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Market Value and Victorian Hybrids: Dickens and Marx Against Latour

When Bruno Latour says that “we have never been modern,” he means only to recognize that the ‘actually living’ of modernity (or the temporal duration we’ve often categorized as ‘modernity’) is something altogether different (and far more complicated) than the theoretical apparatus by which academic intellectuals use to describe and categorize it. The modern condition, then, involves a separation between the socio-economic creation of ‘hybrid objects’ and theoretical reflection on society. This reflection takes the form of ‘purification,’ or a clear distinction between nature and culture, science and politics. Drawing upon Charles Dickens’ last completed novel, *Our Mutual Friend*, as well as Marx, I will argue that *already* in Victorian England we can find coherent representations of modernity that defy Latour’s high standard of actualized purification (or a visible ‘reality’ that conforms to our purified categorizations). That is, in Dickens and Marx we can find a literary-economic discourse of ‘modernity’ (which may also be Victorian post-humanism) that already recognized the failure of ‘purification’ as the *result* of expansive capitalism.

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When Bruno Latour says that “we have never been modern,” he means only to recognize that the ‘actually living’ of modernity (or the temporal duration we’ve often categorized as ‘modernity’) is something altogether different (and far more complicated) than the theoretical apparatus by which academic intellectuals use to describe and categorize it. He situates his extended project in the appropriately titled *We Have Never Been Modern* (1991) (and later in *On the Modern Cult of the Factish Gods* (2011)), which offers a treatment of the history of binaries that includes fact and fetish, arguing that modernity assumes a unique historical ability to sharply distinguish between them. The crisis of Western philosophy, Latour argues, stems from its inability to conceptualize the existence (or increased appearance) of ‘hybrids’ – entities that oscillate between the categories of politics and nature. The modern condition, then, involves a separation between the socio-economic *creation* of hybrids and theoretical reflection on society. This reflection takes the form of ‘purification,’ or a clear distinction between nature and culture, science and politics.

Latour points to 1989 as the watershed year for the collapse of the modern dream – it marks the end of “a state socialism that had the pretence to control both the social and the natural” (Noys 2010, 82). A large part of Latour’s critique of the modern is a critique of capitalism as an explanatory vehicle: a synecdoche of the modern philosophical project, capital is reified by Marxists via their positing of a super-object that subsumes all hybrids (including the very hybrids that ‘modern’ production produces so abundantly). In this essay, I will re-orient the reader’s focus not toward the ‘end’ of state socialism, but towards the beginning of the idea of communism, to the Victorian London of both Karl Marx and Charles Dickens. Drawing upon Dickens’ last completed novel, *Our Mutual Friend*, and Marx’s work, as well as a number of related commentaries within the contemporary discourse on Marxism and actor-network theory, I will argue that *already* in Victorian England we can find coherent representations of modernity that defy Latour’s high standard of actualized purification (or a visible ‘reality’ that conforms to our purified categorizations). That is, in Dickens and Marx we can find a literary-economic discourse of ‘modernity’ (which may also be Victorian post-humanism) that already recognizes the failure of ‘purification’ as the *result* of expansive capitalism.

Though in one sense they are only *examples*, Marx and Dickens nevertheless loom quite large in the historical discourse on modernity, not just as figures that provide well-known narrations but also as writers whose critical models (on the edges of political economy and novelistic narrative and structure) remain embedded in all corners of modern

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intellectual life. By invoking Dickens alongside Marx in a critique of Latour's *specific* brand of Actor-Network Theory, I hope to add a literary dimension (that is not merely *ad hoc* but tied historically and materially to Marx's work at the point of its conception) to the multi-faceted debate on Marx, Latour, and the concept of totality. Drawing on some of the power of these thinkers' formulations, I will attempt to show how Latour's account of the failure of the modern project is a symptom of modern ideology *par excellence*, and that Latour's vision "of a world in which 'nothing is dispensable' and therefore 'nothing can be subtracted' reproduces capital's own fantasy of a world constantly available and amenable to abstraction and subsumption" (Noys 2010, 87), and thus stands in for the apotheosis of capitalist modernity as envisioned by both Marx and Dickens.

