of calculation is pretty obvious to everyone involved. Gender emerges as a commodity-form. Generally, we will find the commodity-aspect more pronounced the more the extended nature of gender transactions is revealed.

It may be argued that the marriage market represents a special and limited case; after all, the majority of gender relationships exist within marriage or similar long-term and non-calculative arrangements. It is true that the gender institutions contain many types of interaction – both the exchange/reciprocity-relations, and activities and labour directed through these relations. And as in any system of control, there is also an element of opposition and

solidarity which is more or less present within the pair relationship.

But if we isolate the distributive or circulative element, this relationship does emerge as a particular exchange-pattern tied to a certain form of abstraction of people and their activities.

If a group of people is seen as representatives of two sexes, we abstract from all personal difference or relatedness. The people were not anonymous, now they are, in our abstraction. And if this abstraction is a real, practical base for further contact, it is no longer an abstraction in theory, it is also a *real abstraction*.

Its reality is disclosed by the development of the gender system itself. Substitution is the practical test of the real abstraction. In a gender system where marriage is a one-and-only affair, lasting to death, never to be repeated, the gender abstraction fades away in favour of the individual aspect. But if the system is no longer based on final choices, but rather on the constant possibility of dissolutions and new choices, the substitutability of the individual according to sex becomes a practical reality.

The treatment of people as sexes is a necessary part of the entrance to marriage, indeed to all gender institutions. And if we regard the matter more closely, it becomes obvious that *any* designation of male and female contains this anonymization; as far as the concrete activities of individuals are treated as male or female, they are no longer only concrete but also *abstract labour*. When activities, or their results materialized as human beings, appear as male and female, they have already passed through a peculiar social filter. They are no longer concrete, individually variable labours in the marxist sense.

It may be objected, firstly, that since some activities are dictated by the sex difference, there will always be a social (gender) abstraction. True, but this concerns a small part of gender-divided labour (for example, according to Norwegian time budget data 1980, at most 6 % of women's domestic labour could possibly be said to be biologically conditioned), and this timeless gender abstraction is of limited relevance as regards the reality of men and women in our society.

Secondly, it may be objected that activities are abstracted in

other manners too, such as mental/physical. So are people: young/old. This is also true, but in so far as we are not just talking about *social class* by way of proxies, none of these abstractions are even remotely similar to the gender abstraction in its direct relevance to a major labour process in society. We conclude, therefore, that gender refers to abstract labour, an abstraction that is not incidental or only ideal. The type of abstraction differs from that brought about by monetary exchange; it is no less real.

The gender frame

On the day-to-day level of interaction, the gender forms of value appear as what Goffman (1974) termed *frames*. A frame is a particular social context in which events occur. Simultaneously, it is a particular mode of enactment which defines and evaluates the acts or events occurring within it. The frame is a category of interactionist and phenomenological analysis.

The value form is a property of the economic system; the frame is a property of the phenomena and expressions of this system in the real world. The conspicuousness of gender frames depends on the separation of the gender value-forms from other properties of the interaction. When these forms become visible and part of the consciousness of individuals, they appear as gender frames. The frame is a context in which acts are no longer only genderized but also, explicitly, gender-relevant. Through the gender frames, an enormous variety of subjective enactments of gender occur, and it is the typical properties of all these enactments which are labelled femininity or masculinity in the social sciences literature.

The gender frames exist in particular social contexts – although the sex of the persons involved, and other use value characteristics, do not vary. In one context, the use values signify gender, in others, they do not. People's sex is constant, people 'as sex' is not. However, this analytical distinction is complicated by the operation of the gender system itself.

We shall later consider how the value relations of the gender system select particular use values as their form of appearance, thereby delimiting the area of what is 'sexual' and what is not. But

as soon as the selection is a continuous process on a societal scale, these use values seem to be connected to gender by themselves. Here, the gender system parallels the monetary system, where the material of money, like gold, appears as money-value regardless of the social context. The theoretical identification of sex and money so popular in post-freudian western culture, is a case in point.

