

## Appropriating Marx's Capital

First written assignment: expository essay

Due date: March 2

Length: 2000-2500 words

### Topics

1. Marx tells us that in capitalist society use-values are “the material bearers of . . . exchange value” (126; see also 143). Try to unpack what he means by this. How is it that the useful properties of things can “bear” the quite different properties associated with exchange?
2. Commodities, Marx argues, possess a “phantom-like objectivity” (128). Elaborate on what Marx means by this. What does he intend in describing the objectivity of commodities as “phantom-like”?
3. Undertake a systematic reading of Ch. 1, Section 2 of *Capital*, v. 1, “The Dual Character of the Labour Embodied in Commodities.” What is the essence of this duality, and why does Marx consider its understanding so crucial for the critique of political economy?
4. What does Marx mean by “the language of commodities” (143)?
5. Discuss Marx's concept of “the form of value” (174-75, including footnotes). How is it connected to his account of commodity fetishism?
6. “Money necessarily crystallizes out of the process of exchange,” writes Marx (181). Why? What does it mean to describe crystallization as necessary?
7. According to Stallybrass (“Marx's Coat”), Marx is concerned to reaffirm the world of sensuous things, experience and memory. With reference to the first chapter of *Capital*, v. 1, discuss this claim.
8. “The theory of fetishism is, *per se*, the secret of Marx's entire economic system, and in particular of his theory of value,” writes I. I. Rubin (5). Discuss and critically analyze this claim.