New Urban Markets

To the Latour who wrote *We Have Never Been Modern*, the contemporary crisis we face when we look the world and its representation in the news is not a crisis of capitalism but of the modern project. Threatening 'objects' - like the hole in the ozone layer, the AIDS virus, or nuclear energy (all 'hybrids') - oscillate between the categories of the social and natural - one cannot exhaust the characteristics of these hybrids by appealing *only* to scientific/material or political/discursive explanations: "[Boyle's air pump, Pasteur's microbes, Archimedes' pulleys] possess miraculous properties because they are at one and the same time both social and asocial, producers of natures and constructors of subjects" (Latour 1993, 112). From the perspective of the assemblage, thinkers as disparate as Wilson (for whom everything is nature), Bourdieu (for whom everything is culture and politics), and Derrida (for whom everything is language) all err equally: the matter of hybridity demonstrates that everything is everything, and that none of these hermeneutic boundaries are sustainable.

The modern constitution, reliant upon purified dichotomies and favored hermeneutics of reduction to various foundational bases, cannot conceptualize this combinational immanence *despite the fact* that modernity has produced (and continues to produce) more hybrids than any recorded historical period. As Latour writes: "The moderns have been victims of their own success," since "the scope of the mobilization of collectives had ended up multiplying hybrids to such an extent that the constitutional framework which both denies and permits their

existence could no longer keep them in place” (Latour 1993, 49). Latour expresses his frustration that – since hybrid objects are not considered sacred to ‘moderns’ (as opposed to the efficacy of the fetish for ‘primitive’ societies) – we continue to rapidly and unthinkingly produce them, while repeatedly maintaining distinctions between the human and non-human, subject and object, nature and culture.

But Tamara Ketabgian, in her fascinating *The Lives of Machines*, which “explores the surprising industrial origins” of these ‘modern’ hybrids, promotes the re-reading and re-historicizing of *Victorian* culture “in ways that do not merely pit people against machines but that instead examine their close mingling and identification” (Ketabgian 2011, 1). Here I hope to follow Ketabgian by establishing a co-relation between Marx and Dickens. Whereas she “historicizes a mechanical model of affect that continues to inform a variety of theorists and philosophers today” (Ketabgian 2011, 3), ranging from the heirs of Freudian psychoanalysis and their “vision of the human psyche as a dynamic hydraulic engine” to the post-humanism of Katherine Hayles and her reliance upon cybernetics and dynamical systems; my focus is centered specifically on Latour’s Victorian blind spot. In Chapter XV of *Capital* - “Machinery and Modern Industry” – the curious phenomenon of the ‘workman’ learning to “adapt his own movements to the uniform and unceasing motion of an automaton” was already quite thoroughly considered.

When the machinery, as a whole, forms a system of manifold machines, working simultaneously and in concert, the co-operation based upon it, requires the distribution of various groups of workmen among the different kinds of machines... Since the motion of the whole system does not proceed from the workman, but from the machinery, a change of persons can take place at any time without an interruption of the work (Tucker 1978, 408).

And Dickens’ last novel, concerned not with the factory but greater London, came quite close to seriously *thinking* hybridity and re-asserting (or at least *reclaiming* for literary analysis) the dominion of the sacred in the modern-capitalist proliferation of assemblages.

Our Mutual Friend, serialized in the years directly *preceding* the initial publication of Marx’s *Capital*, attempts to map the same London Marx himself was observing firsthand. A novel without a clear protagonist (the ‘friend’ of the title is John Rokesmith, the alter ego of John Harmon, presumed dead when ‘his’ body is fished out of the Thames at the outset of the novel), London is conceived of as a unified whole, a mapped totality, in which no individual subject-position is privileged. This is unusual

for a Victorian novel, sprawling as many of them are, since the common focus on either a marriage plot or an inheritance (both of which are also contained in Dickens' novel) is challenged when the center of both is eliminated (Harmon forfeits, upon his 'death,' a vast inheritance and the hand of the lovely Bella Wilfer).