This may be restated in the more simple terms of the frame analysis. All concrete acts have a certain probability of activating the gender frame. The probability is determined by the context of the acts – the same act of kissing means one thing between lovers, but something quite different between Politbureau officials. But the probability is also influenced by the significance of the acts for the frame structure itself. For example, acts that involve the sexual organs tend to activate the gender frame regardless of context – and when this 'misframing' is not intended, as in medical situations, there are usually strong markers in the environment to prevent it. Both in the gender and in the monetary system of exchange, the exchange value seems to stick to the things themselves. This distortion contributes to an ideology in which gender is simply determined by sex.

Gender is an ascribed social characteristic. Femininity and masculinity are also, however, a matter of achievement. The gender system is continually reproduced by individual choices, although its basic terms cannot be changed individually. Individuals can to some extent create or dissolve the gender frame according to their interests, although these options are not equally distributed between the two genders. Reframing also occurs through collective action – as when the women's movement succeeds in the formal degenderization of the labour market, and even introduces counter-measures specifically aimed at the system, like obligatory quotas of women in wage-work and education. The extension of the gender system and its standards of exploitation is changed through continuous struggle – and within a given frame, each individual may achieve more or less successful terms of trade.

Four meanings of gender

The gender frames entail several and quite different meanings of gender. These categories are basic frame elements, always present in the standard gender dyad, but with huge and often abrupt variations of relative prominence.

'Gender' may refer to the *individual*; a first meaning which is so obvious that it easily slips away. Here, gender means gender *identity*, often conceived as a unique configuration of male and female tendencies within the individual. It is the individual, rather than gender, which is the general category; gender here means individual use value.

Secondly, 'gender' refers to a common property of all participants within the frame, as a general trait – *gender as such*. Thirdly, 'gender' may signify one of two genders; gender here means being male or female. This is the dual meaning of gender, or *gender as duality*. Here, everything on the female side has a male counterpart and vice versa. Fourthly, there is a less open but still basic sense in which gender refers to women only; *gender as female*. In this sense, in the last century, women were termed 'the sex'.

If the analysis below is correct, there is no 'gender as male' except on the dual level where all qualities of maleness are opposed by qualities of femaleness (if 'strong' means male, 'weak' means female), while the opposite is not true. When male does not refer to one side of a duality, it refers to general human properties. This is best illustrated by the shift in the term 'man', which outside the dual level refers to 'human', regardless of male or female physical sex. We shall later consider how these four notions of gender – as individual, as female, as dual, and as universal – correspond to three basic gender value forms and their combination.

Gender as commodity-form

Gender interaction involves rights to the dissolution of privacy, rights to body contact and sexuality, rights to personal care and support, and other rights to objects and services. It involves most

kinds of labour as far as these labours can be transacted within a peculiar social form, as a private obligation between woman and man.

It is well known that the *content* of the rights differs widely, so that, for example, the woman's rights in practice mean labour, while the man's mean appropriation. These distinctions belong in a labour/valorization analysis of gender outside our present focus of exchange/realization.

Most male and female things are given, not exchanged, in a reciprocal gift system within marriage. Sometimes, they are 'forsaken' in a guilt-system of negative exchange. They are manifested as true commodities, members of extended exchange, mainly in the form of persons circulating between marriages.

The commodities of the modern gender system are revealed most powerfully on its borders, where it extends into the monetary world, as in the case of prostitution and pornography. Those who find the idea of gender as *commodity* particularly unpalatable, should note Marx's repeated insistence that the commodity form, within capitalism, is the *universal form* of the labour product; and moreover his stress of the condition of bourgeois *privacy*, so amply present in the gender system. He writes:

The product of private labour has, therefore, only social form in so far as it has value form and thereby the form of exchangeability with other products of labour. (Marx 1975, p. 56)

A separate and particular 'gender commodity' does not exist. Gender is a commodity-form, not a category of objects. However, the gender system may be said to display a *typical* object; the female as 'sex object'. But the form includes a huge field of objects and acts which are in the process of becoming objectified. Like the commodity labour power in the labour market, the gender commodity mostly appears as an inseparable aspect of the living person. Unlike labour power as a monetary commodity, the labour capacities of the gender system are not clearly delimited and formalized in monetary terms. As we have seen, the limits of the

system itself are also more diffuse than is the case with the monetary system.

