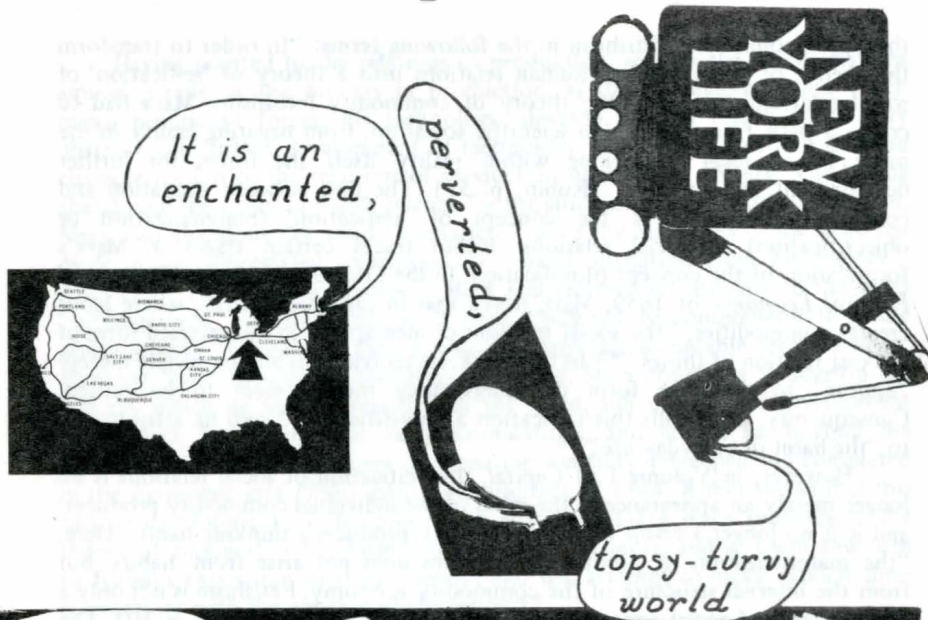


The Fetish Speaks!

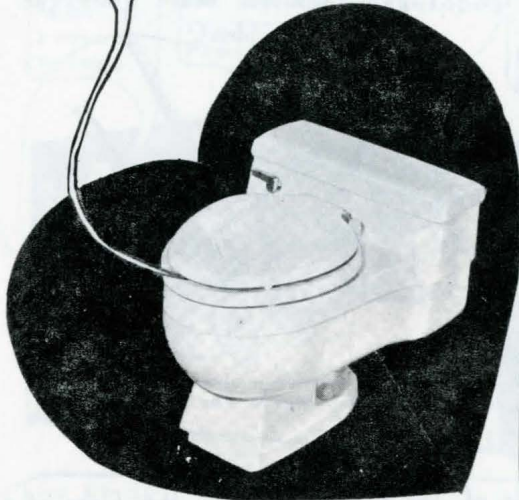
Fredy Perlman

1969

the FETISH speaks!



In this world, a commodity is a very queer thing, abounding in metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties.

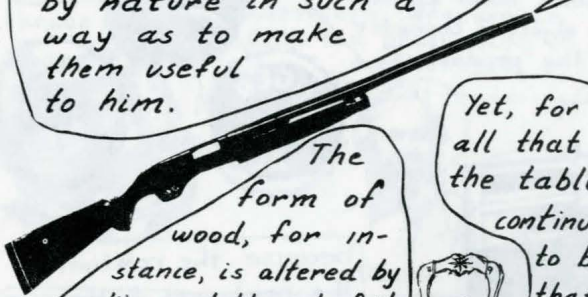


So far as it is a value in use, there is nothing mysterious about it, whether we consider it from the point of view that by its properties it is capable of satisfying human wants,

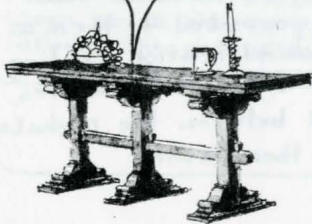


or from the point that those properties are the product of human labor

It is as clear as noon-day that man, by his industry, changes the forms of the materials furnished by nature in such a way as to make them useful to him.



The form of wood, for instance, is altered by making a table out of it.



Yet, for all that the table continues to be that common every-day thing, wood.