While the novel is populated by a number of Dickens' trademark grotesques, a focus on *monetary value* (since, perhaps, it is money that is the only truly 'mutual friend' depicted in the novel) leads the reader into contemplation of an unhappy few. The narrative begins with Gaffer Hexam, a rogue who makes his living scouring wealth off the drowned bodies that turn up in the river, teaching his daughter Lizzie and his rival Riderhood a form of urban subsistence economics. Describing the polluted river as his daughter's "meat and drink" (Dickens 1997, 15), which is likely as literal as it is figurative, Gaffer proceeds to defend his occupation by lecturing on the impossibility of robbing a dead man: "What world does a dead man belong to? The other world. What world does money belong to? This world" (Dickens 1997, 16). Already a form of circulation that will be expanded into all corners of the city's activity has been articulated: death and waste are converted into life, and river waste is converted into value.

The problem of recycling, in the conversion of waste into money, is but one small segment of the novel's market assemblage. Live bodies are commodified just as thoroughly as dead ones, and markets for limbs and body parts as well as children and orphans proliferate (Dickens could be seen here as anticipating, albeit in a less global sense, what Catherine Waldby and Robert Mitchell have called "tissue economies"). Silas Wegg is a peg-legged guttersnipe whose amputated leg, which he hopes to get back, is initially in the possession of Mr. Venus, a taxidermist and articulator of bones whose shop is filled with animal and human body parts to be bought and sold. One easily sees, in the bumbling activities and desires of Wegg, an extension of Herbert Sussman and Gerhard Joseph's thesis on the posthuman in Dickens's novels (particularly *Dombey and Son*), which "[negotiate] the machine/body issues of his age by representing in fantastical terms the splice of the machine and the organic" (Sussman and Joseph 2004, 617). They look particularly at Dickens's concern with prosthesis, "the dismemberment and articulation of body parts" (Sussman and Joseph 2004, 618), though they mention Wegg and Venus only briefly. Wegg's leg operates as the key fulcrum of a massive assemblage in the novel, of the legal doctrines of property, the ethical definitions of life and body, the circulation of parcels, and the action of the market, all of which fall under Wegg's

metaphor of the blood ‘flow’ which he hopes to resuscitate in the limb. Here too, instead of “accepting a Ruskinian opposition of the mechanical and the organic,” which is a dimension of the modern error according to Latour, Dickens “absorbed the reconstruction of the human in the machine age” by foreshadowing “the limits, the boundaries, and the fusion of the human and the mechanical” (Sussman and Joseph 2004, 626).

Forms of speculation and circulation extend thus from the most concrete and material (excrement and body parts) to the least material, which is represented in the financial ‘shares’ of fraudulent high society types like the Veneerings and the Lammles:

As is well known to the wise in their generation, traffic in Shares is the one thing to have to do with in this world. Have no antecedents, no established character, no cultivation, no ideas, no manners; have Shares. Have Shares enough to be on Boards of Direction in capital letters, oscillate on mysterious business between London and Paris, and be great. Where does he come from? Shares. Where is he going to? Shares. What are his tastes? Shares. Has he any principles? Shares. What squeezes him into Parliament? Shares. Perhaps he never of himself achieved success in anything, never originated anything, never produced anything? Sufficient answer to all; Shares (Dickens 1997, 118).

But while some of the novel’s most detestable creatures engage in the wild fantasy of the stock market, the logic of speculation is universalized across the city’s many characters and classes. John Harmon’s father speculated on the future of Bella when, having merely glimpsed her as a child, he wrote her future into his will (as the eventual husband of his son). The Lammles are two people who fake fortunes in order to trade up in the spousal futures market. The Boffins, the couple that inherit Harmon’s fortune once he’s pronounced dead, seek to adopt a child in the aforementioned orphan market that’s eerily similar in description to the financial markets:

The suddenness of an orphan’s rise in the market was not to be paralleled by the maddest records of the Stock Exchange. He would be at five thousand per cent discount out at nurse making a mud pie at nine in the morning, and (being inquired for) would go up to five thousand per cent premium before noon. The market was “rigged” in various artful ways (Dickens 1997, 195).