For the present purpose of circulation analysis, we will define the commodities of the gender exchange as the totality of objectified labour, including human labour power, which change owners in terms of maleness and femaleness. These objects or capacities are gender commodities whenever they are exchanged by people acting 'as sexes' – within more or less pronounced gender frames.

As in every market, the exchange concerns social rights, not physics. As a participant in the marriage market, I offer certain rights to myself as a male in exchange for certain rights to you as a female. Or if married, I do this as male in exchange for your doing that as female. Put shortly, it is an exchange of rights to 'male' for rights to 'female', which we will express as

male = female

The gender exchange does not involve a change of the genders of the participants, on the contrary, each person's gender is fortified by exchanging male for female or vice versa. This paradoxical result is due to the elementary identity within the gender relation, which will be discussed below. Each object of the exchange passes from the male to the female zone or vice versa. But in the moment of exchange, it expresses the basic identity of the gender system, a system of distribution of abstract and utterly genderless human labour. In this moment, the object is no longer male or female, but something common to both – 'attractivity' or 'sexuality' as such.

The standard gender dyad

The exchange of male for female commodities, regardless of the specific type of frame or object, may be termed the standard dyad of the gender exchange. It is standard in the sense of being the common frame of different kinds of exchange and because it already includes two standard commodities: male and female. On the surface, all phenomena – both acts and their objectified results, both objects that are exchangeable outside this relation and objects restricted to it – may become gender commodities.

Money, for example, counts not as a universal equivalent but rather as a gender use value within the dyad. All things are included as far as they express gender attractivity.

The standard gender dyad consists of three types of relations, though usually only the first is manifest. Besides the manifest relation of attraction between male and female, it includes a potential relation of attraction between each of these and other candidates of the opposite gender, as well as a relation of repulsion between each and others of the same gender.

Gender and patriarchy

The gender system is a historical product, and as a system of exchange it is based on the modern, exchange-permeated form of society. The gender system is the first form of patriarchy where the oppression of women and the exploitation of their labour is brought about, mainly, by free and equal exchange between private individuals. Some principal historical changes are outlined below:

	Mode of interaction	Man	Woman
<i>Feudalism</i>	Personal dependency and subordination	Dominant position	Dependent position
<i>Capitalism</i>	Subordination through gender exchange	Relative position	Equivalent position

The scheme is a simplification, since the feudal relations of dependency did include elements of gender, while on the other hand subordination is also brought about by personal means in our society. Nevertheless, it gives an idea of the broad historical change in which open dominance and submission are transformed into two positions, relative and equivalent, within an equal exchange.

Both the feudal and the capitalist stages of patriarchy regulate

women's labour and distribute its surplus, securing thereby also the control over the majority of the men. However, precapitalist patriarchy did not belong to a society ruled by the production of surplus value, or co-exist with a highly developed system of monetary relations expressing this rule. Its content, motive, functions and ways of expression differ from those of capitalist patriarchy.

As capital emerged, it made use of any relation of traditional dependency which contributed to its profit, usually with a more than traditional brutality. These relations were transformed, the rest destroyed. And it can be argued that capitalism itself creates two economic classes within its reproduction process, classes that will develop into genders, given certain historical premises.

As society developed from use value production to a system where use values count only as links in the value-production process, and as the concrete individual differences of labour were negated by the value form of the product, the division of abstract, value-creating labour of persons of the two sexes *appeared*, on the contrary, as a concrete and use-value-based division of genders. As women's labour was thoroughly integrated into the household of capital, creating its vital commodity labour power, it appeared for the first time in history to be something outside the social economy.

The reproduction of capital requires and includes reproduction of capital in the form of wage labourers. Among many marxists, this point of Marx's is overlooked in favour of theories where the domestic sphere is declared as a safe area somewhere outside capital; it is a remnant of precapitalist society; a sphere determined by some remarkably persuasive ideological force; at most an area of small-scale individual production, and so on.