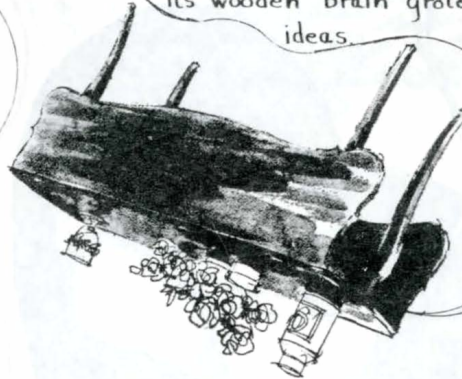


But, so soon as it steps forth as a commodity, it is changed into something transcendent.

It not only stands with its feet on the ground.



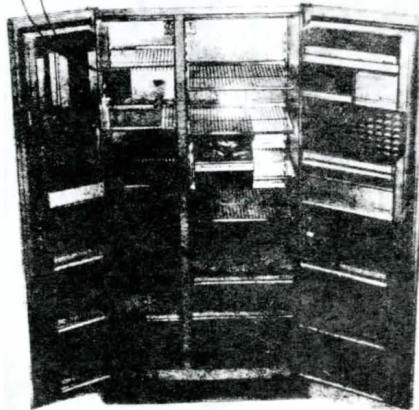
but, in relation to all other commodities, it stands on its head, and evolves out of its wooden brain grotesque ideas.



From the moment that men in any way work for one another, their labor assumes a social form.

But the mutual relations of the producers take the form of a social relation between the products.

A commodity is therefore a mysterious thing, simply because in it the social character of men's labor appears to them as an objective character stamped upon the product of that labor.



because the relation of the producers to the sum total of their own labor is presented to them as a social relation existing not between themselves, but between the products of their labor.

It is a definite social relation between men that assumes, in their eyes, the fantastic form of a relation between things

In order to find an analogy we must have recourse to the mist-enveloped regions of the religious world.

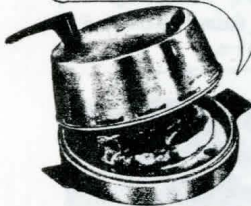
In that world the productions of the human brain appear as independent beings endowed with life, and entering into relation both with one another and the human race.



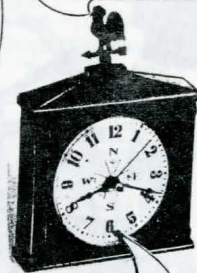
So it is in the world of commodities with the products of men's hands.

This I call the Fetishism which attaches itself to the products of labor, so soon as they are produced as commodities, and which is therefore inseparable from the production of commodities.

This Fetishism has its origin in the peculiar social character of the labor that produces them.

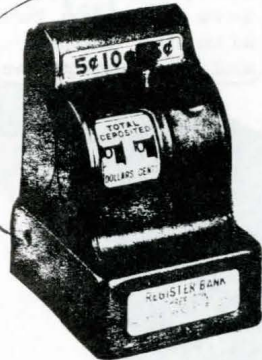


AUTHOR



The labor of the individual asserts itself as a part of the labor of society only by means of the relations which the act of exchange establishes directly between the products, and indirectly, through them, between the producers.

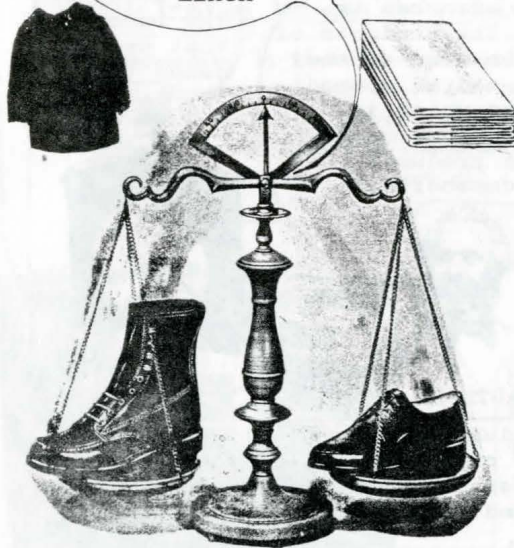
The money form of the world of commodities actually conceals, instead of disclosing, the social character of private labor and the social relations between individual producers.



When I state that coats or boots stand in a relation to linen, because it is the universal incarnation of abstract human labor, the absurdity of the statement is self-evident



Nevertheless, when the producers of coats and boots compare those articles with linen



or, what is the same thing, with gold or silver, as the universal equivalent, they express the relation between their own private labor and the collective labor of society in the same absurd form.



The categories of bourgeois economy consist of such like forms.



They are forms of thought expressing with social validity the conditions and relations of a definite, historically determined mode of production,



namely, the production of commodities.