Mary Poovey, in her analysis of “speculation and virtue” in the novel, reads passages like this as a humorous critique of “the infiltration of economic motives into the domestic sphere” (Poovey 1995, 165).

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More substantively, according to Poovey, the structure of the Harmon plot serves to “re-write ‘value,’” to affect an inversion of speculation and commodification at the level of content that nonetheless maintains its form. To understand how this works, and to relate this literary move to the viability of thinking about ‘modernity,’ one must read the Marx (and the deviation from Marx) in Dickens.

New Economic Transformations

Poovey’s reading of the novel, which examines its romantic relationships closely, formalizes the problem of money and value: “Taking money literally, as a good and an end in itself, leads to the literal commodification of human beings” while “recognizing the metaphorical nature of money facilitates exchanges that enhance domestic relations and bring out the humanity in people” (Poovey 1995, 166). Poovey is thus latching onto the ambiguous relation between the novel’s logic and Marx’s logic of reification: here, under capital, relations between people become relations between things (most obviously in the character of Wegg, but also in Headstone’s vision of Lizzie, for instance), but there is also a fantasy of capitalism ‘with a human face’ operating. A moralized version of Gaffer’s subsistence economics, the transformation of Bella is a conversion of material wealth into metaphoric wealth and human value – this is the engine behind her ‘benefactor’ Boffin’s ploy to demonstrate the wickedness of the miser. The ‘magic’ of the commodity fetishism we find in Marx, where the disguised nature of production under capital and the shift from the dominance of use-value to exchange-value leads to the attribution of ‘magical’ properties to marketed things, is inverted for moral and ethical use: Mrs. Boffin, looking upon Bella and thinking of the inheritance, observes that it was “as if [Harmon’s] money had turned bright again, after a long long rust in the dark, and was at last a beginning to sparkle in the sunlight” (Dickens 1997, 757). Here the newly domesticated woman is the end result of the process of the re-humanization of wealth; the plot allows Bella the objects of her original desire (money and things) *only* when she no longer desires them as such.¹

1 One of the roadblocks to a wider reading of Dickens *avec* Marx comes in the consideration of a *feminist* Marxist analysis of *Our Mutual Friend*, which I do not aim to provide here. The role of Bella Wilfer in the novel, for instance, conforms quite easily to standard 19th-century narratives of domesticity and middle class, self-sacrificial femininity.

Dickens and Marx, writing from the same the place at virtually the same time, thus provide somewhat competing accounts of the ‘modern.’ Although of course Dickens does not speak Marx’s technical language (nowhere do we find terms like ‘socially necessary labor,’ ‘constant and variable capital,’ or the ‘industrial reserve army’), he indeed presents a number of capital’s most notable symptoms: we see London households as sites of consumption that mask class relations of labor and production (the Veneering’s new abode), the displacement of desire into inanimate objects (Wegg’s leg and Boffin’s books), and a picture of profit that nonetheless recognizes the zero labor value of the capitalist (the incorrigible usurer Fledgeby). Dickens and Marx literally begin from the same place, empirically if not theoretically, but differ in their politics: while Marx’s answer to the largely new system of production, commodification, and class structure is struggle and the counter-production of proletarian class-consciousness, Dickens’s proletariat are all *lumpenproletariat*, rogues without even the potential for class-consciousness (Riderhood’s near death experience pointedly demonstrates his incapacity for substantial change). Dickens’s grotesques are static, perhaps due to their lack of access to the middle class. And so moral progress in the novel, demonstrated by Bella as well as Eugene Wrayburn (initially a drifting lawyer without a clear relation to society), relies upon *both* rejecting conspicuous consumption and financial capital *and* accepting some form of domestic middle class existence.