Marx wrote:

From a social point of view, therefore, the working class, even when not directly engaged in the labour process, is just as much an appendage to capital as is the ordinary instruments of labour. Even its individual consumption is, within certain limits, a mere factor in the process of production. (Marx 1970, p. 538).

The favourite male idea of 'individual consumption' is out of step with practical domestic realities and a fetish produced by the elementary cell of the gender dyad. Nevertheless, Marx here regards what we would call the reproductive labour process as a part of capital. By dismissing this truth, modern marxists drop what Marx called his 'social point of view' in favour of the facade of capitalist patriarchy.

Capitalism was created through the alienation of the means of production from the immediate producers. But the advance of capitalism also meant the labourers' right to their own reproduction; the transformation from slave and serf to wage labourer. In capitalism, reproductive labour is per definition owned by the person receiving its useful effects, since each person's labour power belongs to that person. Obviously, this does not preclude exploitation within the sphere of reproduction, but it means that the sphere cannot in its entirety be transformed into wage work. The existence of a non-waged reproductive sphere is part of the core of the bourgeois notions of individual freedom and property.

While the amounts of concrete household labour and free time within the sphere of reproduction varies, capitalist societies in all shades seem unable to approach more than a modest redistribution of this labour between the sexes. More free time in this sphere appears, also, as more freedom of men's oppression of women, which in turn recreates oppression in the wage labour sphere.

But a necessary distinction of waged and non-waged spheres of labour, and the impossibility of removing the latter, may not imply the division of two parts of the total labour power. We have seen that the sale of a part of labour power presupposes an unsold part. But could not the same labour power both be sold and reproduce itself? Marx's answer is in the negative:

Before its sale, the labour power therefore exists separate from the means of production, from the material conditions of its use. In this separate condition it can be used neither directly for production of use values for its owner, nor for commodities from whose sale the worker could live (Marx 1972 p. 31).

In this view, the split between the two spheres of labour is a logical consequence of the wage-labour relationship itself. This does not imply that the forms of capitalist exploitation and control are similar in the two spheres. The labour of the reproductive sphere is regulated only indirectly through the labour market and more directly through the gender system. In the family, it is the social terms of the underlying gender relationship which determine the concrete labours and activities – while monetary values appear as an external matter. Money appears as a quantitative limitation; gender as the inner quality.

The division of wage and domestic labour was only fully brought about quite recently in the development of capitalism, in the second phase of industrialization characterized by production of relative surplus value. Here, the extent of the wage labour sphere is regulated by the capitalist state – in England from the 1840s. The principles of relative surplus production, in Marx's view, include getting more out of few wage workers instead of less out of many. Empirically, the regulation of wage labour led to a further specialization of both parts of total labour, notably through socialization and education and a correspondent discipline and more efficient use of labour power both in the wage and non-wage labour spheres.

The gender system regulates part of the labour of both sexes, and it has an indirect effect on the totality of labour. It is the totality and not only the non-wage sphere of value production which is affected. However, the total value counts as capital value, realized as *profit*, in the wage-labour sphere only.

The value analysis

The commodity, in Marx's view, is a historical social relationship – but a relationship expressed *through a thing* and *as the power of the thing*. The commodity, therefore, is a twofold thing, it is a social relationship as well as a natural phenomenon, a use value.

The value analysis concerns the genesis of the commodity, which is determined by the development of exchange. Through

the exchange stages or *forms of value* the inner doubleness of the commodity becomes external and visible. This is most easily grasped in the monetary form of value, where there is an obvious contrast between the *price* of a commodity, on the one hand, and its use value, on the other.

The commodity is neither eternal nor universal. Commodity-exchange is a historical mode of dependency, with various subsets (exchange or value forms). The exchange dependency differs from what Marx called 'personal', 'open', or 'precapitalist' modes of dependency.

