Let us look at the products of labour: There is nothing left of them in each case, but the same phantom-like objectivity: they are merely congealed quantities of homogenous human labour, i.e. of labour power expended without regard to the form of its expenditure—” (Marx, Capital, vol. 1, p. 128).

The above translation fails to do justice to Marx’s original prose. The curious metaphor eine blöde Gallerte carries with it a series of connotations that may have eluded the English translators. We could alternately translate this phrase to achieve something more satisfactory. Here we might modestly suggest that eine blöde Gallerte, originally translated as ‘congealed quantities of human labour’, in the original German more literally means a pure jelly. This reading is borne out by Marx’s earlier reference to commodities as the residuum (das Residuum) of the products of labour. Equally, we could interpret the phrase to mean a mere or noumenal gelatin, denoting nothing less than an absolute medium to convey value. As we know, medium-like gelatin is the boiled-down collagen from the joints and skins of animals used to manufacture gelatin agents and glue, yet the adjectival modifier harbours a curious insight into capital.

This reference to jelly would have resonated within the mind of a Victorian-era reader, since in Marx’s day it was the pinnacle of fashion amongst the bourgeoisie to offer a first course of moulded-jellies or blancmanges at the end of a meal. These dishes often took form of other foodstuffs—indeed, a jelly might take the appearance of a plate of asparagus—since gelatin assumes the shape of its mould. These desserts were offered in copious quantities, being both garish and ostentatious in appearance, whilst notoriously lacking in flavour. They were culinary blandishments; a veritable bourgeois, classic moulded form without qualitative content that only reflected other dishes. In fact, if we look at the etymology of the word blancmange, writers on medieval food suggest that it originates with word bland mengier, a bland dish, with refined and aristocratic connotations. It was considered an easily palatable sick dish that was as winey and colourless. In gelatin we discover a correspondence between the medium of this bland foodstuff and that which Marx is referring to when he attempts to explain in popular terms how, through production, the temporary presence of value appears to gain a material being. In fact, Marx is keen to prove that the industrious ‘productive expenditure of human brains, muscles, nerves, hands, etc. is reduced down to a mere nothing, a glistening pure medium that reflects only other commodities, a pragmatic abstraction of exchange, congealing and coagulating as capital.

Hence, the value-form is considered a ‘revoluted, zitternde’ that is, a semisolid, tremulous, commestible mass, incombustible back into the ‘meat, bone and connective tissue’ of the various animals used.

World population currently ever-expanding workforce is required to feed one person. Wastewater has contributed to eutrophication of the oceans; these jellies, which thrive in the deoxygenated area in the Gulf of Mexico. In 2008 the US National Academy of Sciences warned of a ‘mass extinction in the oceans with unknown ecological and evolutionary consequences’. Under such conditions jellyfish populations will mushroom in the face of a vast loss of global biodiversity. Yet, whilst low on the phylogenetic tree, jellyfish compete at a high level on the marine foodchain, directly with fish (although some are indeed carnivorous on other jellyfish, in a food web known as the jelly web) further depleting fish stocks. Similarly, interannual changes in jellyfish may also be seen as an indicator of climate induced shifts. With an estimated 70% of the world’s fish stocks depleted to the verge of extinction, jellyfish populations are already harvested for their and edible collagen bioluminescent proteins, inserted as fluorescent tags in genetic engineering.

China already harvests over 400,000 tonnes of jellyfish annually, a multi-billion dollar low-value consumable and source edible collagen, yet uniquely horrifying about the advent of capital.