But what, then, is the relation between these Victorian alternatives and modernity proper or, according to Latour, its impossibility? Latour’s distinction between systems and networks is significant here: “More supple than the notion of system, more historical than the notion of structure, more empirical than the notion of complexity, the idea of network is the Ariadne’s thread of [the] interwoven stories” (Latour 1993, 3) told by interdisciplinary actors that cross the boundaries of nature and culture. The key is the focus on the ‘thread’ itself rather than the substance of the connections between objects – translation, the network theorist’s alternative to purification, occurs when one traces the production of hybrids while bracketing the question of their rootedness in the natural, political, or social. Systems, on the other hand, presuppose foundations, and assume some objects or forces to be more real, complex, or even simply more interesting than all others – a Marxian analysis of base-superstructure relations, indeed, posits economic forces as ontologically and causally primary to social products. For Latour, this involves the influx of idealism into materialism, and betrays the flat, concrete, and immanent ontology of networks.

Johan Söderberg and Adam Netzen relate this brand of Actor-Network critique of political economy to a form of Open Marxism that shares with the former a post-structuralist (and particularly Deleuzian) orientation toward Hegelian dialectics (referencing Latour's "summary dismissals of the dialectical method" - Söderberg and Netzen 2010, 104)). In both cases one finds a dissatisfaction with base-superstructure analysis on ontological grounds, and the influence of Mario Tronti and Harry Cleaver's claims that "[there] are certainly regularities, or 'laws,' of commodity exchange just as there is a logic to the commodity-form itself, but that logic and those laws are only those which capital succeeds in imposing" (Cleaver 2000, 77, also quoted in Söderberg and Netzen 2010, 99). Latour and Open Marxists join hands in rejecting the structural *reifications* of orthodox Marxist dialectics, rendering supposed "social facts" like "(class) interest, power (structure), and references to capital/capitalism" as radically contingent (Söderberg and Netzen 2010, 109).

Hence on the one hand we have, with Marx himself, a systemic meta-narrative that sublates the locality of forms of production, whether material or cultural, in a universalizing logic, while on the other hand *the very purpose* of his analysis is to demonstrate the inadequacy of the picture of 'immateriality' (the commodity fetish) produced by capital, in which "the existence of the things *qua* commodities, and the value-relation between the products of labour which stamps them as commodities, [has] absolutely no connection with their physical properties and with the material relations arising therefrom" (Tucker 1978, 321). Further, while Marx's account of exchange and circulation in the *Grundrisse* maps a totality (for that is essentially the definition of the latter term in relation to the former), it is one that seems to differ from Latour's material networks only in the acknowledged reality of a few key ideological points: "[the] conclusion we reach is not that production, distribution, exchange and consumption are identical, but that they all form members of a totality, distinctions within a unity," so that production predominates over all other mutually-interacting 'moments' of the process of capital accumulation only because, for historical and empirically verifiable reasons, "distribution [is] distribution of *products*" (Tucker 1978, 236; my italics).

If capital according to Marx is too *large* and *all-consuming* for Latour, it is for Marx too; the difference, it appears, is that Marx believes in the *ideological efficacy* of capital's real (concrete) abstractions. That is, the abstractions produced under capital are part of the real for Marx, but *not* for Latour, which makes Latour's claim for a flat, planar ontology problematic. According to Noys, Latour "neglects the function of real

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abstraction and real subsumption in shaping forms of agency.” Accepting the existence of something called capital does not necessarily imply material determination of all else by it, but rather the acknowledgement that powerful abstractions dictate “the need to struggle on [its] terrain if one should want to overturn it” (Noys 2010, 86). And Söderberg and Netzen, by drawing the link between Latour and a form of Marxism that rejects capital-centric historical narratives like Fordism and post-Fordism, or any “Marxist accounts which seek to identify distinct periods in capitalism” (Söderberg and Netzen 2010, 112), show that Latour thereby deprives himself of the tools to articulate anything but a sweeping, reductive account of modernity.²