The monetary concept of value

Marx's value-form analysis is often interpreted as a technical underpinning in his theory of money. As is well known, Marx described it as the solution of the riddle of money. And surely, the dominant value form in our society is the monetary system. But this interpretation neglects the qualities or forms of value which are a central theme in the analysis, in favour of the derived quantitative determinations like the definition of value magnitude by labour time. It tends to neglect the core questions of alienation and reification.

The analysis is also often interpreted as a historical outline of stages in the development of exchange. In this view, Marx's first form (the simple or elementary form of value) concerns the first beginnings of exchange, like primitive barter; the next form concerns a later phase, and so on.

I agree with the current critique of this view. Though it does have a historical aspect, the value analysis is primarily a journey down to the most simple, abstract relations of *capital*. Capital is not one value form, i.e. money. It is 'self-expanding value' in several forms. Capitalist relations contain the more simple forms of value, and capital can be regarded as a *hierarchy* of value forms. Each of the more complex forms of value contains the simpler forms. The simple or elementary form is contained in all transactions of capitalism, although it is now an element in a more complex form and therefore redefined by the latter.

Both the technicist and the evolutionary interpretation of the value analysis contain a monetary view of political economy in which 'economy' tends to shrink into 'monetary relations'. The monetary view, in marxist or other versions, is also a patriarchal view which neglects the reality of non-monetary capitalist relations and spheres of labour. Obviously, if value is seen as a kind of ultimate hard cash lurking underneath the real monetary relations, all talk of gender as value phenomena becomes meaningless.

Five characteristics of the value form

1. The value form defines the mode of *social existence* of the labour contained in the objects of exchange – and thereby, also, the social frame of the labour itself. Marx illustrates this point in simple terms in the value analysis by the example of a wood/iron form of elementary exchange. If wood is perpetually and exclusively exchanged for iron, the social character of the labour contained in the wood will appear as 'iron-like'. The iron will appear as 'wood-like'. The labours behind the two commodities count as social through this exchange, in which the labours are expressed as the natural properties of the opposite commodity. And if this dyadic mode of exchange is the dominant and institutionalized pattern which integrates the two labours, the labours and therefore the labourers will gain their recognized social existence through it. But this happens through an exchange where the (social) value of the first commodity is expressed as the (natural) use value of the other commodity. Only through this strange channel does the labour contained in the commodity and the labourer behind it count as a part of a market-based society.

A form of value is an exchange pattern. Each form of value is a form of exchangeability, a system of possibilities and probabilities of conversion of value. In the wood/iron or any other example of the elementary form, there is only one possible conversion, as the commodity can be exchanged for one other only. In the monetary form, the possible conversions appear as infinite.

2. Each form of value corresponds to a certain mode of reifica-

tion. The 'system' determines the social character of the 'units' within it. As the system changes, i.e. by extension of exchangeability, so does the character of the units. For example, as the market developed, serf-labour within a narrow exchange network became wage-labour, and the serf's personal dependence became the wage dependence of the wage labourer.

3. By being exchanged for each other, two commodities count as equal. And this equality is not purely theoretical, it is an equality in real practical life. When two things are defined as equal, we abstract from their difference. In the exchange relation, this definition is a *real abstraction*, as opposed to abstractions which are ideal – in our minds – only.

4. When something is reflected in a mirror, an identical image is produced. The exchange relation has some similarity to the mirror relation, as one commodity reflects the other. But there the similarity ends. It is the *social*, not the visible or natural character of one commodity which is 'reflected' in the natural properties of the other. The image is distorted, thereby hiding the social relationship. In Marx's words, the commodity owners 'relate their different labours as human labours, as they relate their products as values. The personal relation is hidden by the thing-like form' (Marx 1975, p. 65).

5. *The concept of reification* is in no way identical with the concept of objectification, as is sometimes assumed. All human activity has some objective results. Whether or not these results are reified, on the other hand depends on particular social circumstances.

Reification is a social concept, which is not related to the type of objectification or its degree of fixedness. Human labour power is not objectified in the ordinary sense. It exists as part of a living human being. Nevertheless it is reified when labour power becomes a commodity, i.e. situated in a particular social context.

