Fetish

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But before we get to that, I quick overview of why class struggle matters, this time broken down into a handy-dandy timeline

PAST:: conflict as the basis of society and history

1. class struggle is the actual driver of history, which depends on marx and engels’s idea of dialectical materialism (materialist, because it is anchored in class relations (class defined as relationship to the means of production (i.e., owners vs not) and dialectical because it is based on contradictions and their inevitable resolution, albeit into another set of new contradictions (i.e., thesis 🡪 antithesis 🡪 synthesis, with the synthesis becoming the new thesis)
2. there is power of insurgency in the disaffected masses, but it requires collective action (that is, it is easy to read this critique of capitalism as one of absolute control from above – control from above certainly works (for example, the current situation in the US), but it is not absolute – in the end, the masses, no matter how disenfranchised still hold political power to revolt

Present:: conflict/contradiction “resolved” through consensus

1. hegemony – the way the ruling class (re)shapes common sense and knowledge in order to maintain power – not just through explicit threats of violence (although that is always at the bottom), but more through manufacturing consent (through media, schools, etc, but also through the fetish quality of commodities, see below)
2. exploitation – capitalism rests of exploitation and alienation of workers, which is likely to, in the short term at least (for marx…), make them less likely to see their shared interests, as they are either too alienated, too tired, to fatalistic, or too desperate to move to that level (plus the hegemony stuff above…)

*future*::

1. class consciousness – capitalists create their own gravediggers, by creating the conditions under which workers will see their shared interests (this is the factory and working class neighborhoods, which don’t exist in same way today). That is, they will move from a class-in-itself (a class defined only by its structural similarities) to a class-for-itself (a class defined by consciousness (not collective! That’s a ruse, to marx; it papers over real conflict, erasing it). Class consciousness (not false consciousness, which is when workers think their goals align with the owners) requires recognizing shared interests, a critique of the system, and a political vision, which leads us to..
2. revolt (or, for some, reform): worker power pushes for resolution of the contradiction of capitalism (which is both material and moral). The end! (or is it?!??!)

commodity fetish – what is it? Let’s start by defining the terms

commodity

1. something that serves a need (it has use value)
2. something that is bought/sold on the market (it has exchange value)

[[use value =/= exchange value – they do not necessarily vary together]]

Fetish

1. a part stands for the whole (seen a lot around sexual fetishes)
2. an inanimate object that contains magic/spirit

commodity fetish – when the commodity (stuff we buy in the market) takes on a magical quality, where the magic seems to come from the object itself, rather than the processes of its creation (the labor process)

for marx, the labor process was simple – it was about the workers on the ground. Today, there is more kinds of labor going into creating the magic of the commodity – design, marketing, identity, etc. in some ways, these new kinds of labor do even more to imbue magic into the commodity, further erasing the conditions of production.

Why does it matter? Well, it erases labor, which allows us to accept (or more: demand) exploitation of workers. Also, it grants the market itself power over us and the objects we consume. (just like marx talks, in the theses on Feuerbach, about how humans created god and then god bosses them around, here the market plays the same function, which is why marx uses the language of fetish to talk about it, in order to demystify the market (by drawing attention to its own forms of mystification!)

Marx sees the process of religion not that much differently than Durkheim, but rther than illuminating the world, for marx it obscures and constrains it.