It should come as no surprise, then, that Latour also misunderstands the historically situated role of Marx’s fetish, as Hylton White argues. Situating his work within a more general sphere of post-critical theory (along with ‘critics’ like Rita Felski), White claims that Latour’s interpretation of the Marxian fetish associates the concept itself with “the suspicious methodology that seeks to look behind things rather than at them, in an alleged privileging of depth over surface” (White 2013, 668). On this account, “to call a thing a ‘fetish’ is to show no care for the technical complexities of its creation or the sheer fragility of its existence” (White 2013, 669). But Marx does not “conceptualize the fetishism of commodities as a consequence of the (false) beliefs that people hold about things.” Rather, fetishism inheres “in the social effects of the way the commodity form is organized, *qua* form, as a template for assembling connections between a host of objects, actors, and activities.” Dickens recognizes those “social effects” in his representation of the concrete movement of objects and bodies through London, and his novel is *truly* materialist in its “historically grounded account of the work of the form [of the commodity] in associating activities” (White 2013, 680). Like Marx, Dickens is well aware that the *problem* of the commodity fetish is the resulting epistemological dematerialization of “the material conditions for a flourishing of intersubjectivity” (White 2013, 678).

2 Another way to put this, of course, is that Latour deprives himself of the tools to articulate anything but an overly reductive account of *capital* and capital accumulation (so that all attempts at a total Marxian critique merely replicate the false dichotomies at the heart of the ‘modern project’). A demonstration of the way Marx and Dickens *actually* already were in the process of theorizing and representing the compatibility of the commodity fetish with proto-network models runs parallel to Noel Castree’s and Steven Shaviro’s attempts (to name but two examples in contemporary thought) at dissolving the antagonism between Marxism and actor-network theory by correcting a few vital misunderstandings of Marx on the part of certain partisans of the latter movement.

Ultimately, Latour's Marxist straw man fails to acknowledge that capitalism, while a totality, is a totality that possesses contradictions, and that those contradictions bear witness to its failure at purification. Both Marx himself and Dickens in *Our Mutual Friend* outline some of these contradictions and demonstrate (implicitly) the intellectual danger of a position like Latour's, whose "claims to remove an abstract capitalism and replace it with a world of rich concrete actualities" actually "reproduces the vision of an entirely seamless capitalism that he claims to contest" (Noys 2010, 88), since he allows no conception of capital's immanent *negativity* or structural limit. Marx, however, does: there are (eventually) unavoidable impasses, crises of realization where production outstrips consumption, necessary since workers are themselves consumers whose wage value is less than value produced and, as argued in the *Grundrisse*, as a result of the relation between technology and productive expansion:

[To] the degree that large industry develops, the creation of real wealth comes to depend less on labour time and on the amount of labour employed than on the power of the agencies set in motion during labour time, whose "powerful effectiveness" is itself in turn out of all proportion to the direct labour time spent on their production... Labour no longer appears so much to be included within the production; rather, the human being comes to relate more as watchman and regulator to the production process itself (Tucker 1978, 284).

In this depiction, capital, in its expansion, hits walls that it must deal with, postponing systemic collapse but always moving on with creakier foundations. One might call this Marx's condition of modernity, and it isn't one of illusory purification but rather messy complexification in its constant production of crises.³

3 Though not exactly central to the argument here, Noel Castree's take on capital's effect on the nature/society relation provides another important facet of the dissolution of the *real* distinction between Marxism and actor-network theory. From an ecological perspective, which *Our Mutual Friend* certainly provides in its representation of the Thames, Castree claims that "[by] splitting the difference between a certain kind of ANT and a certain kind of green Marxism, one can perhaps derive some of the conceptual tools necessary to make sense of the processes driving nature's accelerated creative destruction in the twenty first century" (Castree 2002, 142). This insight is consistent with the acknowledgement of capital accumulation as a process of "complexification" rather than "illusory purification," a recognition that "natural entities are [not] mere putty in the hands of capital" but "necessary and active moments in a continuous process of circulation and accumulation," where "the material effects that 'natural' entities have upon capital accumulation are variable and contingent, but rarely passive" (Castree 2002, 139).