One may say that reification means society appearing as nature, or human activity appearing as the natural properties of things. But what is meant by 'natural' and 'social' here? We assume that gender is an image of social relations manifested through the natural properties distinguishing the sexes. Now, 'social' and

'natural' both acquire a double meaning. Social conditions, themselves gender-less, are expressed. But through this expression, new social relations, a new sense of the 'social', are established.

And what's more, through this process, the original conditions are hidden from view. 'Nature', too, takes on a new meaning. Within the value relations, it is 'no mere use value'; on the contrary, it expresses a social relation. Still, it is a use value, a natural property, and this is how it appears. These two transformations, the double shift of the value relation, occur also in the case of gender. On the one hand, social relations appear as the natural differentiation of the sexes. On the other, the sexes are transformed into genders, which obliterates the original relations.

The elementary, simple or accidental form of value

The elementary form of value is the most simple element of exchange – the relation between one commodity and another. The inner contradiction of use value and value, natural and social, which the commodity contains, is in Marx's words posited through an external contradiction, in the relation between two commodities.

In the elementary exchange relation

$$\text{commodity A} = \text{commodity B}$$

the first commodity is expressed in terms of the second. By placing B as being exchangeable for it, and therefore as identical to it in practice, A expresses its worth in terms of B.

The relative and equivalent positions

In the relation above, B counts only as use value, A as value. The value of A is expressed as the use value of B, which thereby becomes the value form of A. A is placed in the *relative*, B in the *equivalent* position. These two positions exist within all the forms of value. Within the elementary form, the two positions are symmetrical and vary according to circumstance. If the value of B

is expressed in A, as in $B = A$, the places have shifted, so that B is now the relative while A is the equivalent commodity. However, one and the same commodity cannot simultaneously occupy both positions.

The relative position is the initial and decisive one of the two. Marx wrote on the form $A = B$, using linen = coat as example:

The linen relates itself to the coat in the latter's capacity of being the sensuously existing material of human labour in abstracto and thus a pre-given body of value. It is this only because and in so far as the linen relates to it in this special manner. Its existence as equivalent is in a manner of speaking only a reflected determination of the linen. However, it appears to be the opposite (Marx, 1975 p. 50).

It appears as if the special qualities of the equivalent define the relative commodity, while in reality the equivalent exists only through the action of the relative commodity.

As A relates to B as value, it separates from itself as use value. The use value of A is no longer directly the material expression of the labour contained in A – on the contrary, the use value of A is of interest to its owner, and gains its social existence, only by being the value-expression of the opposite commodity B.

In $A = B$, the equivalent B serves A as a means of value-expression. Marx: 'Only within this relation is it equivalent. But it relates passively only. It takes no initiatives. It exists in a relation because something else relates to it' (Marx 1975 p. 50).

But it appears as if the equivalent form of the commodity derives from its material nature. Marx wrote:

'The final product of the relation of the linen to the coat, its equivalent form, its determination as exchangeable use value, seems therefore to belong to it also outside the relation to the linen, quite like its capacity of, for example, being warm (ibid).'

Through the equivalent, the private labour producing the relative commodity appears as social, as it is now directly exchangeable for

another private labour. However, private labours thus appear as social only through the reification process in which the equivalent, falsely, appears in the key role.

The simple form of value as 'accidental form'

Marx also called the simple form $A = B$ the 'accidental form', as well as the most 'elementary' aspect contained within the others. By itself, it occurs only by accident. And by itself, the simple form is not, strictly speaking, a form of value. The only abstraction of labour which takes place here is between two commodities – or rather, between two objects which again are not, strictly, commodities. They are not substitutable for others.

There is no immanent 'law of value' which regulates this relation, as the law of value (equal sums of labour-time) presupposes the real abstraction brought about by extension of exchange and substitutability. Marx's analysis of this form of value, then, is meaningful only when regarded as the elementary cell of the others.

The extended form of value

Commodity A = commodities B, C, D, E etc.