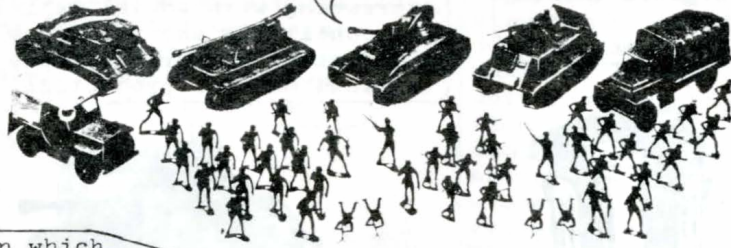
The whole mystery of commodities, all the magic and necromancy that surrounds the products of labor as long as they take the form of commodities,



vanishes so soon as we look at other forms of production.

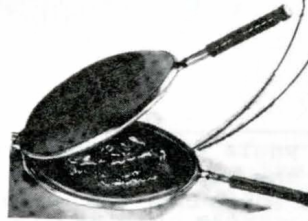
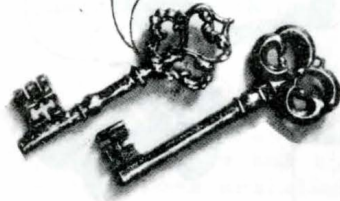


For a society based on the production of commodities,



in which the producers in general enter into social relations with one another by treating their products as commodities and values,

whereby they reduce their individual private labor to the standard of homogeneous human labor--

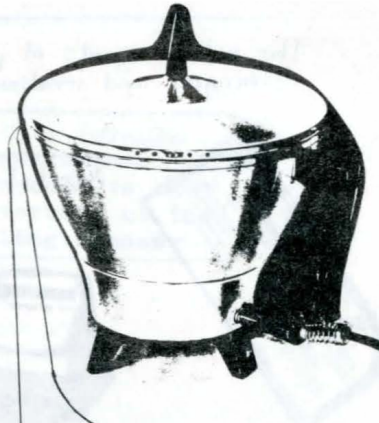


--for such a society, Christianity with its cultus of abstract man,

more especially in its bourgeois developments, Protestantism, Deism, etc., is the most fitting form of religion.

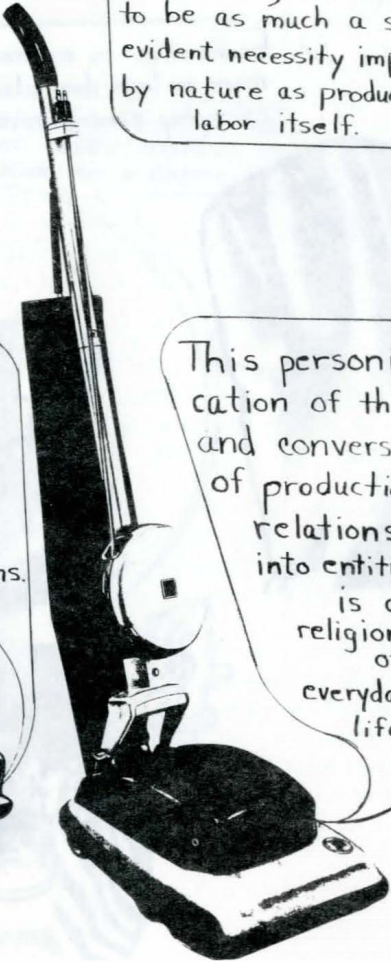


The formulae which bear stamped upon them in unmistakable letters that they belong to a state of society in which the process of production has mastery over man instead of being controlled by him—



—such formulae appear to the bourgeois intellect to be as much a self-evident necessity imposed by nature as productive labor itself.

Hence forms of social production that preceded the bourgeois form are treated by the bourgeoisie in much the same way as the Fathers of the Church treated pre-Christain religions.



This personification of things and conversion of production relations into entities is a religion of everyday life.

The actual agents of production feel completely at home in estranged and irrational forms.



capital-interest



land-rent



labor-wages



Economics is no more than a didactic, more or less dogmatic translation of everyday conceptions of the actual agents of production arranged in a certain rational order.



It sees in this TRINITY, which is devoid of all inner connection, the natural and indubitable lofty basis for its shallow pompousness.



This formula simultaneously corresponds to the interests of the ruling classes

by proclaiming the physical necessity and eternal justification of their sources of revenue and elevating them to a dogma.



First printed in *Black & Red* No. 5, January 1969.

Reprinted in 1973 by
Black & Red
Box 9546
Detroit, Michigan 48202

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Quotations by Karl Marx, extracted and paraphrased from *Capital* Vol. 1 (Chapter 1,
Commodities) and Vol. 3 (Chapter 48, The Trinity Formula).

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