In contrast, by claiming to be more concrete than Marx, and by attempting to deflate capitalism “from an unchangeable monstrous world-dominant regime to a micro-generated network amenable to change,” Latour actually forfeits “any meaningful politics” in favor of a “questionable metaphysics”:

[Real] abstractions are precisely what undermine the usual ontological distinction between the concrete and the abstract. Real abstraction indicates that capital constitutes itself as a totality, or, in Hegel-ese, posits its own presuppositions. This ‘totality’ operates through the distribution of positive differences and the void of capitalism itself – its own lack of content. Latour’s conception of a world of concrete differences and his voiding of the category of capitalism merely reproduces this ontology of real abstraction at one remove (Noys 2010, 85).

This is the way in which Latour’s critique, despite itself, actually gives (intellectual) body to the process of capitalist modernity. His misunderstanding of the commodity form and fetish repeats Marx’s own observation in ‘Crisis Theory’ (from *Theories of Surplus Value*) that the irreconcilable nature of capital’s crises is “reasoned out of existence here by forgetting or denying the first elements of capitalist production: the existence of the product as a commodity” (Tucker 1978, 445). Beyond merely observing that Latour, like certain post-structuralists, misrecognizes the kind of leftist critique appropriate for post-Fordist (or postmodern) capital, one should take a step further: his particular commitment to ‘purification’ as the modern impulse and his intuition that, like modernity itself, “if capitalism doesn’t reach its own standard it simply doesn’t exist,” not only leads him to miss “the way in which capitalism certainly does constantly make and re-make itself” through real, concrete abstractions but, in doing so, “leaves us all the more vulnerable to capitalism” (Noys 2010, 87).

When Alberto Toscano draws attention to the project of 20th century aesthetic *panoramas* (in particular, the work of Allan Sekula and Mark Lombardi), which attempt to “see [society] whole” despite (and thus *including*) the persistence of contradiction, he does so in order to critique Latour’s assumption that “the theoretical desire for totality” is “incompatible with a painstaking attention to traces, objects and devices” (Toscano 2012, 70). To my mind, Toscano’s categorization of a form of art-theory that attempts to totalize through “the exploration of the truncated, instrumental or illusory representations of the whole” (Toscano 2012, 80) hits, albeit anachronistically, upon the value of *Our Mutual Friend*. Dickens, writing at the dawn of urban-industrial

capital rather than at its (supposed) end, observed with striking clarity the network aspects of a rising modernity that couldn't be explained without a *concrete* analysis of money, commodification, and material circulation. It is in the ways *Our Mutual Friend* draws conclusions different than Marx's, in its glorification of domesticity as a haven within capital, that Dickens sets in motion a leftist meta-dialectic (a literary, philosophical, and theoretical conversation about capital and praxis) that is neither purified nor all-consuming but a very real process of the struggle to think (and thus *map*) modernity. The very problem of modernity here, a century before Latour's statement that 'a modern' actor-network theory is one of materiality, of the difference between the immateriality of financial speculation and commodification and wealth that nonetheless 'flows' through a series of material manifestations (and not stopped up either by the holdings of misers generally antithetical to the project of moral progress).⁴ Along with Marx, Dickens recognized both the production of ideological abstractions by capital (which *includes* the illusion that capital has no outside and no alternative) *and* the antagonisms, ready to be mapped and approximated by the thinkers and artists of the social network, which might tear the monstrous system apart.

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⁴ A more metaphysical approach to Dickens might productively utilize the 'new materialism' and object-oriented ontologies as a way of grappling with the relation between the material and immaterial *beyond* their transformations within the commodity form.

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