By development of exchange the commodity is no longer exchangeable only for one other, but for one of a whole series of others. Here, commodities B, C, D, E, etc. are all equivalents of the commodity in the relative position, A. The value of A, now, is expressed not individually (as 'B-like') but in a series of use values.

The extended form contains the elementary $A = B$, as can be seen from the expression above. However, now the relative and equivalent positions are no longer arbitrary. The restrictions of the exchange pattern are no longer symmetric. The first position signifies exchangeability with a whole series of commodities – while on the other hand all these refer to one commodity only.

In the extended form of value, the form of value is further separated from use values. The equivalent position now consists of

a series of commodities, each being an *individual equivalent* of the relative commodity.

The total and monetary forms of value

Commodity B, C, D, E etc. = commodity A

The total form of value (above) appears only as the extended form turned around, or seen from the viewpoint of each of the equivalents in the series. However, the total form in reality represents a huge step forward in the development of exchangeability, in which individual and more or less arbitrary equivalents are reduced to one standard equivalent. In the extended form of value $A = B, C, D, \text{etc.}$ the two sides are clearly asymmetric. Still all commodities are placed in the relative as well as in the equivalent position. For example, from the point of view of the owner of commodity B, exchange may mean $B = A, C, D \text{ etc.}$

In the total form, this is no longer the case. Extension of exchange, as well as external natural and social factors which are only partly spelled out by Marx, tends to create one socially accepted equivalent commodity. A *standard equivalent*, like A above, is thereby formed in place of the individual equivalents. Eventually, this standard may develop into money:

$B, C, D, E \text{ etc. (commodities)} = A \text{ (money)}$

is the monetary form of value.

As the simple form is the elementary aspect also of the total form of value, the individual equivalent does in one sense co-exist with the standard. The individuality of the equivalent may even appear as the primary aspect of the whole deal, as in the gender dyad.

Gender as elementary exchange

I have presented an outline of the gender system and the context of the gender exchange relations, as well as the main points of Marx's

value analysis. We shall now turn to the gender relation itself as a value phenomenon.

The standard dyad incorporates three of the value forms which we have examined: the elementary, the extended, and the total forms. We shall take each in turn, and consider each briefly from three points of view: (1) the historical genesis of the gender system, (2) the gender system in the capitalist structure, and (3) the internal features and typical frames of the system.

The dyad as an individual relation

When the dyad is regarded as an isolated and individual transaction, it corresponds to the 'accidental' or individual aspect of Marx's elementary form. As we saw, the relation here is simply $A = B$, in our case $\text{John} = \text{Mary}$ or male $A = \text{female } B$.

Here the material form of B is the value form of A . However, the relation can just as well be seen from B 's point of view, as $B = A$. Now B is in the relative or active position, while A serves as its form of value.

If the elementary form of value in our case is what it purports to be, an individual relation concerning John and Mary, we would expect the two positions of relative and equivalent to be interchangeable and a matter of accident. They are as yet fluid and not fixed to particular commodities. Which is to say: as far as these positions are *not* really interchangeable between male and female, we are no longer dealing with the individual exchange relation.

As far as people in the dyadic relations relate individually, value does not appear as something different from the individual use values involved, for example as something 'sex-like'. Both historically and structurally, this aspect of gender may be treated quite briefly: it is present throughout history, and it consists of an enormous variety of relations, as in friendships, bordering the gender relations proper.

The genderized self

'The brilliancy of Aristoteles' genius', Marx wrote, is shown as 'he

discovered, in the expression of the value of commodities, a relation of equality' (Marx 1970, p. 50). By 'equality' he means being the same, i.e. identity in terms of human labour. Today, it is folk wisdom that $\text{John} + \text{Mary} = \text{true}$. Their identity is implied in this expression; together they are a sum which is true. The sum, however, is not tangible; what is tangible is that two different people are a pair. Here, folk wisdom shows a bit of brilliance, for by posing $A+B$ as *true*, it expresses simultaneously that they are different individuals – and that a peculiar difference of addition equals their true identity.

The peculiar connection of concrete and abstract, of gender as individual and as a general category, has been noted by Simmel and other sociologists, and it forms the essential element of the psychoanalytical theory of individuation (Simmel 1982 p. 337; Freud 1980). The peculiarity is tied to the dyadic character of gender interaction.

Gender, like class, may be regarded as a category in which all individual differences are dissolved. But in the class system, the person is a class member by being related, as one of many, to another class of many persons. The one-to-one relationship may exist here too, but it does not define the relation, as it does within the gender system.

The paradox of the gender system is that the implicit negation of individuality is brought about, precisely, through the individual dyadic relation. The two genders emerge as groups only indirectly and not through a direct duality or in any collective connection. In the relations of gender attraction or repulsion, each person's self is at least implicitly negated, but it is re-established in the relation of attraction, in which the self relates not to the other as common to itself, nor as the many, as others, but as the other *one*. Gender is a 'social singularity'. As members of categories like ages, classes or races, persons become representatives of the defining qualities of the categories – but here, the dyadic mode of representation is by itself a quality of the category. The person is related to others in the form of one other; *the self* thereby becomes posited as the one, the individual – but also as the other one, the other to whom the first relates.

This peculiar property of singularity, creating *individuation*, is one reason why gender much more than class or race is a social division based exclusively on internalized control. Gender identities become the expression of the social self in a way in which class or race identities are not. The gender system appears as an inherently individual matter, through a particular difference of use values. These use values, therefore, are conceived as inherently individual, deeply personal. This is the frame element of *gender as individual*.

The elementary gender relation is different from the individual aspect of the dyad, though these appear fused. In the elementary relation proper, regarded as the cell-form of the more complex total form, the single male and female are related. They are indeed related as individuals, but only in the sense of being the particular, individual representatives of the dual genders. The relation is one male = one female, which implies what is really produced by a much more complex total exchange, namely the identity of the two, gender as such.

Historically, the individual relation is as old as human society. In this sense, love is an eternal relation. On the other hand, this relation as the unit of a total form of exchange surrounded by monetary relations is the most abstract expression of a recent social arrangement – love now implying genderized love, a love that poses gender as eternal while the individual is a temporary representative. Most people find the idea of non-genderized love and erotics hard to imagine. On love in antiquity a historian writes, 'it is extremely difficult to convey to modern audiences the absolute indifference of most Latin authors on the question of gender' (Boswell 1980, p. 73).

The extended exchange

The dyad of two individuals may accommodate various types of unequal reciprocity, which explains why one gains more than the other. But it cannot explain the social form of these gains. It cannot tell us why the concrete, multi-faceted activities of indi-

viduals are conceived as male and female activities. This is due solely to the fact that the dyad, as well as being an individual relation, is a representative of wider and more complex forms of exchangeability. The marriage market serves as a first illustration.

As potential partners to marriage or similar arrangements, men and women are involved in a series of dyads, in relations in which each man is continually evaluated in terms of several women and vice versa. This is the 'rating' aspect of what Willard Waller called 'the rating/dating system' (Waller 1938). These cases of extended exchange confront members of the same gender with each other through their actual or potential deals with members of the other gender. They are expressions of class and other relations of dominance through the medium of gender.

The extended exchange of the marriage market is a modern expression of gender as a separate and total system of exchange, and quite different from gender considered as one element, or extension, of the total social exchange. We shall first consider the formal properties of extended exchange, then its historical and structural relevance.

Through extension, each commodity confronts a series of possible exchange-offers:

Commodity A = commodity B, C, D, E, etc.

The value form of A is no longer another commodity in its individual shape. Through extended exchange, the individual value form of the elementary dyad is replaced by a series of expressions of value. The relation implies that all the commodities within the series are identical as a class of commodities. They all equal the first, relative commodity. If A equals B, or C, or D, the equality of B, C, and D is implied. But this implication, as we saw from Marx's scheme, is brought out only in the total form of value in which B, C, D, etc. express their value in a single commodity A.

Gender as an extension of exchange

Historically, the exchange of women was one extension of the